

Organization and Strategy Research

PhD Courses (6 ECTS)
Faculty of Business and Economics
University of Antwerp
Belgium

Academic year 2025-2026
First semester

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INTRODUCTION

This course offers an overview of advanced organization theories, is worth 6 ECTS and is part of the PhD program of the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Antwerp. The course consists of plenary sessions during which students are required to actively participate. Thorough preparation and self-study is necessary to maximally benefit from the course.

As will become clear below, the aim is twofold:

1. to offer an overview of the essence of key organization theories,
2. to provide a feeling for key issues relating to research methods in the field of Organization and Strategy Research.

Clearly, given these aims, this is a challenging course as we will discuss state-of-the-art theories, moving up and down different levels of analysis and crossing disciplinary boundaries. However, this is why the current course is part of the Antwerp PhD program, being demanding and exciting, we hope.

ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGY RESEARCH

In the Organization and Strategy Research course, the focus is on theories that offer insight into how organizations look like, behave and perform, oftentimes with a focus on different national contexts. The course provides a plenary overview of the field, and five thematic plenary sessions introducing typical, prominent and related organization theories.

As far as organization theories¹ are concerned, the focus is on a subset of different prominent theories such as: (1) institutional theory; (2) organizational economics; (3) upper echelon and managerial cognition studies; (4) contingency theory; (5) organizational learning theory; (6) organizational ecology; (7) resource-based view; and (8) the behavioral theory of the firm. The key insights from this set of theories are introduced, and the main differences and similarities are explored. Of course, this is only a (non-random) selection of organization theories, as the field is known for its theoretical proliferation. In effect, we consider this to be one of the key strengths of the organization theory and strategy field at large: not being dominated by any paradigmatic dogma, a wide array of rich (sub)theories flourish that all offer a unique contribution to our overall understanding of organizations and their environments, in isolation and interaction. As a consequence, for instance, we will not explicitly deal with many of the sub-theories within organizational behavior (about, e.g., employee motivation and managerial leadership). So be it: we cannot do it all in the context of a 6 ECTS course like the current one. We have selected this set of theories for, basically, two reasons: one, they are representative for the field at large, covering different mother disciplines and levels of analysis (see below); and two, they are among the most powerful theories, still popular among the field's frontrunners.

¹ In the context of this course, Organization Theory is defined broadly, including theories from Organizational Behavior. Moreover, some of the 'theories' referred do not reflect a single 'pure' theory per se, but rather a topic area in which a number of theories are applied. Examples are upper echelon, and organizational learning studies, all reflecting multi-theory domains of application. This issue will be discussed further in the introductory lecture.

As an organizing device, the different theories can be classified according to their main level of analysis and disciplinary origin. In Table 1, you can find a classification for the most important theories that are dealt with, revealing that we will cover a rich diversity of theories indeed.

Table 1: A two-dimensional overview²

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS	DISCIPLINARY ORIGIN		
	Economics	Psychology	Sociology
Industry	Organizational economics		Institutional theory Organizational ecology Resource dependence theory
Organization	Resource-based view Organizational economics	Organizational learning	Contingency theory
Team		Upper-echelon theory and managerial cognition Behavioral theory of the firm	
Individual			

For example, organizational ecology is a meso-level theory of industries developed in sociology, and upper echelon studies reflect a micro-level psychological approach to the study of top management teams. Of course, many theories cross different levels of analysis, or are multidisciplinary in nature. In the table, we only refer to their main focus. Moreover, as will become clear during the course, in many studies more than one theory is applied.

During the course, several different theory development and methodological methods will pass the review so that PhD students get an overall feeling about how advanced research is done in the field. In this respect, the literature is very eclectic ranging from papers that use game theory over simulation models, to quantitative and qualitative data collection to substantiate important conclusions.

During the course, PhD students must write a **theory essay of fifteen to twenty pages** (double-spaced in 12 points font), in which they reflect on their preferred theories (at least three). This essay will be marked, which will provide the course's grade. Papers will be judged on conceptual rigor, theoretical foundation, logic of reasoning, application to research topic, and personal opinion (originality, critical reflection, and creativity). Note that the essay should be an **original paper developed specifically for the course, and not an adaption of old work**.

² Some cells are empty. Partly, this is the result of the nature of the associated discipline. For example, psychology focuses on individuals and teams, not on industries. Others are empty because we decided to ignore them, at least in the context of the current module. For instance, the bottom row has to do with theories at the level of the individual (e.g., organizational behavior in psychology), a level of analysis outside the core of organization theory.

Structure of the Organization and Strategy Research course

Over a period of approximately two months, the Organization and Strategy Research course will comprise of a series of seven plenary meetings. An introduction to the course will be provided (in a two-hour session), and five related pairs of theories will be introduced (in three-hour thematic sessions). In a final session, we will spend some time reflecting on the relationship between theory and management practice.

In Table 2, we provide the Organization and Strategy Research course's structure. All theory sessions will be devoted to carefully discussing two pre-selected articles per theory. The main articles have been selected either for their status as a classic, or for their exemplary nature as a piece of state-of-the-art work. In addition, we have also selected work of our own, illustrating the focal theories, because this course is the module where the Antwerp faculty's research is supposed to meet teaching.

During the opening plenary session, more details will be provided. **All sessions will take place on campus (there is no online teaching) and attendance to each session is mandatory.**

Table 2: The Organization and Strategy Research course structure

SESSIONS	DATES (2025)	LOCATION
1: Introduction	Wednesday October 8 (10-12)	On campus S.C.202
2: Organizational selection, learning and adaptation	Wednesday October 15 (10-13)	
3: Strategy and economic organization	Wednesday October 22 (10-13)	
4: Organizational fields, institutional logics, and ideological competition	Wednesday November 5 (10-13)	
5: Organizational fit with, and control of the environment	Wednesday November 12 (10-13)	
6: Upper-echelons and managerial cognition	Wednesday November 19 (10-13)	
7: Epilogue	Wednesday November 26 (10-12)	
Deadline final essay: January 31, 2026		

Literature of the Organization and Strategy Research course

In an introductory session, the main objectives of the course will be outlined. Subsequently, in the five theory review sessions, four pieces of advanced research will be discussed in depth, two per theory. Below, the papers per session are listed. **Students must download these articles through the library's electronic journal system.** Discussion should not only deal with what articles say, but also where there are inconsistencies or loopholes that give rise to questions for further research. For this, it helps to initiate thinking about what research to develop and to do individually in one's PhD project. In a final session, we will spend some time reflecting on the relationship between theory and management practice with the help of an additional paper listed below.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

Astley, W.G. and A.H. Van de Ven (1983), 'Central perspectives and debates in organization theory', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28: 245-273.

SESSION 2: ORGANIZATIONAL SELECTION, LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

Session 2a: Organizational ecology

Hannan, M.T. and J. Freeman (1977), 'The population ecology of organizations', *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 929-84.

Hannan, M.T. and J. Freeman (1984), 'Structural inertia and organizational change', *American Sociological Review* 49: 149-164.

Session 2b: Organizational learning and adaptation

Burgelman, R.A. (1991), 'Intraorganizational ecology of strategy making and organizational adaptation: theory and field research', *Organization Science* 2: 239-262.

March, J.G. (1991), 'Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning', *Organization Science* 2: 71-87.

SESSION 3: STRATEGY AND ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Session 3a: Organizational economics

Fama, E.F. and M.C. Jensen (1983), 'Separation of ownership and control', *Journal of Law and Economics* 26: 301-325.

Williamson, O.E. (1979), 'Transaction cost economics: the governance of contractual relations', *Journal of Law and Economics* 22: 233-262.

Session 3b: Resource-based view

Barney, J.B. (1991), 'Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage', *Journal of Management* 17: 99-120.

Caves, R.E. and M.E. Porter (1977), 'From entry barriers to mobility barriers: conjectural decisions and contrived deterrence to new competition', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 91: 241-261.

SESSION 4: ORGANIZATIONAL FIELDS, INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS, AND IDEOLOGICAL COMPETITION

Session 4a: Institutional theory and legitimacy

DiMaggio, P. and W. Powell (1983), 'The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields', *American Sociological Review* 48: 147-160.

Davis, G.F., K.A. Diekmann and C.H. Tinsley (1994), 'The decline and fall of the conglomerate firm in the 1980s: the deinstitutionalization of an organizational form', *American Sociological Review* 59: 547-570.

Session 4b: Institutional logics and ideological competition

Boone, C. and S. Ozcan (2014), 'Why do cooperatives emerge in a world dominated by corporations? The diffusion of cooperatives in the U.S. bio-ethanol industry, 1978-2013', *Academy of Management Journal* 57: 990-1012.

Boone, C. and S. Ozcan (2020), 'Oppositional logics and the antecedents of hybridization: a country-level study of the diffusion of Islamic windows, 1975-2017', *Organization Science* 31: 990-1011.

SESSION 5: ORGANIZATIONAL FIT WITH, AND CONTROL OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Session 5a: Contingency theory and configurations

Lawrence, P.R. and J.W. Lorsch (1967), 'Differentiation and integration in complex organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 12: 1-47.

Miller, D. (1986), 'Configurations of strategy and structure: towards a synthesis', *Strategic Management Journal* 5: 35-55.

Session 5b: Resource dependence theory, organizational cooperation and networks

Hillman, A.J., M.C. Withers and B.J. Collins (2009), 'Resource dependence theory: a review', *Journal of Management* 35: 1404-1427.

Powell, W.W. (1990), 'Neither market nor hierarchy: network forms of organization', *Research in Organization Behavior* 12: 295-336.

SESSION 6: UPPER ECHELONS AND MANAGERIAL COGNITION

Session 6a: Upper-echelon theory

Hambrick, D.C. and P.A. Mason (1984), 'Upper echelons: organizations as a reflection of its top managers', *Academy of Management Review* 9: 193-206.

Boone, C., B. Lokshin, H. Guenter and R. Belderbos (2019), 'Top management team nationality diversity, corporate entrepreneurship, and innovation in multinational firms', *Strategic Management Journal* 40: 277-302.

Session 6b: Managerial cognition and motives

Cyert, R.M. and J.G. March (2001), 'A behavioral theory of organizational objectives', in J.M. Shafritz and J.S. Ott (Eds.) *Classics of Organization Theory*, Hartcourt College Publishers, 6th ed., pp. 133-142.

Sajko, M., Boone, C. and T. Buyl (2021), 'CEO greed, corporate social responsibility, and organizational resilience to systemic shocks', *Journal of Management* 47: 957-992.

SESSION 7: EPILOGUE

Ghosal, S. (2005), 'Bad management theories are destroying good management practices', *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 4: 75-91.