

Theory in Information Systems Research

Instructor: Dorothy E. Leidner, PhD Drhc
Ferguson Professor of Information Systems, Baylor University
Email: Dorothy_Leidner@baylor.edu

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.

Theory Presentations	1/3rd
Class Discussion	1/3 rd
Discussion Leader	1/3rd

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

- Feldman, D. 2004. "What are We Talking About When We Talk About Theory?" *Journal of Management* (30:5), pp. 565–567 (doi: 10.1016/j.jm.2004.05.001).
- Sutton, R. I., and Staw, B. M. 1995. "What Theory is Not," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (40:3), p. 371-384 (doi: 10.2307/2393788).
- DiMaggio, P. J. 1995. "Comments on 'What Theory is Not,'" *Administrative Science Quarterly* (40:3), p. 391 (doi: 10.2307/2393790).
- Gregor, S. 2006. "The nature of theory in information systems," *MIS Quarterly* (30:3), pp. 611–642.
- Lee, A. S. 2014. "Theory is king? But first, what is theory?," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 350–352 (doi: 10.1057/jit.2014.23)
- Weick, K. E. 1995. "What Theory is Not, Theorizing Is," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (40:3), p. 385 (doi: 10.2307/2393789).
- Oswick, C., Fleming, P., and Hanlon, G. 2011. "From Borrowing to Blending: Rethinking the Processes of Organizational Theory Building," *Academy of Management Review* (36:2), pp. 318–337 (doi: 10.5465/amr.2009.0155).

Shepherd, D. A., and Sutcliffe, K. M. 2011. "Inductive Top-Down Theorizing: A Source of New Theories of Organization," *Academy of Management Review* (36:2), pp. 361–380 (doi: 10.5465/amr.2009.0157).

Session 2: Theorizing cont. Process vs. Variance Theorizing

- Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. "Building Theories from Case Study Research," *Academy of Management Review* (14:4), pp. 532–550 (doi: 10.5465/AMR.1989.4308385).
- LePine and King, A.S. 2010. Developing Novel Theoretical Insight from Reviews of Existing Theory and Research. *Academy of Management Review*. 35:4. 506-509.
- Poole, M.S. and A. van de Ven. 1989. Using Paradox to Build Management and Organization Theories. *Academy of Management Review*. 14:4. 562-678.
- Klein, R. and A. Rai. 2009. Interfirm Strategic Information Flows in Logistics Supply Chain Relationships. *MIS Quarterly*. 33.
- Xue, L. G. Ray, and G. Bin. 2011. Environmental Uncertainty and IT Infrastructure Governance: A Curvilinear Relationship. *Information Systems Research*. 22:2. 389-399.
- Maitlis, S. and H. Ozcelik,. 2004. Toxic Decision Processes A Study of Emotion and Organizational Decision Making. *Organization Studies*. 15:4. 375-393.
- Sabherwal, R. and D. Robey. 1993. An Empirical Taxonomy of Implementation Processes Based on Sequences of Events in Information Systems Development. *Organization Science*. 4:4. 548-576.

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

- Burton-Jones, A. and M.J. Gallivan. 2007. Toward a Deeper Understanding of System Usage in Organization: A Multi-Level Perspective. *MIS Quarterly*. 31:4. 657-679.
- Chan, D. 1998. Functional Relations among Constructs in the Same Content Domain at Different Levels of Analysis: A Typology of Composition Models. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 83:2. 234-246.
- Klein, K.J. and S.W.J. Kozlowski. 2000. From Micro to Meso: Critical Steps in Conceptualizing and Conducting Multilevel Research. *Organizational Research Methods*. 3:3. 211-238.
- Rousseau. D.M. 2011. Reinforcing the Micro/Macro Bridge: Organizational Thinking and Pluralistic Vehicles. *Journal of Management*. 37:2. 429-442.
- Hong, W., Chan, F. K. Y., Thong, J. Y. L., Chasalow, L. C., and Dhillon, G. 2013. "A Framework and Guidelines for Context-Specific Theorizing in Information Systems Research," *Information Systems Research* (25:1), pp. 111–136 (doi: 10.1287/isre.2013.0501).

Sessions 4: Evaluating Theory and Theory Contribution

- Colquitt, J. A., and Zapata-Phelan, C. P. 2007. "Trends in Theory Building and Theory Testing: A Five-Decade Study of the 'Academy of Management Journal,'" *The Academy of Management Journal* (50:6), pp. 1281–1303 (doi: 10.2307/20159472).

- Bacharach, S. B. 1989. "Organizational Theories: Some Criteria for Evaluation," *Academy of Management Review* (14:4), pp. 496–515 (doi: 10.5465/AMR.1989.4308374).
- Corley, K. G., and Gioia, D. A. 2011. "Building Theory about Theory Building: What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution?," *Academy of Management Review* (36:1), pp. 12–32 (doi: 10.5465/amr.2009.0486).
- Whetten, D. A. 1989. "What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution?," *The Academy of Management Review* (14:4), pp. 490–495 (doi: 10.2307/258554).
- Ågerfalk, P. J. 2014. "Insufficient theoretical contribution: a conclusive rationale for rejection?," *European Journal of Information Systems* (23:6), pp. 593–599 (doi: 10.1057/ejis.2014.35).
- Silverman, D. 2014. "Taking theory too far? A commentary on Avison and Malaurent," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 353–355 (doi: 10.1057/jit.2014.21).
- Avison, D., and Malaurent, J. 2014. "Is theory king?: questioning the theory fetish in information systems," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 327–336 (doi: 10.1057/jit.2014.8).
- Gregor, S. 2014. "Theory – still king but needing a revolution!," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 337–340 (doi: 10.1057/jit.2014.22).
- Markus, M. L. 2014. "Maybe not the king, but an invaluable subordinate: a commentary on Avison and Malaurent's advocacy of 'theory light' IS research," *Journal of Information Technology* (29:4), pp. 341–345 (doi: 10.1057/jit.2014.19).

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

- Rynes, S. 2002. From the Editors. *Academy of Management Journal*. 311-313.
- Barley, S.R. 2006. When I Write my Masterpiece: Thoughts on What Makes a Paper Interesting. *Academy of Management Journal*. 49:1. 16-20.
- Bergh, D.D. 2003. Thinking Strategically about Contribution. *Academy of Management Journal*. 46:2. 135-136.
- Weber, R. 2003. The Problem of the Problem. *MIS Quarterly*. 27:1. 1-1.
- Johns, G. 2006. The Essential Impact of Context on Organizational Behavior. *Academy of Management Review*. 31:2. 386-408.
- Alvesson, M., and Sandberg, J. 2011. "Generating research questions through problematization," *Academy of Management Review* (36:2), pp. 247–271.