Professorship Business in Society – Thesis Topic Selection for spring term 2024

Dear students

For the upcoming semester spring 2024, we have defined several topics that you may find interesting to cover in your bachelor or master thesis. Please read the following topic descriptions carefully. Students will preferably supervised working on these topics.

Please note that I only supervise qualitative or conceptual theses!

If you can agree to one or more topics, please sign up via MyStudy for my supervision. After the deadline of the central thesis process, I offer all students a first talk in which we agree on a topic for your thesis. You will also receive further instructions on the thesis writing process then. A general instruction guide can also be found on my Leuphana webpage.

Best,

Hannah Trittin-Ulbrich

1. **Bachelor- or Master Thesis on Digital Sustainability/Responsibility (First supervision by Prof. Trittin-Ulbrich or Prof. Habersang)**
   - Case studies on digital sustainability: How sustainable is the digital economy? In your thesis, you conduct a single- or multiple-case study to examine how entrepreneurial or incumbent organizations use digital technologies to engage in ecological and social sustainability.
     - Initial references:
       - George, G., Merrill, R. K., & Schillebeeckx, S. J. (2021). Digital sustainability and entrepreneurship: How digital innovations are helping tackle climate change and sustainable development. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *45*(5), 999-1027.
       - Lobschat, L., Mueller, B., Eggers, F., Brandimarte, L., Diefenbach, S., Kroschke, M., & Wirtz, J. (2021). Corporate digital responsibility. *Journal of Business Research*, *122*, 875-888.

2) **Bachelor- or Master Thesis on Employee activism in the Platform Economy (First supervision by Prof. Trittin-Ulbrich or Prof. Habersang)**
   - In recent years, the digital economy, particularly platform companies have experienced a series of employee activism incidences, including whistleblowing, walk-outs or unionization efforts.
     - In your thesis, you may investigate a selected case (or compare selected cases), to analyze what can be learned from these incidences on the problematic nature of digital business models, and the shortcomings of management practices, including transparency practices in this industry.
       - Initial reference: Davis, G. F., & White, C. J. (2015). The new face of corporate activism. *Stanford Social Innovation Review, 13*(4), 40-45.
     - Employee activism is often conducted by white-collar employees in certain privileged positions. A particular focus of one thesis could be discussion of employee activism opportunities of hidden employees working in precarious working conditions.

- o Initial reference: D'Cruz, P., Du, S., Noronha, E., Parboteeah, K.P., **Trittin-Ulbrich, H.**, Whelan, G. (2022). [Technology, megatrends and work: Thoughts on the future of business ethics](). *Journal of Business Ethics*, 180, 879-902.
- o Your thesis could also investigate the book "The power of one" by Frances Haugen (https://www.franceshaugen.com/), for example, in order to better understand as to how whistleblowing in the digital economy constitutes passionate attachment to a specific firm, or to the underlying allure of the digital economy.
- o Initial reference: Kenny, K., Fotaki, M., & Vandekerckhove, W. (2020). Whistleblower subjectivities: Organization and passionate attachment. *Organization Studies, 41*(3), 323-343.

3) Bachelor- or Master Thesis on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication (First supervision by Prof. Trittin-Ulbrich)

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication has established itself as a key concern of CSR research in recent years. Drawing on qualitative research methods or conceptual efforts, in your thesis you might address the following research questions:
- A growing number of studies suggest that CSR Communication is formative or performative on how corporations engage in CSR. In your thesis, you investigate the formative potential of communication in a self-chosen research context based on qualitative research methods.
  - o Initial references: Schoeneborn, D., Morsing, M., & Crane, A. (2020). Formative perspectives on the relation between CSR communication and CSR practices: Pathways for walking, talking, and t (w) alking. Business & Society, 59(1), 5-33.
  - o Schoeneborn, D., & Trittin, H. (2013). Transcending transmission: Towards a constitutive perspective on CSR communication. *Corporate communications: An International Journal, 18*(2), 193-211.
- In your thesis, you may alternatively investigate how corporations respond to changes in the communication landscape. For example, you could investigate the takeover by the social media platform X by Elon Musk. You develop a typology of corporate communication responses to dramatic changes in one of the leading public platforms.
  - o Initial reference:
    - Cornelissen, J. (2017). Editor's comments: Developing propositions, a process model, or a typology? Addressing the challenges of writing theory without a boilerplate. *Academy of Management Review*, *42*(1), 1-9.

4) Bachelor- or Master Thesis on Female Entrepreneurship (First supervision by Prof. Trittin-Ulbrich or Prof. Habersang)

- In your thesis, you investigate the topic female entrepreneurship. Focusing on female social media content creators, you critically investigate the perils and opportunities of such occupation for women.
  - Einstiegsreferenz: Duffy, B. E., & Wissinger, E. (2017). Mythologies of creative work in the social media age: Fun, free, and "just being me". *International Journal of Communication, 11*, 20.
- In your thesis, you study how two of Germany's most famous female entrepreneurs use their (German) podcast „The Fast and the Curious" as a platform to share their stories and experiences of entrepreneurship and innovation, and how they construct and perform their entrepreneurial identities and narratives in the podcast. The concept of antenarrative would be used to analyze the stories that are not yet fully formed or coherent, but are still in the process of becoming narratives. Antenarratives are fragmented, nonlinear, and speculative stories that bet on the future and draw on the past to make sense of the present.
  - *On female entrepreneurship*: Dean, H., Larsen, G., Ford, J., & Akram, M. (2019). Female entrepreneurship and the metanarrative of economic growth: A critical review of underlying assumptions. International Journal of Management Reviews, 21(1), 24-49.
  - *On the methodology*: Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2011). On the Narrative Construction of Multinational Corporations: An Antenarrative Analysis of Legitimation and Resistance in a Cross-Border Merger. Organization Science, 22(2), 370–390.
- In your thesis, you examine how the (German) podcast „The Fast and the Curious" podcast challenges or reinforces the gender stereotypes and inequalities that affect female entrepreneurs in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation, and how it influences the power relations and ideologies in the field. The concept of discursivity would be used to analyze the language and discourse used in the podcast, and how they shape and are shaped by the social and cultural context. Discursivity is the ability of language to produce and reproduce meanings, values, and identities, and to construct and contest social realities.
  - *On female entrepreneurship:* Dean, H., Larsen, G., Ford, J., & Akram, M. (2019). Female entrepreneurship and the metanarrative of economic growth: A critical review of underlying assumptions. International Journal of Management Reviews, 21(1), 24-49.
  - *On the methodology*: Phillips, N., & Oswick, C. (2012). Organizational discourse: Domains, debates, and directions. The Academy of Management Annals, 6(1), 435-481.

5) Bachelor- or Master Thesis on Self-Management & Prefigurative Organizations (First supervision by Prof. Trittin-Ulbrich or Anna Stöber)

- **Different (case) studies of self-management cases & prefigurative organizations**
  In your thesis, you investigate one or multiple cases of preconfigurative organizations. You may investigate and/or compare them with regards to different forms of decision-making processes, membership or leadership mechanisms. Particularly in the food- and beverage industry, but also in the agricultural sector in Lower Saxony several examples (such as the WirGarten) can be investigated based on interviews and/or observations.

- Initial reference: Schiller-Merkens, S. (2022). Prefiguring an alternative economy: Understanding prefigurative organizing and its struggles. *Organization*, 13505084221124189.

Blockchain based Autonomous Decentralized Organizations (DAOs) and their potential for democratic organizing/self-management

In your thesis, you investigate DAOs with respect to their promise of being fully democratic and self-managing organization. DAOs are entities that rely on smart contracts and blockchain technology without the need for a central governing authority. These organizations promise to facilitate decision-making and management of resources in a decentralized and transparent manner. While the concept suggests great promise, DAOs also face challenges, such as security vulnerabilities and regulatory uncertainties, and questions regarding how such decentralization can be enacted over time.

Topic focus 1 (for empirical theses): How do members of DAOs perceive the potential to organize in self-managing/democratic ways in such organizations? How do members negotiate the governance processes in DAOs?

Topic focus 2 (for conceptual theses): In what ways do DAOs complement or challenge ideas of democratic and self-managing forms of organizing? (The starting point here would be a systematic review of the literature on DAOs and connecting the insights to the broader body of literature on self-managing forms of organizing)

Initial references:

- Hsieh, YY., Vergne, JP., Anderson, P. et al. Bitcoin and the rise of decentralized autonomous organizations. J Org Design 7, 14 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41469-018-0038-1
- Fabrice Lumineau , Wenqian Wang , Oliver Schilke (2020) Blockchain Governance—A New Way of Organizing Collaborations?. *Organization Science* 32(2):500-521.
- Martela, F. What makes self-managing organizations novel? Comparing how Weberian bureaucracy, Mintzberg's adhocracy, and self-organizing solve six fundamental problems of organizing. *Journal of Organization Design* 8, 23 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41469-019-0062-9

- **Prefigurative organizing/politics in interorganizational employee activist communities**

In your thesis, you investigate how employee activists (i.e. employees or organizational insiders who use their insider position to advocate for social or environmental issues important to them) use interorganizational communities to imagine and enact alternatives to the status quo.

A question to start with could be:

How can members of interorganizational employee activist communities envision and unite around common alternatives, bridging the gaps created by their diverse backgrounds and positions?

Initial references:

- Briscoe, F., & Gupta, A. (2016). Social activism in and around organizations. Academy of Management Annals, 10(1), 671-727.
- Skoglund, A., & Böhm, S. (2020). Prefigurative Partaking: Employees' Environmental Activism in an Energy Utility. *Organization Studies*, 41(9), 1257-1283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619847716

6) Master's theses on the projects DI-SZENARIO and GAME-DIDAKTIK (First supervision by Prof. Trittin-Ulbrich or Dr. Johannes Katasarov)

- **Topic Focus 1: Ethical Sensitivity in Marketing: Development and validation of an ethical sensitivity test for marketing with social media.**

Based on selected literature (e.g., case studies), you will develop several vignettes that shorty describe problematic marketing behaviors. In the first stage, you will validate the content and design of these vignettes by interviewing faculty and students to make sure that the vignettes represent the right contents in the right way. In the second stage, you will then conduct an online survey to validate the vignette-based test in terms of its reliability and, its convergent and discriminant validity, and analyze the results.

What you will gain: Experience in the development and application of psychometric tests and online surveys, knowledge about marketing ethics and moral psychology, experience in statistical analyses (factor analysis). Co-authorship in a scientific publication.

Your profile: You like to work with numbers and value precision in written and spoken communication. You have gathered some first experience in statistical analysis and are ready to advance your statistical competence – or you already have experience in applying advanced statistical methods like factor analysis. You have an interest in psychological and ethical questions, are self-organized and reliable.

- **Gaming for Sustainability: Literature review on games and simulations for sustainable business development.**

Working with different scientific databases, you will conduct a systematic literature review on games and simulations that can be used to train businesspeople to address environmental challenges and innovate businesses in terms of sustainability. You will then describe and evaluate the identified games systematically, using a novel framework of guiding questions.

What you will gain: Expertise on games and simulations related to sustainability education, experience in conducting systematic literature reviews, experience in systematic analysis (of games) and writing. Authorship of entries in a public wiki on games for higher education and in a respective book publication.

Your profile: You are interested in game-based learning or game studies and want to learn about games and simulations that can promote sustainable business development. You are willing to delve through long lists of literature and carefully analyze entries in view of the question, whether they are of relevance. You like to write and produce texts that are informative and pleasant to read for others. You enjoy playing games, are self-organized and reliable.