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MGT 650
SEMINAR IN THEORY AND RESEARCH IN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR
FALL 2008
Tuesdays 2:30-5:05 PM

The field of organizational behavior has a long history dating back to the original Hawthorne studies from 1927 - 1932. This research uncovered the “informal” side of organizing that has led to most of the basic topics (motivation, attitudes, emotions, human needs, leadership, group dynamics, decision making, social networks, etc.) that still define the study of organizational behavior today. The primary objective of this seminar is to introduce you this discipline and provide you with a beginning foundation/understanding of the research issues and questions that predominate the minds of OB scholars.

The field of OB has grown substantially over the years so that it is impossible to cover all the topics in a semester’s seminar. And, as time has passed, it has become less clear where the boundaries of the field lie. Most OB professionals focus their effort on micro-organizational processes and leave the macro topics for strategy and organizational theory.

There are two basic approaches that can be used in a doctoral seminar. The first approach is for the professor to provide the students with a defined set of readings and then assign these readings on a weekly basis that then get discussed thoroughly in the seminar. This is the traditional approach and has a well tested track record of success.

Another more recent approach is to use the seminar as a space to co-construct the structure of the seminar and therefore allow the student greater influence over their own learning. This is an innovative approach that holds great promise, but also some risks. The promise is that it can help you know the field better since you are involved in a survey of the field as well as making choices regarding what to include in the seminar’s reading list. This often results in the inclusion of topics and readings that the student finds of interest. The risk is that the student needs to actively engage in the seminar at all times, and not passively wait for the professor or others to provide direction. If every student does not do this then it will affect all members of the seminar.

For this semester I have chosen to follow the second approach with some variation. Part of my reasoning for this lies in the fact that I recently went to Wikipedia to look up what had been written there on organizational behavior. I was surprised to find that the only entries for organizational behavior came under the general heading of organization studies (a catch all term that includes both micro and macro aspects of behavior in organizations). Although there are various leads to OB topics, it appears that an opportunity exists to develop the entry for organizational behavior. The one requirement for this course is that we as a class create the organizational behavior entry in Wikipedia.

A second objective of the seminar will be to practice the discipline of précis (pronounced pray-see) writing. Précis writing is one of the most useful skills you can acquire as a

professional. Writing a précis involves summarizing a document to extract the maximum amount of information, then conveying this information to a reader in the minimum number of words. In reducing the number of words, you will express the ideas from the original document in your words and not the words of the author. However, you will not inject your opinion or thoughts in the précis since it will solely be true to the thoughts and ideas of the author. Below is a brief guideline for writing précis:

PRECIS

The following has been excerpted from Warriner's English Grammar and Composition: Complete Course, pages 429-437.

A précis is a brief summary. Writing a précis is valuable training in composition. Since the writing requires you to be clear and concise, you must choose your words carefully and arrange them skillfully you get the maximum amount of meaning into the minimum space.

In addition to its value as a writing exercise, précis work is excellent reading practice. In order to summarize another's ideas in your own words, you must understand the idea thoroughly.

In school and in life after school, there are many situations that call for the writing of a brief, accurate summary of reading. You are frequently asked to prepare a summary of what you have read in your textbook or in the library. Answers on examinations often require a brief summary. People in business, in club work, and in social work must prepare short digests of articles and reports.

Study the following facts about précis and the basic steps in writing.

1. **A précis is a short summary.** It is not a paraphrase, which merely says in different and simpler words exactly what the passage being paraphrased has to say. A paraphrase may be as long as the passage itself. A précis rarely is more than one-third the length of the original selection and may be only one-fourth as long.
2. **A précis gives only the "heart" of a passage.** It omits repetition and such details as examples, illustrations, and adjectives unless they are of unusual importance.
3. **A précis is written entirely in the words of the person writing it, not in the words of the original selection.** Avoid the temptation to lift long phrases and whole sentences from the original.
4. **A précis is written from the point of view of the author whose work is being summarized.** Do not begin with such expressions as "This author says" or "The paragraph means." Begin as though you were summarizing your own writing.

In writing a précis proceed as follows:

1. Read carefully, sentence by sentence, the passage to be summarized. Try to grasp the writer's main point. Spotting the topic sentence will help.

Look up in the dictionary any words whose meaning is not absolutely clear. As you read, take brief notes to be used in your writing.

2. When you have finally decided what the author's main point is, write it out in your own words. Do not use the wording of the original except for certain key words which you may find indispensable. If you cannot translate the idea into language of your own, you do not understand them very well. Be especially careful not to rely too much on the topic sentence. Do not add any opinions or ideas of your own.
3. Revise your writing until you are sure that you have given an accurate summary.
4. Usually you will find your precis is too long, if it is more than one-third the length of the original. Continue your revision until you have reduced the precis to the proper length. In this careful revision lies the principal value of the precis as a composition exercise. The work on reduction on pages 257-62 will be helpful to you in shortening your precis. Don't try to get the precis into a single sentence unless the passage is very short.

EXERCISE 1. Read the following paragraph two or three times. Then read the four precis of it given below. Each of them illustrates one major error in precis writing.

The first thing that strikes the critical minority, as it looks at the whole cultural picture, is that ours is a nation of new-rich people, well washed, all dressed up, rather pathetically unsure just what it is washed and dressed up for; a nation convinced that a multitude of material goods, standardized, furiously and expensively advertised by appeals to greed and vanity, will in themselves make life worth the living. Because we are new-rich, we overvalue possessions. Almost any individual who makes a great deal of money very rapidly supposes that mere possession of wealth is evidence of worth. He also is apt to imagine that with his means he can buy happiness. These mistakes usually seem folly to the old-rich, to one who was born to poverty, whose father and mother were bred with it. Such a one knows that merely because he or his friends have it, it is no sign that they are worth it, but quite commonly the contrary. He has learned through experience that money is not in itself very valuable stuff. Happiness, which is what all men desire, cannot be purchased; it is an illusive something not for sale. The old-rich know these things well enough, but the new-rich rarely discover them until they have grown accustomed to possessions. So it seems to be with our society. We go in, almost without question and in all classes, for the sordid nonsense of supposing that externalities possessed ennoble the owners, that a full fist invariable indicates a fine spirit.

| FAULTY PRECIS | |
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| <p>1. Ours is a nation of new-rich people convinced that material goods will in themselves, make life worth the living. Any individual who makes a great deal of money rapidly supposes that wealth is evidence of worth. He imagines that with his means he can buy happiness. These mistakes seem folly to one born to property. He knows that because he or his friends have it, it is no sign that they are worth it. Happiness, which all men desire, cannot be purchased.</p> | <p>Phrases and sentences merely copied from original</p> |

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| <p>We go in for the nonsense that a full fist indicates a fine spirit. [96 words]</p> | |
| <p>2. On the whole we are a nation of new-rich people who are well washed and well dressed, but we don't know what we're washed and dressed for. Our material goods are all standardized and expensively advertised. Advertisers appeal to our greed and vanity. We think these material goods are the means to wealth and happiness. The old-rich know that their friends aren't worth the money they have, but the new-rich don't know this until they have been rich for a while. [81 words]</p> | <p>Precis misses point of original and emphasizes unimportant points</p> |
| <p>3. First, the critical minority says that we are a nation of new-rich people all dressed up with no place to go. We think the material goods advertised by appeals to our greed and vanity are what makes life worth living. Anyone who makes a lot of money thinks his money shows his worth and believes that it will make him happy. The old-rich, however, think that these ideas are foolish. Born into a rich family with property, these people know that money and property don't make them any better people. They know that the opposite its frequently true. They know that money in itself isn't worth much and that it won't buy happiness, which is the thing everyone wants. The new rich however, don't know these things until they have been rich long enough to find them out. Almost everyone, regardless of social class, believes that possessions make their owners better, and the more you have the more worthy you are. This is nonsense. [163 words]</p> | <p>Precis is too long - nearly two-thirds the length of original</p> |
| <p>4. The critical minority says we are a nation of new-rich people who are victims of newspaper, magazine, and television advertising which, by appealing to our greed and vanity, tries to convince us that all we need for happiness is a lot of possessions. We don't need most of the advertised stuff like appliances, big cars, and fur coats, but the rest of the world judges our worth by what we have. In many other countries, people don't have the material goods we have. We can't all be as lucky as the old-rich, who don't have to worry about money because they already have it. [104 words]</p> | <p>Writer of precis has injected his own ideas</p> |
| <h2>ACCEPTABLE PRECIS</h2> | |
| <p>Critics of American culture see us as a new-rich people who, because we are new-rich, think that material goods make life worth living. We think that money is an indication of worth and that wealth brings happiness. The old-rich know better. Born to property, they do not believe that just because they have it, they are worth it. They know that happiness cannot be bought. The new-rich, however, make the mistake of believing possessions indicate the worth of their owner. [80 words]</p> | <p>Idea stated in precis writer's words Less than one-third of length of original</p> |

To begin, we will start by organizing our group to accomplish the overarching task of writing a Wikipedia entry. I have some ideas about how we might do this that I will share, but we will need to jointly decide how to proceed.