

Current Topics in Management and Business Ethics:

**Tackling Grand Challenges: Understanding the Role of
Management, Organizations, and Institutions**

Universität Zürich
September 8-11 and 16-18, 2020

Location:

To be held virtually and synchronously via Zoom

Instructor:

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Registration:

Register for this doctoral seminar by sending an email with your CV and a short motivation letter to Florian Überbacher (florian.ueberbacher@business.uzh.ch) until August 15, 2020. We will evaluate registration requests on a first-come, first-served basis (due to the GSB regulations, UZH doctoral students have priority). The workshop is worth 3 ECTS points.

For questions regarding the seminar content, contact Joel Gehman (jgehman@ualberta.ca).

OVERVIEW

This is a doctoral-level seminar, designed to provide students with an introduction to management research on *grand challenges*—“formulations of global problems that can be plausibly addressed through coordinated and collaborative effort” (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016: 1880). Notably, George and colleagues (2016: 1881) argue that grand challenges implicate “specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation.” In other words, grand challenges can be seen as an umbrella term for capturing a host of topics, including corporate sustainability and the sustainable development goals (SDGs); climate change and transitions to renewable energy; migration and human rights; gender equality and access to financial services; affordable healthcare and poverty alleviation; preserving biodiversity; protecting against financial crises; and many others. This course will explore the role of management, organizations, and institutions in both supporting and thwarting progress towards goals such as these. In doing so, we aim to examine these topics both theoretically and practically. The course is most useful for doctoral students seeking to learn more about the topic of grand challenges with an eye to engaging this work as a theoretical foundation, conceptual framing, or empirical setting for their own research. The course is open to interdisciplinary perspectives both from within business schools (e.g., accounting, finance, management, etc.) and allied fields such as economics or sociology. Students should be comfortable engaging in critical and appreciative discussions of published journal articles including issues such as theoretical positioning, research design, qualitative and quantitative methods, and overall contributions.

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

September 8-11, 14:00 to 17:00 Zurich / 6:00 to 9:00 Edmonton

Tuesday	Session 1: What’s in a Name? From Problems to Challenges
Wednesday	Session 2: Complexity and Scale
Thursday	Session 3: Relationality and Institutions
Friday	Session 4: Student Presentations and Related Discussion

September 16-18, 14:00 to 17:00 Zurich / 6:00 to 9:00 Edmonton

Wednesday	Session 5: Temporality and Performativity
Thursday	Session 6: Student Presentations and Related Discussion
Friday	Session 7: Research Design Considerations

Individual advising available by request at mutually agreeable days and times.

COURSE FORMAT

The course is organized as a research seminar. In each session we will discuss the assigned articles. Our discussion will be descriptive, critical, and appreciative. In the descriptive mode we examine what the author(s) intended to accomplish and why. In the critical mode we will evaluate how well the author(s) did what they set out to do. In the appreciative mode we will ponder what's next in this line of research and in this general topic area. Thus, beyond an in-depth understanding of the assigned articles we will devote time to raising and discussing new research questions. For this course to be valuable, it is essential that all students read the assigned papers (generally 4 papers per 3-hour class session). My expectation is that you will be an active participant not only in your learning, but also that of your peers. My role is not to lecture, but rather to guide and facilitate the discussion and to provide context and clarification as needed.

You may find it helpful to consider questions such as the following when reading each paper:

1. What is the basic argument/point made by the author(s)? What are its strengths?
2. What are the weaknesses of the argument, and/or the empirical method?
3. If you disagree with an argument or method, what would it take to convince you?
4. What are the scope conditions? Under what circumstances does the argument apply?
5. What modifications would be necessary to extend the argument? Are there critical differences between these authors' arguments and those of others we have read?
6. Can these differences be resolved through an empirical test or something else?
7. What alternative explanations can account for the findings of the authors?

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Discussion comments and questions.

Before class sessions 2, 3, 5, and 7, you will make a post of (100-300 words) about the required readings to a shared course document. Your posting should contain 2-3 questions that you would like to see addressed during the discussion and a brief comment on them. The questions can be about a specific paper, about the general theme of the day, or about connections with other research from this course, or even connections to other research that you find exciting. This can include clarifications, apparent gaps, applications and implications of the ideas, or anything else that you would like to discuss. You can add your post to the shared document as early as you like, but make sure that it is completed no later than midnight Zurich time the day before the relevant class session. For instance, for our September 9 class session, make your post by midnight (24:00) Zurich time on September 8.

2. A working paper or proposal for an empirical research project.

Each student will have the opportunity to present an idea you are working on or that you would like to work on. This can take the form of a full paper (not more than 40 pages) or can be as brief as a short proposal for an empirical study (of 10 or so pages in length). In either case, the point of this assignment is not only to reflect the material covered in class, but to further your own research agenda. Namely, your proposal should minimally pose a new research question and describe how you would go about answering it. Lay out your conceptual argument and research question in the first 4-6 pages of the proposal, and then spend the rest of the document describing how you would conduct a research project to address your question(s). Each student will formally present their paper or proposal in either Session 4 or 6. The presentation slots will be agreed to beforehand. Note: this assignment is only required if you wish to receive ECTS points.

GRADING

This course will be graded pass/fail. To receive a passing grade, you must come to all classes having read the assigned articles and engage in the discussions, as appropriate. I do not necessarily expect everyone to talk about every article, but you should be prepared to make your fair share of contributions. You also must make a cogent presentation of your work during one of the presentation sessions. This includes laying out a research question, providing a motivation as to why this is a problem worth exploring theoretically and practically, identifying how you will conduct your research, and explaining why this is an adequate design given your questions. If you have not yet conducted your study, what do you think it might contribute to our knowledge of the topic? If you are farther along, what have you learned thus far and what contributions are emerging? To facilitate grading, you will turn in a copy of the presentation slides utilized during your presentation and/or the paper or proposal on which it was based.

OTHER DETAILS

The course will be held virtually and synchronously (i.e., live) via Zoom. Once registered, students will receive an invitation with instructions for connecting. Additionally, a cloud-based folder with all course readings will be shared in advance of the course. I am expecting all participants to connect with your video cameras “on” so that we can see each other and create the same kind of feel as during a regular classroom-based seminar to the extent possible. Please make arrangements so that you are in a setting where you are not distracted and where your face is reasonably well lit so we can all see you. Depending on your circumstances, you may need to have a headset so that your microphone clearly picks up your voice and background noise is minimized. I realize that it is tempting to try multitasking. I am asking that you close any unnecessary applications and give your full attention to this course during the scheduled class sessions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank Andreas Scherer for inviting me to deliver this seminar. Second, I want to acknowledge the work of Shaz Ansari and Don Lange who delivered prior versions of this seminar and from whose syllabi I have borrowed various elements in designing the structure and assignments for this course. Third, I want to thank various scholars who provided me with inspiration, comments, or suggestions as I was developing this syllabus, including: Andreas Scherer, Florian Überbacher, Corinna Frey-Heger, Ali Gümüşay, Barbara Gray, Ralph Hamann, and Paula Jarzabkowski.

READINGS

Session 1: From (Wicked) Problems to (Grand) Challenges

Required Readings

1. Rittel & Webber. 1973. Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4: 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01405730>.
2. Trist. 1983. Referent Organizations and the Development of Inter-Organizational Domains. *Human Relations*, 36: 269–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678303600304>.
3. George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi. 2016. Understanding and Tackling Societal Grand Challenges through Management Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1880–1895. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4007>.
4. Kaldewey. 2018. The Grand Challenges Discourse: Transforming Identity Work in Science and Science Policy. *Minerva*, 56: 161–182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-017-9332-2>.

Optional Readings

- Ackoff. 1981. The Art and Science of Mess Management. *Interfaces*, 11: 20–26. <https://doi.org/10.1287/inte.11.1.20>.
- Dietz, Ostrom, & Stern. 2003. The Struggle to Govern the Commons. *Science*, 302: 1907–1912. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1091015>.
- Dorado & Ventresca. 2013. Crescive Entrepreneurship in Complex Social Problems: Institutional Conditions for Entrepreneurial Engagement. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 28: 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2012.02.002>.
- Emery & Trist. 1965. The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments. *Human Relations*, 18: 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872676501800103>.
- Hardin. 1968. The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science*, 162: 1243–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.162.3859.1243>.
- Reinecke & Ansari. 2016. Taming Wicked Problems: The Role of Framing in the Construction of Corporate Social Responsibility. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53: 299–329. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12137>.
- Wry & Haugh. 2018. Brace for Impact: Uniting Our Diverse Voices through a Social Impact Frame. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 33: 566–574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.04.010>.

Session 2: Complexity and Scale

Required Readings

1. Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman. 2015. Tackling Grand Challenges Pragmatically: Robust Action Revisited. *Organization Studies*, 36: 363–390.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840614563742>.
2. Bansal, Kim, & Wood. 2018. Hidden in Plain Sight: The Importance of Scale in Organizations' Attention to Issues. *Academy of Management Review*, 43: 217–241. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0238>
3. Mair, Wolf, & Seelos. 2016. Scaffolding: A Process of Transforming Patterns of Inequality in Small-Scale Societies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 2021–2044. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0725>.
4. Porter, Tuertscher, & Huysman. 2019. Saving Our Oceans: Scaling the Impact of Robust Action Through Crowdsourcing. *Journal of Management Studies*, In press.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12515>.

Optional Readings

- Bowen, Bansal, & Slawinski. 2018. Scale Matters: The Scale of Environmental Issues in Corporate Collective Actions. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39: 1411–1436.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2764>.
- Etzion, Gehman, Ferraro, & Avidan. 2017. Unleashing Sustainability Transformations through Robust Action. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 140: 167–178.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.06.064>.
- Kim & Davis. 2016. Challenges for Global Supply Chain Sustainability: Evidence from Conflict Minerals Reports. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1896–1916.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0770>.
- Padgett & Ansell. 1993. Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98: 1259–1319.

Session 3: Relationality and Institutions

Required

1. Gray & Purdy. 2018. *Collaborating for Our Future. Multistakeholder Partnerships for Solving Complex Problems*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 2 and 3.
2. Westley & Vredenburg. 1997. Interorganizational Collaboration and the Preservation of Global Biodiversity. *Organization Science*, 8: 381–403. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.8.4.381>.
3. Zhao & Wry. 2016. Not All Inequality Is Equal: Deconstructing the Societal Logic of Patriarchy to Understand Microfinance Lending to Women. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1994–2020. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0476>.
4. Georgallis, Dowell & Durand. 2019. Shine on Me: Industry Coherence and Policy Support for Emerging Industries. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 64: 503–541. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839218771550>.

Optional

- Berrone, Gelabert, Massa-Saluzzo, & Rousseau. 2016. Understanding Community Dynamics in the Study of Grand Challenges: How Nonprofits, Institutional Actors, and the Community Fabric Interact to Influence Income Inequality. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1940–1964. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0746>.
- Cobb, Wry, & Zhao. 2016. Funding Financial Inclusion: Institutional Logics and the Contextual Contingency of Funding for Microfinance Organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 2103–31. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0715>.
- Etzion & Ferraro. 2010. The Role of Analogy in the Institutionalization of Sustainability Reporting. *Organization Science*, 21: 1092–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0494>.
- Gehman, Lounsbury, & Greenwood. 2016. How Institutions Matter: From the Micro Foundations of Institutional Impacts to the Macro Consequences of Institutional Arrangements.” In *How Institutions Matter!* (Gehman, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, eds.). Research in the Sociology of Organizations, 48A:1–34.
- Gray & Stites. 2013. Sustainability through Partnerships: A Systematic Review. <https://www.nbs.net/articles/sustainability-through-partnerships-a-systematic-review>.
- Vakili & McGahan. 2016. Health Care’s Grand Challenge: Stimulating Basic Science on Diseases That Primarily Afflict the Poor. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1917–1939. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0641>.

Session 5: Temporality and Processes

Required

1. Garud & Gehman. Metatheoretical Perspectives on Sustainability Journeys: Evolutionary, Relational and Durational. *Research Policy* 41: 980–95.
2. Wright & Nyberg. 2016. An Inconvenient Truth: How Organizations Translate Climate Change into Business as Usual. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60: 1633–1661. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0718>.
3. Howard-Grenville, Nelson, Earle, Haack, & Young. 2017. “If Chemists Don’t Do It, Who Is Going To?” Peer-Driven Occupational Change and the Emergence of Green Chemistry. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 62: 524–560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839217690530>.
4. Kim, Bansal, & Haugh. 2019. No Time Like the Present: How a Present Time Perspective Can Foster Sustainable Development. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62: 607–634. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1295>.

Optional

- de la Chaux, Haugh, & Royston Greenwood. 2018. Organizing Refugee Camps: “Respected Space” and “Listening Posts.” *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 4:155–179. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0040>.
- Grodal & O’Mahony. 2017. How Does a Grand Challenge Become Displaced? Explaining the Duality of Field Mobilization. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60: 1801–1827. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0890>.
- Slawinski, N., & Bansal, P. (2012). A Matter of Time: The Temporal Perspectives of Organizational Responses to Climate Change. *Organization Studies*, 33(11), 1537–1563. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612463319>.
- Williams & Shepherd. 2016. Building Resilience or Providing Sustenance: Different Paths of Emergent Ventures in the Aftermath of the Haiti Earthquake. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 2069–2102. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0682>.

Session 7: Research Design Considerations

Required

1. McGrath. 1982. Dilemmatics: The Study of Research Choices and Dilemmas. In *Judgment Calls in Research* (McGrath, Martin, & Kulka, eds). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 69–101.
2. Alvesson and Sandberg. 2011. Generating Research Questions through Problematization. *Academy of Management Review*, 36: 247–271.
3. Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein. 2016. Grand Challenges and Inductive Methods: Rigor without Rigor Mortis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 1113–1123. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4004>.
4. Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, Chalkias, & Cacciatori. 2019. Exploring Inter-Organizational Paradoxes: Methodological Lessons from a Study of a Grand Challenge. *Strategic Organization*, 17: 120–132.
5. Gehman, Glaser, Eisenhardt, Gioia, Langley, & Corley. 2018. Finding Theory–Method Fit: A Comparison of Three Qualitative Approaches to Theory Building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 27: 284–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617706029>.

Optional

- Eisenhardt. 1989. Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14: 532–550.
- Gross. 2009. A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms. *American Sociological Review*, 74: 358–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400302>.
- Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton. 2013. Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16: 15–31.
- Langley. 1999. Strategies for Theorizing from Process Data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24: 691–710.
- Timmermans and Tavory. 2012. Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30: 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>.
- Hamann, Luiz, Ramaboa, Khan, Dhlamini, & Nilsson. 2020. Neither Colony Nor Enclave: Calling for Dialogical Contextualism in Management and Organization Studies. *Organization Theory*, 1: 2631787719879705. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787719879705>.