

Nothing Quite So Practical: The Role of Theory in General Applied Psychology

Description:

The title of this presentation announces the need. GAP psychology represents a potentially new branch of psychology. However, it has not yet been mapped from a theoretical perspective. The title, of course, is a partial quote from Kurt Lewin, the famous social psychologist who said “There is nothing quite so practical as a good theory.” The subtitle of the talk says even more: Integrating systems theory, neuroscience, social motives, and narrative. The approach of this current presentation is first to demonstrate the need for a theory of applied psychology, what an acceptable theory would look like, and what the components of such a theory could be. After this brief introduction to psychological theory in general, I then preview the four theoretical domains that are included in my approach.

Beginning with systems theory, in particular, a version of systems theory that I have named DST, or dynamic systems theory (Sirkin, 2004, 2020), I demonstrate the importance of a systems approach. This inclusive version of systems theory contains seven axioms that describe living systems at every level, from the sub-cellular to the corporate levels. Applied psychology is unique in the way it uses systems theory to describe, predict, and interact with living systems. In terms of consulting psychology, the systems level could include the person, and their psychology, and the organization-as-a-whole. The seven axioms include phenomena related to Levels of the system, Boundaries of the system, Differentiation of parts within a given system, Hierarchies within the system, Development of the system, Growth of the system, and the fundamental Unpredictability of the evolution of complex, living systems.

Three additional theoretical domains are identified for inclusion: Neuroscience, Motivation, and Narrative. The neuroscience domain addresses the fundamental biology, and recent breakthroughs, in neuroscience research and its applicability to people in complex systems. The Motives domain looks at psychological factors such as emotions, personality, and social motives to help us understand why human actors behave as they do in complex systems. Finally, narrative studies pertain to the manner in which personal and corporate systems require coherent narratives to provide meaning to our actions, values, and goals.

These four pillars, or Domains, encompass what are referred to in the presentation as an integrated approach. The challenge for General Applied Psychology, and Consulting Psychology in particular, is to develop theory, research, and intervention methods that reflect the uniqueness of each domain, and the potential interactions among domains. Ultimately, each Applied Division (in APA) will need to select the relevant theories within each domain that best serves their constituents.

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants will be able to identify the seven axioms of Dynamic Systems Theory and will be able to apply these axioms to organizational diagnosis and interventions.
2. Participants will be able to draw from theories in each domain to fully describe, and address, organizational needs.

Target Audience: Mid-Level and Advanced Level Psychologists

How to Access:

- At APA 2020 Portal
- 1.0 CE* at SCP OnDemand
- Live Discussion Session addressing GAP and the SCP Presidential Address over Zoom on Fri. 8/7 at 5:45 - 6:30pm EDT ([Click](#))
- Disqus Chat in APA Portal at your convenience

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Presenter:

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Mark received his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Connecticut in 1985 and post-doctoral certification in Organizational Consulting from the W. A. White Institute in NYC. He has worked for several large consulting firms throughout his career including RHR International, Hay Group (now part of Korn Ferry), and Hildebrandt (now owned by Thomson Reuters). Currently, he manages his own consultancy, Sirkin Advisors, a management consulting firm specializing in executive development, coaching, and organizational change.