

Amsterdam Business Research Institute

Developing Theory and Theoretical Contributions

Course Manual

Academic year 2026 – 2027

Version subject to change



Course title	Developing Theory and Theoretical Contributions
Coordinator(s)	Dr. Omar N. Solinger
Lecturer(s)	Dr Omar Solinger
Study period	September 2026 – October 2026 (Period 1)
ECTS	5 ECTS
Tuition	€1250 20% discount on early bird registration: €1000
Target Groups	The course is open to PhD candidates and research master students from the VU and other Dutch and international universities engaged in research projects broadly related to business and management or organization studies.
Course goals	After the successful completion of this course, participants will be able to: • To have a basic understanding of theory and ways of judging theory in management and organizational research; • To develop practical skills in writing theory; including skills in basic argumentation, in defining constructs and in persuasive writing; • To develop creative skills in developing theory through specific forms of reasoning such as conceptual blending and counter-factual reasoning.
Course content	Theory and theory development are seen as crucial to making meaningful academic contributions to bodies of knowledge in management and organizational research. Despite its prominence, processes of theorizing are often left implicit, and not typically discussed or taught in doctoral training programs. The course tries to address this very point; participants will through a series of exercises, practical assignments and readings be trained in ‘reading’ and assessing theory in journal articles, and will also develop skills in the development of theory for their own PhD projects.
Course design	The course consists of 6 interactive sessions distributed over 6 weeks. You will be expected to read extensively before and during the course, and complete assignments throughout the course period. Every week 3 groups present articles 1-3 that are assigned to them.

Form of tuition Workshop-format around exercises and articles.

The estimated time participants spend on study activities is:

Attending interactive sessions	24 hours
Reading preparations	60 hours
Work on assignments	66 hours
Total	<u>168 hours</u> (5 ECTS)

Assessment Students will be assessed based on:

1 individual 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.

Course structure

Date	Time	Subject	Room
Thursday, September, 3	13:30 – 17:00	What is theory, debates and styles of theorizing	NU-6A52
Thursday, September, 10	13:30 – 17:00	How to make / frame a theoretical contribution	NU-2B12
Thursday, September, 17	13:30 – 17:00	Analogical reasoning and combining perspectives	NU-4B05
Thursday, September, 24	13:30 – 17:00	Counter-factual reasoning	NU-2B12
Thursday, October, 1	13:30 – 17:00	Construct clarity	HG-11A37
Thursday, October, 8	13:30 – 17:00	Causality	HG-05A16
Thursday, 30 October		Assignment due	

Session 1: Introduction to Theory in Management and Organizational Research (defining theory, different styles of theorizing and the links between management and other social sciences).

Prescribed reading:

1. 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. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2019.0294>
2. Cornelissen J, Höllerer MA, Seidl D. (2021), What Theory Is and Can Be: Forms of Theorizing in Organizational Scholarship. *Organization Theory*. July 2021. doi:[10.1177/26317877211020328](https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211020328)
3. Joined up articles: (1) Tsoukas, H. (2017). 'Don't simplify, complexify: From disjunctive to conjunctive theorizing in organization and management studies'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54, 132-53, and (2) Healy, K. (2017), Fuck nuance, *Sociological Theory*, 35 (2), 118-127.

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. (2017), Preserving theoretical divergence in management research: Why the explanatory potential of qualitative research should be harnessed rather than suppressed, *Journal of Management Studies*, 368-383.

Pfeffer, J. (1993). Barriers to the advancement of organizational science: paradigm development as a dependent variable. *Academy of Management Review*, 18: 599–620.

Sutton, R. I. & Staw, B. M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*; 40:371-384.

Session 2: How to Position, Frame and Claim a Theoretical Contribution

Prescribed reading:

1. Healey, M. P., Leroy, H., Post, C., & Potočník, 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.
2. 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.
3. Lange, D., & Pfarrer, (2017). Sense and structure: the core building blocks of an AMR article. *Academy of Management Review*, 42, 3, 407–416. AND: Grant, A.A., and Pollock, T.G. (2011), Publishing in AMJ- Part 3: setting the hook, *Academy of Management Journal* 2011 54:5, 873-879.

Further reading:

Corley, K. & Gioia, D. (2011), Building theory about theory building: What constitutes a theoretical contribution?, *Academy of Management Review*, 36 (1): 12-32.

Huff, A.S. (1998), *Writing for scholarly publication*. London: Sage.

Zuckerman, E. (2015), On Genre: A Few More Tips to Article-Writers, see http://mitmgmtfaculty.mit.edu/esivan/reviews_essays/

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.

Tihanyi, L. (2020), From 'that's interesting' to 'that's important', *Academy of Management Journal*, 63, 329–331, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2020.4002>

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.

Session 3: Basic Reasoning and Logic behind Theory Development: 1.The Borrowing and Blending of Theories

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. Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516-531.

Further reading:

Boxenbaum, E. & Rouleau, L. 2011. New knowledge products as bricolage: Metaphors and scripts in organizational theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2).

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

Whetten, D., Felin, T. & King, B. (2009). Theory-borrowing in organizational studies: issues and future directions. *Journal of Management*, 35: 537-563

Session 4: Basic Reasoning and Logic behind Theory Development: 2. Counter-factual reasoning

1. Alvesson, M. & Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through *problematization*. *Academy of Management Review*, 36 2.
2. Durand, R., & Vaara, E. (2009). *Causation*, counterfactuals and competitive advantage. *Strategic Management Journal*, 30(12): 1245-1264.
3. Tsang, E.W.K, & Elsaesser, F. (2011). How Contrastive Explanation Facilitates Theory Building. *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 2.

Further reading:

- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1265-1281.
- Davis, M. S. (1971). That's interesting: Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology. *Philosophy of Social Science* 1:309-344.
- Foss, NJ, & Hallberg, NL (2014) How symmetrical assumptions advance strategic management research. *Strategic Management Journal* 35: 903–913.
- Foss, N.J., & Hallberg, N.L (2016), Changing assumptions and progressive change in theories of strategic organization, *Strategic Organization*, doi: 10.1177/1476127016671099
- Shepherd, D.A. & Sutcliffe, K.M. (2011). *Inductive top down* theorizing: A source of new theories of organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 2.

Session 5: Definitions and construct clarity

Prescribed reading

1. 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*.
2. Cornelissen, J. P. Werner, M., de Schutter, L., & Solinger, O. N. (2026). Construct fallacy and construct validation in theories of management and organization. *Academy of Management Review*.
3. 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.

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.

Osigweh, C. A. B. (1989). Concept fallibility in organizational science. *Academy of Management Review*, 14 (4), 579 – 594.

Welch, C. Rumyantseva, M. & Hewerdine, L. J. (2015). Using case research to reconstruct concepts: A methodology and illustration. *Organizational Research Methods*.

Session 6: Theory and causal inference

Prescribed reading:

1. Antonakis, J., Bendahan, S., Jacquart, P., & Lalive, R. (2010). On making causal claims: A review and recommendations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(6), 1086–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.10.010>.
2. Cornelissen, J. P. (2024). The problem with propositions: Theoretical triangulation to better explain phenomena in management research. *Academy of Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2022.0297>.
3. Cornelissen, J. P., & Werner, M. (2026). What are mechanisms? Ways of conceptualizing and studying causal mechanisms. *Organizational Research Methods*, 29(2), 147-176.

Further reading:

King, A., Goldfarb, B., and Simcoe, T. (2021), 'Learning from testimony on quantitative research in management'. *Academy of Management Review*, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0421>.

Aguinis, H., and Edwards, J.R. (2014). 'Methodological wishes for the next decade and how to make wishes come true'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(1): 143-174.

Goldfarb, B., and King, A. A. (2016). 'Scientific apophenia in strategic management research: Significance tests and mistaken inference'. *Strategic Management Journal*, 37(1): 167–176.

Shaver, J.M. (2020). 'Causal identification through a cumulative body of research in the study of strategy and organizations'. *Journal of Management*.