

*Dynamics of Educational Organizations*<sup>1</sup>

EDLPS 550 3 Units – Fall 2015

Time: Tuesday – 4:30-6:50

Location: Thompson Hall 119

<https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/988420>

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 1-3:30pm

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**Overview**

Organizations are often thought of as rational actors: change the org chart, a policy, or resources and they will improve. Yet, as researchers of schools we know that this is not true. Creating change in schools—as organizations, in classrooms, or in teaching practice—is a formidable challenge. Whereas other organizations that do not meet their goals may in fact fail (other than, of course, those “too big to fail”), schools persist that decade after decade fail to serve the children in their classrooms. What is different about schools than other organizations? What can we learn from studies of organizations broadly to understand schools, and what must we think about differently?

This course is designed to introduce students to the key issues and approaches in the study of organizations, with special attention to K-12 schools/districts and educational organizations. We will first seek to understand the *constancy* in schools and districts, and then look at when and under what conditions *change* happens. Finally, we will explore how the relationship between schools and their *environment(s)* complexify both constancy and change. To do these tasks, we will learn how individuals are situated in organizations, which are situated in broader social, cultural, and political environments. We will also explore how reform and improvement efforts consider both individual factors and the ways in which individual action is enabled and constrained by organizational and environmental contexts.

The course has four goals: 1) to explore the organizational contexts and reforms of K-12 schools, 2) to be introduced to and investigate a series of core theoretical approaches to elucidate case-based problems of practice, 3) to provide students different ways of “seeing” and leading such organizations, and 4) to use organizational theories to analyze and provide guidance to a school or non-profit organization’s leadership team on a school-identified problem of practice.

We will take a common approach to each of our readings and partners’ problems of practice, using the dimensions in the matrix below to help us understand when and under what conditions education organizations improve. Each cell in this matrix will not apply to every theory and case; we will fill out the matrix through the quarter to gain a deeper understanding of the connections between the theories and organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this syllabus uses ideas from a number of scholars’ courses, including those of: Cynthia Coburn, Mike Knapp, Angeline Spain, and Dan McFarland.

	Field Level	Organizational Level	Individual Level
Constancy			
Change			

In this course, students are asked to write one shorter essay (4-5 pages) that analyzes a case using a theoretical approach and produce, in a small group, a leadership recommendation report (informed by organizational theory) to a school or non-profit organization on that organization's identified problem of practice. In conjunction with the group report to the school or organization, each individual will write a reflective essay describing his or her participation and learning in the process. These assignments are described below, as well as expectations for classroom participation:

1. ***Concept Application Paper.*** Half-way through the course (noted in the schedule below), students will be asked to prepare a concept application paper, in which they bring a general "big idea" into dialogue with the particulars of a specific case situation with which they are familiar, in order to practice making sense of actual practice and organizational designs, and at the same time, refining the abstractions that theory has developed. An outline is due the week before.
2. ***Project paper: Analysis of organization's problem of practice with recommended leadership actions (rooted in organizational theories).*** In the beginning of the course, you will select one of seven organizations to assist in a problem of practice. To do so, you and your group will meet with the leader(s) of the organization to identify the problem of practice. Together, you will first research the particular problem, conduct research in the organization to understand how the POP exists there, and then apply at least four distinct organizational theories as "lenses" to understand the problem from a variety of possible root causes and to generate a variety of possible solutions. You will present this information in a report form to the school/organization's leader(s) at the end of the quarter. In addition, each student will write a reflection of his or her learning through this process.
3. ***Class participation.*** This class relies on active and thoughtful participation to make it work. I have the following expectations about class participation: a) students attend class consistently and promptly; b) students come to class having read the readings carefully and critically; and c) students participate in class in an active, thoughtful, and respectful manner. Missing class is highly discouraged and will result in a lower class participation grade.

### Schedule of Written Assignments

To help students plan their time during the quarter, a list of the due dates for written work is included below. These assignments are to be turned in to the Canvas Drop Box.

1. ***Concept Application paper: Organizational Constancy & Change; due: November 3<sup>rd</sup> by 4pm***

In this brief (4-5 page) paper, you will take one or more general concepts, claims, or assertions from your readings concerning organizational constancy and change, and use it to explain and make sense of some organizational mini-case with which you are familiar (note: this must be an education organization). The mini-case might derive from an organization you now work in or have worked in, or from a published case you are interested in. In writing this piece you are answering the question: in what ways does the case display the concept at work? How does the mini-case illustrate or elaborate the practical meaning(s) of the concept? A more detailed paper description, model papers, and rubric will be handed out in class.

**2. *Organizational Analysis; due: December 14<sup>th</sup> by midnight***

This analysis will describe the problem of practice, research on that particular problem, analysis of the problem from at least four theoretical perspectives, and possible approaches to solve the problem based on the organizational analysis.

In addition, each individual will write a reflection on his or her learning process of this project. A more detailed project description and rubric will be handed out in class.

**Grading**

Concept Application Paper:	30pts.
Organizational Analysis:	50pts.
Individual Reflection	5pts.
Classroom Participation:	15pts.

**Course Policies**

- Students will receive the most prompt reply if you contact me through email. I check my email frequently, and will respond to student email as soon as possible although usually not on the weekend.
- All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, with 1" margins and 12 point font unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. Assignments should be proofread carefully, because only assignments with minimal or no errors will receive high scores.
- It is expected that students will devote a minimum of 11 hours of work to this class weekly. This consists of 3 in-class hours and 11 out-of-class hours (2 hours per every contact hour). Some students may need to spend more time in order to meet course objectives.
- The schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.
- If you have concerns about the course, please discuss the concerns with me. If you are not comfortable talking with me or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact Marty Howell, Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs at [mthowell@uw.edu](mailto:mthowell@uw.edu). Procedures for student support are available from the Office of Admissions and Academic Support, 206 Miller.

**Accommodations**

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you experience barriers based on a disability or temporary health condition, please seek a meeting with DRS to discuss and address them. If

you have already established accommodations with DRS, please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. Disability Resources for Students (DRS) offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include but not limited to: mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or [uwdrs@uw.edu](mailto:uwdrs@uw.edu) or [disability.uw.edu](http://disability.uw.edu).

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are expected to uphold the UW Student Conduct Code and fulfill their responsibility to (1) uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, (2) refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community.

Cases of suspected plagiarism and/or academic misconduct such as copying assignments, using unauthorized notes or information, and/or cheating on an exam will be referred to the COE Assistant Dean for Academic & Student Affairs for adjudication. Possible penalties range from disciplinary warnings to dismissal from the university. For more information on this issue, including a useful definition of plagiarism, read the UW article on Academic Honesty: Cheating and Plagiarism available at <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm>.

### **Module 1: Conceptual Orientation to Schools as Organizations**

Week 1. October 6<sup>th</sup>: Why analyze schools as organizations?

*Readings:*

- Brint, S. (2006). *Schools and societies*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press. (Chapter 1 -- "Schools as social institutions").
- Metz, Mary Haywood. 1986. "Adams Avenue School for Individually Guided Education." Chapter 4 (pp. 57-103) in *Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools*. Routledge: New York.

*Guiding Questions:*

In this first chapter, Brint (a sociologist) outlines two approaches to understanding schools as institutions.

- How does he define structural-functionalist theory (SFT)? How does he define social power theory (SPT)?
- Compare these two approaches to understanding schools. What does each highlight? What does each background?

Using both of the theories outlined in Brint, think about Adams Avenue:

- From a SFT perspective, what is happening in Adams Avenue? How would SFT explain why Mrs. Michaels made the decision around IGE? How would SFT explain the school norms?
- From a SPT perspective, how does the school represent the interests of the elite? Think about the kinds of interests (market, cultural, political)—how are these interests met at the school?

- How did using these two theoretical approaches help you understand Adams Avenue differently than you might have otherwise?

## **Module 2: Organizational Constancy**

### Week 2. October 13<sup>th</sup>: Unpacking the structure(s) of educational organizations

#### *Readings:*

- Morgan: Chapter 2: Mechanization Takes Command: Organizations as Machines
- Huerta, L.A. (2009). Institutional v. technical environments: reconciling the goals of decentralization in an evolving charter school organization. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 84(2), 244-261.

#### *Guiding Questions:*

Start by reading Morgan, and then Huerta. Think about these questions as you read:

- What are the characteristics of an organization as a machine? How do you see these characteristics show up in the case?
- How do you see both *structure* and *function* of Amigos? In what ways are they similar? Different?
- Where do you see conflict (ala social conflict theory) emerge? When and under what circumstances?
- Can you relate either your high school or an organization/school that you've worked in to Amigos? How?

#### *Assignment:*

By Friday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, please fill out the google form to let me know your preferences for partner organization(s) and to request one person to work with (optional).

### Week 3. October 20<sup>th</sup>: Constancy? Digging into the persistence of "real school."

#### *Readings:*

- Tyack, D. and Tobin, W. (1994). The "grammar" of schooling: Why has it been so hard to change? *American Educational Research Journal*, 31, 453-479.
- Spillane, J. P., & Callahan, K. A. (2000). Implementing state standards for science education: What district policy makers make out of the hoopla. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 37(5), 401-425.

#### *Guiding Questions:*

On Tyack and Tobin:

- What is the authors' explanation for why the graded school and Carnegie unit are reforms that persist?
- What is the authors' explanation(s) for why the other three reforms (The Dalton Plan, The Eight-Year Study, and Open Schools) were not able to change the "grammar" of schooling?
- Make connections with Amigos--how do you see the reform of Amigos in parallel or distinct from the three failed reforms?

On Spillane + Callahan:

- Explain the authors' differentiation between form and function. Why do they argue this matters for what happens in classrooms?
- Spillane and Callahan take a very different approach to the challenge of change in schooling from Tyack and Tobin—use the dimension chart to play out the different ways they explain a similar phenomenon.

### **Module 3: Organizational Change**

Week 4. October 27<sup>th</sup>: Autonomy, control, and cultural norms

*Readings:*

- Chapter 1: Culture & Organization: Kunda, G. (2006). *Engineering culture: control and commitment in a high-tech corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Howard, Jody K. 2010. *The Relationship between School Culture and the School Library Program: Four Case Studies*. School Library Research. American Library Association.

*Optional:*

- Little, J.W. (1990). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teachers College Record*, 91, 509-536.

*Guiding Questions:*

For Kunda:

- Kunda argues that Tech uses normative control as a way to "elicit and direct...required efforts." First, how does Kunda define normative control? What did this look like at Tech? Why does it work?
- What are some of the benefits of a strong organizational culture? What are some potential hindrances?
- How do you "see" culture at Tech?

For Howard:

- Describe the theoretical perspectives she uses to "see" culture in her cases.
- She describes three main findings: collaborative culture, principals' leadership style, and high expectations are found across her sites. How did she "see" these things? What are some of the organizational conditions that she describes that allowed these cultural norms and practices to be present?
- Compare the case study schools with Tech. While the author didn't identify normative control, are you able to see evidence of this in her paper? Where and how? Are there other connections you can make between the two pieces?

Finally, if you have time and interest in changing schools, read Judith Warren Little's paper about the persistence of privacy in teachers' classroom. It's optional, and we won't have time to talk about it in class, but you will be able to see lots of connections with the other articles (and it's really useful to have read, especially for PhD students).

*Concept Application Outline due @ 4:30pm*

Week 5. November 3<sup>rd</sup>: Organizational Learning: how and when do schools learn?

*Readings:*

- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: learning as a social system. *The Systems Thinker*, 9(5).
- Honig, M. (2008). District Central Offices as Learning Organizations: How Sociocultural and Organizational Learning Theories Elaborate District Central Office Administrators' Participation in Teaching and Learning Improvement Efforts. *American Journal of Education*, 114 (August), 627-664.

*Guiding Questions:*

For Wenger:

- What are the key elements of a community of practice (COP)?
- How might COPs play a role in organizational change? Think about this from a number of levels: individuals, school-building level, and “school” (ala Tyack).
- Have you ever been a part of a community of practice? Reflect on if it helped the organization change or improve. If so, why? and if not, why not?

For Honig:

- In what ways does Meredith use COP to frame her argument? What does she add to it?
- Neither author takes up notions of equity and power in a very deep way. How do you think these ideas play a role in organizational learning? How might Meredith have taken it up in her research study?
- Similar to the second question for Wenger, think about the different levels of organizational change that Meredith presents: what is the role of the individual? Of the collective? Of the organization?

*Concept Application Paper due @ 4:30pm*

**Module 3: The Relationship between Organizations and the Environment**

Week 6. November 10<sup>th</sup>: Managing for improvement in the face of multiple, competing demands

*Readings:*

- Honig, M. I. & Hatch, T. C. (2004). Crafting coherence: How schools strategically manage multiple, external demands. *Educational Researcher*, 33 (8), 16-30.
- Carroll, Glenn R. and Anand Swaminathan. 2000. "Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry." *American Journal of Sociology* 106, 715-762
  - Note: you can skim/skip the detailed mathematical formulas and descriptions—focus on the argument—what it is and how the authors are making it.

*Guiding Questions:*

Both articles describe the interactions of organizations within the broader environment, but at different levels.

- Describe the different relationships each article describes. I find it helpful to draw a picture!
- Carroll and Swaminathan present some new terms! Explain what they mean by organizational ecology, resource partitioning, and specialist niche.

- Honig and Hatch argue that school districts need to craft coherence. What does this mean? What are the approaches that school districts should take to do this (bridging and buffering—but what do these mean??)?

Week 7. November 17<sup>th</sup>: Mapping external influences on organizational improvement

*Readings:*

- Coburn, C.E. (2005). The role of nonsystem actors in the relationship between policy and practice: The case of reading instruction in California. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(1), 23-52.
- Headden, S. (2014). *Beginners in the classroom: What new teacher demographics mean for schools, students, and society*. Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement

*Guiding Questions:*

- Coburn argues that teachers' connections with nonsystem actors were more consequential for their classroom practice than other policy messages. Think back to the pictures we made representing last week's readings—how does the author's conceptualization map onto them? What is she trying to explain?
- What were the factors that influenced teachers to be more likely to adopt a practice? According to Coburn, why was this so?
- The Headden piece presents a problem of practice: teachers are leaving the classroom too quickly (for the most part), and offers several reasons why, both internal to the school organization and outside. What are these reasons? Using the theories in Coburn's piece, how would you explain these reasons (or, how would Coburn explain these reasons)?
- Headden also presents a number of cases as potential solutions to the POP. Which theories that we've read so far in this course can help explain why the particular cases might serve as effective solutions?

Week 8. November 24<sup>th</sup>: Organizing by network

*Readings:*

- Goldsmith, Stephen and William Eggers. 2004. *Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector*. Chapters 1-3 (pages 3-52)
- Daly, A., & Finnigan, K. (2010). A bridge between worlds: understanding network structure to understand change strategy. *Journal of Educational Change*, 11(2), 111-138.

*Guiding Questions:*

- Think about the organization you are studying. Draw a picture of their network—which other organizations are they connected to? What are those relationships like?
- Which of the advantages and disadvantages (described in chapters 2+3) do you think your organization faces with those relationships? What might a leader of your organization do to maximize the advantages and downplay the disadvantages?
- Daly + Finnegan's study is a traditional Social Network Analysis (SNA) in education. One of their core concepts is social capital. How do they define this concept? Why do they say it's important?
- Label one of their maps, explaining what all of the lines and nodes signify.
- One of their main findings is around centrality. What did they find? Why does it matter for how the organization is able to function and change?

**Module 4: Putting it all together**

Week 9. December 1<sup>st</sup>: Partner Organizations + Their Problems of Practice

*Reading:*

- Giving High-Quality Feedback: Adapted from <http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/strategies/Pages/commenting-on-writing.aspx#.VP9yFGR4qd8>

*Assignment:*

- *Draft* of Organizational Analysis due in class for peer group review

Week 10. December 8<sup>th</sup>: Synthesis:

- No readings.

*Assignment:*

- *Draft* of Organizational Analysis uploaded to Canvas before class; I will review before the weekend.

*Organizational Analysis + Personnel Reflection due by midnight, December 14<sup>th</sup>.*