Chapter 7
The Toulmin Argumentation Framework

ABSTRACT

The authors present Stephen Toulmin's incredibly powerful framework for analyzing the structure of arguments: the Toulmin argumentation framework, or TAF for short. Every argument terminates in a claim, the end conclusion of an argument. Every argument also makes use of evidence of some kind. In short, the evidence is the evidentiary support upon which an argument is built. The warrant, which is the because part of an argument, is the bridge between the evidence and the claim. The backing is the deeper set of background reasons why the warrant should be accepted. Finally, every argument has a rebuttal. The rebuttal is the full set of counter-arguments against every part of the main argument, for example, why the claim is dubious and makes no sense at all, why the evidence is flawed and therefore doesn't support the claim, why the warrant is deficient, and why the backing doesn't support the warrant.

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." – Albert Einstein

Learning Objectives

- List the five components of the Toulmin Argumentation Framework (TAF)
- Differentiate between a 'claim' and a 'rebuttal'
- Illustrate an example of a 'warrant'
- Recognize the 'backing' for a 'warrant'

INTRODUCTION

In <u>The Uses of Argument</u>, the distinguished Philosopher Stephen Toulmin laid out an incredibly powerful framework for analyzing the structure of arguments. The Toulmin Argumentation Framework offers a practical approach to analyzing and constructing arguments. The framework consists of six elements (Figure 1): claim, data, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal. The claim is the main point or thesis, supported by data or evidence. The warrant links the data to the claim, while the backing strengthens the warrant. Qualifiers add nuance, specifying the conditions under which the claim holds true. Rebuttals anticipate counterarguments, offering responses to weaken them.

In practice, the framework provides a blueprint for constructing persuasive arguments. It starts with asserting a Claim, then offering Data or Evidence to support it. The Data or Evidences needs to be validated by a Warrant, which itself may require additional Backing. Once the core Claim-Data-Warrant structure is solid, the argument can be fine-tuned by adding Qualifiers and Rebuttals. Qualifiers make the argument more nuanced, avoiding overgeneralizations. Rebuttals address potential criticisms, making the argument more robust and persuasive.

The Toulmin framework is versatile, applicable to many fields including Law, Journalism, and Academia. It promotes clarity by breaking down arguments into their constituent elements. This approach allows for easy identification of the weaknesses in an argument, fostering more effective communication and debate. By using this structured mode of TAFl, individuals can create well-supported, nuanced arguments that can withstand scrutiny.

Every argument terminates in a Claim, the End Conclusion of an argument. Every argument also makes use of Data or Evidence of some kind. In short, the Evidence is the Evidentiary support upon which an argument is built. The Warrant, which is the Because part of an argument, is the Bridge between the Evidence and the Claim. That is, given the Evidence, the Warrant asserts why the Claim directly follows from it. Every argument also has a Backing. The Backing is the Deeper set of Background Reasons why the Warrant should be accepted. Finally, every argument has a Rebuttal. The Rebuttal is the full set of Counter-Arguments against every part of the main argument, for example, why the Claim is dubious and makes no sense at all, why the Evidence is flawed and therefore doesn't support the Claim, why the Warrant is deficient, and why the Backing doesn't support the Warrant.

An important example—which is also a classic type of argument—is the Claim that humans are mainly responsible for Global Warming. The Evidence is the Fact that based on their rigorous scientific studies—and thereby not on mere opinion alone--97% of Reputable Climate Scientists worldwide are in strong Agreement that humans are the Primary Cause of Global Warming. Thus, the Evidence is a

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