AIS Research Exchange
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Research Exchange - February 24, 2021 "Advancement at JAIS" with Dorothy E. Leidner and Roman Beck

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Creating Contribution by Developing Distinction

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JAIS Journal of the Association
for Information Systems

Common Grounds for Paper Rejection

- Insufficient contribution

- Insufficient theoretical contribution

- What's new

- Not very interesting

- Not very insightful

- I don't see anything… new, valuable, interesting…

But What is a Contribution?

What is NOT a Contribution	What IS a Contribution
Addition of a moderator Testing theory in a new context Hypotheses without an overarching lens	Interesting Insightful Novel

Concrete ←——————————→ Abstract

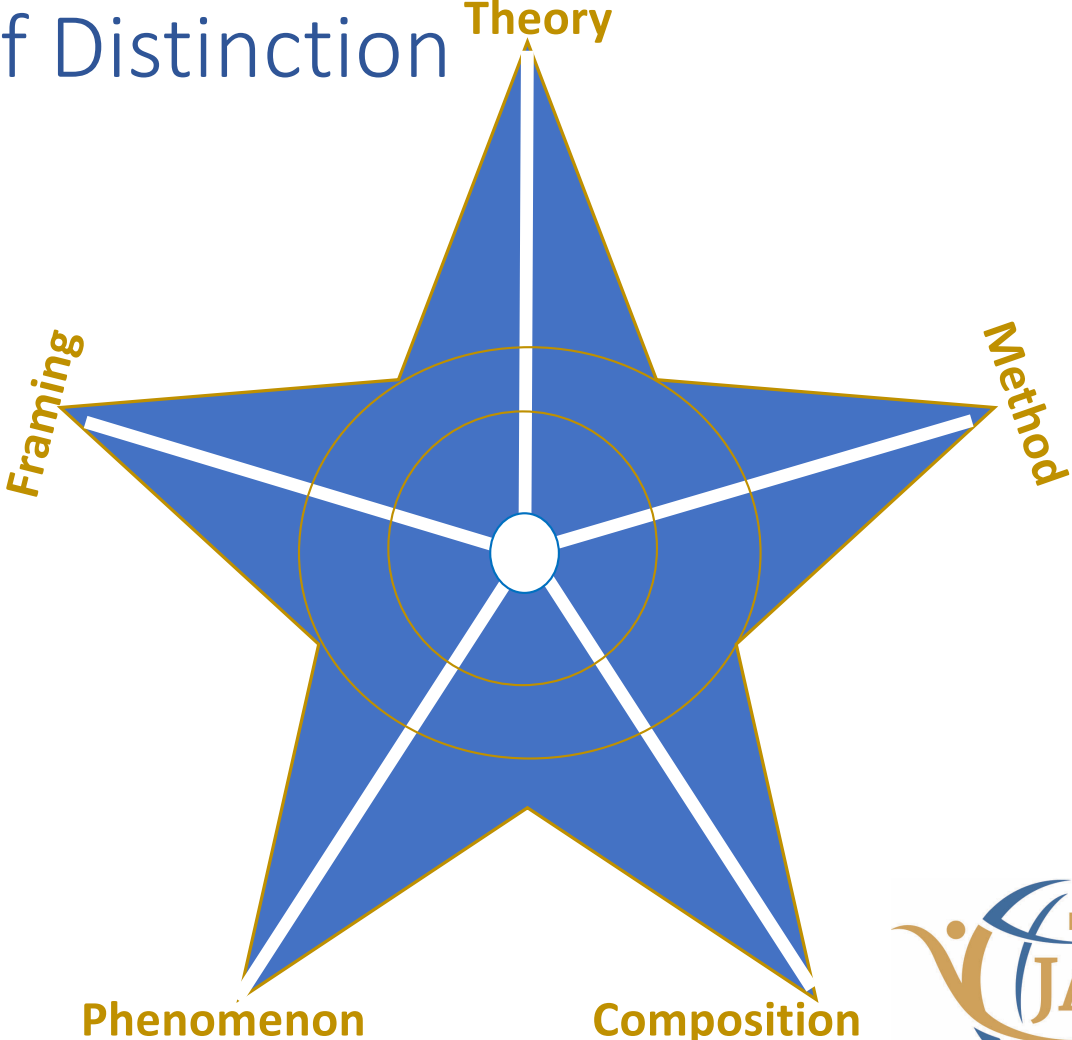Contribution: The creation of something worthy of attention and reflection.

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To Achieve Contribution, One Must Develop Distinction

Distinction: that which sets the paper apart.

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Five Areas of Distinction

Theory
Method
Composition
Phenomenon
Framing

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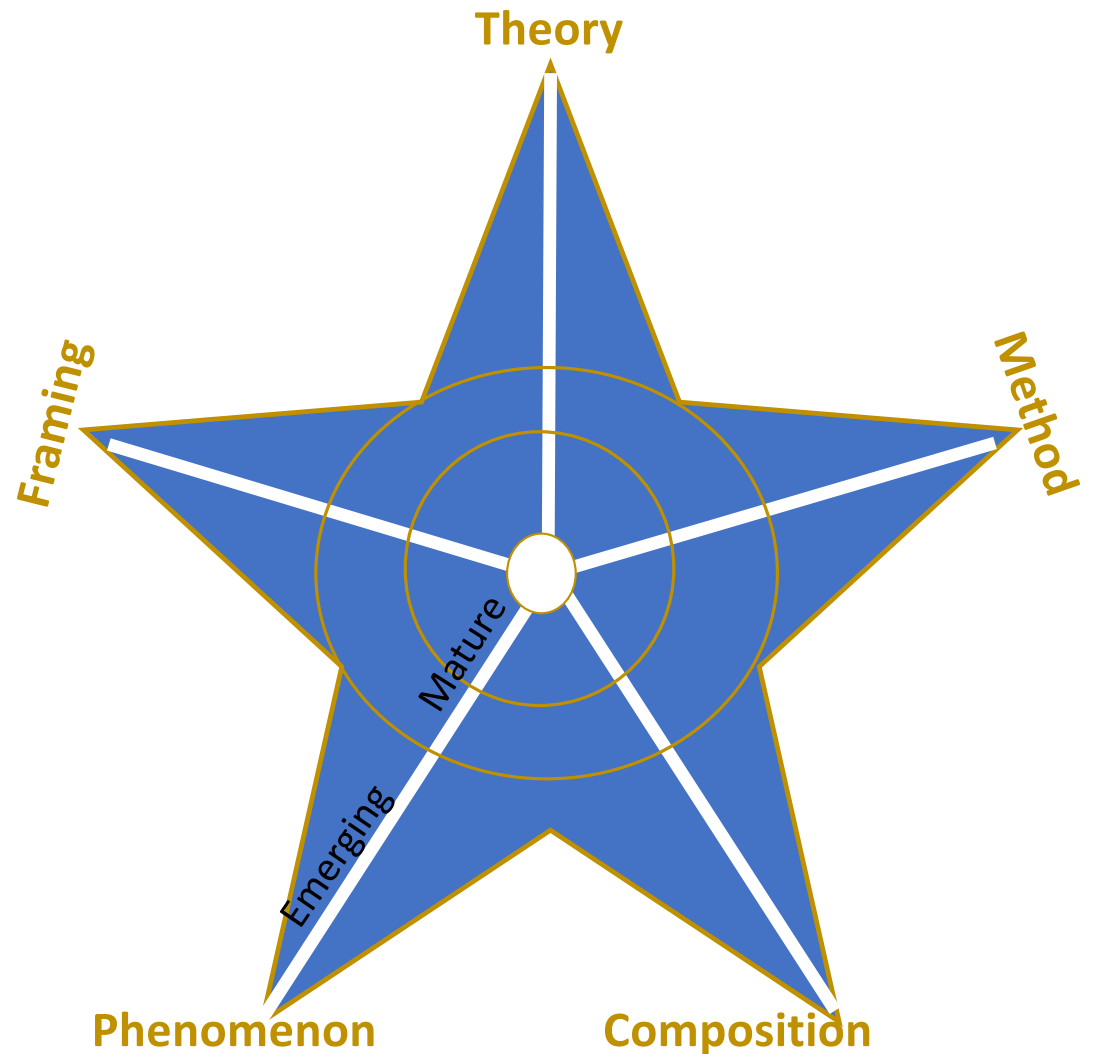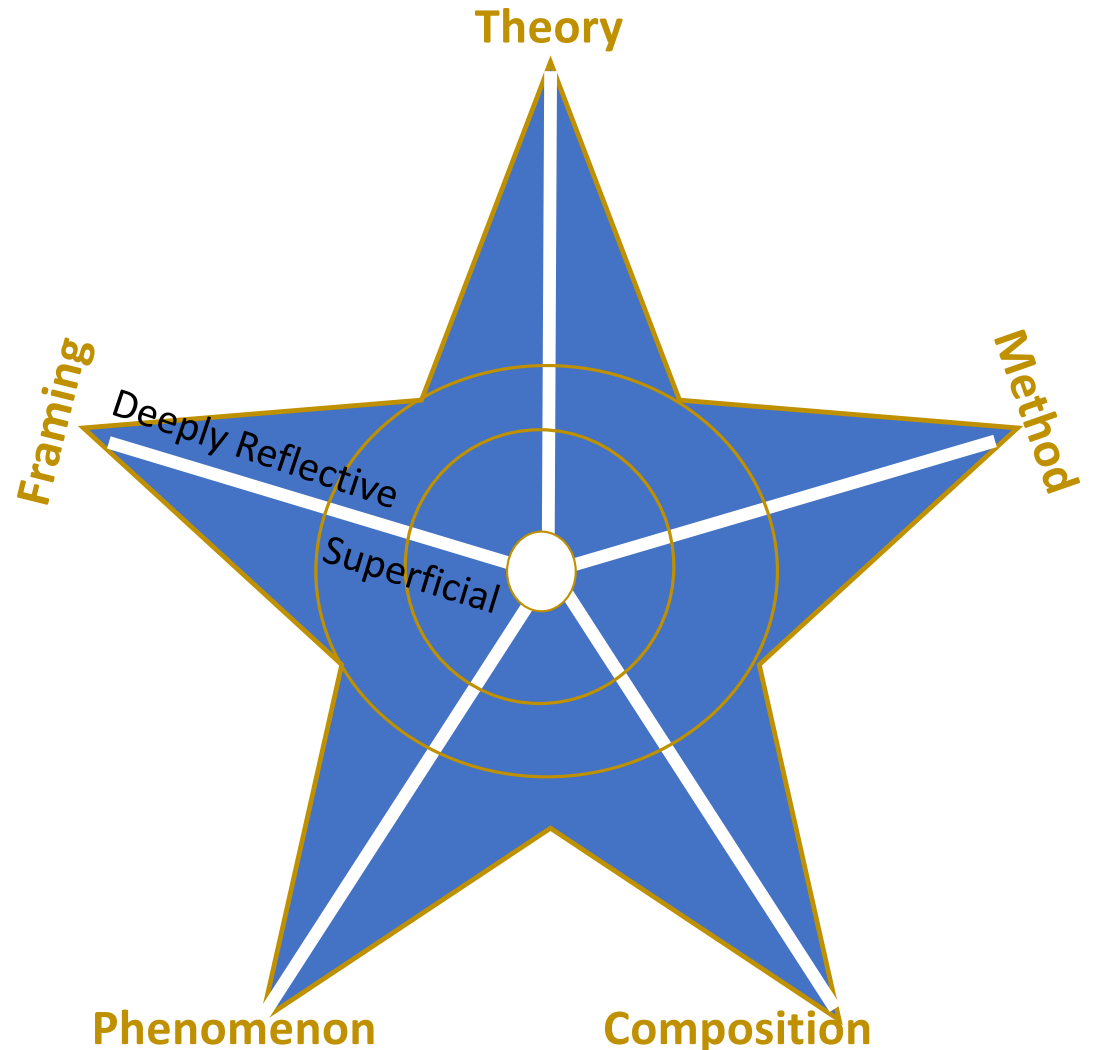
Phenomenon

- Nature of the phenomenon

- Importance of the phenomenon
  to the discipline

- Impact of the phenomenon
  beyond the discipline

- Theory as phenomenon
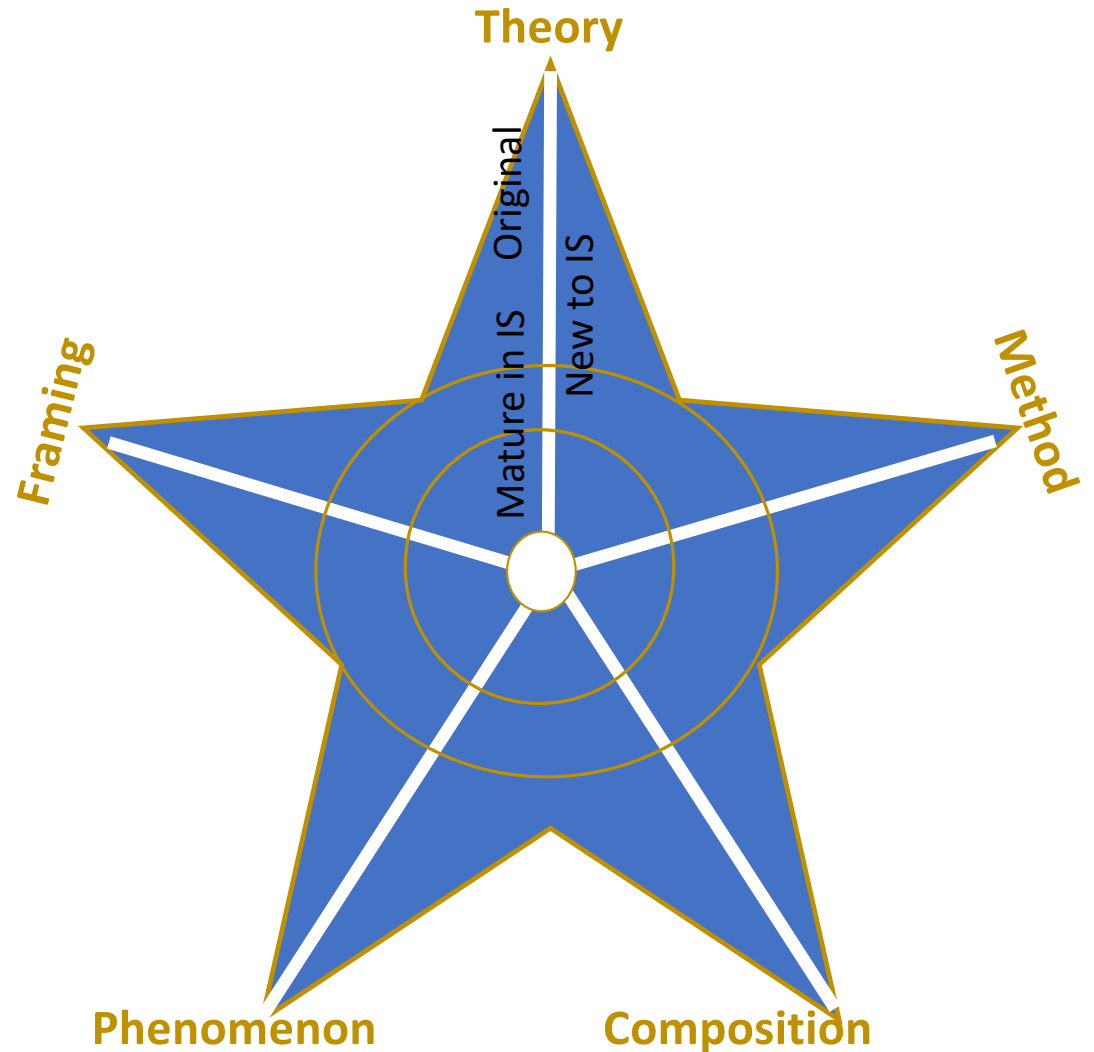
- Data as phenomenon

Framing

- IS-Centric

- Justification of Research Question/Objective

- Single vs. multiple streams of literature

- Superficial: gap in what has been studied

- Moderate: gap in what has been found

- Reflective: insights from what has been found

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Theory

- Uses: Theory as law, lens, paradigm

- Types: Meta, Grand, Mid-range, Micro theories, Accumulated body of knowledge as theory

- Approaches: Theory borrowing, blending, and building

- Purposes: Theories for analysis, explanation, prediction, explanation (and predication), design (and action)

Theory Contribution by Theory Type

Theory as Law   **Theory as Lens**   **Theory as Paradigm**

$\longleftarrow\!\!\!\!\!\!\!\!\!\longrightarrow$

- Testing theory under new boundary conditions
- Expanding theory
- Scale development
- Falsifying causal relationships
- Developing new (mostly micro-level theory
- Combining theories

- Theorizing: thick description of practices, narratives, making sense of breakdowns
- Problematization: challenging assumptions of prior theories; providing alternative explanations
- Contributes a new understanding to a phenomenon

- Theorizing: novel perspective of phenomenon
- Developing new theoretical constructs and relationships
- Providing basis for mid- and micro-level theorizing

Insights that go beyond diligent reporting of empirical findings and the validation of existing knowledge (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013)

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Theory and Phenomenon

	New	
New	Contribution hinges on new insights into an existing phenomenon that has been hard to explain	Contribution hinges on quality of the theory and importance of the phenomenon
Existing/ Mature	Contribution hinges on using the phenomenon to expand, prove, or falsify the existing theory	Contribution hinges on using new phenomenon to push the boundaries of the existing theory

Theory (vertical axis), **Phenomenon** (horizontal axis)

Theory and Phenomenon

New

Persuasive explanation of causal mechanisms and persuasive explanation of previously misunderstood/ill-understood aspects of the phenomenon

Theory

First to apply the existing theory to the mature phenomenon -- need to deliver new elements to the theory and new insights to the phenomenon. Framing and method will be of particular importance

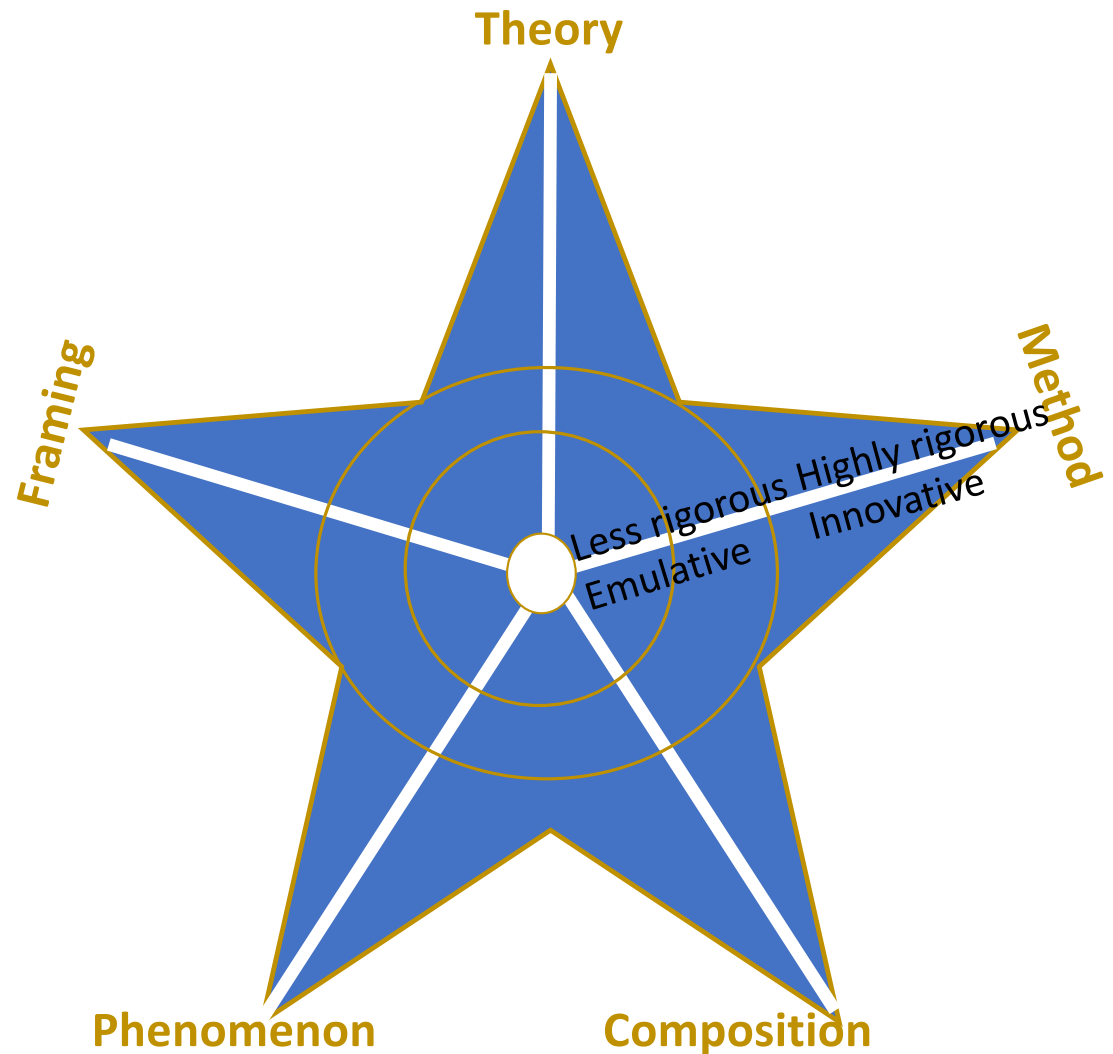|	
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Existing/ Mature

New

Phenomenon

Persuasive explanation of causal mechanisms and persuasive justification of the importance of the phenomenon will be crucial

Need to demonstrate how the theory boundaries were pushed by applying the theory to a new phenomenon – why should the theory NOT be expected to hold.

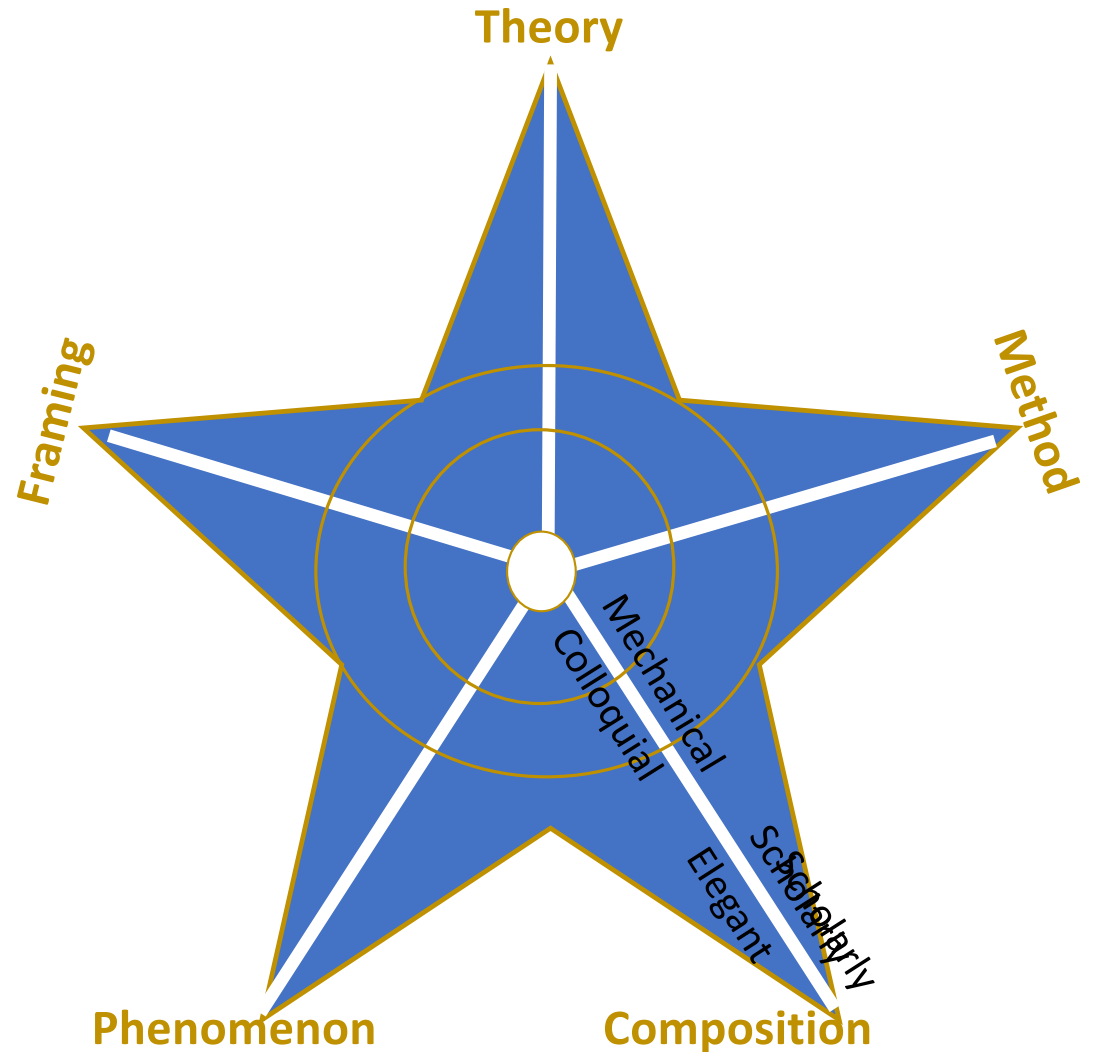JAIS Journal of the Association for Information Systems

Method

- Strength of the data

- Innovation in data collection and analysis

- Method bar is constantly rising in all areas – case study, experiments, design science, econometrics, survey studies

Theory

Method

Framing

Less rigorous   Highly rigorous

Emulative   Innovative

Phenomenon   Composition

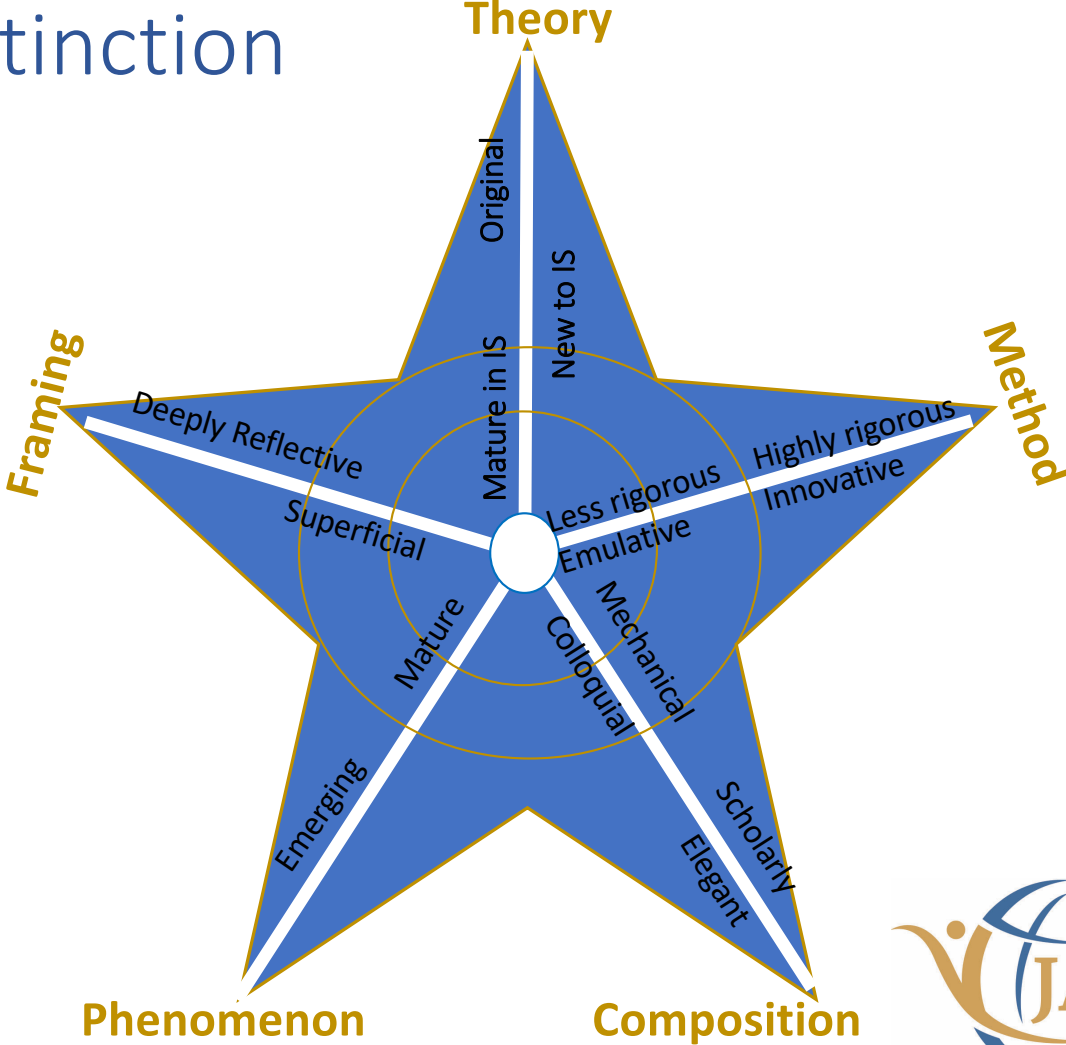JAIS Journal of the Association for Information Systems

Composition

- Composition quality should intensify rather than distract from the contribution
- Theorizing is particularly dependent upon scholarly composition

Creating Distinction

Closing Thoughts

- To publish in "elite" journals, one must develop distinction in multiple areas.

- Our notion of what constitutes a valuable knowledge contribution needs to be divorced from our notion of theoretical contribution

- Not every one of our research endeavors merits an A publication...but it is still worth our time and effort to explore, to seek, to develop, to extend and to expand our own knowledge

- The ultimate challenge is to provide something new and different, not so new and different so as to render the past unrecognizable but new and different enough to render the future imaginable.

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Thank you!