LONDON BUSINESS SCHOOL  
Ph.D. Seminar in Strategy Process  
Spring Term 2009

Location: A127  
Time: Thursdays 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM  
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Course description

Strategy and organization scholars often make a distinction between content and process approaches to strategy. While strategy content usually is concerned with the relationship between strategic positions and firm performance, classical research on strategy process has focused on how firms find themselves in such positions in the first place. Thus, a main criticism of strategy content research has been that it does not address how strategic decisions are made and implemented, and therefore has limited value to management. Not surprisingly, strategy process research has been criticised for describing how strategic decisions are made and implemented without taking into account the attractiveness of the positions attained.

Meanwhile, more recent developments in strategy and organization research have begun to blur the distinction between process and content. Increasing interest in evolutionary approaches to organizational adaptation, theories of dynamic capabilities, complexity models, design theory, strategic entrepreneurship and innovation, all suggest that the simple process/content distinction is becoming outdated. In this seminar we will first trace this development by focusing on some of the classical strategy process literature. We will then explore some of the more recent takes on strategy process, focusing on the different ways this research combines process and content arguments to develop strong theory.

Course Objectives

Though this course is intended to provide students with the knowledge required to complete their degrees, it is equally concerned with their scholarly development. Acknowledging the importance of publishing for career progress, this course will have a significant focus on research. The intention is for students to experience the process of conducting research and crafting a paper. This is knowledge best learnt through practice.
In brief, this course aims at:

1. Providing students with an overview of different ways of studying strategy process, as discussed above.
2. Develop critical skills for the evaluation of work in this area
3. Pushing students to develop a theoretical argument related to a strategy process question and to think about the appropriate empirical evidence to test it.

Course Format
Rather than attempting an exhaustive survey of the vast literature attached to the field of strategy process, this course focuses on key, influential readings. Students will be required to read a smaller number of readings (starred articles) with the understanding that they will study these in depth. In most cases I have also included a few supplementary references, in case you are interested in deepening your knowledge in a particular area. In approaching the required readings, you should think about the following questions:

1. How is the research motivated and framed? What do the authors (implicitly or explicitly) regard as incomplete in existing research such that their argument constitutes a significant contribution?
2. What is the main theoretical argument of the paper? What causal mechanisms are proposed and why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such theory?
3. What types of evidence do the authors bring to bear to support their argument? How convincing is it? What other evidence might help them test their argument better?
4. Is this paper a contribution to a “big picture” question in the field? Could the work have made a bigger contribution in any other way?

Familiarity with general terms and concepts in the field is presumed. Students wishing to brush up on some of the classics may refer to:


For a reminder of what constitutes theoretical development in the social sciences:


Course Requirements

Weekly memos and class participation (30% of the grade)
Students must submit a two-page note criticizing one of the starred readings by 7:00 pm the evening before class. Please send these as email attachments to me by this time. Each student will provide a 5-10 minute overview of his/her assigned reading as part of the class discussion. Everyone, however, is expected to prepare all the required readings, not just the ones they are writing about. Students are also expected to actively participate in class, as the success of this course depends on them reading the material and be prepared to talk critically about it. The class participation grade will depend both on the quantity and quality of the student’s contributions.

Leading class discussions (20% of the grade)
Each student will be required to facilitate and lead class discussion two or three times during the course. They will be expected to present the main ideas of that week’s readings to the rest of the class both pointing out complements and contrasts, as well as contributions to the field (without discussing the individual readings in detail). Presenters will also be responsible for leading class discussion by posing reflective and provocative questions to their classmates. Details of who will lead each session will be provided in class. I will inform you by email about the logistics of the first session.

Research exercises and term paper (50% of the grade)
Students will also be required to partake of an ongoing research exercise in which they develop their own paper or research proposal. The emphasis of this exercise will be to develop original theory and to search for the appropriate empirical evidence to test it. Students will be required to hand in memos at regular intervals and present them briefly during class. I will provide individual feedback after each presentation, and you will be expected to incorporate this (and other students’ feedback) as appropriate in the final paper. The timeline and details of this exercise are:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Section</th>
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<tr>
<td>One day before session 3</td>
<td>Hand in memo on chosen research question (1-2 pages)</td>
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<td>During session 3</td>
<td>Present your proposal to the class</td>
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<tr>
<td>One day before session 6</td>
<td>Hand in literature review and theoretical model (approx. 8 pages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>During session 6</td>
<td>Present your theory and model to the class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two days before session 10</td>
<td>Hand in a draft of the whole paper to me, and distribute a copy to the other students</td>
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<tr>
<td>During session 10</td>
<td>Present your paper and give feedback to your colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 weeks after the end of class</td>
<td>Hand in final paper (20 pages max.)</td>
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COURSE OUTLINE

Session 1: The Classics: January 15th


Session 2: Strategy Formulation: January 22nd


Session 3: Planning vs. Emergent Strategies: January 29th
[The second half of this class will be devoted to students’ presentations of research proposals]


Session 4: Cognition, Learning and Decision Making: February 5th


**Session 5: Resources and Dynamic Capabilities: February 12th**


* In pack 2 →

**Session 6: Evolutionary Perspectives on Strategy: February 19th**

[The second half of this class will be devoted to students’ presentations of literature review and theory development]


Session 7: Knowledge and the Firm: February 26th


Session 8: Knowledge and Networks: March 5th


Session 9: Strategy Processes in the Multinational: Friday March 6th Room P113 - NOTE DIFFERENT DATE AND LOCATION
[The second half of this class will be devoted to the study of an example of how a paper evolves from idea to final version]


Session 10: Presentations and feedback: March 12th