Discipline: Business Information Systems & Engineering

1   Title

Theory and Theorizing in Information Systems Research

2   Language

English: This course and all of the readings and materials used in the course will be in English. Also, students are expected to complete all assignments and pre-class preparation in English too.

3   Lecturer

Prof. Dr. **Benjamin Mueller**
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Prof. Dr. Benjamin Mueller is an Associate Professor of Digital Innovation and Design at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and an Associate Researcher at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany. He received his PhD from the EBS Business School in 2010 and holds master degrees in Business and Information Systems from EBS Business School (Oestrich-Winkel, Germany) and Georgia State University (Atlanta, GA, USA). Benjamin's research focuses on how advanced information and communication technologies transform organizations. He pays particular attention to mechanisms through which individuals use technology to innovate in their work and the corresponding organizational benefits. Complementary to that, he explores ethical and societal implications of digitalization and contributes the ongoing debate on theory and theorizing in IS. Benjamin has published over 90 peer-reviewed papers in outlets such as, for example, the MIS Quarterly, the Journal of Management Information Systems, the Journal of the Association for Information Systems, or the Journal of Business Research and the IS community's various conferences. Benjamin serves the IS community in various editorial capacities.

In relation to theory and theorizing, Benjamin is currently a mini-track co-chair for "Theory, Meta-analysis and Review" at HICSS. In the past, Benjamin served as a member of the editorial board of the Journal of the Association for Information systems, a co-chair of the "Foundations of IS Research: Theory, Methods, and Philosophy" track at ICIS 2017, and a co-chair of the "Advancing Theories and Theorizing in IS Research" track at ECIS (2014-2016).

4   Date and Platform

The course is designed as a fully virtual seminar, organized around a series of live online sessions. We will be using **Microsoft Teams** as a platform to host the live sessions and to enable continued engagement around the seminar's topics outside of the live interactions. I will be providing the team space and the necessary backend.

In comparison with a traditional on-premise seminar, the online version of the seminar differs in two regards: (1) The live sessions are slightly more focused to keep a reasonable limit to screen time on each seminar day. But to fully leverage the affordances of the new online format, we will be continuing key debates from the live sessions in the Team space outside the core class hours. This will allow you to participate in the class more flexibly. (2) The seminar is spread out across more dates, but each day will be a setup of two 90 minutes sessions grouped around the lunch break. The course's three content modules are *tentatively* allocated across the course days as follows. Adjustments in the allocation of these modules across the days might be necessary depending on group interests, speed, and level of interaction.

All the course sessions are hosted around the lunch break on the Fridays in October and November 2021 (except for October 15).

	October 01	*October 08*	*October 22*	*October 29*
11:00 - 12:30	Opening session and introductions	Module 1.1	Module 2.1	Module 2.3
14:00 - 15:30	Module 1.1	Module 1.2	Module 2.2	Module 2.x

	November 05	*November 12*	*November 19*	*November 26*
11:00 - 12:30	Module 2.4	Module 2.6	Module 3.1	Module 3.3
14:00 - 15:30	Module 2.5	Guest lecture	Module 3.2	Module 3.4

As the course progresses, we might selectively leverage additional tools / formats; specific instructions on these will be released in time.

5 Course Description

5.1 Abstract and Learning Objectives

The generation of knowledge is often seen as one of the key contributions of any science. Consequently, many scholars emphasize the centrality of theories for any scientific endeavor – a thought widely reflected in many disciplines from the natural to the social sciences. While a corresponding attention to theoretical work has been at the heart of the Information Systems (IS) discipline for a long time, the focus on theoretical debates and genuine conceptual contributions has been picking up recently. This is reflected by a number of special issues, journal sections, and conference tracks dedicated to advancing theory and theorizing in IS research just as much as in many authors' experiences during the reviews of their work.

The course "Theory and Theorizing in Information Systems Research" invites you to join the ongoing discourse on theories and theorizing in the Business and Information Systems Engineering (BISE) and Information Systems (IS) research communities. It is designed to help you build and extend your understanding of the nature and role of theory in BISE and IS research. Through discussions and analyses of current theoretical developments in the BISE and IS discipline, and some of its main reference disciplines, you will engage with theory and advance your skills of building their own theoretical contributions.

The course aims to achieve the following learning objectives: It is designed to help you …

(1) … build a foundational understanding of what theory is and what role it plays in research

(2) … develop basic theorizing skills and become familiar with extant theorizing strategies

(3) … understand the current state-of-the-art in theory and theorizing along with its limitations

(4) … develop strategies to publish your own theoretical contributions

Overall, the course is designed to facilitate the advancement of your understanding of theory and theorizing in the BISE / IS discipline and to enhance your theorizing skills related to your own research and thesis work.

Be advised that the course is not intended to be a comprehensive or normative prescription of how to engage with theory and theorizing in research. It is rather aimed at encouraging and empowering you to carefully pay attention to your own theoretical contribution and your engagement with the extant knowledge in the field. To do so, the course introduces and reviews the necessary foundations as well as current trends in the extant literature. This explicitly includes a critical reflection on the current state of theory in the IS and BISE field in order to help you advance the current debates on the nature and role of theory and theorizing.

5.2   Contents

The course "Theory and Theorizing in Information Systems Research" is organized around three main modules. **Module 1** introduces you to the foundations of theory by reflecting on and discussing some of the key sources in this context – from within the BISE/IS discipline as well as some of the discipline's reference fields. We will also look at different forms of theory and other refinements of the concept. **Module 2** focuses on the process of theorizing by contrasting different approaches to working with theory. The third module offers students insights into a number of current debates on theory and theorizing in the BISE/IS discipline by analyzing current discourses. This offers you an opportunity to better understand trends and potential future directions and will sensitize you towards opportunities for and approaches to crafting your own theoretical contributions beyond well-trodden paths. **Module 3** reflects on developing, conducting, writing up, and reviewing theory to complement and round off the course.

Please be advised: While the workload required to prepare for class is intense – especially in the weeks before the first live session – students are not expected to have read all of the materials listed below prior to class. Only the foundational readings printed in blue are mandatory literature for everyone. Please make sure that you allow yourselves enough time to prepare these readings. The work to be done on the papers printed in red will be distributed before class to reduce everyone's workload. Be advised that how much we will take away from each of the red papers assigned to you will depend in large parts on your preparation of the paper. Papers printed in black are examples / illustrations only and need not be prepared before class. Across all modules, each student will thus have to read 36 papers (see detailed instructions in 6.2 below), some of which are rather short editorials only and should be easy enough to read.

Module 1 - *the WHAT of theories* (**14**/**--**)

	Content	Readings
Module 1 – the WHAT of theories	**1.1 Constituents and forms**	• Bacharach (1989) • Bichler et al. (2016) • DiMaggio (1995) • Lee (2014) • Mueller and Urbach (2017) • Suddaby (2010) • Sutton and Staw (1995) • Weber (2003b)
	1.2 Refined perspectives	• Conceptual perspectives: Burton-Jones et al. (2015) • Forms of theory: Niederman and March (2019) • Types of theory: Gregor (2006) • Other theoretical artifacts: Shapira (2011) • Level issues: Klein et al. (1994) • Philosophical perspectives: Gioia and Pitre (1990)

Module 2 - **The *HOW* of theorizing (05/52)**

Content	Readings
2.1 Theorizing at a glance	• Mueller (forthcoming) • Ochara (2013) • Rivard (2021) • (Shepherd and Suddaby 2017) • Weick (1995)
2.2 Objects of theorizing	• Constructs (Osigweh 1989) • Causality (Durand and Vaara 2009) • Parts and wholes (Weber 2012) • Hypotheses (Lundberg 1976) • Mechanisms (Mingers and Standing 2017)
2.3 Theorizing revisited	• Burton-Jones et al. (2017) • Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) • Hassan et al. (2019) • Mueller and Raeth (2012) • Suddaby et al. (2011)
2.4 Literature reviews	• Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2015) • Larsen et al. (2019) • LePine and Wilcox-King (2010) • Schryen (2015) • Webster and Watson (2002) Examples: Besson and Rowe (2012), Ebner et al. (2016), Leidner and Kayworth (2006), Schryen (2010)
2.5 Theory building	• Inductive theorizing: (Locke 2007) • Case studies: (Tsang 2013) • Grounded theory: (Urquhart et al. 2010) • Ethnography: (Myers 1999) • "Pure" theory manuscripts: (Zmud 1998) Examples for "pure" theory manuscripts: Burton-Jones and Grange (2013), Carter and Grover (2015), Negoita et al. (2018), Nevo et al. (2016), Negoita et al. (2018), Vial and Rivard (2016)

Module 2 – The HOW of theorizing

Module 2 - **The *HOW* of theorizing** (cont.)

	Content	Readings

Module 2 – The HOW of theorizing	**2.6 Advanced theorizing**	Limits of the status quo
		• Scripts (Grover and Lyytinen 2015)
		• Philosophical foundations (Siponen and Klaavuniemi 2019)
		• Cultural issues (Barkema et al. 2015)
		• Lack of societal impact (Biggart 2016)
		
		Theory as blinders
		• Discourse (Holmström and Truex 2011)
		• Self-fulfilling (Ferraro et al. 2005)
		
		Knowledge fragmentation and accumulation
		• Hovorka et al. (2020)
		• Hovorka et al. (2013)
		
		Theory obsessions
		• Avison and Malaurent (2014b)
		   ○ Compeau and Olivera (2014)
		   ○ Gregor (2014)
		   ○ Markus (2014)
		   ○ Silverman (2014)
		   ○ Avison and Malaurent (2014a)
		• Dennis (2019)
		• Hirschheim (2019)

	2.x Theorizing strategies (virtual poster exhibition)	• Blending (Oswick et al. 2011) • Borrowing (Moeini et al. 2020) • Context (Hong et al. 2014) • Contrasting (Tsang and Ellsaesser 2011) • Design (Kuechler and Vaishnavi 2012) • Imagination (Weick 1989) • Mechanisms (Weber 2006) • Multi-paradigm (Lewis and Grimes 1999) • Paradox (Poole and van de Ven 1989) • Process data (Langley 1999) • Testing (Gregor and Klein 2014) • Typological theorizing (Delbridge and Fiss 2013) • Inductive top-down theorizing (Shepherd and Sutcliffe 2011) • Mystery (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007) • Simulations (Davis et al. 2007) • Thought experiments (Folger and Turilo 1999)

Module 3 - **Strategies for contribution (10/21)**

	Content	Readings
Module 3 – Strategies for	**3.1 Theoretical contribution**	• Ågerfalk (2014) • Corley and Gioia (2011) • Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997) (also: Boxenbaum and Rouleau 2011) • Rai (2017) • Whetten (1989)
	3.2 Making a contribution (mind map)	• Barrett and Walsham (2004) • Bartunek et al. (2006) • Baskerville et al. (2018) • Bergh (2003) • Chatterjee (2015) • Cloutier and Langley (2020) • Corley and Schinoff (2017) • Davis (1986) • Feldman (2004b) • Leidner (2020) • Rai (2017) • Rindova (2011) • Rynes (2002) • Thomas et al. (2011) • Weber (2003a) • Wright (2017)
	3.3 Writing up theory	• Barley (2006) • Cornelissen (2017) • Feldman (2004a) • Shaw (2017) • Pollock and Bono (2013) Some more advice on writing: • Grant and Pollock (2011) and the series that goes with it • Silvia (2007) or Sorenson (2002) for a bit of writing advice • Upper (1974) because you are not alone; and Huston (1998) for help
	3.4 Publishing theory	• Harley et al. (2014) • Lyytinen et al. (2007) • Rai (2019) • Rindova (2008) • Straub (2009)

5.3   Course format and assessment

Across the course, you will be actively involved through a variety of teaching formats. These include (but are not limited to) activities such as working on and presenting small in-class exercises (both individually as well as in small groups), presenting a small number of seminal papers from the list of readings, participating in ad-hoc discussion rounds as subject-matter experts on the literature you prepared prior to class, or sharing insights and experiences form you own work. Presentation formats and the roles you will be asked to play during discussion might differ to allow for variation in the teaching and interaction formats. This will help you foster critical engagement with theory and advance your understanding of how to craft and evaluate theoretical contributions – both your own as well as those of others.

To make this course format work, your preparation before class is essential. Most of this preparation will involve reading a set of papers assigned to each participant that need to be prepared before class. Through this preparation, a large portion of the workload for the course will occur **in the weeks before the actual course dates** (but do keep in mind that the virtual format stretches the course across multiple weeks). You will also be asked to prepare other things as well, such as short handouts or small presentations and a poster. Details on how to prepare are sketched out below and more specific instructions for all of the preparation necessary will be distributed in time before class.

Throughout the course, you will also be given an opportunity to reflect on the theoretical setup of your own research and to actively involve others into the discourse that is essential to the art and craft of making theoretical contributions.

Assessment is based on presentations of the red papers prepared before class and general class participation. If you who are required by your doctoral programs to obtain a grade (i.e., "Leistungsnachweis"), you will be given the opportunity to participate in a small take-home assignment after class. All students will be presented with a certificate of participation (i.e., "Teilnahmebescheinigung"). Both certificates show the credits obtained in the class.

6   Preparation and Literature

6.1   Prerequisites

The course does not come with any specific prerequisites, but a basic understanding of the research process in business and/or the social sciences is helpful.

The course welcomes doctoral students at all levels of their research and thesis projects and is open to students from any subject area or discipline. While most of the course's readings and

discussions focus on business and information systems engineering, management, and organization studies as subject areas, this provides only exemplary context. The course's core tenets can principally be translated to any discipline of business research.

All participants are expected to **read and prepare the assigned materials before class** and participate in the course's in-class discussions actively.

6.2   Essential Reading Materials

The list of modules presented in 5.2 above indicates the required readings that are regarded as essential for each of the modules. Full bibliographic details on the respective articles are provided at the end of this syllabus. For copyright reasons, you must obtain copies of these articles through your home institutions' database or journal subscriptions or through the general Internet. In case any article is not available that way, please contact the lecturer in due time so that alternative solutions can be found.

Given the breadth of the reading materials, **you are not expected to read all the papers listed in 5.2** prior to class. Please read the following instructions carefully to prepare for class:

The readings listed in section 5.2 fall into three categories: mandatory literature for all participants (printed in blue), articles that will be distributed across participants (printed in red), and additional examples or background that must not explicitly be prepared before class (printed in black). While everyone is expected to read all of the blue papers (29 in total), you will have to prepare no more than 7 of the red papers (73 in total) to present in class (depending on overall number of students registered / participating). The corresponding presentations are supposed to introduce the key issues from the readings to the rest of the class. In the subsequent discussions, you should then be able to act as 'subject matter experts' on those readings you prepared to help highlight how each reading advances theory and theorizing and to lead and facilitate the discussion on what your specific paper contributes to the respective module.

Based on feedback from previous years, you are also expected to develop a one-page handout for each of the red readings assigned to you (with the exception of those in modules 2.x and 3.2 where other formats of presentation and discussion will be used; instructions to be distributed before class). These handouts should provide other course participants with a brief summary and overview of the paper as well as the key lesson learned in terms of theory and theorizing. The handouts' design should also make it possible to use them as a support for your presentation of the materials in class and help facilitate the discussion of these materials. **Handouts for all the papers assigned to a student must be submitted to the lecturer on the Friday no later than 5 business days prior to the first day of class**.

Paper assignments and more detailed instructions will be distributed to you vie e-mail in time before class. Before the red papers are assigned, please start preparing the blue papers.

On an encouraging note: Due to the explicit focus on theory and theorizing, both aspects often treated rather implicitly in many scholarly papers, some of the assigned readings will be a bit difficult to read at first. Please do not be discouraged by this. During a previous year, one of the participants observed:

> "*The reading beforehand was quite difficult for me; it often felt like I was watching a Chinese movie* [the student in question not speaking any Chinese]. […] *Now that we are done* [i.e., on the last day of the course], *I feel as if I have been handed the subtitles to that movie to help me make sense of the language and plot*."

Accordingly, engage with every paper to the best of your ability (and with a critical eye on the time assigned for reading) and feel free to bring open issues and struggles to class – chances are that these will form an excellent basis for our discussion.

Of course, you are encouraged to look at all the papers before class, but a deeper engagement and preparation is only required as per the instructions above.

6.3 Additional Reading Material

During the course, you will be provided with additional recommendations on relevant literature that will help you advance and deepen your understanding of theory and theorizing in the business and information systems engineering discipline and beyond. You are not required to work with these additional materials as part of this class.

Similarly, the following textbooks are recommended to students to help them in their work. Some aspects of these books will be touched upon by the lecturer in class, but neither reading nor preparation is required.

- General introduction to philosophy of science: Godfrey-Smith (2003)
- Exemplary theories and their evolution: Smith and Hitt (2009)
- Overview of prominent IS theories: Dwivedi et al. (2011)
- Theory construction and model building: Jaccard and Jacoby (2010)
- Basic tools for conceptual reasoning: Baggini and Fosl (2010)
- Academic writing and publishing: Huff (1999)
- Advise on writing convincing arguments: Weston (2009)
- General writing advice: Strunk and White (1999)

7   Administration

7.1   <u>Maximum number of participants</u>: 16

7.2   <u>Assignments</u>

Across the course, you are expected to conduct in-class presentations of the mandatory readings assigned to you. Presentation formats may vary, detailed instructions will be provided in time before the course takes place. You are required to prepare 1-page summaries of the red readings assigned to you which can be distributed in class later (as per the instructions above).

On top of this, you will engage in small in-class exercises and present the results to the class. For instance, you may be asked to draw out the most important theoretical schools / streams of theoretical discourse in your research domain and present the result to the class.

7.3   <u>Exam</u> (if required)

After class, students who must obtain a grade (i.e., "Leistungsnachweis") will be assigned a take-home assignment to be completed within four weeks of the last day of the course. The exact format and content of this assignment will be revealed to students who have to obtain a grade on the last day of the course.

As discussed previously, this examination is only required if students must obtain a grade for the course ("Leistungsnachweis"). In cases where doctoral programs do not require a grade, students can also opt to obtain a certificate for participation ("Teilnahmebescheinigung"). Given the substantial workload for the course, <u>any documentation will always identify the ECTS credits the course is worth</u>.

7.4   <u>Credits</u>: **6 ECTS**

7.5   <u>Exemplary allocation of working hours</u>

Activities	Hours
Reading and preparation of assigned literature	**120**
Preparation of handouts, presentations, and posters	**32**
Active participation in the live sessions	**24**
Presentation of papers (based on handouts and posters)	**4**
Total	**180**

8   Detailed Bibliography

Ågerfalk, P.J. 2014. "Insufficient Theoretical Contribution: A Conclusive Rationale for Rejection?," *European Journal of Information Systems* (23:6), pp. 593-599.

Alvesson, M., and Kärreman, D. 2007. "Constructing Mystery: Empirical Matters in Theory Development," *Academy of Management Review* (32:4), pp. 1265-1281.

Avison, D., and Malaurent, J. 2014a. "Is Theory King? A Rejoinder," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 358-361.

Avison, D., and Malaurent, J. 2014b. "Is Theory King? Questioning the Theory Fetish in Information Systems," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 327-336.

Bacharach, S.B. 1989. "Organizational Theories: Some Criteria for Evaluation," *Academy of Management Review* (14:4), pp. 496-515.

Baggini, J., and Fosl, P.S. 2010. *The Philosopher's Toolkit - a Compendium of Philosophical Concepts and Methods*, (2. ed.). Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

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Barley, S.R. 2006. "When I Write My Masterpiece: Thoughts on What Makes a Paper Interesting," *Academy of Management Journal* (49:1), pp. 16-20.

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Boxenbaum, E., and Rouleau, L. 2011. "New Knowledge Products as Bricolage: Metaphors and Scripts in Organizational Theory," *Academy of Management Review* (36:2), pp. 272-296.

Burton-Jones, A., and Grange, C. 2013. "From Use to Effective Use: A Representation Theory Perspective," *Information Systems Research* (24:3), pp. 632-658.

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Carter, M., and Grover, V. 2015. "Me, My Self, and I(T): Conceptualizing Information Technology Identity and Its Implications," *MIS Quarterly* (39:4), pp. 931-957.

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Cloutier, C., and Langley, A. 2020. "What Makes a Process Theoretical Contribution?," *Organization Theory* (1:1), pp. 1-32.

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