

Theory development in Management Research

Coordinator: Panikos Georgallis

Period: June 2024

Tentative Dates:

Blocked course: Tentatively from June 17 to June 21 (see below for times)

Learning goals: By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Explain what is theory and the role of theory in the social sciences
- Describe key criteria on which theory is judged
- Understand where (theoretical) ideas come from
- Apply specific tools for idea generation and development
- Develop skills in writing, revising, and supporting theoretical arguments

Teaching method: Discussion of readings, guided workshops, and guest speaker discussions

Contact hours: 18 contact hours

Assessment: Class participation; individual and group assignments.

Facilities needed: Room with projector and whiteboard + flipcharts

Course summary: Theory is essential for scientific progress, and the ability to develop good theory is a critical skill for any social scientist. This blocked course targeted at doctoral students aims to reflect on what constitutes good theory, where theory comes from, and how to develop theory in the social sciences and more specifically management and organization studies. Because “writing is thinking” we will also discuss effective writing strategies and go through a series of practical exercises to help participants devise, revise, and support arguments.

Our profession allows us to ask questions about how the world works. But all too often, doctoral students are so worried about answering the question right that they forget to ask if it is the right question to answer. I hope that this class will urge you to think more about the big-picture implications of your work and to design research that appeals to the broadest possible audience, while being mindful of generalizability issues inherent to everything we do. This requires reading broadly to be aware of theoretical and empirical developments in related fields, challenging yourself to ask interesting questions, exposing your work and accepting feedback, and the curiosity and commitment required to see your work through to the end—to answer your questions convincingly.

Course format: This is an intensive course comprising of seven sessions distributed over the course of one week (tentatively week of June 17, 2024). Morning sessions will typically involve the discussion of readings, and afternoon sessions will focus on exercises and small group discussions. Given the blocked nature of the course, students should reserve the entire week and substantial time to prepare in advance; they will be expected to discuss readings and complete short assignments during the course.

Overview of Sessions (preliminary)

Monday

Morning (9:30 – 12:30): What is theory and why do we need it?

The first session focuses on what is theory, why we need it, and the role of theory in the social sciences. We will place this discussion in the context of disciplinary norms and challenges regarding theory and theoretical contribution in management research.

Tuesday

Morning (9:30 – 12:30): What is good theory?

In this session we will discuss theoretical rigor and relevance and break down the different elements of good theory. A guest speaker (J.W. Stoelhorst) will provide insights, from the perspective of an author and reviewer for leading management journals, on how theory is evaluated in practice.

Afternoon (14:00-16:00): Theory evaluation in practice

Students will be provided with practical tools for theory evaluation and will work individually and/or in-groups to apply them.

Thursday

Morning (9:30 – 12:30): How do we develop theory?

The process of theory building is critical but often elusive. In this session we will discuss how we, as scholars, can develop novel and interesting theories when so much has already been written. Where does good theory come from?

Afternoon (14:00-16:00): Devising theory in practice

Idea generation is one of the most challenging aspects of theory development. In this session students will apply practical tools to help them find and generate ideas related to their topics of interest.

Friday

Morning (9:30 – 12:30): Writing theory for publication

“How can I know what I think till I see what I say?” We are evaluated not by the ideas in our head but by the written record that we leave. So how can we effectively write and support our arguments; how to position them vis-à-vis prior work? We will devote this practical session to answering these questions.

Afternoon (14:00-16:00): Revising theory for publication

Together with a guest speaker, we will reflect on the review process and learn from specific examples that illustrate how papers are molded through the review process at leading journals.