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Guidelines Master Theses

Chair of Sustainable Business

Dear student,

we are delighted that you are interested in completing your master thesis at the Chair of Sustainable Business! To make matters clearer, this guideline sums up some basic information on the process and regulations for a master thesis at our Chair.

If any aspects remain unclear or if you would like to discuss further details, feel free to contact us.

We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

The Team of the Chair of Sustainable Business

1. Before You Start

1.1. Finding a Topic

Generally, our Chair will publish an updated list of topics that are currently available for master theses. These topics will typically relate to our on-going research projects. In some instances, they may tie in with data collections that are already planned or in progress, use empirical tools that we have access to, and/or extend on literature and theory that has already been reviewed at our Chair. However, the exact topic and research question can often be shaped to suit your interests, and we are open for your ideas on the exact contents and design of your thesis.

Alternatively, you may propose a topic of your own, which must naturally relate to the field of sustainable business. Feel free to view our publication lists or other recent publications in sustainable business as a first idea of possible angles. Ideally, your ideas for a topic should carry some new notions or research questions and expand on existing literature. Once you have a sound idea, or list of ideas, feel free to discuss their feasibility and details with us. Please note that we may reject topics if we feel that they are not manageable as a master thesis, or do not tie in with our research at all.

Due to the nature of our own research, our Chair generally leans toward empirical master theses; that is, theses that are based on real-life data. Mostly, this will be quantitative data, for example stemming from questionnaires, tests, economic indices, etc. However, also qualitative data, often stemming from interviews, may be used. Prior to selecting a topic, consider which type of data you feel competent generating and/ or working with. Also note that this may influence your time schedule.

Depending on your topic, you may be required to collect the necessary data yourself, use available secondary data, or use data that the Chair has collected during ongoing research. One way to generate data of your own is to cooperate with one or several companies, initiatives, NGOs, or other relevant practitioners. In some cases, the Chair may already have cooperation projects

with or connections to practitioners that you can make use of. Alternately, you may suggest a cooperation partner/project of your own (e.g., involving a company that you are working at, or have done an internship with). We are happy to discuss your suggestions to assess whether such a cooperation sufficiently ties in with our research, and whether it can provide a feasible basis for your thesis.

1.2. Prerequisites

For formal requirements, please see your respective “Prüfungsordnung” and the [requirements](#) of the examination office.

As described above, there are two ways to determine a thesis topic: First, you can check the list of proposed topics on our website. Second, you can propose a topic of your own choice. Once you have identified a topic that you are interested in, we ask you to contact the person responsible for that topic (the prospective supervisor). This is necessary to ensure that the topic is currently still available and that your time planning fits with the availability of your prospective supervisor. After having agreed on the topic and schedule, we ask you to write a short proposal (approx. 3-5 pages, font size 12, 1.5 margin, Times New Roman). In this proposal, you should answer the following questions:

- 1) Why is the topic of interest? (Here you can use current statistics or news reports)
- 2) What is the state of research in the academic field related to the topic? Which void in the literature do you intend to address? (You may use a table or a figure to illustrate the research gap)
- 3) What is your exact research question?
- 4) What is your research hypothesis? Which rationale is this hypothesis based on? Which theories will you use to derive your hypothesis?
- 5) Which methodological approach do you intend to use to empirically test your hypothesis?

- 6) Which contribution to the literature do you expect from the results of your thesis? Why do you expect your results to be relevant for academia and for management?
- 7) What is your work schedule/ time plan for the thesis? (This can be added in the form of a table.)

1.3. Registering Your Thesis

Please note and follow the [requirements of the examination office](#) (Studienbüro).

2. Writing, Citing, and Formatting

2.1. Language

You are welcome to write your thesis in either English or German. This is your choice.

2.2. Length

Theses at our Chair must adhere to paper-style (i.e., be written in a manner similar to papers that are published in academic journals). For the formal requirements regarding the length of your thesis, please refer to the [information](#) given by the academic office.

2.3. Structure

Master theses at our Chair generally follow the structure used in scientific papers and recommended by the American Psychological Association (APA). For your convenience, important aspects are summarized below. For more details, please also refer to the Publication Manual of the APA or to papers that have been published in scientific journals.

2.3.1. Title page

The first page of your thesis is a title page, including the title of your thesis, your name and matriculation number, your study program, your university e-mail address, the date of submission, and the Chair and supervisors assigned to you. For your master thesis, there are no specific

regulations on the formatting of the title page. We provide a sample title page on the Chair's website which you can download and use.

2.3.2. Table of contents

Please always include a table of contents in your thesis. If you use abbreviations within your thesis, please explain them in the main text when you use them the first time and also include a table that lists and explains all abbreviations. In case you have any tables and/or illustrations, please also include two separate tables listing all of these.

2.3.3. Abstract

The abstract provides a short summary of your thesis. It gives the reader an idea of the problem you dealt with, the data and method you used, and the most important findings. Typically, it does not exceed 250 words.

2.3.4. Introduction

In the introduction, the reader gains an idea of what you are going to do in your thesis and why that is so. The introduction highlights the relevance of the problem and explains the research gap which is addressed in your thesis. Furthermore, you also present your research question(s), a brief overview of your hypotheses (if applicable) and the conducted study, as well as a summary of your key findings and their contribution to theory and practice in your introduction.

2.3.5. Literature Review

Throughout the literature review section, you give an overview of the existing literature from your field of research and summarize previous work as well as relevant theory. If you work quantitatively, you also derive your hypotheses based on previous literature. You can either integrate the hypothesis development into your literature review or place it as a separate chapter right after the literature review.

2.3.6. Methods

The method section describes how you carried out your research in such a way that readers can assess whether the methods you used were appropriate, and that they could replicate your study if they wanted to. The method section of an empirical paper may include some or all of the following labeled subsections: participants, sampling, measures and covariates, research design, experimental manipulations/interventions.

2.3.7. Results

The results section describes the data, the analyses you conducted, and all relevant results. Initially, provide some basic information regarding your data. Depending on your data and analyses, this may include means, standard deviations, sample sizes, correlations etc. Often, a table of the intercorrelations of all variables is included.

For inferential tests (i.e., hypothesis-testing analyses), report all findings that are relevant, even when they are contrary to your hypotheses, or when effects are smaller than you expected. If relevant, include information on potential problems or biases (such as missing data) and your approach to handle them. Do not explain basic concepts or the mathematical background of common analysis techniques (e.g., regression analysis, correlations, ANOVAs), but do include information on your choice of analysis if the procedure is new, unusual, or may be contested.

Typically, reporting your results will include the test's respective value (e.g., a correlation coefficient, t , F , or χ^2 value), the degrees of freedom, and the probability value. Providing effect sizes, robustness checks or the results of manipulation checks may also be useful.

2.3.8. Discussion

The discussion offers the opportunity to evaluate and interpret your study. Typically, the discussion begins with a summary of results that clearly summarizes which hypotheses were supported, which were not supported, and whether alternative explanations exist. The discussion

then also addresses limitations of your study by discussing aspects such as generalizability, validity, the appropriateness of your measures or interventions, characteristics of the sample, etc. Lastly, the discussion typically turns to the relevance of the study by pointing out its contribution to theory and research, its implications for further studies and for practitioners.

2.3.9. Bibliography

Your master thesis must contain a bibliography, in which every source that you referred to throughout the thesis must be listed. Please take care in creating your bibliography! For further information, see 2.4.

2.3.10. Appendices

Material that may be helpful for the reader but that is too lengthy or distracting for inclusion in the main body may be included in an appendix. This may apply to lists of variables, stimulus materials, more detailed information on your sample or its subgroups, etc. If you use a questionnaire, we also ask you to include this in your appendix. In case your appendix is very long (e.g., because you used a long questionnaire, need to use many illustrations, etc.), you are also permitted to hand in the appendix in a digital format only instead of including it in your printed version.

2.3.11. Declaration

Your thesis must include a signed declaration assuring that the thesis is entirely your own work and does not contain plagiarism. See the Appendix of this guideline for the required wording of the declaration.

2.4. Using References and Citing

In the process of arguing your standpoint and approach, you will depend on the ideas and knowledge of others. Whenever you use background information, definitions, arguments, data, or any other information created by others, you must then cite this source appropriately. By

citing, you confirm that you have actually read the original source, and that you are repeating its contents to the best of your knowledge. This must be true whenever you include a reference!

For your master thesis, there is no minimum (or maximum) number of references to be included. There are also no rules regarding the type of reference that may be used. Typically (but not necessarily!), the most useful sources are meta-analyses, articles in highly ranked journals, and articles by authors who are experts in the respective field. Especially concerning dynamic areas, it is advisable to include the most recent research. Depending on the topic, useful sources may stem from areas other than business such as psychology, sociology, etc. Most scientific papers, and hence also paper-style theses, rely on journal articles (rather than, for example, books, media reports, dissertations etc.) as main sources. To identify highly recognized journals, you can view journal rankings such as [FT50](#), [UTD Top 100](#), or [VHB Jourqual](#).

All references must be made according to the guidelines of the APA. Also, please note that “recycling” written material that you yourself have created some time earlier (e.g., as a bachelor thesis) is also plagiarism unless you officially cite yourself. For details, see the Publication Manual of the APA. Please take care when using references and citing! Not giving credit to sources is a serious mistake and may lead to suspicions of plagiarism, which the university does not tolerate.

In order to simplify citing, you have the option to use the software Citavi (licenses are provided for free by the university, see <https://www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/services/software/rahmenvertraege/citavi.html>) or any other reference management program. Most of these programs are capable of accurately and efficiently implementing APA reference style. However, it remains your responsibility to check the references' correctness.

2.5. Formatting

Formatting must fulfill the requirements of the APA. For details, see the Publication Manual of the APA and/or the APA's extensive online documentation.

Important aspects include:

- double-spaced manuscripts
- Time New Roman font, 12 pt.
- 1-inch margins
- running head with title and page number
- use active tense whenever possible
- flush left

3. Handing in your thesis

Please note and follow the [requirements of the examination office](#) (Studienbüro) for handing in your thesis.

4. Declaration

Your thesis must include the following declaration (including the date and your signature) in either German or English:

Ehrenwörtliche Versicherung

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig und nur unter Benutzung der angegebenen Literatur und Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. – Wörtlich übernommene Sätze oder Satzteile sind als Zitat belegt, andere Anlehnung hinsichtlich Aussage und Umfang unter Quellenangabe kenntlich gemacht. – Die Arbeit hat in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form noch keiner Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegen und ist nicht veröffentlicht.

Hamburg, [Abgabedatum]

[Unterschrift]

Statutory declaration

I hereby declare that I have developed and written the enclosed thesis completely by myself and have not used sources or means without declaration in the text. Any thoughts from others or literal quotations are clearly marked. The thesis was not used in the same or in a similar version to achieve an academic grading or is being published elsewhere.

Hamburg, [Abgabedatum]

[Unterschrift]