

Sociology 25

Introduction to the Sociology of Organizations

Spring, 2017
MW(F) 11-12
William James Hall B-1

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Overview:

Organizations—business firms, government agencies, health providers, trade unions, political parties, schools, religious bodies, voluntary associations—are the principal social structures invented to accomplish complex tasks in contemporary society. Deliberately designed, goal-oriented activity systems, their structures and routines shape the lives of their employees, customers, clients, and members. Like other social groups, organizations have goals, structures, environments, and cultures, and hence the study of organizations engages many problems and approaches in the field of sociology.

This course introduces the study of organizations. Our approach will center in sociology, but this is an interdisciplinary field, so we will draw on ideas based in related social science disciplines at points. The course aspires to

- Acquaint you with contemporary organizational phenomena that you may encounter, both in your studies and in your lives as employees, entrepreneurs or employers, customers, and citizens
- Acquaint you with classical and contemporary theorizing about organizations and organizing, with emphasis on the distinct modes and mechanisms used to coordinate human activity in organizations
- Convey an appreciation for how organizations are shaped by, and in turn shape, their settings or “environments”
- Consider some problems and challenges that organizations pose—both for their participants, and for the societies in which they are situated
- Ask you to think about how we might build more effective organizations—for all stakeholders—in the future
- Give you some experience in analyzing organizational questions, and in writing concisely about them

The study of organizations is most developed for work organizations in the private sector, those that produce goods and/or provide services. Most of what we cover here will reflect that emphasis, but many of the ideas pertain to governmental and nonprofit organizations, too.

The early part of the course surveys types of organizations and introduces some classical writings about them. We consider micro-level questions involving the structuring of positions within organizations and how individuals and work groups interact with the formal organization. Then we turn to larger-scale questions of organizational architecture, including ways of grouping tasks into units, achieving coordination, and allocating responsibilities and authority for decision-making among participants. After that, we engage the important question of why organizations take different forms; the course will approach this from several angles involving different "contingency" factors—among them size, age, technology, environment, and fashion. Among the perspectives used to understand variations in organizational features are their deliberate pursuit of goals, their ongoing maintenance needs together with needs of their human participants, and situational factors and circumstances in their environments.

At the end of the course, we focus on several types of organizations that are prominent, or are becoming prominent, in contemporary society. We also consider some ways that organizations contribute to the production of inequality. In closing, we consider some emerging organizational forms and some proposals for altering organizations—innovations that are thought to help solve, or ameliorate, some problems of an organizationally-based society. Throughout, the course, we will analyze and discuss case studies drawn both from social science studies and management education sources in order to gain familiarity with organizational issues and phenomena.

Book and other readings:

The only required book for the course is:

Mintzberg, Henry (1992) *Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*. Pearson Education (originally published by Prentice-Hall).

This provides a story line that we will follow throughout the semester. The book has been ordered at the Coop. The price of new copies is distressingly high, so I encourage you to explore much more reasonable options for purchasing used copies online (e.g., as of January 18, Amazon.com was offering 44 different used options, most [but not all] of which were priced a good deal more modestly).

Numerous articles and chapters from other sources will be assigned. Most of these will be available on the course website in advance of when you need to read them for class or section meetings.

You will need to purchase and read a few case studies that are available from Harvard Business School Publishing. After a coursepack for this course is developed early in the semester, we'll send you a link via which you can obtain them.

Academic Integrity Policy:

I have adopted an FAS-provided statement about permissible collaboration in this course, as follows:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

I expect that you can and will learn from one another, just as I constantly learn from colleagues and students. At the same time, it is essential that any aid you receive be duly credited, and that you keep in mind that the aim of discussing assigned work with one another is to mutually support each other's learning—not to substitute the work of one person for another. Please observe this policy in letter and spirit.

Requirements:

There will be two written examinations (a midterm and a final).

There will be four short (3-5 pp.) written assignments, spaced throughout the semester. Formats will vary: You may be asked to reflect on your experiences with organizations, to read and analyze case studies, or review books, for example.

Most (but not all) weeks will include section meetings in which readings and case studies of organizational phenomena are discussed. Participation in these is required and is a component of your course grade.

Comments on sections, due dates, extensions, and the like:

1. *Sections.* Sections will be held on Thursdays and/or Fridays. Times for sections, and section assignments, will be determined during the first week or so of the semester. No section meetings will be held during the first week (January 26-27) or the week immediately before spring break (March 9-10).
2. *Readings.* Readings other than the Mintzberg book and the HBS case studies will be available on the course website, in a Reading List folder within the Modules tab.
3. *Midterm Examination.* The midterm examination is scheduled for Wednesday, March 8. It will cover materials indicated in sections A, B, and C of the outline below. The format will be short-answer/multiple choice.
4. *Written Assignments.* Written assignments will be explained on separate assignment sheets. The assignments are spread more or less evenly throughout the semester, as indicated below. No

assignment will be due during the week of the midterm examination. They should be submitted in hardcopy because we read them in that form.

5. *Grades.* Grades will reflect your performance on course work as follows: midterm, 15%; final exam, 25%; written assignment 1, 5%; written assignments 2-4, 10% each; class/section participation, 15%. Please note that the clarity and presentation of your writing do count towards your grades on both written assignments and examinations. Irrespective of this formula, frequent absence from class or section can detract from your grade.

6. *Extension Policy.* We expect your written assignments to be submitted on time. Credit for assignments will be reduced by 10% per day if they are late.

Recognizing that all of us have complicated lives and schedules, each of you may take one-2-day, no-questions-asked extension, as long as you notify us in advance that you will be using it. To use it, email in advance of the due date to either the TF or the instructor is sufficient. You need not explain your reasons when requesting the routine extension. We will need to know your reasons for requesting more than one such extension, or extensions that are longer than 2 days, however.

7. *Final Examination.* The Registrar has scheduled the final examination for Tuesday, May 9, from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon. Its format will be generally the same as that of the midterm, though the final will be longer in general and may include essays as well as short-answer questions.

Topic Schedule and Readings:

Please note: there may be some adjustments to this list, especially in later parts of the course.

A. Introductory Materials (first week of classes)

Mintzberg, chapter 1

Perrow, Charles (1991) "A Society of Organizations." *Theory and Society* 20 (6): 725-762.

B. Organizations at the Micro-level: Individual Positions and Work Groups (through mid-February)

Mintzberg, chapter 2

Taylor, Frederick W. "Scientific Management." Pp. 55-66 in *The Sociology of Organizations: Basic Studies*, Second Edition, edited by Oscar Grusky and George A. Miller. New York: Free Press, 1981.

Rachleff, Peter. "Machine Technology and Workplace Control: The U.S. Post Office." Pp. 120-133 in *The Sociology of Organizations: Basic Studies*, Second Edition, edited by Oscar Grusky and George A. Miller. New York: Free Press, 1981.

Roy, Donald (1952) "Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop." *American Journal of Sociology* 57 (5): 427-442.

Van Maanen, John. "The Smile Factory: Work at Disneyland." Pp. 58-76 in Peter J. Frost, Larry F. Moore, Meryl Reis Lois, Craig C. Lundberg and Joanne Martin (eds.), *Reframing Organizational Culture*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991.

- Blau, Peter M. "Consultation Among Colleagues and Informal Norms." Pp. 110-127 in Fred A. Kramer (ed.) *Perspectives on Public Bureaucracy*, Third Edition. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981.
- Hackman, J. Richard, Greg Oldham, Robert Janson, and Kenneth Purdy (1975) "A New Strategy for Job Enrichment." *California Management Review* 17 (4): 57-71.
- Bowen, H. Kent, Janice Hammond, Sylvie Ryckebusch, and Hiroshi Uchikoga (2008) "Toshiba: Ome Works." HBS Case 9-696-059. (Purchase with coursepack from Harvard Business School Publishing via link to be provided.)

Written assignment #1, Due Wednesday, February 15.

C. Organizational Architecture: Macro-level Design (late February-early March)

- Mintzberg, chapters 3-5
- Weber, Max "Bureaucracy." Pp. 7-36 in *The Sociology of Organizations: Basic Studies*, Second Edition, edited by Oscar Grusky and George A. Miller. New York: Free Press, 1981.
- Urwick, Lyndall F. (1956) "The Manager's Span of Control." *Harvard Business Review* (May-June): 39-47.
- Adler, Paul S. and Bryan Borys (1996) "Two Types of Bureaucracy: Enabling and Coercive." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41 (1): 61-89.
- Daft, Richard L., Kristen D. Skivington and Mark P. Sharfman, "Calgary Police Department." Pp. 116-122 in *Organization Theory: Cases & Applications*, Second Edition. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1987.
- Gittell, Jody Hoffer, Julian Wimbush and Kirstin Shu (2000) "Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center: Coordinating Patient Care." HBS Case 9-899-213. (Purchase with coursepack from Harvard Business School Publishing via link to be provided.)
- Lockridge, W. R. "Atlas Electronics Corporation." Pp. 107-115 in Richard L. Daft, Kristen D. Skivington and Mark P. Sharfman (eds.), *Organization Theory: Cases & Applications*, Second Edition. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1987.

Written assignment #2, Due Wednesday, March 1.

MIDTERM EXAMINATION, Wednesday, March 8 (in class)

D. Contingencies of Design: Size, Age, Environment, Technology, and Fashion (mid-March to early April)

- Mintzberg, chapter 6
- Blau, Peter M. (1972) "Interdependence and Hierarchy in Organizations." *Social Science Research* 1 (1): 1-24.
- Hannan, Michael T. and John Freeman (1984) "Structural Inertia and Organizational Change." *American Sociological Review* 49 (2): 149-164.
- Lawrence, Paul R. and Jay W. Lorsch, "Organizations in a Diverse and Dynamic Environment." Pp. 23-53 in *Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration*. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1969.
- Dobbin, Frank. "Cultural Models of Organization: The Social Construction of Rational Organizing Principles." Pp. 117-141 in *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by Diana Crane. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994.

- Miles, Robert H. "The U.S. Tobacco Industry: Environmental Threats and Strategic Responses." Pp. 29-54 in *Coffin Nails and Corporate Strategies*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.
- Hirsch, Paul M. (1972) "Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization-Set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems." *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (4): 639-659.

Written Assignment #3, Due Monday, April 10.

E. Organizations and Inequality (mid-April)

- Baron, James N. and William T. Bielby (1980) "Bringing the Firms Back In: Stratification, Segmentation, and the Organization of Work." *American Sociological Review* 45 (5): 737-765.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss (1977) "Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women." *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (5): 965-990.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia, "The Gender Frame and Social Order." Pp. 189-207 in Edward J. Lawler, Shane R. Thye and Jeongkoo Yoon (eds.) *Order on the Edge of Chaos: Social Psychology and the Problem of Social Order*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Reskin, Barbara and Debra Branch McBrier (2000) "Why Not Ascription? Organizations' Employment of Male and Female Managers." *American Sociological Review* 65 (2): 210-233.
- Kalev, Alexandra, Erin Kelly and Frank Dobbin (2006) "Best Practices or Best Guesses? Assessing the Efficacy of Corporate Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies." *American Sociological Review* 71 (4): 589-617.
- Thomas, David A. and Stephanie J. Creary (2009) "Meeting the Diversity Challenge at PepsiCo: The Steve Reinemund Era." HBS case 9-410-024. (Purchase with coursepack from Harvard Business School Publishing via link to be provided.)

F. Some Contemporary Organizational Forms (end of April)

- Mintzberg, chapters 7-12
- Adler, Paul S. and Robert E. Cole (1993) "Designed for Learning: A Tale of Two Auto Plants." *Sloan Management Review* 34 (3): 85-94.
- Graham, Laurie (1993) "Inside a Japanese Transplant: A Critical Perspective." *Work and Occupations* 20 (2): 147-173.
- Barker, James R. (1993) "Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38 (3): 408-437.
- DeLong, Thomas J., Tejal Mody and David L. Ager (2003) "C&S Wholesale Grocers: Self-Managed Teams." HBS case 9-404-025. (Purchase with coursepack from Harvard Business School Publishing via link to be provided.)
- Gardner, Heidi K. and Robert G. Eccles (2011) "Eden McCallum: A Network-Based Consulting Firm (A)." HBS case 9-410-056. (Purchase with coursepack from Harvard Business School Publishing via link to be provided.)
- Tushman, Michael L. and Charles A. O'Reilly III (1996) "The Ambidextrous Organizations: Managing Evolutionary and Revolutionary Change." *California Management Review* 38 (4): 8-30.

Written assignment #4, Due Monday, May 1.

Postscript (read as you wish)

Mintzberg, chapter 13

Davis, Gerald F. (2013) "After the Corporation." *Politics & Society* 41 (2): 283-308.

FINAL EXAMINATION: Tuesday, May 9, 9 a.m.-12 noon