

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 Jonas 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
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
Bridging the divide? – Relational governance and the formation of trust in interorganizational relations <i>Eine Brücke schlagen? – Relationale Governance und die Bildung von Vertrauen in interorganisatorischen Beziehungen</i>	How is trust formed between businesses and NPOs with differing goals and operational logics? What governance practices best support the development and maintenance of trust between businesses and NPOs? Method: qualitative	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 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
The Blame Game: Attributing Responsibility for Corporate Social Irresponsibility in the Eyes of the Public <i>Das Schuldspiel: Die Zuschreibung von Verantwortung für unternehmerisches soziales Fehlverhalten aus der Perspektive der Öffentlichkeit</i>	Which factors influence whether consumers attribute corporate social irresponsibility to individual managers, organizational culture, or systemic industry pressures? How do attribution patterns affect consumer trust and behavioral intentions toward the offending company? Method: quantitative (experimental)	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 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

Buried in Paperwork – A Study of Administrative Burden in Government-Business Interactions. <i>Begraben im Papierkram - Eine Studie über administrative Hürden in der Interaktion zwischen Behörden und Unternehmen</i>	Welche wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnisse hinsichtlich der Rolle administrativer Hürden für Unternehmen werden in der Literatur diskutiert? Welche Faktoren beeinflussen, wie Entscheider in Unternehmen administrative Hürden im Kontakt mit Behörden wahrnehmen? Methodik: qualitativ	Petersen, O. H., Hansen, J. R., & Houlberg, K. (2022). The administrative burden of doing business with the government: Learning and compliance costs in Business-Government interactions. <i>Public Administration</i>. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12904 Moynihan, D. P., Herd, P., & Harvey, H. (2015). Administrative Burden: Learning, Psychological, and Compliance Costs in Citizen-State Interactions. <i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i>, 25(1), 43–69. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muu009
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Human Ressource Management	Introductory questions	Introductory literature

Strategic Management	Introductory questions	Introductory literature
Dynamic Capabilities and Organizational Resources – The value of Dynamic Capabilities for NPOs <i>Dynamische Fähigkeiten und Organisatorische Ressourcen: Der Wert der dynamischen Fähigkeiten für gemeinnützige Organisationen</i>	How are dynamic capabilities in the context of nonprofit organizations discussed in the literature? How do dynamic capabilities manifest within nonprofit organizations (NPOs)? Which role do dynamic capabilities play in NPOs' adaption to changes in the external environment, such as donor trends or policy changes? Method: qualitative	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 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

Who Gets Blamed? Resource Dependence and the Legitimacy of Protest Targets <i>Wer wird beschuldigt? Ressourcenabhängigkeit und die Legitimität von Protestzielen</i>	How do internal and external resource dependencies of social movement organizations shape which actors are seen as legitimate or feasible targets? In what ways do internal resources and/or capabilities expand or constrain the range of feasible targets for social movement organizations? Method: qualitative	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 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
Consuming strategy narratives: How strategy texts influence the actions of organizational members <i>Der Konsum strategischer Narrative: Wie Strategietexte das Handeln von Organisationsmitgliedern beeinflussen</i>	What scientific findings are discussed in the literature concerning how organizational members consume and interpret narratives within strategy texts? How does the consumption and interpretation of strategy narratives influence how organizational members act and contribute to the organization's strategic direction? Method: qualitative <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>	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 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 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

When giving back creates challenges: The unintended consequences of family firm philanthropy Wenn Gutes tun Herausforderungen mit sich bringt: Unbeabsichtigte Folgen unternehmerischer Philanthropie in Familienunternehmen	What unintended challenges and consequences resulting from corporate philanthropy in family firms are discussed in the literature? How do family firms manage unintended consequences arising from corporate philanthropy? Method: qualitative	Zhao, W. & Zhang, Z. (2020) How and When Does Corporate Giving Lead to Getting? An Investigation of the Relationship Between Corporate Philanthropy and Relative Competitive Performance from a Micro-process Perspective. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>, 166, 425–440. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04149-0 Feliu, N., & Botero, I. C. (2016). Philanthropy in Family Enterprises: A Review of Literature. <i>Family Business Review</i>, 29(1), 121-141. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894486515610962
Catalysts for Change: Examining the Impact of NPOs in the Fight Against Climate Change Katalysatoren des Wandels: Eine Untersuchung der Wirkung von gemeinnützigen Organisationen im Kampf gegen den Klimawandel	What is the role of nonprofit organizations in combating environmental problems? How do nonprofit organizations contribute to addressing climate change, and how does their role differ from that of governments and businesses? Method: Qualitative	Gazley, B., & Prakash, A. (2023). Climate change and the voluntary sector: An introduction. <i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>, 52(4), 845-870. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764023117252 Greenspan, I., Cohen-Blankshtain, G., & Geva, Y. (2022). NGO roles and anticipated outcomes in environmental participatory processes: A typology. <i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>, 51(3), 633-657. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764021100898

Market-Oriented Leadership	Introductory questions	Introductory literature
When Service Recovery Matters – How Recovery Activities Influence Citizens' Perception of Public Service Failures Wenn Service Recovery den Unterschied macht – Wie Service Recovery Maßnahmen die Wahrnehmung von Public Service Failures durch Bürger*innen beeinflussen	Which scientific findings on the effect of recovery activities in the context of public service failure are discussed in the literature? What recovery activities after a public service failure are expected by affected citizens and third parties? Method: quantitative (qualitative possible)	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 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
Giving what matters? Understanding donor's decision-making in in-kind giving Geben, was zählt? Entscheidungsprozesse von Spender*innen bei Sachspenden	What scientific findings on individuals' motivation to donate goods rather than money are discussed in the literature? How do donors make sense of the needs and preferences of donation recipients? Method: qualitative	Gangadharan, L., Grossman, P. J., Jones, K., & Leister C. M. (2018). Paternalistic giving: Restricting recipient choice. <i>Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization</i>, 151, 143-170. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.03.007 Fung, J., Fung, W., Israel Rosales, A., Jin, J., & Pettit, R. M. (2023). The Role of Implicit Biases and Explicit Attitudes Toward the Poor in Donation Choices. <i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>, 52(1), 153-175. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211073530
More Than Fame: Celebrities as Signals in Nonprofit Fundraising Mehr als Fame: Prominente als Aushängeschilder für das Fundraising gemeinnütziger Organisationen	What role do celebrities play in generating donations for nonprofit organizations from the perspective of signaling theory? How does the perceived congruence between a celebrity endorser and a nonprofit organization affect donation behavior? Methods: Quantitative / Qualitative	Ogiso, W., & Mano, Y. (2025). Signaling Nonprofit Experts' Endorsement in Celebrity Advocacy: Experimental Evidence from Japan. <i>VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations</i>, 36(3), 291-302. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-025-00717-3 Harris, E. E., & Ruth, J. A. (2015). Analysis of the value of celebrity affiliation to nonprofit contributions. <i>Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly</i>, 44(5), 945-967. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764014546428

