

Vaughn TAN

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UCL School of Management
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APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship (2013-present)
University College London, School of Management; London, United Kingdom.
Visiting researcher (January–May 2018)
University of Southern California, Marshall Business School; Los Angeles, CA.

RESEARCH

I investigate individual and organizational responses to uncertainty and ambiguity in various contexts. I am particularly interested in how open-ended structures and processes enable adaptation and innovation in uncertain situations.

Research areas: Innovation, organization design, R&D, design, adaptability, uncertainty.

EDUCATION

PH.D, Organizational Behavior and Sociology. Harvard University, May 2013.
Dissertation: “Intentional ambiguity,” an ethnographic study of innovation and internal ambiguity.
Committee: Amy Edmondson (co-chair), Jeffrey Polzer, Christopher Winship (co-chair).
A.M, Sociology. Harvard University, 2012.
A.B, Social Studies (*summa cum laude*). Harvard University, 2005.

PUBLICATIONS

The Uncertainty Mindset: Innovation Insights from the Frontiers of Food, a peer-reviewed scholarly book on the organizational practices and processes that support innovation in uncertain environments. Columbia University Press (June, 2020). Nominated for the Grigson Prize and FT/McKinsey Business Book Award.
“Using negotiated joining to construct and fill open-ended roles in elite culinary groups,” a paper on how groups acquire new members whose roles are not defined in advance. *Administrative Science Quarterly* (2015), 60(1), p103-132.

WORK IN PROGRESS

A paper on the nature of knowledge that permits the production of organizationally appropriate innovations. Third round revise and resubmit.
A Good Living, a book about the structural characteristics of businesses that innovate on quality (with Tom Downey). Proposal under competitive offer.
A paper on designing projects that stimulate organizational learning and adaptation. Under consideration.
A paper on goal-setting for innovative outcomes. Under consideration.
A paper on uncertainty and entrepreneurial commitment. Under consideration.
Networks of Secret Influence, a book on hidden networks of influence in the transformation of taste. Proposal under consideration at two scholarly presses.
A paper on taste intermediaries in the low-intervention wine industry. In draft stage.
A paper on preference uncertainty. In draft stage.

TALKS AND LECTURES

2020 “Organizational adaptation in a time of crisis.” University of Ljubljana.
“Opportunity in uncertainty.” Turning the Tables.
2019 “Models for innovation in regenerative agriculture.” Conference on Regenerative Agriculture.
2018 “Linking intentional goal uncertainty and innovation performance.” University of Southern California.
2017 “Structural characteristics of innovative cities.” University of Southern California.

- 2015 “Types of organizational preference uncertainty.” Ludwig Maximilian University.
“Transferring artisanal knowledge.” H-Farm.
- 2014 “Design for adaptation.” Zappos/Downtown Project.
- 2013 “The pains and pleasures of joining up.” University College London.
“Learning house style.” MIT Sloan School of Management.
- 2011 “Ambiguity and innovation.” UN Development Program, Office for Europe and the CIS.
“Time and effort in managing innovation.” Danish Ministry for Economic and Business Affairs.
“A partial history of new ideas in food.” Boston University.
“Telling stories with maps.” Lake Forest College.
- 2010 “Morality and process in design thinking.” Brown University and RISD.
- 2008 “Using visualized geographic data in climate change education.” The Climate Project Conferences.
- 2007 “Designing systems for emergent data and schema interchange.” Encyclopedia of Life Consortium.

CONFERENCES

- 2020 Davis Conf. on Qualitative Research: “How intermediaries influence tastes for low-intervention wine.”
Terroir Conference: “The uncertainty mindset.”
- 2019 Conference on Regenerative Agriculture (Cornwall): Program advisor.
DRUID (Copenhagen): “Intentional goal uncertainty and innovation performance.”
- 2018 Acad. of Mgmt meeting (Chicago): “Tacit knowledge transfer through work routines in innovation teams.”
- 2018 DRUID (Copenhagen): “Using open-ended goals for search and coordination in innovation teams.”
- 2016 MAD5 (Copenhagen): Tomorrow’s Kitchen (co-organizer).
- 2015 Acad. of Mgmt meeting (Vancouver): Research in unusual settings (co-organizer).
- 2013 Am. Soc. Assn. meeting (New York City): “Ambiguity and adaptation.”
Acad. of Mgmt meeting (Orlando): “Learning complex and ambiguous style.”
- 2011 Organizing Institutions (Boston): “An invisible college comes to ground.”
- 2010 Organizing Institutions (Copenhagen): “Amorphousness in organizational boundaries”
- 2009 Aage Sørensen Conference (Stockholm): “A theory of amorphous boundaries.”
Trans-Atlantic Conference (London): “Closure theory and organizational diffusion.”

TEACHING

- MSIN0046: Qualitative research methods (PhD seminar). UCL Sch. of Mgmt.; 2019–present.
- MSIN0020: Strategy by design (lecture course). UCL Sch. of Mgmt.; 2015–present.
- MSIN0134: Strategy and design (PhD seminar). UCL Sch. of Mgmt.; 2014–present.
- IM3: Managing uncertain portfolios (executive education). Singapore Mgmt. University; 2017.
- SOC97: Classical and contemporary social theory. Harvard Dept. of Sociology; 2011.
- ES147: Idea translation and innovation. Harvard Sch. of Engineering & Applied Sciences; 2010.
Award: Bok Center award for distinction in teaching.
- BIO95hfy: Agriculture, economics, and biology. Harvard Dept. of Biology; 2005.

GRANTS

- 2011 Research grant, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies.
- 2004 Research grant, Reischauer Institute for Japanese Studies.
- 2003 Pforzheimer Research Grant, Schlesinger Library.

HONORS

- 2011-16 Fellow, Institute for Data-driven Design.
- 2010-13 Graduate Fellow, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies.
- 2011 Center for European Studies Fellowship (declined).
- 2005 Hoopes Prize; Noma-Reischauer Prize; Clarendon Fellowship (declined); elected to Phi Beta Kappa.
- 2002 Detur Prize.
- 2001 Service commendation, cco Stagmont, Republic of Singapore Army.

EXPERIENCE

- 2005-08 Google, Inc. Mountain View, CA. Special product development (bioinformatics, structured data products);
Product marketing manager (Ads, Google Earth, Google Maps).
- 2008 Anderson Ranch Art Foundation. Snowmass, CO. Marketing consultant.

- 2001 Hewlett-Packard Asia. Singapore. Design consultant on launch of DesignJet line of products.
1998-01 Republic of Singapore Army, Infantry. Staff signals logistician (HQ Signals Division).
Service commendation. Non-commissioned officer, rank of 2nd sergeant.

ADVISORY

- Aspen Institute (2020; special project advisor);
Wellcome Collection (2019–; diversity and inclusion advisor);
Rethink Food NYC (2019–; executive board member and strategy advisor);
Dredge Partners (2019–; technology and strategy advisor);
Oyster Sunday (2019–; strategy advisor);
Boston World Partnerships (2012-2013; strategy advisor);
Guanacaste Dry Forest Conservation Fund (2009–; technology advisor);
E. O. Wilson Foundation (2007-2009; technology advisor).