

Topics for master's theses

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The master's thesis topics offered by our chair are derived from our research profile. We broadly distinguish between four fields: Organization, Human Resource Management, Strategic Management, and Market-Oriented Leadership in Public and Non-Profit Organizations. In addition to this list of topics, you also have the option to propose your own topic that aligns with the chair's profile. The following table provides examples of possible topic areas within each field. To develop a master's thesis topic, please get in touch with Mr. Bruder (jonas.bruder@uni-mannheim.de). For information on the framework and requirements for master's theses at our department, please first read our guidelines for academic writing.

| Research domain | Possible topic areas |
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| Organization | Hybrid Organizing, Bureaucracy, Public-Private Partnerships, Resilience, Digitalization, Organizational development, Corporate Social (Ir)Responsibility |
| Human Ressource Management | Volunteering, Recruiting, Motivation, Person-Environment (Mis-) Fit |
| Strategic Management | Accountability, Legitimacy, Citizen-State Interactions, Administrative Burden, Nonmarket Strategy, Shared Value Creation, Corporate Philanthropy, Dynamic Capabilities, Resource Dependence |
| Market-Oriented Leadership | Representative Bureaucracy, Fundraising, Public service delivery |

| Organization | Introductory questions | Introductory literature |
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| <p>Blockade or Steppingstone? Effects of Multiple Logics in Nonprofit Organizations</p> <p><i>Blockade oder Sprungbrett? Die Effekte von multiplen Logiken auf Nonprofit Organisationen</i></p> | <p>Which scientific findings on the multiplicity of logics in nonprofit organizations are discussed in the literature?</p> <p>How do multiple logics affect nonprofit organizations?</p> <p>Method: qualitative (quantitative possible)</p> | <p>Malhotra, A., Wright, A. L., & Jarvis, L. C. (2024). Hybridity in Nonprofit Organizations: Organizational Perspectives on Combining Multiple Logics. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05687-y</p> <p>Tuckerman, L., Nelles, J., Owalla, B., & Vorley, T. (2024). Exploring the Evolutionary Boundaries of Community Business. <i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>, 53(5), 1205-1229. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640231210555</p> |
| <p>Bridging the divide? – Relational governance and the formation of trust in interorganizational relations</p> <p><i>Eine Brücke schlagen? – Relationale Governance und die Bildung von Vertrauen in interorganisatorischen Beziehungen</i></p> | <p>How is trust formed between businesses and NPOs with differing goals and operational logics?</p> <p>What governance practices best support the development and maintenance of trust between businesses and NPOs?</p> <p>Method: qualitative</p> | <p>Poppo, L., Zhou, K.Z. and Zenger, T.R. (2008), Examining the Conditional Limits of Relational Governance: Specialized Assets, Performance Ambiguity, and Long-Standing Ties. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i>, 45: 1195-1216. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2008.00779.x</p> <p>Cao, Z. and Lumineau, F. (2015), Revisiting the interplay between contractual and relational governance: A qualitative and meta-analytic investigation. <i>Journal of Operations Management</i>, 33-34: 15-42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2014.09.009</p> |

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| <p>The Blame Game: Attributing Responsibility for Corporate Social Irresponsibility in the Eyes of the Public</p> <p><i>Das Schuldspiel: Die Zuschreibung von Verantwortung für unternehmerisches soziales Fehlverhalten aus der Perspektive der Öffentlichkeit</i></p> | <p>Which factors influence whether consumers attribute corporate social irresponsibility to individual managers, organizational culture, or systemic industry pressures?</p> <p>How do attribution patterns affect consumer trust and behavioral intentions toward the offending company?</p> <p>Method: quantitative (experimental)</p> | <p>Lange, D., & Washburn, N. T. (2012). Understanding attributions of corporate social irresponsibility. <i>Academy of Management Review</i>, 37(2), 300-326. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2010.0522</p> <p>Valor, C., Antonetti, P., & Zasuwa, G. (2022). Corporate social irresponsibility and consumer punishment: A systematic review and research agenda. <i>Journal of Business Research</i>, 144, 1218-1255. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.02.063</p> |
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| Human Ressource Management | Introductory questions | Introductory literature |
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| <p>The Power Puzzle: Managing Competing Demands in Nonprofit Organizations</p> <p><i>Das Machtpuzzle: Der Umgang mit konkurrierenden Anforderungen in Nonprofit-Organisationen</i></p> | <p>Which scientific findings on the relation between power and dealing with competing demands are discussed in the literature?</p> <p>How does power influence the ability of employees to deal with competing demands in nonprofit organizations?</p> <p>Method: qualitative</p> | <p>Ciuk, S., & McCabe, D. (2025). "Little Boxes All the Same": Exploring and contextualizing paradoxes of power in a strategic change programme in a UK university. <i>Organization Studies</i>, 46(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251314594</p> <p>Pache, A.-C., Battilana, J., & Spencer, C. (2024). An Integrative Model of Hybrid Governance: The Role of Boards in Helping Sustain Organizational Hybridity. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>, 67(2), 437–467. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2021.0966</p> |
| Strategic Management | Introductory questions | Introductory literature |
| <p>Dynamic Capabilities and Organizational Resources – The value of Dynamic Capabilities for NPOs</p> <p><i>Dynamische Fähigkeiten und Organisatorische Ressourcen: Der Wert der dynamischen Fähigkeiten für gemeinnützige Organisationen</i></p> | <p>How are dynamic capabilities in the context of nonprofit organizations discussed in the literature?</p> <p>How do dynamic capabilities manifest within nonprofit organizations (NPOs)?</p> <p>Which role do dynamic capabilities play in NPOs' adaption to changes in the external environment, such as donor trends or policy changes?</p> <p>Method: qualitative</p> | <p>Wilden, R., Devinney, T. M., & Dowling, G. R. (2016). The architecture of dynamic capability research identifying the building blocks of a configurational approach. <i>Academy of Management Annals</i>, 10(1), 997-1076. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2016.1161966</p> <p>Brown, W. A., Andersson, F. O., & Jo, S. (2016). Dimensions of capacity in nonprofit human service organizations. <i>Voluntas</i>, 27(6), 2889-2912. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9633-8</p> |

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| <p>Who Gets Blamed? Resource Dependence and the Legitimacy of Protest Targets</p> <p><i>Wer wird beschuldigt? Ressourcenabhängigkeit und die Legitimität von Protestzielen</i></p> | <p>How do internal and external resource dependencies of social movement organizations shape which actors are seen as legitimate or feasible targets?</p> <p>In what ways do internal resources and/or capabilities expand or constrain the range of feasible targets for social movement organizations?</p> <p>Method: qualitative</p> | <p>Briscoe, F., & Gupta, A. (2016). Social activism in and around organizations. <i>Academy of Management Annals</i>, 10(1), 671-727. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2016.1153261</p> <p>Hiatt, S. R., Grandy, J. B., & Lee, B. H. (2015). Organizational responses to public and private politics: An analysis of climate change activists and US oil and gas firms. <i>Organization Science</i>, 26(6), 1769-1786. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2015.1008</p> |
| <p>Consuming strategy narratives: How strategy texts influence the actions of organizational members</p> <p><i>Der Konsum strategischer Narrative: Wie Strategietexte das Handeln von Organisationsmitgliedern beeinflussen</i></p> | <p>What scientific findings are discussed in the literature concerning how organizational members consume and interpret narratives within strategy texts?</p> <p>How does the consumption and interpretation of strategy narratives influence how organizational members act and contribute to the organization's strategic direction?</p> <p>Method: qualitative</p> <p><i>The thesis is interview-based. Strategy texts may be used as contextual reference or interview prompts. Discourse or textual analysis is not required.</i></p> | <p>Fenton, C., & Langley, A. (2011). Strategy as Practice and the Narrative Turn. <i>Organization Studies</i>, 32(9), 1171–1196. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611410838</p> <p>Vaara, E., & Fritsch, L. (2022). Strategy as language and communication: Theoretical and methodological advances and avenues for the future in strategy process and practice research. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i>, 43(6), 1170–1181. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3360</p> <p>Vaara, E., Sorsa, V., & Pälli, P. (2010). On the force potential of strategy texts: A critical discourse analysis of a strategic plan and its power effects in a city organization. <i>Organization</i>, 17(6), 685–702. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508410367326</p> |

| Market-Oriented Leadership | Introductory questions | Introductory literature |
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| <p>When Service Recovery Matters – How Recovery Activities Influence Citizens' Perception of Public Service Failures</p> <p>Wenn Service Recovery den Unterschied macht – Wie Service Recovery Maßnahmen die Wahrnehmung von Public Service Failures durch Bürger*innen beeinflussen</p> | <p>Which scientific findings on the effect of recovery activities in the context of public service failure are discussed in the literature?</p> <p>What recovery activities after a public service failure are expected by affected citizens and third parties?</p> <p>Method: quantitative (qualitative possible)</p> | <p>Döring, M. (2022). 'Explain, but make no excuses': service recovery after public service failures. <i>Public Management Review</i>, 24(5), 799-817. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1864013</p> <p>Grégoire, Y., & Mattila, A. S. (2021). Service failure and recovery at the crossroads: recommendations to revitalize the field and its influence. <i>Journal of Service Research</i>, 24(3), 323-328. https://doi.org/10.1177/10946705</p> |