Guidelines for a doctoral (or master's) thesis dissertation proposal
by
John Antonakis
Department of Organizational Behavior, University of Lausanne
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The below refers mostly to potential doctoral students. However, it is equally applicable to students who wish to have me as their supervisor for a master's thesis.
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We offer a Doctorate of Economic Sciences with a Management Major (see http://www.hec.unil.ch/hec/doctorats/phdmanagement/why/welcome). This is a top-notch program that has extensive coursework with a strong quantitative and theoretical component upfront (i.e., obligatory courses). The thesis I expect students to do must make an important and original contribution to knowledge, and this in the form of 3 papers (this end-point will be far in the future, so don't worry too much about it now; rest assured that writing 3 papers is in your interest because it will prepare you for an academic career and paper-writing and not a career as a perennial doctoral student writing theses!).

Below are some guidelines that students should look before I will consider supervising their thesis. I expect students who wish to have me as a supervisor to have completed the MSc organizational behavior specialization here (or equivalent elsewhere). Students who do not have this background will be require to take the requisite courses to "get up to speed," especially regarding quantitative analysis methods; they must also be able to think theoretically (by theoretically, I mean Academy of Management Review journal-style theory). Of course, you don't need to be an expert theorist and statistician; however, you need to have a level that ensures you have MSc-level knowledge that is compatible to that of our MSc program.

Students who would like me to supervise their thesis must first submit a proposal following the below guidelines. Students who (a) want me to supervise their master's thesis or (b) intend to do a doctorate but have not yet been accepted on the doctoral program and who would like to have me as their doctoral advisor should submit a proposal to me. For the master's thesis, the proposal must be two pages long, maximum; the proposal for the doctorate must be four-five pages, maximum. Please use the guidelines below to draft the proposal.

Please ensure that the substantive area in which you wish to research is closely linked to my areas of expertise (so check-out my research record first). Also, please note that for doctoral thesis I will only supervise quantitative cross-sectional or experimental studies (including qualitative studies whose data can be quantified and analyzed quantitatively, and which have an appropriate sample size). For certain types of master's thesis I might consider supervising integrative theoretical projects.

Doctoral theses that I intend to supervise must make substantive and original contributions to theory. Essentially, a theory refers to a framework of constructs (and their manifest indicators), how they are interrelated, their units of analysis, their boundaries (i.e., moderating conditions), and how they are causally related to some dependent measures at the same or a different level of analysis. Theories must make predictions and must explain why and when these predictions should hold. Making a substantive contribution will mean extending previous theoretical work into an area where there is a gap, that is, an area that is not well understood (i.e., puzzling), where previous models have not predicted an outcome well, and so forth. Extensions can include additional explanatory (or possibly dependent variables) and moderating conditions of the theory (i.e., identification of third variable that alter the relations of the theoretical framework), different levels conceptualizations and implications, and so forth.

I do not judge master's thesis at the same level as a doctoral thesis. A master's thesis that replicates or tests alternative aspects of a theory is fine for me.

As concerns what a theory is, please refer to the following:

Bacharach, S. B. (1989). Organizational theories: Some criteria for evaluation. *Academy of Management Review 14*, 496-515.

Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution. *Academy of Management Review, 14*, 490-495.

The thesis proposal: What I expect
The thesis proposal should at least contain the sections below (please use my headings). What interests me is to know whether you have done sufficient work, and have the necessary background and knowledge to work with me; of course, I also want to ensure that the study is feasible. I prefer to work in English though feel free to submit work to me in French (with the expectation that you will write your thesis papers in English).

1. Title
The title should clearly and succinctly convey the essence of the study.

2. Research problem/research questions/hypotheses/significance.
Here, the research problem that you seek to address should be made clear. What is the puzzle that you are trying to solve? Why is it a puzzle? Try to write the research problem in question format. The research problem should be very pointed and focused, but not to the extent that it becomes trivial. You must identify why the problem is important (the questions that usually come to mind when reading problem statements are: "so what, who cares, what difference will it make to society"?) In other words, the study should clearly be important and make some unique/significant contribution to theory and practice. What are the hypotheses that will be tested (i.e., a statement, in null or substantive form, indicated a relation or difference between the variables)?

3. Background to the study

The literature reviewed (for the doctorate cite about 15 sources from peer-reviewed journals of international repute; for the MSc about 5 sources will do) should provide a strong enough theoretical and empirical foundation to support section 2 above (i.e., the research problems/questions should be distilled and naturally follow from the literature, which will also guide the hypotheses that need to be tested and predict the outcome of the study) and to set the tone of the study. The literature reviewed should provide the basis for the gap that you intend to fill with your study.

4. Method and design

The design of the study (i.e., survey method/cross-sectional design, experimental design, field study, longitudinal study, etc.), is essential in terms of what type of data will be gathered, how it will be gathered, and the data-gathering instrument will be used. The intended sample must be clearly identified and justified. The data-analysis method must be clearly stated and justified, and support the hypotheses that are to be tested.

5. Anticipated findings and implications

This section must logically follow from the literature review and the hypotheses. Provided you have strong theory, you must be able to predict the outcomes of the study. Implications for theory and practice must be clearly made.

6. References

References/citations (and the style of the proposal) should follow the guidelines of the APA (American Psychological Association) publication manual.

Note: if you are not a fluent speaker of the language in which you will submit the proposal, please have your work copy-edited before sending it to me (note: even fluent speakers oftentimes need help in writing clearly). I expect all student work to be clear and precise.