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Theory Building and Validation Protocol

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Abstract: All disciplines and fields of practice depend on theorization (theory building) and theory validation. Theoretical validity impacts the veracity of implications, conclusions, and recommendations for research, curriculum, and policy and the rigor and relevancy of practice. It also influences research integrity and research ethics. This paper is intended to be a tool for theory builders. It shares a generic overview of theory building and theory validation protocol. Five theory-building elements are explained to ensure high-quality theorization: assumptions, concepts, propositions, pictorial models, and logical reasoning. Thirteen criteria for a valid theory are identified. Constituting a theory-validation expert panel is discussed. This protocol can be used to build and validate new theories or judge theories underpinning research, curricula, policies, programs, and practice.

Keywords: Theory; theory building; theoretical elements; theory validation; research ethics and integrity.

I. Introduction

All disciplines and fields of practice depend on theorization (theory building) and theory validation. Thus, all scholars can benefit from a treatise on this topic with some attempts more informative than others. Weick (Weick 1989, 512) posited that "we cannot improve the theorizing process until we describe it more explicitly." In that spirit, this paper is a generic tool for theory builders. Its concise and focused overview of theory building elements, with attendant explanations and interconnected relationships among theory elements, reflects a comprehensive amalgamation of existing literature, which often addresses some aspects of theory building but not all.

The paper's contents also have ethical implications, especially regarding normativity. It was assumed that theory building and validation are normative in nature (what should happen) rather than descriptive (what does happen). Norms are specific rules that people typically follow, that they censure others for not following. This paper sets out established protocol for building and validating theories – their goodness and strength. Theories are judged from a normative stance. Did theorists do what they should have done to get a valid

theory: follow expected rules, a set of standards, and established protocols recommended for theorizing and attendant validation?

As a caveat, people employ different conceptualizations of normativity (Finlay 2019; Wedgwood 2007). Herein, normativity characterizes theoretical validation, which serves as a foundation for research integrity and research ethics. Poorly developed and invalid theories do not bode well for either. "Normativity plays a role in the process of research [where it] is in fact 'unavoidable' because when a particular problem (or facets of a problem) is chosen and the decision for a specific project [including theory building] is made, other problems (or facets) are excluded" (Ziebertz 2004, 289). In a sense, deciding what aspects of reality to theorize is as normative as the need to judge the validity of the ultimate theory.

From a normative stance, a valid theory correctly addresses a real part of the world (Murphy 2015). Conducting research (from framing the problem to interpreting outcomes), thus, faces ethical challenges if the theory is not valid. To better ensure validity, and by association more ethical research and research integrity, protocol has evolved for theory building and subsequent validation and is recounted in this paper. Because "no methodology exists to regulate the research process internally" (Ziebertz 2004, 289), valid theories are de rigueur, which necessitates theory building and validation prowess.

"There is nothing as practical as a good theory" (Lewin 1943, 129) with practical meaning effective in real circumstances. Theories serve several key roles. (a) They provide explanations of the mechanisms underlying phenomena – why, how, when, and where events (what and who) occur. (b) They contain someone's assumptions about an observed phenomenon that others can use to understand and adjust their practice. (c) Practitioners can avail themselves of theory-informed, evidence-based principles, procedures, and protocols. (d) Theory-based evidence can augment people's content knowledge, longstanding practice, and innate talent. (e) And theories can provide tried-and-true frameworks for more ethical, responsible, and effective research, policies, curricula, and practice (Artino & Konopasky 2018).

All disciplines and fields of practice depend on theorization (i.e., theory building) to (a) bring their perspective to bear on complex phenomena; (b) guide and interpret research; (c) evaluate programs, curricula, policies, and practice; (d) generate new knowledge; and (e) address and solve problems (Styhre 2022; Svejvig 2021). "Knowledge is enhanced in a discipline through high-quality theory as well as improving the abilities of practitioners to apply theories in an effective way" (Svejvig 2021, 849).

Because a good theory can correctly account for what was actually observed in reality, practitioners must be able to judge the goodness and validity of any theory used (a) when research, curricula, policies, or programs are designed or practice ensues and (b) when interpreting and discussing impact, influence, and outcomes of research and practice. Theoretical validity impacts the veracity of implications, conclusions, and recommendations and the rigor, relevancy, and ethical nature of practice (Artino &

Konopasky 2018; McGregor 2018).

That said, "a lot of theories are simply wrong. Some are completely false, and don't match reality under any circumstance; others are right under specific conditions but are often applied too broadly, or in the wrong context" (Vartanian 2019, para. 6; see also Lynham 2002). For these and other reasons, researchers must become familiar with how to build and judge a theory because relying on invalid theories is untenable. "What is the purpose of good theory other than to describe and explain how things actually work and, in so doing, to help us improve our actions in this world" (Lynham 2002, 221)? Hence, the ethical implications.

However, "despite its importance, developing and refining theories remains a formidable task, given the inadequate clarity, inherent confusion, and compounding complexity faced by scholars in theory development" (Lim 2026, 1). Weick posited that "we cannot improve the theorizing process until we describe it more explicitly" (Weick 1989, 512). Lim further clarified "the need for clear, coherent, and constructive guidelines [when] developing theories in scholarly research" (Lim 2026, 21). Specifying the components and structure of a good theory guides researchers and scholars in designing and building their own theories and analyzing, testing, evaluating, and validating other's theories (Svejvig 2021).

To wit, this paper shares a generic overview of theory building and theory validation protocol applicable to all disciplines. The latter are expected to systematically develop and evaluate theories (McGregor 2009) and strengthen the interaction between research and theory (Couch & Felstehausen 2009).

II. Theory-Building Elements

Theory is Greek *thorós*, "spectator, someone who watches or observes" and *theoria*, "contemplation and speculation" (Harper 2026). Thus, a theory "is basically a system of ideas or suppositions tendered by a theorist after [having] observed and contemplated a particular phenomenon" (McGregor 2018, 68). Theories serve four functions: explain, predict, control, or interpret. Respectively, they (a) offer logical reasons to explain why and how things happen, (b) allow researchers to predict future outcomes or events under certain conditions, (c) enable them to manipulate and control conditions to achieve a desired outcome and (d) aid in interpreting and understanding how things operated to make sense of past events (McGregor 2018; White & Klein 2002).

All theories should comprise five elements including (a) *assumptions* about the world and reality relative to the phenomenon; (b) a collection of *concepts* with theory-specific definitions; (c) a network of interrelated, systemically ordered *propositions* about how and why concepts relate to each other to address the phenomenon; and (d) pictorial *models* illustrating how everything is connected (cf. Botha 1989; McGregor 2018; Mosterín 1996; Northouse 2018; Svejvig 2021; Swanson & Chermack 2013; Wacker 1998; Webster

& Watson 2002; Whetten 1989) (see Figure 1). (e) The fifth element is the theorist's logical reasoning (McGregor 2018).

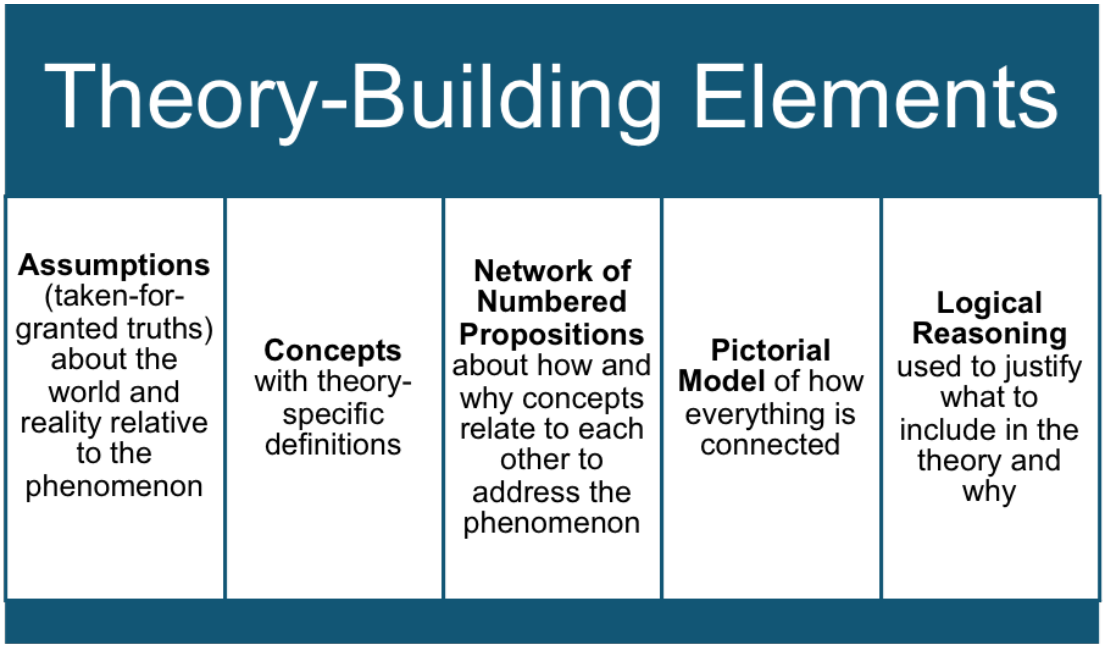


Figure 1: Theory-building elements.

Four of these theoretical elements succinctly clarify the 5 Ws and how, thus portraying a theorist's logical reasoning. Assumptions address *why*. The theory's context – its boundaries, what it observes – concerns *when/where/who.* Concepts address *what*. Propositions focus on *how* (Lim 2026; Swanson & Chermack 2013; Whetten 2002). (e) As a fifth element, theories also inherently reflect the theory builders' logical reasoning for rigorously arriving at and justifying choices of what to include, and why in the theory. They must convince a rational person to accept their reasoning, argumentation, and theoretical contribution (Lim 2026; McGregor 2018; Swanson & Chermack 2013).

II.1. Assumptions

Assume is Latin *assumere*, "to take" (Harper 2026). A theory is only as good as its assumptions (i.e., *taken*-for-granted truths accepted without proof for the sake of argument, modeling, or simplification). Theories are rendered useless without assumptions, as they are the glue that holds everything together (Nkwake 2013). "Assumptions are a key part of the skeleton of theorizing" (Foss & Hallberg 2017, 410). Theories reflect their builders' assumptions about aspects of reality. Flawed assumptions can lead to misrepresentations of reality, poor decisions, misunderstandings, and unforeseen problems when the theory is applied; thus, reliance on theories based on faulty reasoning and argumentation is ill advised (McGregor 2018).

As a working example throughout the paper, economic theory assumes scarcity, rational behaviour, perfect (full and relevant) information, consumers' emotional and value neutrality, maximized utility (consumer), maximized profit (producer) and perfect

competition (Browning & Zupan 2020). To be theoretically useful, assumptions must fall within the realm of possibility (i.e., plausible and within reason) because people use them to draw conclusions about phenomena. Researchers and practitioners eventually shy away from theories built on blatantly unrealistic assumptions (Arena 2012; Foss & Hallberg 2017).

A powerful example is economic theory's flawed assumptions that all consumers (a) have perfect information, (b) always make rational decisions and (c) are not affected by their values. This theory does not work when people do not have complete information about all relevant data points (e.g., price, availability, and quality), which in turn precludes rational decisions. And because values make things unpredictable, economic theory excludes them despite their pivotal role in consumption decisions (Foss & Hallberg 2017).

Assumptions also reflect the theorist's worldview or conception of how the world operates, which they use to choose what to include and exclude from observed reality and then develop assumptions around those aspects of the phenomenon (Foss & Hallberg 2017). Assumptions, thus, "frame the logical reasoning behind the choice of [concepts] and definition of their relationships [i.e., propositions]" (Swanson & Chermack 2013, 55).

For example, Adam Smith developed economic theory in the late 1770s when people's view of the world was changing dramatically with the First Industrial Revolution, which was characterized by the rise of capitalism, free markets (minimal government intervention), the division of labour, efficient production, and the surge of private wealth. His theory of economic capitalism (i.e., use *private* wealth to create more personal wealth and personal power) replaced longstanding mercantilism with its state-controlled, export-focused economy for *national* wealth and power (Browning & Zupan 2020).

Beer and Coffman (2021) identified three types of assumptions: (a) causal dealing with cause and effect; (b) contextual dealing with external conditions and factors; and (c) operational, which focus on practical aspects such as resource availability. inFocus (2020) added (d) intervention assumptions that address how things are expected to bring about an effect and (e) domino-effect assumptions, where achieving one thing leads to another. *If/then* statements are recommended when stating assumptions (Brown 2024; Brunner 1969). For example, "If consumers have perfect information, then they can maximize utility."

Finally, there is no set number of assumptions; this depends on the theory's scope, purpose, and discipline/field of study. The quality of a theory is not judged by the number of assumptions. But there must be enough assumptions to describe the phenomenon, and they must be stated clearly enough to allow critical examination and challenges. That said, the general rule is as few assumptions as possible — just the most fundamental to effectively explain premises and suppositions about the phenomenon. The original assumptional base can be finetuned later, since theoretical assumptions can be challenged and changed once used in research or practice or informed by scholarly debate (Foss & Hallberg 2017; Nkwake 2013).

II.2. Concepts

Concept is Latin *conceptum*, "something conceived or devised in the mind or imagination" (Harper 2026). A *concept* is an observed fact (e.g., a dog, house, or book). A *construct* is something inferred from what is observed or thought to be happening (e.g., leadership, well-being, or quality of life). As a caveat, despite this distinction, most theory-building discussions use concept rather than construct even when dealing with inferences rather than observed fact (McGregor 2018; Shoemaker et al. 2003; Weiskopf 2009). Concepts are an "intellectual representation of some aspect of reality that is derived from observations made from phenomena" (Nalzaro 2012, Slide 4). Each describes a portion of reality, but when connected in propositions, concepts offer deep insights (Shoemaker et al. 2003).

To elaborate, after theorists observe reality related to a phenomenon of interest, they take away (abstract) ideas from what they saw, name the new ideas (concepts), and assign a theory-specific definition (McGregor 2018). For example, in economic theory, *consumer demand* does not mean forcefully or urgently asking for something. Instead, it refers to the quantity of a good or service that consumers desire *and* their financial ability *and* willingness to buy it at various prices (Browning & Zupan 2020).

A good concept has a simple name that resonates with and rings true for the intended audience; there is a "cognitive click" (Gerring 1999, 370). The concept should discernibly differ from existing ones and have depth, meaning it richly represents some characteristic of the phenomenon. The better the name, the more memorable, intuitive, and easy to communicate the underlying abstracted idea thereby increasing the concept's usability and applicability in theory building (Anderson 2021; Gerring 1999) and future research initiatives.

Indeed, good concepts have theoretical utility (i.e., are useful for theory building) (Gerring 1999). To that end, because theories individuate concepts by making them unique or distinct, theory builders must create theory-specific definitions (see the consumer demand example). Concepts "are what they are" in each theory because they are in relationship with other concepts – expressed in propositions (Weiskopf 2009) (to be discussed).

For example, the economic law of supply and demand relates to price, equilibrium price, and price elasticity (i.e., five interrelated concepts). Economic theory posits that supply and demand will interact to reach an equilibrium price, whereby the item or service sells and the market clears. Price elasticity refers to the degree to which price changes can affect supply or demand. For example, price is inelastic when changes do not affect consumer demand; that is, people continue to buy regardless of price changes (e.g., bread, milk, or cigarettes) (Browning & Zupan 2020).

If a theory changes due to some combination of observations, scientific evidence, and/or scholarly debate, concepts and their definitions may also have to change or be

discarded (Foss & Hallberg 2017; Weiskopf 2009). And theorists should not ignore concepts just because they are hard to define or explain. The theory's validity and goodness may depend on their inclusion (Mouly 1978). For example, good conceptual definitions are necessary for empirical research validity (i.e., construct, criterion, convergent, and discriminant validity) (Wacker 2004).

Also, many concepts run the risk of sounding familiar, which can cause people to use their own lay meaning, which can differ from its ties to a particular theory. Sometimes, theory builders borrow or reuse concepts from other theories. Thus, loosely defined concepts lose their potential contribution to a theory. To minimize this eventuality, theorists must clarify exactly how they understood their abstractions from observing reality (Becker 1983). Someone else may observe the same phenomenon and take away quite different interpretations of what is going on. McGregor (2023) illustrated this by comparing how divorced couples can be understood so differently when using family systems theory versus exchange theory.

Finally, "the question of truth and non-truth has no place in either the delineation, analysis, or use of concepts in the development of theory. [Concepts] are neither true or false, valid or invalid" (Becker 1983, 52). While assumptions can be true or false, concepts can be more-or-less significant (Becker 1983; Brunner 1969). If what the concept refers to happens infrequently or in unusual circumstances, the concept is insignificant for theory building "regardless of the goodness-of-fit" (Becker 1983, 52). In other words, it is not important enough to merit theoretical attention or inclusion.

II.3. Propositions

Theories are systematic collections (sets) of propositions that relate concepts to each other to help explain, predict, control, or interpret phenomena (Bhattacherjee 2024; Wacker 1998). Propose is Latin *proponere*, "to put forward" (Harper 2026). Thus, when developing propositions, theorists put forward their thoughts on how and why concepts relate to each other per the phenomenon (Mosterín 1996). A combination of strategies can be used to develop theoretical propositions: (a) personal experience, (b) practice literature, (c) logical reasoning and (d) previous research about how concepts relate or connect (Webster & Watson 2002; Whetten 1989).

Regardless of strategy, propositions should "cover novel theoretical ground" (Ulaga et al. 2021, 401). And they should be prefaced with a clear, logically detailed statement of the main problem or questions that the theory addresses (Boss et al. 1993; Ulaga et al. 2021; Weiskopf 2009). To illustrate, economic theory concerns resource *scarcity*, which triggers choices for goal attainment (Browning & Zupan 2020). Each "concept has a logical reason for being selected as a part of the theory, and the logic for inclusion is clarified in the propositions as well, as a clue to the directional relationships expected" (Swanson & Chermack 2013, 150).

Propositional relationships can be associative, causal, and explanatory. Some

deal with positive or negative direction and direct or indirect influence. Respectively, associative reflects influence. Causal concerns producing an effect or making something happen — cause and effect. Explanatory describes how variables affect each other. Variables move in the same direction in positive relationships and opposite directions in negative relationships. In a direct relationship, one variable influences, or causes, another (e.g., X directly causes Y). Indirect relationships require a mediating (M) variable(s) (e.g., X affects M, which then affects Y) (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007; McGregor 2018; Ulaga et al. 2021; Weiskopf 2009).

Writing sound propositions is difficult. It is simply too easy to (a) state truisms (obviously true), (b) use tautology (say same thing using different words) and (c) prepare an internally contradictory collection (state or imply opposing things) (Ulaga et al. 2021; Varadarajan 1996). Regardless, the declarative form (i.e., sentence ending with a period) should be used because propositions *declare* (i.e., state, announce, or make clear) information, facts, and opinions, and they offer explanations rather than pose questions, offer advice, give a command, or make emotional statements. Finally, propositions need not be true, but they must be testable, so that people can determine if they are true for the theory in question. The concepts comprising propositions must be operationalizable – turned into a measurable observation (Bhattacherjee 2024; Ulaga et al. 2021).

As most phenomena are very complex, it is a challenge to "identify *all* propositions that form the network structure of a theory" (McGregor 2018, 81). But theorists must try for the sake of theoretical quality. As best they can, they must articulate the underlying theoretical arguments that expose the logical link between and among concepts in propositions (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007). Furthermore, novel propositions are preferred (i.e., not yet documented in the literature). Novelty distinguishes theories, challenges conventional wisdom, identifies aspects of reality not covered by existing theories, drives new lines of research, and develops nuances leading to "aha!" moments (Lim 2026; Zeithaml et al. 2020).

On a final note, multiple propositions are required for a theory because one relational statement cannot capture everything the theory entails (Creswell 2009; Lynch 2013). The final set should meet four criteria: (a) *clarity* (clear links between and among concepts), (b) *consistency* (systemically and logically related as a whole relative to the theory's full gamut), (c) *conciseness* (simple yet with breadth and depth) and (d) *relevancy* to both theory and practice (Ulaga et al. 2021). The ultimate set of propositions (i.e., the relational network) should be presented as a logically interrelated and numbered system (Bhattacherjee 2024; McGregor 2018; Wacker 1998).

II.4. Pictorial Models

Using pictorial *models* helps theorists represent their theoretical formulation and any interrelationships between and among concepts expressed in propositions (Stiles 2009). "Models are visible or tangible renderings of an idea that is difficult or impossible

to display just with words" (McGregor 2018, 86). They comprise a combination of words, shapes, images, symbols, arrows, lines, color, shading, fonts, and pitch (McGregor 2018; Stiles 2009).

Pictorial models usually contain and expound on selected elements that convey the theory's essence and exclude those not immediately relevant for visualizing the most significant theoretical threads (Bhattacherjee 2024; Nalzaro 2012). To illustrate, economic theory's circular flow model (pictorial image) demonstrates the inexorable flow of money, goods, services, and resources through the economy as production (supply) and consumption (demand) (with government intervention) interact in the face of inevitable resource scarcity (Browning & Zupan 2020; McGregor 2018).

II.5. Theory-Builder's Logical Reasoning

As noted, theories reflect the theory builders' logical reasoning for rigorously arriving at and justifying choices of what to include, and why. They use this logic to convince a rational person to accept their reasoning, argumentation, and theoretical contribution. Logical reasoning plays a crucial role in theory building by providing a systematic framework for constructing coherent explanations and justifications for a theory's content (Lim 2026; McGregor 2018; Swanson & Chermack 2013).

This logical reasoning involves valid inference whereby arguments and claims are supported by what the theorist assumed. All must be clearly articulated whether the theory builder makes their inferences using (a) deductive logic (i.e., true premises lead to *certain* conclusions), (b) inductive logic (conclusions are *probable* not certain) or (c) abductive logic (conclusions are *plausible* based on best explanation using available information) (Editorial Content Team 2026; McGregor 2014; Stiles 2009).

Lines of thought (whether deductive, inductive, or abductive) used to build a theory must be logically consistent (i.e., not contradictory) and logically interconnected (i.e., truth values and claims depend on each other) (Stiles 2009). This is important because "theories can never be fully confirmed" (Stiles 2009, 16). They "are never proven in any kind of absolute sense. [Rather], they gain acceptance by consistently explaining and predicting observations better than alternative [theories and by] explaining many anomalies" (Brown 2025, 281). Theoretical acceptance depends on the theory builder's logical reasoning being clear and open to challenge.

III. Judging a Theory's Validity and Goodness

A theory is considered valid (Latin *validus*, "strong") if there is no evidence to dispute it. Any new evidence triggers refinement or replacement as theories are inherently open to revision or rejection (Guest 2024). A theory exhibits goodness when, among other things, it (a) breaks a complicated phenomenon down to its essence, (b) is based more on observation of or experience with the phenomenon than on the literature, (c) recognizes

the real world and any ethical implications of its application, (d) offers new explanations and (e) has solid agreement from the field that it is valid (McGregor 2018).

Table 1 showcases and explains key traits that make a theory stronger and more compelling thus inspiring people to accept it and use it to explain, predict, control, or interpret phenomena (McGregor 2018; Tsui & Waddock 2018; Utley et al. 2018). These criteria or dimensions "can be used to evaluate the theory from both a formative (ex-ante) and summative (ex-post) perspective" (Svejvig 2021, 853); that is, both while building it and using it. "If a theory can be argued to have a vice, we can move on to examining a better theory and/or work hard towards making it virtuous on that dimension" (Guest 2024, 522).

Theory Trait	**Explanation**
Parsimonious	as simple and straightforward as possible given the reality being addressed; simplicity means that the relationships and underlying structures are easily diagrammable; as a caveat, the fewer the assumptions, the better the theory (more parsimonious – it accounts for the largest number of observations with the fewest number of assumptions)
Unique	sufficiently different from other theories or is an entirely new addition to the field
Conservatism	superior to any existing theories, which are presumed lacking and can thus lose some status or be rejected (i.e., not worth *conserving*); new theory is worth conserving
Clear and precise	easy to understand with a good, logical flow; all concepts are theoretically defined, relational propositions are provided, and a model pictorially illustrates how everything is connected; any jargon or neologisms (unique terms) are well defined; abstract concepts are clear enough that researchers can easily operationalize them (i.e., turn them into measurable observations)
Internally consistent (noncontradictory)	logically coherent and rigorous; its components are in agreement (*consistent*) – they logically support rather than contradict each other; an internally consistent theory can explain and make sense of nearly all data and empirical observations pursuant to the phenomenon – the theory holds true and does not break down in different scenarios
Rational	deductions based on its assumptions do not violate the rules of logic, yield contradictory conclusions, or engender tautological statements (i.e., say the same thing using different words)
Empirically precise (operational)	concepts are measurable and operationalizable, so research can support or refute the theory's assumptions and premises
Refutable (withstands challenges)	can withstand questioning and be defended, but the theorist is open to changing it with new evidence
Testable and falsifiable	can be proven false, *if* it is false; once it passes a falsification test, the theory is considered verified or empirically validated
Generalizable (inclusive and representative)	can explain the phenomenon in many domains and a broad range of circumstances; focuses on main effects of the phenomenon with nominal contingencies (few exceptions, qualifiers, or ifs)
Fecund (can trigger new things)	provokes new thinking and stimulates new ideas; generates many research questions and rich hypotheses; expands research into new areas

Practical (effective in real circumstances)	provides a practical and sensible application of principles; helps practitioners inform and understand their practice and organize their thinking
Derivable consequences (affects adoption)	the consequences or outcomes of using the theory are discernable (i.e., can be derived or seen); *if* its use has proven beneficial (e.g., changed practice or contributed to knowledge), the theory is deemed important and should be adopted

Table 1: Characteristics of a Valid Theory (adapted with permission from McGregor 2018).

III.1. Expert Panel Theory Validation

Ideally, theory builders should constitute a panel of experts to critically review and judge the theory's penultimate version before its use in research or practice. (a) Academic background, (b) recognition and track record in the field and (c) work experience are appropriate judge-choice criteria. Three judges or more insure diversity in informed opinions and nuanced expertise. A theorist-created assessment instrument allows for both (a) quantitative, numerical scores via Likert scales; and (b) qualitative, reasoned opinions and elaborative comments on validity criteria (see Table 1). Theory validation can be provided by individual people comprising the panel or garnered from a group exercise of everyone at the same time. Regardless, the expert panel is fundamental to affirming, clarifying, adding, removing, or modifying aspects of a theory (Escobar-Pérez & Cuervo-Martínez 2008; Fernández-Gómez et al. 2020; Langfeldt 2004; Ma et al. 2008).

Caveat

As a caveat, the theory development process described herein should not be construed as a linear progression or final endpoint. Although not addressed in this primer, Lim (2026) clarified that building theories can further involve (a) theoretical generalizability (testing original in an untended context), (b) theoretical reproducibility (original version supports existing knowledge in *similar* contexts), (c) theoretical replicability (original version supports existing knowledge in *different* contexts), (d) theoretical adaptation and contextualization (fitting original theory into a new context with nominal changes), (e) theoretical modification (depth) (changing original theory to fit a given context) and (f) theoretical extension to increase breadth and gain wider insights. Any lessons learned from these theory-related enterprises can be used to further build, revise, update, or refute a theory – theory validation.

IV. Conclusion

Whether building theories from scratch, refining and finetuning existing theories, rejecting or questioning theories, or choosing a theory for research or practice, knowledge of rigorous theoretical elements and what constitutes a good theory is crucial.

In that spirit, this paper detailed what is involved in building a strong, valid, and reliable theory. Responsible practice, rigorous research and scholarship, effective curricula, and accountable policies can better arise from efforts supported by valid theories. As Lewin (1943) professed, there is nothing as practical as a good theory. Real-life circumstances demand solid and dependable theorization. This paper serves as a valuable tool for that academic enterprise leading to more ethical theory development and validation.

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