



**University of  
Zurich** <sup>UZH</sup>

**Distinguished Scholars Seminar Series**

**“Practices, Processes, Routines and Institutions: Relating and Researching”**

**Prof. Richard Whittington, University of Oxford**

**Course code:** DOEC0907 (3ECTS)

**Time:** April 21st to 23rd, 2020

**Room:** PLM-1-103/104, Plattenstrasse 14

**Contact:** Violetta Splitter ([Violetta.Splitter@uzh.ch](mailto:Violetta.Splitter@uzh.ch))

These four seminars will relate practice theory to other adjacent traditions in Strategic Management and Organization Theory – specifically process approaches, routines and institutional theory - all with an eye to the practicalities of research and publication. In particular, we will discuss overlaps between traditions, distinctive strengths (and weaknesses) and synergistic research opportunities. Practices, processes, routines and institutions are all concepts that any strategy and organization scholar will have to engage with very frequently, whether as teachers, reviewers or researchers. For those specifically researching within one of these traditions, I hope that the seminars will help you both to position your research in the field and to affirm with confidence your consequent methodological choices.

Please come along ready to share your own research projects and dilemmas with us all. I ask you also to read (or reread!) the four highlighted ‘key’ articles *before* we first meet: these should help you to frame relevant issues for us to discuss right at the start. You should at least skim-read the remaining articles in order to gain a more general orientation. Some of you will be asked to discuss these other articles in detail, as parts of the more specific ‘jobs to be done’ for each seminar - depending on circumstances, these will be either allocated before we meet or on a more ad hoc basis as we go along. You should also arrive at each session with one tough (and significant) question for group discussion.

This course is somewhat exploratory for me, so we may change it a little as we go along. Looking forward to working together on this!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Whittington'.

[Richard.whittington@sbs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.whittington@sbs.ox.ac.uk)

## Schedule & Reading List

**Tuesday, April 21**

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**9:00-12:00**

### **1. Practice theory and the Processual Approach**

We'll begin this session by introducing our current research and key dilemmas. We shall build on these presentations to discuss whether and where your research fits into the Langley and Tsoukas (2016) 2x2 matrix. We will go on to discuss the relationship between practice theory and the processual approach (what do you particularly associate with each?) and put our 'tough questions' for the session on the table.

Reading:

**Langley, A. and Tsoukas, H. eds., 2016. Introduction: The SAGE Handbook of Process Organization Studies, 1-26. Sage (key reading).**

Burgelman, R.A., Floyd, S.W., Laamanen, T., Mantere, S., Vaara, E. and Whittington, R., 2018. Strategy processes and practices: Dialogues and intersections. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(3), pp.531-558.

Whittington, R., 2007. Strategy practice and strategy process: family differences and the sociological eye. *Organization Studies*, 28(10), pp.1575-1586.

*Job:* Regarding the other two articles (Burgelman et al, 2018, and Whittington, 2007), can you tabulate the overlaps and distinctions between practice theory research, weak process theory research and strong process theory research?

PS: If you need a refresher on practice theory, read Sandberg J and Tsoukas H. 2018, Practice Theory What It Is, Its Philosophical Base, and What It Offers Organization Studies, in Tsoukas, *Philosophical Organization Theory*, Oxford University Press.

**14:00-17:00**

### **1. Practices and Routines**

We'll start by discussing the extent to which practice theory and routine theory overlap, and where in particular they can learn from each other: can we construct a table comparing them? Then we'll consider whether routines (and practice) theory offer a route into the more mainstream strategic management literature, as represented here by Teece (2016). There should be some 'tough questions' here.

Reading:

**Pentland, B.T. and Hærem, T., 2015. Organizational routines as patterns of action: Implications for organizational behavior. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.*, 2(1), pp.465-487. (key reading).**

Feldman, M.S., D'Adderio, L., Dittrich, K. and Jarzabkowski, P., 2019. Introduction: Routine Dynamics in Action. In *Routine Dynamics in Action: Replication and Transformation* (pp. 1-10). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Teece, D.J., 2016. Dynamic capabilities and entrepreneurial management in large organizations: Toward a theory of the (entrepreneurial) firm. *European Economic Review*, 86, pp.202-216

*Job:* Consider instances of the use of routine by Teece (2016); how does his conception of routine differ, for instance, from Pentland and Haerem's (2015)? In what specific domains of strategy could routine theory be applied to understanding key issues in strategic management?

## **Wednesday, April 22nd**

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**9:00-12:00**

### **3. Practices and Institutions**

Institutional theory too talks about practices and routines. We shall ask which concepts the three fields share and which concepts are distinctive. My tough question is: does practice theory *need* institutional theory (you can see where I'm coming from in my chapter below)? What is your tough question?

Reading:

**Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Lawrence, T.B. and Meyer, R.E. eds., 2017. Introduction: Into the Fourth Decade, *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*. Sage (key article).**

Smets, M., Aristidou, A. and Whittington, R., 2017. Towards a practice-driven institutionalism. *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, p.365.

Whittington R, 2019, *Opening Strategy: Professional Strategists and Practice Change, 1960 to Today*, OUP: Chapter 2. Pp. 22-54.

*Job:* Can we add an extra institutional theory column to the table begun in session 2? What does practice theory imply for institutional research and what does institutional theory bring to practice research (can we specify three things for each)?

**13:00-16:00**

### **4. Researching Practices, Processes, Routines and Institutions**

In a controversial but likely influential contribution, Aguinis and Solarino (2019) have proposed various criteria for qualitative research. My tough questions to you all are: to what extent does your research meet these criteria; and what research strategy will you adopt for dealing with reviewers who may have these criteria in mind?

Reading:

**Aguinis, H. and Solarino, A.M., 2019. Transparency and replicability in qualitative research: The case of interviews with elite informants. *Strategic Management Journal*. 40, 8, 1291-1315 (key article)**

Kouamé, S. and Langley, A., 2018. Relating microprocesses to macro-outcomes in qualitative strategy process and practice research. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(3), pp.559-581

Pratt, M.G., Kaplan, S. and Whittington, R., 2019. Editorial Essay: The Tumult over Transparency: Decoupling Transparency from Replication in Establishing Trustworthy Qualitative Research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, p.0001839219887663.

*Job:* How does Whittington (2019) relate microprocesses to macro outcomes, in Kouamé and Langley's terms. If I had taken one of the alternative approaches, how would my research on Strategy look different (you might want to skim some of the rest of *Opening Strategy*)?

### **Thursday, April 23**

**9-16h**

Individual feedback and paper discussions (tbd.)

## **Applications**

If you are interested in participating in the seminar, please send an application with your motivation and your CV to Kalliopi Vagias ([kalliopi.vagias@uzh.ch](mailto:kalliopi.vagias@uzh.ch)). Deadline for applications is **March 31st, 2020**. After you have received a confirmation of participation you can book the course in the module booking system (for UZH members only).

## **Course Requirements for ECTS**

If you require ECTS for this seminar, we ask you to submit either (1) a synthesis of the course content or (2) a reflection on how the notions discussed in class help advance your own research project (10-pages, 1.5 line spacing, Times New Roman). Deadline for submission of the essay is **May 31, 2020**, to be sent to Violetta Splitter ([violetta.splitter@uzh.ch](mailto:violetta.splitter@uzh.ch)).