DPLS 719 Systemic Organizational Change

Fall 2009  3 Credits
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Office hours: Please call for an appointment
Class Logistics:
Wednesday evenings 6-10
Room: TBA
Dates: 9/2, 9/16, 9/30, 10/14, 10/28, 11/4, 11/18, 12/2

Course Overview
The course explores theories and ideas related to organizational change looking at both rational strategies for change and strategies based on the phenomenon of emergence.

The first readings in the course are about key ideas underpinning organizational thought – readings by Hayek, Jensen & Meckling, and Jaques establish pragmatic and inescapable facts about organizations. The text by Porter, Angle, and Allen will further solidify these modernist views of organizations. Later readings and discussion will progressively critique and deconstruct the modernist perspective in an effort to ‘include and transcend’ these ideas with a more postmodern framework for organizational change.

This course will be conducted in a seminar format. One key volume by Porter, Angle, & Allen (see below) around Organizational Influence Processes will serve as both a touchstone as we explore the concept of systemic change from multiple perspectives and as the context for group work. Weaving in and out of the readings on Organizational Influence will be key readings and texts that will review the concept of systemic change from both anthropological/social theory and evolutionary psychology/linguistics perspectives. The piece by Emirbayer serves as a jumping off point for thinking about organizational change through a postmodern lens. That work will serve to further contextualize the texts by Douglas and Blackmore.

The text by Mary Douglas will introduce a rigorous way of thinking about the 'unit of analysis' that we call a group or organization. Douglas will help us think about how we relate to groups (institutions in her vocabulary) objectively and how we are both (individuals and groups) mutually informed and sustained by them. Her book and thinking will point to the literature on Communities of Practice, Activity Systems, and other theoretical frameworks commonly used to conceptualize and work with organizations.

The text by Susan Blackmore is a comprehensive introduction to memetics - exploring the scope and depth of the place that memes, or persisting (and replicating!) units of language, have in our consciousness and day to day thinking and speaking. Looking at memes may help us understand why and how change works and doesn't work in different contexts. This work will help us understand why group efforts like Appreciative Inquiry Summits, CogniScope, Open Space
meetings, participatory democracy methods, etc. appear to have a more lasting and meaningful effect on system change and design efforts.

Stacey’s Complex Responsive Processes in Organizations will help knit together the foundational work in organizational thought outlined in the edited volume by Porter, Angle, & Allen and contextualize the more abstract and theoretical perspective of Douglas and Blackmore. Please come prepared for discussion & dialogue, lots of thinking and lots of engagement.

Hopes and Aims

- We will develop a working knowledge of organizational influence processes as they relate to the idea and fact of systemic organizational change.
- We will develop an understanding and appreciation of the role and scope language (memes) in organizations and in organizational change initiatives.
- We will develop a vocabulary and conceptual framework for integrating technical definitions of communication, subjectivity, motivation, and beliefs into a coherent image of collective activity.
- We will learn about & practice strategies, models, and methods for adapting to and affecting change at interpersonal and group levels.
- We will connect knowledge of organizational change to leadership behaviors and principles.

Course Structure

This course is composed of reading, writing, class discussion, lecture, and group activities. We will form small working groups during the first class that will remain intact throughout the course. These groups or cohorts will serve multiple functions. Among them are:

Content & process support - group participants will have an opportunity to discuss readings, past discussions, and class assignments.

Project and activity work – A central part of the course is the group work around the Porter, Angle, & Allen text. Each group will be responsible for reading, synthesizing, and presenting chapters from a section of the text. The key task of each group is to present to the entire group a coherent, abbreviated, and integrated presentation of the chapters. More information about this assignment will be posted on Blackboard along with group assignments and dates.

Most 4 hour classes will open with individual check-ins followed by an overview of the readings. Small group discussions of course notes and readings will typically follow. We will generally take a 20-30 minute break. Following the break we will work on projects, conduct full class debriefs, continue class discussion, or review readings.

It is also my habit to prepare interpretive notes of selected readings and make them available on Blackboard prior to class. I use these notes to frame my ideas for dialogue when we meet. I also hope that my interpretations inspire students to interpret and analyze the readings from their own perspectives. I then prepare a number of slides based on my notes to stimulate discussion and/or communicate concepts and ideas. There will also be additional readings posted on Blackboard.
Assignments & Grading – all writing should conform to DPLS Red Book and APA 5th Edition

- Read all materials and attend all classes and participate with all your attention. Please let me know if you intend to miss any classes. (15% of grade)
- Pre Class assignment – (15% of grade) due on first Class. See Blackboard > Assignments area for description
- Group Assignment – (30% of grade) See Blackboard > Assignments
- Final paper – Please see Blackboard > Assignments area for Final Assignment (40% of grade) due on December 10th.

Expectations and Assessment
Assessment of doctoral work in leadership studies is challenging. Interdisciplinary work dealing with complex and sometimes contested theories and concepts requires (from my perspective) a tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and contingency. I am also struck by the need for a high degree of self-directed behavior on the part of doctoral students and candidates. I would like my teaching style, assessment policy, and rubrics to support and facilitate self-direction. The DPLS is an interdisciplinary program and students come with a variety of experiences, different types of expertise, and different professional and scholarly needs. It is my intention to honor, help cultivate, and support these differences.

However, behind my philosophical questions about assessment and uncertainty in evaluating anyone in an absolute manner there does reside (in my view) a set of skills that serve to hold and shape work with language in a complex world. I believe we need a grammar, syntax, and semantics of clarity, coherence, depth, and breadth. My assumption at the beginning of the term is that all of the students in this class possess the requisite skills, talents, and propensities needed to be clear, cogent, and complete. I admit that the standards I refer to are objectively stated and subjectively enacted. My assessment will be based on the quality and content of expressed thought as exhibited in both written assignments and classroom presentations and participation.

Grading Criteria for Written Work (adapted from the DPLS Academic papers rubric)

Content Criteria
The content of papers should reflect the level and style of content in readings and discussions. There is an expectation that doctoral students will reach outside of their comfort zone in terms of appropriation of ideas, concepts, and frameworks. The substance of papers and other writings will be weighed against the general level of discourse in class meetings and the style and density of expression of the readings.

Thought and Expression Criteria
Student writing should raise vital questions or issues, formulating them clearly and precisely. I will be looking for evidence of breadth and depth and the insightful, in-depth analysis of complex ideas. Main points should be developed and supported with relevant information and references that are appropriately incorporated.
The organization and logic of your writing is critical. The expectation is for well focused, well organized, and well reasoned conclusions. The writing should flow with the reader not getting lost or having to work to determine what you are saying.

There is also an expectation that your writing/thinking has an open and inclusive character when exploring alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as appropriate, their assumptions, implications, and/or practical consequences.

**Technical Criteria**

Your writing should be clear and demonstrate a high level of vocabulary through careful word choice. Sentences should be constructed skillfully and purposefully. Transitions between paragraphs and sections are important and will be evaluated for their efficacy in weaving your concepts, themes, and purposes together. Summaries and conclusions are also vital elements of good writing and will be evaluated based on their appropriateness and effectiveness.

Of course grammar, punctuation, and spelling are expected to be flawless. Careful proof reading of your paper is a basic expectation.

Papers, unless otherwise noted are to be completed in APA style. References should be cited properly within the text and a complete reference list must be provided. Appropriate use of headings will also be noted. All papers to be sent via email to francovich@gonzaga.edu

**Point/Grade correspondence:**

95-100% = A
90-94.99% = A-
85-90% = B
80-84.99% = B-

**Required Texts**


**Required Readings (Available on Blackboard)**

Other Readings will be provided as assigned/
The folder on Blackboard containing reading on Systems Theory contains interesting but not required articles.

Provisional Class Outline
Pre Class Reading & Assignment
• Read the papers by Jaques, Jensen and Meckling and Hayek and write a short synthesis paper - no more than 6 pages (not incl. cover page and references) over chapters 2 & 3. See Blackboard > Assignments > Pre-Course Assignment for a more comprehensive description.
• Other Reading (will be available on Blackboard) to be announced
• Paper Due on first day of class via email.

First Meeting
• Housekeeping Issues & Group process activity
• Discussion of Pre-Class Reading Notes & Papers
• Group Work
• Debrief
• Readings 2nd Meeting:
  o pp. xv-116 in Organizational influence processes
  o Emirbayer – Manifesto for a Relational Sociology (on Blackboard)

Second Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Group Work (Earth Group to Facilitate OIP Conversation - see Blackboard for group assignment responsibilities).
• Readings for 3rd Meeting:
  o pp. 117-274 in Organizational influence processes
  o How Institution Think (Douglas) preface - chapter 2 (up to p. 30)

Third Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Group Work (Water Group to Facilitate OIP Conversation).
• Readings for 4th Meeting:
  o Pp. 275- 406 in Organizational influence processes
  o Douglas chapters 3 - 8

Fourth Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Group Work (Fire Group to Facilitate OIP Conversation).
• Readings for 5th meeting:
  o pp. 407 - 546 in Organizational influence processes
  o Douglas Chapter 9

Fifth Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Group Work (Sky Group to Facilitate OIP Conversation).
• Readings for 6th Meeting:
  o Meme Machine by Susan Blackmore- Foreword & chapters 1 - 6
  o Complex Responsive Processes by Stacy – Part 1

Sixth Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Readings for 7th Meeting:
  o Blackmore Chapters 7 – 11
  o Stacey Part II

Seventh Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Readings for 8th Meeting
  o Blackmore Chapters 12 – 18
  o Stacey Part III

Final Meeting
• Readings review and discussion
• Group Activity
• Wrap up

Other Reading that may help in developing an understanding of change in organizations:

References


