

Topics for Master-theses – Suggestions/working titles – Studyyear 2014/15

The following suggestions/proposals for topics are suggestions or working titles. You are supposed to work out a research proposal that clarifies or specifies the research questions, indicates the methods that will be employed etc.

It is also possible to take these suggestions simply as inspirations for developing your own research topic, research question and methodological choices.

It is advisable that you coordinate your preferences with others.

The proposal should be developed in the winterterm 2014/15 in the context of the seminar 'organizational inquiry'. The proposal (3-4 pages) has to be handed in by February 7, 2015 at the IOL-secretary (Mrs. Scheller). Students and academic supervisors will be allocated by topic and mutual agreement by second week of February.

The topics will be allocated on the basis of the quality of the research proposal.

Suggestions Learning and HR-development (A. Ostendorf):

(1) Facilitating informal competence development at workplaces.

The master thesis investigates 'facilitating' activities for individual competence development at workplaces using qualitative research methods. The 'facilitating' activities may be carried out by all kinds of non-formal 'educators' in companies (example: managers qualifying their team, project leaders making their group more knowledgeable, staff introducing apprentices/trainees/novices).

Introducing text:

Ostendorf, A.: Informal workplace 'educators' - the hidden protagonists of workplace learning, in: Chisholm, L. A., Lundardon, K., Ostendorf, A., Pasqualoni, P. P. (Eds.): Decoding the meaning of learning at work in Asia and Europe, Innsbruck 2012, Innsbruck University press, pp. 67-76.

(2) Career guidance and counseling as a human resource development task.

The master thesis should reflect the state of the art of corporate career guidance and counseling theories and integrate a concrete case study for empirical evidence.

Introducing text:

Leung, S. A., The big five career theories, in: Athanasou, J.A., van Esbroeck, R. (Eds.): International Handbook of Career Guidance, pp. 115-132.

Suggestions Gender & Organizations (M. Auer/H. Welte)

Boundary Work in Organizations (M. Auer)

The concept of boundary work (Gieryn 1983 and 1999) was developed in science studies to describe and explain practices of demarcation, which are used in science to separate and exclude other forms of knowledge from scientific knowledge. Generally said, boundary work is a process of “defining a practice in contrast with other practices, to protect it from unwanted participants and interference, while trying to ascribe proper ways of behavior for participants and non-participants (demarcation)” (Halffman, 2003: 27).

Thus far the concept of boundary work was not often used outside of its original empirical context, but more recent exceptions indicate the general value and potential of adopting a boundary work perspective. A range of publications in the field of environmental management showcase a boundary work perspective’s potential to assess and subsequently also improve stakeholder-participation (e.g. Eden et al, 2006; Clark et al, 2011; Robinson & Wallington, 2012; Sternlieb et al, 2013). Other authors, from various fields of science, point out the value of the concept of boundary work for understanding relational processes (Gracia & Oats, 2012; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Pyykkö et al, 2011), particularly to explore the mechanisms through which professional fields are socially constructed and patrolled (Lewis, 2012; Llewellyn, 1998).

The general aim of this research project is to further explore the significance and effects of boundary work practices in organizations. As this is a broad topic, I suggest for you to select one of the following specifications:

a) Boundary work in connection with new organizational roles

Boundary work generally describes the social construction of professional fields.

What role do practices of demarcation play in the social construction of an organizational role?

Current examples for newly introduced organizational roles in organizations are specific managerial positions (or even departments) for sustainability (e.g. CSO – Chief Sustainability Officer, Ethics Officer) or employer reputation (e.g. Employer Brand Manager).

b) Boundary work in the context of HR business partner models

Boundary work describes practices that strive to claim cognitive and formal authority over contested areas of expertise.

What role do practices of demarcation play in HR-business-partner models?

The strategic partner model of HRM aims at including HR professionals in strategic decisions that impact on organizational design and organizational performance (Ulrich, 1997). In many organizations HRM is organized on the basis of this business partner model which makes it particularly relevant for the understanding of HRM practices.

c) Boundary work in interdepartmental projects

Boundary work happens “when there is something valued on the line: material resources, prestige, the truth of a cherished claim, power” (Gieryn, 1999: 356).

What role does boundary work play in interdepartmental projects, like employer brand management?

Employer brand management concerns various areas of management beyond HRM. Although employer brand managers’ educational background and work experience is in HRM in most cases, in addition to core areas of HRM their task also concerns aspects of corporate reputation, public relations and marketing (Martin et al., 2011). In addition to this interdepartmental and cross-functional character of their task, employer brand management also spans the areas of internal and external employer branding.

For the empirical investigation of your topic I suggest for you to use vignettes as an elicitation tool within qualitative interviews (Brown & Clarke, 2013a). Using vignettes facilitates the interview process and also results in more focused qualitative data, which aids pattern-based analysis (Brown & Clarke, 2013b).

Appropriate vignettes to describe practices of demarcation in organizations were derived from an inductive study earlier this year. You can adopt these vignettes to suit your specific empirical research interest.

I would like to build a team of 3 students, who work on the different empirical fields but with the same theory ('boundary work') and empirical method (qualitative interviews based on vignettes); I expect that we work together on these issues also including colleagues from a currently ongoing research project on 'employer branding as a communicative interface between employers and employees' (EBKOM <http://www.uibk.ac.at/projects/ebkom/>).

Human Resource Management (HRM) in 'care homes' (Auer/Welte):

There is little research (in Austria) on HRM in organizations that are offering care (e.g. for the elderly). The focus of the thesis can either be a review of the existing literature on HRM in care homes and/or an empirical work in the socio-cultural and legal context of Austria.

Suggestions Art-, Culture- and Expertorganizations (M. Piber)

- (1) Restricting frame or enabling leverage: How to organize processes of reflection, composition and generation in the fields of arts and culture
- (2) Artists in residence as an organizational intervention: Issues of identity, learning and change
- (3) Understanding Open Innovation Communities through the lense of Organization theory
- (4) Social Entrepreneurship: Case studies highlighting organizational change
- (5) How organizational theory can contribute to a better understanding of cultural organizations?

Suggestions Organization (R. Weiskopf , M. Vötsch)

(1) Possibilities and limitations of 'organizing differently'

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the modes of organizing in organizations that try to ,organize differently' and integrate ethical and societal considerations in their modes of organizing.

The focus should be on empirical cases that allow demonstrating how the selected organization attempts to integrate ethical/societal concerns; how this affects the mode of organizing, what are the specific challenges and questions are that arise from the attempt to organize differently?

Organizational examples/case studies might include explicitly ,ethical organizations', it might include organizations that attempt to implement corporate social responsibility (CSR), it might include organizations that incorporate notions of the ,common good' into their policies, etc.

Suggested literature for a start:

L Hartman, F Wilson, D Arnold (2005) Positive Ethical Deviance Inspired by Moral Imagination: The Entrepreneur as Deviant, in: ZFWU (Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Unternehmensethik), 2005.

(2) Problematizing responsibility:

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the construction of 'responsibility' in the discourse of management and organization science.

How is 'responsibility' (of management/of organizations) constructed (as problem) in different discourses? Why is 'responsibility' (seen as) a problem? For whom is it a problem? What are the consequences of (not) taking responsibility? Etc.

The thesis might have a comparative dimension that demonstrates either (a) how the form of problematizing responsibility changes historically or (b) how responsibility is problematized (i.e. constructed as problem) in different discourses or (c) how the technologies and practices of 'managing' responsibility are changing.

Suggested Method: Discourse analysis.

Gee, J. (2005) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. Routledge.

Van Dijk, A. T. (2001) *Critical Discourse Analysis*, in: Schiffrin et. al (eds.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell.

Jäger, S. (2004) *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*. Münster: Unrast.

Would, A. & Kroger, O. (2000) *Doing Discourse Analysis. Methods for studying Action in Talk and Text*. Sage.

(3) The problematization of whistleblowing in the Discourse of HRM:

The aim of this thesis is a (historical) analysis of how „whistleblowing“ is constructed, problematized in the discourse of HRM. What are the technologies and practices of dealing with whistleblowers? What is relevance of organizational technologies like “whistleblower hotlines”? etc.

The thesis might have a comparative dimension that demonstrates either (a) how the form of problematizing whistleblowing changes historically or (b) how whistleblowing is problematized in different discourses.

Suggested Method: Discourse analysis and/or empirical case-study.

Gee, J. (2005) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. Routledge.

Van Dijk, A. T. (2001) *Critical Discourse Analysis*, in: Schiffrin et. al (eds.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell.

Jäger, S. (2004) *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*. Münster: Unrast.

Would, A. & Kroger, O. (2000) *Doing Discourse Analysis. Methods for studying Action in Talk and Text*. Sage.

(4) The 'naked corporation': possibilities and limitations of transparency in organizations

The concept of 'transparency' has a long history that implies notions of democracy, efficiency and control. It has increasingly become a norm, which influences and shapes the modes of managing organizations and social relations more broadly. The aim of this thesis is a (historical) analysis of how „transparency“ is constructed, used, established or problematized in organizations.

Method: ideally case studies

Empirical case studies that show how organizations deal with the issue of “transparency”. How is transparency constructed/how is the norm of transparency implemented? How do managers, employees respond to the requirements of transparency, what are the technologies for creating transparency? How are these technologies used in organizations? What are the effects of these technologies on individuals, social relations, etc.

Literature for start/inspiration:

Garsten, C. & de Montoya M. (2008): The naked corporation: visualization, veiling and the ethico-politics of organizational transparency, in: Garsten & de Montoya (eds) Transparency in a New Global Order. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, p. 79-96.

Ball, C. (2009) What is Transparency? In: Public Integrity, Volume 11, Number 4 / Fall 2009

Roberts, J. (2009). „No one is perfect’. The limits of transparency and an ethic for „Intelligent Accountability“, in: Accounting, Organizations and Society 34: 957-70.

(5) The role and impact of NGOs in establishing ‘Transparency’ in Organizations.

The thesis should explore the role and work of organizations like “Transparency international” in fighting organizational corruption. How does this organization work? What are its impacts and effects? What are its limitations? Etc.

Literature for a start:

Gebel, A. (2012) HUMAN NATURE AND MORALITY IN THE ANTI-CORRUPTION DISCOURSE OF TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL, in: Public Administration and Development; Special Issue: RETRIBUTION, RESTITUTION, OR A CULTURE OF REJECTION – RE-ASSESSING APPROACHES TO CORRUPTION, Volume 32, Issue 1, pages 109–128, February 2012

Tänzler, D. (2010) Transparency International. Von der Moralinstitution zur Politikberatungsagentur– Professionalisierungsstrategien in einer globalen Nonprofit-Organisation, Springer.

(6) Whistleblowing in Austria:

The aim of this thesis is to explore the situation of whistleblowing in Austria. What is the (empirical) relevance of WP in Austria, what are the cultural, institutional (legal) conditions of WP in Austria?

The theses could also explore empirical case(s) that demonstrate the complexity of issues involved in Whistleblowing.

(7) The visual dimension in Organizational Communication

Visual analysis is a relatively recent development in organization studies. The aim of this thesis is to analyse and theorize the role of images and pictures in the context of organizational communication. Ideally the thesis contains a case-study (or several case studies), which demonstrates the significance of the use of images in organizational communication.

Literature for a start/inspiration:

Bell, E./Schroeder, J./Warren, S. (eds.) (2013) Routledge Companion to Visual Organization.

Renate E. Meyer, Markus A. Höllerer, Dennis Jancsary & Theo van Leeuwen (2013) The Visual Dimension in Organizing, Organization, and Organization Research: Core Ideas, Current Developments, and Promising Avenues, *The Academy of Management Annals*. Volume 7, Issue 1, 2013

(8) Co-creation:

The role of co-creation in organizations / forms of co-creation. How do organizations involve various stakeholders in the organizing process and what are the effects of co-creation?

The theses should develop the concept of cocreation and explore empirical case(s) of co-creation.

Literature for a start:

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. 2010. Toward a theory of brand co-creation with implication for brand governance. *Journal of Brand Management*, 00(0), 1-15.

Ind, N., & Coates, N. 2013. The meanings of co-creation. *European Business Review*, 25(1), 86-95.

(9) CSR-strategies

The role of CSR strategies in practice. The thesis should ideally contain an analysis of empirical case(es) that demonstrate how CSR strategies/concepts work in practices. What are the challenges of developing and implementing CSR strategies? How is the implementation of CSR managed and organised? What is the impact of CSR strategies on various stakeholder relations?

(10) Corporate Architecture, space and organizing:

The thesis should explore and explain the role of architecture in creating, influencing, shaping relations at work.

Ideally the thesis should contain a casestudy that demonstrates the impact of corporate architecture on shaping relations in the workplace.

Suggested Literature for a start:

Kornberger, M. & Clegg, St. : Bringing Space Back In. *Organization Studies* September 2004 vol. 25 no. 7 1095-1114

Dale, K. & Burrell, G. (2007) *Architecture, Space and Organization*, Palgrave Macmillan

(11) Organizing ,precarious work' and/or boundaryless careers.

Aim: Showing and analyzing how precarious work arrangements and/or 'boundaryless careers' impact the organizational relations. What are the impacts of precarious work on self-understanding and identity construction? What are the forms of identity work that are associated with these work-arrangements? What are the implications for management? The theses should ideally contain a case-study/case-studies of ,precarious' work and/or 'boundaryless careers').

Suggested Literature for a start:

M Alvesson, H Willmott (2002) Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual, *Journal of management studies*, 2002.

Kalleberg, A. Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition, *American Sociological Review* February 2009 vol. 74 no. 1 1-22

Ross, A. (2009) Nice work if you can get it: Life and labor in precarious times

Brophy, E. (2006) System Error: Labour Precarity and Collective Organizing at Microsoft, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 31(3)

Weick, K. (2001) 'Enactment and the boundaryless career: Organizing as we work', in Weick, K. (ed.) *Making sense of the organization*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Business.

(12) The role of social media in modern organizing

Social media play increasingly play and important role in organizing. This is the case in enterprises (e.g. corporate communication, recruiting, learning...), political organizations, in the organization of networks and social movements. The theses should explore the role of social media in organizing and demonstrate how social media are used and what the effects of their use are. Ideally the theses should analyze the role of social media in case studies. The research questions needs to be focused and elaborated:

You may get inspiration from the following literature:

Kaplan, A./ Haenlein (2009) Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media, in: *Business Horizons*, Volume 53, Issue 1, January–February 2010, Pages 59–68

Richard D. Waters^a, Emily Burnett^b, Anna Lamm^b, Jessica Lucas (2009) Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook, *Public Relations Review* Volume 35, Issue 2, June 2009, Pages 102–106

Ryan, C. (1991) Prime time activism: Media strategies for grassroots organizing

Downing (2001) Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements

Bauman, Z. and Lyon, D. (2013) *Liquid Surveillance*. London: Polity.

(13) The role of 'big data' in managing and organizing.

The theses should explore the role of 'big data' in managing internal or external relations in organizations. What are the possibilities and dangers of "big data"?

Literature for a start:

McAfee, A. and Brynjolfsson (2012) 'Big Data: The Management Revolution', *Harvard Business Review*, October: 3-9.

Harvard Business Manager, Edition 4/2014 (Special Issue: "Big Data: Was Manager, Marketer und Personaler über das Megathema wissen müssen")

Mayer-Schönberger, V. and Cukier, K. (2013) *Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think*: Boston, MA: Eamon Dolan.

Kallinikos, J. (2013) "The Allure of Big Data", *Mercury Magazine* 3: 40-43.

Suggestions HRM (J. Brandl & Team):

(1) Betriebliche Umsetzung des HR Business Partner Konzepts

Ziel der Arbeit ist es, Variationen der Ausgestaltung des einflussreichen Rollenmodells für HR Manager in der Praxis zu analysieren. Die Analyse soll auf Basis von Stellenanzeigen für „HR Business Partner“ erfolgen.

Einstiegsliteratur: Keegan A, Francis H. 2010. Practitioner talk: the changing textscape of HRM and emergence of HR business partnership. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 21: 873-98.

(2) Betriebliche Umsetzung der Neuregelungen zu psychischen Belastungen im Österreichischen Arbeitsschutzgesetz (insbes. ASchG-Novelle und B-BSG)

In dieser Arbeit soll im Rahmen einer Fallstudie aufgearbeitet werden, wie Betriebe den Interpretationsspielraum für die Umsetzung von Neuregelungen der ASchG-Novelle nutzen.

Einstiegsliteratur: Fuller, S.R., Edelman, L.B., & Matusik, S.F. (2000). Legal readings: Employee interpretation and mobilization of law. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 200-216.

(3) Bewerberanforderungen in Printmedien und Online-Stellenmärkten

Die Arbeit zielt darauf ab zu analysieren, inwieweit mit dem Wechsel des Mediums zur Kommunikation von Stellenanzeigen von Printmedien hin zu Online-Stellenmärkten eine Veränderung der Beschreibung von Anforderungen an ideale KandidatInnen einhergeht.

Einstiegsliteratur: Marchal E, Mellet K, Rieucan Gr. 2007. Job board toolkits: Internet matchmaking and changes in job advertisements. *Human Relations* 60: 1091-113.

(4) ‚Gutes‘ Verkaufspersonal im Einzelhandel

In dieser Arbeit wird analysiert, wie strategische Positionierungen die Rekrutierungspraktiken von BewerberInnen für Verkaufspositionen sowie die Auswahlkriterien beeinflussen.

Einstiegsliteratur: Musselin C. 2002. Diversity around the profile of the "good" candidate within French and German universities. *Tertiary Education & Management* 8: 243-58.

Boxall, P. (2003). HR strategy and competitive advantage in the service sector. *Human Resource Management Journal* 13(3): 5-20.