

EGOS Colloquium 2026

Belfast Local Hub:
Queen's University Belfast

Pre-colloquium Workshop (90 min.)

How to work with suboptimal concepts: Philosophy and AI-based solutions

Convenor:

Piotr Tomasz Makowski
p.makowski@qub.ac.uk

Call for Participation

Management and organisation studies produce concepts at an impressive rate. Yet many of our most cited constructs are vague, overextended, or in other ways under-disciplined. While “reconceptualisations” are a well-established way of writing theory papers, we rarely engage systematically with the structure of concepts in ways that promise intentional conceptual improvement. And now, we often turn to AI—frequently without enough critical attitude towards the conceptual solutions it offers.

This interactive workshop introduces **conceptual engineering** as a structured method for diagnosing and repairing suboptimal concepts in management research. Drawing on philosophical foundations, the workshop combines basic concept analysis and evaluation with AI-assisted solutions.

The session has two objectives. First, it provides participants with a minimal but rigorous framework for analysing concept structure and explains why it may be suboptimal. Second, it explores how generative AI can be used as a “conceptual co-engineer” to diagnose, evaluate, or improve a construct. We’ll also critically reflect on conditions when this “co-engineering” practice may generate the most promising results.

Participants will apply both human and AI-based optimisations to selected management concepts and compare the outcomes.

Workshop Format and outline

Format: A 90-minute interactive session

Outline:

Part I (approx. 30 min.) Introduction to conceptual engineering

- concepts and their structure,
- conceptual engineering as a philosophical method,
- conceptual engineering in management research,
- AI-supported optimisations and how to approach them.

Part II (approx. 60 min.) Interactive Concept Lab

1. **Concept analysis and engineering** (approx. 20–25 min.): Participants work in small groups to analyse the structure and evaluate weaknesses in selected concepts, and try to propose improvements.

2. **AI-Assisted conceptual engineering** (approx. 25–30 min.): Using a structured prompt, groups apply generative AI to the same concepts, compare results with their human improvements and critically reflect on the outcomes.
3. **Plenary reflection** (approx. 10 min.): Discussion of benefits and risks of AI-supported conceptual optimisation, including questions of actionability and responsibility of “co-engineered” concepts.

The session is interactive; no formal paper presentations are required.

Recommended readings:

Gerring, J. (1999). [What makes a concept good? A criterial framework for understanding concept formation in the social sciences](#). *Polity*, 31(3), 357-393

Goertz, G. (2006). *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Makowski, P.T. (2021): [Optimizing concepts: conceptual engineering in the field of management. The case of routines research](#), *Academy of Management Review* 46(4): 702-724. DOI: 10.5465/amr.2019.0252,

Makowski, P.T. (2024): [“\(Re\)Conceptualizations: Intentional concept development in the social sciences”](#). In Stalmaszczyk (Ed.). *Conceptual Engineering: Methodological and Metaphilosophical Issues*, Brill: mentis;

Pre-workshop submission (optional)

Participants are invited to submit a short concept note (max. 1 page) at least two weeks prior to the workshop including the following:

- The name of one concept from their research,
- A brief working definition from the literature (3–5 sentences),
- A short explanation of why this concept may be suitable for optimization.

Please submit your concept to the workshop convenor via email: p.makowski@qub.ac.uk.

Submitted concepts may be selected for group work during the session. Participants who prefer not to submit in advance may work with pre-selected examples provided by the convenor.

Registration

Please register for the local hub events via the EGOS colloquium portal.

For workshop related queries, please contact: p.makowski@qub.ac.uk