Syllabus

Problem Formulation VT 27
(Doctoral Course, 7.5 ECTS)

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Background

The purpose of research is to extend existing knowledge. To fulfil this purpose, researchers must identify and formulate relevant research problems. The problem formulation, in turn, guides the researcher in the generation of research questions and intended contributions. For doctoral students, it is essential to learn how to formulate problems within his/her research field in order to contribute to knowledge development. Furthermore, to develop skills in problem formulations is an important prerequisite for publications in high quality outlets. Thus, such skills are important not only for accomplishing a successful PhD thesis, but also for a future career development.

Aim

The overall aim of this course is to enable doctoral students to formulate well-motivated research problems and research questions within their fields of interest. The course covers discussions on scientific perspectives and how these relate to problem formulation. The course therefore aims to increase students' understanding of how the problem formulation process may differ across various disciplines. Furthermore, the course focuses on the purpose of problem formulation, how research problems may be formulated, and how the doctoral student can apply these skills in the formulation of their own research problems.

Course content

The course consists of the following main components:

- Review of scientific perspectives and different approaches to problem formulations
- Analyses of problem formulations in previous research within various disciplines
- Formulation of own research problem, research questions, and contributions

Learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, the student should be able to:

1. Understand the purpose and features of problem formulation in the context of academic writing.
2. Understand how problem formulation is related to scientific perspectives.
3. Critically assess claims of research contributions in published and unpublished work.
4. Develop problem formulation skills in order to craft a significant and substantial research contribution.

Teaching and learning activities
The course is structured as a combination of lectures, seminar discussions, individual and group exercises, student presentations, and written assignments. The language of instruction and examination is English.

Before the first course meeting, each participant should deliver a short thesis idea paper (approx. 1,000 words) outlining the main research topic/idea/context of the dissertation (or article). Year of enrollment in the PhD program should also be indicated. The course mainly targets first (and second) year doctoral students, but senior doctoral students are also welcome.

Assessments

- Active participations during lectures and seminars (Assessing learning outcome 1 and 2)
- Reflective essay on the course literature (Assessing learning outcome 1, 2, 3)
- Final essay (Assessing learning outcomes 1, 2, 3,4)

Participation in all activities is compulsory. Performance on the course is assessed individually and graded according to a two-level scale (Pass or Fail). In order to pass the course, the student must have participated in all scheduled course meetings, and passed all assignments.

Readings

A complete list of reading material will be posted 1 months before the course starts.

Course Schedule (Preliminary)

The course starts with the first series of lectures in March. It includes 5 Lectures (all at Stockholm Business School) and 3 seminars (some at Stockholm Business School and some via Zoom). Depending on the composition of the class/student seminar 2-3 might be run in split parallel format lead by each teacher where different students will be allocated based on their discipline.

Activity	**Preparation**	**Content**
Lecture 1 26 JAN 13-16	Short thesis idea paper (approx. 1 000 words)	Problem formulation and its different approaches
Lecture 2 27 JAN 10-12	Read assigned material	Problem formulation and scientific perspectives
Lecture 3 27 JAN 13-15	Read assigned material	Problem formulation in prior research The relevance of the literature review
Seminar 1 18 FEB 13-16	Reflection on problem formulation in published work	Discussion of reflection essays
Lecture 4 19 FEB 10-12	Read assigned material	Problem formulations in different disciplines
Lecture 5 19 FEB 13-15	Read assigned material	Problem the contribution in different disciplines
Seminar 2 (zoom?) 10 Mar 9-12 (group 1) 13-16 (group 2)	Draft 1 of problem formulation Peer reviews	Discussion of draft 1
Seminar 3 (zoom?) 31 Mar 9-12 (group 1) 13-16 (group 2)	Draft 2 of problem formulation Peer reviews	Discussion of Draft 2

Reading list

Alvesson, M., & Sandberg J. (2011). Ways of Constructing Research Questions: gap spotting or problematization? *Organization,*18(1), 23-44

Bowen III, D. E., Frésard, L., & Taillard, J. P. (2017). What's your identification strategy? Innovation in corporate finance research. *Management Science*, *63*(8), 2529-2548.

Breslin, D., & Gatrell, C. (2020). Theorizing through literature reviews: The miner-prospector continuum. *Organizational Research Methods*, 1094428120943288.

Locke, K., & Golden-Biddle, K. (1997). Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence and "problematizing" in organizational studies. *Academy of management journal*, 40(5), 1023-1062.

Stremersch, S., Verniers, I. & Verhoef, P. C. (2007). The Quest for Citations: Drivers of Article Impact, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 71, no. 3, pp.171–193

Schinckus, C. (2015). Positivism in finance and its implication for the diversification finance research: Diversifying finance research: From financialization to sustainability. *International Review of Financial Analysis*, *40*, 103-106.

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of business research*, *104*, 333-339.

Tourish, D. (2020). On Crisis, Genuine Imposters, and Complacency in Management Studies, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp.247–251

Weick, K. E. (1995). What Theory is Not, Theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 40 (3), 385-390.

Wickert, C., Post, C., Doh, J. P., Prescott, J. E. & Prencipe, A. (2021). Management Research That Makes a Difference: Broadening the Meaning of Impact, *Journal of Management Studies*, [e-journal] vol. 58, no. 2,

Whetten, D. A. (1989). What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution? *The Academy of Management Review,* 14(4): 490-495

Koskela-Huotari, K. (2024). How to craft a compelling storyline for a conceptual paper. *AMS Review*, 1-8.

Lucarelli, A., Shahriar, H., Ulver, S., & Egan-Wyer, C. (2024). Research contributions in interpretivist marketing and consumer research studies: a kaleidoscopic framework. *Marketing Theory*, *24*(3), 417-447.

Shahriar, H., Egan-Wyer, C., Ulver, S., & Lucarelli, A. (2026). The audience turn: crafting contributions for impact in marketing and consumer research. Journal of Marketing Management, 1-33.

Krlev, G., Hannigan, T., & Spicer, A. (2024). What Makes a Good Review Article? Empirical Evidence From Management and Organization Research. *Academy of Management Annals*, (ja), annals-2021.

Fernandez, K. V. (2019). Critically reviewing literature: A tutorial for new researchers. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *27*(3), 187-196.

\+ *possible additional articles specific to each seminar*