

Sciences Po
Master of Public Affairs 2008-2009

Syllabus, Required Course, 1st semester (5 credits)

Erhard Friedberg

Situating Ourselves in Complex Settings

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Objectives:

Modern organizations, be they private or public, be they for profit or non profit organizations, have developed ever more sophisticated management tools, but face increasing difficulties in actually implementing these tools in day to day action. Why does this implementation prove so difficult? What is it that makes changing and managing organizations such a complex process?

This seminar will provide methodological inputs designed to help students understand and diagnose the difficulties they may have encountered in their work situations, and discuss means for overcoming them. Emphasis will be placed on working in direct reference to the participants' experience, providing them with the opportunity to reflect upon past working experience, enhance their capacity to produce a relevant diagnosis of organizational contexts and increase their problem-solving capacity as organizational leaders.

Course Outline:

The seminar will proceed in four steps:

This seminar is fully integrated. It will move from an initial point (understanding organizations and situating ourselves within an organization) to a final one (how to act in and on organizations). The progression follows four stages:

1. The first stage is to understand the **problem of organizations**: what are we talking about when we use the term "organization," what does it mean to look at organizations as a set of human behaviors?

2. The second stage will then propose a **conceptual framework and a set of tools for the purpose of “reading an organization”**, i.e.
 - understanding its functioning as the result of the structured interaction of a set of interdependent yet relatively autonomous actors
 - analyzing the impact of one’s own behavior in the structuring of a working context.This presentation will be illustrated with many examples drawn from different organizational contexts.
3. The third stage will be devoted to giving participants an **opportunity to use this methodology on a case which is not directly related to their organizational experience**. This choice is made on purpose. The goal is to give participants enough distance (it is the first time they are using this approach) to concentrate on the methodology and not on the substance of the case. The case study makes it possible to cover two points: the use of the notions and tools previously proposed and a first attempt at moving from diagnosis to action in and on organizations.
4. If we want to make sure that what is being learned is useful, then it is important that participants have the opportunity to apply it to their own reality and judge for themselves. The last stage will therefore be an **“active learning sequence”**, which will draw on participants’ working experience. To do this, a number of volunteers will be solicited from among the participants to propose live cases drawn from their former working experience. Teams will be organized around each of these real life situations and, using the methodology learned, an in-depth analysis of this situation, leading to a diagnosis and the discussion of options for action, will be developed. Team presentations will then be worked out in order to share their analyses with the entire class.

Course Organization:

In order to allow for an interactive learning context, students will be dispatched into two groups of approximately twenty students, each group working with one instructor.

1. September 23 (9:00 – 18:00) and 24 (9:00 – 18:00), Erhard Friedberg (EF) and Henri Bergeron (HB) :

Stages 1 to 3 will be organized as an intensive seminar right at the beginning of the MPA program. At the end of the two days, ten teams will be organized. Each team will analyze the live-case provided by one of its members following the methodology proposed in the seminar.

2. October 9 (10:15 – 13:15, EF), October 10 (10:15 – 13:15, EF), October 13 (14:00 – 17:00, HB), October 16 (17:30 - 20:30, HB)

Each team will then have the opportunity to present a first analysis of its case to one of the seminar leaders and get feedback and advice on how to proceed further.

3. October 23 (10:15 – 13:15, HB), October 24 (17:30 – 20:30, EF), October 30 (10:15 – 13:15, HB and EF), October 31 (10:15 – 13h15, EF) and November 5 (17:30 – 20:30, HB):

Each team will have prepared a presentation of the case and its analysis. These presentations will then be discussed within each group and final conclusions will be drawn by the participants and the instructors.

4. November 20 (10:15 – 13:15, EF and HB):

A final session with the whole class and the two instructors will allow for an overall discussion and will draw more general conclusions about how to understand collective action contexts and how to go about analyzing them.

This initial seminar will be followed up by an elective seminar on *Ethics, Leadership and Organizational Change* programmed over the first and second semester.