

## SOCIOLOGY 8710: SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

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Office hours: Fri. 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

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Tuesday, 10:00 – 12:30 p.m.

Randall Hall 112

### Overview

Organizations affect virtually every sector of modern social life. In traditional societies, people get things done by mobilizing multi-purpose collectivities such as the household, the clan, the village, or the feudal fief. In modern societies, people achieve goals beyond the reach of a single individual by mobilizing formal organizations formed for those purposes. Organizations have important effects on society, in two broad ways. First, as wealthy and powerful collective actors, they shape political and cultural outcomes to further their interests—and, some argue, subvert democracy in the process. Second, they shape the (unequal) earnings, status, everyday experiences, and habits of mind of the people who work for and in them.

Organizational sociology is part of a larger interdisciplinary field focused on the study of organizations. Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and management scholars participate in this larger conversation. In this course, although our perspective will be primarily sociological, we will encounter ideas that emerged in a variety of disciplines.

This course aims to provide students with a thorough grounding in the sociological research literature on organizations. We will begin with a brief dip into work that attempts to conceptualize and document the social consequences of organizations. In the first part of the course, we will cover topics that may be broadly understood as internal to the organization: the problem of collective action and how organizations overcome it; the nature of bureaucratic structure and how it differs from both traditional patrimonialism and collectivism/collegiality; rational explanations of organizational structure as a response to the nature of work inputs and outputs; organizational culture and its effects. In the second part, we will consider issues involving the external social context of organizations: institutional fields and practices, power and dependence relationships, organizational ecology, transaction cost theory, organizational networks, and status hierarchies.

### Readings

In recent decades, the sociology of organizations has become a largely article-based subfield. Most of the readings will consist of journal articles available through the UVA library's online databases. A few articles and book chapters (marked with an asterisk) are available in the "Resources" section of the course Collab site. Students should plan to buy the following book, which we will read in its entirety (either the first or second edition is acceptable).

Kunda, Gideon. 2006 [1992]. *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

The following book is recommended as a thoughtful and comprehensive (although now slightly out of date) overview of the field by two well-known scholars:

Scott, W. Richard and Gerald F. Davis. 2007. *Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural, and Open System Perspectives*. Pearson Prentice Hall.

## Requirements and Grading

### Class participation (30%)

The format of this course is a discussion-based seminar, which depends on the active and informed participation of all students.

### Weekly reflection memos (30%)

Each week you will turn in a short reflection/response memo (1-2 single-spaced pages) responding to the week's prompt or addressing other themes of interest to you. In these memos you should aim to demonstrate engaged reading of the assigned material, reflect critically on it, and identify key questions to explore in class discussion. Reflection memos should be submitted electronically via the course Collab site's Assignments page by 9 a.m. on the due date.

### Discussion leading (10%)

Each student will take a turn leading the discussion for one week. Discussion leaders will prepare a document that includes (1) an outline or summary of each of the week's readings (3-4 single spaced pages) and (2) a series of 6 or 7 discussion questions (with 2 or 3 possible answers for each). This document should be submitted electronically in lieu of a regular reflection memo. You do not need to distribute the document to the class. However, you are welcome to prepare handouts or slides if you believe they would aid the class discussion.

### Term paper (30%)

Students will also write a final course paper of approximately 20 double-spaced pages in length, exclusive of title page, references, tables, figures, etc., on a topic of your choice related to the sociology of organizations, due **Wednesday December 12**. A prospectus is due in class on **Tuesday October 2**; this should be 1-2 double-spaced, plus 5-10 references. I recommend choosing one of the following options:

1. *Literature review*. Choose a topic area within organizational sociology—either one of the topics we touch on in the course, or another one of interest to you—and investigate it in greater depth. The outcome should be a detailed, thematic review of the literature following the model of review essays published in the *Annual Review of Sociology*. Ideally, your review should also identify gaps or problems in the existing research literature that provide opportunities for future contribution. This is a great option for those of you who are new to organizational sociology. It lays the necessary groundwork for a research project by thoroughly mapping the “research conversation” to which your future work could contribute.
2. *Research proposal*. For those of you who are already well versed in a particular topic area and wish to pursue it, develop a proposal for an empirical research study that would be suitable for submission to a granting agency (without the budget, of course). Such a proposal should follow the general format of the “front end” of a journal article: introduction, brief literature review, theory (and hypotheses if appropriate), and research design/methods.
3. *Research paper*. For students who are already embarked on an empirical research project relating to organizational sociology, the completion of an actual research paper will qualify as the term paper in this course *if it involves substantial additional work beyond what you have done before and it will not be used to fulfill any other academic requirement*. This will generally require you to articulate and investigate a new research question based on your data. If you wish to pursue this option, discuss the details with me.

## Course Schedule

Aug 28

### Week 1. The social consequences of organizations

*How do organizations impact the communities and societies around them? How do they shape the lives of the people who work in them? To what extent are these effects due to the advantages conferred by the corporate form? To what extent are they due to sheer size in terms of number of employees?*

- Merton, Robert K. 1940. "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality." *Social Forces* 18: 560-568.
- Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender and Society* 4: 139-158.
- Perrow, Charles. 2002. *Organizing America: Wealth, Power, and the Origins of Corporate Capitalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1-2\*
- Davis, Gerald F. 2013. "After the Corporation." *Politics & Society* 41: 283-308 \*

Sep 4

### Week 2. Organizations as collective actors

*How should we define collective action? Does it require a mutually recognized common purpose? Organizations face the perennial problem of securing the cooperation and effort of participants: why? Why and to what extent is authority a solution to this problem? Capitalist organizations additionally aim to make employee effort as efficient as possible: why?*

- Wilhoit, E. D. and L. G. Kisselburgh. "Collective Action without Organization: The Material Constitution of Bike Commuters as Collective." *Organization Studies* 36: 573-592.
- Barnard, Chester. 1968 [1938]. "The Theory of Formal Organization." Ch. 7 in *The Functions of the Executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.\*
- Olson, Mancur. 1965. "A Theory of Groups and Organizations." Ch. 1 in *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.\*
- Simon, Herbert A. 1976. "The Role of Authority." Ch. 7 in *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization (3d Ed.)*. New York, NY: Free Press. (Read pp. 177-191 and 197-201; skip the section on "Unity of Command")
- Edwards, Richard. 1979. "Three Faces from the Hidden Abode" and "The Personal Touch: Competitive Capitalism and the Simple Forms of Control", Ch. 1-2 in *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Basic Books.\*

Sep 11

Week 3. Bureaucracy vs. patrimonialism

*How does bureaucracy differ from patrimonial forms of organization? In what ways does bureaucracy represent an improvement? What new problems does it create? Where does patrimonialism persist today? What preconditions are necessary for bureaucracy to be effective?*

- Weber, Max. "Bureaucracy." In *The Sociology of Organizations: Basic Studies*, edited by Oscar Grusky and George A. Miller.\*
- Perrow, Charles. 1986. "Why Bureaucracy?" Ch. 1 in *Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay*. New York, NY: Random House.\*
- Collins, Randall. 2011. "Patrimonial Alliances and Failures of State Penetration: A Historical Dynamic of Crime, Corruption, Gangs, and Mafias." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 636: 16-31.
- Kiser, Edgar and Audrey Sacks. 2011. "African Patrimonialism in Historical Perspective: Assessing Decentralized and Privatized Tax Administration." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 636: 129-149.

Sep 18

Week 4. Bureaucracy vs. the collectivist-collegial model(s)

*How does bureaucracy differ from the collectivist or collegial model(s) (and are they the same or distinct)? Is collectivist-collegial structure equivalent to the absence of structure? Will collectivist-collegial organizations generally evolve toward increasing bureaucracy?*

- Rothschild-Whitt, Joyce. 1979. "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models." *American Sociological Review* 44: 509-527.
- Waters, Malcolm. 1989. "Collegiality, Bureaucratization, and Professionalization: A Weberian Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 94: 945-972.
- Freeman, Jo. 1972. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." *Second Wave* 2 (1): 20-33.\*
- Leach, Darcy K. 2013. "Culture and the Structure of Tyrannylessness." *Sociological Quarterly* 54: 181-191.\*
- Michels, Robert. 1981. "Oligarchy." Pp. Pp 37-54 in *The Sociology of Organizations: Basic Studies (2d Ed.)*, edited by O. Grusky and G. A. Miller. New York, NY: Free Press.\*

Sep 25

Week 5. Where does organizational structure come from? Rational views

*Modern business and governmental organizations generally utilize some mix of bureaucratic and collectivist-collegial structures. Do they exercise rational choice when they locate themselves on this continuum? Is the choice a rational response to the nature of their work processes? Is it a rational means of extracting employee productivity?*

- Smith, Adam. 1994 [1776]. "Of the Division of Labor." Ch. 1 in *The Wealth of Nations*.\*
- March, James D. and Herbert A Simon. 1993 [1958]. "Cognitive Limits on Rationality." Ch. 6 in *Organizations*. 2 ed. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.\*
- Perrow, Charles. 1967. "A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 32: 194-208.
- Van de Ven, Andrew, Andre L. Delbecq, and Richard Koenig. 1976. "Determinants of Coordination Modes within Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 41: 322-338.
- Edwards, Richard. 1979. "Bureaucratic Control", Ch. 8 in *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Basic Books.\*

Oct 2

Week 6. Organizational culture

*What is organizational culture? Can it be “engineered” by organizational leaders? Can culture serve as a substitute for structure in obtaining employee effort and efficiency? For employees, are cultural means of control preferable to structural ones?*

- Kunda, Gideon. 2006 [1992]. *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- O’Reilly, Charles, and Jennifer Chatman. 1996. “Culture as Social Control: Corporations, Cults, and Commitment.” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 18: 157-200.\*

**Term paper proposal due**

Oct 9

Week 7. Fall Break, no class

Oct 16

Week 8. Institutionalized practices and isomorphism

*Organizations exist within larger cultural and institutional environments. How do those environments affect them? To what extent are organizations passive, “oversocialized” actors?*

- Meyer, John W. and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340-363.
- DiMaggio, Paul J. and W. Walter Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality." *American Sociological Review* 48: 147-160.
- Tolbert, Pamela, and Lynne Zucker. 1983. "Institutional Sources of Change in the Formal Structure of Organizations: The Diffusion of Civil Service Reform, 1880-1935." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28: 22-39.
- Edelman, Lauren B., Christopher Uggen, and Howard S. Erlanger. 1999. "The Endogeneity of Legal Regulation: Grievance Procedures as Rational Myth." *American Journal of Sociology* 105:406-454.

Oct 23

Week 9. Institutional change and legitimacy

*Early institutional theory seemed to preclude the possibility of organizational agency or institutional innovation. How do organizations and the individuals within them bring about both limited and radical change? How is such change legitimated—or de-legitimated?*

- Hallett, Tim. 2010. "The Myth Incarnate: Recoupling Processes, Turmoil, and Inhabited Institutions in an Urban Elementary School." *American Sociological Review* 75: 52-74.
- DiMaggio, Paul. 1982. "Cultural Entrepreneurship in 19th-Century Boston - the Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America." *Media Culture & Society* 4: 33-50.\*
- Thornton, Patricia H. and William Ocasio. 1999. "Institutional Logics and the Historical Contingency of Power in Organizations: Executive Succession in the Higher Education Publishing Industry, 1958-1990." *American Journal of Sociology* 105:801-843.
- Suddaby, Roy and Royston Greenwood. 2005. "Rhetorical Strategies of Legitimacy." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50:35-67.

Oct 30

Week 10. Organizational ecology

*Organizations of the same form in the same place can arguably be thought of as a population. To what extent do principles of ecology and demography shed light on the growth of organizational populations? Methodologically, do researchers need to actually measure the processes their theories posit, or is it enough if observed outcomes are consistent with those theories?*

- Hannan, Michael T. and John Freeman. 1977. "The Population Ecology of Organizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 82: 929-964.
- Carroll, Glenn, and Michael Hannan. 1989. "Density Dependence in the Evolution of Populations of Newspaper Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 54: 524-541.
  - Zucker, Lynne G. 1989. "Combining Institutional Theory and Population Ecology: No Legitimacy, No History (Comment on Carroll and Hannan)." *American Sociological Review* 54: 542-545.
  - Carroll, Glenn R. and Michael T. Hannan. 1989. "On Using Institutional Theory in Studying Organizational Populations (Reply to Zucker)." *American Sociological Review* 54: 545-548.
- Carroll, Glenn R. and Anand Swaminathan. 2000. "Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry." *American Journal of Sociology* 106: 715-762.

Nov 6

Week 11. Dependence and power in organizational relationships

*Is Emerson's influential argument—that power is simply the converse of dependence—persuasive? How does it apply to organizations?*

- Emerson, Richard. 1962. "Power-Dependence Relations." *American Sociological Review* 27: 31-41.
- Pfeffer, Jeffrey, and Gerald Salancik. 2003 [1978]. *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource-Dependence Perspective*. Chapters 3, 5, 6.\*
- Casciaro, Tiziana and Mikolaj J. Piskorski. 2005. "Power Imbalance, Mutual Dependence, and Constraint Absorption: A Closer Look at Resource Dependence Theory." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50:167-199.

Nov 13

Week 12. Markets, "hierarchies," and transaction costs

*What is the conceptual distinction between "markets" and "hierarchies" as modes of structuring economic activity? What are "transaction costs" and why might they be the dispositive factor determining which mode is used? What circumstances increase transaction costs and why? What critiques can be made of Williamson's influential theoretical elaboration?*

- Coase, Ronald. 1937. "The Nature of the Firm." Pp. 18-33 in *The Nature of the Firm: Origins, Evolution, and Development*.\*
- Williamson, Oliver. 1985. *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism*. Chapter 1 pp. 15-23; Chapters 2, 4, 9.\*
- Bridges, William P. and Wayne J. Villemez. 1991. "Employment Relations and the Labor Market: Integrating Institutional and Market Perspectives." *American Sociological Review* 56:748-764.

Nov 20

Week 13. Organizational networks

*Can networks of social ties provide a third alternative to markets and hierarchies? How? What are the advantages of networks, and under what circumstances is the use of networks preferable? How does the structure of an actor's network affect that actor's opportunities and competitive position?*

- Granovetter, Mark. 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91: 481-510.
- Uzzi, Brian. 1997. "Social Structure and Competition in Interfirm Networks: The Paradox of Embeddedness." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42:35-67.
- Powell, W. Walter. 1990. "Neither Market nor Hierarchy - Network Forms of Organization." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12:295-336 \*
- Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 1360-1380.
- Burt, Ronald. 1992. "The Social Structure of Competition." Ch. 2 in *Networks and Organizations: Structure, Form, and Action*, edited by N. Nohria and R. G. Eccles. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.\*

Nov 27

Week 14. Organizational status and status hierarchies

*Under what circumstances does organizational status become salient? What is the relationship between status and quality? What are the economic effects of status? How does status affect organizational choices? How do third-party evaluators affect status hierarchies?*

- Podolny, Joel M. 1993. "A Status-Based Model of Market Competition." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 829-872.
- Burris, Val. 2004. "The Academic Caste System: Prestige Hierarchies in PhD Exchange Networks." *American Sociological Review* 69: 239-264.
- Phillips, Damon and Ezra Zuckerman. 2001. "Middle-Status Conformity: Theoretical Restatement and Empirical Demonstration in Two Markets." *American Journal of Sociology* 107: 379-429.
- Espeland, Wendy and Michael Sauder. 2007. "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds." *American Journal of Sociology* 113:1-40.

Dec 4

Week 15. Student presentations and the future of organizational sociology

*Business-school based organization studies has arguably overwhelmed organizational sociology, and many sociologists have turned away as a result. Yet business-school based scholars focus on a relatively narrow range of topics. Do avenues remain for sociologists to make important--and interesting--contributions to the study of organizations?*

- Scott, W. Richard. 2004. "Reflections on a Half-Century of Organizational Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 1-21.
- Posts from the *Work in Progress* blog "panel" on "The Future of Organizational Sociology" <https://workingprogress.oowsection.org/category/panels/panel-future-of-organizational-sociology/>
  - Gorman, Elizabeth. "The end of 'organizational sociology' as we know it?"
  - Suchman, Mark. "Why before how: 'Distinctive and indispensable' beats 'sophisticated but superfluous.'"
  - King, Brayden. "Why we should stop worrying about organizational sociology."