

Lecture/seminar plan for chapter 1

As this is the first chapter and most likely the starting point for your programme, it would be worth testing out where your students currently are with their level of understanding of OB. Many will claim not to have studied OB formally before but you should be able to quickly point out that we all interact with organisations most of the time so we have all been working with and sometimes against organisations for many years.

The following outline is suggested for one or two sessions depending on the time you have, the size and diversity of the group and the level of interaction you can achieve.

- Introduce with question what is OB? (5 minutes)
- Pull together answers and group under existing subjects e.g. sociology, economics, psychology to illustrate that OB is a collection of a range of social science categories (15-20 minutes)
- Ask students in small groups to consider why we should study organisations e.g. how would we benefit from knowing more about how they work? (15-25 minutes)
- Conduct a quick energising experiment to measure a few group members height, followed by the 'trick' question, how do we measure his/her feelings? This should bring out the difficulties of measuring intangibles. (15 minutes)
- Conclude with the three category description of the structure of OB (10-15 minutes) pointing out that the principles of observation, solid research, comment and interpretation hold true at all levels.
- Use the discussion questions below to stimulate further debate and discussion.

Discussion questions guidance chapter 1

1. How can theories be used in OB, when many of the concepts and beliefs are largely unprovable?

2. If some theories of OB are not based on verifiable facts, how can you defend the field from the claim that it is 'just common sense' and not really scientific?

Both questions require the same approach from the respondent. The first centres on the traditional scientific need to prove things to be universally true before they can be considered valid.

The response requires an discussion of generalisation from observable phenomena which may dilute the value in some researchers view. The second question should elicit the response that claims that OB is just common sense are erroneous.

Social science research techniques are used with rigour and subjected to validation through external scrutiny, triangulation and debate.

Where OB theories do differ from some 'hard science', is the emphasis placed on interpretation and justification which one could argue gives greater validity. In a world which consists of shades of gray, answers are rarely black or white.

3. What do you think about the contribution of teams to organisational working versus that of an individual?

Here the student should be encouraged to think of situations where teams will achieve far more than individuals either through physical or mental capability. Areas such as creativity, competitiveness, team spirit or project management should be discussed.

4. How important do you think the psychological contract is between employees and the organisation, how is it changing?

This question is to test the students understanding of the concept of the psychological contract which is covered in the text. Areas such as motivation and employee development should feature in the response. In the second part of the question the correct should be on the increasing levels of flexibility being witnessed in many organisations.

5. Do you see the importance and influence of OB growing in the future, if so why and if not why not?

The answer we would like to see here is in the positive. As our understanding of the applicability of OB concepts and theories grows, it is likely that the influence of the OB field will spread.

The only way the influence of OB will not grow is if the concepts prove to be invalid or incorrectly applied. The key question is “can we make our organisations better through studying them and changing the way they operate?” So long as the answer to this is yes the field will continue to thrive.