MT Themes by OD&D MT supervisors
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Theme 1: Meaningful work and organizational (re)design
Within this theme, the main premises are (1) that the organizational infrastructure may support or frustrate the (experienced) meaningfulness of a job and (2) that people can purposely redesign their work to increase meaningfulness.

In recent years, the topic of meaningful work has gained a lot of attention, mainly from organizational scientists using a positive lens on organizations. Two perspectives dominate the discussion. The first assumes that the meaningfulness of a job is a matter of taste and highly subjective: some people have a calling to work in healthcare, while others have a passion for teaching or for solving organizational issues. If you want a job that is meaningful, you should choose a job that allows you to realise your calling. The second perspective, which is more closely related to the OD&D perspective, assumes that characteristics of the job affect the experienced meaningfulness, for example your ability to solve problems, the opportunities for learning and collaboration at work and stress levels. In this second perspective, researchers want to understand what organizational characteristics can contribute to the experienced meaningfulness of work, what organizational outcomes can be realized by creating meaningful jobs, what the characteristics are of jobs that are experienced as especially meaningful and what activities employees engage in themselves to increase the meaningfulness of their job. From an OD&D perspective, the question how organizational design and redesign (top-down or bottom-up) can increase (or decrease) the experienced meaningfulness of work is relevant.

In your Master Theses, you could explore meaningful work in relation to organizational (re)design. In order to write a thesis on this topic, you will have to decide on:

- The industry (e.g., healthcare, education) and/or job (low status jobs such as cleaning; blue, pink, white or gold collar jobs; jobs with high levels of professional autonomy such as doctors, consultants, scientists) on which you will focus;
- A theoretical perspective on meaningful work (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Steger, Dik & Duffy, 2012; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012);
- A theoretical perspective on organizational structures and (re)design, for example: job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 2010), job crafting (Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski, 2013), sociotechnical systems theory (De Sitter, 1998).

Literature
Theme 2: Infrastructures supporting (im)moral behavior

What makes people behave (un)ethically in organizations? Main premise: the organizational infrastructure may support or frustrate moral decision making.

Research on ethics in and of organizations focuses on three ‘levels’ of business ethics: the individual, the organizational and the societal. At an individual level, business ethics is concerned with moral decision making by organizational members. It looks at the process of moral decision making and at individual, situational and organizational factors that influence this process. At the organizational level, business ethics is about the responsibility of organizations to further moral behaviour of its employees as well as moral behaviour of organizations as moral actors. The societal level of business ethics is about the responsibility of organizations towards society (CSR), external stakeholders and the influence of society on businesses through laws and ethical standards. These levels interact, and a full theory of business ethics would include all levels.

Business ethics (at all levels) can be normative, i.e., formulating moral standards that individuals and organizations should adhere to or focusing on the moral responsibility of individuals, organizations and society. It can also be descriptive. For example, drawing on insights from moral psychology, organizational theory and organizational behaviour, factors that may impact or explain moral behaviour of and in businesses are analysed. Several authors have suggested that these normative and descriptive approaches have to be integrated (e.g., Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe 2008).

Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe, & Umphress (2003) introduced the concept of “ethical infrastructures”: the organizational elements that contribute to its ethical effectiveness. This ethical infrastructure consists of the collection of formal and informal organizational systems (such as reward systems, leadership programmes, ethical officers, codes of conduct, ethics training and the use of communication technology) as well as the organization’s ethical climate. The underlying assumption is that various aspects of an organization can—and should—be designed to support moral decision making and to encourage organizational moral behaviour. Research in this field raises several issues.

First, most of the research on moral decision making concerns preventing immoral behaviour rather than encouraging responsible or exemplary behaviour (cf: Zimbardo, 2007). Put differently, it has a negative focus. Recently, a new approach to studying ethics in organizations has surfaced: ‘positive business ethics’ (Sonenshein 2005; Stansbury & Sonenshein 2012). This field of study attempts to explain and encourage exemplary moral conduct in organizations. It appears that the dynamics of encouraging morally right behaviour differ from the dynamics of preventing immoral behaviour. Does the current literature help us to design infrastructures that promote moral responsible behaviour? What methodologies could help us gain insight in organizational processes that encourage moral behaviour?

Second, research on moral decision making has found numerous factors that may influence the steps of the decision making process and empirical accounts of the nature and direction of this influence differ (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; Treviño et al. 2006). It is unclear which organizational measures have what impact and under what circumstances. For example, the effect of reward systems on moral behaviour is ambivalent. A reward system can have various unintended, unethical consequences and its precise outcomes cannot be determined in advance (Jansen & Von Glinow, 1985). What reward systems should organizations employ?

A third, more OD&D specific issue is that few scholars have looked at the design of tasks and how this relates to moral decision making (Ford & Richardson 1994; Treviño et al. 2006). Put differently: there is little research on how moral behaviour can be embedded in everyday tasks and responsibilities (Weaver et al. 1999; Weaver 2006). However, several studies indicate that how tasks are designed and coupled have an important effect on the possibilities for ethical conduct (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2009; Vriens, Achterbergh & Gulpers, 2018; Browning, 1992). Small-scale tasks, extensive hierarchies, ambiguous divisions of responsibility are likely to contribute to lowered feelings of moral responsibility, lowered moral awareness and may result in unethical behaviour.
Thus, the topic of infrastructures supporting moral behaviour raises several interesting avenues for thesis projects, for example:

- What organizational practices are related to ethics in organizations? What makes these practices (e.g., whistleblowing) more or less effective? What causes politicians or government officials to lose their integrity? What are practices that are especially suitable in one field (e.g. nursery)?
- What is the effect of organizational measures (related to organizational structure, HRM or technology) on moral behaviour. Which are consequences of implementing such measures to encourage moral behaviour in specific industries or organizations?
- How do organizations design, implement and evaluate programmes to further ethical behaviour? What measures, instruments, approaches do organizations use?
- Which organizational structures are destructive to moral agency and which structures are supportive, and why? What are the implications for the design of organizations?

In order to write a thesis on this topic, you will have to decide on:
- A specific type of moral problems (e.g., pertaining to the financial sector or healthcare);
- A theoretical perspective on ethics, e.g., virtue ethics, deontology and/or a theoretical perspective on organizational ethics, e.g., a compliance or integrity approach;
- A particular part of the organizational infrastructure (e.g., structure);
- A research goal and methodology (e.g., diagnosis, theory-testing, theory-building);
- The industry and/or job on which you will focus.

**Literature**


**Dr. Waldemar Kremser (w.kremser@fm.ru.nl; EOS03.563)**

**Theme: New forms of organizing**
The rapid diffusion of new organizational forms – like holacratic organizations, multi-sided platforms, agile organizations, open organizations, etc – have significantly altered the practice of organizational design. Design has changed from a one-off, top-down task where top management comes up with a design in a major effort once every couple of years, into a distributed process that engages all employees in the continuous re-creation of the design once every month, sometimes even once a week. And while this new approach to organization design holds the promise of increasing both adaptiveness and efficiency of organizations, it is still only poorly understood and implementation efforts often fail. In this regard master-theses are invited that examine empirically organizational design practices in an organization that already uses or is trying to implement this new design approach. Research questions could, for instance, focus on

- the role of IT in design practices (e.g. how is Glassfrog, Asana, etc used in the design process)
- the resistance that is often met when implementing this new design approach in established organizations

**Literature**
The Emergence of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives as a Form of Private Governance – the Case of the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textiles

The United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration and multi-stakeholder partnerships to address global sustainability challenges. Given existing governance gaps in global economic systems where states are no longer rule-makers but rule-enforcers at the most, cross-sectoral partnerships allow for collaborative governance on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, enabling inter-organisational collaboration across multiple stakeholder groups, such partnerships hold the potential to address systemic sustainability challenges that individual actors are unable to tackle on their own.

However, voluntary partnerships for collaborative governance are difficult to constitute and maintain because of the challenges involved in bringing together parties from different sectors (e.g. business firms and NGOs) with often different, if not conflicting, interests. These challenges, among others, include issues of collective action on different levels (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2017). Thus, while scholars and practitioners alike agree on the potential of partnerships for fostering collaborative governance and collective action, there is a lack of clarity when it comes to the conditions under which partnerships evolve and are most effective (see e.g. Ashwin et al., 2019).

We therefore need to better understand the voluntary engagement of multiple stakeholders within partnerships as well as the deliberative processes that evolve around their emergence. Therefore, the focus will be set on both the strategies of business, state, and non-state actors (e.g. NGOs and unions) to join and engage in voluntary partnerships as well as the processes of interest negotiation involved in their constitution. These issues can suitably be studied by looking at the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textiles (Nederlandse Convenant Duurzame Kleding en Textiel) as a rather recent and prominent example of collaborative governance for sustainable development.

Theses might take different aspects into account, such as:
- the process of the emergence of the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textiles, looked at from different actors’ perspectives (e.g. firms, NGOs, trade unions, …)
- different actors’ motivations for engaging in collaborative partnerships, such as the Dutch Agreement
- Collaboration-enabling factors, such as trust or inter-organisational relationships
- Processes of interest negotiation and conflict resolution between stakeholder groups

Literature
Dr. Stefan Schembera (s.schembera@fm.ru.nl)

Theme 1: Responsible Organizing – The Role of Firm Size

While recent literature on corporate (ir)responsibility started to address the rising and heterogeneous challenges for internationally operating companies in a globalized economy (Schembera & Scherer, 2017; Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl, 2013), our knowledge is so far mostly restricted to large firms. In contrast, we know little about the role, motives and challenges of internationally operating small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as regards responsible conduct. While the corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature suggests that, despite their limited resources, internationally operating SMEs may pursue an approach of solving societal problems that is not necessarily inferior to the one of large MNCs (Jenkins, 2004; Murillo & Lozano, 2006; Wickert, 2016), particular insights from the corporate irresponsibility literature suggest that SMEs face greater challenges, e.g., in fighting corruption, and are more likely to be involved in irresponsible practices (Aterido, Hallward-Driemeier, & Pagés, 2011). Moreover, whereas large MNCs of high visibility and prominence were forced to respond to increasing expectations to fight corruption after a series of scandals threatening their legitimacy (Pfarrer, DeCelles, Smith, & Taylor, 2008), SMEs so far were mainly untroubled by such scandals (Schembera & Scherer, 2018) and feel less pressure to respond to external expectations (Beck & Walgenbach, 2005).

In their MA theses, students may empirically address some of the following questions:

- What are the actual organizational differences between SMEs and MNCs in organizing corporate responsibility?
- Why are there differences and how did they develop over time? How can the development be explained?
- Based on these findings, can we identify whether one approach of responsible organizing is ‘inferior’ to the other? Put differently, how can SMEs, as opposed to MNCs, fight corruption?

Theoretically, students may build, for example, on the literatures on (neo-)institutionalism, (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), organizational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), ethical decision-making (Treviño, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999) and/or (anti-)corruption (Ashforth, Gioia, Robinson, & Treviño, 2008).

Theme 2: Responsible Organizing – The Role of Collaboration and Global Governance

In the absence of a global governance structure in today’s global economy, numerous international initiatives have emerged with the aim to unify companies and other actors in tackling ethical challenges. The UN Global Compact (UNGC) is the world’s largest voluntary initiative in the areas of human rights, labor standards, the environment, and corruption. Since February 2011, members assess their level of UNGC implementation on the basis of predefined criteria for each of the four issue areas (Schembera, 2018). In their MA theses, students may empirically investigate the implementation progress of companies participating in voluntary responsibility initiatives such as the UNGC, the Global Reporting Initiative, the SA 8000 Standard, or the Forest Stewardship Council. In doing so, students can, e.g., rely on corporate reporting and implementation information on the initiatives’ websites. In addition to the institutional theory literature, students may also orient at stakeholder theory (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997) and network theory (Gilbert, 2010; Knight, 2002).

Students may build on some of the following questions in their MA theses:

- How and why do corporations collaborate with each other in tackling (un)ethical issues (e.g. business partner training or monitoring processes)?
- How and why do companies implement responsibility initiatives like the UN Global Compact?
How did implementation develop over time, and why?

- What role do continuous stakeholder dialogues and network meetings play in developing a common understanding of how to address corporate responsibility issues?
  
  How and why may technological advances in our digital age stimulate or hinder such stakeholder interactions?

For both themes, prior knowledge in empirical qualitative or quantitative methods is advantageous (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Wooldridge, 2012).

References


Dr. Raphael Smals (raphael@rsmals.nl)

Theme 1: Different strokes for different folks: multiple faces of entrepreneurship
Entrepreneurship is a driving force of society which permeates all sectors. From manufacturing to science, from the hospitality sector to the arts—throughout society, entrepreneurship is a vehicle for creating socio-economic value, individual career development, innovation and in some cases even transformation of society itself. This diversity of contexts and purposes also implies that entrepreneurship itself is heterogeneous in its implementation (Welter et al. 2017). One source of variation is the fundamental beliefs and convictions of individual entrepreneurs, which are often related to the context in which they are embedded. For example, the argument has been made that knowledge of entrepreneurship from the business studies domain is not entirely applicable to entrepreneurs in the arts, as the ‘artistic logic’ results in different scope and emphasis in embarking upon entrepreneurial activities (Bridgstock 2012).
We could capture these fundamental different world views among entrepreneurs in various sectors in the concept of institutional logics. Society has been argued to consist of different institutional orders – Friedland and Alford (1991) distinguished the capitalist market, the bureaucratic state, families, democracy and religion as major institutions. They also contend that each of these institutional orders has an institutional logic consisting of values, beliefs, norms, behaviors and symbols that drive the behavior of individual actors within the institution. Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012) added the community to the list of institutional orders. And by extension, it can be argued that each profession or group of professionals, such as healthcare (cf. Scott et al. 2000), higher education (cf. Thornton & Ocasio 1999) and even sports (Carlsson-Wall, Kraus & Messner, 2016), has its own institutional or ‘professional’ logic. Each of these logics will have unique characteristics, and as such, entrepreneurship in different fields may take different forms in accordance with the dominant logic(s) in these fields.
In this research project, you will (1) conceptualize the dominant logic(s) in one or more chosen fields (in the choice of which you are free to follow your own personal interest) and (2) investigate the influence of the logics that individual entrepreneurs adhere to on their entrepreneurial activities. In order to understand this influence, it is advisable to compare different (groups of) entrepreneurs in different fields. While the research is essentially explanatory, it has substantial exploratory aspects (e.g. in conceptualizing the different logics) and therefore, a qualitative research strategy is preferable.

References
Theme 2: Cuddle a robot: acceptance of new technologies by employees of manufacturing SMEs

The manufacturing industry in Europe is faced with the challenge of adapting to the current wave of technological innovations, which is reflected in industry programs such as Smart Industry (The Netherlands) and Industry 4.0 (Germany) (e.g. Ahuett Garza & Kurfess 2018, Habraken & Bondarouk 2019). These programs are aimed at making the manufacturing ‘smarter’ and thereby more competitive. Acceptance of concepts such as the ‘Internet of Things’ can be expected from large players in the manufacturing industry, given their financial clout and absorptive capacity for new knowledge. However, this picture may be different for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In particular, it is unclear to what extent workers in manufacturing SMEs are willing to embrace new technologies such as robots. Research among relatively highly educated individuals suggests that several factors positively influence their attitude towards working with robots (Lotz, Himmel & Ziefle 2019), but it is quite unclear if this optimistic image holds true for those whom it really concerns: workers in manufacturing jobs, often with vocational training instead of higher education. How enthusiastic are they really about the new technologies that they are faced with?

From a theoretical perspective, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM; Davis 1989) could be a relevant starting point, but this is also somewhat problematic. The TAM originates from the field of information management, which shows only partial conceptual overlap with manufacturing technologies. It also implicitly assumes that individuals have some degree of freedom in choosing to adopt a technology, while this is not entirely true in a typical job setting. Another promising theoretical angle is to try to understand the attitudes of workers towards innovations from a more general technology attitude model, such as the more recent ‘Attitudes Towards Technology’ (ATT) model proposed by Kerschner and Ehlers (2016). Again, this model originates from a different context (ecological economics) and it was specifically developed with an eye on academic lecturers. A possible integration of both models (or entirely different theoretical perspectives) could be part of the theoretical contribution of the project. A qualitative research methodology would best suit this project.

References


Theme 3: Sustaining community-driven sustainable energy projects

The energy transition unfolds in the form of thousands of sustainable energy projects. Partly, these projects involve the community, with private individuals jointly investing in the installation of small solar farms or onshore wind parks, or even taking the initiative in launching new projects (cf. Van Veelen, 2018), while these projects also intimately involve local governments and industry (Hasanov & Zuidema 2018). It has recently been argued that such initiatives are not so much a driver of institutional change, but rather depend on their institutional context in order to have a profound impact on the energy system (Kooij et al. 2018). Furthermore, due to the local nature of these initiatives as well as their dependence on e.g. current subsidy schemes, questions rise about the future outlook of these projects. Windmills and solar farms typically have a multi-decade lifespan, whereas the conditions under which they are currently undertaken may be less stable over time. To what extent are current
community-driven green energy projects actually future proof, and therefore sustainable in a broad sense? And what are the future perspectives of individual projects – do they lead to new, additional projects, or do they typically remain limited to a ‘one-off nature’? What does the fact that the community itself plays a pivotal role in realizing the project mean for the future of these projects? This research project invites you to investigate how sustainable energy projects evolve over time and to what extent they lead to new initiatives, the emergence of new businesses, and which challenges they face in terms of long-term viability. Due to the explorative nature of the project, a qualitative research design is appropriate.

References
Dr Arjen Verhoeff (social.innovative@gmail.com)

Theme: Mapping the Interests of Stakeholders and Matching Choices in Organizational Design

Creative destruction assumes existing firms are driven out by startups. In the past decade, a new class of established firms has set out a strategy of disruptive renewal of their existing business model, more and more based on digital technology. These established firms are faced with an innovator’s dilemma: they rely on, for instance, existing customers and current organizational design(s) but cannot fully adopt a disruptive business model – and congruent organizational design – yet given a low profit margin and a small market. The scale-up of new business in an existing firm runs the risk to overlook a blind spot: the role of stakeholders.

Related questions are:
a. Why are the interests of stakeholders related to a firm relevant for organizational design?
b. What are relevant and actual criteria for aligning organizational design with interests?
c. How can organizational choices be prepared, decided upon and implemented?

Literature
Luc van de Sande MSc. (l.vandesande@fm.ru.nl)

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Recent developments in healthcare show that more and more healthcare organizations, especially in the care for people with intellectual disabilities, home care and care for the elderly, are working to reorganize their organization. Many organizations have opted for some kind of self-organizing or semi-autonomous teams. The reasons for this transition are multiple.

An important reason is to focus on the client and his or her immediate surroundings. An important starting point here is personal attention with all the room for the healthcare professional to develop professional knowledge and a professional working method. This should lead to less work pressure and stress for the healthcare professional. This can be achieved, among other things, by reducing possible sources of disturbance in the organization and increasing the possibilities for taking personal responsibility.

For the organization, this could also reduce the pressure on management and control, and thus also the control costs. Further cost savings are often expected through the introduction of self-organization by reducing coordination (e.g. between departments) in the primary process. At the same time, the quality of care would greatly improve by introducing self-organization. An additional effect could be an attractive labor-market perspective in healthcare. By creating more challenging and varied jobs, in which taking responsibility and professionalism are the starting points, this can have an attracting effect on future employees.

However, in practice, the introduction of self-organization does not appear to be easy. Many organizations are struggling with the introduction and exploitation of the concept of self-organization. There are at least two reasons for this struggle, both of which are reflected in two separate research projects.

**Theme: Self-organizing teams: concept and implementation**

**Project 1. Principles of the concept**
Although the concept of self-organization is relatively well developed in theory (e.g. in cybernetics, sociotechnical systems design, Lean, or QRM), in practice it is given different interpretations. This in itself does not have to be problematic. However, it does become a problem when only parts of the concept, such as part of the control structure, are introduced and other parts, such as the production structure, are forgotten. The consequence is that the organization then has to deal with problems that can be even worse than before. Against this background, it makes sense to:

- Gain more insight into the underlying principles of the concept
- Gain insight into current practices in the implementation of the concept.
- To make a comparison between:
  - types of self-organizing teams in practice
  - types of self-organizing teams and the underlying principles of the theory

**Project 2. The implementation of self-organization**
When introducing the concept of self-organization, it can make a difference whether the concept will be introduced in an existing (non-self-organization) organization or whether an organization can be set up without the legacy of a past (as was the case with Buurtzorg, for example). The reason for this is:

1. The gap between the existing structure and the self-organizing structure to be introduced is very large (functional task)
2. The gap between the behaviour/culture of a self-organizing structure and a non-self-organizing structure is very large (social task)
3. Given 1 and 2 the design of the intervention and its organization are crucial, and thus also represent a significant risk to the success of the intervention. Against this background, it is relevant to investigate:
   a. What functional, social and infrastructural problems occur during the implementation of self-organization?
   b. What ways can be found for dealing with such problems?

Literature

Many people are convinced that we need to change our daily practices if we are serious about addressing the needs of the present regarding people, planet and profit without compromising the needs of future generations. Social movements around the world have become increasingly vocal to alert politicians and the public to the need for urgent action regarding the escalating climate catastrophe. What are the implications of these changes for business organisations?

Based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that the UN proposed in 2015, management scholars have begun to take up these grand challenges as a research topic (George et al., 2016). On the one hand, businesses contribute to these grand challenges and could therefore be expected to also be involved in the search for solutions. On the other hand, if we study how people organise for change in social movements, we might be able to learn about changing business organisations as well.

Currently those most concerned are not necessarily the most powerful. How can they still create momentum for change? The literature on issue selling indicates that such upward influencing processes are possible although not always successful. Sustainable business practices often require collaboration across organisational boundaries to address problems on a larger scale, to set up circular business models or to agree on standards for reporting.

The aim of this thesis project is to investigate change processes towards sustainability from the perspective of ‘insider activists’, to trace how they initiate change and how it affects them personally as well as the outcomes for the organisation.


Dr. Ir. Hans Lekkerkerk (h.lekkerkerk@fm.ru.nl; EOS03.564)

Note: If I supervised your BT I will not supervise your MT (This is just to prevent an overdose of ‘Lekkerkerk’ in your education, so don’t take it personal 😊)

**Theme 1: Organizing Innovation in ‘turbulent orderflow’ companies**

In turbulent order flows each customer order is unique. These order flows are found in organizations characterised as project-based organizations, knowledge intensive business services, and engineer to order companies.

**Subtheme 1.1 From Engineer to Order to Configure to Order (EtO > CtO)**

Because customers only reluctantly pay the engineering costs in these projects, organizations are looking for ways to reduce this work. One way to do that is to redesign the systems into a modular, scalable design. A bit simplified, engineering work is reduced to choosing the modules needed, and enter a scale-factor in the CAD-system that represents the required capacity. This leads to questions regarding innovation. When you engineered to order, for each customer some innovative solution was needed to meet the specifications. These innovations were later be sold to other customers too. When the change to CtO is made this innovation mechanism doesn’t work any longer.

Finding organizations that use CtO now are the research objects.

**Subtheme 1.2 Organizing Innovation in Engineer to Order companies.**

As mentioned above, when you engineer to order, for each customer some innovative solution may be needed to meet the specifications. These innovations may later be sold to other customers too. These organizations are in fact mixing their innovation process with their primary process, and may leave innovation to chance, depending on customer requests. What does the innovation structure look like, and how innovative is the company.

Both themes may build on Lekkerkerk’s PhD thesis (2012).


**Theme 2 Diagnosing organizational structure or innovation structure/management**

You may come across organizations in need of advice on how to improve their structure, or you may convince an organization that it is very useful to let you do a (preventive) diagnosis of their organizational structure.

To find such an organization, you can look for organizations that published about their efforts to implement self-managing teams, whether successful or not (yet). E.g. Cordaan, an Amsterdam based care organization, ended its self-managing team effort ‘on request of their employees’. Finding out why this went wrong from a structure perspective would be interesting.

**Theme 3 Surprise your supervisor with your research passion**

You may have a research idea that you are really passionate about, but doesn’t seem to fit under any of the teams presented by this year’s supervisors: let’s have a chat to explore it.
Dr. Dirk Vriens (d.vriens@fm.ru.nl; EOS 03.757)

Theme 1: Structural innovations in healthcare (2 students)
Healthcare organizations are changing their structures in order to deliver care that is more affordable and accessible. In fact, in the Netherlands (and beyond) healthcare organizations have experimented with and even adopted structures that have low values on (some) sociotechnical design parameters. Some of these experiments turned out to be successful, while others have been abandoned. Theme 1 is about evaluating these structural reform efforts by health care organizations.

Theme 2: Designing a game for understanding the effects of structural designs (2 students)
Explaining the effect of specific values (e.g. high or low) of sociotechnical structural design parameters is difficult. For instance, it is often difficult to see the effect of high/low functional concentration (or other parameters) on effectiveness or quality of work for students – let alone for consultants. It gets even more complicated if the joint effect of specific values on design parameters should be understood. One way of explaining this effect is by means of a game in which participants experience the effect of a design by working in a simulated work-environment (in which networks of tasks have high or low values). Some games are available, but it remains to be seen if these games do the job. This theme is about (1) setting up criteria for a ‘design game’; (2) evaluating existing games and (3) making a proper design game yourself.

Theme 3: Evaluating new forms of organizing (1 student)
PWC (a consultancy firm, based in Amsterdam) is looking for a student who is willing to participate in a research on new forms of organizing / organization structures and their effects. Questions relate to (1) which new forms of organizing have emerged lately (e.g. agile, holocratic etc.); (2) what do they amount to / what are their differences (in theory and in practice) and (3) do organizations claiming to have ‘organized in a new way’ have better / other results?
A selection procedure applies.
Theme 1: Temporary organizations design challenges

Temporary organizations are often depicted as having highly adaptable and ‘fluid’ properties (e.g., Kenis & Cambré, 2009). As Schreyögg and Sydow (2010) remark, notions of ‘structure’ are often seen as conflicting with the very nature of the concept ‘fluid organization’ itself. They stress however, that fluid organizational forms cannot exist without any form of structure. Based on insights developed by Luhmann, Schreyögg and Sydow argue that, at a more abstract level, any system is characterized by some structural characteristics because without this property the system would be as complex as its environment, which would mean that the organization as such would dissolve and cease to exist. Furthermore, by means of Giddens’ structuration theory, which points to the duality of human agency and structural system characteristics, Schreyögg and Sydow emphasize that understanding and studying ‘fluid’ organizational forms cannot go without acknowledging the interplay between system structure and self-organizing operational action into account.

In this theme, the intertwined relationship between ‘structure’ and operational outcomes is explored in temporary organizations

1. Modig (2007) has developed a typology for temporary organizations and highlights that temporary organizational forms are used in many different industries. For example, she highlights the military context, event management and film production. Also, temporary organizational forms are used in contexts such as construction and crisis management.

2. Insight into the influence of structural design characteristics on the operations of temporary organizations is however, underdeveloped (see: Miterev, 2017). Therefore, applying and adapting design concepts to temporary contexts is necessary. In this theme, the application of sociotechnical concepts to temporary context will be central. A previous MT that successfully did so in a construction context was written by Albers (2017). He found, for example, that construction projects are to a large extent characterized by a hyper-specialized, high parameter, organizational structure that jeopardized several organizational outcomes.

References
healthcare contexts, technical production facilities and the Air Force. A main aim of such a diagnosis is also to create starting points for developing structural interventions. By means of participative methods such as a ‘focus group’, sociotechnical concepts can be used to delve into the dynamics and challenges of structural change in organizations.

This theme is suitable for a wide variety of organizational contexts such as healthcare, production organizations, consulting firms, service organizations etc. Although the focus of this theme seems to be on the more practical side of Business Administration, its theoretical foundation opens up many possibilities to formulate theoretical contributions. At the one hand such theoretical contributions may be oriented towards organization science in a more general sense or, on the other hand, relative to the contextual field that is chosen.

References
Theme 1: How digital technology affect how we work

It is often thought that due to algorithms, AI and automation many jobs will disappear, or at least will be altered by how digital technology (software) and the emergence of ‘big data’ entered the workplace. Dominant discourse emphasizes what is to be gained by using digital technology – improving the efficiency and effectiveness of work processes, creation of new knowledge based on combining data sets and timely deliverance of relevant information at the right location. However, critical researchers and practitioners start to question whether these apparent benefits are indeed obtained, but more importantly, they worry what is lost or jeopardized by increased use of digital technology. For example, by relying more and more on algorithms in our decision making, how can people still account for what they do? By storing data mainly for the purpose of it being transferred to another location and context (the quest of interoperability), our work is captures in countable figures and numbers, stripping it from meaning and context, only to fit in standardized work formats that enable smooth exchange. Workers’ creativity, spontaneity and flexibility are sacrificed for a goal (new knowledge based on transferring and combining data) that might never be achieved. The question for now then, perhaps, is not so much whether our work will be taken over by robots, but whether working with digital technology turns us into robots. By using digital technology, work gets represented in pre-defined, standardized formats that present a particular reality, however, this representation in data starts to become ‘performative’. As actors know that particular things will be done based on the representations of their work, they will start to behave accordingly.

Research questions of interest to me (and hopefully to you ☺) are:

- How does working with digital technology (software, particular applications (e.g., health apps) affect how actors work?
- How does digital technology affect power relations between employees and managers, or organizations and ICT suppliers?
- How do actors deal with loss of flexibility and creativity when working with digital technology (software)? How is this ‘resistance’ expressed and ‘dealt with’?

Suggested reading material

Theme 2: Challenges of interoperability in health care settings: implications for organizational change and design.¹

Health care providers such as hospitals, GPs, but also related parties such as laboratories, care homes or therapists nowadays more than ever have to collaborate to provide the best possible care in an efficient way. In order for these collaborations to succeed, information exchange (e.g. patient data) is crucial (Nictiz, n.d.). These collaborations require attunement on different levels between organizations: on the level of strategic decisions, between health care processes, regarding the structure and content of information, how applications should be connected and regarding ICT infrastructures (ibid). For example, the strategic decision of a hospital board to collaborate with satellite labs often turns out not to be simply a matter of adopting one standard information system by which information is exchanged. ICT literature refers to this phenomenon as the lack of interoperability. “Interoperability is the ability of different information and communications technology systems and software applications to communicate, to exchange data accurately, effectively, and consistently, and to use the information that has been exchanged” (Iroju et al., 2013, p. 263). For example, patient information from a referred patient from one hospital is manually added to another hospitals’ data base, because different software applications cannot be aligned due to different licenses that hospitals have. In this theme the topic interoperability is approached from an organizational change perspective.

Although interoperability is a topic much debated in ICT literature, less is known about the organizational and managerial aspects that are related to lack of interoperability. When organizations decide to collaborate and exchange information, their work practices partly have to be standardized (or at least represented in standardized formats). In the process of trying to work according to these standards, (temporary) workarounds are created to deal with unexpected setbacks when setting up collaborative practices. Research questions from a change perspective in this context that might be interesting to investigate are:

- How is alignment between organizations’ routines negotiated to establish interoperability among different actors? (interorganizational decision making, strategic level)

- How are intra-organizational alignment of routines (e.g., between ICT and healthcare processes) established to improve interoperability? (tactical level change management processes)

- How do Chief Medical Information Officers (CMIOs) span boundaries between different knowledge areas and work practices?

¹The text on interoperability is very much focused on healthcare organizations, however, the issues is relevant in many organizations. I have connections with the Municipality of Nijmegen (governments deal with interoperability issues as well!) and within the university, to name just a few, that would be very interested students willing to study the effects of the aim for interoperability in their context.
How do ICT workers decide when to fix a temporary workaround as a routine? (which criteria do they use, how is decision making supported, how do they deal with resistance and setbacks regarding what cannot be fixed with ICT?)

Suggested reading material:


Methodology

Depending on the nature of your research question; however, for a focus on practices often a qualitative research approach is recommended. I can, however, also supervise in quantitative methods.