

Special Topics in Management: Interpreting Organizations



Robert J. Trulaske, Sr.
College of Business
University of Missouri

Professor: Todd Chiles, Ph.D.

Course Description

In this course, you will learn how to “read” and make sense of organizations. That is, you will learn how to interpret organizations; how to get a “finger on the pulse” of organizational problems and organizational life. To do so, you will use a powerful set of metaphors: machines, organisms, brains, cultures, and psychic prisons. Each metaphor will help you see organizations in new ways by using one aspect of your experience (e.g., machines) to understand another (i.e., organizations). This unique approach to interpreting organizations will give you an opportunity to broaden, deepen, and sharpen your understanding of organizations. And you’ll get to apply what you’ve learned in the classroom to a number of real organizations. Specifically, you’ll conduct a series of five visits

to organizations in the Alicante, Spain area. To ease you into this unfamiliar context, your first two visits will be to a familiar organization operating in Spain. Your last three visits will be to Spanish organizations of your choosing. Using a different metaphor each visit, you will conduct your organizational interpretations in groups comprised of roughly half American (MU) and half European (Erasmus) students, and you will periodically return to the classroom to present your interpretations – cycling back and forth between “classwork” and “fieldwork.”

Course Materials

A readings packet is required and will be provided by the TCOB Study Abroad

Course Evaluation

The evaluation techniques and their respective weights are as follows:

Quizzes and Exams – Quizzes - Exam

Note: You may drop the lowest one of the above two scores.

Project

Fieldwork, Presentation & Hardcopy of Slides (approx. 3x) (40%)

Fieldwork & Hardcopy of Slides (approx. 2x) (10%)

Student performance will be evaluated on the following 100-point, S/U grading scale.

Please note that the instructor reserves the right to curve class grades as necessary.

Quizzes

Your performance will be assessed on five short quizzes to be given at the beginning of the lecture/discussion portion of the class period. Please consult the course outline for quiz material and dates. No make-up quizzes will be given. However, you may

drop your lowest quiz score. These quizzes are meant to: (1) encourage reading of the material, (2) promote class discussion and exercises, and (3) prepare you for your project.

Exam

Your performance will be assessed on a final exam, which will be given on the last day of class (see course outline below). It will be given only on the scheduled date, at the scheduled time. No make-up exam will be given. The exam will cover: (1) Assigned readings in course packet, (2) Any supplemental articles that may have been assigned, (3) Lecture, discussion, videos, exercises, etc. in class.

Project

You will take on the role of organizational analysts in a number of visits to organizations in the Alicante area (“fieldwork”). Specifically, you will apply what you’ve learned in the classroom by making five visits to Spanish organizations. While your first two visits will be to a familiar organization operating in Spain (McDonald’s), your last three visits will be to Spanish organizations of your choosing. You will conduct this “fieldwork” in groups of approximately 4-6 students (about half MU and about half Erasmus students), and periodically return to the classroom to present your interpretations. I expect each group will make approximately three oral presentations. Hardcopy of slides will be due at the time of each of these presentations. I expect each group will have approximately two sessions where they don’t deliver an oral presentation, but do submit a hardcopy of their slides. As we know more about class size and hence the number of groups in the class, I will firm up these details. See instructional notes below for additional information on oral presentations and written submissions.

Peer Evaluation Adjustment

In order to minimize the tendency of individuals to “free ride” on the efforts of others in group projects and to penalize those who do, each student will evaluate the other members of his/her group. Please see the instructional note on peer evaluations for more details. The peer evaluation form can be found on the course web site.

Attendance

Students are required to attend all class sessions. Without attending class, it is impossible to participate in exercises, discussions, cases, presentations, etc., and get the full value of this course. Given the importance of attendance to both your and your peers’ learning (and success) in this class as well as your own professional development: (1) If you have perfect attendance, you will have 2% added to your overall course grade (e.g., 78% (U) \square 80% (S)); (2) For every class you are absent, you will have 10% subtracted from your overall course grade (e.g., one absence: 88% (S) \square 78% (U), two absences: 98% (S) \square 78% (U)). After two absences, a student would have to have a perfect score in the class in order to pass the course.

Coming in just to take the quiz, give your presentation, or make a brief appearance and then leaving will count as an absence (and hence 10% will be subtracted from your overall course grade for each such occurrence). Coming in 30 minutes or more after class has started or leaving with 30 minutes or more remaining in the session will count as an absence (and hence 10% will be subtracted from your overall course grade for each such occurrence). In less

extreme instances, a pattern of arriving late, leaving early, and/or exiting-and-reentering the class while it's in session will also count as an absence. Two such events constitutes a pattern. A recurrent pattern will count as two additional absences for the first recurrence, three additional absences for the second recurrence, etc. Your informing me of an absence and my acknowledging this does not constitute an excused absence. I will be keeping regular attendance records. It is your responsibility to sign the roster during each class session as evidence of your attendance. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of the class and, if deemed necessary, during the class at a randomly chosen time.

Attention and Focus in the Classroom

Your ability to carefully focus and actively participate in class lectures, discussions and exercises is crucial to your success in this course. Accordingly:

- Electronic devices – including, but not limited to, cellular phones, laptops, PDAs – have been found to direct students' attention away from the learning process. Therefore, before the beginning of each class you are required to turn off all cellular phones, laptops, and other electronic devices and store them someplace other than your work area. Unless otherwise noted by the professor, any student found using an electronic device in the classroom – no matter the length of time – will have 5% subtracted from their overall course grade for each occurrence. See me at the beginning of the course if you have any questions about this policy.
- Sleeping obviously directs students' attention away from the learning process. Moreover, it's rude and unprofessional behavior. Any student found sleeping, nodding off, etc. in the classroom – no matter the length of time – will have 5% subtracted from their overall course grade for each occurrence. See me at the beginning of the course if you have any questions about this policy.
- Please do not talk during the class session, except when participating in class discussions and exercises. A student who keeps on talking may be asked to leave the classroom. Attendance policies will apply in such cases.

Instructional Notes

1. Note on Oral Presentations

A PowerPoint slide show is required in order to make the presentation more clear, interesting, and persuasive. I strongly recommend that you come prepared with a backup set of materials that can be displayed on the document camera (assuming the room is equipped with one). The presentation will be assessed by the instructor using an evaluation form that can be found on the course web site. I do not require that each and every member of the group be a presenter; however, all members should stand in front of the class in an orderly fashion during the presentation. I encourage you to talk with me prior to your presentation; I will try to answer any questions you may have, reduce your uncertainty, and give you the best advice possible. In my experience, you will need to practice your presentation as a group prior to delivering it in order to avoid problems with time management, persuasive logic, and consistency and flow between presenters. If you choose to use technologies not supported by our classroom setup, you are responsible for securing all the necessary hardware and software, and having it there on time. If you want me to assist you with such technologies, I ask that you come see me at least three days in advance of the presentation. Presentations will be made on the dates indicated in the course outline below. If you miss the class period when your group's presentation is due, then your group

members will present without you. Any problems associated with a group member's absence should be "taken up" within the group (in advance of the presentation if at all possible). For example, if someone misses a presentation, the group may want to make changes in the previously agreed-upon division of labor or to reflect this lack of participation in a lower peer evaluation. To ensure fairness, time limits on presentations will be enforced at a maximum of _____ minutes per presentation.

NOTE: The number of presentations each group will make will depend on the class size, group size, and length of the presentation. These details will be worked out as more information becomes available. I'm hoping that each group will get to make approximately three oral presentations.

2. Note on Written Submissions

You are required to submit in class one bound hardcopy of your slides (which I will keep) immediately prior to your presentation. Please provide a professional quality cover page with the company's name, the metaphor employed, your group number, the name of the course (MGMT 3901), the semester of the course (i.e., SU2012), and group member names in alphabetical (by last/sir name) order. In the bound hardcopy, be sure to provide a list of references on which you drew. The reference list should include all materials used in your interpretation, including full names/titles of people with whom you spoke during your fieldwork, secondary data collected during your fieldwork, internet sites, etc. As appropriate, references must be specific and detailed enough that I can look them up and find them. So, be sure to include author(s), editor(s), dates, article/chapter/etc. title, book/journal/magazine/newspaper/etc. title, page numbers, volume/issue numbers, edition number, etc. For binding your slides, please use a good stapler or a good metal clip. No paper clips or plastic binders, please.

3. Note on Peer Evaluations

Each group member will be required to complete a peer evaluation form for all group work associated with the project. Individual grades will be adjusted to reflect these peer evaluations where appropriate. Some cases of freeriding can result in a substantial grade reduction. Please use the "peer evaluation form" available on the course web site. Every student is required to turn in a peer evaluation. Turning it in late or not at all will negatively affect your overall course grade by 2% (e.g., 81% (S) \square 79% (U)) if 0.2-2 hours late, 3% (e.g., 82% (S) \square 79% (S) if 2-5 hours late, and 4% (e.g., 83% (S) \square 79% (U)) if over 5 hours late. In order that every member of the group understands the standard to which the group will hold them, I ask as a group that you thoughtfully come to a consensus and render these standards explicit in a document of understanding (DOU). Type it up, have each group member sign it, and submit this document to me in class on the date shown in the course outline. Each group member should keep a copy for his/her records. Turning it in late or not at all will negatively affect your overall course grade by 1% (e.g., 90% \square 89%) if 1 day late, 2% (e.g., 90% \square 88%) if 2 days late, 3% (e.g., 90% \square 87%) if 3 days late, and 4% (e.g., 90% \square 86%) if over 3 days late. I have examples of DOUs that you are welcome to review. Consider, for example, these factors in your discussion and drafting of the DOU:

- Did they contribute to the group process? (1) On time for all group meetings, stayed for the duration of the meeting, and was really "into" it. (2) Coordinated his/her schedule with the group so meetings were easy to schedule. (3) Met the task deadlines that were set up by the group. (4) Respected other group members' time by

coming fully prepared for all group meetings. (5) Kept the group organized, cohesive, and progressing toward the completion of group goals. (6) Maintained a constructive, positive attitude throughout the project.

• Did they contribute to the group product? (1) Contributed useful ideas and suggestions. (2) Contributed creative ideas that forced new insights. (3) Strong contributor in the development and/or delivery of the group's presentation. (4) Strong contributor in the development of the group's report. (5) Skill in carrying out his/her special role (computer graphics, research, presentations, etc.). (6) Overall quantity of work on the project. (7) Overall quality of work on the project.

Course Outline

* Monday, July 9, 9:00am – 11:00am

Classwork: Course Overview

• Read: Morgan, Chapter 1 (part)

Classwork: Interpreting Organizations from a Mechanistic Perspective

• Read: Morgan, Chapter 2 (all)

* Tuesday, July 10, 9:00am – 11:00am

Fieldwork: Interpreting McDonald's from a Mechanistic Perspective

* Wednesday, July 11, 9:00am – 11:00am

Presentations: Interpreting McDonald's from a Mechanistic Perspective

Classwork: Interpreting Organizations from an Organic Perspective

• Read: Morgan, Chapter 3 (part)

• Read: "Father, Son and Gum"

• Quiz 1: Assigned readings from Morgan Chapters 1-3 and "Father, Son & Gum"

• Due: Document of Understanding (DOU) from each group

* Thursday, July 12, 9:00am – 11:00am

Fieldwork: Interpreting McDonald's from an Organic Perspective

* Monday, July 16, 9:00am – 11:00am

Presentations: Interpreting McDonald's from an Organic Perspective

Classwork: Interpreting Organizations from Learning and Self-Organization (Brain) Perspectives

• Read: Morgan, Chapter 4 (all)

• Read: "Strategic Termites"

• Quiz 2: Assigned readings from Morgan Chapter 4 and "Strategic Termites"

* Tuesday, July 17, 9:00am – 11:00am

Fieldwork: Interpreting _____ from a Brain Perspective

* Wednesday, July 18, 9:00am – 11:00am

Presentations: Interpreting _____ from a Brain Perspective

Classwork: Interpreting Organizations from a National Culture Perspective

• Read: Morgan, Chapter 5 (part)

• Read: "The Honda Effect"

• Quiz 3: Assigned readings from Morgan Chapter 5 and "The Honda Effect"

* Thursday, July 19, 9:00am – 11:00am

Fieldwork: Interpreting _____ from a National Culture Perspective

* Monday, July 23, 9:00am – 11:00am

Presentations: Interpreting _____ from a National Culture Perspective

Classwork: Interpreting Organizations from a Corporate Culture Perspective

• Read: Morgan, Chapter 5 (part)

- Quiz 4: Assigned readings from Morgan Chapter 5

- * Tuesday, July 24, 9:00am – 11:00am

Fieldwork: Interpreting _____ from an Organizational Culture Perspective

- * Wednesday, July 25, 9:00am – 11:00am

Presentations: Interpreting _____ from an Organizational Culture Perspective

Classwork: Interpreting Organizations from a Mental Traps (Psychic Prisons)

Perspective

- Read: Morgan, Chapter 7 (part)

- Read: “The Icarus Paradox”

- Quiz 5: Assigned readings from Morgan Chapter 7 and “The Icarus Paradox”

- * Thursday, July 26, 9:00am – 11:00am

Classwork: Course Summary

- Exam: Final Exam

Note: The instructor reserves the right to amend or re-schedule the course outline as deemed necessary.

About your professor: Todd Chiles (PhD, University of Oregon) is Associate Professor of Management at the University of Missouri.