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MGC2021 Introductory Lecture

Rethinking Organisation: From Classical to Critical Perspectives

Laura Visser

I am an **LGBTIQ** Ally
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Your teaching team - Lecturer

Dr Laura Visser – laura.visser@monash.edu

Research interests in gender & diversity, inequality and power in organisations, and healthcare (technology)



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Your Teaching Team - Tutorials

Me (Thursday at 5)
&



Dr Georgina Caillard

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Teaching Associate
Fri 9:00 and 10:00 tutorials

PhD explored situated learning in law firms



Lara Owen

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Teaching Associate
Fri 11:00 tutorial

PhD explores menstruation in the workplace



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Today's lecture objectives

- 1. To introduce you to key academic, assessment and administrative elements of the unit
- 2. To provide you with working definitions of the unit's 'threshold' concepts
- 3. To outline the three key ways we will develop our understandings of these concepts over the course of the unit

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Objective 1
To introduce you to key academic, assessment and administrative aspects of the unit

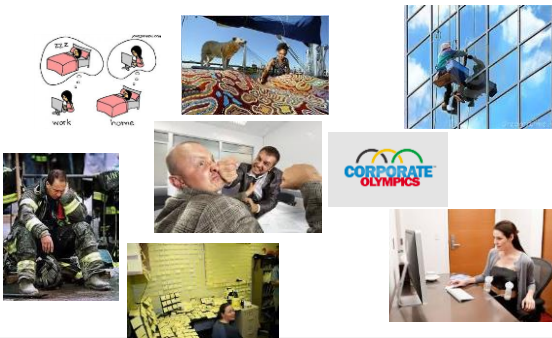
Key elements include

- Ethos and rationale 'rethinking organisation'
- Learning outcomes
- Assessments
- Learning resources
- Learning expectations

Ethos What is the world of work like?



Or this...?



Ethos of the unit

To look at the **experiential** dimensions of work in the 21st century ...

And how, as future employees and managers, we can understand the way people (both ourselves and others) negotiate their way through the contradictions, tensions and struggles they face in their daily working lives

"studying organizations is ultimately inseparable from wider political and social issues" (Grey, 2013: 16)

Ethos cont.

Key is **depth** rather than breadth of knowledge

Your reflections and active learning are vital in this process: **informed** opinion counts

Formal assessments are designed with this **ethos** in mind...

Overview topics of lectures

Week	Topic
1	Rethinking organisation: from classical to contemporary perspectives
2	Perfecting work and workers: organising identities and identification
3	Bodies at work, bodies that work and working bodies
4	Masculinities, femininities and gendered organisations
5	Emotional and sexualised labour
6	Playfulness, naughtiness and deviance in organisations
7	Technology at work: Cycles, cyborgs and cynicism
8	Prosumption and the coconstruction of value at the organisational interface
9	Reimagining work and organisation with postcolonialism
10	Organisations and space
11	Shame, the organisation and the institution
12	Conclusion: Why is the organising project important here, now and in the future?

Learning outcomes (i.e. **what you are assessed on**)

1. Compare a **classical** and **critical** understanding of work organisations with reference to key academic **theories** and approaches
2. Critically assess key theoretical **debates** surrounding **topics** introduced in the unit with reference to the **organisational/sociocultural interface**
3. Evaluate the different ways in which the organisational/sociocultural interface **manifests** in and around **organisational contexts**

Learning outcomes cont.

- 4. Demonstrate evidence of skills in independent assessment and synthesis of academic literature and the effective communication of academic knowledge
- 5. Demonstrate recognition of ethical, social and cultural issues and their impact on multiple stakeholders

Assessments

- 1. World of Work (WoW) essay: 1500 words (does not include list of references at the end), 20% (Thursday 22nd of March @4pm) (wk 4)
- 2. Wordpress Website on work and popular culture, 50% (Wednesday 26th of April @4pm) (wk 9)
- 3. Formal exam: 30% (2hrs, examination period)

Assessment 1: WoW Essay, 20%, 1500 words

The foundation of this unit is based on the differences between classical and critical approaches to understanding organisations and organising.

Discuss three main ways in which classical and critical approaches differ in these understandings. Use either the topic of "perfecting work and workers" (week 2) or "bodies at work" (week 3) to illustrate these three differences.

Key aspects of the question

You should focus your essay with reference **either** to the topic “perfecting work and workers” (week 2) **or** “bodies at work” (week 3). To be clear, you must choose **ONE** of these topics in your answer (not both, or a different topic altogether).

You must draw upon at least 5 academic articles (further information in the unit guide)

Assessment 2: Wordpress Website

Choose **one** topic from weeks 1-8 of the unit, and **one** popular cultural artefact (e.g., a specific TV programme, cartoon, comic strip, song, album, film, book, set of paintings) that heavily references the world of work.

Develop an online Wordpress project (in a website, NOT BLOG format) that presents a thesis related to your chosen topic based on your interpretation of your chosen popular cultural artefact. Original analysis of the links between academic theory and popular culture is necessary by making explicit reference to academic debates in journal articles and other sources.

Assessment 2 cont.

- On Moodle you will find a manual with a step by step guide to developing your basic website
- 3 tutorials dedicated to the assessment
- The website will be ‘owned’ by you after the assessment
- Is a significant % of the overall mark (50%) so start early!
- Begin by reading some of the articles and books that use popular culture to get an idea about analysis
- Make sure you focus on the academic literature around your topic, not just the actual artefact, and that there is significant work-related component in the artefact you choose

Exam

- Taking place in exam week (details to follow)
- Essay questions/long answer questions



Learning Resources

- Moodle site
- Reading list
- Lecture recordings
- Tutorial program, including 3 tutorials dedicated to assessment 2
- Examples of prior World of Work essays
- Examples of prior Wordpress websites
- All the marking rubrics



Learning Expectations

- Expectation that you will
 - attend and prepare for lectures and tutorial on time and be 'present', for instance by pre-reading the **scene-setting texts**
 - respect us and your peers
 - take **responsibility** for your learning
- Expectation that we will
 - provide material for your learning & engagement about the world of work
 - give timely feedback on your learning through discussion in tutorials and formal assessments
 - respect you as adult learners

Do not underestimate this unit – most students find it challenging, but also very rewarding!





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Objective 2

To provide you with working definitions of the unit's threshold concepts



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Objective 2: threshold concepts

Meyer and Land (2003, p. 373) write that threshold concepts "are 'conceptual gateways' or 'portals' that lead to an epistemological [...] shift" in a learner's understanding of a topic

Main threshold concepts for this unit:

- Classical and critical perspectives
- The organisational/sociocultural interface



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Threshold concept 1

Classical and critical perspectives (or approaches)

The classical perspective in MOS (management and organisation studies)

- Sometimes referred to as the 'mainstream' or 'normative' perspective
- Often promoted as the definitive view of management, or how it 'should' be
- Can be unspoken or assumed
- Underpins a majority of management education, theory, ideas and practice
- Emphasizing the 'how' not the 'why' of organisations

The origins of the classical perspective in MOS

Seeds sown in classical theorists of management

- Frederick W. Taylor (scientific management) and Fordism
- Max Weber (bureaucracy)
- Henry Fayol (principles of management)



The origins of the classical perspective cont.

- Focus on scientific/objective/systemic/rules or technology-driven improvement for productivity, efficiency or profit
- Frames organisational actors (i.e., employees, managers, owners and so on) as rational, dispassionate/neutral and logical
- Impartial and neutral work organisations

Some limitations of classical approaches

- Can overlook the 'human' aspect of work:
Or try to suppress it
- Power usually assumed to be top-down:
Management functions assumed to be able to control key aspects of organisational life, such as culture
- Changing contexts and empirical complexities:
Difficult to integrate new modes of working into classical theories (globalization, technological change)
Does not equip people for the reality of everyday worklife

However, classical is not 'old hat'...it is still widely influential today

- Based on following rationales:
- Business case
 - Stakeholder analysis
 - Growth is good
 - Work must be balanced with life
 - Competition drives success
 - Profit-making and the bottom line



Towards a critical understanding: People-as-people ... not commodities

“many academics would argue that all good work in the social sciences is critical, in the sense of being sceptical of common sense” (Parker and Thomas, 2011 p.421)

But....

Towards a critical understanding: People-as-people ... not commodities

- In parallel with classical conceptions, there was an awareness that people behaved in different ways
 - E.g. Elton Mayo, [The Hawthorne Studies](#) (1920's)
 - Being 'watched' or 'cared for' as important?
- Human Relations School: considers the individual's attitudes and feelings towards work and other social factors
- Does suggest that 'happier' people work harder...but is this the only reason to consider people's feelings and emotions?

The Development of Critical Approaches: Labour Process

Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*

Underpinned by Marx's view of economic power and worker-owner relationship

Key themes include exploring employment relationship, deskilling, labour relations, subjugation and resistance

Historical approach: interested in 'the ways in which modern work organisation is the product of a rich history of contestation and conflict; reflecting the basic features of the capitalist economic system' (Wright, 2011: 19)

The Development of Critical Management Studies

- Emerges in the 1990s from Europe (see Parker & Thomas, 2011 for overview)
- Usually 'claims that the centre of the discipline is conservative and that radical changes to the canon are required' (Parker & Thomas, 2011: 420)
- Challenges the 'neutrality of management theory and the impartiality of management practice' (Knights & Willmott, 1992: 4)
- Asking the 'why' questions
- Emphasis on inequality and social justice (Adler et al., 2007)
- Often more complex understanding of organizations; "a complexity that makes them infinitely interesting!" (Grey, 2013: 142)

Some challenges to CMS too...

- Tendency towards negativism, essentialism, and intellectualism (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992)
- Seek to pose 'questions that provoke unease, and the sort of reflection that doesn't sit easily within the core of disciplines and institutions' (Parker and Thomas, 2011: 425)
 - ... but exactly, therefore, important?
- Does it practice what it preaches?
 - Turf wars and power play exist in this arena too

So how does this influence your education?

2008 opinion piece by Martin Parker in UK national newspaper that caused international discussion: [‘If only Business Schools wouldn’t teach Business’](#)

‘Can you imagine studying in a biology department which only teaches animals with four legs and omits the rest? Or getting a degree in history based on studying a part of 17th-century Staffordshire? **This is what business schools are doing.** They are creating a managerialist encyclopaedia that has had entire categories of organising airbrushed out of it’

Classical versus critical - resources

- Required reading!
- But also recommended readings, such as Grey (2013) or Hatch (2011)



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Threshold concept 2

The organisational/sociocultural interface

What do we mean by (organisational/sociocultural) 'interface'?

- Interface: the interaction between two spheres/systems
- In this case; organisations and 'the sociocultural'



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The organisational/sociocultural interface

Management is not just a function, or a role, nor is it a purely 'rational' activity

It is a human activity and thus an everyday **social** activity embedded in an institutional context.

Society impacts organising (and organising impacts society)

e.g. Influenced by dominant ideas in society surrounding

Gender, age, race and other 'master' identifiers

Power structures and politics





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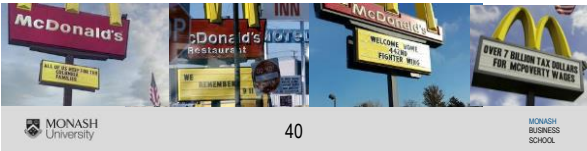
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Why is this interface important to us?

Society's impact on organisations:

- Impact of world events on how organisations work e.g. 9/11
- Organisations held to account depending on social mores e.g. corporate taxation post-GFC

'One of the most common beginnings for critical work is the recognition that **'knowledge has a politics'** (Parker & Thomas, 2011: 421)



Parker & Thomas (2011: 421) on classical and critical perspectives

There are [...] often implicit political judgments embedded within [research] models.

1. On the one hand we could imagine the social sciences and humanities as exploring problems which contribute to the maintenance or reform of existing cultural and social arrangements.
2. On the other hand, 'critical' research and teaching would seek to radically change these arrangements through introducing [...] new forms of knowledge.





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Objective 3

To outline the three key ways we will develop our understandings of these concepts over the course of the unit

3 ways of exploring the organisational/sociocultural interface

1. Organisational *theory*



2. Managerial and organisational *practice*



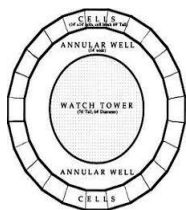
3. Popular *culture*



1. Organisational Theory

- Concerned with how different paradigms or lenses help us understand organisations (Burrell & Morgan, 1979)
- Draws on a range of social theories and philosophies
 - Encourages interdisciplinary approach
- Example: Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and organisation studies
 - Organisation as surveillance
 - Organisation as self-governance

Foucauldian organisation studies: The panopticon onwards ..



2. Managerial and organisational practice

Explores organisational life through undertaking 'fieldwork':
the process of going into an organisational setting and
collecting information or 'data' by observing and
documenting work practices

Example: Ackroyd & Crowdy (1990) on slaughtermen.
**CONTENT WARNING – This article contains some
explicit material on animal slaughter.**

Begin by presenting (then countering) classical position on
culture; then outlines an ethnography of slaughtermen to
explore culture as an informal work group dynamic

Slaughtermen cont.

'Each gang had a strong informal hierarchy, dominated by
the fastest and most accomplished workers' (p.6)

'Sticking' the most revered job (even though not the most
skilful)

- Allowed pace to be dictated
- Status of being closest to the killing (heavily masculinised)

Informal aspects of work an integral
part of the work process

- Individual and collective demonstrations
- 'Set pieces'



Slaughtermen cont. – link to the O/SC interface

'Outside' identities and practices important for workplace
cultural dynamics

- Shared leisure activities also important (e.g. the same pub)
- Hobbies (e.g. taxidermy; pigeon fancier)

Links 'large' concept of culture to everyday practices
E.g. masculinity: 'Younger men were sometimes observed splashing
the visible parts of their chests with blood before leaving the plant
for the day' (p.9)



3. Popular Culture

"Where [else] can we look when we seek to study organizations?" (Rhodes, 2001: 374)

"Organizations also exist outside of their physical locations. They exist, too, as representations – cultural images created as people work to understand and make sense of the institutions that saturate their lives." (Rhodes & Westwood, 2008:4)



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Functions of popular culture – beyond entertainment

Can be considered as 'social documents' (O'Sullivan & Sheridan, 1999) that explain why inequalities persist

Two-way relationship: popular culture is informed by AND informs organisational practices

Studies have also explored how organisations draw on popular culture in their practices – a 'doubling' effect (Westwood & Johnston, 2011)

Parody and critique (Rhodes, 2001) of dominant institutions and organisational practices



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Example: Rhodes (2001)

Looks at Springfield Nuclear Power Plant in the Simpsons and relationship between Homer and Montgomery-Burns

Organisational/sociocultural interface is manifest in terms of social norms or expectations portrayed (e.g., heteronormativity, white privilege)



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For next week's (Week 2) sessions...

- **TUTORIAL:** Undertake the preparation for the 'reading organisation through popular culture' tutorial. Bring in a short TV or film clip (that can be accessed on your laptop or mobile device), cartoon, greeting card or other 'popular cultural artefact' that relates to work.
- **LECTURE:** Make sure you read the 'scene setting' article: Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (2002) Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5), 619- 644.

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