

# Chapter 7

## Theory and Theorizing in Information Systems

**Mampilo Phahlane**  
*University of South Africa, South Africa*

### ABSTRACT

*Markus and Robey, in their seminal paper, assert that good theory guides research and when appropriately used it increases the likelihood that Information technology will be implemented with desirable results in any organization. This laments the importance of using theory in information systems research because of explanations it provides and paying attention to other areas that might otherwise be ignored. Researchers in the IS field such as Gregor, Grover, Corley and Gioia, Weber, and Whetten have discussed and classified theory and what constitutes a theoretical contribution. Despite the importance that many researchers ascribe to theory and theorising, the development of new theory and the refinement of existing theories there's a belief the information systems discipline has neglected theory and theorising. This, however, suggests that there's enough guidance on theory and theorising within the IS field and it is documented for different contexts and boundaries.*

### INTRODUCTION

Markus & Robey (1988) in their seminal paper assert that good theory guides research and when appropriately used it increases the likelihood that Information technology will be implemented with desirable results in any organization, for its users and those affected by it. This laments the importance of using theory in information systems research because of explanations it provides and paying attention to other areas that might otherwise be ignored. Researchers in the IS field such as Gregor (2006),

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Grover et al. (2008), Corley and Gioia (2011), Weber (2012) and Whetten (1989) have discussed and classified theory and what constitutes a theoretical contribution. The works of Hassan et al. (2019), Guillemette & Paré (2012), Grover & Lyytinen (2023) and many others have contributed to theorizing in the IS discipline.

Despite these progresses made in the field, there's still a belief that the information systems discipline has neglected theory and theorising. By their very nature, theories are incomplete, for no one theory can explain and include all phenomena, and thus, they can only be approximations (Hassan et al., 2019). This chapter, however, suggests that there's enough guidance on theory and theorising within the IS field and that it is done in different ways and needs to be formulated and assessed according to the different contexts. Further, if researchers wish to continue to expand theory and theorising within the IS field, they should continue to do so with some of the guidelines mentioned in this paper. The aim of this paper is to highlight some of the ways in which researchers in the information systems field have developed and how theorizing has happened. The rest of the chapter is structured as follows: what is theory is discussed next, what theory is not follows this discussion and the field of IS theory and theorising follow and conclusion discussed last.

## **WHAT IS THEORY**

Theory largely depends on assumptions related to philosophy and discipline (Gregor, 2006). Within the natural sciences, theory is viewed as providing explanations, and predictions and as being testable positivist stance (Popper, 2005). Within the interpretive tradition however, theory is constructed from “lived experiences”, “understanding meaning”, “multiple knowledges existing”. Weber (2012) describes theory as a specific kind of model that is intended to describe for some subset of events in the real world. Theory describes reality because of collaborative consensus, and it is an artifact built by humans to achieve a specific purpose. Theory by nature represents a platform for research to be transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary as most fields develop, apply, and evaluate theories, this makes theories interconnected ideas with predictive and explanatory properties (Kerlinger et al., 2000).

(Joseph, 2021) asserts that theory offers the ability to predict, validate or disprove hypotheses for quantitative research-based methodology to develop theory within this paradigm. It also offers explanatory power and value on the process of conceptualising and demystifying social phenomena.

There are other words or names used in synonym as theory, these concepts are used interchangeably with the term theory. The concepts include words such as paradigm, model, view/worldview, principle, approach, framework, perspective,

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