DOCTORAL/POST-DOCTORAL SEMINAR ON SOCIAL-SYMBOLIC WORK

March 25-27, 2020
Saïd Business School
University of Oxford
Park End Street
Oxford, UK

Instructors

Primary instructor: Professor Thomas B. Lawrence, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford (contact: tom.lawrence@sbs.ox.ac.uk)

Guest instructor: Professor Nelson Phillips, Imperial College Business School, London

Aims

Across the social sciences, scholars are increasingly showing how people ‘work’ to construct organizational life, including the rules and routines that shape and enable organizational activity, the identities of people who occupy organizations, and the societal norms and assumptions that provide the context for organizational action. The idea of work emphasizes the ways in which people and groups engage in purposeful, reflexive efforts rooted in an awareness of organizational life as constructed in human interaction and changeable through human effort. Studies of these efforts have identified new forms of work including emotion work, identity work, boundary work, strategy work, institutional work, and a host of others. Missing in these conversations, however, is a recognition that these forms of work are all part of a broader phenomenon driven by historical shifts that began with modernity and dramatically accelerated through the twentieth century.

In this seminar, we will explore the social-symbolic work perspective, which addresses this broader phenomenon. The social-symbolic work perspective integrates diverse streams of research to examine how people purposefully and reflexively work to construct organizational life, including the identities, technologies, boundaries, and strategies that constitute their organizations. The social-symbolic work perspective revolves around three broad categories: self work, organization work, and institutional work.

Social-symbolic work highlights people’s efforts to construct the social world, and focuses attention on the motivations, practices, resources, and effects of those efforts. The seminar will explore eight distinct streams of social-symbolic work research. It will provide participants with an integrative theoretical framework useful in understanding social-symbolic work, a survey of the main forms of social-symbolic work, a rich set of theoretical opportunities to inspire new studies, and practical methodological guidance for empirical research on social-symbolic work.

Seminar Elements and Structure

Discussions of key social-symbolic work literatures. Seminar participants will leave with an understanding of the key ideas and issues in the study of emotion work, identity work, career work, strategy work, boundary work, technology work, practice work, and category work.
Discussion of theoretical and methodological opportunities. Seminar participants will explore new issues, topics, and research questions, as well as novel research methods, that are opened up in the study of social-symbolic work.

Participant presentations. Seminar participants will present their submitted papers in a conference format, but with greater opportunity for discussion and constructive feedback from seminar faculty and other participants than at a regular academic conference.

Networking and social interaction. Seminar participants will be given the opportunity to connect with other new scholars interested in issues connected to social-symbolic work.

Readings:

**Wednesday afternoon**

**Required readings**


**Optional readings**


7) Spottiswoode, R. 1993. And the band played on. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaSRrxvfVJU

**Thursday morning**

**Required readings**

8) Constructing Organizational Life: Chapters 3-6


Optional readings


Thursday afternoon

Required readings
26) Constructing Organizational Life: Chapters 7-8


Optional readings


Friday morning

Required readings
38) Constructing Organizational Life: Chapters 9-11

Optional readings


Friday afternoon

Constructing Organizational Life