

## SYLLABUS

**Course title:** CONTRIBUTING TO THEORY PROGRESS THROUGH RESEARCH

**Instructor:** Prof. Mikko KETOKIVI (IE University, Madrid)  
**Email:** [mikko@ketokivi.fi](mailto:mikko@ketokivi.fi)

**Course website:** (if applicable)

**Semester:** Autumn 2022

### Timetable:

September 21 – 8:00-12:00 – Room Anthropole 5146

September 23 – 8:00-12:00 – Room Anthropole 5146

October 5 – 8:00-12:00 – Zoom

October 12 – 8:00-12:00 – Zoom

October 19 – 8:00-12:00 – Zoom

**Credits:** 6.0 – 28 hours

**Prerequisites:** As prerequisite, students are expected to be familiar with the research literature in their own field of research, and ideally, more broadly as well. Students are also expected to have taken doctoral-level seminars both in qualitative and quantitative methods. Familiarity with the literature on philosophy of science, methodology, and epistemology is also useful but not necessary. This is not a seminar on philosophy, but rather, on the foundations of empirical research on organizations and management.

### Registration procedure:

Sign-up for the course by sending an e-mail to [benedicte.moreira@unil.ch](mailto:benedicte.moreira@unil.ch)

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

This is a doctoral seminar on how we make contributions through empirical research. The seminar is intended for doctoral candidates who are in their dissertation phase, that is, either thinking of the topic and the research design, already collecting and analyzing data, or writing up the results.

In the five sessions of this seminar, we ask the following five questions:

- How do I make a scholarly contribution?
- How do I reason?
- How do I structure my argument?
- How is my argument evaluated?
- How do I build my career as an academic?

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this seminar is to explore the ways in which you can make your research and arguments resonate with your audience, in short, how to construct a contribution.

## COURSE INFORMATION PER SESSION

### SESSION 1: HOW DO I MAKE A SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION?

Thesis: “A theorist is considered great, not because [his or her] theories are true, but because they are interesting” (Davis, 1971)

Every researcher seeks a contribution, but the very definition of what constitutes one remains elusive. In this introductory session, we examine different ways of thinking about establishing contributions. We also ask in what ways research can achieve the elusive objective of being interesting.

- 1) Davis, M. S. (1971). That's interesting: Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1(4), 309-344.
- 2) Bartunek, J. M., Rynes, S. L., & Ireland, R. D. (2006). What makes management research interesting and why does it matter? *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1), 9-15.
- 3) 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.

### SESSION 2: HOW DO I REASON?

Thesis: “As a descriptive claim about what scientists, qua scientists, actually do—let alone about what they believe about what they do—Popper’s view strikes us as absurd. But even as a [prescriptive] claim it fares little better” (Hájek & Hall. 2002)

We all know that the rationality of managers in particular and human beings in general is severely limited. Very few scholars, however, consider this basic fact when they examine their own reasoning faculties. In this session, we look at scholarly reasoning and argument from the point of view of research practice. We also examine what role, if any, prescriptive and normative methodology has in the process.

- 4) Mantere, S., & Ketokivi, M. (2013). Reasoning in organization science. *Academy of Management Review*, 38(1), 70-89.
- 5) Ketokivi, M., Mantere, S., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2017). Reasoning by analogy and the progress of theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(4), 637-658.
- 6) Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(2), 175-220.
- 7) Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(6), 1121-1134.

### SESSION 3: HOW DO I STRUCTURE MY ARGUMENT?

Thesis: “The choices researchers make are not limited to matters of policy and preference, such as choosing a specific research topic, but also choices in how we reason from empirical data to theoretical conclusions. Understanding these choices is crucial in peer evaluation in particular” (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2021)

Surprisingly enough, the structure of arguments remains under-researched and under-specified in many contexts, including scientific argumentation: What is the basic structure of an argument? What is the role of empirical data? How about assumptions? In organizational and management research, there are many competing paradigms that vary drastically in their approaches and underpinning assumptions; how is this evident in how arguments are structured? Are there choices associated with arguments? What are these choices and where do we make them? In this session, we look at how arguments are made and how claims are justified.

8) Toulmin, S. E., Rieke, R., & Janik, A. (1979). *An Introduction to Reasoning*. New York: Macmillan. Chapters 2-6.

9) Ketokivi, M., & Mantere, S. (2021). What warrants our claims? A methodological evaluation of argument structure. *Journal of Operations Management*, 67, 755-776.

#### **SESSION 4: HOW IS MY ARGUMENT EVALUATED?**

Thesis: “Authors should remember that editors and reviewers are not superior and that the ultimate decisions about what is right must come from inside themselves” (Starbuck, 2003)

A claim to knowledge is deemed scientific only after it has cleared the hurdle of peer review. When it comes to evaluation of claims, peer review is the most important institution in science. In this session, we look at this institution from different points of view, again focusing on the practice of science (as opposed to abstract, general principles). What are the roles of the authors, referees, and the editors? How do you prepare a manuscript for publication? How do you respond to reviews? How do you write a review yourself?

10) Daft, R. L. (1995). Why I recommended that your manuscript be rejected and what you can do about it. In P. Frost & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Publishing in the Organizational Sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 164-182). Homewood, IL: Irwin.

11) Ragsin, B. R. (2015). Editor's comments: Developing our authors. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 1-8.

12) Starbuck, W. H. (2003). Turning lemons into lemonade: Where is the value in peer reviews? *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 12(4), 344-351.

13) Bedeian, A. G. (2003). The manuscript review process: The proper roles of authors, referees, and editors. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 12, 331-338.

#### **SESSION 5: HOW DO I BUILD MY CAREER AS AN ACADEMIC?**

Thesis: “The field of organization science is characterized by high levels of disagreement. We disagree about what phenomena are important, about what theories are worthy of attention, about appropriate methodologies, and about basic research questions” (Glick, Miller, and Cardinal, 2007)

In this session, we take stock of the key learning points in session 1-4. Then, assuming most of you intend to make a career out of research and teaching, we conclude the seminar by looking at the issues examined in the first four sessions from a professional and career development point of view.

14) Miller, A. N., Taylor, S. G., & Bedeian, A. G. (2011). Publish or perish: academic life as management faculty live it. *Career Development International*, 16(5), 422-445.

15) Glick, W. H., Miller, C. C., & Cardinal, L. B. (2007). Making a life in the field of organization science. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28, 817-835.

16) Miller, C. C., Glick, W. H., & Cardinal, L. B. (2005). The allocation of prestigious positions in organizational science: accumulative advantage, sponsored mobility, and contest mobility. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(5), 489-516.

## ASSESSMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

To complete the seminar, students are required to:

- 1) *Prepare & Participate*. Students are expected to participate in at least 4 of the 5 seminar sessions (because the sessions build fundamentally on one another, attending all 5 is strongly recommended). Students are also expected to carefully prepare for each class by completing all the required readings, and actively participating in in-class discussions and group exercises.
- 2) Write a *Learning Journal*. Each student is expected to write about 700 words on each of the five sessions (this corresponds to about one page of single-spaced text per session). In this learning journal, I am interested in seeing you describe your key takeaways from each of the session.
- 3) Write an *Application Essay*. Students are expected to write an essay of about 4,000 words in which they examine the implications of some of the key takeaways to their dissertations.
- 4) Take an *Oral Exam*. This is about an hour-long Zoom conversation with the professor regarding the student's Learning Journal and Application Essay.

These different components and the associated deadlines are discussed in more detail in the first seminar session.

Grades are based on your performance in these four categories, which are weighed equally. The seminar is graded using UNIL's standard grading scheme: 6 excellent - 5.5 very good - 5 good - 4.5 satisfactory - 4 pass - 3.5 fail - 3 poor - 2.5 very poor - 2 extremely poor - 1.5 almost no performance - 1 no performance - 0 absence with good cause, cheating or attempt to cheat.

## RETAKE ASSESSMENT

Re-examination procedure: Students can redo failed assessments, with the only exception that the first performance category (Prepare & Participate) obviously cannot be redone. The resits will be during the official resit examination period. The grade after resits will be calculated on the assessments that are redone along with the assessments that are not redone.