

# **Department of Organizational Psychology**

## **Birkbeck, University of London**

Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management

Organizational research and organizational analysis 2012

### **Module Handbook - Including a guide to the Research Proposal**

Note:

deadline draft proposal 15 July

deadline final proposal 15 September

#### **Term 1**

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#### **Introduction**

This short handbook gives you an overview of the Organizational Research and Organizational Analysis modules. These two modules are taken together in Term 1. The handbook sets out the main aims, objectives and learning outcomes of the modules. The structure of the course is included, with the corresponding conferencing topics and questions, and the various exercises we will be conducting. Set reading is also highlighted. In addition, the assessment of the course is discussed, and suggestions for wider reading are made.

Over Term 1 you will participate in ten topic conferences, each lasting one week. Five of these conferences will cover issues relating to Organizational Analysis and five issues relating to Organizational Research. It is important to note that these two modules closely complement each other and they are assessed by a single piece of work, the Research proposal.

## **Student starters and finishers for each topic conferencing**

Information about who will be starting and finishing the discussion of each conferencing topic will appear on the OPHRM VLE. Please ensure that you check whether you are 'starting' or 'finishing' a conference. The first OA and the first OR conferences will be started by a tutor.

### **Some tips for conferencing:**

- Don't be frightened to 'say' things on the conference. One always feels the others are probably further ahead, more intelligent, have already thought of it, etc., its not true! You have all been hand-picked and what is really impressive is the level of ALL contributions.
- Try to bring in theory rather than anecdote, or fit the two together.
- Don't be afraid to disagree - and don't take it personally if someone disagrees with your comments. Critique is vital and aimed at improving thought processes.
- Therefore do be critical, especially of theory and research (see course modules and handbook)
- Do read the course aims, module aims and objectives AND the computer conferencing aims.
- Do ask if a contribution isn't clear or if you don't understand something
- Don't underestimate how long it takes to do all the readings and prepare contributions - half an hour before you go to bed is not ideal (and likely to end up more), but I guess its better than nothing.
- Do use the electronic library to further inform your thoughts – starters and finishers will be expected to bring in additional journal articles – see the VLE for more information.

## Types of contribution

When you read a message, you may feel sometimes that you haven't anything to say. However you are encouraged to make many types of contributions, to increase the feel of a 'conversation'. I have hinted at some of this above, for example:

- Comment when you agree with someone or with something you have read. Ideally you should be able to say why, to help with the discussion.
- Comment when you do not agree with something you have read or another contribution (although do ensure it does not come across as a personal insult, remember this is a multi-cultural group, and it is sometimes difficult to be sure how people will react, so comment on the content not the person).
- Ask when you do not understand something. If you feel really embarrassed, send a personal email to the tutor, but I assure you most of the time these are shared misunderstandings/confusions.
- Bring in relevant theory and research explicitly to relate to a comment.
- Give others details of other journal articles you have read so that they can find them also on the electronic library.
- Ask questions and ask for other peoples opinions.
- Raise ethical issues.
- Question the methods used in the research, or other aspects you feel are weak in the readings.
- Use the electronic library facilities to find other readings relevant to the topic, and bring them in.

Remember it is important to contribute **at least twice to every weekly topic!** This allows your tutors to know that you are 'present' on the conference, but more importantly, it facilitates your own learning. Research suggests that taking part in these conferences and actively engaging in the questions and discussions, enhances student learning and improves your grades on the course.

Your tutors will not respond to every comment you make, but will try to engage the students in the task, correct misunderstandings and support the learning process. If you are unable to contribute you should always let your tutor know in advance. If

your contributions are considered to be unsatisfactory you will be contacted. If you are concerned or worried about your style or content of contributions please ask your tutor to comment. Normally if you have not been told there is a problem, there is not one, but we understand that you sometimes like to have additional feedback. Your understanding of the module is formally assessed through the research proposal (jointly with Organizational Research), but in borderline cases the quantity and quality of contributions on the VLE may be taken into consideration.

Tutor facilitating will tend to have the following aims:

- Facilitate critical evaluation of theory and application.
- Encourage you to critically evaluate research, practices and processes.
- Focus the learning on the topic question where excessive drifting occurs.
- Encourage you to engage in active learning, debate and feedback to other students and myself.
- Answer any questions directly addressed to the Tutor and clarify aspects of the course when confusion or lack of clarity occurs.
- Assist you in achieving the module objectives outlined in the module handbook; therefore the measurable aspect of Tutor success/failure will be at least to some extent how well you feel those objectives have been met.

Remember though, attempting to answer other students' questions actually increases your own learning, so tutors will try to avoid question and answer sessions, and will often ask other students to comment - this is not us avoiding the subject but facilitating your own learning! If however we see you are struggling we will chip in and clarify - sometimes we will wait a few days in the hopes that another student will try to answer and increase their own knowledge. If you think something has been forgotten and you want to know the 'answer' (beware, there are often no simple right/wrong answers in OA) then do put up a reminder on the VLE. And now on to the conferencing topics.

## Conferencing topics and related reading

### Week 1 or Topic 1 'Problem definition'- Research process 1: Defining the problem

Most ideas for research in Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management start with an interest in a topic area or the observation of a work related problem. The first step in the research process involves refining initial research ideas to produce a clear and precise research question.

The starter's role is to describe a work issue or problem that they have observed and present a few pointers or questions to start the group discussion. The starter should also conduct a brief on-line literature search and suggest two articles which could be relevant to the topic. The group as a whole should then discuss what steps might be taken develop a clearly defined research question that is related to this work issue or problem. The discussion should address issues such as whether preliminary exploratory research is needed to define the problem, what form the exploratory research might take, how to focus a literature search, and what problems might be encountered in carrying out preliminary research.

Reading:

- The introduction to the module, chapter 1 and the first half of chapter 2, pages 3 to 22 in the Organizational Research Subject Guide and the associated reading in the Resource Pack:
- Neuman, W.L. (2000). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon. Chapter 1: Science and Research. Pages 1-19.

## **Week 2 OA Topic 1: An introduction and levels of analysis**

### **7 - 20 February**

This topic is designed to help you find your way around the OA module. We are aware that starting a course is daunting – not least when you are presented with what may at first appear to be chaos. On the VLE there will be an electronic lecture presentation called *Organizational Analysis – An Introduction* which gives a succinct overview of the material for this course. Please have a look at this and note down any questions you may have. These questions will form the material for discussion in our first two weeks of conferencing. We will focus in particular on levels of analysis as this is something that many people have some knowledge of, but any aspect of the presentation can be discussed – the knowledge will develop during the following few weeks so do not expect to know it all now. Don't be afraid to ask if you don't understand! This is tough material, but by the time we get to week ten, you will be more comfortable with this level of argument and conceptualisation. It is a good idea to keep referring back to this conferencing topic at any time you feel you are 'losing the way' in OA.

#### **Read:**

*Organizational Analysis – An Introduction* and skim through the first four chapters in the OA subject guide. You may find chapter four covers a lot of new ground, and many students will want to read it again for topic 2. It will also help to set all of this in context if you could read the history section (Part I) in the OA subject guide. However, do not feel you need to understand or have read all of this to start. Read chapter one and then make comments about individuals, before moving on to the next chapter.