



**University of
Zurich^{UZH}**

University of Zurich | Chair of Organization & Management

Distinguished Scholars Seminar Series

**Theorizing and Writing Qualitative Work:
From Field Materials to Theoretical Contribution**

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Professor of Organization Theory

The Hebrew University Business School, Jerusalem, Israel

Course code: DOEC1102

Lecturer: Prof. Tammar B. Zilber

Dates: September 26-28, 2023

Time: 9-16h

Address and Room: tba.

Language: English

Contact person: Benjamin Hensel (Benjamin.hensel@business.uzh.ch)

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

In this workshop, I aim to offer a birds-eye understanding of *theorizing*, *writing*, and *publishing* qualitative research while actively applying this knowledge on your research projects through hands-on exercises.

Doing qualitative research is challenging, and many find the move from rich field materials to interpretations and analysis to theorizing and theoretical contribution especially so. *Theorization* and *writing* up our findings will be the focus of our course. We will try to be concrete as possible and follow in detail the entire process. Why is a theory so critical? Should we think of theory or theorizing? What is the role of theory in the research process? How do we move between known theories, field materials, interpreting, analyzing, and theorizing them? When should we start writing, and how to write qualitative research and publish it, that is, succeed in contributing to the literature? These questions will be at the heart of our discussions.

We will mix between lecturing sessions, doing and sharing personal exercises, and round table discussions. I will also share practical examples from my research and writing. As you would be busy with guided activities concerning your research projects in the afternoon sessions, I will also be happy to meet one-on-one to discuss them.

The course is designed for Ph.D. students in any stage of their research journey – planning to start a qualitative research project, working in the midst of data collection, already analyzing the field materials, or working on writing up the draft of a dissertation or a paper.

Please bring your laptops (for the exercises) and have in mind your qualitative projects to discuss during the seminar. I will invite you to think and rethink with the group about your own theorizing and writing while discussing the ideas and examples we will share in the classroom.

Intended Learning Objective

- Acquire a critical understanding of theory and theorizing (and how different they are from analysis and interpretation) in the context of qualitative research.
- Learn diverse ways to theorize qualitative materials per various qualitative research designs and analysis and interpretation methods.
- Train in approaching theoretical positioning and connecting theorizing findings with relevant literature.
- Learn how to move between field materials and theoretical contributions through various layers of theorizing (analysis, interpretation, analytic argument, and analytic generalization).
- Gain a critical understanding of academic publishing and its relevance to your research and writing.

Pre-course work:

1. Please read all the assigned (marked*) articles before class. I included additional readings in each topic if any of these ignite your curiosity and you have the time.
2. Please bring to class your laptops so you can use them for the exercises.
3. Please bring to class a project at its interpretation and analysis stage, and/or at its writing stage based on empirical data you collected or are still collecting. E.g., a text or as-yet-only-an-idea (based on field materials) that you are developing or planning to develop into a paper.
4. Please search, identify, and bring to class a published article that (a) was published in an outlet in which you would like to publish and is (b) similar enough to your own writing project. It does not need to be similar in terms of the case study or theory, but it should be similar in its deep structure. E.g., if you hope to develop a process argument, find a published paper that offers a process model.

About the Course Leader

I am interested in institutional dynamics – how ways of organizing are embedded within and affect institutions, which are broadly shared beliefs and understandings, embedded in materials, structures, and practices. I use ethnographic and qualitative methods to connect macro-level cultural ideas and understandings with micro-level thought and action by people and organizations. For example, I studied a rape crisis center and how its practices were anchored in feminist and therapeutic world views; the Israeli hi-tech industry and how it coped with the burst of the dot-com bubble of the year 2000, given its core beliefs in globalization, modernity, and technology; and the ways ethnographies are represented and written in top tier outlets in our field, given specific understandings of science. I spent my entire career (so far) within one academic institution – the Hebrew University – moving from Psychology to Anthropology and finally landing at the Hebrew University Business School. Still, I have also been a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley, MIT, Boston College, and UC San Diego, a research fellow at Gothenburg University, and a teaching fellow at Copenhagen Business School. I published ethnographic and qualitative work in leading journals, including the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*, and *Journal of Management Inquiry*. I served as an Associate Editor at the *Academy of Management Journal* and on the EGOS board. I am now a Senior Editor at *Organization Studies* and will serve as its co-Editor-in-Chief from September 2023.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

DAY 1 (Tuesday, September 26, 2023)

9:00-12:00 Context I: Theorization and the research process

- Who are you, and what do you study
- Who I am, and what I would like you to achieve in this seminar? (Objectives & Plan)
- What is theory? Why "theory is king": Communicating through theory
- The role of theorizing in qualitative research
- From theory to theorizing to theoretical contribution (and publishing)
- Tensions between the spiral process of research and the linear process of discussing it

13:00-16:00 Positioning yourself in a theoretical conversation

- Three layers of reading prior research:
 - "Vertical" reading
 - "Horizontal" reading
 - Reading for "relevance"
- Hands-on exercise and one-on-one meetings with Tammar

Reading for Day 1

- Colquitt, J. A., & Zapata-Phelan, C. P. (2007). Trends in theory building and theory testing: A five-decade study of the Academy of Management Journal. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6), 1281–1303.
- Hambrick, D. C. (2007). The field of management's devotion to theory: Too much of a good thing? *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6), 1346–1352.
- Kesting, P. (2023). What theory is—A late reply to Sutton and Staw 1995. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 39(2), 101–273.
- *Locke, K., Golden-Biddle, K., & Feldman, M. S. (2008). Perspective—Making doubt generative: Rethinking the role of doubt in the research process. *Organization Science*, 19(6), 907–918.
- Sutton, R. I., & Staw, B. M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 371–384.
- Sandberg, J., & Alvesson, M. (2021). Meanings of theory: Clarifying theory through typification. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(2), 487–516.
- Shepherd, D. A., & Suddaby, R. (2017). Theory building: A review and integration. *Journal of Management*, 43(1), 59–86.
- *Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167–186.
- *Weick, Karl E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review* 14, 516–531.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). What theory is not, theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3), 385–390.
- Weick, K. E. (1999). That's moving theories that matter. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 8(2), 134–142.
- *Zilber, T.B., & Meyer, R.E. (2022). Positioning and fit in designing and executing qualitative research. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 58(3): 377–392.

DAY 2 (Wednesday, September 27, 2023)

9:00-12:00 Between field materials and theoretical contribution

- Possible interpretative moves: Answering questions (why, when, how, who, etc.)
- Three analytical approaches: Categorical, comparative, processual
- The "great leap": Moving from valid meaning to their significance

13:00-16:00 From meaning to significance

- From phenomenon through description to an interpretative and analytical argument
- From an interpretative and analytical argument to theorization
- Theorization and visualization: Theoretical models
- From multiple arguments to a one-point-paper
- Hands-on exercise and one-on-one meetings with Tammar

Reading for Day 2

- Cornelissen, J. P. (2006). Making sense of theory construction: Metaphor and disciplined imagination. *Organization Studies*, 27(11), 1579–1597.
- *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*, 54(3), 368–383.
- Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2018). Finding theory–method fit: A comparison of three qualitative approaches to theory building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 27(3), 284–300.
- Howard-Grenville, J., Nelson, A., Vough, H., & Zilber, T. B. (2021). From the editors—Achieving fit and avoiding misfit in qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 64(5), 1313-1323.
- *Klag, M., & Langley, A. (2013). Approaching the conceptual leap in qualitative research. *International Journal of Management |Reviews*, 15(2), 149–166.
- Langley, A., & Ravasi, D. (2019). Visual artifacts as tools for analysis and theorizing. In *The production of managerial knowledge and organizational theory: New approaches to writing, producing and consuming theory* (Vol. 59, pp. 173-199). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- 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.
- Mees-Buss, J., Welch, C., & Piekkari, R. (2022). From templates to heuristics: How and why to move beyond the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(2), 405-429.
- Parmentier-Cajaiba, A., & Cajaiba-Santana, G. (2020). Visual maps for process research: Displaying the invisible. *M@n@gement*, 23(4), 65-79.
- Pradies, C., Berti, M., Pina e Cunha, M., Rego, A., Tunarosa, A., & Clegg, S. (2023). A figure is worth a thousand words: The role of visualization in paradox theorizing. *Organization Studies*, 01708406231161998.
- Prasad, A. (2023). What’s up with our obsession with the theoretical contribution: A means to an end or an end in and of itself?. *Organization*, 13505084231183079.
- von Nordenflycht, A. (2023). Clean up Your Theory! Invest in Theoretical Clarity and Consistency for Higher-Impact Research. *Organization Science*.

DAY 3 (Thursday, September 28, 2023)

9:00-12:00 Writing as a method of inquiry

- When to start writing?
- Where to start?
- Reviewing, friendly and otherwise
- Writing and rewriting

13:00-16:00 Publishing

- How to start writing? Using templates and modelling
- Hands-on exercise and one-on-one meetings with Tammar

Reading for Day 3

Cloutier, C. (2016). How I write: An inquiry into the writing practices of academics. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 25(1), 69-84.

Cloutier, C., & Ravasi, D. (2021). Using tables to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, 19(1), 113-133.

Golden-Biddle, K., & Locke, K. (2006). *Composing qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Golden-Biddle, K., Locke, K., & Reay, T. (2006). Using knowledge in management studies: An investigation of how we cite prior work. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(3), 237-254.

Katila, S., Laamanen, M., Laihonen, M., Lund, R., Meriläinen, S., Rinkinen, J., & Tienari, J. (2020). Becoming academics: embracing and resisting changing writing practice. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 15(3), 315-330.

Kiriakos, C. M., & Tienari, J. (2018). Academic writing as love. *Management Learning*, 49(3), 263-277.

Langley, A., & Klag, M. (2019). Being where? Navigating the involvement paradox in qualitative research accounts. *Organizational research methods*, 22(2), 515-538.

Mandard, M. (2022). On the shoulders of giants? Motives to cite in management research. *European Management Review*, 19(1), 10-21.

Pratt, M. (2009). For the lack of a boilerplate: tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5): 856-862.

Ober, H., Simon, S. I., & Elson, D. (2013). Five simple rules to avoid plagiarism. *Annals of biomedical engineering*, 41(1), 1-2.

*Reay, T., Zafar, A., Monteiro, P., & Glaser, V. (2019). Presenting findings from qualitative research: One size does not fit all! In *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, Vol. 59 (Special issue on The production of managerial knowledge and organizational theory: New approaches to writing, producing and consuming theory), pp. 201–216.

Richardson, L. (1998). Writing: A method of inquiry. In: Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research: Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (345-371). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Thomson, P. Blog on Academic writing <https://patthomson.net/>

Weatherall, R. (2023). If on a summer's day a researcher: the implied author and the implied reader in writing differently. *Culture and Organization*, 1-16.

Zilber, T. B., & Zanoni, P. (2022). Templates of ethnographic writing in organization studies: Beyond the hegemony of the detective story. *Organizational research methods*, 25(2), 371-404.

Zilber, T. B., Amis, J. M., & Mair, J. (2019). Dismantling the Master's House Using the Master's Tools 1: On the Sociology of Organizational Knowledge. In *The Production of Managerial Knowledge and Organizational Theory: New Approaches to Writing, Producing and Consuming Theory* (pp. 1-19). Emerald Publishing Limited.

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). **Deadline for applications is August 31, 2023.** After you have received a confirmation of participation you can book the course in the module booking system (for UZH members only; please note that the booking system closed in October, so early application is necessary).

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) an updated narrative of your current stage of theorizing and writing, including a reflection on how the content discussed in class help advance your own research project (10-pages, 1.5 line spacing, Times New Roman). Deadline for submission is **November 30, 2023.**