

PhD Workshop on “Contributing” to the Management Literature (AKA: What is my paper’s contribution and how do I articulate it?)

Philipps University Marburg

Syllabus Version Date: January 25, 2023 (Subject to change)

PROFESSOR HART E. POSEN

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MEETING TIME

April 3 (Monday): 9:00 – 12.00 and 14:00 – 17:00

April 4 (Tuesday): 9:00 – 12.00 and 14:00 – 17:00

April 5 (Wednesday): 9:00 – 12.00 and 14:00 – 17:00

Location: Philipps Universität Marburg, Am Plan 1, 35037 Marburg (Room AP2)

Class Size Limit: approx. 10 (to allow for rich discussion of students’ papers)

Requirements: As a prerequisite for participation in the workshop, each student **must** (a) have a working paper that they are willing to share and discuss and (b) commit to attending all three class days. While the Philipps University Marburg hosts the workshop, should there be room, the course may be opened to students from across Europe.

Application & Deadline: To apply, please send an email to Angelina Schilling (Sustainability Management Research Group; angelina.schilling@wiwi.uni-marburg.de). In this email, please specify (a) where you are in your PhD program, (b) what you currently expect to do once you finish your PhD program, and (c) what you hope to get out of this class. On top of that, please (d) attach the current version of the working paper you hope will be improved as a result of this workshop and (e) paste the abstract of the working paper to the bottom of the email. The application deadline is 22.02.2023. Students will, of course, be able to submit an updated version of their working paper prior to the workshop.

COURSE OBJECTIVES, FORMAT, & GRADING

What does it take to write a research paper that is published in one of the top management journals? Editors and reviewers at top journals seek papers that make important ‘contributions’ to the literature. But what is a contribution? How do you know when your paper is contributing? More importantly, how do you write your paper to make a contribution that editors and reviewers recognize such that they want to publish your paper?

My objective in this workshop is to help you conceptualize, frame and write your work in a manner that substantially increases your odds of being published in leading journals — by framing your

research to articulate the contribution of your paper compellingly. On average, over 90 percent of submissions are rejected by top journals. You do not need to suffer — you can learn to do much better. You will enjoy a very successful research career if you can make your rejection rate 50 or, better yet, 25 percent. I believe that you can learn to do this.

In this workshop, we will discuss — and put into practice — a way of thinking about your research that will enhance your ability to write papers that make a “contribution.” The approach is based on my efforts over the last 15 years to develop a useful definition of a contribution by decomposing it into three constituent parts: interestingness, importance, and validity.

This workshop differs from others you have taken in two ways. First, while most courses focus on a specific domain of research, we will consider ideas that are valuable across a broad range of management literature (most prominently strategy and organization theory, but adjacent domains as well). Second, while most research courses involve lots of reading and relatively little practice, you will get hands-on experience (and feedback) in the workshop by developing and refining your research ideas.

Each of the days in this three-day workshop will be divided into two parts. In the morning sessions, we will read and discuss published papers that highlight ways of contributing to the literature. While some of these papers are big blockbusters, others are less well-known. Nonetheless, each paper finds some way to make a clear and important contribution to the literature. In reading these papers, focus on answering the question: What was the contribution that got this paper published in a leading journal, and how did the authors’ craft it? *Please note that in this workshop, the readings are not chosen for their specific theoretical content but rather, as a basis for discussing and learning how to frame the contribution of a paper.*

In the afternoon sessions, we will focus on your working papers. Each student is required to submit a working paper that will be the focus of his/her attention during the workshop. The objective of this part of the workshop is twofold. First, I hope that a discussion focusing on the contribution of your paper will enable you to improve the paper and the likelihood of publication in a top journal. Second, in my experience, one of the best ways in which to come to understand how to craft a paper that contributes is to help others do so.

[NOTE: If you require a grade for the course, I will base it solely on your contribution to the seminar discussion and improvement in the working paper you submit to the course. *There is no additional written work required for this workshop.*]

READING LIST & PREPARATION

All papers listed below will be posted to the course's Google share folder. (You will receive an invitation prior to the start of the course).

Preparation instructions for published research (morning sessions): You should read the abstract, introduction, and theory sections closely. Skim the remainder of the paper with the objective of making sure you understand the underpinnings of the material in the front end.

Preparation instructions for student papers (afternoon sessions): We will have substantial time to discuss each of your working papers. To make this time worthwhile, I would ask that each of you read all of the student papers in their entirety. *Your primary task is to identify the contribution as intended by the author.* Then put yourself in the position of a reviewer or editor at a top journal — assess the extent to which the paper contributes to the literature. To do so, you may find it helpful to answer the following questions: (1) What is the gap in the literature identified in the paper? (2) Why should we care about this gap — is it important (and for whom)? (3) Does the paper successfully fill the gap in our knowledge (theoretically and empirically)?

NOTE: I do not expect you to do any additional reading outside of the syllabus to assess the contribution of the paper. Use your own understanding of the literature as best you can, even if your domain is quite far from that of the paper, to make your assessment of the contribution.

Schedule and Readings (subject to change)

Day 1

Morning session — Readings

The first three papers below form the background on what constitutes a 'contribution.' We will draw on the ideas in these three papers throughout the workshop.

- Davis, M. 1971. That's Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1: 304-344.
- Bartunek, J.M., S.L. Rynes, R.D. Ireland. 2006. What makes management research interesting, and why does it matter? *Academy of Management Journal* 49(1) 9-15.
- Alvesson, M, Sandberg, J. 2011. Generating Research Questions Through Problematization. *Academy of Management Review* 36(2): 247-271.
- WATCH THIS VIDEO (~80 minutes): <https://youtu.be/vtIzMaLkCaM>

On the papers below, read the front-end closely (abstract, introduction, and theory sections) and quickly skim the rest.

- Cohen, W., and Levinthal, D. A. 1989. Innovation and learning: The two faces of R&D. *Economic Journal*, 99(397): 569-596.
- Posen, H., Levinthal, D. 2012. Chasing a Moving Target: Exploitation and Exploration in Dynamic Environments. *Management Science*, 58(3), 587-601

- Corredoira, R. A., and Rosenkopf, L. 2010. Should auld acquaintance be forgot? The reverse transfer of knowledge through mobility ties. *Strategic Management Journal*, 31(2): 159-181.

Afternoon session — Student papers: TBA

Assignment details will be announced in advance of the session.

Day 2

Morning session — Readings (read the front-end closely and quickly skim the rest)

- Levinthal, D. A. 1997. Adaptation on rugged landscapes. *Management Science*, 43(7): 934-950.
- Coff. R. 1997. Human assets and management dilemmas: Coping with hazards on the road to resource-based theory. *Academy of Management Review* 22(2): 374-402.
- Westphal, J., and Zajac, E. 1998. The symbolic management of stockholders: Corporate governance reforms and shareholder reactions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43(1): 127.
- Opper, S, Burt, RS. 2021. Social Network and Temporal Myopia. *Academy of Management Journal* 64(3): 741-771.
- Leiblein, M. J., & Chen, J. S., & Posen, H. E., 2021. Uncertain Learning Curves: Implications for First Mover Advantage and Knowledge Spillovers. *Academy of Management Review*, Forthcoming.
 - I will provide the original submission, reviewer comments, and my responses as an extended background discussion on this paper.

Afternoon session — Student papers: TBA

Assignment details will be announced in advance of the session.

Day 3

Morning session — Readings (read the front-end closely and quickly skim the rest)

- Lazear, E. 2004. The peter principle: A theory of decline. *Journal of Political Economy* 112(S1): 141-163.
- Zhao, M. 2006. Conducting R&D in Countries with Weak Intellectual Property Rights Protection. *Management Science*, 52(8): 1185-1199.
- Katila, R., and Ahuja, G. 2002. Something old, something new: A longitudinal study of search behavior and new product introduction. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(6): 1183-1194.

- Grohsjean, T, Kober, P, Zucchini, L. 2016. Coming back to Edmonton: Competing with former employers and colleagues. *Academy of Management Journal* 59(2): 394-413.
- Piezunka, H., Aggarwal, V., & Posen, H.E. 2021. The Aggregation-Learning Tradeoff. *Organization Science*, Forthcoming.
 - I will provide the original submission, reviewer comments, and my responses as an extended background discussion on this paper.

Afternoon session — Student papers: TBA

Assignment details will be announced in advance of the session.