Institut für Organisation und Personal
Abteilung Organisation
Masterarbeiten FS 2020

You can apply for the following topics between 25.11.2019, 12:00 noon and 02.12.2019, 12:00 noon. Applications sent before will not be considered. Please send a complete list of priorities over all topics, a transcript of records of your Bachelor’s degree and a current version of your transcript of records of your Master’s program. Topics will be assigned based on the first-come-first-served principle.

Please send applications to: kathrin.friedrich@iop.unibe.ch

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A short description is available for each topic (see below).
**Topics 1-3 (will vary in details, general topic is identical)**

**Description:** Voluntary cooperation between employees is a paramount variable affecting organizational effectiveness. Yet, despite considerable advances into the underlying psychological mechanisms of cooperation or the lack thereof, there remains a dearth in the empirical literature addressing the psychological foundations of cooperation. Despite its high relevance, how attribution processes of institutionalized cooperation (e.g., sanctions, repeated-game context) affect behavior outside of such institutions has thus far not received any research attention. In this light, the present theses aim to fill this gap by adding new experimental data to our body of knowledge. In particular, the work intends to systematically manipulate cooperative versus non-cooperative experiences of participants to investigate subsequent attribution processes and important downstream consequences affecting organizations and social groups in general. Among these consequences, perception, welfare, and endogenous institutional choice are particularly interesting candidates.

**Goal:** Design and conduct at least one behavioral experiment on cooperation, pre-register and receive ethical approval for the study, analyze the data using the statistical software R, writing a paper-style manuscript.

**Literature:**


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**Topic 4: Prosocial mission and performance**

**Description:** Nowadays many employees are looking for meaningful jobs that are related to a social purpose beyond profit maximization. Examples include jobs in non-profit organizations supporting disadvantaged people, animals or the environment, the job of teachers or jobs in companies that invest highly in corporate social responsibility (CSR). In addition, economics studies have shown that the willingness to cooperate makes a significant contribution to team performance.

**Goal:** The goal of this thesis is to examine the recent literature about prosocial mission orientation and (team) performance and to investigate experimentally whether and under what circumstances a pro-social environment increases (team) performance. The successful completion of the thesis will enable the student to design, plan, execute, and evaluate experiments as well as to communicate effectively the results to an academic audience or decision makers within organizations.

**Topic 5: Bonus versus penalty: What drives the effect of contract framing?**

**Description:** Although incentives can be very effective in raising employees’ performance, the way incentives are implemented and framed matters. Recent experimental literature shows that negatively framed penalty contracts that punish agents for not meeting expectations increase productivity relative to payoff-equivalent bonus contracts that reward for good performance. However, as some studies are not able to find this contract framing effect (for an overview see de Quidt et al. 2017), results are not conclusive. In fact, there are many differences across the experimental design regarding the implementation of the penalty contract, which makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the exact causes of the discrepancy in results.

**Goal:** The goal of this thesis is to examine the recent literature about contract framing and to investigate experimentally what makes a penalty contract successful and to what extent loss aversion drives the productivity increase under a penalty contract. The successful completion of the thesis will enable the student to design, plan, execute, and evaluate an experiment as well as to communicate effectively the results to an academic audience or decision makers within organizations.


**Literature:**


**Topic 6: The willingness to work in teams**

**Description:** Increasingly, companies rely on their workforce to engage in teamwork. In some situations, teamwork is not mandatory, but employees can opt in to work with a colleague instead of working alone. Who is willing to work in teams, and what can influence the decision to team up with a colleague? This thesis looks at selected factors of influence to help understand decision-making in such situations.

**Goal:** Detailed discussion of the literature. Design of an experiment. Conduction, analysis and evaluation of the experiment.

**Literature:**

**Topic 7: Gender differences in context sensitivity**

**Description:** A large body of research analyzes gender differences in a wide range of settings, providing explanations for the still persistent gender gap in top management positions. Recently, some studies show that the behavior of women depends more on the context than the behavior of men. How are decision-making and performance outcomes of men and women affected by contextual factors? This thesis takes up this recent angle and examines the power of the decision-making context to shed light in the current debate.

**Goal:** Detailed discussion of the literature. Design of an experiment. Conduction, analysis and evaluation of the experiment.

**Literature:**

**Topic 8: Are we fair by default?**

**Description:** Understanding the drivers of pro-social behavior is critical as it is seen to contribute to save, stable and successful private and public environments. To craft initiatives that elicit such behavior, a key question to be answered is whether fairness is our ‘default setting’ – our intuitive reaction – or rather the result of deliberate weighting of costs and benefits. Findings aiming to answer this question have been ambiguous, mostly testing decision-making under varying degrees of time pressure and time delay. More recently, the subjective difficulty in making fair decisions has been considered to affect time pressure. In this study, the student is asked to investigate how fair intuitive decision-making can be tested and apply those findings in an experimental design (e.g., prisoner’s dilemma or dictator game).

**Goal:** Detailed discussion of the theory and supplementary literature. Design of an experiment to further investigate if decision-making is fair by default or the result of thorough deliberation.


**Topic 9: The enigma of lies**

**Description:** Deception and fraud are omnipresent – we experience it in our private lives and new revelations in politics and business make the news daily. While lying is natural, the negative effects on economies and societies can be also be immense, e.g., considering the billions lost each year through tax fraud. The questions *why we lie* and *when we lie* are subject of investigation: Do we lie whenever it is in our (monetary) favor? Or do we only lie when it is in our favor and we think it goes unnoticed? Or do we have a natural pre-disposition to tell the truth? Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi (2013) have developed a simple experimental design to test lying behavior. Building on this, the student can investigate motives and situational factors of lying and honesty, testing current findings e.g., with different populations, with different payoffs, negative externalities, etc.

**Goal:** Detailed discussion of the theory and supplementary literature. Design of an experiment to investigate lying behavior in a specific / different context(s) and/or for different populations.