



**University of
Zurich** ^{UZH}

Chair of Organization and Management

*Distinguished Scholars Seminar Series
Fall Term 2025*

«Developing Theory»

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Lecturer: Professor Joep Cornelissen
Dates: November 3rd (Mon) – 5th (Wed), 2025
Times: 9:30-16:30h
Location: UZH Campus Central
Language: English
Contact: om@business.uzh.ch
Application Deadline: July 31st, 2025

MODULE OVERVIEW

Theory is central to management and organizational research, as it is to other areas of the social sciences. However, developing theory as part of a PhD project or research papers is far from easy. Oftentimes, as authors, we perceive the theory aspects of our work much harder to deal with and think through compared to methods or the practical relevance of our research. In this three-day workshop, we will deconstruct ways of thinking about theory and help you craft and develop the theoretical aspects of your work through a number of practical exercises on key aspects such as framing and positioning, the grounding of your theoretical approach, and the clarity of your concept or construct definitions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To develop a basic understanding of theory and ways of judging theory and forms of theoretical argumentation in management and organizational research;
2. To develop practical skills in writing theory; including skills in basic argumentation, in defining constructs and in persuasive writing;
3. To develop creative and transferable skills in developing theory through specific forms of reasoning such as conceptual blending and counter-factual reasoning.

PREPARATION

In preparation for this course, it would be helpful if you (a) read the required readings from the reading list below and (b) draft and submit a short summary of your research project and/or papers (one page). For this summary, please describe your research topic and research questions, as well as the backdrop (existing literature) to the topic and in what ways you aim to theoretically extend or advance thinking and research on the subject.

COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Joep Cornelissen is a Professor in Management at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University and Chair in Strategy and Organisation (part-time) at the University of Liverpool Management School. He is a former Editor-in-Chief of Organization Theory, a former Associate Editor for the Academy of Management Review (2014-2017), and a former General Editor of the Journal of Management Studies (2006-2012) and serves on the editorial boards of the Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, the Journal of Management Studies and Organization Studies. He recently received the Joanne Martin Trailblazer award from the Academy of Management for his leadership and editorial work in the area of theory.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

DAY 1: Introduction to theorizing and theory; or how to frame a theoretical argument

9:30-11:00	Introduction: what is theory? What is a theoretical contribution? What are common styles of theorizing?
11:00	coffee break
11:30-13:00	Disciplined imagination: Ideational exercise to identify the contours of your theoretical argument
13:00-14:00	lunch
14:00-17:00	Framing the argument: framing exercise to lay out your argument (for a paper)

Readings for Day 1

Prescribed reading:

1. Cornelissen J, Höllerer MA, Seidl D. (2021), What Theory Is and Can Be: Forms of Theorizing in Organizational Scholarship. *Organization Theory* 2 (3), 1-19.
2. Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516-531.
3. Lange, D., & Pfarrer, (2017). Sense and structure: the core building blocks of an AMR article. *Academy of Management Review*, 42, 3, 407–416.

Further reading:

Agarwal, R. & Hoetker, G. (2007). A Faustian bargain? The growth of management and its relationship with related disciplines. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50: 1304-1322.

Abend, G. (2008). The meaning of “theory”. *Sociological Theory*, 26,173-199.

Colquitt, J. A., & Zapata, C. P. (2007). Trends in theory building and theory testing: A five-decade study of Academy of Management Journal. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50: 1281-1303.

Cornelissen, J.P. (2024). The problem with propositions: Theoretical triangulation to better explain phenomena in management research. *Academy of Management Review*, in press.

Cronin, M. A., Stouten, J., & van Knippenberg, D. (2021). The theory crisis in management research: Solving the right problem. *Academy of Management Review*, 46(4), 667-683.

Healey, M. P., Leroy, H., Post, C., & Potočnik, K. (2023). Changing the scholarly conversation: What it means, why it matters, and how to approach it in micro research. *Journal of Management Studies*, 60(6), 1633-1656.

- Locke K. & Golden-Biddle K. (1997) 'Constructing Opportunities for Contribution: Structuring Intertextual Coherence and "Problematizing" in Organizational Studies'. *Academy of Management Journal* (40)5: 1023-1062.
- Pollock, T. (2021), *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing: Techniques for Engaging Readers and successfully navigating the writing and Publishing Processes*. Edward Elgar publishing.
- Wickert, C., Post, C., Doh, J.P., Prescott, J.E. and Prencipe, A. (2021), Management Research that Makes a Difference: Broadening the Meaning of Impact. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58: 297-320.

DAY 2: Basic Moves in theorizing: Blending and Counter-factual Reasoning

9:30-11:00	Working with theoretical lenses: blending exercise to integrate theories and constructs
11:00	coffee break
11:30-13:00	discussion of projects/papers
13:00-14:00	lunch
14:00-15:30	Counter-factual reasoning: exercise around problematizing assumptions (about constructs and relationships)
15:30-17:00	discussion of projects/papers

Readings for Day 2:

Prescribed reading:

1. Cornelissen, J. P. & Durand, R. (2014), Moving Forward: Developing Theoretical Contributions in Management Studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51: 995–1022.
2. Okhuysen, G., & Bonardi, J.P. (2011). The challenges of theory building through the combination of lenses. *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 1, 6-12.
3. Alvesson, M. & Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through *problematization*. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 247-271.

Further reading:

- Boxenbaum, E. & Rouleau, L. 2011. New knowledge products as bricolage: Metaphors and scripts in organizational theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 272-296..
- Durand, R., & Vaara, E. (2009). Causation, counterfactuals and competitive advantage. *Strategic Management Journal*, 30(12): 1245-1264.
- Ketokivi, M., Mantere, S. and Cornelissen, J.P. (2017), Reasoning by analogy and the progress of theory, *Academy of Management Review*, 42(4), 637-658.
- Oswick C, Fleming, P & Hanlon, G. (2011), 'From Borrowing to Blending: Rethinking the Processes of Organizational Theory-Building', *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), p.318-337
- Tsang, E.W.K, & Elsaesser, F. (2011). How Contrastive Explanation Facilitates Theory Building. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 404-419.
- Whetten, D., Felin, T. & King, B. (2009). Theory-borrowing in organizational studies: issues and future directions. *Journal of Management*, 35: 537-563

DAY 3: Working with Concepts and Constructs

9:30-11:00	Working with concepts and constructs
11:00	coffee break
11:30-13:00	Construct clarity: definitional exercise
13:00-14:00	lunch
14:00-16:00	Integrative discussion – and feedback on projects
16:00	summary and closing

Readings for Day 3

Prescribed reading

1. Solinger, O. N., Heusinkveld, S. & Cornelissen, J. P. (2024). Redefining concepts to build theory: A repertoire for conceptual innovation. *Human Resource Management Review*, 34(1), 100988.
2. Suddaby, R. (2010). Construct clarity in theories of management and organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (3) 346-358.
3. Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., & Podsakoff, N.P. (2016). Recommendations for Creating Better Concept Definitions in the Organizational, Behavioral, and Social Sciences. *Organizational Research Methods* 19(2), 159-203.

Background reading

- Locke, E. A. (2005). Why emotional intelligence is an invalid concept. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26, 425-431.
- Hirsch, P.M., & Levin, D.Z. (1999). Umbrella Advocates Versus Validity Police: A Life-cycle Model. *Organization Science* 10: 199–212.
- Welch, C. Rummyantseva, M. & Hewerdine, L. J. (2015). Using case research to reconstruct concepts: A methodology and illustration. *Organizational Research Methods* 19(1), 111-130.

Course Requirements for ECTS

If you require ECTS for this seminar, we ask you to submit an improved version of one of your papers or of your PhD thesis project. The project or paper that you submit needs to be at least 30 pages long and clearly show an improvement compared to previous works (50%). Alternatively, you can either submit a synthesis of the topics discussed in the seminar or your individual course work based on one of the exercises (with background literature) used in class (minimum 5 pages). Please send your submission as a PDF file to om@business.uzh.ch.

Deadline for submission: **December 31, 2025**.