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Theory building for hypothesis specification in organisational studies, Badrinarayan Shankar Pawar. Response Books, Sage Publications, 2009. 133 pages, Price: Rs. 495 (Hardbound).

The doctoral curriculum in management, worldwide, lays emphasis on the following four topics: the philosophical underpinnings of management research, theory building for research, research design planning and choice of methods, and statistical tools for research and analysis. These four topics are addressed (usually sequentially since one informs the next) in the curriculum either through separate courses for each topic or otherwise. *Theory Building for Hypothesis Specification in Organisational Studies* is squarely positioned as a near text or reference for a doctoral seminar on theory building. The book's contribution is marked for two key reasons: the rarity of books on the topic and the difficulty of self learning associated with such a topic. The book's intent is to focus on theory building to arrive at empirically testable theories rather than non-empirical grand contributions. The author uses examples, hypothetical as well as from extant research, from organisation studies to describe the anatomical aspects of theory and theorising. The book is equally relevant to researchers of other areas of management, such as marketing, strategy and so on, since the thrust is on theory building.

This book is organised into seven chapters. The first two chapters are devoted to a broad overview of the book and the philosophical aspects informing theory. The author has developed some part of his long standing course on research methods into this book. The ontological and epistemological aspects of research inquiry are briefly treated in the second chapter under the respective headings: 'Reality' and 'Knowledge'. The terms 'science', 'research' and 'paradigms' are then discussed in their relatedness to 'theory'. In doing so, the author sticks to the argument for theory's rightful place in scientific research.

The subsequent two chapters are devoted to the morphological aspects of theory. The third chapter clarifies what exactly a theory is supposed to be and of its requirement in research. The purpose of a theory, we learn, is to represent some portion of reality in a simplified manner and this representation takes the form of systematically inter-related and generalised statements. The fourth chapter is my pick of the book. It dissects a theory into seven constituents: its domain, concepts, variables, definitional statements, premises, propositions and hypotheses. Not only is it a rigorous way of looking into a theory but also a very useful one. Such a view enables

doctoral scholars to aim and check for well-roundedness in all of these constituents during their dissertation.

The final three chapters of the book are devoted to the dynamics of theory building. The fifth chapter elaborates on the hidden steps behind the concepts, propositions and hypotheses apparent from research articles. While the author describes two approaches to concept specification—one definitional and the other classificatory—he however does not contrast the two in usage. Definitional schemata and taxonomic schemata are closely related and a researcher may face a dilemma as to when she should opt for one over the other. As pointed out by [Hunt and Burnett \(1982\)](#) in the case of specifying the concepts of say, micromarketing and macromarketing, a definitional specification could lead the researcher into excluding a marketing phenomenon from both the micro and macro classifications, whereas, a taxonomic specification would lead the researcher to including it assuredly as either micro or macro. This apart, it is in this chapter that the thrust of the book begins to drift from aspects of theory to aspects of explanation i.e., from the 'theory' in theory building to the 'building' aspect. The author demonstrates how hypotheses are arrived at, using logical arguments and examples. The sixth chapter, an extension, discusses more arguments from extant literature which the author categorises as simple or complex. Theorising in practice, we learn, may not be so straight forward as reasoning in the strict logical argument format. The last chapter, apart from providing other valuable inputs, discusses the aspects of theorising required for the specification of hypotheses involving mediation or moderation.

A key strength of this book is its clarity. This is particularly welcome when much confusion exists on the subject in practice. Not many researchers tend to distinguish hypotheses from propositions or variables from concepts, let alone constructs from concepts. The reader is reassured by the authoritative tone of the author and the rigorous nature of the rendition of the text. Further, the author has impartially presented to the reader the differing views on the subject. The other strength of the book is its closure. There are only seven figures in the book but these, especially Fig. 1.2 (p. 6) and 4.1 (p. 63), serve the purpose of facilitating closure effectively with Fig. 1.2 giving an overview of the research process and Fig. 4.1 offering the linkage between various constituents of theory. The author's faithful recall of Fig. 1.2, in the last chapter to reiterate the book's place in the research process gives the reader a sense of completeness and fulfilment.

However, the book is not without its shortcomings. Presentation-wise, certain features are conspicuous by their absence. Chapter level questions or exercises and additional learning pointers would be useful to students, while a glossary of terms would be useful to all readers. Focus-wise, the reader would have been more benefitted had the vigorous emphasis on the morphological aspects of theory and its construction been supplemented with do-it-yourself aids usually offered at theory building workshops. After reading the book, a reader is likely to end up recognising theory and its construction much better than building a theory (or theoretic explanation) herself. Thus, that Pawar's book is a theoretical rather than practical book on theory building could be an expected, if

not appropriate, reader reaction. Content-wise, seasoned readers and instructors would compare and appreciate the complementary nature of this book and Hunt's (2003). Both books concur on paraphrasing extant research literature into logical arguments for efficient theory building. However, Pawar's synonymous consideration of the terms 'positivist and quantitative research' and 'interpretivist and qualitative research' respectively on pages 11 and 12 is at sharp issue with Hunt (2003, p. 76). That apart, while both these books deal with more or less the same subject matter, the treatment and emphasis are quite different—a welcome double blessing for a course outline on 'theory and related aspects'! Despite the aberrations, Pawar's book is extremely well written, abundantly useful and a seminal contribution to the literature on theory building. It is a concise book that can inform academically inclined managers on what is essential to research. And undoubtedly, this book is a reassuring bedside text for management doctoral scholars of all time.

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Superfreakonomics: Global cooling, patriotic prostitutes, and why suicide bombers should buy life insurance, Steven D. Levitt, Stephen J. Dubner, London: Penguin Books, 2009. 219 pages, US\$29.99.

After a four-year wait since *Freakonomics* (2005) gained acclaim, economist Steven Levitt and journalist Stephen Dubner released their reprise, *Superfreakonomics*, in 2009. Again, the authors make bold use of the 'economic approach' to delve into issues typically left to sociology, psychology, and political science.

Their approach is a 'systematic means of describing how people make decisions', beginning with meticulous data collection. While the authors acknowledge that averages and probabilities only show part of the picture, they assert, 'While there are exceptions to every rule, it's also good to know the rule'.

Levitt continues to make economics exciting for non-economists by applying economic principles inventively, presenting evidence that exceeds expectation, and reminding us of the dangers of untested ideologies. Their unconventional correlations offer new ways of examining

old problems, and the message for policy-makers is that under careful scrutiny, patterns emerge that defy convention and aid an understanding of how to operationalise policies in context.

The cases presented demonstrate how microeconomic principles can be skilfully applied to what are usually regarded as 'non-economic' issues to yield unexpected policy implications, reinforcing the importance of rigorous analysis over rules-of-thumb. By refocusing on individuals as unit of analysis and identifying incentives driving their decisions and the factors constraining them, social scientists can examine the same issues from altogether new viewpoints. As the authors argue, 'Believe it or not, if you can understand the incentives that lead a schoolteacher or a sumo wrestler to cheat, you can understand how the subprime-mortgage bubble came to pass' (p 17).

Superfreakonomics lacks a central theme, though several key messages persist, namely that people respond to incentives (often unpredictably) and that data can reveal surprising patterns. Empirics are not as strong as in their earlier work *Freakonomics*, but the present volume remains compelling. In 'How is a street prostitute like a department store Santa?', sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh's research shows how microeconomic concepts such as supply and demand, availability of substitutes, and price discrimination can be used to understand curious arrangements for the prostitution business in urban Chicago. By identifying the underlying principles at work, the authors make plausible demand-side policy arguments for managing prostitution in contrast to prevailing supplier-targeted tactics.

The authors also highlight resistance to change and the importance of understanding individual incentives. In one example, a doctor's efforts to improve emergency room efficiency led him to develop software that would revolutionise hospital practices across the US. Despite barriers, the doctor succeeded through inventive means: a 'do not use' sign on the testing console piqued curiosity and led to widespread use. For new policies to take hold, inside knowledge is required to understand the incentives necessary for change. In other words, context is critical.

By 'letting numbers speak the truth', the authors link improvements in the domestic lives of Indian women to cable television access, recount the behaviour changes that brought down maternal deaths in 19th century Europe, and show how unusual banking transaction indicators comprise an algorithm for identifying terrorists.

But some cases offer more entertainment than analysis. In several, findings are too confident where underlying assumptions are uncertain. For example, the mathematics used to assert the danger of 'drunk walking' is too weak to support the argument. Considering the authors' acclaim, this oft-repeated conclusion is an irresponsible bandying of pseudo-analysis. While they prove that numbers are a powerful media of truth through their best analyses, they expose the reverse through their worst.

Another major theme is the optimistic position that nonexistent solutions to major problems often develop unexpectedly, and are often simpler than expected. As the authors assert, 'When the solution to a given problem doesn't lie right before our eyes, it is easy to assume that no solution exists. But history has shown again and again that such assumptions are wrong' (p 11). In 'The fix is in –