MANA6318  
Seminar in Organization Theory
Spring 2020

Instructor: Ann McFadyen  
e-mail: mcfadyen@uta.edu  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Class Time: Thursdays 9am  
Phone: 817-272-3166  
Room: COB 610

Course Description and Objectives

1. To provide a broad overview of classic research in the discipline.  
2. To become aware of and involved in the major debates ongoing in the journals today.  
3. To become familiar with the multiple and often competing theoretical perspectives in the field.  
4. To develop a paper suitable for submission to a top academic conference and ultimately journal.

We will discuss a variety of theoretical perspectives. Our goal is to have an integrative sense of how the theoretical perspectives contribute to an understanding of the important organizational phenomena. The effort you put in now is a major intellectual investment. This investment should produce attractive returns in terms of theoretically better-informed manuscripts that lead to publication streams.

Required materials:
2. Articles available through the UTA library  
3. Access to the print and digital edition of the WSJ
   Activate your WSJ memberships via this URL.  
   WSJ.com/UTArlington

Course Requirements
Weekly write-ups 15%  
Session Leader 10%  
Theory building exercises 35%  
Term paper 40%

Weekly write-ups (15%)  
For each session, all are required to be prepared to discuss all the required readings. In addition, please submit a one to two page write-up that integrates the required readings each week, except

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1 This syllabus was adopted from Professors Tim Pollock’s and Chao Chin’s PhD Seminar syllabi.
for the weeks when you submit the theory building exercise papers or when you are the session leader. Please submit your assignment to CANVAS by 10am on the class day.

A basic understanding of each article would include, but not limited to, the following:
• What question do the author(s) address in this article?
• What is the basic argument made by the author(s)?
• What is the focal level of analysis?
• What are the key concepts?
• What are the underlying (implicit or explicit) assumptions made by the author(s)?
• What is the main causal mechanism/explanation?
• What are the weaknesses in the argument?
• How does the explanation in this article compare with others you have seen in past weeks? Are they consistent or inconsistent with one another?
• If they are inconsistent, could the difference be resolved, theoretically or empirically?
• What would be the ideal way to test this theory?
• [For empirical papers]: is the evidence convincing? Is the research design appropriate?
• Are there alternate explanations or lines of reasoning the authors omit?

Basic integration would include but not limited to:
• Compare and contrast theories
• Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the week’s readings.
• Discuss the basic theoretical model of the paper (constructs and relationships among them), and what is the foundational theory upon which the theoretical model is built?
• Discuss the main contribution of this paper?

Session Leader (10%) The success of this course depends on how students are actively engaged. Each student is required to act as a session leader once during the semester. A session leader for each class will be assigned in our first class. The session leader makes a power point presentation of the assigned readings and the current research in the topic area of the week. Leading the discussion requires a deep understanding of the major research questions, the strengths, weaknesses, controversies, and gaps in the readings as well as a literature review of current research literature.

Specifically, the session leader should:
• Provide an organizing framework for classroom discussion of theories and empirical research
• Compare & contrast (as appropriate) theories or themes of research covered within a given session or between sessions
• Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the week’s readings.
• Discuss the basic theoretical model of the paper (constructs and relationships among them), and what is the foundational theory upon which the theoretical model is built?
• Discuss the main contribution of this paper?

Please upload your presentation to CANVAS before class.

Theory building exercises (35%)
We have 3 theory building exercises, due at the beginning of class February 13, March 5 and March 26. The exercises are designed to aid in developing theory and to potentially act as foundations for your term paper. Steps I and II may help you think more deeply about your write-up.

I. What do you think your article is really about?
   • Why is it of interest to OT scholars and/or OT practitioners?
   • What OT theories are relevant to the story?
   • What research questions come to mind?

II. Select one of your research questions and develop it more fully by discussing the following:
   What assumptions are related to this theory/phenomenon?
   How does your research question address these assumptions?
   What are possible answers to your questions?
   How could you study this phenomenon and test competing answers to your question?

III. Assignment: Write a research question and short abstract related to the question (2-3 double-spaced pages)

Please see the appended Theory Building Exercise Instructions.

Final paper (40%) (Due May 12th 10:00am)
An initial one-page proposal is due April 2nd prior to class. Please format your paper according to AMR (AMJ if empirical) guidelines. Please limit your papers to no more than 25 double-spaced pages of text, yet no less than 20 pages. Please prepare a 15 minute presentation of your paper in the last two classes. Remember to appropriately cite all references within the text of your proposal, as well as including a reference list at the conclusion of your paper (for the format of referencing, see AMJ publication guidelines).

The paper should be developed enough that you are able to send it to a conference and eventually developed into a publishable journal article (e.g., for Academy of Management Review, or the basis for an empirical paper for a top tier journal submission).

Theory Building Exercise I. (Due February 13th prior to class)
Instructions: Look through the WSJ to identify a story of interest that could spark a research study. Note: as business management scholars and future business professors it is important to understand issues relating to industry as well as to bring in relevant industry issues into your classroom. The WSJ is also a great source of new paper ideas and research topics.

For example, the WSJ on January 7, 2020 had an article on Decision making at Boeing and their relationship with the FAA (Botched Predictions, Strife With Regulators Cost Boeing CEO His Job Write a research question and 2 – 3 double-spaced paper discussing the question.

Theory Building Exercise II. (Due March 5th prior to class)
Instructions: Think about things you enjoy (Musical Concerts, Restaurants, Sporting Events) or organizational phenomena in contexts that interest you (TMT decision making, managing interorganizational partnerships, organizational reputation building and legitimacy). Think of the research questions that come to mind and what type of research is needed to develop new
insights into these settings. Write a 2 – 3 double spaced paper about your research questions and theory related to the question. Be sure to include a bulleted list of benefits an organization would receive by allowing you to conduct your research in their organization.

Following is an example of how to develop this type of research.


**Theory Building Exercise III. (Due March 26th prior to class)**

An innovation paper is a short write-up of a novel idea or hypothesis related to the assigned readings and class discussions (something not already known or immediately obvious to researchers in OT). Please use theories from one of the topic areas covered in this class in a substantive and novel manner. State your hypothesis and then present a theoretical justification about why it is a good idea and how it fills a gap in existing literatures or answers important questions that researchers have overlooked (3 pages). Please also mention how you might test your ideas (1-2 pages of the total). Your paper should be 4-6 pages (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) and include a figure, diagram or table that illustrates the causal relationships that your propose. The figure and/or table is not included in the page limit. You do not need to do an elaborate literature search to make sure that your idea is new; the course readings and a quick computer search will suffice. Some of you have already described ideas and empirical tests in your weekly comments and theory building exercises that could be turned into innovation papers.

Below are some questions that might aid in formulating ideas:

1. Is there a theory that did not fit with your personal experiences in organizations or in groups? If the theory does not fit, suggest how it might be modified and tested.
2. Did any of the theories seem to contradict each other? How can the contradiction be resolved and the amended theory be tested?
3. Is there a setting in which you could test a theory we read about and find opposite results, or no results at all (i.e. context may matter)? Describe how you would revise the theory and test the amended theory.
4. Was there a theory that you found to be wrong? Why? Describe how you would revise the theory and test the amended theory.

Assessment of the assignment is based on 2 areas:

1. Is your argument/idea written clearly enough so that I can understand it; that means there is a logical structure and a clear thesis.
2. Have you made reasonable arguments to support your thesis and supported those arguments with evidence from existing empirical literature.
## Summary Schedule

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<td>Introduction and What is Theory</td>
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<td>Organization Theory Overview</td>
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<td>Final Papers</td>
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List of General Reference Books

Session 1 Introduction and What is Theory
Required
Scott & Davis Chapter 1

Recommended:
Session 2 Organizational Theory Overview

Required
Scott & Davis Chapter 2

Recommended
Session 3: Organizational Structure

Required

Scott & Davis Chapter 3

Recommended

  Ch. 1. Why Bureacracy?
  Ch. 4. The Neo-Weberian model: Decision making, conflict, and technology.
**Session 4   Environment and Adaptation**

**Required**
Scott & Davis, Chapter 4

**Recommended**
Session 5  
**Transaction Cost and Agency Theories**

**Required**
Scott & Davis, Chapter 9

**Recommended**


Flinstein, N. & Freeland, R. 1995. Theoretical and comparative perspectives on corporate organization. Annual Review of Sociology, 21: 21-43. (Read pp. 21-32 only, plus references. We will focus on the economic theories section).


Section 6: Status, Reputation, and Celebrity

Required


Recommended


Session 7 Contingency Theory and Resource Dependence Theory

Required

Scott & Davis, Chapter 5


Recommended


Scott, W.R. 1998. Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems. (Chapters 8 and 9 address some of the issues that Donaldson refers to in his work).


Alternatively, for a lite” version, read…

Session 8  Population Ecology Theory

Required
Scott & Davis, Chapter 5, 10


Recommended
Session 9 Learning, Culture and Change

Required


Recommended


Session 10 Sensemaking
Required:

Recommended:


Session 11  Organizational Embeddedness, Social Capital, Network Theory

Required
Scott & Davis, Chapter 11

Recommended
Session 12  Institutional Theory

Required
Review Scott & Davis Chapter 4


The following two are very short articles. There is no need to summarize or present them. But we will be discussing them. So please make sure that you read them.


Recommended Readings (If you decide to pursue this topic further)
The “Big 2” must reads:


More internal discussion about institutional theory:


Other great papers:


Session 13  Interorganizational Relations, Behavioral Theory

Required
Scott & Davis – Pages 53 – 56

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