

SOCY 431 PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATIONS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: Sociology studies social behavior at four main levels of analysis: interpersonal interactions, groups, organizations, and societies. The principles of organizations, therefore, are core sociology and are basic to the understanding of almost all substantive fields of sociology. This course will present the main principles of organizations and will require that the student use them in analyzing an organization of their choice. The main focus is on organizational effectiveness and figuring out which factors make organizations more or less effective. It also examines how these factors change in different contexts. Since most people spend most of their lives participating in organizations, these principles will help students be more effective in their organizational roles.

COURSE OBJECTIVE: To enable students to make the principles of organizations a part of their personal conceptual framework and to analyze, understand and run organizations and organizational life in terms of them.

REQUIRED TEXTS: There is one textbook and a reading packet. The textbook by George Ritzer is The McDonaldization of Society (latest edition) an organizational analysis of McDonalds which exemplifies many of the principles discussed in the course and extends these principles to many areas other than fast foods. The reading packet is obtained at College Copy (cash only, \$26) at 7319 Baltimore Ave (South of Knox Road which is 1 block south of campus; next to Bentley's) (301 985 5100)

COMPONENTS OF THE GRADE: The grade will be based on 1) the midterm (25%), 2) the final (25%), 3) 10 written assignments (25%), and 4) a class presentation and paper (25% **mostly based on the paper**). The tests will be entirely essay exams (make up exam will be given one week after the midterm and by special arrangement for the final). The 10 required written assignments will be based on your field research on your O and the readings. The reading assignments are listed in the course outline and the written assignments are listed after the course outline. The listed dates are when both readings and written assignments are expected. However, your research schedule will not synchronize with those dates (especially the interview and work meeting assignments), because you may not be ready to do some assignment by the posted date. Try to complete at least 5 assignments by and a second 5 by **10/16** The written assignments are for you. They are your workbook from which you will write your paper. The first one asks you to evaluate all the key variables (in my and Harrison's theories) for your organization. Because it should be done in the first week it will be superficial but it gets you started and should alert you to all the major problems (you should upgrade it later before turning it in). The next assignment, the interview, will probably be conducted later when you have enough information to ask good questions. Be sure to analyze your interview results. The first two assignments are long and may require 5 pages to report. Most of the other assignments will require around two pages. The purpose of the 10 assignments is to make you look carefully at all important aspects of your organization and judge whether they are good or bad. Assignments 1-8 deal with basic dimensions of your O. The other 4 are less central but quite interesting.

The paper will be your report using the course framework and the organizational diagnosis that you have performed. It is due on the last day of class (no special style is required; late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade within first week and 2/3 of a letter grade after one week). You will get more instructions later on how to write the paper.

COURSE OUTLINE

- 1/27 Introduction - Including a discussion of systems theory and research methods.
- 1/29 Finsterbusch theory of organizational effectiveness: Finsterbusch "Framework for assessing the capacity of organizations"
- 2/3 Diagnosis and causes of effectiveness: Harrison ch 2; System components and features of the model are key (p27-29). Know them cold.
- 2/5 Hage and Finsterbusch contingency theory: pp59-80.
- 2/10 Assessing Individual and Group Behavior: Diagnosing, evaluating, and explaining organizational performance: Harrison ch 3.
- 2/12 Ditto for organizational structure and processes: Harrison ch 4.
- 2/17 Findings and theories on organizational structure: Hall ch 3 (complexity, formalization, and centralization)
- 2/19 Holbeche, The High Performance Organization pp.5-25.
- 2/24 The Theory and Practice of Integrated Management Systems. Lee ch 1. This reading presents

- one view of good management practices. The Challenge of Intransigent Organizations, Lee ch 7. This chapter applies the theory to government agencies.
- 2/26 Organization Theory: A Strategic Approach. In this selection Hodge presents some important ideas from agency theory and transaction cost economics.
- 3/3 Knauft Profiles of Excellence pp.1-29. Build your theory of effectiveness of non profit NGOs.
- 3/5 Knauft Profiles of Excellence pp.31-58. Further build your theory of effectiveness of non profit NGOs. These readings present case studies that will be used in class discussions from here on out.
- 3/10 Osborne Reinventing Government. 10 principles for making government effective
Catch up and review: Turn in last five assignments
- 3/12 MID TERM TEST
- 3/24-4/2 Student reports and discussions about organizational analysis
- 4/7 The McDonaldization of society (MOS) Ritzer ch 1 and student reports
- 4/9 The McDonaldization story (MOS) Ritzer ch 2 and student reports
- 4/14 The rationalization of society, Ritzer ch 3 and student reports
- 4/16 Calculability (MOS) Ritzer ch 4 and student reports
- 4/21 Predictability (MOS) Ritzer ch 5 and student reports
- 4/23 Control technology (MOS) Ritzer ch 6 and student reports
- 4/28 Problems with the rational (MOS) Ritzer ch 7 and student reports
- 4/30 Globalization and McDonaldization (MOS) Ritzer ch 8 and student reports
- 5/5 Modifications to McDonaldization (MOS) Ritzer ch 9 and student reports
- 5/7 Alternatives to McDonaldization (MOS) Ritzer ch 10 and student reports
- 5/12 Wrap up (Paper is due)

FINAL EXAM: Monday May 18 at 10:30 in the regular classroom (1 1/2 hour exam)

Writing assignments: (these assignments relate to the readings on the dates indicated at the end of the assignment)

1. Evaluate your study organization on a scale of 1-7 (and explain your scores, especially the low scores) on Finsterbusch's 12 factors of effectiveness. Harrison Ch 2 heavily overlaps the Finsterbusch framework and can be consulted for further description of these variables. Using the same evaluation scheme, evaluate the following three environmental dimensions which will later help you understand internal aspects of your O: 13) environmental predictability, 14) environmental competition, and 15) and dependency/autonomy of O on the environment. The scale that you should use is 1=very low, 2=low, 3=somewhat low, 4=average, 5=somewhat high, 6=high, 7=very high. First figure out whether your O is average, above average, or below average. Then estimate whether your O is just a little above/below average, very much above/below average, or moderately above/below average. In explaining your scores, at least name the major factor(s) which you think accounts for the high or low performance. Also identify O priorities; major coordination mechanisms; structure of power on key activities; the main high level decision making practices; and major areas of conflict. Conclude with an analytical discussion of your O's strengths and weaknesses which have been identified in the above evaluation. This is a long assignment which should begin right away to really get you going and set up your study. Later you should come back to it and flesh it out and finalize your evaluations. [1/29]
2. Conduct a revised General Orientation Interview (emailed file see Harrison #2 p52) and present your analysis of the results. This also is a long assignment. Though assigned at this time because it is attached to Ch 2, you are not to do it until you know enough about your O to ask the right questions and advance your understanding of the O and its problems and issues. You are to modify and amend the emailed questionnaire to suit your particular O. Present much of the information that you gather in your interview and your analysis of that information in terms of other things that you know about the O. [2/3]
3. Classify your O in terms of Hage and Finsterbusch's four organizational types and analyze what its strengths and weaknesses are and whether it needs to move more toward the ideal or further away. Should it employ some of the characteristics of the other types of Os? Use this framework to discuss how efficient/inefficient your O is and how adaptive or innovative it is. [2/5]
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of individual and group behaviors (+ & -) selectively guided by Harrison's model, figures, lists, tables (see handout), and methods. Select the most important dimensions for your O and evaluate how well they contribute to O effectiveness. Be sure to evaluate abilities, training and education, accountability, motivation, and links between performance and rewards for individual performance and extent of rules, decision procedures, control procedures, coordination mechanisms, cohesiveness, cooperation/conflict, supervisory

supportiveness, and clarity of goals for group performance. Note the criteria for effectiveness Harrison p40f and score your O on effectiveness. [2/10]

5. Attend a work group meeting and perform exercise 2 Ch 3 (write at least 1 page). This assignment you might have to postpone to an appropriate time. [2/10]
6. Discuss the fit of system elements using as guides Harrison figure 4.1 and the rest of the chapter. Identify all problems or potential problems. Your discussion of fit should also try to explain the problems. [2/12]
7. Discuss O structure using Hall. With the help of Hall analyze the dimensions of O structure: complexity, formalization, and centralization and describe and score your O on them (relative both to Os in general and to other Os of the same type). Judge whether it has too much or too little of the components of the three structural dimensions. [2/17]

Turn any five of the above seven assignments in on 2/17 for grade and feedback.

8. Identify key factors that contribute to high organizational performance. [2/19]
9. Discuss Lee's Theory of Integrated Management Systems as it applies to your O. Be sure to assess the extent that your O truly pursues performance improvement and the methods by which it does so. [2/24]
10. Identify transaction costs and the agency/principal problems and analyze how your O can reduce them. [2/26]
11. Use Knauff's theory and the lessons of his cases to discuss leadership and accountability as it applies to your O. [3/3, 3/5]
12. Apply at least 6 of the following concepts to your O: 1) gaining O's objectives by involving non O people, 2) empowering rather than serving workers or clients, 3) injecting more competition into the O or the O's providers, 4) get workers focused on the mission rather than the rules, 5) fund or reward outputs rather than inputs, 6) focus on the needs of the customer or client, 7) reward making money and spending as little as possible, 8) focus on prevention rather than cures, 9) reduce hierarchy and increase participation, i.e, decentralization of authority, and 10) invent ways to use markets to solve problems. [3/10]

Turn five additional assignments in on 3/10