

SOSC 4041.6 Alternative Economic Firms and Organizations

Alternative Firm Analysis Instructions

Jan. 17, 2008

A) Requirements

In Week 19 (Feb. 7) you are to submit a four-to-five page Alternative Firm Analysis (AFA) paper – including an annotated bibliography for future research – which reports on your intermediate *organizational analysis* of your specific alternative firm from the southern Ontario region. Broadly, this paper is intended to: 1) discuss your ongoing understanding of the cooperative structure of the firm you've chosen for your term project and 2) assess, in a preliminary manner, where it is placed within the social economy of southern Ontario. More specifically, the paper will look at – in the context of its cooperative structure and its position in the social economy as you currently understand it – 3) the strategic direction that the alternative firm has identified for itself in light of the product or services it provisions for its constituency; 4) what it is an alternative to (i.e., tied to where it fits in to the social economy); 5) how it measures success; and 6) what problems and challenges it seems to be facing preventing it from reaching its success benchmarks, or, alternatively, what innovations or initiatives it has put in place or will develop in order to reach its success benchmarks. 7) You will also come up with at least two, but possibly more, research questions that you will be addressing in more depth in the context of the southern Ontario social economy in your final Contemporary Research Paper (CRP) that you will be handing in on April 3. These research questions are to be presented after your analysis of the first 6 points. And, 8) you will develop an annotated bibliography above and beyond your four-to-five page analysis at the end of your document consisting of at least 6 sources that will assist you in further understanding your type of firm and the sector of the social economy in which it falls within, in preparation for your in-class presentations in March and your final CRP. For the annotated bibliography you may include two course texts. A minimum of four other sources outside of the course texts must also be presented. As part of the annotated portion of the bibliography you must indicate, in a paragraph per bibliographic reference right after the properly cited reference, why this source is important for answering your research questions or for further informing your project on any of the first six points (see above).

In sum, you can think of the Alternative Firm Analysis as an early critical look at the organizational structure of the firm; its place in the social economy; as well as the successes, challenges, issues, or problematics faced by the firm as far as you understand it at this intermediate stage of your research. All of this information should directly inform your research questions that you will later address in your CRP.

This initial report will be evaluated and returned to you after reading break. Again, it will form the basis of your more thorough and sophisticated CRP. So you know where the AFA exercise will be taking you, your CRP – again, due April 3 – will compare, using much more detail and analytical sophistication, the organizational analysis you begin to provide in your AFA with other similar firms in the social economic sector or other firms

that it is an alternative to. The end goal of your project that will culminate in your CRO could be to develop a series of policy recommendations for the firm.

B) Important Considerations

Important note: This project will require you to do some “on-the-ground” research into the firm because little traditional research (i.e., library books, even websites) exists for most contemporary alternative economic firms. This means you will have to actually go and visit the firm and conduct informal chats or a preliminary but formal interview with someone or several people from the firm. You might have to contact or go back to the firm several times between now and Feb. 7 and then again before you hand in your final CRP in April, so plan well ahead.

Another important note on interviewing: Also, when and if you conduct any type of formal or informal interview with anyone from your firm you will have to have them, as “human participants” in a research project, sign an “Informed Consent” form that I will be discussing and showing you how to do on Jan. 17. I will also be talking to you briefly about how to conduct a good interview, so make sure you attend class on Jan. 17. You can read up on the “Informed Consent” form that York University requires all social researchers to fill out, by going here:

http://www.arts.yorku.ca/research_and_teaching/ethics_review_of_course_work/ (or see class blog). Shortly, I will be providing you an “Informed Consent” form that I have specifically designed for our class and that you can present to your interviewees. I will also make this available on our blog, so stay tuned for my announcement on this.

C) Ideas on How to Organize Your Alternative Firm Analysis

Here is a suggestion for how to organize your AFA.

Section A

- 1) What kind of an organization is it, cooperative, not-for-profit, or informal collective? That is, what kind of a “social enterprise” is it? How do you know?
 - a. How old is the firm?
 - b. Where in Melnyk’s stage of cooperatives does it seem to be in? What seems to be telling you this?
- 2) Briefly describe its history (you will be elaborating on this further in your CRP, so be brief here but do contextualize it historically a bit).
- 3) Where does it fit into the social economy? How do you know?
- 4) What services, projects, products, or community needs does this organization provide or provision?
 - a. To whom (i.e., what is its constituency)? The business world would ask here “What is its (target) market?” We would ask, as alternative economic

analysts, “What is its *constituency*?” Another way to ask this question is “What are the alternative firm’s *stakeholders*?”

- 5) What is it an alternative to? What social, political, or economic needs is it meeting? What seems to suggest this to you?
 - a. Hint: This question and question 3 are closely related. The services or products of the alternative organization are closely related to its place in the social economy and what it is an alternative to.
- 6) What does the firm’s “institutional framework” look like? That is, what is its organizational structure? How does it seem to be organized? Vertically or horizontally? Who is in charge? Is there management or do the members self-organize?
 - a. What kind of people seem to work there? Hired staff (i.e., waged or salaried employees), volunteers, cooperative members, contract workers?
 - b. Is work organized in formal or informal ways?
 - c. What kind of work seems to occupy people on a daily basis?
- 7) What are the success benchmarks of the firm? That is, how does it measure success?
- 8) What seems to you, at this intermediate stage, to be the problems or issues that prevent it from attaining its success benchmarks. Or, alternatively, what are the things that the firm is doing to ensure that it has met or is exceeding its mandate or success benchmarks?
 - a. (Note: Whether you look at the “problems” faced by the firm or its “successes” actually depends on your firm, whether it’s meeting or not the mandate and benchmarks that were set for it or that it set for itself.)
 - b. Point 8 should directly inform the Research Questions you ask below...

Section B

Research Question 1: _____ .

Research Question 2: _____ .

Section C

Works Cited

(Here you would include any secondary sources directly cited in your AFA.)

Section D

Annotated Bibliography

(Here you would include specifically your Annotated Bibliography, which may or may not include citations from your “Works Cited” section.)