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COURSE..... **THEORY DEVELOPMENT FOR BUSINESS RESEARCH**
SEMESTER/YEAR.... 2º/2026
PROGRAM..... Winter School
CLASS-HOURS..... 30 hours
PROFESSOR..... ALES POPOVIC
LANGUAGE.....ENGLISH

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students develop an understanding about developing theory and about its critical role in surfacing a theoretical and practical contribution.
- They understand how to formulate problems to develop important research questions. They learn about the key elements of a theory and the approaches to build a theory.
- They understand the distinctions between variance and process models. They learn how to conceive, construct and justify different types of variance and process models in relation to their research questions.
- They develop the know-how to achieve correspondence between logical arguments and the different elements of a model including constructs, measures, functional form of relationships, assumptions, and boundary conditions.
- They develop an understanding about how to leverage context and time in the theory building process, and also about the roles of multi-dimensional constructs and multi-level models.

Cumulatively, they develop the skills and understanding to formulate a problem to advance compelling research questions, synthesize the relevant literatures to effectively position their work in relation to the literature, build a model, specify a model, and achieve correspondence between these essential elements in the research process.

LEARNING GOALS

The course learning goals are presented in the table below, showing how they contribute to the learning goals related to methods, for the stricto sensu graduate programs at FGV-EAESP.

Program learning goals	Course learning goals	Level of contribution
Scientific method	Develops understanding of theory building, key elements of theory, variance vs. process models, and rigor in constructing arguments.	● ● ●
Research project / procedures	Formulates problems, develops research questions, conceives and specifies variance and process models, and aligns proposals with contribution.	● ● ○
Qualitative research methods	Introduces role of context, problematization strategies, process models, and literature synthesis as qualitative-oriented approaches.	● ● ●
Quantitative research methods	Provides basic exposure to variance models, constructs, measurement, moderation/mediation, and correspondence principles.	● ● ●
Development of academic papers	Enhances skills for synthesizing literature, structuring research proposals, and writing empirical articles.	● ● ●
Other course learning goals: Ability to leverage context and time in theory building; understanding multidimensional constructs and multilevel models.		

PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

Students need to have picked their research topic/idea.

CONTENT/METHODOLOGY

The teaching method will involve a combination of lecture, discussions, student presentations, and in-class group exercises. Students will be called upon to lead discussions and all students are expected to participate actively in the discussions. Students are expected to thoroughly read the assigned readings prior to class .

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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Students will prepare a structured research proposal. Based on these readings and discussions, they will revisit their research proposal to identify:

• How they expect to make a contribution – with focus on importance and novelty (what may be surprising as they envision)
• What conversations and conversants will it connect with?
• Where do they expect their work not to be differentiated or make a contribution?
• What core concepts and constructs are they using in their study? Why are they focusing on them?
• Present the ladders of abstraction for their concepts and constructs. Present a table of definitions of their constructs.

Final grade: proposal.

COURSE SCHEDULE (OPTIONAL)

Modules	Topics	Reading Assignments (Recommended articles do not need to be read prior to the class; all other articles are required readings prior to the class.)
Session 1 & 2	**Foundations of theory building:** ***What theory is (and is not)*** ***Elements of a theory; theory vs. theorizing, criteria to assess theoretical contribution***	• **Whetten, 1989, AMR** • **Sutton & Staw, 1995, ASQ** • **Weick, 1995, ASQ** • **DiMaggio, 1995, ASQ** • **Bacharach, 1989, AMR** • *Recommended*: Feldman, 2004c, J Mgmt
	In-class practicum: Research proposal recipe	• **No prior reading: In-class intensive exercise on formulating an effective research proposal**
	Strategies to Make Contributions (I): ***Selecting and formulating problem, Selecting scholarly Conversations***	• **Rynes, 2002, AMJ** • **Barley, 2006, AMJ** • **Bergh, 2003, AMJ** • **Weber, 2003, MISQ** • *Recommended*: Lee, 1999, MISQ • *Recommended*: Simon, Essay, 1980
Session 3 & 4	**Strategies to Make Contributions (II):** ***Role of context, Research questions through different strategies of gap-spotting; Research questions through different strategies to problematize assumptions; Role of empirical materials***	• **Johns, 2006, AMR** • **Johns, 2017, AMR** • **Hong et al. 2013, ISR** • **Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, AMR** • *Recommended*: Edmondson and McManus, 2007 • *Recommended*: Alvesson & Karreman, 2007, AMR • *Recommended*: Klein & Rai, 2009, MISQ
Session 5 & 6	**Principles of variance models** ***Construct clarity, Achieving correspondence of theoretical arguments and the specification of variance models***	• **Suddaby (2010)** • **Venkatraman, 1989, AMR** • **Overby, 2008, OrgSci (Illustration of moderation)** • **Klein and Rai, 2009, MISQ (Illustration of mediation)** • **Xue et. al (2011) (Illustration of non-linear effects)**

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Modules	Topics	Reading Assignments (Recommended articles do not need to be read prior to the class; all other articles are required readings prior to the class.)
	In-class practicum on variance models	• **No prior readings: This will be an intensive exercise involving formulating research questions; conceiving a model; constructing the model (constructs, relationships, boundary conditions, assumptions); and justifying the model.**
Session 7	**Principles of process models** **In-class practicum on process models**	• **Pentland, 2003, Org. Science** • **Sabherwal and Robey, 1993, Org. Sci (p. 548-558)** • **Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004, Org. Sci (p. 375-386)** • *Recommended* Poole and Van de Ven, 1989, AMR
	Synthesizing the literature ***Different strategies to synthesize the literature it will be discussed along with illustrative examples.***	• **Techniques to synthesize the literature (handouts from Indiana University and North Carolina State University)** • **LePine and King, AMR, 2010** • **Webster and Watson, MISQ, 2002** • *Recommended*: Ahuja et al. 2008 • *Recommended*: Bem, 1995, Psyc Bull • *Recommended*: Carter and Hodgson (2006) • *Recommended*: Feldman, 2004a, J Mgmt • *Recommended*: Feldman, 2004b, J Mgmt
	Writing Empirical Articles	• **Bem (2003, book chapter)**
Session 8	**Developing multilevel theories** ***In-class practicum on multilevel models***	• **Mathieu and Chen, Journal of Management, 2011** • **Klein and Kozlowski, Org. Research Methods, 2000, p. 211-221.** • *Recommended*: Chan, 1998, JAP • *Recommended :* Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994, AMR • *Recommended :* Rai et al., 2009, MISQ (Illustration) • *Recommended***:** Rousseau, Journal of Management, 2011 • *Recommended*: Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999, AMR • *Recommended*: Burton-Jones & Gallivan, 2007, MISQ (Illustration) • *Recommended*: Zhang & Gable, ISR, 2017
	Avoiding Type III Errors in the Research Process	• Rai (2017)
	Design theories	• Gregor, MISQ, 2006

Modules	Topics	Reading Assignments (Recommended articles do not need to be read prior to the class; all other articles are required readings prior to the class.)
Additional resources	***Specifying multidimensional constructs***	• Wong et al., Journal of Management, 2008 • Law, Chi-Sum, & Mobley, 1998, AMR • Jarvis, Mackenzie, Podsakoff, Mick, & Bearden, 2003, JCR • Petter, Straub, & Rai, 2007, MISQ
	Role of time	• Mitchell & James, 2001, AMR • Ancona et al., 2001, AMR

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