

Theory Criteria and Evaluation Resource

Theory Committee
Academy of Human Resource Development
www.theorypractice.net

1. Selected source citation:

Bacharach, S. B. (1989). Organizational theories: Some criteria for evaluation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 496-515.

2. Stated purpose of selected source:

“A set of ground rules and vocabulary to facilitate focused discussion about the structure of organization and management theories are proposed...the proposed matrix may be useful both for defining the necessary components of good theory and for evaluating and/or comparing the quality of alternative theories” (Bacharach, 1989, p. 496).

3. Direct quotation of the theory criteria or evaluation:

The two primary criteria upon which any theory may be evaluated are (a) falsifiability and (b) utility.

Criterion #1: Falsifiability (Determines whether a theory is constructed such that empirical refutation is possible)

a. The falsifiability of variables: measurement issues

The theorist specifies the time and space parameters of the variables embedded in the hypothesis so that constructs may be meaningfully measured.

Criteria: Variables are operationally defined, have face and content validity, noncontinuousness and reliability

b. The falsifiability of constructs: construct validity

The theorist must show how variables which should be derived from the constructs are indeed correlated with the construct, and those variables which should be unrelated to the construct are indeed uncorrelated.

Criteria: Clarity and parsimony, Construct Validity (convergent/discriminant)

c. The falsifiability of relationships: logical and empirical adequacy

Logical adequacy: the implicit or explicit logic embedded in the hypotheses and propositions ensures that the hypotheses and propositions are capable of being disconfirmed.

Criteria: Individual propositions and hypotheses (a) must be nontautological and (b) the nature of the relationship between the antecedent and consequent must be specified.

Empirical adequacy: propositions and hypotheses are operationalized in such a manner as to render the theory subject to disconfirmation. The theory must be proposed in such a way as to permit longitudinal analysis.

Criteria: There must be more than one object analysis or that object of analysis must exist at more than one point in time.

Criterion #2: Utility (Determines if the theory both explains and predicts)

a. The utility of variables and constructs: scope

Criteria: For adequate scope, the variables included in the theoretical system must sufficiently tap the domain of the constructs in question, while the constructs must, in turn, tap the domain of the phenomenon in question.

b. The utility of relationships: explanatory potential and predictive adequacy

The explanatory potential of theories can be compared on the basis of (a) the specificity of their assumptions regarding objects of analysis, (b) the specificity of their assumptions regarding determinative relations between antecedent and consequent, and (c) the scope and parsimony of their propositions.

Criteria: A theory must include (a) explanatory potential and (b) predictive adequacy.

4. Contributors: (name & year)

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5. Contributors' comment of reflection:

Bacharach's work from an organizational studies perspective makes it useful for evaluating theories in the applied field of Human Resource Development. We found this article to be valuable in several ways. First, the author differentiated between theories, typologies and metaphors noting that theories contain a set of formal arguments with their primary purpose to answer the *how*, *when* and *why* rather than the *what* found in purely descriptive statements. Second, this article is important because it contains an informative discussion on how new theories "fit" with older theories and, if evidenced, call for older theories to be revised thus enhancing the refinement and developmental nature of theory building (see Lynham, 2002). Bacharach further explained that by employing the qualitative dimensions of connectivity and transformation, this fit can be more fully described. Third, when comparing Bacharach to Patterson's work on theory evaluation, it was observed that many evaluative criteria are common to both frameworks (see Weinberger, 1998) thus enhancing their confirmability.

6. Classification of this source (Check all that apply)

Theory end-product

Theory development process

Theory evaluation

Other: _____

References:

Lynham, S. A. (2002). The general method of theory-building research in applied disciplines. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 4(3), 221-241.

Weinberger, L. A. (1998). Commonly held theories of human resource development. *Human Resource Development International*, 1(1), 75-93.