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## SOCIOLOGY FOR BUSINESS STUDIES

**Period:** a.y. 2021/22 – I sem.

**Instructor:**

**Class times:**

Wednesday: 08:30-11:50

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### Course description

This course provides an introduction to scholarship in a growing research community: the sociologists and sociologically-inclined organization theorists who investigate central questions in management studies. In particular, we will be concerned with identifying and assessing sociological work in different active topical areas that aims to shed light on the emergence and change of industries and on the degree of freedom of firms' behavior and interaction.

The second major goal of this course is to introduce students to academic thinking in general. By analyzing the development and partitioning of a specific academic field (in our case the sociology of organizations), this course also aims at introducing students to general issues regarding scholarly contributions and academic debates and disputes.

### *Class format and teaching approach*

As in any doctoral course, students and faculty need to be co-owners of the class and collectively responsible for its quality and outcomes. Class activity is mainly based on **in-depth discussion** of the assigned readings. Each session will be facilitated as a seminar or inquiry in which all participants hold themselves and each other accountable for a strong and rich intellectual enterprise and dialogue. The purpose is to engage each other in developing the best critical understanding of each topic.

The role of the instructor in class sessions is to stimulate and facilitate such dialogue; students' role is to attend each meeting and to come prepared to take an active role in class. This means not only having read the assigned materials, but also being prepared to discuss the salient issues, questions, and problems emerging from the readings and topics of the session.

When academics and scholars of all kinds publish their research, part of what they are doing is setting their ideas forth to be criticized. In many cases, criticism of past work is an integral part of new work, and sometimes new work consists exclusively in criticism of old work. Criticism isn't just familiar to academics; it's an essential component of what they do. Given such perspective, always keep in mind that class participation involves opening

oneself to challenge others' ideas and positions. In return, students should expect **to be challenged** on their opinions, and be prepared to justify them.

### **Evaluation and grading policy**

Students will be evaluated according to the following table:

<i>Course requirements</i>	<i>Points</i>
Class participation and discussion questions	30
Written reports and class presentation	30
Written exam	40
<b>TOTAL Points</b>	<b>100</b>

Letter grades will be assigned according to the observed distribution of total points earned in the different required components by the entire class. Points will be attributed according to the comparison and distribution of the class performance. It will be students' best interest to perform as well as possible in each task.

#### *Class participation and discussion questions*

This course is discussion based and the quality of the learning experience depends greatly on each student's contributions and students' interactions during the class sessions. This means that each student must take responsibility for the success of the class by being an active (and constructively critical) participant in all class sessions. A student who sits back and listens (however intently) is likely to detract from others' learning experience. Preparation before class is essential, and an important part of the evaluation of performance will be based on student preparedness and internalization of concepts as evidenced by in-class discussion. Preparation requires reading all required assigned materials. However, simply reading the materials is not enough – students must also evaluate the material, critique it, analyze how it fits with the literature, etc. Remember that this is not a methodology course and thus we are more interested in the theory, the concepts, the logics, and the empirical settings of the articles.

Your class contributions should go well beyond “I liked this reading” and “I didn't like that one” (although these reactions are important). Try to dig deeper and ask questions like:

- What are the explicit or implicit assumptions of this perspective?
- How realistic are those assumptions?
- What are the broader implications of the perspective?
- Do you find these implications believable?
- What relevant questions are not answered?
- What studies could be done to develop theory in the area under discussion?



For each session, I expect students to think of questions they would like to discuss in class regarding the assigned articles. Each student is allowed to submit one question only (not a series of questions) per session. You can focus on a single article, otherwise you might also try to make connections between the current readings or with the readings we have discussed in previous sessions.

DEADLINES AND RULES:

- Questions should be sent by email to the instructor and to the entire class and also copied in an online document (link will be provided)
- Deadline: two-days before each class (Mondays) no later than 11pm. Questions sent after the deadline will not be discussed in class and will not be evaluated. No exceptions. No excuses.
- Students should not submit questions that are similar to the ones that have already been sent for that session by other students.
- Students cannot submit questions on the same readings of the memos they were assigned to.
- Students cannot change or refine their questions after their first submission. Only the first version will be considered and evaluated.

*Written reports*

Each student will choose **two articles** - among the readings from sessions 2-6 - to summarize and critique. Instructions regarding this choice will be given before the starting of the course.

Structure your written report according to the following points (the reference section below can help you in understanding some basic concepts):

1. Describe what is the nature of the gaps or problems in the field of research that this article intends to fill.
2. Summarize the article (its theoretical statements and concepts) in one sentence.
3. Describe the logic/mechanisms (“explanation”) that are used by the author(s) to support such statements.
4. Identify the “boundary conditions” of the article (i.e., the limits of generalizability of a theory).
5. Describe how this article is related to other articles in the same or in different sessions.
6. Identify problems, limitations and future extensions
  - For a theoretical paper you might consider questions such as: How interesting is the theory? What are the core assumptions behind the theory? How plausible are these assumptions? Can testable hypotheses/propositions be developed based on the argument presented?



What future empirical studies can we design to test this theory? What (if any) ideas from different/competing theories are contested by the paper? What (if any) implications does this theory have for the practice of management?

- For an empirical paper you might consider questions such as: How novel and interesting is the theory developed? How much does this paper advance our knowledge about the phenomenon studied? How well is the theory linked to the empirical analysis? How well do the measures capture the author's theoretical constructs? Do you find the story "believable"? Why or why not? What alternative explanations might drive the findings? How could the paper be improved? What further research questions does this paper suggest to you? What (if any) implications do the findings have for the practice of management?

#### DEADLINES AND RULES:

- Length: each report should be a 2-3 pages (single spaced) PDF document.
- Due date: students should upload their files (the link will be provided at the beginning of the course) two days before each class (Monday) no later than 11pm.

#### REFERENCES:

- Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 490-495.
- Hedstrom, P., & Swedberg, R. (1998). *Social mechanisms*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (Ch. 1 and 3). [Link](#).

Students should also briefly (5-10 min.) present a summary and critique of the assigned article in class. Students will present only once and the assigned presentation will be decided at the beginning of the course.

#### *Written exam*

The written exam is a closed book examination with 2-3 open questions on the readings and discussions of the course. Students should expect general questions about specific topics and/or comparison of different papers. The duration is generally 60 minutes.

## Sessions and readings

### 1. Groups and social boundaries

- Robinson, J. (1956). The industry and the market. *The Economic Journal*, 66(262), 360-361.
- Nightingale, J. (1978). On the definition of Industry and Market. *The Journal of Industrial Economics*, 31-40.
- Porac, J. F., & Thomas, H. (1990). Taxonomic mental models in competitor definition. *Academy of Management Review*, 15(2), 224-240.
- Rosa, J. A., Porac, J. F., Runser-Spanjol, J., & Saxon, M. S. (1999). Sociocognitive dynamics in a product market. *Journal of marketing*, 63(4), 64-77.
- Deephouse, D.L. (1999). To be different, or to be the same? It's a question (and theory) of strategic balance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 20: 147-166.
- Lamont, M., Pendergrass, S., & Pachucki, M. (2001). Symbolic boundaries. *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences*, 23, 15341-47.

### 2. Categories and social deviance

- Zuckerman, E. W. (1999). The categorical imperative: Securities analysts and the illegitimacy discount. *American Journal of Sociology*, 104: 1398-1438.
- Pontikes, E. G. (2012). Two sides of the same coin: How ambiguous classification affects multiple audiences' evaluations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 57: 81-118.
- Granqvist, N., Grodal, S. & Woolley, J.L. (2013). Hedging your bets: Explaining executives' market labeling strategies in nanotechnology. *Organization Science*, 24: 395-413.

### 3. Organizational forms and new market categories

- Perretti, F., Negro, G. & Lomi, A. (2008). E Pluribus Unum: Framing, Matching, and Form Emergence in US Television Broadcasting. *Organization Science*, 19: 533-47.
- Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2010). How new market categories emerge: Temporal dynamics of legitimacy, identity, and entrepreneurship in satellite radio, 1990-2005. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(3), 439-471.
- Lo, J. Y., Fiss, P. C., Rhee, E. Y., & Kennedy, M. T. (2020). Category viability: Balanced levels of coherence and distinctiveness. *Academy of Management Review*, 45(1), 85-108.

#### 4. Social positions: status

- Phillips, D. J. & Zuckerman, E. W. (2001). Middle-status conformity: Theoretical restatement and empirical demonstration in two markets. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107: 379-429.
- Rao, H., Monin, P. & Durand, R. (2005). Border crossing: Bricolage and the erosion of categorical boundaries in French gastronomy. *American Sociological Review*, 70: 968-991.
- Phillips, D. J., Turco, C.J., & Zuckerman, E. W. (2013). Betrayal as market barrier: Identity-based limits to diversification among high-status corporate law firms. *American Journal of Sociology*, 118: 1023-1054.

#### 5. Social positions: stigma

- Vergne, J-P. (2012). Stigmatized categories and public disapproval of organizations: A mixed-methods study of the global arms industry. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55: 1027-52.
- Piazza, A. & Perretti, F. (2015). Categorical Stigma and Firm Disengagement: Nuclear Power Generation in the United States, 1970–2000. *Organization Science*, 26: 724-742.
- Ruebottom, T., & Toubiana, M. (2020). Constraints and opportunities of stigma: Entrepreneurial emancipation in the sex industry. *Academy of Management Journal*, (ja).

#### 6. Social change and category dynamics

- Hiatt, S. R., Sine, W. D., & Tolbert, P. S. (2009). From Pabst to Pepsi: The deinstitutionalization of social practices and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54: 635-667.
- Lashley, K., & Pollock, T. G. (2019). Waiting to Inhale: Reducing Stigma in the Medical Cannabis Industry. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1-49.
- Hsu, G., & Grodal, S. (2021). The double-edged sword of oppositional category positioning: A study of the US E-cigarette category, 2007–2017. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 66(1), 86-132.



## Course Schedule

Sess.	Topics	Date	Activities and deadlines
1	<b>Introduction</b> <i>Groups and social boundaries</i>	Sep. 08 - (W)	CLASS
2	<b>Categories and social deviance</b>	Sep. 13 - (M)	<i>Send questions and memos (11pm)</i>
		Sep. 15 - (W)	CLASS
3	<b>Organizational forms and new market categories</b>	Sep. 20 - (M)	<i>Send questions and memos (11pm)</i>
		Sep. 22 - (W)	CLASS
4	<b>Social positions: status</b>	Sep. 27 - (M)	<i>Send questions and memos (11pm)</i>
		Sep 29 - (W)	CLASS
5	<b>Social positions: stigma</b>	Oct. 04 - (M)	<i>Send questions and memos (11pm)</i>
		Oct. 06 - (W)	CLASS
6	<b>Social change and category dynamics</b>	Oct. 11 - (M)	<i>Send questions and memos (11pm)</i>
		Oct. 13 - (W)	CLASS
	<b>WRITTEN EXAM</b>	Oct. 27 - (W)	