Cover Letter for NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp 2018 Application

Name:
Vanessa Schreiber

Institution:
University of Oxford

Name of PhD supervisors:
(a) Christopher Woodruff (Department of International Development)
(b) Simon Quinn (Department of Economics)

Name of recommendation letter writer:
Christopher Woodruff

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VANESSA SCHREIBER

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EDUCATION

University of Oxford, UK **D.Phil. in Economics** Fall 2017-Present
Three-year Doctoral degree in Economics

- *Thesis Topic:* Essays on Firm Productivity in Developing Countries – Evidence from Bangladesh
- *Supervisors:* Christopher Woodruff, Simon Quinn
- *Audited courses:* Development Economics, Advanced Microeconomics

University of Oxford, UK **M.Phil. in Economics** 2013-2015
Two-year Master's degree in Economics

- *Thesis Topic:* Cointegration Analysis of the Exchange Rate and Bilateral Trade between the United Kingdom and Germany
- *Supervisor:* Bent Nielsen
- *First Year Courses:* Econometrics, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics
- *Second Year Courses:* Advanced Econometrics, Industrial Organisation, International Trade, Theory Based Empirical Analysis

University of Copenhagen, Denmark **Summer School** July 2014
Coursework in Macroeconomic Modelling at INET Center (Institute for New Economic Thinking)
Finale grade: 12.0/12.0

University of St. Gallen, Switzerland **B.A. in Business Administration** 2010-2013
Bachelor's degree in Business and Management, minor in Economics and Statistics
Final grade 5.71/6.0, *among the top 5%*

The University of Texas at Austin, US **BBA Exchange Program** Fall 2012
Coursework in Economics, Finance and International Relations
Final grade: 4.0/4.0

SCHOLARSHIPS

- Scholarship of the German National Academic Foundation 2012-2015
- The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation Scholarship 2010-2013
  (spokeswoman for scholarship students of the Swiss Academic Group St. Gallen/Zurich)
- Active Youth Scholarship, Association for the Advancement of Youth Responsibility 2010

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

McKinsey & Company, Munich 2015-2017
Consultant, e.g.

- Identified recruiting pools and created training capacities for local government to cope with refugee crisis
- Developed strategy and initiatives to improve real-time customer information for public transportation company
- Supported negotiation and claims management to improve capital productivity in African Electrical Sector

European Parliament, Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), Brussels
Summer Assistant to Markus Ferber, Vice-Chair of ECON committee Summer 2014

- Wrote speeches and prepared notes on committee sittings, public hearings, and panel discussions
- Outlined position papers about different policy issues, e.g. Financial Regulation or Digital Agenda
- Prepared meetings for electoral district visits, e.g. drafting of speeches

MAN Truck & Bus AG, Munich Summer 2011
Summer Intern, Sales Management Truck Business Steering

- Conducted competitive and market analysis
- Supported strategic activities in sales management
- Developed concept for iPad pilot project, incl. data collection, project planning and presentation
- Designed intranet page for sales management department, incl. development of surface structure and coordination with different teams

CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

Management Training Program: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Bangladesh *(with Christopher Woodruff).* We investigate the impact of a management training program (HR and production modules) for lower/middle managers in garment factories in Bangladesh. We test whether lower level managers have the autonomy to change procedures and practices, and examine spillover effects within factories.

Customized Interventions: A Field Experiment in Bangladesh *(with Christopher Woodruff).* We involve factory personnel in designing customized interventions specific to the needs of the participating factories. We aim to understand how firms function in terms of decision-making, problem solving, up-skilling and communication in uncertain environments.

Information Transparency: A Field Experiment in Bangladesh. I investigate how information transparency affects organizational practices. I gather data on how firms react to the introduction of technical tools (e.g. RFID equipment), which allow to measure productivity per worker in sewing departments.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE AND ACTIVITIES

My Finance Coach Foundation (MFC) – *Teacher* 2017-Present

Music Academy of the National Academic Foundation – *Project coordinator* 2017-Present

Musical Involvement (e.g. Oxford University Orchestra) – *Violinist* 2007-Present

Taller Artistico Xuchialt, Nicaragua – *English Teacher* Summer 2013

National Model United Nations (NMUN), New York **–** *Delegate* Spring 2012

University of St. Gallen Student Parliament – *Representative School of Management* 2011-2012

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Languages: German (mother tongue), English (fluent), French (fluent), Spanish (basic)
Skills: MS Office, Stata, OxMetrics
Interests: Violin, Piano, Rowing, Travel, Tennis, Jogging, and Skiing

Economists have recently re-examined the importance of management practices in improving productivity in the manufacturing industry in developing countries (see Bloom et al. 2013; Schoar, 2013). Yet there is little empirical evidence on why productivity differences persist. In my research, I would like to deepen the understanding of the determinants of persistent productivity differences, in particular in the garment sector in Bangladesh. In this essay, I explain the motivation for my research, a description of my current and future work, and why I wish to attend the boot camp.

The garment sector in Bangladesh is crucial to the national development, accounting for approximately 80% of export earnings and contributing one-eighth of the country's economic output (Bangladesh Bank, 2017). However, garment factories in Bangladesh are viewed as inefficient in comparison to many other countries with which Bangladesh competes. In spite of this relative inefficiency, low labour costs have kept the sector competitive internationally, especially for lower-end products (e.g. t-shirts). But as wages rise in the broader economy (due to an annual per-capita income growth of around six percent for the past two decades), efficiency gains and movements to more complex products will be key to the industry's continued prosperity. Few studies have looked closely at productivity improvement interventions and how factories function in terms of decision-making, problem solving, up-skilling, and communication, particularly in uncertain environments. A better understanding of these issues in Bangladesh is increasingly important. Due to my professional experience in management consulting and my educational background in Economics, I find it particularly exciting to contribute to the further development of this research area.

Specifically, I am currently focusing on two projects for my PhD: The first one is about the effect of a management training program on productivity and worker wellbeing; the second one is about the effect of customized interventions (specific to the needs of participating factories) on organizational practices. For the first project, an RCT was carried out in garment factories in Bangladesh. Randomly selected lower-level managers and supervisors participated at seven one-week training modules covering topics such as production planning and personnel development. The analysis aims to shed light on the questions why factories find it so difficult to carry out productivity-enhancing changes and whether lower/middle management has the autonomy to change processes, practices and cultures.
The second project takes a different format than the previous one as the factory personnel will be involved in designing customized interventions specific to their needs, rather than bringing a prescribed intervention to the factories. These may include new incentives, collection of new information, or training of either supervisors or machine operators. The purpose of this project is to gain knowledge on both productivity improvement strategies and the successes and challenges of working closely with factories on context-specific interventions.

In terms of future projects, I would like to understand how information transparency affects management practices and organizational cultures in the garment sector. Does information transparency lead to more communication and trust? Kelley et al. (2017) show in a field experiment with minibus drivers in Kenya that the provision of information about driving behavior, routes, etc. (via sensors installed in vehicles) increases productivity. Likewise, according to the famous quote of Peter Drucker "what gets measured, gets managed", it remains interesting to analyse whether increased information transparency about individual worker productivity, e.g. by measuring the flow of thread from a machine (via sensors installed at sewing machines), changes management practices.

I would like to attend the NBER Entrepreneurship boot camp due to two main reasons. First, the program is an ideal fit for my interests on firm productivity and organizational practices, and would allow me to gain a much deeper understanding of the academic literature. It seems a great opportunity to participate in lectures, which are highly relevant for my research, from a very distinguished line-up of professors. This will surely add to the breadth of my PhD chapters. I am particularly interested in discussing empirical and theoretical aspects covered in Nick Bloom's work on firm decentralization and management practices, Philippe Aghion's work on authority and delegation, Antoinette Schoar's work on HR management practices or John Haltiwanger's work on firm dynamics and firm size – work from researcher professors who have been speakers at the boot camp in recent years.
Second, I believe that I can strongly benefit from the program as it would help me leverage the opportunity to work with Bangladeshi garment factories to address some of the questions in the academic literature, i.a. from above mentioned professors. It would allow me to shape my view on which organizational theories are relevant and applicable to test empirically in Bangladesh, and how possible interventions can be designed best (data generation process) to gather the most interesting insights on firm productivity and organizational practices.

Some of my fellow students (Daniela Scur, Muhammad Meki) have previously attended the boot camp and shared very positive experiences. I would be honored to also be selected, and look forward to hearing your decision. As required, I would be happy to provide any further information.

References

Bangladesh Bank (2017). *Quarterly Review on RMG: July-September FY17*. Retrieved from https://www.bb.org.bd/pub/quaterly/rmg/july_sep2017.pdf [23.03.2018].

Bloom, N., McKenzie, D., Mahajan, A., & Roberts, J. (2013). Does Management Matter: Evidence from India. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 128*(1), 1-51.

Kelley E., Lane, G., Schoenholzer, D., & Waiganjo P. W. (2017). *Monitoring, Contracts, and Employee Behavior: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in the Public Transport Industry.* Working Paper.

Schoar, A. (2013). *The Importance of Being Nice: Supervisory Skill Training in the Cambodian Garment Industry.* Working Paper.

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Christopher Woodruff, Professor of Development Economics

26 March, 2018

To: David Robinson
Academic Coordinator, NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp

Dear David:

It is a great pleasure to recommend Vanessa Schreiber for the NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp in July. I have been working with Vanessa as her core Ph.D. supervisor since October 2017. During that time, I have interacted with her regularly in weekly meetings, in a weekly research reading group on firms an labor markets, and in several weekly seminar series. So although I met Vanessa less than a year ago, I have come to know her abilities quite quickly.

Having had several students attend the camp over the years (and having taught in the inaugural version), I am aware of both the caliber of students who attend and the value of the program to the attendees. In short, Vanessa compares very favorably to past students in the program, both in terms of talent and research focus. She is an excellent candidate, and I recommend her most strongly.

Vanessa came to the DPhil program at Oxford after spending two years at McKinsey. Vanessa's main dissertation project will examine the challenges of improving management practices and productivity in large firms. The project involves very detailed work aimed at understanding the decision-making process within firms in detail. She aims to provide insight into why changes in management practices are so difficult for firms. Vanessa will work with a group of large garment factories in Bangladesh. Garment production is ideal for understanding changes in productivity, because the sewing activities in large factories are organized in a several parallel and quasi-independent lines. This allows for interventions that affect some lines but not others, providing a clean comparison group against which to measure treatment effects. We have a great deal of flexibility in the interventions in the factories, but with that flexibility comes the need to organize the work around the relevant theory. Toward that end, Vanessa has led several discussions on relevant theories with members of the firms reading group. I have been impressed with her ability to summarize the key points of fairly complex theoretical models.

Given her experience working for McKinsey, Vanessa is ideally suited for this project. During a field visit in January, I noted her maturity and ability to convey ideas to senior management, doubtless honed during her time with McKinsey. This will serve her well in this project. I have also now had the chance to observe her interacting both with the local team and factory management, and I have no concerns that she will excel in this role. She is both outgoing and diplomatic and shows she can align different interests and create consensus. I have no doubts that she will manage the project is a way that generates data providing insights into managerial decision-making while preserving relationships developed over the years with both the local research team and the factories.

During her MPhil, Vanessa focused on time series econometrics, shifting to more applied work on firms when she re-engaged with the DPhil last fall. As a result, she needed to catch up to both

the tools and the literature in this area. I have been impressed with how quickly she is catching up with the tools, but the Boot Camp would be a massive step for her in catching up to the literature. The value added would be very high. Given both her background in consulting and (by summer) fairly extensive experience in the field, I believe she would also contribute an interesting perspective to the discussions in the sessions.

Vanessa's strong academic and intellectual abilities, together with her experience and interests, make her an excellent candidate for the NBER Entrepreneurship Boot Camp. I encourage you to include her in the program. If I can provide any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at christopher.woodruff@qeh.ox.ac.uk.

Sincerely,



Chris Woodruff

Professor of Development Economics