Theory in Information Systems Research

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Course Overview

This course is designed to provide doctoral students across different disciplines a broad introduction to key theories and their application in IS research. The theories originate from a variety of disciplines including management, psychology, communication and sociology. However, an emphasis is given to theories that originated within the IS discipline. The course is designed for both information systems (IS) and non-IS Ph.D. students. The readings in the course will deepen the students’ understanding of the role of theory in understanding IS related organizational phenomenon and enhance their ability to theorize about IS related to their own various research themes.

Course Objectives

1. To understand the meaning and nature of theory and theorizing in organizational/IS research
2. To be able to distinguish and articulate different forms of theory contribution
3. Have a broad foundation of knowledge of the theories associated with IS research on which to build in your own future research;
4. Develop an appreciation for the diversity of research currently being undertaken within the information systems discipline;
5. To learn to evaluate critically information systems research.

Course Grade

The grade will be based upon class discussion, upon leading the discussion of one of the articles, and upon a single individual project.

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Course/Class Organization - Our Approach
This course will be driven by discussion and as such you are expected to come prepared to each class. Each of you should come to class having read and thought about the articles/readings for the week. On the first day of class, each student will volunteer to lead the discussion on one reading of their choice for each session.

The purpose of the classes is to discuss what you have learnt from the readings - both assigned and otherwise and to clarify points you did not understand. My role (as instructor) will be to ensure that the key points have been identified and understood and to keep the discussion moving.

Just for purposes of describing each class layout, we are assuming four-hour sessions. Normally, there will be 5-8 assigned readings per week. These assigned readings are the bare minimum - as we indicated above, we expect you to be reading and contributing to the class several articles in addition to those assigned.

You are expected to attend all the classes and be prepared with each reading.

**Theory Presentations:**

Each student will bring one non-IS theory into the course not covered by the course readings. The student should plan to diagram the theory in one or more powerpoint slides, present the slides to the class, and distribute the slides in the class dropbox folder. The final slide should provide references to the seminal work as well as other references, as needed, to the theory. These will be presented during the final class session.

**Course Schedule**

**Session 1: On Theory and Theorizing**


Session 2: Theorizing cont. Process vs. Variance Theorizing


Session 3: Multi-level Theorizing and Context-specific Theorizing


Sessions 4: Evaluating Theory and Theory Contribution


**Session 5: Strategies for Making Theory Contribution: Framing the Problem, Context and Questions**


