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DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THEORY, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

A theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena. This definition says three things:

- 1) a theory is a set of propositions consisting of defined and interrelated constructs
- 2) a theory sets out the interrelations among a set of variables (constructs), and in so doing, presents a systematic view of the phenomena described by the variables
- 3) a theory explains phenomena; it does so by specifying which variables are related to which variables and how they are related, thus enabling the researcher to predict from certain variables to certain other variables.

Characteristics of a Theory. Characteristics of a Theory

- a. It has to be logical and coherent
- b. It has clear definitions of terms or variables, and has boundary conditions
- c. It has a domain where it applies
- d. It has clearly described relationships among variables
- e. It describes, explains, and makes specific predictions

To invoke Guba's (1981) criteria for good research, we can say that a theoretical framework helps the achievement of these criteria:

- *It increases the credibility of qualitative data or the internal validity of your quantitative data.*
- It may enhance the transferability of the findings from your qualitative data or external validity and generalizability of quantitative data analysis.

- It increases the confirmability of your findings in qualitative data or objectivity of your findings in quantitative data.
- It improves the dependability of your findings in qualitative data or reliability of findings in quantitative data