Organization Theory

Sample Syllabus

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Course Description

The purpose of this master-level course is to provide a venue for students to become exposed to knowledge, insights, and skills necessary to manage and lead public and nonprofit organizations. To achieve this goal, this course will survey the major topics, perspectives, and theories under the umbrella of “organization theory” over time, including organizational environments, goals and effectiveness, strategy and decision-making, structure and design, communication, leadership, culture, and other topics. Emphasis is placed on understanding both the theoretical development of the field and its many practical applications in real public and nonprofit management contexts. Students are encouraged to apply the theories and concepts of the subject matter covered in this course to their own individual fields of specialty or interest, and to draw from their experience and offer relevant insights to share with the class.

Course Format

A typical class will be divided into two parts. During the first half of the class, we will discuss assigned readings on a specific organization management topic. The instructor will provide an overview of the topic. One/two student(s) will then lead the discussion of readings. Discussion leaders should provide an overview of the readings, introduce questions and issues for examination, and facilitate the discussion. The focus should be on how these readings help us understand organizational behaviors and management, not just summarizing readings. Such discussions should be conducted in an interactive way, joined by the instructor and all students. In the second half of the meeting, we will study particular cases and explore how the theoretical concepts and ideas we’ve covered could be applied to the cases being discussed and other more generic day-to-day management and leadership in public and nonprofit organizations. The case discussion will be led by the instructor, actively joined by all students.

Course Materials

Required Readings:


In addition, we will be reading a number of case studies. All of the cases are available for purchase on-line:
Jiahuan Lu, Sample Syllabus, Organization Theory


The names and numbers of the cases are included in the weekly readings below. Be sure to mark your status as “Academic” to receive a substantial discount on the purchase price.

All of the other required readings for the course will be available on Blackboard.

Recommended Readings:


The following list includes some of the leading journals on public and nonprofit organization research. I encourage you to read articles on your topics of interest in these prestigious journals.


Course Expectations

The course requires extensive reading and class preparation as well as a high level of participation in class. Student assessment will be based on class participation, short memos, and final exam. I will be using the +/- grade system.

Class Participation (20%)

Active class participation means engagement, informed by knowledge of the readings and other materials, in class sessions and other aspects of the course. It requires more than simply coming to class and it does not mean an effort to dominate class discussion. Asking and responding to questions in ways informed by close attention to the readings is the best indication of effective class participation.

In the first class, each student (or two students together) will choose a course topic that he/she/they would like to lead future discussions. We will talk about the detailed
requirements for discussion in the first class. Each student (except for discussion leaders) is required to prepare at least 2 or 3 discussion questions related to the assigned readings and bring the questions to the class. Please email the questions to discussion leaders and copy to me by 5:00 pm on the day before class. However, in order to allow time to explore a smaller number of issues in greater depth, not every question will be discussed in class.

Students should also prepare for the case discussions each week by identifying, and being prepared to participate in the class discussion, on: (1) the issues raised, (2) the relevant theory and practice (from readings, experience, etc.), and (3) your recommended actions and rationale.

**Case Memos (40%)**

Students are expected to submit four short memos among ten case studies throughout the semester. Memos are due in hard copy at the beginning of class. If more than four memos (up to five) are submitted, four highest grades will be recorded. The instructor will have all written assignments returned to you, graded and with comments, one week after they have been handed in.

**Requirements for written assignments:** All written assignments should be clearly written and well organized. They are to be typed, no more than 3 pages each, double spaced, and 12-Times New Roman format. All written assignments must be on time. Late assignments will not be accepted. **All assignments will be anonymous; label your assignments using only your student ID numbers.**

**Final exam (40%)**

There will be an open-book, take-home final exam on the materials covered in the course. You may consult all the readings and cases, but not anyone else, when writing your exam answers. The exam is typically made up of two theoretical questions (you will have the option to choose two from three) and one case study. You will be expected to finish the exam in 5 days. Again, **label your assignments using only your student ID numbers.**

**Course Overview**

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**CLASS SCHEDULE**

The course schedule is provided as a guideline and is subject to slight changes. Necessary revisions will be announced in class with as much advance notice as possible.

**Week One**

*Introduction*

*Students select topics to lead future discussions.*

**Think while Reading:**

What is an organization? What are the basic elements of organizations? Why do we need organizations? What are the general perspectives in studying organizations (rational, natural, and open systems)? What are the current challenges in managing public and nonprofit organizations?

**Required Reading:**

Rainey, Ch. 1.


**Suggested Reading:**


**Week Two**

*Overview of Organization Theory & “Publicness” in Public Organizations*

**Think while Reading:**

What is the intellectual development of organization theory like (Weber, Taylor, Follett, Merton, Barnard, Maslow, …)? Pay attention to Exhibit 2.1 in Rainey (Ch. 2). Are public and private organizations different? If so, what are the differences? If not, why?
Required Reading:

Rainey, Ch. 2 and 3.

Suggested Reading:


Case Study:

The Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai, India: In Service for Sight (HBS Case 593-098)

Case Study Questions:

1. What does Dr. Venkataswamy need to do right in order to translate his vision for Aravind into reality? What does Aravind do in organizing its production process to accomplish these things? (Think particularly about attracting village patients, organizing the surgical process, and recruiting doctors.)

2. Can Aravind financially afford to increase the salaries it pays its doctors? If it can, should it?

3. What grade would you assign to Aravind’s strategy and why?

Week Three

*Internal Organization (1): Structure and Process*

Think while Reading:

What are the basic components when designing an organization? How does organizational structure affect organizational behavior? What is effective organizational design? Recall the discussion on bureaucratic structures. What are advantages and disadvantages of such structure? Can we abandon it?

Required Reading:

Rainey, Ch. 8, p.180-211.


Suggested Reading:

Case Study:

What If We Could Start Over? The US Forest Service Champions “Bottom-up” Management (A) (HKS Case 1246.0)

Case Study Questions:

1. What are the virtues of rules/standard operating procedures (SOP’s) in designing organizations? What are their drawbacks? For each virtue and drawback, be prepared to give an example from your personal work experience, your experience as a student, and/or the situation of the Forest Service in this case.

2. Overall, do you support the efforts of the Forest Service to gain greater freedom to move money more freely across budget categories? Why or why not? Is there any way to reconcile the demand of the Appropriations Committee for accountability and the desire within the Forest Service for fewer rules?

Week Four

Internal Organization (2): Decision-making and Politics

Think while Reading:

Compare different models of decision making process (rational, incremental, garbage can, …). Prepare a short case of your interest to share with the class that could be analyzed using Allison’s models. How do you think about the argument that decision is a matter of compromise? What are the sources of power in organizations? What are the factors influencing political behaviors in organizations? How do organizational politics affect managers and management? How to use politics strategically?

Required Reading:

Rainey, Ch. 7, p.151-169.


Suggested Reading:


**Case Study:**

Columbia’s Final Mission (HBS Case 9-304-090)

**Case Study Questions:**

1. Assess the performance of Rodney Rocha and Linda Ham. Did each do all what he or she should have done?
2. Why was it so hard to hold anyone accountable?
3. How organizational issues kept important technical concerns from being heard?
4. How organizations should deal with "ambiguous threats" - weak signals of potential crisis?

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**Week Five**

**Internal Organization (3): People, Team, and Control**

**Think while Reading:**

Recall the human relationship school in organization theory. What is the implication for human resource management? How do employee motivations affect organizational performance? Does public service motivation matter? How to enhance employee motivations? What are the dimensions in designing effective control mechanisms within organizations? What are the promise and pitfall of using pay-for-performance in public and nonprofit sectors?

**Required Reading:**

Rainey, Ch. 9 and Ch. 12


**Suggested Reading:**


**Case Study:**

Keeping an Open Mind in an Emergency: CDC experiments with ‘Team B” (HKS Case 1895.0 and 1895.1)

**Case Study Questions:**

1. What are the possible problems to which a Team B at the CDC can be seen as a solution?

2. How might a Team B be used so as best to cope with these problems, if the goal is to improve the ability of the working team (“Team A”) to do its work?

3. What do you think of the idea of using Team B as an alternate source of information and opinions for a higher-level CDC decision maker?

**Week Six**

**Internal Organization (4): Culture & Identity**

**Think while Reading:**

What are organizational culture and organization identity? How do they affect organizational behaviors and management? Is there a downside of organizational culture? Is there a link between organizational culture and performance? How to observe, measure, and manage culture and identity?

**Required Reading:**

Rainey, Ch. 11, p. 307-316.


**Suggested Reading:**


**Case Study:**

Columbia’s Final Mission (HBS Case 9-304-090)


**Case Study Questions:**

1. What role did NASA’s culture play in the Columbia disaster?

2. Put yourself in the shoes of the managers in the case, consider the following questions:
   - What prior assumptions and beliefs shaped the way that you thought and behaved during the Columbia mission?
   - What pressures affected your behavior? Where did these pressures originate?
   - In what ways did the culture impact your actions?

3. If you were in that person’s shoes during the Columbia mission, would you have behaved differently? Why or why not?

**Week Seven
Management and Leadership**

**Think while Reading:**

What is leadership? How is leadership different from management? Why leadership is important? What leadership competencies are necessary to be an effective leader? What is the difference between transactional and transformational leadership?

**Required Reading:**

Rainey, Ch. 11


**Suggested Reading:**


**Case Study:**

Rudy Giuliani: The Man and His Moment (HKS Case 1681.0)

**Case Study Questions:**

1. What life experiences and social and institutional resources helped Giuliani play such a special leadership role bringing the city and country together in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks?

2. What does the public need from their leadership in acute crisis situations?

3. How can leaders prepare themselves to rise to the moment in times of crisis?

**Week Eight**

**Organization and Environment (1): Overview**

**Think while Reading:**

What are the general dimensions of organizational environments? Recall the differences between public and private organizations. How different are their environments? Compare different theoretical perspectives in studying organizational environment (population ecology, resource dependence, transaction cost, and institutionalism). What values should public organizations pursue?

**Required Reading:**
Rainey, Ch. 4


**Suggested Reading:**


**Case Study:**

Business Process Transformation at the CIA (HKS Case 1515.0 and 1516.0)

**Case Study Questions:**

1. What challenges does Dick Calder have in a changing political and fiscal environment?

2. Is it strange to you that Calder talks in terms of CIA mission directorates vis-à-vis the DA and of the White House vis-à-vis the CIA as a whole as being “customers”? Why or why not?

3. Is “giveback” a Rocky Aoki solution to the problems of delivering DA services?

4. Evaluate Calder’s organizational change strategy. What do you like about it? What don’t you like?

**Week Nine**

Organization and Environment (2): Interorganizational Network and Collaboration

**Think while Reading:**

Public and nonprofit organizations are more and more often utilizing networks to solve complex problems that span organizational and sector boundaries. Why does network form of organizations occur, particularly in public organization context? What difficulties it brings to organization management? How can we effectively manage interorganizational networks?

**Required Reading:**


Suggested Reading:


Case Study:

Going it Together: Coventry’s Community Safety Partnership (HKS Case CR16-06-1831.0)

Case Study Questions:

1. Why is it difficult to get agencies to work together on common problems that cross organizational boundaries?

2. What are some of the assets those interested in promoting interorganizational collaboration have available to try to promote such collaboration? Give examples from the case of how some of these assets were used to promote partnership working for community safety in Coventry. Are there approaches to promoting partnership working that Coventry could have used but didn't?

3. To what extent is the Coventry CDRP basically an effort to extend the resources available to traditional kinds of police work through assistance from other agencies, and to what extent does it represent a new approach to crime and disorder reduction?
Think while Reading:

Organizational change and innovation is a complicated job, which requires the knowledge we have covered in previous classes. So a revisit of previous discussions would help. Why organizations need changes? What are the benefits and risks associated with changes? What are the attributes of organizational innovations? What are the general sources of the resistance to change? How to manage changes? Patterns and steps of successful organizational changes.

Required Reading:

Rainey, Ch 13, p. 355-382.


Suggested Reading:


Case Study:

Michelle Rhee and the Washington D.C. Public Schools (HKS Case 1957.0)

Case Study Questions:

1. Should Rhee have adopted the approach Coch and French recommend for bringing about organizational change? Why or why not?

2. Rhee’s first major action as superintendent was to close 15% of DC school buildings. Do you agree with her decision to choose this as her first major step? Why? If you disagree, what would you have done instead as the first major action -- and what would you have been trying to accomplish by the action you recommend?
3. Are there steps Rhee could/should realistically have taken to reduce opposition to her ideas among teachers and/or parents? Would these likely have advanced her organizational change agenda or not?

**Think while Reading:**

Compare different approaches of effectiveness assessment (goal, system-resource, …). What are the dimensions of organizational effectiveness? Why measuring performance is so difficult? New development in performance measures (competing values, balanced scored, …). What challenges do interorganizational networks bring to performance measures?

**Required Reading:**

Rainey, Ch. 6


**Suggested Reading:**


**Case Study:**

Mayor Anthony Williams and Performance Management in Washington, DC (HKS Case 1647.0)

**Case Study Questions:**

1. Why did Anthony Williams choose scorecards as one of his first mayoral initiatives? What were the potential benefits and risks of this choice? If you were Mayor
Williams, would you be scared as you make performance commitments you may not meet?

2. Was it effective to set specific agency goals for Washington DC? Will setting and monitoring specific goals lead to better delivery of services? What are the drawbacks of using measurable goals in this setting?

3. Look at line managers’ use of performance measures at the Departments of Motor Vehicles and Consumer & Regulatory Affairs. What do you think about these measures? Be specific, and be sure to explain why you make the judgments.

4. What are arguments for why outcome measures are preferable to input/output measures? What are arguments for why input and/or output measures might be acceptable, or even superior to, outcome measures? Under what circumstances are input and/or output measures most appropriate, and when are outcome measures most appropriate?

**Week Twelve**

Wrap-up: Being An Effective Public & Nonprofit Manager

**Required Reading:**

Rainey, Ch. 14
