Bocconi

Ph.D. Course 41018

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Advances in Organization

Period: a.y. 2026/27 – II sem.
Monday-

Instructor:

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Course Description

This second-year PhD course studies recent advances in organizational economics and organizational research. The course is designed to give students a structured first experience with core questions in the field: how organizations allocate authority and information, how managers affect productivity, how incentives and work practices shape behavior, how culture and cognition influence performance, how firms innovate, and how relational contracts sustain cooperation. The emphasis is on reading research papers as researchers: identifying the economic question, evaluating the empirical or theoretical strategy, understanding the mechanisms, and developing constructive critiques.

Required readings: Any reading marked with an asterisk (*) is a required reading for class, and all of students are expected to read it before the session.

Course Topics and Schedule

All of the meeting dates will be from 830am to 1145am.

Meeting	Date	Schedule Sessions	Schedule Title	Discussion Leaders
1	Friday, September 11, 2026	1, 2	Core Organizational Economics	Xinyi; Giuliana
2	Monday, September 14,	3, 4	Experiments	Benedikt; Giuliana
3	Tuesday, October 6, 2026	5, 6	What Managers Do?	Tsung, Rodrigo
4	Friday, October 9, 2026	7, 8	Culture and Behavior	Benedikt; Xinyi
5	Tuesday, October 13, 2026	9, 10	Innovation	Giuliana; Tsung
6	Friday, October 16, 2026	11, 12	Other Topics: Relational Contracts	Benedikt; Xinyi, Rodrigo

Class Format and Teaching Approach

Each class combines an instructor-led lecture with student-led discussion. Miguel will begin every class with a lecture that provides background, motivation, historical context, and connections to the broader literature. The lecture is intended to place the required papers within a larger research conversation and to make clear why the questions, methods, and mechanisms matter for organizational economics. Miguel will sometimes use slides; whenever slides are used, they will be shared with the students.

After the lecture, the two discussion leaders for the session will lead the discussion. Their first responsibility is to organize a focused conversation around the required asterisk (*) papers. They may also bring in non-asterisk papers from the syllabus and additional relevant papers not listed in the syllabus when doing so helps clarify a mechanism, contrast methods, or connect the session to related research.

For every research paper, presentations should be concise, analytical, and discussion-oriented. The goal is not to reproduce the paper, but to help the class understand the contribution and evaluate it critically. Each research-paper presentation should address:

- Paper titilte.
- Motivation.
- Research context.
- Methodology.
- Main research question.
- Main findings.
- Main mechanism.
- Strengths of the paper.
- What the presenter would have done differently.
- Discussion questions for the class.

Handbook chapters do not require the same presentation structure as research papers. Students should briefly summarize the key concepts, explain why the framework is useful, and make clear how the chapter helps the class understand the subsequent papers in the session.

There is a strong preference for presentations using slides. Slides should be concise and should facilitate discussion rather than reproduce the paper. The most useful slides identify the question, the research design, the mechanism, the key result, and the critical issues the class should debate.

Within each session, the two discussion leaders are jointly responsible for ensuring that every assigned reading is covered, the workload is divided approximately equally, and transitions between presenters are smooth.

Student Preparation and Discussion Leadership

There are four students in the course. Every student is expected to actively participate in all sessions. Discussion leaders have additional preparation responsibilities: they should coordinate before class, divide the readings, prepare the discussion structure, and make sure that the required readings receive sustained attention. Each student should lead approximately three sessions over the course.

Assessment

Assessment is based on a take-home final paper and on class presentations and discussion. The final paper will be a referee report on a set of papers. Students will have one week to complete it (To be Delivered by 21st October -9am CET). The presentation and discussion grade reflect preparation, clarity, analytical depth, engagement with the required readings, and the ability to stimulate productive class discussion. For these reports, students cannot use AI tools.

Course Requirement	Weight
Final paper (take-home referee report)	70%
Paper presentation and class discussion	30%

Readings

This syllabus uses the following acronym: HOE refers to Gibbons, Robert, and John Roberts, eds. 2013. The Handbook of Organizational Economics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Meeting 1: Introduction

Date: Tuesday, September 8, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 1, 2. Schedule title: Core Organizational Economics. Discussion leaders: Xinyi; Giuliana.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapters: Introduction; Insider Econometrics; and Personnel Economics.

Research Papers and Articles

Bloom, Nicholas, Raffaella Sadun, and John Van Reenen. 2010. "Recent Advances in the Empirics of Organizational Economics." Annual Review of Economics 2(1): 105-137.

Garicano, Luis, and Luis Rayo. 2016. "Why Organizations Fail: Models and Cases." Journal of Economic Literature 54(1): 137-192.

Meeting 2: What Managers Do and Productivity

Date: Friday, September 11, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 3, 4. Schedule title: What Managers Do?. Discussion leaders: Tsung.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapter: What Do Managers Do? Exploring Persistent Performance Differences among Seemingly Similar Enterprises.

Research Papers and Articles

* Bloom, Nicholas, and John Van Reenen. 2007. "Measuring and Explaining Management Practices across Firms and Countries." Quarterly Journal of Economics 122(4): 1351-1408.

Syverson, Chad. 2011. "What Determines Productivity?" Journal of Economic Literature 49(2): 326- 365.

Bloom, Nicholas, Benn Eifert, Aprajit Mahajan, David McKenzie, and John Roberts. 2013. "Does Management Matter? Evidence from India." Quarterly Journal of Economics 128(1): 1-51.*

Bloom, Nicholas, James Liang, John Roberts, and Zhichun Jenny Ying. 2015. "Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment." Quarterly Journal of Economics 130(1): 165- 218.*

Lazear, Edward P., Kathryn L. Shaw, and Christopher T. Stanton. 2015. "The Value of Bosses." Journal of Labor Economics 33(4): 823-861.

Benson, Alan, Danielle Li, and Kelly Shue. 2019. "Promotions and the Peter Principle." Quarterly Journal of Economics 134(4): 2085-2134.

Hoffman, Mitchell, and Steven Tadelis. 2021. "People Management Skills, Employee Attrition, and Manager Rewards: An Empirical Analysis." Journal of Political Economy 129(1): 243-285.*

* Benson, Alan, and Kathryn Shaw. 2025. "What Do Managers Do? An Economist's Perspective." Annual Review of Economics 17.

* Hoffman, Mitchell, and Christopher T. Stanton. 2025. "People, Practices, and Productivity: A Review of New Advances in Personnel Economics." Handbook of Labor Economics 6: 729-818.

Meeting 3: Experiments

Date: Monday, September 14, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 5, 6. Schedule title: Experiments. Discussion leaders: Benedikt; Giuliana.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapter: Experimental Organizational Economics.

Research Papers and Articles

Milgram, Stanley. 1963. "Behavioral Study of Obedience." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 67(4): 371.

Haney, Craig, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo. 1973. "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison." In The Sociology of Corrections, 65-92. New York: Wiley.

* Bandiera, Oriana, Iwan Barankay, and Imran Rasul. 2007. "Incentives for Managers and Inequality among Workers: Evidence from a Firm-Level Experiment." Quarterly Journal of Economics 122(2): 729-773.

* Bandiera, Oriana, Iwan Barankay, and Imran Rasul. 2009. "Social Connections and Incentives in the Workplace: Evidence from Personnel Data." Econometrica 77(4): 1047-1094.

Bernstein, Ethan S. 2012. "The Transparency Paradox: A Role for Privacy in Organizational Learning and Operational Control." Administrative Science Quarterly 57(2): 181-216.

Sandvik, Jason J., Richard E. Saouma, Nathan T. Seegert, and Christopher T. Stanton. 2020. "Workplace Knowledge Flows." Quarterly Journal of Economics 135(3): 1635-1680.

Castro, Silvia, Florian Englmaier, and Maria Guadalupe. 2022. "Fostering Psychological Safety in Teams: Evidence from an RCT." Available at SSRN 4141538.

Delfino, Alexia. 2024. "Breaking Gender Barriers: Experimental Evidence on Men in Pink-Collar Jobs." American Economic Review 114(6): 1816-1853.

Englmaier, Florian, Stefan Grimm, Dominik Grothe, David Schindler, and Simeon Schudy. 2024. "The Effect of Incentives in Nonroutine Analytical Team Tasks." Journal of Political Economy 132(8): 2695-2747.

Choudhury, Prithwiraj, Miguel Espinosa, Christos Makridis, and Kyle Schirmann. 2025. "Internal Communication and Remote Work." Working paper, January 21.

Espinosa, Miguel, and Christopher Stanton. 2026. "Training, Communications Patterns, and Spillovers inside Organizations." Journal of Political Economy 134(7): 000-000.

*Sandvik, Jason, Richard Saouma, Nathan Seegert, and Christopher Stanton. 2026. "Should Human Capital Development Programs Be Mandatory or Voluntary? Evidence from a Field Experiment on Mentorship." Management Science 72(6): 4610-4632.

Meeting 4: Culture and Behavior

Date: Tuesday, October 6, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 7, 8. Schedule title: Culture and Behavior. Discussion leaders: Benedikt; Xinyi.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapter: Leadership and Corporate Culture.

Research Papers and Articles

Ichino, Andrea, and Giovanni Maggi. 2000. "Work Environment and Individual Background: Explaining Regional Shirking Differentials in a Large Italian Firm." Quarterly Journal of Economics 115(3): 1057-1090.

* Weber, Roberto, and Colin Camerer. 2003. "Cultural Conflict and Merger Failure: An Experimental Approach." Management Science 49(4): 400-415.

Martinez, Elizabeth, Nancy Beaulieu, Robert Gibbons, Peter Pronovost, and Thomas Wang. 2015. "Organizational Culture and Performance." American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings 105(5): 331-335.

* Guiso, Luigi, Paola Sapienza, and Luigi Zingales. 2015. "The Value of Corporate Culture." Journal of Financial Economics 117(1): 60-76.

Gibbons, Robert, and Laurence Prusak. 2020. "Knowledge, Stories, and Culture in Organizations." American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings 110: 187-192.

Corno, Lucia, Eliana La Ferrara, and Justine Burns. 2022. "Interaction, Stereotypes, and Performance: Evidence from South Africa." American Economic Review 112(12): 3848-3875.

* Huffman, David, Collin Raymond, and Julia Shvets. 2022. "Persistent Overconfidence and Biased Memory: Evidence from Managers." American Economic Review 112(10): 3141-3175.

Bursztyn, Leonardo, Alexander W. Cappelen, Bertil Tungodden, Alessandra Voena, and David H. Yanagizawa-Drott. 2023. How Are Gender Norms Perceived? NBER Working Paper No. 31049.

* Han, Yi, David Huffman, and Yiming Liu. 2024. "Minds, Models and Markets: How Managerial Cognition Affects Pricing Strategies." Unpublished manuscript.

Delfino, Alexia, and Miguel Espinosa. "Value Dissonance at Work." (2025).

Meeting 5: Innovation

Date: Friday, October 9, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 9, 10. Schedule title: Innovation. Discussion leaders: Giuliana; Tsung.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapter: Theory and Evidence in Internal Labor Markets.
* HOE chapter: Technological Innovation and Organizations.

Research Papers and Articles

Li, Danielle. 2017. "Expertise versus Bias in Evaluation: Evidence from the NIH." American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 9(2): 60-92.

Zhu, Feng, and Qihong Liu. 2018. "Competing with Complementors: An Empirical Look at Amazon.com." Strategic Management Journal 39(10): 2618-2642.

* Camuffo, Arnaldo, Alessandro Cordova, Alfonso Gambardella, and Chiara Spina. 2020. "A Scientific Approach to Entrepreneurial Decision Making: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial." Management Science 66(2): 564-586.

* Camuffo, Arnaldo, Alfonso Gambardella, Danilo Messinese, Elena Novelli, Emilio Paolucci, and Chiara Spina. 2024. "A Scientific Approach to Entrepreneurial Decision-Making: Large-Scale Replication and Extension." Strategic Management Journal 45(6): 1209-1237.

* Brynjolfsson, Erik, Danielle Li, and Lindsey Raymond. 2025. "Generative AI at Work." Quarterly Journal of Economics 140(2): 889-942.
* Kim, Hyunjin. 2025. "The Value of Competitor Information: Evidence from a Field Experiment." Management Science 71(4): 3600-3621.

Dell'Acqua, Fabrizio, Edward McFowland III, Ethan Mollick, Hila Lifshitz, Katherine C. Kellogg, Saran Rajendran, Lisa Krayer, Francois Candelon, and Karim R. Lakhani. 2026. "Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier: Field Experimental Evidence of the Effects of Artificial Intelligence on Knowledge Worker Productivity and Quality." Organization Science 37(2): 403-423.

Li, Danielle, Lindsey Raymond, and Peter Bergman. 2026. "Hiring as Exploration." Review of Economic Studies 93(2): 1200-1240.

Meeting 6: Relational Contracts

Date: Tuesday, October 13, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 11, 12. Schedule title: Other Topics. Discussion leaders: Benedikt; Xinyi.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapter: Relational Incentive Contracts.

Research Papers and Articles

Baker, George, Robert Gibbons, and Kevin J. Murphy. 1994. "Subjective Performance Measures in Optimal Incentive Contracts." Quarterly Journal of Economics 109(4): 1125-1156.*

Baker, George, Robert Gibbons, and Kevin J. Murphy. 2002. "Relational Contracts and the Theory of the Firm." Quarterly Journal of Economics 117(1): 39-83.*

* Gibbons, Robert, and Rebecca Henderson. 2012. "Relational Contracts and Organizational Capabilities." Organization Science 23(5): 1350-1364.

Macchiavello, Rocco, and Ameet Morjaria. 2015. "The Value of Relationships: Evidence from a Supply Shock to Kenyan Rose Exports." American Economic Review 105(9): 2911-2945.*

Macchiavello, Rocco, and Ameet Morjaria. 2021. "Competition and Relational Contracts in the Rwanda Coffee Chain." Quarterly Journal of Economics 136(2): 1089-1143.

Faculty Bio

Miguel Espinosa is Assistant Professor at Bocconi University and Research Affiliate at CEPR, CESifo, and LEAP.

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Date: Tuesday, October 13, 2026. Official schedule sessions: 11, 12. Schedule title: Other Topics. Discussion leaders: Benedikt; Xinyi.

Handbook and Background Readings

* HOE chapter: Relational Incentive Contracts.

Research Papers and Articles

Baker, George, Robert Gibbons, and Kevin J. Murphy. 1994. "Subjective Performance Measures in Optimal Incentive Contracts." Quarterly Journal of Economics 109(4): 1125-1156.

Baker, George, Robert Gibbons, and Kevin J. Murphy. 2002. "Relational Contracts and the Theory of the Firm." Quarterly Journal of Economics 117(1): 39-83.

* Gibbons, Robert, and Rebecca Henderson. 2012. "Relational Contracts and Organizational Capabilities." Organization Science 23(5): 1350-1364.

Macchiavello, Rocco, and Ameet Morjaria. 2015. "The Value of Relationships: Evidence from a Supply Shock to Kenyan Rose Exports." American Economic Review 105(9): 2911-2945.

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2. **Deliverables**

The grade will be composed by group take-home exam (70%) and a in-class presentation (30%). The take-home exam can be made in groups of maximum 2 students and will cover all the topics of the syllabus. The presentation is individual and will be based on the last two topics. It will last 20-25 minutes (depending on the number of enrolled students) and seeks to present one unpublished paper on the chosen topics. The selection of the paper requires approval of the professor. In these presentations, the students will explain the context and main findings of the paper and propose ways to improve it.

3. **Structure**

0. Introduction
1. The making of Research with Organizations
2. Experiments: Laboratory and Field
3. Relational Incentive Contracts
4. Culture and Leadership
5. What Managers do and its effect on Productivity