UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

# COURSE SYLLABUS

# Company Organization - 1

**2627-3-E1802M150-E1802M152M-T1**

## Learning objectives

The main aim of the course is to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the theories, concepts, and analytical tools used to examine organisations and organisational design.

The course explores how organisations define their objectives, develop strategies, design structures, coordinate activities, respond to environmental pressures, and manage internal processes. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between organisational strategy and organisational architecture, as well as to the ways in which different structural solutions influence effectiveness, decision-making, innovation, control, and organisational performance.

Students will learn to analyse organisations as open systems that interact continuously with economic, institutional, technological, and social environments. They will examine how organisations manage uncertainty, establish interorganisational relationships, operate in international contexts, and respond to contemporary challenges such as digital transformation, sustainability, ethical responsibility, and the growing importance of data.

A further objective is to develop students' ability to observe and interpret concrete organisational models and decision-making processes. The course combines theoretical frameworks, research findings, and business cases in order to connect organisational theory with managerial practice.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- recognise and compare different organisational structures and design choices;
- analyse the relationship between strategy, structure, technology, and environment;
- assess the effectiveness and limitations of alternative organisational arrangements;
- understand how organisational culture, power, conflict, and politics influence organisational processes;
- evaluate the organisational implications of digital technologies and big data;
- formulate theoretically grounded diagnoses of organisational problems;
- propose coherent and critically reasoned organisational solutions;
- communicate organisational analyses effectively in academic and professional settings.

## Contents

The course introduces the main theories and approaches of organisation theory and organisational design.

It examines organisations as complex social systems whose structures and processes are shaped by strategic objectives, technologies, environmental conditions, institutional expectations, organisational size, culture, and relations with other organisations.

The first part of the course introduces the nature of organisations and the fundamental principles of organisational design. It then explores the relationship between strategy, organisational architecture, and effectiveness, including the main structural configurations and coordination mechanisms.

The course analyses organisations as open systems, focusing on the external environment, uncertainty, interorganisational relations, internationalisation, and the emergence of organisations oriented towards both economic performance and social impact.

Particular attention is given to the design of manufacturing, service, and digital organisations, as well as to the organisational implications of big data, digital platforms, and new technologies.

The final part of the course addresses internal organisational processes, including culture, control, innovation, change, decision-making, conflict, power, and organisational politics.

Throughout the course, theoretical concepts will be connected to concrete examples and cases drawn from Italian, European, and international organisations.

## Detailed program

**Module 1 – Organisations and Organisational Design**

This module introduces the fundamental concepts of organisation theory and organisational design. It examines what organisations are, why they exist, and how they differ from other forms of coordinated collective action.

Students will explore the main dimensions used to describe and compare organisations, including formalisation, specialisation, hierarchy, centralisation, professionalism, organisational size, technology, and environment.

The module also introduces the distinction between structural and contextual dimensions and explains how organisational design involves aligning different organisational elements rather than selecting a universally optimal structure.

Topics include:

- Definitions and characteristics of organisations
- Organisations as social and economic systems
- The purpose and functions of organisational design
- Structural and contextual dimensions
- Formalisation, specialisation, hierarchy, and centralisation
- Coordination and organisational integration
- Mechanistic and organic organisational models
- Contingency approaches to organisational design

- Organisational design and managerial responsibility

**Module 2 – Strategy, Organisational Design, and Effectiveness**

This module examines the relationship between organisational strategy and organisational architecture.

Students will analyse how strategic objectives influence organisational structures, control systems, technologies, human resource practices, and decision-making processes. They will also explore different approaches to measuring organisational effectiveness.

Particular attention will be paid to the principle that organisational structures should be coherent with strategic priorities and environmental conditions.

Topics include:

- Organisational mission, purpose, and strategic direction
- Strategic objectives and organisational priorities
- The relationship between strategy and structure
- Competitive and institutional pressures
- Organisational effectiveness
- Goal-based approaches to effectiveness
- Resource-based approaches
- Internal process approaches
- Competing values and multiple organisational objectives
- Stakeholders and organisational performance
- Organisational alignment and strategic coherence

**Module 3 – Fundamental Elements of Organisational Structure**

This module introduces the main elements and alternatives of organisational structure.

Students will examine how tasks are divided, responsibilities are assigned, information is circulated, and activities are coordinated. They will compare the strengths and limitations of different structural configurations and consider the conditions under which each solution may be appropriate.

Topics include:

- Division of labour and departmentalisation
- Vertical and horizontal differentiation
- Authority, responsibility, and accountability
- Centralisation and decentralisation
- Vertical information systems
- Horizontal coordination mechanisms
- Functional structures
- Divisional structures
- Geographic and product-based structures
- Matrix structures
- Team-based structures
- Process-based structures
- Network and modular organisations
- Hybrid organisational configurations
- Structural fit and organisational effectiveness

**Module 4 – The External Environment and Open-System Design**

This module analyses organisations as open systems that depend on external resources, information, legitimacy, and relationships.

Students will explore how environmental complexity, instability, and uncertainty affect organisational structures and processes. They will examine the mechanisms organisations use to monitor the environment, manage dependencies, reduce uncertainty, and maintain flexibility.

Topics include:

- Organisations as open systems
- The task environment and the general environment
- Environmental complexity and change
- Environmental uncertainty
- Organisational differentiation and integration
- Boundary-spanning roles
- Environmental scanning and organisational intelligence
- Planning, forecasting, and adaptive capacity
- Resource dependence
- Institutional expectations and legitimacy
- Organisational resilience
- Structural responses to uncertainty

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** Module 5 – Organisations, Social Impact, Sustainability, and Ethics**

This module examines the growing importance of social purpose, environmental sustainability, and ethical responsibility in organisational design.

Students will analyse organisations that pursue economic and social objectives simultaneously and consider the tensions that may emerge between different institutional logics, stakeholders, and performance criteria.

The module also explores how sustainability and ethics can be incorporated into organisational structures, governance arrangements, decision-making processes, and control systems.

Topics include:

- Corporate social responsibility
- Sustainability and organisational design
- Economic, social, and environmental objectives
- Hybrid and dual-purpose organisations
- Benefit corporations and social enterprises
- Stakeholder governance
- Ethical decision-making
- Organisational accountability
- Codes of ethics and ethical infrastructures
- Sustainability governance
- Social and environmental performance indicators
- Tensions between profit and social impact
- Greenwashing and symbolic compliance
- Responsible management and organisational legitimacy

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** Module 6 – Technology, Manufacturing, and Service Organisations**

This module examines the relationship between technology and organisational design.

Students will analyse how production technologies, workflow interdependence, task variety, and knowledge

requirements influence structures, coordination mechanisms, and management systems.

The module compares manufacturing and service organisations, highlighting the distinctive organisational challenges associated with customer contact, intangible outputs, simultaneous production and consumption, and knowledge-intensive work.

Topics include:

- Technology as an organisational contingency
- Core and non-core technologies
- Manufacturing technologies
- Small-batch, mass-production, and continuous-process systems
- Task variability and analysability
- Routine and non-routine technologies
- Workflow interdependence
- Pooled, sequential, and reciprocal interdependence
- Service technologies
- Customer participation in service production
- Front-office and back-office organisation
- Professional and knowledge-intensive organisations
- Technology, structure, and coordination
- Lean organisation and operational flexibility

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** Module 7 – Digital Organisations and Big Data**

This module focuses on the organisational implications of digital transformation.

Students will examine how digital technologies, platforms, algorithms, data analytics, and big data affect organisational structures, roles, boundaries, decision-making, and forms of coordination.

The module will also critically assess the opportunities and risks associated with data-intensive management.

Topics include:

- Digital transformation and organisational redesign
- Digital business models
- Platform organisations
- Organisational ecosystems and digital networks
- Big data and organisational decision-making
- Data infrastructures and data governance
- Data-driven management
- Algorithmic coordination
- Automation and organisational routines
- Artificial intelligence and organisational design
- Digital monitoring and control
- Remote and hybrid organisations
- Organisational agility
- Data quality and accountability
- Digital surveillance and employee autonomy
- Ethical implications of digital transformation

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**Module 8 – Organisational Culture and Control**

This module explores organisational culture as a system of shared meanings, assumptions, values, and practices.

Students will examine how culture develops, how it is communicated, and how it influences employee behaviour, coordination, identity, control, and organisational performance.

The module also analyses different systems of organisational control and the relationship between formal control, cultural control, trust, and self-regulation.

Topics include:

- Definitions of organisational culture
- Values, beliefs, assumptions, and artefacts
- The emergence and transmission of culture
- Organisational stories, symbols, rituals, and language
- Strong and weak cultures
- Organisational subcultures
- Culture and organisational effectiveness
- Culture and ethical behaviour
- Cultural change
- Bureaucratic, market, and clan control
- Formal and informal control mechanisms
- Management control systems
- Trust and self-control
- Control in digital and remote organisations
- Culture, identity, and organisational commitment

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**Module 9 – Innovation and Organisational Change**

This module examines how organisations generate, adopt, and implement innovation and how they manage processes of change.

Students will analyse the structural conditions that facilitate or inhibit creativity, learning, technological innovation, and organisational adaptation.

Particular attention will be given to resistance to change, organisational ambidexterity, and the relationship between exploration and exploitation.

Topics include:

- Organisational innovation
- Product, process, managerial, and business-model innovation
- Creativity and idea generation
- Innovation structures and processes
- Organic structures and innovation
- Exploration and exploitation
- Organisational ambidexterity
- Open innovation and collaboration
- Sources of organisational change
- Incremental and radical change
- Resistance to change
- Change agents and organisational leadership
- Communication and participation in change processes
- Organisational learning
- Institutionalisation of change
- Digital and sustainable transformation

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**Module 10 – Organisational Decision-Making**

This module analyses decision-making as a central organisational process.

Students will compare rational, bounded-rationality, political, incremental, and emergent models of decision-making. They will examine how information, uncertainty, cognitive limitations, organisational structures, interests, and power affect decisions.

Concrete examples of organisational decisions will be used to evaluate how decisions are actually made rather than how they are formally expected to be made.

Topics include:

- Individual and organisational decision-making
- The rational model
- Bounded rationality
- Satisficing
- Intuition and managerial judgement
- Cognitive biases
- Organisational decision premises
- Management science and analytical models
- The Carnegie model
- Incremental decision-making
- The garbage-can model
- Organised anarchies
- Uncertainty and ambiguity
- Group decision-making
- Participation and decision quality
- Data-driven and algorithmic decision-making
- Ethical dimensions of organisational decisions
- Decision-making failures and organisational learning

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**Module 11 – Conflict, Power, and Organisational Politics**

The final module examines organisations as political arenas in which actors possess different goals, interests, resources, and forms of influence.

Students will analyse the sources and consequences of conflict, the distribution of organisational power, and the formal and informal political processes that shape organisational decisions.

Topics include:

- Sources of organisational conflict
- Horizontal and vertical conflict
- Interdepartmental conflict
- Differentiation and incompatible objectives
- Scarce resources and interdependence
- Functional and dysfunctional conflict
- Conflict-management mechanisms
- Organisational power
- Individual and structural sources of power
- Dependency and resource control
- Formal authority and informal influence
- Organisational politics
- Coalitions and alliances
- Political tactics
- Power in decision-making processes

- Ethics, responsibility, and the misuse of power
- Conflict, negotiation, and organisational change

## Prerequisites

A general familiarity with management, economics, organisational studies, sociology, or the social sciences may be beneficial, but it is not required.

Students from different disciplinary backgrounds are welcome. No previous professional or managerial experience is necessary.

Students should be willing to engage with theoretical frameworks, organisational cases, and examples of managerial decision-making. An interest in organisational structures, strategy, digital transformation, sustainability, innovation, and management processes is recommended.

## Teaching methods

The course combines different teaching methods in order to integrate theoretical knowledge, critical analysis, and practical application.

Teaching activities include:

- lectures introducing the main theories and analytical frameworks;
- interactive classroom discussions;
- analysis of Italian, European, and international business cases;
- examination of concrete organisational structures and design problems;
- individual and group exercises;
- guided readings of academic and professional texts;
- organisational diagnosis activities;
- simulations of managerial and decision-making processes;
- group presentations;
- guest lectures by academics, managers, and professionals.

Case-study analysis will play a central role in the course. Students will be encouraged to identify organisational problems, distinguish symptoms from underlying causes, apply appropriate theoretical models, and evaluate alternative organisational solutions.

Classroom activities will also require students to examine the relationship between different organisational variables rather than treating structure, strategy, culture, technology, and environment as separate elements.

## Assessment methods

Assessment will be continuous and based on active participation throughout the course.

Students will be evaluated through a combination of short written assignments, organisational case analyses, group activities, and in-class presentations.

Particular emphasis will be placed on students' ability to:

- understand and compare organisational theories;
- identify the relevant dimensions of an organisational problem;
- apply theoretical models to concrete organisational cases;
- analyse the coherence between strategy, structure, technology, culture, and environment;
- assess the advantages and limitations of alternative organisational solutions;
- formulate clear and theoretically grounded recommendations;
- communicate and defend a reasoned position.

Frequent assessments will be conducted through classroom discussions, group exercises, and individual in-depth explorations developed during the lessons.

Students may be asked to analyse the structure and decision-making processes of a real organisation, reconstruct its organisational model, identify its main design challenges, and propose possible interventions.

A final written assignment or project presentation may also be required. The final work may involve the organisational analysis of a company, public institution, non-profit organisation, network, or digital platform.

These assessment methods are specifically designed for **attending students**. Regular attendance is therefore strongly recommended, as classroom participation and involvement in case discussions represent essential components of the learning and assessment process.

For **non-attending students**, a dedicated reading list and detailed bibliographical guidelines for exam preparation will be provided at the end of the course.

For any questions or further information, students may contact the lecturer at adriano.solidoro@unimib.it.

## Textbooks and Reading Materials

The main textbook is:

**Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory and Design*, 2021

The textbook provides the main theoretical and analytical framework for the course. It combines organisation theory, research findings, concrete organisational models, and examples of managerial decision-making.

The Italian edition, where adopted, includes original cases drawn from Italian and European organisational contexts and gives particular attention to digital transformation, ethics, sustainability, and contemporary organisational practices.

Additional teaching materials may include:

- selected academic articles in organisation theory and organisational design;
- book chapters on strategy, structure, technology, innovation, and change;
- Italian and European business cases;
- cases concerning public and non-profit organisations;
- corporate reports and organisational charts;
- sustainability and social-impact reports;
- OECD, European Union, and institutional publications;
- materials on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and big data;
- podcasts, documentaries, expert talks, and professional interviews.

All required and recommended materials will be made available through the course platform or the university library.

## Semester

Second Semester.

## Teaching language

Italian

## Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS