Section 5 Where to from here?
Building New Knowledge Frameworks for Productive Organisations

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In the 21st century, most organisations in the public and private sector are in the process of adapting their stand-alone more specialist historical arrangements to an emerging work context that is increasingly fast moving, interconnected, and multidisciplinary. The global context for organisational decision making is also multi-cultural, highly mobile, and increasingly places demands for collaborative approaches to becoming or remaining competitive. These changes are stimulating new strategies for checking interpretations, creating feedback loops and impact checks, and new efforts to design work contexts for high levels of engagement, devolved authority to specialist teams, and new responsibilities for leaders. In Australia, most of this development is happening in an ad hoc fashion with little shared public discussion of the way ahead. The **THEORI** group has presented some of their research based knowledge in this book as a first strategic step in a program to share their knowledge in ways that enable organisations to become sustainably productive.

Emerging theories

The book contains a series of theories that the authors have found useful to explain how organisations develop, adapt, and change. The first three theories are based on semiotics, and as such, emphasise the notion that intended signals and meanings are often interpreted in many different ways. In this era of complex interactions through digital technologies and increased mobility of people at work, change agents often find that their best plans and instructions are interpreted, and responded to, in ways that lead to unintended outcomes. A key idea from Activity Theory is the importance of understanding that thinking, feeling, and acting are shaped by previous experience and together determine the ways people interact with each other, their tools, and the organizational context – the way they work. Further, changes in tools or work conditions necessitate changes in the ways people think, feel and act. The chapter on Actor Network Theory further stresses the interconnectedness of experience, beliefs, intention and perceived 'truth' as it is expressed through justifications and explanations in different fields. Increasingly, people and organisations work in multi-stakeholder contexts involving collaboration between people from different backgrounds and professional training. This theory is a useful explanation of the importance of negotiating a shared situational awareness where different 'truths' can be used collaboratively, across historical boundaries, to build a new understanding and broader shared capabilities.

The more complex notion of organisations as systems is taken up further by the several authors. For example, Action Regulation Theory (ART) provides a basis for measuring and optimising the human-technical interface in the workplace. ART is a way to measure stresses or errors in a work system that are characteristic of poor technical or organizational design of the work task and hinder the regulation of the workers' mental processes. For example, when demands for higher levels of engagement or responsibility in one area are introduced without adjustment to a lower level of engagement or effort in another, the resulting stresses raise the risk of system induced human errors. Interesting accounts of recent developments in theories about Human Resources, Competitive Advantage, Complexity, Knowledge Transfer and Attribution follow.

The section ends with two accounts of the ways that organisations change and perform over time in an increasingly complex economy. The 'processual' perspective provides a useful account of the practical reality of making change over time and the Responsible Leadership Framework explains some of the dilemmas facing organisational leaders as a result of the changing context in which they lead.

Emerging applications of research to enable organisations

The second section of the book describes four practical applications of research based knowledge. Some of these have already been used by consultant firms for practical advice and organisational training. This section is about how research-based knowledge can be used in organisations to enable new learning, collaboration, and adaptation for sustainable productivity in a more connected digital society. They include the 4L Framework for planning for succession in family companies, Strategic Marketing Sustainability, Strategic B2B Online Service Quality, Modes of Knowledge Sharing Between Groups and a Green IS Taxonomy.

Where to next

As mentioned at the beginning of this book**, 'THEORI's** vision is to leverage the particular mix of expertise and experience in the Faculty of Business to build a reputation as leaders in **...**the knowledgeable use of theory in research and the application of theory to sustain best practice, support policy and guide organisational transformation'. This book is a small first step and largely reflects the research demands of university organisations in its style and focus. We know from our theories that for research findings to be transformed into widely understood, practically expressed knowledge that enables sustainable adaptation and productivity will require a more collaborative effort with organisations.

For us, some possible next steps will be to work with leaders from other organisations to co-create:

- A shared situational understanding of our capabilities and the challenges facing us all;
- A strategic process for sharing knowledge in ways that enable us to build new capabilities;
- A strategic process for sharing knowledge that result in widely accepted and understood new norms in organisational practice that lead to higher productivity and economic prosperity;
- A strategic process for advocacy to government and a more collaborative knowledge sharing process to develop an enabling technical, policy and legal infrastructure that better supports organisations to take up emerging economic opportunities; and,
- A strong labour force that is knowledgeable, capable, and committed to supporting new ways of working.

Such a shared mission will require us to work more closely together and to co-opt other expertise and influence from people in our networks. Three important next steps could be:

- A series of collaborative leadership workshops to enable shared understanding and to co-create a working strategy for change;
- Developing a shared leadership advocacy strategy, to government, to present the case for technical, legal and policy infrastructure development to support organisations to adapt and be more sustainably productive;

- A series of events to engage, inform, and inspire young people to join in the process of creating their future and to build on their own particular knowledge, energy, aspirations and skills in the process.

A key aim of this book is to begin a process where the historical boundary between the 'ivory tower' of academia and the more practical knowledge and experience of people working in organisations is opened up to enable better collaboration and the best possible outcomes for Australian society.