

Roundtable: Sharing experiences related to developing theories for the information field

Martha Garcia-Murillo
Syracuse University
245 Hinds Hall
Syracuse NY 13244
(315) 443-1829
mgarciam@syr.edu

Martin Weiss
School of Information Sciences
720a IS Building
135 North Bellefield Ave, Pittsburgh
PA
(412) 624-9430
mbw@pitt.edu

Allen Renear
University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign
314 LIS, 501 E. Daniel Street MC-
493
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 265-5216
renear@illinois.edu

ABSTRACT

This roundtable will allow academics in information schools the opportunity to share their experiences on theory development, the tools and techniques that they have used to facilitate this theorizing process and the challenges that they face doing so.

Keywords

Theory construction

1. THEORY DEVELOPMENT IN THE INFORMATION FIELD

We, as academics, aim to make contributions to our fields. This is becoming easier as a result of the amount of scholarly work that is now available through digital libraries, databases, and journals. There are, however, some challenges. While much attention is given in graduate education to scientific method and theory testing there are few courses that cover the topic of theory construction/development. As a result many doctoral students and junior faculty do not have a clear idea of how to make a contribution, how to develop their own theories, and how to build and extend the work of others to move a field forward. The process of theory development is more a creative process than is typically taught in methods classes. Theory development improves when we challenge our own assumptions and step out of the comfort of our fields to explore ideas from other disciplines. This is particularly true in the information field which crosses so many disciplines.

2. GUIDING QUESTIONS

To facilitate the discussion in the roundtable we have formulated the following research questions.

- How do you go about finding your contributions?
- What techniques have you used that have made it easier for you to foster your imagination as you try to develop explanations to a problem?

- Have you used any tools that make it easier for you to find, organize, and manage the amount of information now available online?
- How do you find the holes in your research field?
- Have you made any attempts to bring ideas from another discipline that can help formulate an answer to a problem in your field?
- Have you used metaphors as a device to develop theory?
- What methodological tools have made it easier for you to develop your own contributions?
- What are the main obstacles that you have confronted when trying to develop a theory of your own?

This roundtable is the starting point to a conversation that will continue online on a monthly basis. We will decide at the conference the topics that we would like to cover each month.

There are several ways in which these discussions will be facilitated. We will develop a webpage dedicated to theory construction which will identify papers that cover the issue. It will also be the platform for collaborative blog discussions on the topic of theory construction. On a monthly basis we would connect using Adobe Connect to discuss the topics selected during the iConference.

3. ROUNDTABLE LEADERS

The individuals facilitating this roundtable were selected because their work has been on the topic of theory development or because of their interest in supporting research efforts at their academic institutions given their academic responsibilities

Martha García-Murillo
Syracuse University, School of Information Studies
mgarciam@syr.edu

Martin Weiss

University of Pittsburgh/School of Information Sciences

mbw@pitt.edu

Allen Renear

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

reear@illinois.edu

4. REFERENCES

[1] Shoemaker, P. J., Tankard, J. W., & Lasorsa, D. L. (2004). How to build social science theories: Sage Publications

[2] Turner, J. H. (1988). Theory building in sociology: Assessing theoretical cumulation: Sage Publications (CA). Price: 80.71 Length: 152 pgs.

[3] Asher, H. B., & Association, M. P. S. (1984). Theory-building and Data Analysis in the Social Sciences: University of Tennessee Press

[4] Hage, J. (1972). Techniques and problems of theory construction in sociology: John Wiley & Sons.

[5] Davidson-Reynolds, P. (1971). Primer in Theory Construction. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill