



NORDISK FÖRETAGSEKONOMISK FÖRENING • NORDIC ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT



**The 26th Nordic Academy of Management Conference**  
Bringing Research Together  
**25-27 August 2021**  
Örebro University School of Business, Sweden

**Call for Papers**

We invite you to submit your research to explore the theme of “*Bringing Research Together*” for the 26<sup>th</sup> biennial NFF Conference in Örebro. We are looking forward to receiving your submissions.

**Track 11.1 – A workshop: Contemporary Notions on Theoretical Contributions, Empirical Work and Knowledge Development**

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**Description:**

An argument from a rejection letter:

*“Manuscripts published in XX make a strong theoretical contribution to the field of X studies literature, and in its current form, I do not see that your manuscript can make such a contribution. ... the clear emphasis in [the studies we publish] is making a theoretical contribution to the field of X studies.”*

According to the rejection letter, the authors of this paper appear to have replaced strong empirical research with the journals strive for strong theoretical contributions. Reading the aim of contemporary journals, their specified purposes almost appear as copy-paste versions. Some examples from the aims of top-ranked outlets read accordingly: “publishes top quality theoretical and empirical research”, “publishes the best theoretical and empirical papers”, “to be published in XX, the research must make strong empirical and theoretical contributions, “advance theory development” and similar declarations. In a response to such declarations, special workshops are established with the focus: “oriented towards developing high-quality theory-driven papers for publication in the top journals of our field”. Taken together, these ambitions seem to be a very consistent trend prescribing scholar’s main task as to produce theory.

[www.oru.se/NFF2021](http://www.oru.se/NFF2021)





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Management studies, including fields as accounting, marketing, finance, organization studies, international business and so forth, is a scientific field often described as complex, diverse, multifaceted, eclectic and of an adhoc nature (Whitley, 1984), being characterized by a wide range of possible theories and perspectives. The multiplicity of theories and perspectives corresponds with variations in how to understand theory, the role of theory, and subsequently, and what should be considered the very content of theory is debated, a theme that Hervé Corvellec nicely introduces.

However, not only the content of theory is up for dispute. *What theory is not and theorizing may be* summarizes the lack of consensus when it comes to what a theory will explain and what a strong theory may consist of. The oft-cited article "What theory is not" by Robert I. Sutton and Berry M. Staw (1995) mentions five items sometimes taken for theory but which are not: references, data, list of constructs, diagrams, hypotheses or predictions. But, as pointed out by Karl E. Weick (1995), if the theory development is in its early stages, these items will be part of the theorizing. The reason is that theory is a continuum, starting with a sort of approximation. In the process of theorizing, as a next step such an approximation will be elaborated upon with further analysis of concepts, further observations of the phenomenon and, eventually, generalizations summarizing the approximation. For each step, a number of studies are likely to be developed. Taken together, these may serve as the foundation of a full-blown theory.

This given, there seems to be different ways to come up with strong theory, theoretical contributions, and theorizing. Yet, when following publications in top-ranked journals, the requested theory production seems to follow a specific preferred functionalist-oriented template.

Alluded to this development we intend to host a workshop on topics related to:

- Why this contemporary focus on theory in the broad field of management studies?
- How can contribution to knowledge in general be replaced with, or distinguished from, a limited theoretical contribution?
- How can theorizing be acknowledged when "strong theory" and (the best) theoretical contributions are asked for?
- Which is the role of empirical work in contemporary publications?

**Keywords:**

Theory, Theoretical Contribution, Theorizing, Empirical Work

**References:**

Corvellec, Hervé (ed.) (2013). *What is Theory? Answers from the Social and Cultural Sciences*. Stockholm and Copenhagen: Liber and Copenhagen Business School Press.

Sutton, Robert I. and Staw, Berry M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40: 371–384.

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Weick, Karl E. (1995). What theory is not – Theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40: 385–390.

Whitley, Richard (1984). *The Intellectual and Social Organization of the Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Author guidelines:**

Go to [www.oru.se/NFF2021](http://www.oru.se/NFF2021) for more information about how to submit a paper. The deadline for abstract submission is 30 January 2021. Full paper due: 21 June 2021.

***We very much look forward to welcoming you in Örebro!***

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