



**BUSINESS 9826: ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR
SPECIAL FIELD SEMINAR IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY**

**Winter 2023-2024
Thursday 9:00-12:00, Room 3102**

Instructor:

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES:

This course is an introduction to the major theoretical approaches and ongoing debates within organization theory. Organization theory draws on disciplinary roots in (alphabetically) economics, political science, psychology, and sociology to explain the origins, persistence, and disappearance of the structures (organizations, firms, networks, markets, and others) that we use to order our lives. We will read some of the classic statements of the major approaches and trace the history of ideas as the field has developed up to the present. Disparate roots imply disparate approaches to explanation, and thus there are many lively debates within the field that provide some of the frisson of current research.

The aim of the course will be to examine a number of perspectives, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each, and to look at the comparative ability of these models to explain a variety of organizational phenomena. Given that we only have one semester together, the course is necessarily limited, so we will touch lightly on some topics and neglect others completely. I am happy to suggest other readings if you would like.

The course objective is to develop your ability to assess organization theory and research both critically and comprehensively. By the conclusion of the course, you should (a) be familiar with important sources and references on fundamental issues in organization theory, (b) have a grasp of advanced theory and research on a breadth of topics, (c) have a better understanding of the process of developing theoretical articles, and (d) develop your ability to evaluate the contributions of various research streams to the field of organization theory. With this roadmap in hand, you should be well prepared to generate original research ideas that advance the discourse in your chosen area.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Discussion Questions / Overview / Moderator

Because this course is a seminar, most of the action takes place during class discussion. Each class member is responsible for leading the discussion on several topics (the actual number of topics is a

function of the number of people enrolled). This involves preparation of discussion questions in advance and leading the class discussion.

Discussion questions: Each discussion leader (or discussion team) must prepare a set of discussion questions for my review before distribution to the class. These must be submitted via email by Tuesday evening (5:00 pm) the week *before* our Thursday seminar. I will review the questions and suggest changes or additional questions as appropriate. The questions will be distributed to seminar members Thursday (a week before the actual meeting). These questions should provide guidance to your classmates in preparing for each session.

Presentation/Moderating the Discussion: Each discussion leader (or discussion team) is also responsible for moderating the discussion. While there will be differences in how everyone approaches the role of moderator, providing the following information would be a good starting point:

1. Review the assigned material collectively, identifying (as appropriate) key theoretical arguments, research questions, and methodologies.
2. Constructively critique the material that you read (on both sides of the issue, as appropriate) by considering
 - a. What the material tells us;
 - b. What questions remain to be answered; and
 - c. Where the particular area or theory might go from here.
3. To the extent possible, it would be helpful to let us know how you view the relationships between your topic and previous topics discussed in the seminar.

I may intervene to consolidate arguments, point out missing links, and guide the conversation.

Participation

Each class member is expected to participate **ACTIVELY** in every class. You are expected to be prepared to discuss and comment on all of the required readings for each session. Pre-class preparation involves reading the material as well as reflecting upon the discussion questions assigned for that session.

As you do the readings, consider not only what the author did wrong—the usual stock-in-trade of graduate seminars—but what the author did right. What are the interesting ideas in the paper? If you disagree with an argument, what would it take to convince you? What are the scope conditions—under what circumstances is the argument meant to apply (e.g., only to U.S. non-profits; only to family businesses in Canada; etc.)? What modifications would be necessary to extend the argument? Are there critical differences between this author's arguments and those of others we have read? Can these differences be resolved through empirical test? What would a study look like that did this?

Your enthusiastic involvement is essential to the course. We want to develop an open, inviting, inclusive, but penetrating culture of discourse. That is what makes for a great seminar!

Response points

We will do a considerable amount of writing in this class. Starting with week 2, each student will write a weekly half-page “response point” based on one of the assigned readings. The response point is to be shared with the class by 5:00 p.m. on the Wednesday before the session. The response point is

simply a nagging thought, idea, argument, or question that you might want to pose during class discussion. (This means that you should plan to bring a copy to class as well!) You are allowed to miss *two response points* over the course of the semester. However, you should still plan to read the material and contribute to class discussion!

The response points help ensure that we will all come with something interesting to contribute to the class discussion.

Reaction memos

In addition to the weekly response points, you will also write 2-page 'reaction memos' every other week. Hardcopies of your response papers are due by *5 p.m. the Saturday after class*. This will allow you to further develop your response paper based on insights from our class discussion of the readings. You might choose to elaborate on your response point or, based on the discussion, you might choose to go in another direction. Regardless of what you choose to do, your reaction memo should include some kind of thought, criticism, argument, idea or application in response to the readings. It should not be a summary of the readings and it should go beyond what we discussed in class.

Regular writing is a fundamental means of intellectual growth! You should treat both your response points and your reaction memos as a grounding for your future research.

Term Paper

You are required to submit a term paper. The content of this will be centered on a topic in organizational theory related to what we have covered in the course. This paper must be original work. You should not submit a paper used to satisfy the requirements of another course or a research relationship with another faculty. These papers should be 15 to 20 pages, double-spaced, excluding references and any appendices, tables, and / or figures.

The term paper must contain: Part 1, theory (15 pages); and, Part 2, a research study design (5 pages).

Part 1: The paper should be theoretical or conceptual (e.g., no data), based on a specialized topic within the domain of the course. Most likely this part of the paper would, (1) develop a particular topic linked to one of the schools of thought we consider in the seminar; (2) integrate the perspectives from two or more schools of thought that might offer a unique conceptualization of an OT issue; or (3) use the various schools of thought discussed in the seminar to explain a current phenomenon in organizations. You should identify the problem or issue of interest and convince the reader of the importance of examining the issue further. That involves identifying a question, problem, or tension in the literature, arguing why the question is important and interesting, and then discussing how you intend to address the question, problem, or tension. You should review the appropriate literature and then use that literature to develop original theoretical arguments. Those arguments might lead to the specification of testable hypotheses or to a theoretical framework or model that could guide future research.

Part 2: An important part of your comprehensive exam is the ability to explain how you are going to design a study to test, explore, or investigate the 'gap' identified in the literature. This part of the paper should focus on how you would actually design a study to investigate the line of argument developed in part 1. These reflections should as a minimum focus on choices around: (1) the empirical context (if it is a field study), (2) data collection, including data sources (survey, interview

etc.), (3) data analysis and method, (4) theory testing vs. theory development – basically, what type of study are you designing? Overall, you need to argue why this design is appropriate for answering your research question, and investigating the line of thinking developed in part 1.

The following two online resources might prove helpful:

- Bem, Daryl J. 2003. Writing the empirical journal article. In J.M. Darley, M.P Zanna, and H.L. Roediger III, eds., *The Complete Academic: A Practical Guide for the Beginning Social Scientist*, 2nd Ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Available at: <https://psychology.yale.edu/sites/default/files/bemempirical.pdf>
- Zuckerman, Ezra. 2008. Tips to article-writers <http://mitsloan.mit.edu/shared/ods/documents/?DocumentID=2468>

EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on the following:

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| • Discussion Questions / Moderator | 10% |
| • Weekly Seminar Contribution/10 Response Points | 20% |
| • Reaction memos (5) | 20% |
| • Referee Report | 10% |
| • Term Paper | 40% |

ATTENDANCE

Attendance in all sessions of this course is mandatory. If you miss a class, you will not receive any contribution credit for that class; there is no way to “make up” for a missed day. A grade of zero will be assigned to those classes (the notification requirements must be met: see below). If absenteeism has reached 25 percent (3 or more classes), you will not be eligible to write the final exam, and you will fail the course.

(https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf)

Missed classes, with the exception of religious holidays with advance notice or extended absences approved by the program office, will be included in the overall calculation for contribution.

ACADEMIC OFFENSES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at <https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/13.html>.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Support Services: Health and Wellness

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness at Western University <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Additionally, students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), program coordinator or other relevant administrators in their unit.

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. See <https://www.uwo.ca/health>.

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION WESTERN

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

REQUIRED BOOKS & MATERIAL

W. Richard Scott and Gerald F. Davis (2007). **Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural, and open systems perspectives**. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Becker, Howard S. 2007 [1986]. *Writing for Social Scientists* (2nd Ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. [Read chapters 1-8.]

Both books are available from Amazon.com. I strongly urge you to buy both books. Becker's book is the best book on writing that I know about. I still reread it when I struggle with writing. Scott and Davis is a resource that you will use throughout your career. When I need to think about a topic on organization theory, I will pick it up for guidance. Yes, it is overpriced. (Jerry always complains about this.) Used copies are available.

Required readings you can obtain in electronic format.

COURSE OUTLINE – REQUIRED READINGS

January 11, 2024: Introduction to Organizational Theory and Theorizing

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapter 1.

Perrow, Charles. 1991. “A Society of Organizations.” *Theory and Society*, 20:725-62.

Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory Construction as Disciplined Imagination. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258556>

Becker, Howard S. 2007 [1986]. *Writing for Social Scientists* (2nd Ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. [Read chapters 1-8.]

January 18, 2024: Approaches to thinking about organizations

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapters 2-5.

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1982. Should sociologists forget their mothers and fathers? *The American Sociologist*, 17(1), 2-11.

Lounsbury, Michael, and Christine M. Beckman. “Celebrating Organization Theory” *Journal of Management Studies* 52, no. 2 (March 2015): 288–308. doi:10.1111/joms.12091.

Davis, Gerald F. “Celebrating Organization Theory: The After-Party.” *Journal of Management Studies* 52, no. 2 (March 2015): 309–19. doi:10.1111/joms.12094.

January 25, 2024: Carnegie School

March, James G., and Herbert A. Simon. 1958. *Organizations*. New York: John Wiley. [Chapter 2 “Classical” Organization Theory and Chapter 6 Cognitive Limits on Rationality]

Cyert, Richard M., and James G. March. 1963/1992. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. [Chapter 2 Antecedents of the Behavioral Theory of the Firm, Chapter 3 Organizational Goals, and Chapter 7 A Summary of Basic Concepts in the Behavioral Theory of the Firm.

Zbaracki, Mark J., Lee Watkiss, Cameron McAlpine, and Julian Barg. 2021. “Truth, Beauty, and Justice in Social Science Models.” *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 76: 159-177.

Zbaracki, M. J., & Bergen, M. (2010). When Truces Collapse: A Longitudinal Study of Price-Adjustment Routines. *Organization Science*, 21, 955–972.

February 1, 2024: Contingency Theory

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapter 6.

Woodward, Joan. 1965. *Industrial Organization. Theory and Practice*. London, UK: Oxford University Press. [Chapters 4 and 5]

Lawrence, P.R., and J.W. Lorsch. 1967. “Differentiation and integration in complex organizations”. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 12: 1-47

Schoonhoven, Claudia B. 1981. Problems with Contingency Theory: Testing Assumptions Hidden within the Language of Contingency "Theory." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(3): 349-377.

Padgett, John F., 1992. "Review Essay: The Alchemist of Contingency Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 97: 1462-70.

February 8, 2024: Resource dependence

Scott and Davis, Chapter 9

Emerson, R. 1962. "Power dependence relations." *American Sociological Review* 27: 31-40.

Casciaro, T., and M. J. Piskorski. 2005. "Power imbalance, mutual dependence, and constraint absorption: A closer look at resource dependence theory." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 30: 167–199.

Gulati, R. and M. Stych (2007) Dependence asymmetry and joint dependence in interorganizational relationships: Effects of Embeddedness on a manufacturer's performance in procurement relationships. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52(1): 32-69.

Davis, G. F., & Cobb, J. A. (2010). Resource dependence theory: Past and future. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 28, 21–42.

February 15, 2024: Reviewing and being reviewed

Johanson, L. (2007). Sitting in your reader's chair. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16:290-294.

Murnighan, J.K. (1996). "Revising and Resubmitting: Author Emotions, Editor Roles, and the Value of Dialogue" Eds. Peter J. Frost & M. Susan Taylor. *Rhythms of Academic Life: Personal Accounts of Careers in Academia*.

Reviewing is not only an important service to our profession, but it helps us to be better writers ourselves. This week you will write your own review of a manuscript that I will distribute before spring break. After reviewing it, you will read the reviews and the author's response, and we will discuss reviewing in class.

For guidelines on how to review a paper, see:

<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/societyimages/asq/ASQ%20reviewer%20guidelines.pdf>

February 22, 2024: Organizational ecology

Scott and Davis, Chapter 10

Hannan, M. T. & Freeman, J. 1977. The population ecology of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82: 929-964.

Carroll, G. R. & Swaminathan, A. 2000. Why the microbrewery movement? Organizational dynamics of resource partitioning in the US brewing industry. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(3): 715-762.

Hsu, G. 2006. "Jacks of all trades and masters of none: Audiences' reactions to spanning genres in feature film production". *Administrative Science Quarterly* 51: 420-450.

February 29, 2024: Embeddedness, Networks, and Innovation

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.

Burt, R. S. 2004. "Structural holes and good ideas." *American Journal of Sociology*, 110: 349-399.

Lingo, Elizabeth Long and O'Mahony, Siobhan. 2010. Nexus work: Brokerage on creative projects. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 55: 47-81.

Soda, Giuseppe, Tortoriello, Marco, and Iorio, Alessandro, 2018. "Harvesting Value from Brokerage: Individual Strategic Orientation, Structural Holes, and Performance," *Academy of Management Journal* 61(3): 896-918.

March 7, 2024: Institutions and Symbolic management

Meyer, J. W. and Rowan, B. 1977. "Institutionalized organizations: formal structure as myth and ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340-363.

DiMaggio, Paul J. and Walter W. Powell. 1983. The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48:147-160.

Zbaracki, Mark J. "The Rhetoric and Reality of Total Quality Management." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (September 1998): 602. doi:10.2307/2393677.

Sudday, Roy, Bitektine, Alex, and Haack, Patrick, 2017. "Legitimacy," *Academy of Management Annals*, 11 (1): 451-478.

March 14, 2024: The New Neo-Institutional Theory

Lok, J., & de Rond, M. 2013. On the plasticity of institutions: Containing and restoring practice breakdowns at the Cambridge University Boat Club. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56: 185–207.

Leibel, E., Hallett, T., & Bechky, B. A. 2018. Meaning at the source: The dynamics of field formation in institutional research. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12: 154–177.

Harmon, Derek J., 2019. "When the Fed Speaks: Arguments, Emotions, and the Microfoundations of Institutions," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 64 (3): 542-575.

Steele, C. W. J. (2021). 'When things get odd: Exploring the interactional choreography of taken-for-grantedness'. *Academy of Management Review*, 46, 341–61.

March 21, 2024: No class

March 28, 2024: The ambiguities of experience

Cohen, Michael. D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 1972. A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17 (1): 1-25.

Weick, K. E. (1993). The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster.

Administrative Science Quarterly, 38(4), 628. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393339>

Cohen, Michael D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 2012. "A garbage can model' at forty: a solution that still attracts problems." In, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations, vol. 36: The Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice: Looking Forward at Forty*. Alessandro Lomi and J. Richard Harrison, eds. Bingley, UK: Emerald Books, 2012.

Weick, K. E. (1993). The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(4), 628. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393339>

Zbaracki, Mark J. 2013. Book review: "A garbage can model' at forty: a solution that still attracts problems. *Organization Studies*.

April 4, 2022: Occupations, negotiated order and power

Huising, Ruthanne. 2015. "To hive or to hold? Producing professional authority through scut work." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60: 263-299.

Bechky, B.A. 2020. "Evaluative spillovers from technological change: The effects of 'DNA envy' on occupational practices in forensic science." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65: 606-643.

Anthony, C. 2021. When knowledge work and analytical technologies collide: The practices and consequences of black boxing algorithmic technologies. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 66(4): 1173-1212.

Rahman, H.A. 2021. "The Invisible Cage: Workers' Reactivity to Opaque Algorithmic Evaluations." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 66(4): 945-988

April 21, 2024: Final Paper Due at 11:59 p.m.