

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS**

**PhD Course Syllabus**

**Course Code/Title:** STRA6019 – Organization Theory

**2025-26 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester**

**Time, Tuesdays (9AM-11:50AM) and Fridays (3PM-5:50PM)**

**Course Description:** This course is a seminar in organization theory surveying several areas, sometimes denoted with the term “paradigms” or perspectives. This course will cover the main theoretical perspectives on organizations and their environments e.g., institutional theory, organizational ecology, and some latest developments in that domain i.e., status, categories. Although the seminar is focused in the area of organization theory, the underlying theoretical ideas are general enough to have applicability in other domains of social science

- Course Objectives:**
1. Critically discussing and evaluating empirical studies by examining and contrasting the main theoretical statements in depth
  2. Drawing out key ideas from the readings, raising issues and criticizing the theories and research
  3. Developing integrations and competing tests of the theories

**Pre-requisite:**

**Assessment:** 50% Participation, 50% Final paper, 0% examination

**Remarks:** All PhD courses are non-credit-bearing and will be assessed on a letter grade basis.

<b>Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)</b> On completion of this course, students should be able to:	<b>Aligned PLOs*</b>				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gain familiarity with foundational concepts, frameworks, and models in organizational theory	x	x	x		x
2. Identify and compare different types of organizational structures and process	x	x	x	x	
3. Understand the relationship between organizational design and strategy, environment, and performance	x	x	x		x
4. Critically evaluate organizational practices using theoretical lenses	x		x	x	
5. Identify research topics	x	x	x		x

### **\*Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Research Postgraduate Programme:**

1. Demonstrate critical understanding, at an advanced level, of up-to-date knowledge and research methodology of a particular field
2. Implement effective academic and personal strategies for carrying out research projects independently and ethically
3. Contribute original knowledge in response to issues in their specialist area
4. Communicate research findings at a diverse range of levels and through a variety of media
5. Evaluate one's own research in relation to important and latest issues in the field

### **COURSE DETAILS**

**Year/Semester:** 2025-26, Second Semester  
**Time/Venue:** KK Leung 1235/1236  
**Instructor:** Dr. Filippo Carlo Wezel  
Email: [wezelf@hku.hk](mailto:wezelf@hku.hk)  
Office: Mondays 8AM-9AM (by appointment)

### **I. Teaching and Learning Activities**

In-class and Out-of-class Activities (e.g. lectures, class discussion, papers reading, proposal writing)	Expected hour	% of student study effort
1. Lectures	15	15
2. Class discussion	20	20
3. Paper reading	35	35
4. Homework	30	30
Total		100%

### **II. Assessment**

Assessment Components (e.g. assignments, proposal, presentation, examination)	Weight	CLOs to be assessed				
		1	2	3	4	5
1. Participation	50	x	x	x	x	x
2. Final paper	50	x	x	x	x	x
3.						
4.						
Total	100%					

#### **1. Participation:**

You are expected to participate actively in each class. We are all co-producer of the class discussion, and we should attempt to build on or constructively critique our comments. To this aim, you should complete the assigned readings and deliver in my email the day before each class a note of 1 page containing a critical analysis of the session's central arguments. The quality of these assignments and class participation will account for 50% of the evaluation.

## 2. Final paper

The final paper you will write in this course should be the backbone of a publishable paper related to one of the topics discussed in class. You will need to come up with an interesting and relevant research question and provide justification for why it is worthwhile to study what you have proposed. Such justification should be grounded in a brief review of the relevant literature. You will then develop theoretical propositions about your ideas and substantiate them with an extensive review of earlier research on the topic. The last part of the paper should outline your research design: the data, the measures, the model and the expected outcome of the empirical analyses. The paper should be at least 12 and no more than 20 double-spaced pages long using 12-point times new roman font (excluding any title pages, abstracts, graphs/tables and references). The final paper is due by 12 pm on June 6, in my email.

**Students will be assessed based on the following performance standards:**

Course Grade	Performance Standard
A	Strong evidence of excellent ability to fulfill the intended course learning outcomes
B	Strong evidence of very good ability to fulfill the intended course learning outcomes
C	Evidence of good ability to fulfill the intended course learning outcomes
D	Evidence of adequate ability to fulfill the intended course learning outcomes.
E	Evidence of limited ability to fulfill the intended course learning outcomes.
F	Evidence of poor ability to fulfill the intended course learning outcomes

### Assessment Component 1 *Participation*

Score	Performance Standard
A	Strong evidence of excellent ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each session's central arguments and generating critical discussion.
B	Strong evidence of very good ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each session's central arguments and generating critical discussion.
C	Evidence of good ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each session's central arguments and generating critical discussion.
D	Evidence of adequate ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each session's central arguments and generating critical discussion.
E	Evidence of limited ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each session's central arguments and generating critical discussion.
F	Evidence of poor ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each session's central arguments and generating critical discussion.

### Assessment Component 2 *Final Paper*

Score	Performance Standard
A	Strong evidence of ability to develop novel theoretical propositions and substantiate them from an extensive review of earlier research on the topic.

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- B** Strong evidence of very good ability to develop novel theoretical propositions and substantiate them from an extensive review of earlier research on the topic.
  - C** Evidence of good ability to develop novel theoretical propositions and substantiate them from an extensive review of earlier research on the topic.
  - D** Evidence of adequate ability to develop novel theoretical propositions and substantiate them from an extensive review of earlier research on the topic.
  - E** Evidence of limited ability to develop novel theoretical propositions and substantiate them from an extensive review of earlier research on the topic.
  - F** Evidence of poor ability to develop novel theoretical propositions and substantiate them from an extensive review of earlier research on the topic.
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### III. Course Content and Tentative Schedule

	Topic
Sessions 1	Rational model of action and critiques to it
Sessions 2	Old institutional theory
Sessions 3	Carnegie school, behavioral theory
Sessions 4	New institutional theory
Sessions 5	Organizational ecology
Sessions 6	Resource dependence
Sessions 7	Sensemaking and enactment
Sessions 8	Status
Sessions 9	Networks
Sessions 10	Categories

### IV. Required (Additional readings are available upon request)

#### **SESSION 1, Rational model of action and critiques to it**

- Elster, J. 1990. Introduction. In: *Ibid.* (ed.), *Rational Choice*. New York: NYU Press, 1-33.
- Hirschman, A. 1986[1984]: *Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse*. In: *Ibid.*, *Rival Views of Market Society and Other Recent Essays*. New York: Viking, 142–160.
- Sen, A. 1990[1977]: *Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory*. In: Jane J. Mansbridge (ed.), *Beyond Self-Interest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 25-43.
- Zelizer, V. 1992[1978]: *Human Values and the Market: The Case of Life Insurance and Death in 19th Century America*. In: Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (eds.), *The Sociology of Economic Life*. Boulder: Westview Press, 285–304.
- Etzioni, A. 1988: *The Moral Dimension: Towards A New Economics*. New York: Free Press, 1-19 [Chapter 1: The New Paradigm: Underlying Themes].

#### **SESSION 2, Old institutional theory**

- Merton, R.K. 1936. *The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposeful Social Action*. *American Sociological Review*, 1: 894-904.
- Selznick, P. 1948. *Foundations of the Theory of Organization*. *American Sociological Review*, 13: 25-35.
- Selznick, P. 1957. *Leadership in Administration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. – Chapters 1 and 5
- Stinchcombe, A. 1965. *Social Structure and Organizations*, in James G. March (ed.) *Handbook of Organizations*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally. 142-193.

Selznick, P. 1996. Institutionalism "Old" and "New". *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41: 270-277.

### **SESSION 3, Carnegie school, Behavioral Theory of the Firm**

March, J.G., & Simon, H.A. 1958. *Organizations*, Chapters 5 (pp. 149-156) & 6 (pp. 157-179, 190-192), 7 (pp.193-221).

Cyert, R. and J. G. March. 1963. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Prentice-Hall, Chapter 1, 2 and 6.

March, J. G. 1991. Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning. *Organization Science* 2: 71-87.

Greve, H. 1998. Performance, Aspirations, and Risky Organizational Change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43: 58-86.

Gavetti, G. and Levinthal, D. 2000. Looking forward and looking backward: Cognitive and experiential search. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 45: 113-137.

### **SESSION 4, New institutional theory**

Meyer, J.W. & Rowan, B. 1977. Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83: 340-63.

DiMaggio and Powell 1983. The Iron Cage Revisited. *American Sociological Review*, 48: 147-160.

Friedland, R., 1991. Bringing society back in: Symbols, practices, and institutional contradictions. *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*, 232-263.

Bromley, P., & Meyer, J. W. 2021. Hyper-management: Neoliberal expansions of purpose and leadership. *Organization Theory*, 2: 1-20.

Greve, H. R., & Man Zhang, C. 2017. Institutional logics and power sources: Merger and acquisition decisions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60: 671-694.

### **SESSION 5, Organizational ecology**

Hannan, M.T., & Freeman, J. 1977. The population ecology of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82: 929-964.

Hannan, M.T., & Freeman, J. 1984. Structural inertia and organizational change. *American Sociological Review*, 49: 149-164.

Hannan, M.T., & Freeman, J. 1989. *Organizational ecology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 2, 9, and 11.

Carroll, G. R. 1985. Concentration and specialization: Dynamics of niche width in populations of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology* 90: 1262-1283.

Carroll, G. and Swaminathan, A. 2000. Why the Microbrewery Movement? *Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the US Brewing Industry*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106:715-762.

### **SESSION 6, Resource dependence**

Emerson, R.M. 1962. Power-dependence relations. *American Sociological Review*, 27: 31-41.

Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G.R. 1978. *The external control of organizations*. New York: Harper & Row. Chapters 1 & 3

Baker, W.E. 1990. Market networks and corporate behavior. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96: 589-625.

- Casciaro, T. & Piskorski, M.J. 2005. Power imbalance, mutual dependence and constraint absorption: A closer look at resource dependence theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50: 167-199.
- Li J, Xia J, Zajac EJ. 2017. On the duality of political and economic stakeholder influence on firm innovation performance: Theory and evidence from Chinese firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39:193–216.

### **SESSION 7, Sensemaking and enactment**

- Weick, K.E. 1995. Chapter 2: Seven properties of sensemaking. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 17-62.
- Abolafia, M.Y., & Kilduff, M. 1988. Enacting market crisis: The social construction of a speculative bubble. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 33: 177-193.
- Weick, K.E. 1993. The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38: 628-652.
- Fine, G.A. 1996. Justifying Work: Occupational Rhetorics as Resources in Restaurant Kitchens. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41: 90-115.
- Abolafia, M. Y. 2010. Narrative Construction as Sensemaking: How a Central Bank Thinks. *Organization Studies*, 31: 349-367.

### **SESSION 8, Status**

- Merton, R.K. 1968. The Matthew effect in science. *Science*, 159: 56-63.
- Podolny, J. M. 1993. A status-based model of market competition. *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 829-872.
- Phillips, D.J. and Zuckerman, E.W. 2001. Middle-status conformity: Theoretical restatement and empirical demonstration in two markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107: 379-429.
- Kovács, Balázs, and Amanda J. Sharkey 2014. "The paradox of publicity: How awards can negatively affect the evaluation of quality." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 59.1: 1-33.
- Sands, D. B. 2025. Double-edged stars: Michelin stars, reactivity, and restaurant exits in New York City. *Strategic Management Journal*, 46: 148–176.

### **SESSION 9, Networks**

- Granovetter, M. 1985. Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3): 63–68.
- Baker, W. E. 1984. The social structure of a national securities market. *American Journal of Sociology*, 89(4): 775–811.
- Coleman, J.S. 1988. Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94: s95-s121.
- Burt, R. S. 2004. Structural Holes and Good Ideas. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110: 349–399.
- Phillips, D. J. 2011. Jazz and the disconnected: City structural disconnectedness and the emergence of a jazz canon, 1897–1933. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117: 420-483.

### **SESSION 10, Categories**

- Zuckerman, E. W. 1999. The categorical imperative: Securities analysts and the illegitimacy discount." *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (1999): 1398-1438.

- Hsu, G., & Hannan, M. T. 2005. Identities, genres, and organizational forms. *Organization Science*, 16(5), 474-490.
- Ruef, M. and K. Patterson 2009. Credit and classification: The impact of industry boundaries in 19th century America, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54, 486-520.
- Ahn, J., Vergne, J.-P., & Sharkey, A. 2026. When does category spanning hurt or help producers? Forthcoming, *Strategic Management Journal*.
- Negro, G., & Hannan, M. T. 2026. A Cognitive-Structural Sociological Account of the Emergence of Novel Worlds. Forthcoming, *Sociological Theory*.

## V. Course Policy

**The University Regulations on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced!** Academic dishonesty is behaviour in which a deliberately fraudulent misrepresentation is employed in an attempt to gain undeserved intellectual credit, either for oneself or for another. It includes, but is not necessarily limited to, the following types of cases:

- a. Plagiarism - The representation of someone else's ideas as if they are their own. Where the arguments, data, designs, etc., of someone else are being used in a paper, report, oral presentation, or similar academic project, this fact must be made explicitly clear by citing the appropriate references. The references must fully indicate the extent to which any parts of the project are not one's own work. Paraphrasing of someone else's ideas is still using someone else's ideas, and must be acknowledged. Please check the University Statement on plagiarism on the web: <http://www.hku.hk/plagiarism/>
- b. Unauthorized Collaboration on Out-of-Class Projects - The representation of work as solely one's own when in fact it is the result of a joint effort.
- c. Cheating on In-Class Exams - The covert gathering of information from other students, the use of unauthorized notes, unauthorized aids, etc.
- d. Unauthorized Advance Access to an Exam - The representation of materials prepared at leisure, as a result of unauthorized advance access (however obtained), as if it were prepared under the rigors of the exam setting. This misrepresentation is dishonest in itself even if there are not compounding factors, such as unauthorized uses of books or notes.

You are expected to do your own work whenever you are supposed to. Incident(s) of academic dishonesty will NOT be tolerated. Cheating or plagiarism of any kind would result in an automatic FAIL grade for the course plus strict enforcement of all Faculty and/or University regulations regarding such behaviour.