


Chapter 8

A Conceptual Examination of Theorizing Syndromes in Doctoral Studies: A Case in the Information Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks form the basis of sound research. They provide the bedrock upon which research is structured. They help to explain, predict, and guide research. Nonetheless, some doctoral dissertations and theses completely omit the use of theoretical or conceptual frameworks, in which case the researchers commit an error of omission. Atheoretical studies often result in poorly structured research with questionable and contested results. The common miscue that this chapter focuses on is the error of commission, where theoretical and conceptual frameworks are often misunderstood, poorly articulated, and wrongly applied in dissertations and theses with a focus on the information science discipline. Doctoral students should expend energy, time, and effort to grasp the correct use and application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks to avoid falling victim to the syndromes of wrong theorization, the syndrome of theory window-dressing, the syndrome of under-theorization, the syndrome of over-theorization, and the syndrome of interchanged theorization.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-5676-1.ch008

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the importance of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in doctoral-level study, with a special focus on the information sciences discipline. The chapter contends that dissertation or thesis writing is incomplete without theoretical or conceptual frameworks. Nonetheless, many doctoral students face challenges regarding their selection and application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, an anomaly that results in loss of marks, impaired research, and in research findings that are not properly supported and articulated. The chapter addresses five scenarios in which theoretical and conceptual frameworks are poorly applied, in which case, the chapter coins such “theorizing syndromes”. These are the syndromes of theory window-dressing, the syndrome of wrong theorization, the syndrome of under-theorization, the syndrome of over-theorization, and the syndrome of interchanged theorization.

The Collins English Dictionary defines “syndrome” as a combination of signs and symptoms that indicate the presence of a particular disease or disorder. It is a set of symptoms that indicate the presence of a disease. In other words, a ‘syndrome’ is not a disease *per se* but an indication of some form of dysfunctionality within a given system. The word “syndrome” is normally used in the medical field, where the following syndromes feature very prominently: Down’s syndrome, Turner syndrome, Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome, and trisomy 18. “Syndrome” is a 16th-century invention that was derived from the Greek word “sundrome” where “sun-” refers to “together” and “dramein” refers to “running” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This means that a set of symptoms occurs together, indicating the presence of a specific disease. The word “syndrome” can be used figuratively, outside the medical fraternity, to describe some pattern of behavior. In the context of this chapter, the word “syndrome” is used derivatively to refer to a set of signs and symptoms that indicate the defective use of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in doctoral studies.

This chapter seeks to raise awareness against the wrong application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks amongst doctoral students in the information science discipline. Araújo (2021) holds that the information science discipline encompasses many subject areas such as information studies, library and information science, and information systems. Yan (2011) adds telecommunications and communication to this list. In addition, there are closely related subject areas such as knowledge management, digital humanities, and cultural heritage studies. All these fields may benefit greatly from this chapter insofar as the application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in doctoral studies is concerned. Furthermore, students from other social science disciplines and the humanities may benefit greatly from this chapter.

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