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MGT 650
SEMINAR IN THEORY AND RESEARCH IN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR
FALL 2009
Tuesdays 2:30-5:00 PM

Brief Overview

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, teams and group dynamics, conflict, work stress, decision making, communication, job design, organizational change, job commitment and satisfaction, empowerment, trust, absenteeism, turnover, cross-cultural issues, social networks, etc.) that still define the study of organizational behavior today. More recently the field has taken a positive turn by moving away from the traditional concepts that focused on a deficit model of healing pathologies and weaknesses to identifying positive deviance and building organizations that capitalize on human strengths and capacities (peak performance, thriving and human flourishing, resilience, positive identity and meaning, positive emotions, positive relationships, creativity, compassion, appreciative inquiry, etc.) that result in collective and emergent processes of optimal organizational functioning. These new positive dimensions of OB are often referred to as Positive Organizational Scholarship or Positive Organizational Behavior.

Because the field of OB has grown substantially over the years, it is impossible to cover all the main 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. However, many professionals now focus on the meso level, the connection between micro issues and the larger organization, and refer to the field as Organization Studies. You can get a quick overview of the OB by looking at the website for the Organizational Behavior Division of the Academy of Management (<http://www.obweb.org/>).

A field is often defined by the journals in which professionals publish their research. Here you can find the latest trends and research findings. There are a wide range of journals that publish papers with OB topics and interests. Most people refer to the key journals in the field simply by acronyms; here’s a “code list” for acronyms you may not yet be familiar with:

- AMJ: Academy of Management Journal
- AMR: Academy of Management Review
- ASQ: Administrative Science Quarterly
- JAP: Journal of Applied Psychology
- JOM: Journal of Management

- JPSP: Journal of Personality and Social Psychology
- OBHDP: Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes
- OS: Organization Science
- Psych Bull: Psychological Bulletin
- ROB: Research in Organizational Behavior

If we hold up the field of OB to traditional notions of the growth of knowledge, then we would conclude that the field is in a fragile and turbulent state. It is a field that is growing incrementally and consensus about new developments are achieved only slowly. Jeff Pfeffer once said that the field is a large weed patch. And in fact, the variety of approaches is reflected in a recent proliferation of new journals that offer alternative foci. (Examples include Organization, Journal of Management Inquiry, Journal of Organizational Change Management).

There are many text books that cover the field of Organizational Behavior and Organization Studies. We will be start by using Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural, and Open System Perspectives by Richard Scott and Gerald F. Davis. The first few chapters of this book will give us a historic overview. It is important to remember when reading textbook overviews that the authors are often rehashing old themes from previous studies that have become “classics” and there is a tendency, as a secondary source, to be an interpretation of the original article. That is why it is so important for you to read the original source, and not depend solely on another professionals interpretation of this work. What I like about the Scott and Davis book is that it covers the classics, but does so from a fresh and rich perspective.

Course Structure and Requirements

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-create the structure of the seminar and therefore allow the student greater influence over their own learning by engaging them in the selection of course content and delivery. 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 that you will read. This often results in the inclusion of topics and readings that the student finds of particular interest to them and their professional aspirations. Designing a class where you are asked to embark on an adventure in the co-creation of knowledge does have requirements that, if not met, can diminish learning. To be successful all students must 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. To be successful, we need to set a norm of trying out new ideas, pushing ourselves with questions, and challenging each other in supportive ways to move beyond our status quo thinking. If we can do this then our learning potential is great.

For this semester I have chosen to follow a blend between the two approaches. We’ll

start with some foundational readings that I will assign over the first several weeks and then, after we have a basis of learning from this literature, we will collaboratively create a list of topics and readings that will become the structure for the remainder of the semester. Each individual will take responsibility for two topics in which they will develop a reading list and help facilitate that class session. In addition, they will write a concise paper (up to five double spaced pages) for each topic area they are responsible for that summarizes this topic area in organizational behavior and includes an extensive bibliography of references (that goes beyond the five pages). At my discretion I may also ask you to write short (2-3 page) reflective papers on topics or issues that arise from the seminar. At the end of the semester you will be asked to write an short integrative paper (again, up to five double spaced pages). These writing exercises are intended to help you clarify and understand the reading material as well as aide you in developing a personal opinion concerning the content of this material. The more formal integrative assignment will be given to you approximately four weeks before the end of the semester. The purpose of this writing assignment is to help prepare for the last course requirement, an oral examination. This individual oral examination will cover any of the material in this course and will be conducted during finals week.

The primary objective of this seminar is to introduce you to the OB discipline and provide you with a beginning foundation/understanding of the research issues and questions that predominate the minds of OB scholars.

To achieve this overarching objective, I plan to use whatever methods of instruction seem appropriate to the subject we are addressing and to change direction as it is deemed necessary. At the same time, I understand that my success in helping convey the ideas of this course will depend upon you. Your participation is critical to this course; I can provide a map and vehicles, but you have to drive to our destination. I want to provide enough structure to give us a sense of mutual direction, but at the same time leave enough latitude for you to work on issues and ideas that capture your individual attention.

According to Weick, "One metaphor that is often used to describe effective managers is to argue that they are akin to conductors of orchestras. Examination of what conductors actually do suggests that contrary to popular folklore, conducting is most effective when it is tacit, unobtrusive, noninterfering, and takes into consideration control processes already woven into the orchestra." Substitute "professor" for "conductor" and you have a pretty good feel for how I'd like to "conduct" this course.

If you have caught my drift thus far, you probably have guessed that this course will demand a fair amount of work from you! My expectations for you are very high. I acknowledge that there is a great deal of material and that our reading will be quite heavy at times. But, it is my hope that indulging yourself and actively participating in this seminar will help formulate the type of educator, researcher, and writer that you would like to become. Much of the reading chosen for this course has had a monumental influence on the development of organizational science and as such needs to be consumed and integrated by the informed scholar of organizations.

Although I will be very flexible in developing this seminar so that it fits your style and preferences, I do have some boundaries that at times appear (and are) rigid. These stem from my deep inner convictions about adult learning and the education process. For example, I will not tolerate any activities or diversions that will limit the depth and breadth of our understanding about organizational behavior. I expect people to be proactive in their learning and that they understand the inherent responsibility that goes along with this. Should you have difficulty in interpreting what I say or do, and maybe

even why I say or do what I do, I always invite you to discuss this with me. From my view, I try to behave as close to my convictions as possible. Should this not be the case and what I do lacks integrity, then I surely have something to learn and would appreciate your feedback and help. Likewise, these situations may also have promise for your learning. Let's not let learning opportunities slip through either of our grasps.

Evaluation for the seminar will be determined from the above listed writing assignments, your oral examination, plus the quality of seminar participation and leadership. You will lose points with me if you miss class frequently or fail to actively engage in discussions. You will not lose points for contributing half-baked ideas, criticizing my methods of instruction or in other ways demonstrating your lack of good judgment. You will need to be equally forgiving when I can't provide the answers to your questions. Human systems are inherently more complex than the mental processes we use in trying to understand them, so I expect all of us to be confused part of the time and many of us to be confused most of the time. That is the nature of the beautiful beast; the more we have to muddle, the closer we are to the complexity that is a real part of human systems.

Tips on Reading Academic Journal Articles

Part of the socialization into a doctoral program is learning how to read academic journal articles. If you have limited experience with this then it can be, at least at the beginning, a daunting task. Often, it is not clear why much of the information offered in the article is given, and the writing at best can be seen as dense and terse. Add to this very domain-specific jargon, complicated statistics and research designs, and you can easily find yourself falling asleep while reading this work. But remember, what might seem like irrelevant and complex information at first is there for a purpose. These journal articles are not solely written to convey what the author did and what they found, but as important, to describe the study in detail so that others could replicate the authors' work. As a researcher and intelligent consumer of research this level of detail is very important information.

Thus, a lot of the information given may seem irrelevant—but it is not. This information will help you to determine how much stock to put into the research. The methodological and statistical details, in particular, provide vital information for determining an article's strengths and weaknesses, and generally for determining whether it is an example of "good scholarship." Therefore it is important that you learn how to read journal articles so that you gain the relevant information, yet be aware of their limitations.

Though you will develop your own strategy over time, here are some things to keep in mind:

- What is the background behind the research? (i.e., what are its theoretical foundations?)
- What is the aim of the research?
- For empirical articles, who were the participants? What method was used? Are the sample and method appropriate given the study's hypotheses?
- What were the major findings that are relevant to the aims of the study?

- How generalizeable are the findings? What are the boundary conditions? (i.e., for whom and under what conditions do the findings apply?)
- What conclusions did the authors draw? What theoretical and practical contributions does the research offer?
- What do you think of the research? What do you see as its strengths and weaknesses?