THEORY CONSTRUCTION IN MARKETING
SOME THOUGHTS ON THINKING

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Chapter 7 was concerned with the question, "How do we know?" Different summary tests used to answer this question were discussed. In this chapter we review a number of specific characteristics of a theory that are assessed when we judge its quality, worth, and significance and the need to alter it. The relative strength of these characteristics is the criterion for evaluating the theory. These specific criteria are used in the summary reality tests discussed in the last chapter. The criteria in this chapter should be used as design guidelines in developing or forming a theory. If they are attended to in the development of a theory, the chances of having an interesting theory that meets most reality tests are fairly high.
CHAPTER EIGHT: EVALUATING THEORY

Since all models are wrong the scientist must be alert to what is importantly wrong. It is inappropriate to be concerned about mice when there are tigers abroad.

George E. P. Box

Theories are evaluated in order to determine their potential contribution to marketing. The theory builder has several opportunities to receive feedback during all phases of theory construction. Interactions with colleagues, customers or clients, and students are important in the initial stage. Seminars, response to working papers, and professional conferences are other means of receiving evaluations. Research submitted for publication is subjected to the evaluation of reviewers who are respected experts in the field.

A theory may go through numerous revisions before publication. Subsequently, the scientific community, both academicians and practitioners, may challenge parts of the framework and extend the work by examining specific parts of the model. Thus, an exchange of ideas takes place within the marketing community.

A variety of evaluative criteria have evolved from the philosophy of science and other areas which are useful in evaluating theories in marketing. The choice of a particular set of criteria, however, is somewhat idiosyncratic to the person doing the evaluation. It may also depend upon the nature and purpose of the theory itself. In this chapter we will present two sets of criteria that can be used to evaluate marketing theory especially in the formative or developmental stages. We will begin with some well-established general criteria adapted from the philosophy of science literature, and continue with nontraditional criteria for theory evaluation.

Philosophy of Science Criteria

What are the properties of a good theory? Table 8.1 lists some important properties. Note the similarity of some of these to the reality tests discussed in the previous chapter.

A theory is *internally consistent* if it follows the basic rules of logic; thus $A > B, B > C, C > A$, would fail the test imposed by this criterion. If a theory of consumer complaint behavior draws upon other bodies of knowledge, such as social learning theory, role theory, and attribution theory, it displays a high degree of *strength*. If the mechanisms involved in the theory are basic ones, it is

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Table 8.1
Properties of a Good Theory

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Internal consistency</td>
<td>Has no logical contradictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Entails other theories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representativeness</td>
<td>Deals with deep mechanisms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empirical interpretability</td>
<td>Is operationalizable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Falsifiability</td>
<td>Falsifiable when confronted with reality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>Coheres with facts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Originality</td>
<td>Increases knowledge by deriving new propositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unifying power</td>
<td>Connects previously unconnected items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic power</td>
<td>Suggests new directions for research</td>
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Considered to have *representativeness*. Theory should be capable of being tested empirically; out of social learning theory came the concept of interpersonal trust and a scale developed by Rotter\(^1\) to measure it. Such a theory therefore has a high degree of *empirical interpretability*, at least in this instance. When possible hypotheses should be stated in a way that they can be proven wrong, meaning that the theory is *falsifiable*. A theory should cohere with facts (*confirmation*). The interesting theorist will pay particular attention to the criterion of *originality*, expanding the boundaries of knowledge beyond the taken-for-granted world. Thus a theory might be evaluated in terms of how interesting it is (see Chapter 2). *Unifying power* also carries a high interest quotient, with the creative process being invoked in seeing relationships where others have seen only separateness. Finally, a theory high in *heuristic power* raises interesting questions that stimulate further inquiry. As in the famous story of the Lady and the Tiger, a good theorist raises more questions than can be answered immediately and leaves the reader to his or her own devices in finding the answers—in extending the chain of inquiry.

**Applying the Criteria: An Example**

Several of the better known theories of consumer behavior, including ones by Howard-Sheth; by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell; and by Kerby, have been evaluated elsewhere.\(^4\) We will apply these criteria to a basic theory of buyer

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behavior in housing markets, developed by Hempel and Ayal. This particular theory (or theoretical attempt) is chosen somewhat arbitrarily, not because it necessarily represents either a "good" or "bad" example. Most theories score high on some criteria and low on others, and this one does so as well. Figure 8.1 shows the basic processes involved in the theory.

Briefly, the theory can be illustrated using a graduate business student who has accepted his or her first position with a marketing research firm in another city. An abrupt shift occurs in the life space, from dynamic equilibrium, in which

![Diagram of the transition process]

Figure 8.1. A simple model of transition period influences on the home-buying process and related consumption systems.


gradual acquisitions were made (cross-country skis, stereo system speakers, bookcases), to a state in which the rate of change accelerates. This transition period involves changes in cognitive processes, intense deliberation over purchase decisions, and the emergence of new criteria for decision making. The home ownership versus rental decision, for example, may emerge for the first time. The household is the unit of analysis in the model; for the married student, joint decision making would be expected in the two consumption systems: (1) the primary system consisting of housing and related services, such as realtors, and (2) the secondary system, including durables to equip and operate the home.

The change in life space position will probably involve changes in one or more of the following variables: family composition; buying power (increase); lifestyle (activity patterns); and attitudes toward the current residence.

The couple may spend a long weekend in the new city, searching for a suitable home. Of the several possible residences shown them by the realtor, they decide upon a two-bedroom condominium since it satisfies their most salient criteria of privacy, proximity to work, recreational facilities, and acceptable price range. The student may expect to be transferred in a couple of years, so resale value is important, and the adjoining condos are occupied by other young professional couples (expected state of mobility). They sign the purchase agreement and arrange the bank loan (on the basis of the increased buying power). A reevaluation of their current consumption system then takes place, as they consider their preferences for furnishing and appliances, set priorities, and design a sequence of planned purchases of these items. The move is completed and the household returns to dynamic equilibrium.

Hempel and Ayal derive the following six propositions from the theory:

1. Where major durables are concerned, the purchasing behavior of households during periods of dynamic equilibrium will represent a gradual adjustment of existing stocks to a desired assortment. The process of gradual adjustment will be reflected by purchases of durables item by item, at relatively long time intervals.

2. The period immediately preceding and following an abrupt shift in the household's position in life space will be marked by a distinct disruption in the regular purchase behavior of the household. This disruption will appear as a "compression" effect in the household's pattern of major durables purchased. In effect, the transition period precipitates a concentrated planning process for durable goods acquisitions. For these plans to materialize, however, enabling conditions must permit purchase.

3. Purchases of durable goods during transition periods will reflect a household's reevaluation of the total existing and desired stock. Compared to stable time periods of equal length, these purchases will be more interrelated into a recognizable pattern, reflecting a reorganization of the total consumption system.

4. Buyer behavior for durable goods, and particularly buyer behavior and post-purchase satisfaction in housing, can be explained and predicted on the basis of position in the life space (and changes in it), search behavior, and availability of alternatives. These elements can serve as useful bases for market segmentation.

5. A “consumption system” entrepreneurial approach to marketing and financing housing the major durables can benefit both the suppliers and the consumers.

6. The house buyer's immediate satisfaction with his new home and with the commercial organization involved in its sale (e.g., brokers and builders) will be lower for households in transition periods than for those in dynamic equilibrium.

How does the Hempel and Ayala theory hold up under the criteria listed in Table 8.1? Keeping in mind that these criteria are only a subset of the range available to the evaluator, we can illustrate how each applies to the theory.

A weakness of the theory is the imprecision in the stating of propositions, a problem of internal consistency. For example, Proposition 5 states that the consumption system approach can benefit both the buyer and seller, a statement that cannot be readily contradicted. In the interest of improving explanation, the Lewinian concept of balance (whether the situation is perceived positively or negatively by the household) could be added to Proposition 6. Some households may adjust to rates of change in a positive way, partially because of their experience. If balance is not added, empirical findings that some households were more satisfied when in transition would appear contradictory.

The Hempel-Ayala theory is high in strength. Some aspects of the theory are general—that is, collective, household decision making—rather than individual—the accommodation of several transitions precipitating the move, and the inclusion of both social and geographical dimensions of mobility.

Underlying the Hempel-Ayala theory is the process of social change, which Rogers and Shoemaker define as an alteration of the social structure (status) and the functioning elements (roles). Role is a deep (basic) mechanism, and role transitions are an important element in the movement from one steady state to another. The impact of role transitions upon the consuming household—the individual and his or her role partner—varies according to many criteria, including whether they are anticipated or unanticipated, and whether they are structurally incremental (a gain in status when the graduate student moves into a managerial or researcher role) or decremental. If we regard consumption as a role-prescribed behavior, then it is useful to study role transitions and the behavioral traces apparent in markets such as housing. Persons moving from one steady state to another provide an excellent sample for a natural experiment in which several interesting propositions could be tested. For example, the stages of socialization that the person goes through in acquiring a new role set could be examined. In the initial stage of socialization, the consumer would be expected to conform to the formal aspects or stereotypes of the role. Later, after having acquired some experience with the role, the individual (household) would be

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expected to shape the role according to his or her identity. In this way, improvements to the theory can be made—explanatory power is enhanced.

Some parts of the theory lend themselves more readily to empirical interpretability than do others. Buying power, for example, is operationalized through twenty separate measures, including total amount and source of income and duration of employment. More problematic is the measurement of concepts lacking in linguistic exactness, such as "compression effect" in Proposition 2 and "recognizable pattern" in Proposition 3.

Regarding falsifiability, Propositions 1 and 2 could be tested together. Proposition 3 would be difficult to falsify based upon the previous objection to the lack of clarity in the use of the term "recognizable pattern." Proposition 5 is a managerial statement, not a proposition.

In terms of confirmation, Propositions 2, 4, and 6 were subjected to empirical test in three housing markets. Life space measures were highly consistent across markets. Those households in transition engaged in less search behavior and expressed lower satisfaction than households in dynamic equilibrium, and they had higher expenditures. However, cases with low rates of change were not included in the analysis.

The theory is original in relating transitions to consumption behavior, and this is a strong point. Hempel and Ayal consider the disposition process as well in their discussion of the implications of the theory: "Consumer satisfaction and the quality of life can be improved by marketing systems that recognize significant states of change. These systems should be capable of suggesting and providing appropriate revisions in the total assortment as well as easing the transition by providing effective disposal for replaced assortment items." Jacoby et al. have noted that virtually no theory development or empirically oriented research has addressed the issue of disposition by consumers. The Hempel-Ayal theory lacks originality, however, in some of its concepts. The family life cycle, for example, needs to be updated, given changes in social trends. Some attempts have been made in this direction: Jain proposes three life cycles (divorced/widowed, single, married), while Wortzel recommends attention to trends such as cohabitation.

The theory has a high degree of unifying power, relating transition periods to at least two consumption situations. Clear specification of potential connections, such as social mobility and lifestyle, would add to this unification.

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10 Hemmel and Ayas, op cit., p. 218.
By far the strongest point to be made in favor of the theory is that it is high in heuristic power. As mentioned above, the disposition process can be investigated by examining, for example, the relationship between social mobility and the decision to replace versus to retain possessions upon changing residences. A theory that raises interesting research questions contributes to science. Through the continual process of evaluation, constructive criticism, implementation of suggested improvements, and empirical testing is gradually woven the fabric of a mature discipline.

Nontraditional Criteria

Di-Stance

The reader may recall, perhaps all too easily, having had the following kind of experience. You have entered a lecture hall, assumed a customary seat, opened a notebook, and begun attending to the speaker’s introductory comments. Perhaps a few notes are made as you attempt to reproduce what the speaker is putting on the blackboard. Twenty minutes pass on the clock and you are rather involved in the content of the lecture. Another twenty minutes pass and you are reminded by a numbness in a certain area that seats in the hall are wooden and uncushioned. Fifteen minutes later (by the clock) you inhale deeply, attempt an unobtrusive stretch of your upper and lower torso, glance up at the clock, and groan inwardly, almost unconsciously, noting that another thirty-five minutes remain of the lecture. You begin to look around the hall: (a) spotting a previously unnoticed ventilation shaft with colored yarns hanging limply from it, (b) noticing a section of overhead lights which do not work and which cause you to wonder whether it has been like that since the course began five weeks ago, (c) realizing that the same students are always in the front and then realizing further that nearly everyone in the room including yourself is in the same seat that he or she always assumes for this class, although that is hardly mandatory. You become more conscious of the physical movement of the instructor while trying a bit harder to identify the geographical origin of his or her accent. While these musings are going on you have not totally disengaged from the content of the lecture and something said brings you back, perhaps briefly, to the instructor and you make a few more written notes.

The experience described above reflects a special kind of distance, a psychological di-stance, a divisional posture in which one is able both to be a part of the phenomenon (here, a class lecture) and yet to be apart from the phenomenon much like a fly on the wall. If we are to explain fully a particular marketing phenomenon such as conflict between different participants in a distribution channel, the insights should reflect both the “detached” and “attached,” or “objective” and “subjective,” points of view. For example, an explanation of classroom activity should reflect the insights of the student in the
example above who would be able to give an account of the lecture in terms of (1) the verbal content delivered by the instructor and (2) the general ambiance of the setting as he or she experienced it. Great novels and memoirs display the quality of distance; they offer the point of view of the detached observer as well as the experiences of the participants. A good theory requires no less a quality.

Metaphor

A metaphor is a "thing" to be used for viewing another "thing." A theory is a metaphor used for viewing a phenomenon. No one would confuse the actual phenomenon with the theory. They are different entities even though we hope they are related. In fact, metaphor is itself a logic of discovery. Interestingly, the positivist tradition in philosophy considers metaphor to be of minor relevance in understanding reality.

There are probably few areas of inquiry in the social sciences that rely on metaphor to the degree marketing does. Whenever we "borrow" a theory or concept from psychology, sociology, operations research, or another discipline for the purpose of viewing a marketing phenomenon, we are using a metaphor. Similarly, we actively "lend" marketing metaphors such as "market segmentation" or "product life cycle" to people or agencies in the so-called nonprofit sector for use in viewing their activities and problems. We often examine research literature in other sciences such as educational psychology, rural sociology, or organizational behavior even though we are not particularly interested in the learning of nonsense syllables among fourth graders, the type of farmer who is most likely to try a new breeding technique for his commercial livestock, or which hospitals are most apt to adopt the latest tool in management science. We survey other literatures looking for a pleasant insight or surprise which might be transferred to contexts that are of greater concern to us. Both the data and the concepts or theory in a research study outside marketing may serve as metaphor. For example, there may emerge from the data an idea that the researchers did not originally specify. The well-known two-step flow of communication metaphor arose this way, as have many major advances in science.

The very notion of a controlled experiment is an example of the use of a metaphor. For example, we use the control group as a perspective from which to view the experimental group. The two groups are intended to be alike in certain important ways. In fact, this alikeness is absolutely essential in order for us to spot the effects of a particular phenomenon (treatments) in the experimental group. The reader may now recognize that he or she has probably received very substantial training in the construction and use of metaphors in various research method results i

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*4 A fascinating discussion of metaphors can be found in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
methods courses. Thus the very logic of inquiry involves metaphor, as does the results it produces.

Metaphor involves a transfer of a symbol from one setting to another. The symbols of mathematics and operations research may be used to describe buyer behavior, as may the cognitive symbols of the anthropologist and archeologist. If we invited an anthropologist and an operations researcher to view consumers in a supermarket and provide us with an account of their observations using their professional points of view, we would receive very different looking reports. And neither might resemble what the store manager would tell us. In fact, the symbols used by each party may affect our insights in unintentional ways because the symbols may carry certain “baggage” or connotations that broaden or delimit our perspectives. It is thus important to ask of a theory whether the metaphors used help broaden thinking or limit it in special ways. Does the term “exponential” and its algebraic expression add to our thinking about consumers’ behavior as they wait in line at the checkout counter in a way which the term “rising impatience” or “increased nervous actions” does not? And vice versa? The metaphor of social marketing or nonprofit marketing is enriching because it widens the domain of contexts in which marketing tools and concepts (marketing itself is a metaphor for these contexts) may be applied. These metaphors may be restrictive in the sense that they may imply too great a distinction between the profit and nonprofit marketing or may suggest that these other areas have not themselves independently developed so-called marketing tools and concepts.

Many theories in marketing rely heavily on spatial metaphors to organize ideas and concepts. For example, we speak of attitude and market structure, rank order of preferences, preference surfaces, attribute ideal points, hierarchy of effects, middlemen, and asymmetrical power structures in the marketing channel. Notions of movement (brand switching, stock turnover) and up and down are especially important, with “up” generally being better than “down.” Certain insights are gained and others lost when one particular orientational metaphor is used. What is helpful—and generally difficult—is to try to express the same idea using different metaphors. Metaphors from chemistry, biology, economic development, cultural change and marriage, family and divorce are as appropriate as metaphors from physics for conveying ideas about attitudes, choice, interorganizational relationships, and so forth. The reader who is inclined to dismiss this idea as “absurd” and thus “uninteresting” might try to explain why physical spatial metaphors are more appropriate than other metaphors. The reader who dismisses this idea because it is so “obvious” is invited to express ideas about attitudes, product attributes, manufacturers, wholesaler relations, and so forth, using nonconventional metaphors.

Even the way we speak of theory conveys certain biases in metaphors. Consider the title of this book “Theory Construction in Marketing” and our frequent use of the expression theory building. Apparently, theories and arguments or propositions are buildings.
Is that the *foundation* for your theory? The theory needs more *support*. The argument is *shaky*. We need some more facts or the argument will *fall apart*. We need to *construct* a strong argument for that. I haven't figured out yet what the *form* of the argument will be. Here are some more facts to *shore up* the theory. We need to *buttress* the theory with solid arguments. The theory will *stand* or *fall* on the strength of that argument. The argument *collapsed*. They *exploded* his latest theory. We will show that theory to be without *foundation*. So far we have put together only the *framework* of the theory.\(^\text{15}\)

Thus, in evaluating the metaphor used in a theory, we should ask whether it is guilty of "cookbookery." This is a "tendency to force all problems into the molds of one or two routine techniques, insufficient thought being given to the real objectives of the investigation or to the relevance of the assumptions implied by the imposed methods."\(^\text{16}\) Is the metaphor really appropriate? For example, the use of the "life cycle" metaphor in product planning assumes an end and thus tends to preclude notions of rejuvenation, especially when the term is applied to specific brands. Reliance on the metaphor may itself have hastened the discontinuance of some products.\(^\text{17}\) The reader might evaluate the appropriateness of metaphors from music (the stages of a symphony), botany (seasonal changes of trees), and astronomy as alternatives for thinking about the same product phenomenon that life cycle refers to. What insights or ideas are gained and lost with such other metaphors?

**Generative Capacity and Irony**

In Chapter 1 we introduced the notion of the generative capacity of theory. This refers to the ability of a theory to challenge commonly accepted assumptions and to suggest alternative ways of looking at phenomena. Thus an important criterion becomes: Does this theory challenge an important assumption *and* does it do so in a fashion which suggests an alternative way of viewing an event? It is not sufficient simply to challenge an assumption. Making counterassertions is relatively easy. What is most useful is the offering of a new viewpoint. A very good example of a carefully developed conceptual scheme which both challenges traditional perspectives and offers a new viewpoint may be found in an article by Stern and Reve analyzing distribution channels as political economies.\(^\text{18}\) The metaphor of a political economy allows the authors to generate a number of provocative propositions, including propositions that challenge one another.


\(^{16}\) *Box, op. cit.*, p. 797.


This creates the opportunity to generate additional notions which could accommodate apparently conflicting propositions or to provide corrective data.

Generative capacity is related to irony, which is a way of seeing an idea through viewing its opposite. When a surprise quiz in class greets us—unprepared—or we find that a deadline for which we are already in trouble has been moved up, we commonly respond with something like, “Great! Just what I need.” Our tone of voice and facial gestures leave little room for doubt as to exactly what we do feel. In fact, our true and opposite feelings may sometimes best be expressed in this way. Irony may also serve as a logic of discovery. By deliberately building irony into a theory, we may better understand the phenomenon we are trying to explore and explain. Thus, the presence of irony is a criterion of a potentially good theory.

Irony is somewhat akin to understanding the value of a cash register at a busy checkout line by removing it for a while. We might more readily appreciate or understand its importance by viewing the situation this way than by watching the cash register being used. We might not perceive as readily the value of the cash register in terms of customer and especially clerk or checker mental stress if we watched only the register in use. If a theory of the role and importance of cash registers at busy checkout counters possessed irony, it would enable us to see the effects of the absence of the register without having to actually remove one. (Note: building such a theory might be a good topic for a surprise quiz.)

A good illustration of the explicit use of irony in a theory of information system design can be found in Mitroff, Kilmann, and Barabba’s discussion of management information and misinformation systems. Their work reports a theory of design which underlies a market intelligence system developed for the marketing division of the Xerox Corporation. A major feature of this system is the presence of a dialectic technique which deliberately induces conflict under controlled circumstances. This technique challenges all facts and interpretations. An interpretation or explanation of certain market research results are viewed through what the opposite of what those interpretations would be and what the opposite of those results would be. For example, a theory describing the “Office of the Future” might be developed in the form of a scenario to examine the market potential of certain innovations in document processing. Current research about trends in the quality of training of office clerks and the basic competencies of people choosing such careers is an example of the type of data used to develop such a descriptive theory. The scenario expressing a theory of the office of the future should permit irony. That is, the feasibility of introducing a particular item of equipment when general competencies among clerical

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employees is high should also be viewed from the standpoint of a scenario where such competencies are rather low. This helps determine whether a given factor in a theory (such as office worker competency) is a necessary or sufficient factor in a given application of the theory. Each component of the theory is altered—viewed through its opposite state—using Tables 2.2 and 2.3 in Chapter 2.

Reality Tests and Other Criteria

The various reality tests discussed in Chapter 7 also represent summary evaluative criteria. Such questions as: does it work? whose theory is it? are frequently used criteria for evaluating theories. We might also suggest the considerations expressed in Table 1.2 in Chapter 1 as useful criteria. For example, does the theory enable us to understand ongoing, evolving processes? Is the theory relevant to both academic and practitioner communities? On this last question we are cautioned against mathematistry, which is the “development of theory for theory’s sake, which since it seldom touches down with practice, has a tendency to redefine the problem rather than solve it.” This, of course, has nothing to do with mathematics per se. In fact, the ability to easily express a theory in mathematical terms is another important criterion.22

The Reader’s Turn

Reference was made earlier in this chapter to a discussion of distribution channels as political economies (footnote 18 in this chapter). This particular view of distribution channels is reprinted in Appendix 1 as the basis of an exercise: to apply the various criteria discussed in this chapter to the framework offered by Louis W. Stern and Torger Reve. This exercise has three purposes. One is to provide the reader with an opportunity to apply these criteria to an existing system of ideas. The second, and perhaps more important purpose, is to provide the reader with an opportunity to use these criteria in a formative evaluation mode. That is, the reader should use the criteria to develop further the ideas contained in the framework. Professors Stern and Reve are careful to suggest that they offer a framework, not a theory. They believe that there is an important difference between a framework and a theory and that the one should not be confused with the other. It might be useful for the reader to attempt to define those differences. Here, we are asking you to apply evaluative criteria that appropriately should be laid against a theory. In this instance, the reader is therefore encouraged to use various evaluative criteria to develop a theory out of the framework.

Sum

This chapter evaluated the criteria and evaluative criteria refer to develop a better understanding of the task of the formal theorist. The reader is encouraged to apply these criteria to a framework, not a theory.
THE READER'S TURN

The framework. These new ideas might serve as the basis for further contributions to the marketing channels area and may be the source of useful future research. The third purpose is to demonstrate how different people may judge a theory differently with respect to a given criterion. This third purpose requires readers to compare their evaluations.

Summary

This chapter has introduced several traditional and nontraditional criteria for evaluating theories. In nearly all cases considerable subjectivity is involved in applying these criteria. Additionally, with respect to a given theory, different evaluators may assign rather different importance weightings to particular criteria. When theory builders are sensitive to these criteria and the frames of reference and truth tests of their audience (see Chapter 7), they are likely to develop more readily accepted theories. Presumably these theories will also be better as measured by these criteria. Applying these notions is not always easy. The explicit use of any large subset of these criteria is extremely rare. In fact, the reader is cautioned in their use. It may be best to select only a small number of what you judge to be the most important criteria and to work to satisfy only these at the outset. As these criteria come under control, another two or three might be attended to. Trying to do all things well at the outset may stifle creativity while unduly stimulating despair.
NINE

POSTSCRIPT:
A COMMENCEMENT

The contents of this book represent starting points for further reflection and action. In this concluding chapter we present a brief review of some of the main topics considered in earlier chapters and also indicate some important topics or issues that were necessarily underdeveloped.
CHAPTER NINE: POSTSCRIPT: A COMMENCEMENT

Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Winston Churchill¹

Because of its dynamic nature, the field of marketing has substantial need for creative thinking. The world of marketing is in frequent change due to competitive, governmental, and other institutional actions and social forces. Marketers must also contend with new situations that are the direct result of their own actions. Many changes require new understandings and new interpretations concerning the nature of markets and responses to markets. Even in the absence of change, many marketers require better understandings of their current situations or fields of interest. Developing better understandings and interpretations of new or existing situations involves a process of inquiry we have referred to as "theory building." As indicated in the Preface, theory building—the development and use of interrelated ideas for purposes of explaining, predicting, and/or controlling events—is an inherent human activity. Because of the dynamic nature of marketing phenomena and the costs of not being creative, the development of skills in theory building should be given special attention. Like so many inherent human characteristics, they can be improved upon. This book has tried to highlight a selection of issues and skills involved in building theories. In this postscript we would like to review briefly some of the basic messages conveyed. This book could not touch upon or, in some cases, develop adequately a number of other important messages. These too will be reviewed briefly. It is hoped that the reader will treat all messages referred to in this postscript and in preceding chapters as a sort of commencement address. They are starting points for further reflection and action.

A Brief Review

One purpose of this book is to "unfreeze" current ways of viewing marketing problems and situations and encourage people active in marketing to play with alternative thinking styles and to develop their own set of "thinker toys." In developing one's own set of thinker toys one should keep in mind a number of considerations.

1. There is no one approach for developing explanations of marketing phenomena that is "best" for all individuals and situations. If anything, the stress should be on developing a generative capacity that allows divergent perspectives to arise when one is developing explanations.

2. Theory building is not unbiased and value-free. This fact does not reduce its usefulness, but recognizing it does encourage one to surface his or her own preferred mode of thinking about a particular problem by breaking down perceptual and intellectual blocks. It permits richer and better-understood insights which are the starting points for developing more valid and reliable theories. The benefits of methodological rigor in testing theory are enhanced or restricted in direct proportion to the artistry contained in ideas. And artistry is very much a matter of values and healthy bias.

3. A major problem in theory development is not the generation of ideas, but the generation of interesting ideas. These are ideas that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions. Various perceptual and intellectual blocks contribute to this problem. Interesting ideas need not be complex. They may, in fact, be quite simple. What are important are the consequences of ideas if they are accepted as valid and reliable. Would many people have to change much of their thinking and many of their actions if the idea were accepted? Developing interesting ideas does not alter the importance of conventional tests of validity and reliability but merely provides a broader spectrum of ideas to which these tests might be applied.

4. Although not all events need be construed using causal imagery, it is useful for marketing managers to construct marketing explanations in terms of how changes in one marketing variable can affect another. The importance of causality lies in developing one's own "map" or "blueprint" of how the marketing system works so that decisions can be made more efficiently and effectively.

5. When constructing maps of marketing systems, marketers should develop their own "thinker toys," that is, concepts, propositions, and models. One's own thinker toys may often be a blend of those used by others and those that are unique to one's own particular circumstance.

6. Using concepts and propositions to develop marketing maps requires a constant interplay between deductive and inductive thinking—between generating concepts and propositions and assessing their logical and actual consequences. This process is more one of a series of iterative learning experiences where the marketing manager moves back and forth between ideas and observed facts until a conclusion can be reached.

7. Explicating theories-in-use, a kind of personal cartography of marketing phenomena, may yield new insights into those phenomena for the theory holder and the theory builder. It is also a way of constructing maps so that their intellectual content may be more easily shared with others.
8. A “good” theory-in-use or theory produced in any other way is one which can pass a number of reality tests. There is not necessarily one best theory to explain a particular marketing phenomenon. Rather, different theories may be useful depending on what tests are used to validate them. What is considered “real” or “true” depends on one’s own particular frame of reference. A key point, however, is that marketing managers and scholars must realize that a number of different reality or truth tests might be used to assess the solution to a particular marketing problem or question.

9. Evaluating a theory relies on a constant interplay between traditional and nontraditional criteria. The focus of evaluation is to develop a more accurate “goodness of fit” between one person’s particular theory and those that might be held by others with regard to a particular marketing phenomenon.

Some Underdeveloped Issues

As we have said, many important issues in theory building could not be addressed at least to the degree their importance may warrant. This is beyond the possibility of a multivolume encyclopedia of the philosophy of science. A few of these topics are identified here.

1. The unique role in theory building of each of the various ways of designing and conducting research has not been treated. Different research designs and data analytic methods often produce different kinds of insights. They also tend to emphasize different types of validity and reliability criteria. Apart from design and data analytic issues, the important role of measurement in the operationalization of concepts has not been treated. We refer not to technical matters concerning test construction and interpretation, although these too are significant, but rather to the philosophy of measurement and observation.

2. A positivist approach to science dominates the philosophical landscape in marketing research and theory. This includes the ideas that theories are expressible by first-order mathematical logic, that correspondence rules can link theory to phenomena, that a theory has a high degree of confirmation if it passes a number of empirical tests, that theories are expanded by encompassing more events, and that seemingly disparate but

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apparently well-supported theories can be reduced to a more comprehensive theory. These ideas and others go virtually unchallenged in marketing. They have, however, come under severe attack by scholars of science. It is correct to say that some of the most prevalent and dearly held ideas in marketing about the philosophy of science are largely disparaged outside of marketing.\footnote{Frederick Suppe (Ed.), The Structure of Scientific Theories, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).} Perhaps the best available statement in defense of this last sentence is to be found in the essays and commentaries by leading scholars contained in The Structure of Scientific Theories. (The reader who may now be a bit offended cannot in good conscience suffer or express dignified indisposition without reading seriously that volume or other current treatises on the philosophy of science.)

3. The major premise of this book, that thinking about thinking is constructive, has not been challenged within the context of the book. There is, however, a challenge suggested by Theodore Levitt.\footnote{Theodore Levitt, personal communication.} This is the idea that reflection upon certain creative processes may actually constrict those processes. If artists or poets, for example, begin to analyze why they are creative in the ways that they are, they may in some cases begin to be less creative. A kind of inhibitory self-consciousness develops. Certainly anecdotal evidence exists to the effect that this problem occurs. The prevalence of the problem is not clear and we do not feel that on balance it poses any threat to the marketing profession. However, the idea cannot be lightly dismissed. It can also manifest itself in other ways. Increased competency in critical analysis (whether in one of the positivistic traditions or in one of the contemporary schools of thought) can produce a reluctance to put forth new sets of ideas since the case with which any idea can be criticized is more fully appreciated. Understanding the ultimate frailty of theories may daunt creativity at least for some of those who feel science is primarily a means for obtaining reliable knowledge rather than a means for extending perception.\footnote{Cf. David Bohm, “Science as Perception: Communication,” in F. Suppe (Ed.), Structure of Scientific Theories, pp. 374-391.} No prescriptions have been offered (or will be) for creating a synergy between critical and creative abilities. This is clearly another commencement point. The prescriptions may well lie in sociological and psychological analyses of knowledge production.

4. Two related themes which have been touched upon only in passing are of such substantial importance in marketing that they require special mention here. One has to do with what is called the “social construction of reality.”\footnote{Burkart Holzner, Reality Construction in Society (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1968); P. Berger and T. Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); B. Latour and S. Woolgar, Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979).}
This idea holds that reality emanates not from nature but from the structure of society, that is, social positions and relationships impact our concepts, frames of reference, and reality tests, and thus our processing of information. Because of diverse positions and relationships, there are multiple realities which guide activity in any particular setting. The idea of multiple social constructions of reality is especially relevant if one accepts the exchange theory approach to the study of marketing. The second theme which deserves further inquiry is the notion that for many phenomena the act of observation as well as understanding (see Bohm, op. cit.) constitutes an intervention. This is sometimes referred to as Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty (with reference to subatomic physics): the influence of the observer makes it impossible to know precisely both the position and the momentum of a particle. Either can be known precisely (but nothing of the other) and both can be known only approximately. This principle is not confined to quantum mechanics but operates in the context of social exchange as well. What is at issue here is something quite beyond Hawthorne effects phenomena.

A wide variety of ideas have been touched upon in varying degrees in this book. It is hoped some of these ideas will invite further inquiry and perhaps augment the ways in which readers think about and systematize their ideas about marketing issues. While this book is not in any way a comprehensive review of contemporary thinking in the philosophy of science and related fields, we hope it will encourage further reading in these fields. We hope also this book and the subsequent inquiry it might stimulate will lead to broader points of view. A quote which might have fittingly introduced Chapter 1, “Points of View,” is also appropriate for closing this Commencement.

Oh foolish people and without understanding: which have eyes and see not; which have ears and hear not.

Jeremiah 5:21
