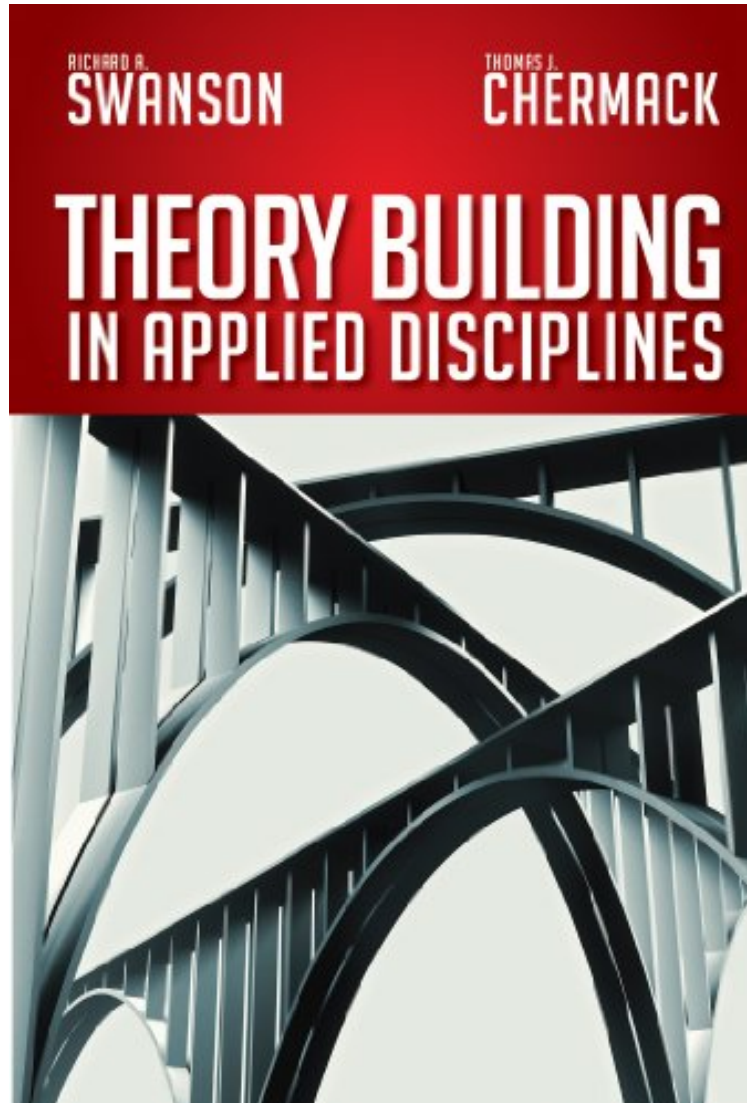


Theory Building in Applied Disciplines

Richard A. Swanson, Thomas J. Chermack
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Richard A. Swanson, Thomas J. Chermack : Theory Building in Applied Disciplines before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Theory Building in Applied Disciplines:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Letty Ygood resource for graduate theory or philosophy course.0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. too much reverse engineeringBy tom abelesThe author and colleagues have spent an inordinate time deconstructing to create models to help others construct but then show there are other ways to approach the problems. They lack sufficient examples to demonstrate both theory building and how these fit in practice. The endpoint is a bridge too far and the bridge is more ephemeral than the one in the movie, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. All the diagrams and charts give a semblance of accomplishment.

The material is deserving of a good article and not play to the expected novice reader. A scientist would try to cut through the persiflage aimed at disarming the inexperienced reader. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An excellent resource for theory builders

By Camber For several years, I've researched the role of human factors in failure and safety of dams and other systems, and I sensed that I was 'theory building in applied disciplines'. So this book was naturally of interest to me when I came across it, but I was skeptical that I'd get much out of it. Well, I'm glad to report that I was wrong! The authors have combined strong philosophical and practical insight to produce a book which provides in-depth understanding of the nature of theory in applied disciplines, as well as detailed guidance on the process of developing such theory. And considering the inherently abstract nature of the subject matter, the writing is also surprisingly clear and straightforward, so this is a book which both academics and practitioners should appreciate. I did find that the book became somewhat repetitive after the first half of the book, but the readability of the book made it easy to finish, and of course repetition does have value. Here are my notes from the book:

1. In applied disciplines, theory and practice need to be interactive and support each other, and theory can emerge from both practice and scholarly research. Motivations for theory building can include practical problems, new areas of human activity, and immature existing theories. Even with a seemingly mature theory, fundamental flaws may be discovered which warrant major changes to the theory or starting over with a new theory. And changes in applied disciplines themselves may warrant change in theories (theory may need to adapt to a moving target).
2. Theories go well beyond hypothesis and conceptualization, and generally have a broader scope than what we typically refer to as models. Models would ideally be founded on theories, but that's not always the case.
3. Theory building in applied disciplines is difficult, 'messier' than in hard sciences, may draw on both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and can take years. Theory building isn't a linear or even cyclic process, but rather can involve working in multiple directions at once with iterations in each direction, interactions among them, and repeated revisions and re-synthesis.
4. Effective theory building requires both knowledge of the subject matter and general skill with theory building. Traits of successful theory builders include intense curiosity and interest in the topic, humility about their knowledge and understanding, ability to adopt multiple perspectives, a diverse toolbox of inquiry methods, openness to input from others (especially since developers of a theory can become so close to it that it becomes difficult to look at it critically), and patience and persistence with regard to the theory building quest.
5. Theory building can be both inductive and deductive, and can draw on metaphors and analogies. With a deductive approach, it can be useful to experiment with varying assumptions. Theory building may also draw on and incorporate other existing theories, and therefore involve some degree of synthesis.
6. Sources of information for theory building can include literature reviews, personal experience, participant observation, case studies (both 'routinized' and 'rare' cases), questionnaires, interviews, collection of practitioner rules of thumb, quantitative measures and analyses, thought experiments, etc.
7. The conceptualization phase of theory building involves establishing a theoretical framework by identifying the key elements of a theory, an initial explanation of their relationships, and an initial description of the boundaries of the theory in terms of where it does and does not apply. Regarding boundaries, 'midrange' theories are usually best and most realistic, as compared to grand theories or local theories (which may only apply to one or a few cases).
8. The operationalization phase of theory building involves putting elements of the theoretical framework in a form which can be empirically related to the real world, so that the theory can be tested and refined. This would include generating hypotheses, propositional claims, and empirical indicators. The more a theory has successfully gone through such testing and refinement, the more it can be considered to have been confirmed (or corroborated, but certainly not proved). Application of a theory in practice enables further testing and refinement of a theory and can include workshops, application of new policies, and application of interventions based on the theory.
9. Criteria for assessing theories include relevance to real-world situations, internal consistency and coherence, ease of relating the theory to data and practice, ease of developing hypotheses, ability to make testable predictions, parsimony (without oversimplification), comprehensiveness of coverage within the boundary of the theory, fit with empirical evidence (including surviving attempts at falsification), ability of the theory to evolve, ability to generate new knowledge, and usefulness to practitioners in their thinking and practice. Theories should be modified and evolve as needed to best meet these criteria, and theories can't generally ever be considered to be complete and final.

I can recommend this book to anyone interested in getting understanding and advice on theory building in applied disciplines. This is a solid book on the topic.

A Comprehensive Method, Tools, and Techniques for Building Sound Theory Richard Swanson and Thomas Chermack present a complete five-step approach for developing sound theory in applied disciplines, from conceptualizing a theory to creating relevant assessment criteria, establishing a research agenda to test the theory's validity, applying the theoretical concepts in the real world, and using that experience to further refine and improve the theory. The method is not restricted to any single discipline, nor is it limited by any research ideology. The authors provide a set of tools for each phase of the process, making this book accessible to a wide audience. And in addition to examples in each chapter, they offer two extended case examples of full theory building.

ldquo;Swanson and Chermack argue that applied disciplines falter when either theory or practice dominates. The method of theory building in applied disciplines presented and detailed in this book is simple yet powerful.rdquo;mdash;Wayne F. Cascio, Robert H. Reynolds Chair in Global Leadership and Professor of Management, Business School, University of Colorado Denverldquo;Theory Building in Applied Disciplines is a long-overdue book. Swanson and Chermack have made a truly significant contribution to the development of practice-based theories that will enrich applied disciplines.rdquo;mdash;Marshall Scott Poole, Professor of Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaignldquo;This book practices what it preaches by meshing theory and practice in an accessible and rigorous way. Scholars and graduate students will benefit from the advice and examples provided.rdquo;nbsp;mdash;Kevin Dooley, Distinguished Professor of Supply Chain Management, Arizona State Universityldquo;This is a welcome addition to the growing conversation on the role of theory and theory development in applied disciplines.rdquo;mdash;David Whetten, Jack Wheatley Professor of Organizational Studies, Brigham Young Universityldquo;Swanson and Chermackrsquo;s excellent presentation and expansion of the phases of theory building in applied disciplines represents a significant contribution to the scholarly literature.rdquo;mdash;Pedro Reyes, Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, The University of Texas System