ADVANCED TOPICS IN STRATEGIC HRM (PHD COURSE)

Credits: 5 ECTS.
Format: Seminar-style, discussion-based.
Course duration: 11 sessions (March-June).
Prerequisites: PhD enrolment required; prior exposure to HRM and/or OB theory is helpful.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this PhD course is to introduce early-stage PhD students to key theory and empirical research in Human Resource Management (HRM), combining classic and recent studies. The course focuses on major debates in strategic HRM and on how HRM practices can enhance the well-being of both the organization and its workforce, across different levels of analysis (individual, team, and organization).

The course involves a deep dive into core theories and empirical evidence in HRM, preparing students for their own doctoral research in the field. Each session is discussion-based and built around a carefully selected set of academic readings. Students are expected to complete the readings and participate actively in class. They will receive regular feedback and be intellectually challenged through critical discussion of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies in HRM.

The course also supports students in moving from reading research to developing their own publishable projects. We will practice how to formulate a strong research question, position it within the literature, design a study, and navigate the submission, review, and revision process. To support learning, students will rotate in-class roles and provide peer feedback, following the seminar format.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Formulate and refine a strategic HRM research question** with clear theoretical positioning and appropriate level(s) of analysis.
2. **Assess fit among research question, theory, method, and target outlet** (including framing and positioning).
3. **Critique and synthesize contemporary HRM theory** and evidence across key strategic HRM topics.
4. **Design a publishable paper** (research question, contribution, and methodology).
5. **Perform peer review** and respond constructively to reviews (including R&R strategy and revision mapping).

COURSE OUTLINE

Module 1—The research cycle (Weeks 1–2):

- Selecting and refining a research question (theory/method/levels of analysis in HRM)
- Choosing an outlet and crafting a paper (framing, contribution, paper architecture)

Module 2—Strategic HRM topics (Weeks 3–10):

Strategic issues in HRM

- HRM and firm performance
- Organizational change and HRM
- Digitalization/AI and HRM
- Work-related health and HRM

Strategic HRM in practice

- Staffing as a strategic system (workforce planning, recruitment, selection)
- Motivation and control (incentives, monitoring, commitment vs control logics)
- HRM implementation and devolution (line managers, HR operating model)
- HR differentiation (i-deals, talent systems)

Module 3—Submission & review process (Week 11):

- Submission mechanics, reading decision letters
- How to approach an R&R: revision strategy, developing a response letter, "reviewer management"

TEACHING METHODS AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The course includes weekly lectures, complemented by student presentations and research briefs. In addition, students are expected to develop an original research project and provide constructive feedback on each other's work.

Attendance is compulsory and active engagement is essential: students are required to come well prepared for each session and to contribute meaningfully to group discussions. Unlike undergraduate and master's courses, this PhD-level course emphasizes critical thinking, scholarly dialogue, and the active creation of knowledge.

- Each session includes discussion of 3–4 key academic papers.
- In Modules 1–2, students rotate as session leaders and deliver a structured research brief (total ~60 minutes) based on the weekly readings:
    - *Synthesis and critique* (not a summary): map the papers' core constructs, causal logic, levels of analysis, key findings, and major debates; compare and contrast theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses.

    - *Research scout*: identify 2-3 recent developments (last ~3 years) and highlight one "must-read" article in relation to the weekly topic; share a 1-page annotated bibliography with classmates 24 hours before class.
    - *Class exercise*: lead an activity linked to the topic (e.g., applied debate, case analysis, measure critique, mock editorial decision).
- After presentations, the class has ~30 minutes of moderated discussion with instructor input, focusing on: (a) promising research questions (and why they matter); (b) theoretical tensions or boundary conditions to resolve, and (c) method/design insights (what to replicate, change, or extend).
- Throughout Modules 1–2, students will develop an integrative paper linked to their dissertation (2,500–3,000 words).
- In Module 3, students will write a peer-review report on another student's integrative paper (1,500–2,000 words).

ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT EVALUATION

Participation and engagement (30%):

- Active contribution to class discussions and peer learning
- Evidence of careful reading and preparation
- Constructive critique and collegial debate

Rotating session leadership and research briefing (30%):

- Research brief
- Research scout
- Class exercise

Integrative paper (20%):

- 2,500–3,000 words, double-spaced (A4)
- Research question and motivation ("hook")
- Theoretical framing and intended contribution (what's new vs. what's known)
- Conceptual model with propositions or hypotheses (as appropriate)
- Design logic (data, identification strategy, measures, qualitative design, etc.)
- Target outlet(s) and a positioning paragraph (why this journal, why now)

Peer review report (20%):

- 1,500–2,000 words, double-spaced (A4), structured as a journal review
- Very brief summary
- Contribution and fit with the literature
- Theory: clarity, logic, novelty, boundary conditions
- Method/design: credibility and feasibility
- Revision guidance: what to change for a strong R&R