NEOMA BUSINESS SCHOOL
REIMS · ROUEN · PARIS

PhD in Management
Call for Projects 2027

1. From Advice to Action: Designing Responsible Agentic AI for Trustworthy Human-AI Collaboration

Agentic AI marks a shift from systems that advise to systems that act on behalf of people and organisations. This raises the central tension of responsible AI: the more autonomous the agent, the harder it becomes to oversee it meaningfully rather than rubber-stamp or over-constrain it.

The central question is: how should agentic AI be designed and governed so that human-AI collaboration remains trustworthy, accountable and respectful of human autonomy? Adopting a Socio-Technical Systems (STS) perspective, the research integrates the design of an AI agent with the investigation of its behavioural and governance implications, treating trust, transparency and control as design variables rather than afterthoughts.

The research combines design science and mixed methods in three phases. First, interviews and observations in a partner organisation, selected at project start, will establish how practitioners delegate to, monitor and override AI agents, yielding design requirements. Second, an agentic AI artefact will be built and iteratively refined, comparing intervention strategies, explanation designs and levels of human oversight, from per-action approval to exception-based control. Third, controlled and field experiments will quantify how these choices affect trust, perceived fairness, reliance and decision quality, complemented by interviews and focus groups on users' perceptions and organisational implications.

The project will contribute to Information Systems and management research with a theory of meaningful human oversight in human-agent collaboration, design principles for responsible agentic AI, and a governance framework aligned with the EU AI Act's human-oversight requirements. For organisations, it offers actionable guidance on when and how to delegate to AI agents while preserving accountability and human autonomy.

The thesis will be co-supervised by Kristijan Mirkovski (Deakin University, Australia).

AI, Data Science and Business
Laura Trinchera
Full Professor
Department of Information Systems, Supply Chain & Decision Making, NEOMA Business School
laura.trinchera@neoma-bs.fr

2. Business Models, Operations, and Competition in Artificial Intelligence Markets

Unlike traditional digital services, AI involves significant variable inference costs and capacity requirements, while service quality is partly endogenous and performance is probabilistic. These characteristics shape AI business models and operational decisions.

The central question is: how should firms design, price and operate AI services when intelligence is costly to produce, heterogeneous in quality and uncertain in its outcomes? The thesis would develop an analytical understanding of this question, focusing on pricing and service differentiation, computational capacity and resource allocation, contracting and performance risk, and competition between alternative business models, including proprietary, open-source, API-based and self-hosted models.

The research will employ analytical models drawing on operations management, marketing and economics. Depending on the research question, methods will include game theory, mechanism design, contract theory, capacity and queueing models, and optimisation methods. The models will capture distinctive features of AI services, including heterogeneous inference costs, endogenous quality, uncertain performance, customer heterogeneity and alternative sourcing arrangements. Although the research will primarily use quantitative models, analytical results may be complemented by numerical analysis using publicly available market data.

The expected outcome is a theoretical foundation for understanding AI not simply as a technology adopted by firms, but as a new class of economically and operationally complex service. The research will contribute to Operations Management by linking computational capacity, quality, reliability and resource allocation to strategic decisions, and to Marketing through insights into pricing, segmentation and business-model design. The findings could help AI providers and adopting firms determine when different pricing, sourcing, capacity and contracting structures are economically viable, while providing broader insights into the emerging competitive structure of AI markets.

The Complexity Advantage
Arvind Sainathan
Full Professor
Department of Information Systems, Supply Chain & Decision Making, NEOMA Business School
arvind.sainathan@neoma-bs.fr

3. Distrust Dynamics in Diverse, Digitally Mediated Teams: From Suspicion to Entrenchment

Six and Latusek's (2023) review identifies important unresolved questions concerning suspicion, distrust development and distrust traps. Building on existing research into distrust emergence and self-reinforcement, this project examines culturally diverse teams collaborating through digital and hybrid work arrangements. It treats distrust as confident negative expectations about another actor, distinct from merely low trust, and investigates why some concerns are resolved while others become entrenched. Digital and hybrid collaboration provides a consequential setting for investigating these dynamics. Delayed responses, differences in communication practices, persistent digital records and unequal access to informal exchanges may influence how ambiguous conduct is interpreted and whether concerns can be clarified. Cultural differences may also become interpreted as evidence of incompatible values, although neither value incongruence nor distrust is assumed to follow from diversity.

The central question is: how does suspicion develop into distrust in digitally mediated teams, and under what conditions do subsequent interactions reinforce or reopen negative expectations? The project seeks to explain how team members' interpretations and protective actions shape subsequent interactions and opportunities to reassess negative expectations. Related questions concern when distrust spreads across domains, coexists with trust, or becomes resistant to reassessment. The project will distinguish entrenched distrust from continuing negative expectations warranted by another actor's conduct.

A qualitative, longitudinal approach would be particularly suitable for examining these processes as they unfold. Repeated interviews, observation of virtual or hybrid meetings, and consented communication records could illuminate how members interpret consequential episodes and respond over time. Comparing contrasting trajectories—for example, concerns that are resolved and those that escalate—could support theoretical development. Applicants are encouraged to develop and justify a coherent theoretical focus and research design within this topic.

The project aims to advance understanding of distrust dynamics by explaining how workplace interactions enable or obstruct the reassessment of negative expectations. It could also help managers recognise emerging relational difficulties and identify opportunities for clarification, while distinguishing warranted vigilance from self-reinforcing distrust.

The Future of Work
Branko Božič
Associate Professor
Department of Marketing, NEOMA Business School
branko.bozic@neoma-bs.fr

4. Navigating Change When Lives Are at Stake: Healthcare Professionals and Organizational Transformation

Organisational research on the work and careers of healthcare professionals is becoming increasingly prominent, given the important role these professionals play in shaping patient outcomes and the functioning of healthcare organisations more broadly. Healthcare professionals, such as doctors and nurses, are increasingly faced with navigating changes in their expertise, careers and work practices as the healthcare industry continues to evolve. These changes include, for example, the growing number of cancer patients, the introduction of new diagnostic technologies and evolving spatial arrangements within hospitals. Much of the existing literature on how professionals navigate changes to their work and careers focuses on those working in more traditional organisational settings. Less is known about contexts where the stakes can be particularly high, given the direct implications for human health and, potentially, life and death.

The central question is: how do healthcare professionals navigate and negotiate changes to their work, expertise and careers during major organisational transformations in hospitals, particularly when professional responsibilities for patient care remain central?

The project will primarily adopt a qualitative methodology, drawing on interviews and observations, while leaving open the possibility of incorporating a mixed-methods approach. The empirical setting is a hospital in France. Specifically, NEOMA's Future of Work Area of Excellence is in the process of establishing a partnership with a hospital specialising in cancer care in Rouen, which is currently undergoing multiple organisational changes. Examples of these changes include the spatial reorganisation of the hospital in response to the growing number of cancer patients in Normandy, as well as changes in the role patients play in their own treatment and care processes.

This project offers an opportunity to develop novel theoretical insights that can advance management and organisational research on professional work, careers and organisational change. Beyond its academic contribution, the project can shed light on the challenges healthcare professionals face and the different ways in which they navigate and negotiate major organisational transformations. Given the complexity of ongoing changes in healthcare and the broader societal implications of work conducted in this sector, a deeper understanding of how professionals experience and respond to organisational change can have important implications for healthcare professionals themselves, hospitals and patients.

The Future of Work
Nishani Bourmault
Associate Professor
Department of People and Organizations, NEOMA Business School
nishani.bourmault@neoma-bs.fr

5. Is Entrepreneurship a Ladder? Social Mobility Trajectories of Entrepreneurs in European Panel Data

Entrepreneurship is promoted as a route to upward mobility and inclusive growth, yet evidence is mixed: some studies find gains in earnings and wealth, others lower and more volatile returns than wage employment. Income alone is a poor yardstick for entrepreneurs, whose rewards are volatile, delayed and often under-reported.

The central question is: whether, for whom and under what institutional conditions does entrepreneurship improve social position? The project treats mobility as multidimensional (income, wealth, class and status, household position, subjective standing), and asks how these dimensions align or diverge over time and how social origin shapes selection and returns.

The PhD student will analyse longitudinal household panels from the UK (BHPS/UKHLS), Germany (SOEP) and France (e.g. SRCV/EU-SILC, INSEE files) to trace multidimensional mobility trajectories, with the US (PSID) as an optional benchmark. Techniques include trajectory analysis, event-study and difference-in-differences designs, and selection-sensitivity approaches. A third paper extends the analysis to more European countries using harmonised cross-national data (e.g. EU-SILC, ESS, ISSP) linked to country-level indicators of welfare, credit and labour-market institutions in multilevel models.

The project is expected to yield three papers, covering: (1) measuring multidimensional entrepreneurial mobility, (2) social origin and selection, (3) how institutional regimes shape mobility across Europe.

The project builds on our recent publication, a methodological roadmap on social mobility in entrepreneurship (Chan et al., 2026, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*).

The World We Want
Steven A. Brieger
Full Professor
Department of Strategy & Entrepreneurship, NEOMA Business School
steven.brieger@neoma-bs.fr

6. What the Body Knows: Neurophysiological Experiments on Entrepreneurial Cognition and Investor Judgement

Several central questions in entrepreneurship concern processes that people cannot or will not report. Examples include noticing an opportunity one was not looking for, where an idea comes from, and reacting to a founder's appearance in ways an investor would never state. This project combines randomised experiments with eye tracking, EEG and autonomic measures to observe these processes directly and to test between competing theories that self-report cannot separate.

The project addresses three indicative research questions, which the candidate will develop and refine. The first concerns spotting opportunities without looking for them: do people notice unmet customer needs while browsing for something else, before they consciously start searching, and are entrepreneurs better at this than other people? The second concerns where business ideas come from: when a business idea pops into someone's head, did it come from something they just saw, or from their own thinking? Tracking the eyes and brain in the moments before an idea appears can tell these apart. The third concerns how a founder's looks affect investors: do investors judge the same pitch differently depending on whether the founder is fit or overweight, younger or older? If they do, is it a gut reaction, or a judgement about things like energy, health or how long the founder will stay in the business?

The project uses preregistered lab experiments, drawing on established eye-tracking, EEG and physiological measurement processes.

The expected output is a thesis by three papers targeting leading entrepreneurship and management journals. As more people build careers through entrepreneurship, understanding how opportunities are recognised and how founders are judged by those who fund them becomes central to the future of work.

The World We Want
Teemu Kautonen
Full Professor
Department of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, NEOMA Business School
teemu.kautonen@neoma-bs.fr