

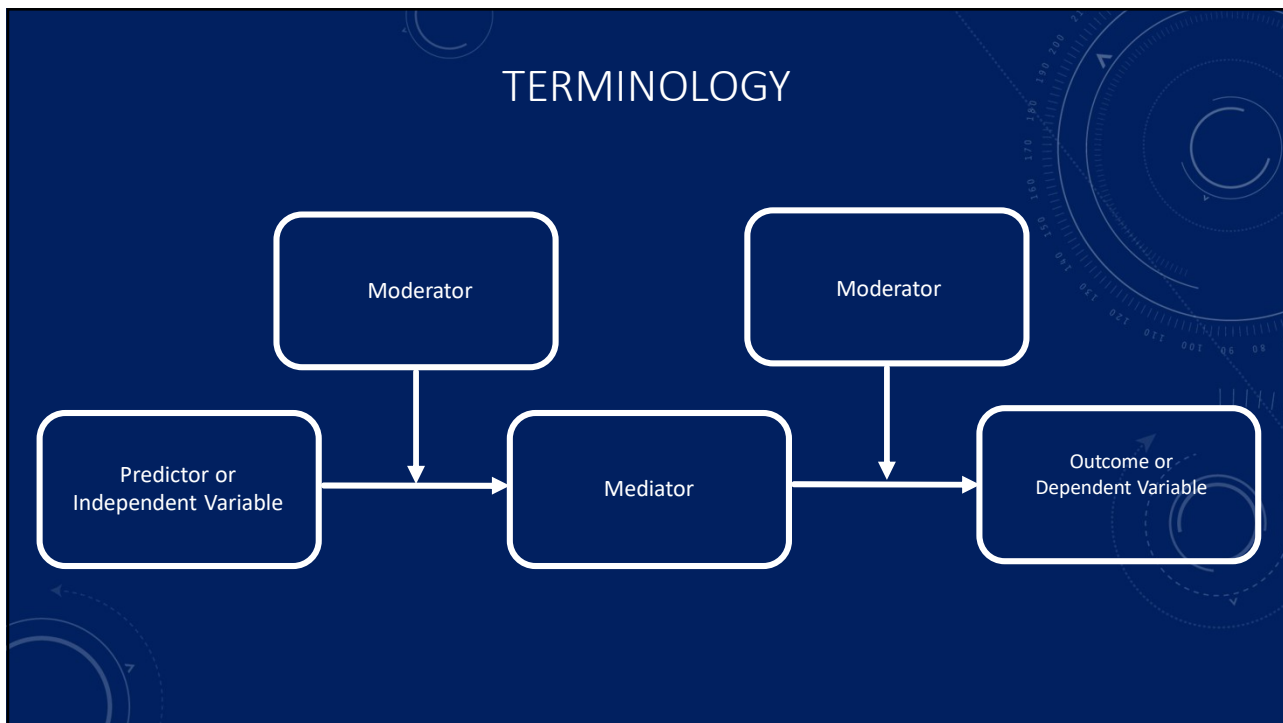
THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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**Australian
Journal of Management**

There is nothing quite so practical as a good theory – Kurt Lewin 1951

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Australian Journal of Management



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- **Founded in Australia at UNSW**, AJM upholds values of integrity, pragmatism, and creative problem-solving, and welcomes submissions from every part of the world.
- **Publish conceptual and empirical research** that meets the standards of the world's leading journals, **advancing theory, informing policy, and addressing major managerial and societal challenges.**

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Strong theoretical contribution
Policy-relevant insights with clear recommendations
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Clear and substantive societal relevance
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Transparency, methodological rigour and integrity
Originality
Clear writing that communicates with broad audiences

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THEORY



Theory is an abstraction and simplification of reality. It attempts to accurately capture salient aspects of a phenomenon.



Desirable characteristics

- Accuracy
- Simplicity
- Generality

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WAYS TO MAKE THEORY CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Research question
2. Mode of theorising
3. Level of analysis
4. Phenomenon
5. Causal mechanism
6. Set of constructs or variables
7. Set of boundary conditions
8. Set of outputs

COMPONENT PARTS OF A THEORY

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1. RESEARCH QUESTION

A main input into the theorising process.

Without a research question, there is nothing to theorise about.

A good research question is broad enough to interest a wide audience yet narrow enough to be answerable.

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY - RESEARCH QUESTION



Asking a new question



Modifying an existing question in some ways

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2. MODE OF THEORISING

Intellectual process through which a theory's main input-the research question-gets transformed into its outputs

Lever that defines **how** we theorise

Two Examples

1. Inductive vs. deductive

Deductive theory starts with a set of general assumptions from which specific observations implications are logically deduced. Inductive theory starts with specific observations and relies on comparisons between them to infer possible generalisations.

2. Process-based vs. variance-based

Process modelling explains how a particular entity changes over time, whereas variance modelling explains why entities differ from each other

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY – MODE OF THEORISING



Change the mode of theorising along any of those dimensions



Integration of modes, such as triangulation and mixed method

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3. LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

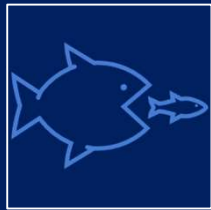
Who we are theorising about

Careful adaption and appropriate adjustments are needed

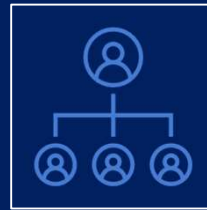
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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY – LEVEL OF ANALYSIS



Competition between firms to competition between nations (Porter, 1990)



An entirely new level of analysis (Porter, 1979)

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4. PHENOMENON

Where our theory is relevant, that is, the context of the theory

A theory may be relevant in multiple contexts, with implications for multiple phenomena

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY - PHENOMENON



Applying a theory to a different phenomenon. Makadok and Coff (2009) take incentive-system theory of the firm and show how some minor adjustments to one key assumption can adapt it to explain a wide variety of hybrid governance reforms.

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5. CAUSAL MECHANISM

Most central aspect of a theory

Why the theory's proposed relationships or effects occur

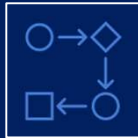
Psychological mechanisms include perception, cognition, affect, learning, motivation and attachment

Sociological mechanisms include conformity, deviance, conflict, symbolic interaction, power relations, status seeking, deference and structuration

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY – CAUSAL MECHANISM



Introduce or import a causal mechanism, not previously been recognised as relevant to a research question (e.g., Kogut, 1991)



Compare and contrast different causal mechanism of multiple theories for a research question to clarify their similarities and differences (Gibbons, 2005)



Synthesise multiple causal mechanisms (Makadok, 2010)

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6. CONSTRUCTS AND VARIABLES

What we are theorising about

Conceptual constructs and variables are the lifeblood of a theory

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY - CONSTRUCTS AND VARIABLES



Introduce (e.g., Teece et al., 1997), import, question
(e.g., Barney, 1989), remove, redefine, clarify,
broaden or narrow



Change the role a construct or variable plays
(e.g., Schmidt et al., 2016)

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7. BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

No theory is universally applicable

When our theory does or does not work

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY - BOUNDARY CONDITIONS



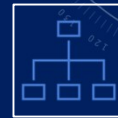
A new theory may rely on assumptions that are not fully articulated. Exposing or clarifying the theory's assumptions is a useful theoretical contribution as it clarifies the boundary conditions (e.g., Ryall, 2009)



Exploration of boundary conditions by identifying logical inconsistencies (e.g., Slater & Spencer, 2000)



Assumptions of two different theories conflict with each other



Creating different versions of a theory by either restricting or relaxing its boundary conditions (e.g., Hennart, 1988)

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8. OUTPUTS

Explanations, predictions and prescriptions

Explanations. When the existence of an observed phenomenon is deduced from a theory's assumptions and propositions.

Predictions. They involve assertions about some future state.

Prescriptions. Actions managers can take to affect some specific workplace outcomes.

No theory output can fully serve all purposes.

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY - OUTPUTS



Deriving additional outputs from existing theories, especially different types of outputs, such as from explanation only to prediction or prescription (e.g., Levy, 1994)



Imposition of more assumptions or more restrictive boundary conditions can help derive more specific outputs (e.g., Casadesu-Masanell & Zhu, 2013)



Integrating multiple theories to derive new outputs (e.g., Chen, 1996)

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WAYS TO MAKE THEORY CONTRIBUTIONS

- RQ - Apply a theory in new and interesting ways (2)
- Mode of theorising (2)
- Level of analysis (2)
- Understanding of underlying phenomenon (1)
- Causal mechanisms (3)
- Constructs and variables (2)
- Boundary conditions (4)
- Outputs (3)

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EXAMPLE

Ali, M. (2016). Impact of gender-focused human resource management on performance: The mediating effects of gender diversity. *Australian Journal of Management*, 41(2), 376-397. (GS Citations: 120+)

Research Question. Does gender diversity mediate the relationship between gender equality policies and practices and performance?



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WAYS TO MAKE THEORY CONTRIBUTIONS

- RQ - Apply a theory in new and interesting ways (2) ✓
- Mode of theorising (2)
- Level of analysis (2) ✓
- Understanding of underlying phenomenon (1)
- Causal mechanisms (3) ✓
- Constructs and variables (2) ✓
- Boundary conditions (4)
- Outputs (3) ✓

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5.4. Theoretical and research implications

The study's results have several theoretical and research implications. The findings ^{RQ} support signaling theory for both non-management and management gender diversity (Spence, 1973). The findings related to the positive impact of gender-focused policies and practices on non-management and management gender diversity ^{Causal Mechanisms} strengthen the signaling argument that the observable actions (gender-focused HR policies and practices) form unobservable perceptions (the organization values gender diversity; Connelly et al., 2011). The support found for ^{Level of Analysis} both levels indicates that this ^{Causal Mechanisms} signal is strong because of the discretionary nature of gender-focused policies and practices and the fact that most organizations do not offer many of these policies and practices (D'Netto et al., 2014; D'Netto and Sohal, 1999; Fenwick et al., 2011; Kalev et al., 2006; Lingard and Francis, 2004). The

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support found ^{Causal Mechanisms} weakens the argument regarding the ambiguity of the signaling process in management research (Connelly et al., 2011). This research demonstrates that testable predictions can be derived from signaling theory. Moreover, the results ^{Outputs} support the integration of signaling theory with the resource-based view of the firm to propose the processes through which gender-focused policies and practices affect performance (Barney, 1991; Spence, 1973). The support found for this relationship strengthens the argument that signaling theory can be used in various contexts and with other theories (Karasek and Bryant, 2012). The findings can help ^{Causal Mechanisms} refine the resource-based view of the firm; the valuable resources provide a competitive advantage that should be reflected in the most appropriate performance measure. The results indicate that non-management gender diversity was positively associated with productivity, while management gender diversity was associated with perceived market performance. As such, this finding also strengthens the argument that ^{Variables & Outputs} scholars should focus on intermediate performance measures, such as productivity (Ray et al., 2004). The effect of competitive advantage on overall organizational financial performance might not be traceable to one particular source, such as gender diversity (Guest, 2011).

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This study addresses important research gaps in the fields of gender-focused policies and practices and gender diversity, and provides future research directions. For example, this research contributes to emerging empirical support for a business case for diversity-focused policies and practices (Armstrong et al., 2010) and gender diversity (Ali et al., 2011; Frink et al., 2003). Further, it pioneers the study of gender diversity as a mediator between HR policies and practices and performance. Future research can benefit from studying the processes between gender-focused policies and practices and gender diversity, such as organizational attractiveness, and between gender diversity and performance, such as market insight, creativity and innovation, and improved problem-solving. Just as gender diversity was studied as a mediator between HR policies and practices and performance, diversity climate is another possible mediator between HR policies and practices and performance (Mor-Barak and Cherin, 1998). The supportive HR policies and practices produce the shared perceptions among employees that the employer wants them to succeed, leading to higher productivity. Future research should take a configurational perspective to inves-

Causal Mechanisms & Variables

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* Major sources of content

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