Technology and Organizational Environments

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Soc. 344 Spring 2014
Tu. & TH 1:25am-2:40pm
311 Social Science Building

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Goals:
This is an introductory course about the impacts of information revolution on organizations. Recent development of information technology has presented a great challenge to organizations. Many business leaders have argued that this is an era of either E-business or no business. The rapid development of information technology sometimes quickly reverse the successful path of previous winners. Nokia, for example, has encountered a rapid decline after failing to catch up the trend of smart phones. The decline of Japanese home electronic makers is another example. Strategic alliance based on new information technology can also provide companies that seem to have lost the momentum with new opportunities to reclaim their dominance.

The impacts of information technology on organizations can be seen not only in purchasing, R&D and production, but also in marketing, distribution and advertising. If you want to better prepare yourselves for the future, you need to understand these important changes. Nevertheless, technology is not the only determining factor that shapes the environments of business organizations. As the sociology literature has demonstrated, business organizations face many different environments that affect their performances. In order to understand the impacts of technology on organizations, we need to analyze not only the direct impacts of technology on organizations, but also how technology intersects with other organizational environments.

In this course, we will explore the extent to which information revolution has changed the environments of business in the past two decades.

The goals of this course include the following:

1. Discuss the basic social science perspectives on organizational environments.
2. Discuss the impacts of information technology on organizational environments.
3. Provide students with opportunities to employ the social science theories to analyze the
ongoing changes in the real world.

4. Provide students with opportunities to obtain research skills.

Three components are designed to achieve the above goals in this class. The first involves the coverage on social science literature on technology and business organizations. The second includes team debates on the ongoing changes resulted from the recent development of information technology. The third contains a team research project through which students apply the theories covered in this class to study how the development of information technology has affected the organizational environment in a specific industry that they have chosen.

During the semester, team will be the basic unit to organize the debate and research project. I will divide the class into 10 teams after the enrollment is finalized. Both team debates and team presentations of the research projects are important components of this class and they function as a valuable self-learning process. Each team is expected to prepare a one-page handout for the entire class for its presentation and the contents of these handouts may be tested in quizzes or essay tests. Throughout the semester, each team needs to meet me twice to discuss its team debate and team research projects.

Grade:

Your performance in the class is evaluated on an ongoing basis. Instead of having a big mid-term and final, your final grade in this class is an accumulation of points earned through several components. They can be divided into two categories, individual components and team components:

The individual components count for 60% of your final grade and they include: (1) four small quizzes, each counts 10%. (2) two short-essay tests (each no more than one page single-space), each counts 10%. These quizzes and essays spread out throughout the semester and each of them covers only a portion of our readings.

The team project components count for 40% of your final grade: (3) team debate, 13%. (4) final presentation of research project, 13%. (5) final research paper (double-space 15 pages) 14%.

You will be given an opportunity to use an individual project to replace the lowest grade in your quizzes or essay tests. In this individual project, you need to create a set of five power-point slides. Among these five, three are empirical evidences or data in the form of table, graph, or short videos. The theme is the impact of technology on an industry. This project has to be original and you CANNOT use either team debate or team research project materials.

Rules and Expectations:
1. Students are expected to read the materials in advance and be prepared to answer questions. All readings will be on reserves and you should be able to find them on Sakai.

2. For both team debates and final presentations, each team is required to create a one-page handout and send it to everyone through email. These handouts may be used for quizzes. Every team is expected to submit the set of power-point slides for both debate and project presentation directly to me. These team debates and final presentations will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of the research, the quality of the power-point slides, the quality of the presentation, the quality of the exchanges, internal division of labor, and team coordination. **Attention: you need to take these requirements seriously and we really use these criteria to evaluate your performance.**

3. Students are expected to attend all classes. A missed class without official excuse will lead to the loss of one point in your final grade. Students are expected to write comments and suggestions on team debates and project presentations. The form of comments and suggestions functions as a mechanism of attendance checking as well. Missing one comment/suggestion sheet in these events without official excuse leads to the loss of one point in your final grade.

4. Those are absent in class due to sickness need to provide the official “short-term illness sheet.” Absence due to personal reason needs to provide a Dean’s letter. The athletic travel needs a letter from the coach. **Please send all official excuses to Katie and also keep a copy by yourself in case there is a dispute about the attendance record. We will deduct the total points from your final grade at the end of the semester when we calculate the total points you have earned.**

Schedule and Reading:

8/26 Business meeting

8/28 Introduction

Organizations in the Era of Internet


Video: Internet Money Machine

9/2. The Information Revolution


Videos: Did You Know? The power of the internet

9/4. Organizations and Environments: Three Approaches


Video: The State of Wikipedia by JESS3

9/9. We will divide the whole class into small teams. Each team will choose an organizer and exchange email addresses and phone numbers. We will also decide the topics for both team debate and final presentation for each team and decide the order of presentation for both by conducting draws

9/11. The Internet Boom and Burst


Quiz no. 1 covers contents on 8/28, 9/2, and 9/4

9/16. Social Structure of the Market


Video: Facebook for business marketing

9/18. Team Debate No.1: Who will be the winner in the future Smart Phone Market: Apple or Google?
As the recent court decision on the Apple vs. Samsung case indicates, Apple and Google are competing for the dominant position for the smart phone market. Apple’s strengths include its integrated product lines and customer loyalty while Google’s strengths involve its alliances with many smart phone producers and its powerful search engine and related services. Analyze their competition strategies and come up with your own answer.

9/23  Technological Development


**Quiz no. 2 covers contents on 9/11, 9/16, and 9/23.**

9/25  Team Debate No.2: Genetic Technology and the Equity Issue

Whole genome sequencing is an important part of the information revolution and it is the most exciting development in the cancer treatment. Nevertheless, the application of this new technology has touched upon a sensitive issue, namely, equity and individualized medicine. Since the current cost of such medical procedure is very high, it raises an issue of whether our society should concentrate the medical resources first to cue those who can pay. Below are links to two background articles.


9/30  Neo-Institutional Theory


Video: Eli Pariser: Beware online “filter bubbles”

10/2  Team Debate No. 3: Stanford Versus Harvard: Who Will be Number One College in the 21st Century?
The competition between Stanford and Harvard for supremacy has been tense in recent years. In 2013, for the first time, Stanford became the “most dreamed college” in America in the Princeton Review Survey. Is this temporary or does it represent a bigger trend? http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2013/04/harvard_vs_stanford_america_has_a_new_dream_college.html

10/7  Resource Dependence Theory


first essay on 9/30 due in class (you will receive the essay question through Sakai in the morning of 10/5). Please type and print rather than handwriting and submit hard copy only. Katie will collect the hardcopy in classroom.

10/9. Team Debate No.4: Will 3-D printer replace traditional manufacturing industry?

One of the most profound changes in the next 20 years will be the widely-spread application of 3-D printers. If every household has a 3-D printer, is there any thing left for the traditional manucturing industry to produce? Do some research and analyze both the potentials and limitations of 3-D printers.

Fall Break

10/16 Team Debate No.5: Does Bitcoin have a future? Bitcoin witnessed some dramatic growth in 2013. There is intense debate about its future. Do research on both sides’ arguments and come up with your own position.

10/21 Lecture: How to do a social science research project.

10/23 Final Presentation One

10/28. Transaction Cost Theory


http://e.viaminvest.com/B11TransactionCostEconomics.asp

Video: Jeff Howe - Crowdsourcing

The second essay on 10/7 due in class:

Please submit a hard copy to Katie in class on 10/28th. Points will be deducted for delayed submission. Delay within 30 minutes loses one point, within one hour 2 points, within two hours 3 points, and within three hours 4 points.

10/30. Final Presentation Two

11/4. Organizational Ecology


Video: 1. Oh Nine, Eff Nine
2. Digg: Death and Resurrection

11/6 Final Presentation Three

11/11. Political Influence


Video: Empire - Information wars

Quiz No. 3 convers the contents on 10/28 and 11/4
11/13. Final Presentation Four

11/18. Cultural Environment


11/20. Final Presentation Five

12/2. International Competition


Video: The Mix: The State of Science: International Competition

Quiz No. 4 covers the contents on 11/11 and 11/18

12/4. Optional individual project due 12 noon. Please send your power-point slides to drop box on Sakai. We do not accept other forms of submission. Delay within 30 minutes loses one point, within one hour 2 points, within two hours 3 points, and within three hours 4 points.

12/7. Final research paper due 12 noon. Please submit you paper to drop box on Sakai. Delay within 30 minutes loses one point, within one hour 2 points, within two hours 3 points, and within three hours 4 points.

Grading Sheet: You will receive numerical grades for these components. The accumulated number, after deducting one point for each missed class, will be converted into a letter grade at the end of the semester according to the following schedules. I will report this letter grade to the university as your final grade for this course.
Conversion of Your final Grade (decimal grade will be rounded up)

A+=100-97
A =96-93
A-=92-90
B+=89-87
B =86-83
B-=82-80
C+=79-77
C =76-73
C-=72-70
D+=69-67
D =66-63
D-=62-60