## Course Manual

### Academic year 2015 - 2016

**Course title**  
Developing Theory and Theoretical Contributions

**Coordinators**  
Professor Dr. Joep Cornelissen

**Lecturer(s)**  
Professor Dr. Joep Cornelissen

**Start date**  
31st of March

### Course goals

1. To have a basic understanding of issues around management and organizational theory; what theory is, and what its core components are.
2. To develop reflective skills in theory development; including basic argumentation and the formulation of propositions, construct clarity and persuasive writing.
3. To develop creative skills in developing theory through specific forms of reasoning such as conceptual blending and counter-factual reasoning.

### Content

Theory and theory development are seen as crucial to making meaningful academic contributions to bodies of knowledge in management and organisational research. Despite its prominence, the constituent processes around theorizing are often left implicit, and not typically discussed or taught in doctoral training programmes. The course tries to address this very point; participants will through a series of exercises, practical assignments and readings be trained in ‘reading’ theory in journal articles, and will also develop skills in the development and assessment of theory.

### Form of tuition

Workshop-format around exercises and articles

### Assignment

The final assignment for the course will consist of a written essay that describes the participant’s use of the methods or concepts used in class (e.g., construct clarity, counter-factual reasoning) in the context of their own research. Details on the assignment will be distributed in class.
Session 1: Theory: What is it, How does it relate to Practice and How do you Claim a Theoretical Contribution?

Prescribed reading:


Further reading:


Take-home assignment: write a short introduction for a paper (200-500 words) you are working on or for your overall thesis using the ‘framing’ method introduced in class to position your study and claim a theory contribution.
Session 2: The State of the Field: Theory, Paradigms and (Inter)Disciplinary Approaches to Theory Development

Prescribed reading:


Further reading:


**Take-home assignment:** (200-500 words). Write a short reflection on your own research topic in relation to business and management research. In what tradition does it fit? Can you identify new literatures to draw from? Can you think of other disciplines that might enrich theorizing in your own topic /field of study? If so, what would these be?
Session 3: Basic Reasoning and Logic behind Theory Development: 1. The Borrowing and Blending of Theories

Prescribed reading:


Further reading:


Take-home assignment: write a short reflective summary (500-1,000 words) of how you are (or could be) borrowing and blending different theories and constructs as part of your PhD project. Make sure to evaluate the consistency of the underlying assumptions and the argumentation by which you justify the combination of theories and/or constructs.
Session 4: Basic Reasoning and Logic behind Theory Development: 2. Counter-factual reasoning


Further reading:


Take-home assignment: write a short reflective summary (500-1,000 words) of how you are (or could be) challenging established theories as part of your PhD project. Make sure to point out how through counter-factual reasoning you are able to challenge default assumptions or the existing argumentation in a literature.
Session 5: Definitions and construct clarity

Prescribed reading


Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B.; and Podsakoff, N.P. (2016), Recommendations for Creating Better Concept Definitions in the Organizational, Behavioral, and Social Sciences, Organizational Research Methods, April 2016 19: 159-203,

Background reading


Take-home assignment: (500-1000 words). Select a construct of interest that is likely to play an important role in your Ph.D research project. Identify the different definitions of this construct in the literature and discuss and explain potential sources of ambiguity or a lack of clarity in how the construct is currently understood in the literature (‘problem diagnosis’). Then explore how this problem might be solved through reconceptualization.
Session 6: Variance versus Process Theorizing

Prescribed reading:

Cornelissen, J.P. (in press), Preserving theoretical divergence in management research: Why the explanatory potential of qualitative research should be harnessed rather than suppressed, *Journal of Management Studies*.


Further reading:


Take-home assignment: (200-500 words). How would you classify the available theory on your phenomenon or construct of interest (variance or process)? Why is that? Explore how your construct (and its relationships with other constructs) might behave over time using a temporal (‘process’) epistemology. What might such process theorizing contribute to the extant literature?