

## **Theoretical Constructs, Concepts, and Applications**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses the importance of theory to research and includes a discussion of how theory is conceptualized. Researchers have debated the definition of theory for many years, with many theorists using typologies and classifications systems to describe the types of theory, in the context of purpose, functions, boundaries, and goals. Theory that is driven by research is directly relevant to practice and beneficial to any field of study. The systematic nature of theory is to provide an explanation of a problem, to describe the distinguishing innovative features of a phenomenon, and to provide predictive utility. Research without theory has no foundation; likewise, theory depends on research to provide proof of the theories correctness.*

**Keywords:** Theory, Constructs, Concepts, Practice, Research, Neo-institutional, Grounded Theory, Substantive Theory, Worldviews

### **Introduction**

The importance of theory in research cannot be underestimated. In addition, research requires a sound theoretical basis and strong methodology. Wacker (1998) provided three reasons why theory is important for research: (a) it provides a framework for analysis, (b) it provides an efficient method for field development, and (c) it provides a clear explanation for the pragmatic world. However, the definition of what constitutes a theory is debated by researchers (Gelso, 2006; Harlow, 2009; Henderikus, 2007). Many researchers and theorists use typologies and classifications systems to describe the types of theory, in the context of purpose, functions, boundaries, and goals (Gay & Weaver, 2011). Although differing opinions and conflicting points of view constitute a major theoretical controversy, Gelso (2006) defined theory using eight constructs: (a) descriptive ability, (b) explanatory power, (c) heuristic value, (d) testability, (e) integration, (f) parsimony, (g) clarity, (h) comprehensiveness, and (i) delimitation. These constructs are based on the fact that theory generates research and research generates and refines theory (Gelso, 2006). Harlow (2009) argued that theory does not have a fixed and universal meaning, but considering the competing research paradigms, theory might suggest a determining law, or system of laws, as in the natural sciences, or a construct or set of constructs for ordering and understanding phenomena.

### **1.0 Theory Definition and Constructs**

Although there are differing opinions as to what constitute a theory, a comparison and contrast of the diversity of opinions on what constitute the virtues of a good theory is important. Wacker (1998) stated, "Operationalization of the definition of theory should directly be tied to the necessary components of theory" (p. 363). According to Walker (1998), theory is composed of four components: (a) definitions, (b) a domain of applicability, (c) a set of relationships of variables, and (d) specific predictions or factual claims. Rychlak (1968) argued that a good theory must be stated explicitly with the aim of formulating a logically consistent and mutually interdependent body of knowledge. Rychlak (1968) suggested the four functions of a theory are (a) descriptive, (b) delimiting, (c) generative, and (d) integrative. Based on Rychlak suggestions, Gelso (2006) argued that for a theory to have scientific value, it must go beyond the simple propositional level.

Most importantly, theories should serve to describe and explain a phenomenon effectively, should place a limit on what might be examined, and should be highly generative to heuristically stimulate further investigation (Gelso, 2006). Although a good theory should have an integrative function to be able to consolidate disparate or contradictory propositions and constructs for a high degree of consistency, having an ingredient of parsimony that includes only the constructs and ideas that are necessary to better explain the phenomena under investigation is important (Gelso, 2006). However, despite these definitions and constructs, much discussion has occurred among theorists and researchers based on their scholarly approach to theory from different and competing worldviews and paradigms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Gay & Weaver, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Harlow, 2009; Henderikus, 2007; Suddaby, 2006).

### 1.1 Theory and Competing Worldviews

Due to intellectual curiosity, competing conceptions, conflicting assumptions, and astonishing variety of approaches to theory based on individual worldviews, there are several taxonomies associated with theory. According to Gay and Weaver (2011), the research assumptions and goals tend to detect which approach to theory researchers utilize. Lynham (2002) defined the conceptual development of theory as an “informed conceptual framework that provides an initial understanding and explanation of the nature and dynamics of the issue, problem, or phenomenon that is the focus of the theory” (p. 231). According to DiMaggio (1995), “There are at least three views of what a theory should be: (a) theory as covering laws, (b) theory as enlightenment, and (c) theory as narrative (p. 391). In addition, Gelso (2006) discussed three critical points as central to theory (a) idea generation, (b) hypothesis generation, and (c) interpretation of results. Lynham (2002) argued that due to an inherently generic nature of theory, different methods of theory building require different theory-building research processes. Despite these numerous and competing views, it is important to examine the intersection between theory and related concepts, paradigms, model, and hypotheses to be able to have an explicit view on the nature and types of theory.

Rychlak (1968) and Kerlinger (1986) also held similar views and provided a description of theory as a series of two or more interrelated constructs, abstractions, concepts, variables, definition, and propositions, which have been hypothesized with a systematic view of phenomena, for the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena. According to Gelso (2006), theories contain theoretical propositions, and hypotheses are derived from these propositions. While Sutton and Stow (1995) defined hypotheses as crucial bridges between theory and data, Cozby (2009) stated that propositions are statements that express the relationship of two or more concepts. Bachman and Schutt (2007) described concept as “a mental image that summarizes a set of similar observations” (p. 72). Although models are used in research for the purpose of illustrating the connectedness of variables within a theory, they do not constitute a theory (Gay & Weaver, 2011). Instead, “paradigms are general ways of viewing the phenomenal world, but by contrast, theories are systematic sets of interrelated statements and constructs intended to explain some aspect of social life” (Gay & Weaver, 2011, p. 26).

As Bosk (2008) stated, “All fieldwork done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?” (p. 35). Prediction and understanding are the two primary purposes of a theory (Zikmond, 2010). Research has four goals: (a) attempts to describe behavior, (b) explain behavior, (c) predict behavior, and (d) determine the causes of behavior (Cozby, 2009). Worldviews are the philosophical paradigms that encapsulate specific beliefs that guide researchers in social research (Creswell, 2009). A constructivist paradigm suggests that reality is constructed through social interaction and dialogue; postpositivists reflect the need to assess and identify the causes that influence outcomes, and pragmatic worldview consists of an exploratory and investigative fact-finding endeavor, based on truth and complemented with qualitative and quantitative assumptions (Cozby, 2009; Creswell, 2009). The pragmatist may borrow significantly from paradigms such as the interpretivists and postpositivists because truth is based on a balanced analysis of circumstances (Creswell, 2009). Because of these diverse paradigms that are founded on deductive and inductive reasoning of theorists and researchers, Gay and Weaver (2011) suggested that “theory is grounded in the nuances of life that give meaning and significance to the various stakeholders” (p. 27). Although sound empirical research begins with strong research problem grounded in related literature that identifies a research gap, and proposes research questions to address the gap, the primary concern is to justify whether the research question is better addressed by theory-building rather than theory testing (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

## 1.2 Grounded and Substantive Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed grounded theory based on the argument that new theory could be developed by paying careful attention to the contrast between “the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas” (p. 239) and the interpretations of those daily realities made by those who participate in them (the “actors”). Although “it is difficult to find a grounded formal theory that was not in some way stimulated by substantive theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 79), in grounded theory, the theoretical concepts and framework are grounded in and emerge from the data and analysis that follow, instead of prior theory that guided data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Harlow (2009) argued that case studies either test a particular theory, develop theory, or both, arguing that developing theory inevitably involves an element of testing. Harlow coined the term *retroduction* as the circular process by which the researcher tests his or her theoretical ideas against emerging data, reframes the ideas, and retest until a trustworthy conclusion that is generalizable and transferable are reached (Harlow, 2009).

A necessary link exists between substantive theory or theory grounded in extant research and grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006). Thus, substantive theory is a strategic link in the formulation and generation of grounded formal theory (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Indeed, substantive theory is often used in stimulating grounded formal theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) neo-institutional theory emerged from the old institutional theory and is widely adopted as a dominant theoretical framework in organizational studies. The theory provides a framework for organizational research ranging from leadership, interaction, and the impact of environmental contingencies. Hu, Liang, Saraf, and Xue, (2007) used neo-institutional theory to examine the mediating role of top management considering the institutional forces and enterprise system assimilation in organizations. Similarly, Rant and Rozman (2008) conducted research on organizational performance using contingency theory to advance the knowledge on how different organizations should adapt their organizational structure to changes in the environment and other contingencies through a dynamic organizational fit model.

DiMaggio and Powell’s new institutional theory or neo-institutionalism emerged in contrast to the traditional functionalists view (Selnick, 1949) that organizations are rational entities with structures, rules, and procedures designed to perform certain tasks. An institutional theorist, Scott (1987), argued that organizations are social constructions in the sense that organizational structures are adaptive vehicles “shaped in reaction to the characteristics and commitments of participants as well as the influences and constraints from the external environment” (p. 494). The conception of the functionalists was largely definitional rather than explanatory. Despite the seminal work of Meyer and Rowan (1977) on institutional theory that states that organizations are structured by phenomena in their institutional environment and gradually become isomorphic with them, many questions still remained unanswered: how do institutionalized structures and practices propagate among organizations within and across organizational fields? DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) neo-institutional theory explained that institutionalization and isomorphism processes capture organizational homogenization, emphasizing coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. In order for an endeavor to be considered research, it must clearly present the potential for creating identifiable new knowledge (Ellis & Levy, 2008). Although substantive theory is often used as a theoretical framework in research, grounded theory places greater emphasis on the concept of emergence: to “let the data speak for themselves” (Glaser, 2002, p. 125) and to allow theoretical concepts to “earn their way into the analysis” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 230).

## 2.0 Relationship Between Theory and Research

Theory has a central role in research. Although theory should ideally guide research, theory and research are interrelated and are dependent on the other to make sense of a phenomenon. In addition, although research contributes significantly to the explanatory power of a theory (Gay & Weaver, 2011), to be able to increase or build knowledge effectively, a theoretical framework must be used to develop the research process. Hence, “research knowledge tends to contribute to theory more incrementally, building upon, and adding to a lexicon of facts” (Gay & Weaver, 2011, p. 29).

The primary issue of concern in the definition of research is that it must be used collect and analyze new information or data that will enhance the body of knowledge (Ellis & Levy, 2008). Theory is statement of a hypothesized relationship between and among variables (Gleso, 2006) involving a series of interrelated constructs, abstractions, concepts, variables, definition, and propositions that have been hypothesized or assumed with a systematic view of phenomena, for the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena. Although theory is grounded in the nuances of life that give meaning and significance to the various stakeholders, theory stimulates and generates research and research generates and refines theory (Gay & Weaver, 2011; Gelso, 2006). According to Harlow (2009), developing theory inevitably involves an element of testing and therefore the two are interlinked. A case study, in particular, is either designed to test a theory, develop a theory, or both (Harlow, 2009). Theory building and theory testing will form the basis of discussion on the relationship between research and theory.

The connectedness between theory and research begins with a problem definition, and indeed, when a research idea is generated. Research projects usually begin with a review of the relevant literature in which the researcher engages with existing theoretical explanation of the topic in question (Harlow, 2009). The theory or construct to be tested or developed will inform the choice of case or cases to be studied, the data to be gathered, the methods by which the data will be gathered, as well as the way in which the data will be analyzed (Harlow, 2009). Building theory from case studies is a research strategy that involves using one or more cases to create theoretical constructs, propositions or midrange theory from case-based, empirical evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989). The emphasis of theory building on developing constructs, measures, and testable theoretical propositions makes inductive case research consistent with the emphasis on testable theory within mainstream deductive research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). An inductive research strategy that lets theory emerge from data can be a valuable research starting point when only a limited theoretical knowledge exists concerning a particular phenomenon (Siggelkow, 2007). However, inductive and deductive logics are mirrors of one another: inductive theory builds from cases producing new theory from data and deductive theory testing completes the cycle by using research data to test theory. Thus, Holton and Lowe (2007) “argued that it is deductive theory that has the greatest potential for advancing science because it often proposes new constructs and relationships that spur other researchers to conduct new empirical research to verify the theory” (p. 304).

## 2.1 Research Contribution to Theory

Ellis and Levy (2008) discussed seven ways in which original research contributions can be made to the body of knowledge. Such contributions can be summarized using the following constructs (a) establishment of causal relationship, (b) examination of element, (c) method of creating product through developmental study, (d) constructs development, (e) predictive model development, (f) efficacy evaluation, and (g) examination of the impact of time on the nature of the documented problem in a longitudinal study. Harlow (2009) discussed the *retroduction* research process involving the testing of theoretical ideas against the emerging data, the reframing and retesting of the ideas until the conclusions reached are deemed reliable and trustworthy. Because a theory-building approach is deeply embedded in rich empirical research data, building theory from cases is likely to produce theory that is accurate, interesting, and testable within a research environment (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). According to Ellis and Levy (2008), “In order for an endeavor to be considered research, it must clearly present the potential for creating identifiable new knowledge” (p.23).

Every research is used to understand a phenomenon. Siggelkow’s (2007) discussion on persuasiveness provides a compelling argument for the appropriateness of the case study design to contribute to a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. From a positivistic perspective, Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) affirmed the usefulness of a case study approach for building theory, which is expected to be strongly attached to empirical reality. This claim, according to Andrade (2009), is also applicable to interpretive researchers in which the resultant theory should emerge from the data. This inductive thinking process is more than simply generating hypotheses, of which the alleged “goal is not to conclude a study but to develop ideas for further study” (Andrade, 2009, p. 45). Grounded theory, which is the discovery of theory from data, will enable a researcher to theorize from evidence existing in the data. With this systemic process, the researcher can produce either substantive theory, which is generated from within a specific area of enquiry (Lehmann, Myers, & Urquhart, 2006) or formal theory, which is focused on conceptual entities (Strauss, 1987). Thus, phenomenon understanding, identification and retrieval of studies, and construction of analysis are the three major ways research can contribute to theory.

## **2.2 The Practical Application of Theory**

The relationship between theory and practice is an extensive discussion in scholarly literature covering diverse fields of study (Gay & Weaver, 2011; Lincoln & Lynham, 2011; Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007; Vogel, 2010). The systematic nature of theory is to provide explanatory leverage on a problem, describing innovative features of a phenomenon, or providing predictive utility (Henderikus, 2010). There are three prevailing influential views that hold theories to be (a) reducible to observables, (b) used as instruments to do things in the world, and (c) statements about things that really exist (Henderikus, 2007). There is no academic study or research that can be undertaken without a theory. Most scholars agree that “theory is the currency of scholarly research” (Corley & Gioia, 2011, p. 12). A theory provides a framework for analysis, facilitates the efficient development of academic field, and is needed for the applicability to practical real world problems (Wacker, 1998). Theory propels all the ideas that fuel research and practice. Apart from social sciences, theory has a practical and revealing connection in chemistry, physics, medicine, biology, and other life sciences because it gives rise to useful practice, discovery, explanations, and predictions (Gary 2007; Vogel, 2010).

## **3.0 Literature Review: Application of Neo-Institutional Theory**

The systematic nature of theory is to provide explanatory leverage on a problem, describing innovative features of a phenomenon, or providing predictive utility (Henderikus, 2010). According to Copes et al. (2007) and Middlehurst, (2008), theory that is driven by research is directly relevant to practice and beneficial to the field. Neo-institutional theory will be used in this paper to review its applicability in five different uses. Bjorkman, Fey, and Park (2007) used neo-institutional framework to examine human resource management (HRM) practices within multinational corporations operating in the U.S., Finland, and Russia. The use of neo-institutional theory for this research was based on the premise that organizations are under social influence and pressure to adopt practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Bjorkman et al., (2007), posited that employee development is an important source of competitive advantage for organizations and it is important for organizations to adopt HRM practices. Neo-institutional isomorphic processes offer three distinctive definitions (a) coercive due to government regulations, (b) normative due to dissemination of professional organizations’ patterns, and (c) mimetic where organizations imitate other organizations (DiMaggio et al, 1983). However, HRM practice is used in this study as a generic construct and neo-institutional theory does not offer a lens for generic organizational constructs but institutional pressure. Although the researchers identified local institutional pressures from the subsidiaries of multinational corporation (Bjorkman, Fey, & Park, 2007), there are two controversial issues in the study (a) adoption of HRM practices is not regulatory, and (b) the HRM practices are not defined nor championed by any professional body to justify the presence of normative pressure. Neo-institutional theory, then, actually help in the understanding of the determinants of HRM practices, but the theoretical constructs of neo-institutional theory did not justify the phenomenon considered for the research.

It was difficult to differentiate coercive, normative, nor mimetic influences to justify the application of this theory for a generic HRM practices within a global context. Parry and Tyson (2009) drew from neo-institutional theory to provide a deeper understanding of the forces that framed how human resource policies and practices were adjusted in response to externally imposed UK legislation against age discrimination.

The theoretical lens examined two factors (a) examination of legislation on HR policies and (b) identification of forces, other than legislation, that affect the introduction of the policies (Parry & Tyson, 2009). Neo-institutional theory as a theoretical perspective used the three DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) isomorphic pressures to analyze the forces that HR was subjected to (a) coercive, (b) normative, and (c) mimetic. The research explained the convergence of these three forces within the HR: (a) coercive pressure introduced by the UK legislation, (b) mimetic pressure, introduced by groups like the “Employers Forum on Age” and “Age Positive” and (c) normative pressure from professional networks such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (Parry & Tyson, 2009). Due to the natural attitude of people with diverse agendas and stereotypes, the research seeks to understand how coercive pressure from the new law was perceived within organizations in the UK. Although neo-institutional theory is limited in studying the impact of isomorphic pressures within organizations (Suddaby, 2010), this research, through interpretive case study discovered that organizational complexities, pre-existing values, sectorial distinction, diverse stakeholders, and interest groups collectively complicated and delayed the implementation of the legislation (Parry & Tyson, 2010).

Despite internal factors, neo-institutional theory succeeded in analyzing the phenomenon within its theoretical proposition, with evidence of all three isomorphic pressures. However, a gap exists for further research on what constitute the definition of pre-existing conditions and other internal HR values within neo-institutional context.

From the perspective of neo-institutional theory, Cooke, Hart, and Hu (2007) developed a case study to better understand how internal and external organizational factors influence organizational actions (Cooke, Hart, & Hu, 2007). The study identified external regulation in the form of Sarbanes-Oxley Act that constituted a coercive force that motivated the top managers to initiate a change in ABC International (Cooke et al, 2007). Communications and interactions with professional associations and publications constituted a normative influence (Cooke et al, 2007). Although the researchers could not identify the existence of mimetic isomorphism, the analysis of the sources of pressures in the context of neo-institutional theory provided two different effects (Cooke et al, 2007). First, the coercive force of Sarbanes-Oxley motivated the top managers to mandate top-down information security related changes across the entire company. Second, the normative pressures provided an important source of ideas about what security policies, practices, and technologies to adopt. Although neo-institutional theory does not explain how organizations are supposed to manage conflicting demands (Campbell, 2007), the researchers used the construct “dual influence” from external force and internal management to posit such conflicting interactions. Nevertheless, although such claim is based on assumption, it provides future research opportunities.

Rosenblatt (2011) used neo-institutional theory to conduct a study with the aim of exploring the roles of institutional mechanisms and moderating functions of social network structures and cultural values in diffusion of global work values within the context of multinational organizations (MNO). In addition, the study suggested that the regulative and normative institutional processes are likely to diffuse global work values more efficiently among the subsidiaries or members of the MNOs. But regulative or coercive institutional processes are enacted laws and rules in a particular environment that promote certain types of behavior or restrict others (Scott, 2001). This is in support of the coercive or regulatory pressure as experienced in the Cooke, Hart, & Hu’s (2007) study. Erez and Drori (2009), argued that MNO must integrate shared global work values to create an environment, where workers are able to communicate and coordinate their activities to reach common goals, but this is not practicable with subsidiaries of MNOs located in different cultures. Bjorkman, Fey, and Park (2007) presented a different view on international research involving the diffusion of coercive or normative institutional pressures in a globalized context because of jurisdictional preferences. Similarly, although scholars (Brodbeck, Chhokar, & House, 2008; Shokef&Erez, 2006) posited that leadership characteristics, customer orientation, competitive performance orientation, openness to cultural diversity are work values that can transpire the global work environment, such claims cannot be generalized in the context of neo-institutional theory or the applicability of isomorphism due to differences in institutional context between countries. Such claims are an attempt to go beyond the theoretical proposition.

### **3.1 Relationship between Theory and Practice**

According to Gay and Weaver (2011), Kurt Lewin’s most famous assertion is that “nothing is quite so practical as a good theory” (p. 29) and a good theory serves as a baseline in establishing best practices. Although a good theory is crucial to informed practice and the continual improvement and maturity of a discipline (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011), it also has the potential to improve the practice and understanding of practitioners (Gay & Weaver, 2011). However, many academics have continued to argue and discuss several controversies associated with the relationship between theory and practice in the context of perceived gap between the two (Gay & Weaver, 2011; Vogel, 2010). Such controversies are discussed in two views (a) the practitioner viewpoint and (b) academic viewpoint (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Lincoln & Lynham, 2011). According to Copes, Vieraitis and Jochum (2007), the practitioner is always asking the question “Why does theory matter” and “When am I ever going to use this theory” (p. 444); the academic is guided and driven toward rigorous and increasingly relevant theoretical contributions that may contradict the demands of the practitioner (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011). Gay and Weaver (2011) described theory as “the truth” and the pursuit of theory by the academic is grounded in its explanatory and revelatory power, capable of invoking themes in extant literature that can lead to overall paradigm shift. Many theorists (Copes et al., 2007; Kleinrichert, 2005; Lincoln & Lynham, 2011) have argued that in the applied fields of management and leadership, theoretical propositions should be driven by relevant practice for the progression and advancement of knowledge in a continuous cycle.



Theory that is driven by research is directly relevant to practice and beneficial to the field (Copes et al., & Middlehurst, 2008). However, what constitutes a theoretical contribution in a field of study can be another source of contention among scholars (Southern & Devlin, 2010). A theory-practice relationship is a mainly communication relationship. Van de Hen and Johnson (2006) discussed *engaged scholarship*, as a solution to a real or perceived gap, that needs a mode of inquiry to convert the information provided by both scholars and practitioners into actions to be able to address problems in a given field. Even in contextual, theoretical, methodological circumstances, using a range of methods to test a theory informs practice and generates valued and substantive knowledge (Marsden (2007). The bottom line is that theory generates research and research generates and refines theory (Gelso, 2006).

### **3.2 Issues Involved in Translating Theory into Practice**

The relationship between theory and practice is crucial (Vogel, 2010); theory directs practice and practice directs theory (Usha, 2006). However, there are a number of issues, controversies, and assumptions involving the translation of a theory into practice. Typically, the gap between theory and practice is framed as a knowledge transfer problem (Van de Hen & Johnson, 2007). The initiation of the dialogue and information sharing between scholars and practitioners is a better way to address the perceived divide and misassumption between theory and practice (Kuchinka, 2010). Van de Hen and Johnson (2007) proposed a method of scholarship engagement to address the knowledge production issue, arguing that engaged scholarship enhances the relevance of research for practice, in addition to contributing to the advancement of knowledge in a particular domain. Furthermore, to say that the knowledge of theory and practice are different is not to say that they substitute each other; rather, they complement each other (Van de Hen & Johnson, 2007).

Owing to the disconnect in conception between theory and practice, Lynham (2002) designed an integrated model of four phases that describes the relationship between theory and practice or application. The first is the conceptual development phase which provides an initial understanding and explanation of the nature and dynamics of an issue, problem, or phenomenon that is the focus of the theory (Lynham, 2002). The second phase is operationalization, which is an explicit connection between the conceptual development phase and practice (Lynham, 2002). The third phase is confirmation or disconfirmation and involves the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of an appropriate research agenda and studies to confirm or disconfirm the theoretical framework that is central to the theory (Lynham, 2002). Finally, the application phase tests the theory through experience and learning from the real world application: the practice is judged to certify the usefulness and relevance of the theory for improved action and problem solving (Lynham, 2002). According to Lynham (2002), the continuous refinement and development is based on the learning from the application phase because “theory is never complete” (p. 232).

### **Summary**

Theoretical conceptualizations are almost as many as there are researchers conducting research and using theories (Gay & Weaver, 2011; Wacker, 1998). Researchers view theory in different ways and across different research disciplines (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Gay & Weaver, 2011; Harlow, 2009). The systematic nature of theory is to provide explanatory leverage on a problem, describing innovative features of a phenomenon, or providing predictive utility (Henderikus, 2010). Heinen (1985) defined “a theory as a group of logically organized laws or relationships that constitutes explanation in a discipline” (p. 414). Theory that is driven by research is directly relevant to practice and beneficial to the field (Cops et al., 2007; Middlehurst, 2008). Although substantive theory is often used as a theoretical framework and a strategic link in the formulation and generation of grounded formal theory, grounded theory emphasizes the concept of emergence that inspires new research. It is important to note that the process of grounded theory and substantive theory produces four primary constructs of (a) heuristics (expansion of the existing body of knowledge, discovery, and problem solving), (b) description, (c) delimitation, and (d) parsimonious. The relationship between theory, practice, and research is central to the discussion of theory as a conceptualized cycle of development and facilitation (Colquitt & Phelan, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2011; Wacker 1998, 2008). However, theory is speculative and one’s theory seems to follow one’s chosen philosophical commitment, even to a degree that advocates of different philosophical stances do not necessarily understand each other’s conceptions of theory (Westerlund & Väkevä 2011). The theoretical process puts boundaries on what is examined or studied.

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