

SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATION
2023-24 LM 59, 63, 87/88 9 ECTS
Prof. Matteo Villa

Course title.

Learning, change and organizational processes in complex society: from mechanistic approaches to Systemic Action Research.

Purpose.

The aim of the course is to learn some theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of organizational processes in the world of production, associative systems and public institutions. Reflection and analysis are based on international studies and research aimed at understanding these mechanisms in a complex and deeply changing society in the face of the social, economic and environmental challenges. For this purpose, the course proposes to the student(s) (I) a *historical-theoretical and interdisciplinary exploration* of the main research paradigms and approaches, (II) an in-depth pragmatic-experimental investigation based on *Systemic Action Research* into the assumptions and methods of organizational learning and change, and (III) a series of *thematic insights* on current topics.

Programme (contents of the course).

Syllabus and examination program are divided into three parts, connected to each other:

The first part (Institutional), "*Paradigms and approaches to organizational understanding and practice*", is mainly devoted to the exploration and study of the main organizational theories. The path revolves around some metaphors proposed by the author of the handbook (G. Morgan): organizations as machines, organisms, brains, cultural systems, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, instruments of domination.

The second part (Methodological), "*Organizational knowledge and change using a complexity approach: the Systemic Action Research*", delves into one of the approaches discussed in Part I, cybernetics and complexity sciences through systemic action research as a methodological approach to organizational study and change, beginning with the original and eclectic contributions of Kurt Lewin and Gregory Bateson and their actualization.

The third part (Experimenting and Deepening), "*Organizational Topics and Problems between Knowledge and Action*", applies systemic action research by investigating and experimenting with organizational learning and change on some current issues, challenges and crises. Five options are provided from which students must choose one:

- **Option 1. LABORATORY:** *Learning, leadership and decision-making processes in democratic organizations* (Compulsory participation required. Info about modalities and times during the lectures and on the [professor's institutional website](#)). Experiencing methods and tools to accompany/lead decision-making processes and foster the development of democratic organizations.
- **Option 2 - Theoretical-methodological path.** *Bureaucracy, Managerialism and Bottom-up Practices: Street-level bureaucracy and the transformation of welfare systems.* Theoretical-methodological models and case studies for the innovation of practices, policies and organizational forms in local welfare systems and the access to social rights.
- **Option 3 - Theoretical-methodological path.** *Organizational processes for ecological transition: ideas, paradigms and models.* Theoretical-methodological models and case studies for organizational process innovation toward ecological sustainability.
- **Option 4 - Thematic Path.** *IV Industrial Revolution, Artificial Intelligence and Organizational Processes: political, socio-economic, ethical and environmental implications and responses.* Studies and research on the implications and possible organizational responses to the challenges of the Second Machine Age.
- **Option 5 - Thematic path.** *The anti-democratic organization: historical-philosophical assumptions and topical elements of Nazi managerialism.* The characteristics of an anti-

democratic managerial model analyzed through the Nazi case, its historical and pseudo-philosophical roots, and its legacy and current relevance in business, management and economic organization models.

Required texts:

I PART – Institutional. *Paradigms and approaches to organizational understanding and practice*

- G. Morgan, *Images. Le metafore dell'organizzazione*, Milano, FrancoAngeli 2002 (reprint 2015). EN Edition: *Images of Organizations*, Sage, London, 2006.
- G. Bonazzi, *Il cambiamento del paradigma organizzativo nel 20° secolo: alcune ripercussioni sulle convinzioni profonde*, *Sociologia del lavoro*, N. 100, 2005; <https://www.francoangeli.it/riviste/articolo/25828> (printed journal)

II PART – Methodological. *Organizational knowledge and change using a complexity approach: the Systemic Action Research*

- K. Lewin, *La teoria, la ricerca, l'intervento*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005. Solo il capitolo XII, "Ricerca per l'intervento sui problemi delle minoranze". EN version: K. Lewin, *Action Research and Minority Problems*, *Journal of Social Issues*, 1946, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1946.tb02295.x>.
- B. Burnes, *Kurt Lewin and the Planned Approach to Change: A Re-appraisal*, *Journal of Management Studies*, 2004, Volume 41, Issue 6, pp. 977-1002. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2004.00463.x>.
- G. Bateson, *Mind and nature. A Necessary Unity*, New York, Dutton, 1979. Only the Chapters 1. "Introduction" and 2. "Every schoolboy knows"
- P. Hawkins, *A centennial tribute to Gregory Bateson 1904–1980 and his influence on the fields of organizational development and action research*, 2004, *Action Research*, Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 409-423. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750304047984>.
- D. Burns, *Systemic action research: Changing system dynamics to support sustainable change*, *Action Research*, 2014, Volume 12, Issue 1, pp. 3–18. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750313513910>.

III PART – Experimenting and Deepening. *Organizational Topics and Problems between Knowledge and Action*.

Choose one option between the following ones:

Option 1. LABORATORY: *Learning, leadership and decision-making processes in democratic organizations* (Compulsory participation required; info [here](#)):

- G. Bateson: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler publications, New York, 1972. Only the Chapter "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication".
- K. Lewin, *La teoria, la ricerca, l'intervento*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005. Solo il capitolo VIII "Il problema della democrazia e il gruppo". EN Edition: *Paragraphs drawn from Resolving Social Conflicts. Selected Papers on Group Dynamics*
- B. Burnes, M. Hughes, R. T By, *Reimagining organisational change leadership*, *Leadership*, 2018, Volume 14, Issue 2, pp. 141–158. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715016662188>.
- D. Coghlan and T. Brannick, *Doing action research in your own organization*, London, Sage, 2014. Only the Chapter 5., "Designing and implementing your action research project".

Option 2. Theoretical-methodological path: *Bureaucracy, Managerialism and Bottom-up Practices: Street-level bureaucracy and the transformation of welfare systems:*

- G. Bonazzi, *Come studiare le organizzazioni*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006, Only Chapter I. "La burocrazia e le sue varianti storiche".
- J. Clarke and J. Newman, *Managerialism and the continuing project of state reform*, 'Generacionalismo', Educação & Realidade, 2013, Maio/Ago, V.37 n.2: 353-382. Downloadable [here](#).
- A. Andreotti, D. Coletto and A. Rio, *Street Level Bureaucracy e sistemi locali di welfare: discrezionalità e contesti istituzionali nell'implementazione delle politiche*, Professionalità Studi, 2020, Numero 3/III., pp. 12-38. Downloadable at: https://riviste.gruppostudium.it/sites/default/files/ps_iii-3_2020_0.pdf.
- M. Bonetti and M. Villa, *Innovare le politiche sociali in contesti di crisi. Una ricerca-azione locale tra apprendimento e trasformazione organizzativa*, in Salvini A. (a cura di), *Contesti di crisi. Nuove forme della disegualianza e ricerca sociologica*, Pisa, Pisa University Press, 2018, pp. 99-159. E-book scaricabile gratuitamente qui: <https://www.pisauniversitypress.it/scheda-ebook/andrea-salvini/contesti-di-crisi-9788833391298-575509.html>.
- M. Villa and V.F. Johansen, *What difference does the context of activation make? Challenges and innovations in the Italian and Norwegian local welfare*. International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, Vol. 39 Issue: 5/6, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-11-2018-0196>

Option 3. Theoretical-methodological path: *Organizational processes for ecological transition: ideas, paradigms and models:*

- G. Bateson: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler publications, New York, 1972. Only the Chapter: "Ecology and Flexibility in Urban Civilization"
- W.E. Stead, J.G. Stead, *Can Humankind Change the Economic Myth? Paradigm Shifts Necessary for Ecologically Sustainable Business*, Journal of Organizational Change Management, 1994, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 15-31. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534819410061351>.
- C. Feger and L. Mermet, *New Business Models for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management Services: Action Research With a Large Environmental Sector Company*, Organization & Environment, 2022, Volume 35, Issue 2, pp. 252-281. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026620947145>.
- J. García-Arca, A.T. González-Portela Garrido and J.C. Prado-Prado, *Deploying Sustainability Through Employee Participation. An Action Research Proposal*, Systemic Practice and Action Research, 2024, Volume 37, pp. 19-40. Downloadable at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11213-023-09639-x>.
- A. Espinosa, T. Porter, *Sustainability, complexity and learning: insights from complex systems approaches*, The Learning Organization, 2011, Volume 18, Issue 1, pp. 54-72. Downloadable at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09696471111096000/full/html>

Option 4. Thematic Path: *IV Industrial Revolution, Artificial Intelligence and Organizational Processes: political, socio-economic, ethical and environmental implications and responses:*

- M. Pansera and M. Fressoli, *Innovation without growth: Frameworks for understanding technological change in a post-growth era*, Organization, 2021, Volume 28, Issue 3, pp. 380-404. Downloadable at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1350508420973631>.
- S. Ivaldi, G. Scaratti and E. Fregnan, *Dwelling within the fourth industrial revolution: organizational learning for new competences, processes and work cultures*, Journal of

Workplace Learning, Volume 34, Issue 1, 2022, pp. 1-26. Downloadable at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JWL-07-2020-0127>.

- P. Fleming, *Robots and Organization Studies: Why Robots Might Not Want to Steal Your Job*, Organization Studies, 2019, Volume 40, Issue 1, pp. 23–37. Downloadable at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0170840618765568>.
- I. Al-Amoudi, *The politics of post-human technologies: Human enhancements, artificial intelligence and virtual reality*, Organization, 2023, Volume 30, Issue 6, pp. 1238-1245. Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084231189269>.
- B. Carsten Stahl, J. Antoniou, M. Ryan, K. Macnish, T. Jiya, *Organisational responses to the ethical issues of artificial intelligence*, AI & SOCIETY, 2022, Volume 37, pp. 23–37, Downloadable at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-021-01148-6>.

Option 5. Thematic path: *The anti-democratic organization: historical-philosophical assumptions and topical elements of Nazi managerialism*:

- K. Polanyi, *The Essence of Fascism*, in K. Polanyi, J. Lewis, D.K. Kitchin (eds.), *Christianity and the Social Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 392. Accessible: <http://kpolanyi.scoolaid.net:8080/xmlui/handle/10694/565>
- J. Chapoutot, *Nazismo e management. Liberi di obbedire*, Torino, Einaudi, 2021. English edition: *Free to Obey: How the Nazis Invented Modern Management*, Europa Compass, 2023.
- A.S. Chaudhary, R. Chappe, *The Supermanagerial Reich*, Los Angeles Review of Books, 2016, November 7, accessible: <https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-supermanagerial-reich/>

Methodological indications. The mode of lectures is theoretical-active, based on action-research training methods and the integrated use of theory, experimentation, elaboration. The lectures will involve a mix of frontal and group presentations, practical exercises and moments of discussion, comparison and reworking. As for the third part of the program (see above), they will take on a more laboratory character, also aimed at the construction of presentations for practical tests (see next point). The course includes a laboratory where attendance is restricted and compulsory for those who choose option 1. Information will be available on the lecturer's website: https://people.unipi.it/matteo_villa/.

Exam mode. Exams are based on oral test according to the art. 23 of University Regulations on Teaching Activity. The third part of the program can be addressed in a different way, a Practical test consisting of a group oral presentation (2 or 3 people) with multimedia tools, based on elaboration of the required texts of the option of your choice. Those who choose this mode will not be asked to answer questions on the third part of the program during the individual oral exam. The practical test may be taken in one of three specially arranged calls per year. Dates and further information can be found on Lecturer's Institutional website at the page Studenti > Esami: https://people.unipi.it/matteo_villa/esami-exams/. At the student's choice it is possible to take the exam in English.

Further important indications. All the Students, particularly Non-attending students, Not Italian Native Speakers and Erasmus Students, are encouraged to get as soon as possible all the information about courses, exams and other teaching issues from the Professor's Institutional website (see below). To clarify any possible doubt, getting further information about courses, lectures and examinations held by the lecturer, as well as to discuss the syllabuses you can write an e-mail or access to the Office Hour (see below).

Where to find more information:

Students are encouraged to carefully check the institutional Professor's web site to find additional information on programs and on their validity for courses of previous Academic Years and information on where to find the required texts.

E-mail lecturer: matteo.villa@unipi.it

Lecturer institutional website: https://people.unipi.it/matteo_villa/

Course Page: https://people.unipi.it/matteo_villa/sociologia-del-lavoro-e-dellorganizzazione/

Other students' info: https://people.unipi.it/matteo_villa/studenti-tutte-le-info/

Where to find the texts:

- The texts of the third part can be *downloaded* directly from the Internet where indicated, or they are *books' chapters* or *article in printed journals* available at the Library of Political Sciences, or *articles in online journals* subscribed by the University of Pisa Library System and can be downloaded for free by connecting through the university network or university VPN (see the Lecturer's Website for information on the library).
- Texts are also generally purchasable through bookshops, online shops and magazine sites.