

# Define a Social Construction Theory

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Through shared perceptions and interactions, social realities and meanings are produced, according to the theoretical framework known as social construction theory. An overview of Social Construction Theory, its fundamental ideas, and its consequences for comprehending knowledge, identity, and social phenomena are given in this abstract. It explores the concept that reality is socially produced via language, society, and cultural conventions rather than being innate. It also analyses how social processes, speech, and power influence how we see the world. Understanding social surroundings and interactions as they affect our ideas, values, and social structures provides important insights into this theory of social construction.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Cultural, Construction, Idea, Social, Reality.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A theoretical framework called social construction theory examines how social realities and meanings are created via shared perceptions and interactions and questions the idea of an objective, permanent reality. It implies that rather than being only a reflection of objective facts, our perception of the world is influenced by social dynamics, language, culture, and historical context. Social Construction Theory's core tenet is that people and groups actively contribute to creating and preserving social reality. This viewpoint emphasises the dynamic and socially influenced character of our ideas and experiences rather than seeing reality as a given. It implies that social elements including language, power dynamics, social norms, and cultural surroundings have an impact on our views, values, and identities. The notion that knowledge is socially created is one of the central ideas of social construction theory. This viewpoint holds that knowledge is not a permanent and objective fact, but is instead moulded by the common understandings and agreements among members of a certain social group or society. This casts doubt on the idea of universal truths and emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend information in light of various viewpoints and cultural settings[1], [2].

The study of how language shapes our perception of the world is another crucial component of social construction theory. Language is entangled with power dynamics and social hierarchies rather than being just a neutral medium for communication. The dominant discourses and cultural frameworks in a society have an impact on the meanings we give to words and ideas. The social construction theory also emphasises how social interactions and processes shape both our personal and societal identities. Social interactions, common understandings, and societal expectations all contribute to the construction of our sense of self as well as our social roles and connections. The social character of identity creation and the impact of social environment on our behaviour are highlighted by this. Researchers and academics may obtain insights into how social influences impact our perception of reality, affect our ideas and values, and establish social structures and institutions by adopting a social constructionist viewpoint. It promotes critical thinking on the social injustices and power relationships that are ingrained in our social constructs[3], [4].

We will examine the major ideas and applications of social construction theory in a variety of fields, such as psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, in the debate that follows. We will look at how this theoretical framework gives different viewpoints on social phenomena and questions established ideas about reality and knowledge. We may get a more sophisticated knowledge of the intricate and socially

created character of our environment by comprehending Social Construction Theory. A wide number of academic fields and disciplines are affected by Social Construction Theory. It questions the notion of essentialist views of human nature in psychology and places an emphasis on how social and cultural factors shape our behaviour, cognition, and emotions. It emphasises how crucial it is to take into account social context in order to comprehend personal experiences and thought processes. The Social Construction Theory in sociology offers a paradigm for looking at social phenomena including gender, race, and social class as socially produced classifications rather than as permanent and inherent traits. It looks at how societal norms, power dynamics, and discourses impact social interactions and inequality as well as the meanings and identities attached to these social categories[5], [6].

Social Construction Theory sheds light on how cultural practises, symbols, and discourses influence how we see the world in cultural studies. It draws attention to how particular ideas, values, and social norms are created and maintained through cultural institutions, the media, and popular culture. Researchers and practitioners may challenge prevailing narratives and put into question presumptions by taking a social constructionist stance. It offers a more sophisticated view of societal problems and occurrences and stimulates critical thinking. It also emphasises the possibility of social transformation by acknowledging that social realities are malleable and subject to reconstruction via group efforts. It's crucial to recognise Social Construction Theory's limits, however. While it gives insight on the social and cultural elements that influence how we see the world, it could ignore personal agency and the possibility of personal resistance to social constructs. Additionally, detractors contend that a total denial of objective reality might result in relativism and diminish the significance of scientific data.

The dynamic and socially produced character of reality, knowledge, and identity is discussed in compelling detail by Social Construction Theory. It opposes essentialist viewpoints and promotes a critical examination of the societal and cultural influences on how we see the world. We may promote a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of human experiences and strive towards social change and justice if we acknowledge the influence of social processes, language, and discourse in the construction of social realities[7], [8].

## II. DISCUSSION

According to the social construction theory, many things in our society that we take for granted as unchanging universal truths really resulted from institutionalised social interaction patterns. The idea aims to acknowledge and emphasise the influence these social truths have on both facilitating and limiting our day-to-day existence. The custom of stating the time of day is one omnipresent example. Our system of time zones that extend out from Greenwich Mean Time was developed socially. The fact that it is 9:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) everywhere in the EST zone when the New York Stock Exchange bell rings in the United States is something we take for granted on a daily basis. We are aware that the Tokyo Stock Exchange has already closed and that the London Stock Exchange has been operating for six and a half hours. Consider the significant influence that these social truths will have. Only until something changes, such as when the United States switches to daylight saving time in the summer, do their social constructions become apparent to us. Because organisations are social institutions and that behaviour inside and among them is influenced by institutionalised patterns of behaviour, the idea is pertinent to management. It may thus be used in any area of management, including human resource management, competitive strategy, and international markets. As we will see in this entry, organisational sociologists' observations that organisational structures and routines frequently persist even when they are not optimal given technological and competitive conditions were the first to have an impact on the management field[9], [10].

The basic elements of social construction theory are discussed in the section that follows. The history and evolution of the theory are discussed in the next part, and its relevance to management is evaluated in the last section. Although the phrases culture and cultural knowledge are not often used by theorists, the concept is essentially the same. Exactly what the right technique to communicate with other social group members? How do we set our day up? How does our work have structure? Social group

interactions lead to the emergence of socially constructed knowledge. The transfer of social information from experts (adults) to novices (children) is the most prominent example of this, but it also happens in many regular encounters and activities. Interaction is thus a crucial component of social construction. People's interactions create an intersubjective set of ideas and behaviours about what is right and proper. In a social group, appropriate behaviours develop into habits over time. In other words, activities and exchanges take on a script-like quality. Over time, the proper methods for the social group to organise tasks like labour become reified. They adopt the characteristics of objective reality, in other words. Additionally, they gain legitimacy; that is, not only are practises accepted as reality but also as legitimate, desirable, and right.

The following are the main presumptions that underlie social construction theory: First, information is shared socially among individuals within a family, community, group, or civilization. As a result, knowledge is no longer something we own but rather something that is generated, interpreted, and altered via social interaction. The intersubjective construction of the commonplace world via subjective processes and meanings is the basis of socially distributed knowledge. In other words, social contact creates the framework for interpretation and meaning. Second, actors who engage within a community with which they identify and who share its practises negotiate and build knowledge and its meaning. In this context, the term "negotiation of meaning" refers to both "negotiating a price" (competing interpretations) and "negotiating a sharp curve" (steering and remaining on course).

Third, there is more agreement regarding the meaning of knowledge and practise inside a community than between communities because social interaction is more frequent within social groupings. As a result, socially constructed knowledge about which activities are suitable and how to engage in them has bounds that line up with a certain social group's boundaries. Communities' shared histories of education create distinctions between those who take part in them and those who do not. Fourth, when members of a social group carry out the customs of their society, they participate in reciprocal learning and interaction and build a common body of skills and pastimes. This common vocabulary consists of expressions, narratives, objects, and symbols. It represents a distinct and contextualised history of learning, but it also keeps its intrinsic ambiguity since in a community, meaning is always being debated and reargued via interaction. However, after a while, socially created knowledge and meaning within a society become reified, which means that abstract notions are viewed as fundamentally existent, true, and real, similar to a physical material item. Examples include ideas like "the economy" or "the rule of law" or "democracy." From a managerial perspective, ideas like reputation and market capitalization are social constructs with significant practical significance.

Of course, not all information is influenced by society. With the exception of solipsism, social construction theory does not contest the reality of a physical world in which light and dark periods alternate for about 24 hours each day due to the Earth's rotation on its axis. Societies have sometimes created socially constructed explanations for the pattern of light and dark because they have not always had this objective information. We nevertheless establish socially built institutions to aid us in organising our activities inside and among social groupings, such as the time zones mentioned earlier, even though we now understand the objective fact that generates this pattern. As a result, rather than being based on scientific or mathematical truth, the social world is seen to constitute the boundary condition of social construction theory. The symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, sociology of knowledge, institutional theory, structuration theory, the social building of technical systems, and views on enactment and sensemaking are all intimately connected to social construction theory.

## Evolution

The sociology of knowledge is a discipline from which the theory has its origins. Philosophers who were interested in ontology (the essence of being) and epistemology (the origins, nature, and limitations of knowing) were the first to bring up the sociology of knowledge, or what we see as facts, causal connections, and the methods by which we acquire such information. The phrase was initially used by German philosopher Max Scheler in the 1920s, but it was Karl Mannheim's work from the 1930s through the 1950s that gave rise to the concepts as we know them today. Mannheim's works

paved the way between the philosophical inquiry of "how do we know what we know?" and the sociological inquiry of how social interaction and social context produce all knowledge that is not defined by nature or mathematics. Even the founder of rational bureaucracy, Max Weber, made reference to the significance of subjective meaning in motivating behaviour. In the 1950s, American sociologists Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton completely incorporated the concepts into sociology literature. Nevertheless, the creation of ideology or, more specifically, how we come to believe what we do was the primary emphasis of all these books.

The sociology of knowledge did not change significantly from a focus on philosophy and ideology to a concern with all knowledge that is used in daily life and how social interaction creates much of what we experience as objective reality until sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, was published in 1966. This study focused on how commonplace encounters produce what we take for granted as knowledge of social facts and how to behave in the context of these facts, drawing on both symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead) and ethnomethodology (Harold Garfinkel) in phenomenological sociology. The ideas of objectification and signification are especially crucial.

The process through which an object acquires a subjective aim and meaning is referred to as objectification. It is helpful to think about how knowledge gets ingested into things. A hammer is an example of a tool that embodies knowledge of leverage, force, and material. They also represent the purpose or action of hammering a nail into a wall or another object in order to hang a painting. We know what a hammer is for when we see one. However, when taken away of its historical and cultural context, a hammer could not imply the same thing or even make sense at all. An excellent example of this is in the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, when the Bushmen who find an empty Coca-Cola bottle interpret it as a gift from the gods. They had no idea that it was designed as a container for a sweet soft drink, but they soon learn that it may serve a variety of beneficial purposes, from flattening snake skin to serving as a child's toy.

A key illustration of objectification is signification. The clearest and most complex kind of signifying is language, where signals "stand for" purpose and significance. Another excellent illustration of the fundamental presumptions of social production is language. The social distribution of language, the negotiation and development of meaning via social interaction, and the creation of meaning borders between languages and the societies in which they have developed are all effects of shared learning histories. Mutual interaction and education build the common lexicon of terms, narratives, and symbols that define social groupings and their languages. The social construction of societies and their institutions was further discussed by Berger and Luckmann. The reciprocal typification of habitualized activities by categories of actors is how they defined institutionalisation (p. 54). Let's have a look at this illustration to better grasp what they meant.

Both the clerk and I are aware that we are guests and clerks when I contact the front desk of a hotel to request more towels. In a hotel, customers behave like actors by making requests. Actors who receive requests and carry them out include clerks. We are both unsurprised by the request and answer. The conversation will be mostly the same if I call again in the morning. As a result, in institutionalised settings, certain categories of actors will anticipate and be anticipated to behave in particular ways throughout the course of their contacts (reciprocal typification), and these behaviours are repeated across many encounters (habitual). Behaviours become predictable and coordination of behaviour is made feasible via this process. A 1977 paper in the *American Journal of Sociology* by John Meyer and Brian Rowan brought the concepts of social construction directly into the realm of organisations and management. They made the case that when organisational practises and structures are institutionalised, we tend to accept them as legitimate and suitable. When a result, we see these characteristics as unchanging realities about how things work in organisations. Indeed, they contend that organisations' widespread use as a means of coordinating economic activity can be explained by factors other than their effectiveness and efficiency, such as their status as the proper and legal way to organise economic activity. This essay served as the cornerstone for institutional theory, one of the most significant and

well-known ideas in the area of management. Scholars of institutional theory have delved deeply into the survival and propagation of legal organisational forms.

Karl Weick, a social psychologist, introduced social construction theory to his articles on the social psychology of organising in 1979. The idea of enactment, which contends that the environment we perceive and respond to is based on our own actions, is crucial to his thesis. For instance, managers of organisations may genuinely contribute to the reality they want to see by behaving in a manner that is consistent with their values. Weick expanded on two issues brought up by Berger and Luckmann: Through social contact, our perception of reality is moulded, although everyone interprets reality differently. According to Weick, perspectives vary because people really encounter various realities. They do so because people live out their reality, which means that they also generate the things they observe. By highlighting the fact that managers were actively creating the surroundings to which they needed to adapt by their own actions rather of just reading and reacting to them, Weick's study had a significant impact on the management field. This idea sparked the creation of a number of new management research fields, such as managerial sensemaking and sensegiving, the construction of managerial and organisational identity, reputation, and legitimacy, the social construction of technology, and the development of competitive communities, markets, and organisational fields. The section that follows provides further information on different schools of management research and emphasises how crucial it is to managers and managerial practise.

### **Importance**

These concepts were later included into management theory thanks to the application of social construction theory to conceptions of organisations, institutions, and technologies that went beyond philosophy. Through its contributions to at least four major schools of thought institutional theory, the social psychology of organising, the social construction of competitive contexts, and the social construction of technology social construction theory has had an impact on management researchers and educators. It is challenging to conduct an empirical analysis of the idea due to its highly philosophical and conceptual character. However, each of the four schools of thought mentioned above has a strong foundation, which gives their forecasts some validity. The idea has had a major impact on managers' understanding of how institutionalised practises both support and impede their operations as well as how their own organisations shape the aspects of the environment to which they are attempting to adapt.

With the above-mentioned work of John Meyer and Brian Rowan, institutional theory initially emerged within the discipline of organisational sociology. Later, Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell added to this body of knowledge. One of the most significant management theories, institutional theory first addressed the issue, "Why are organisations so similar in the way they organise work?" Fundamentally, institutional theory seeks to answer this question by examining the reasons behind the validity of certain organisational forms, the legitimacy of which has its origins in socially created notions of right and wrong. These concepts from organisational sociology were widely accepted by academics, who then used them to address crucial management issues including how to preserve credibility in the eyes of stakeholders and how to strategically change while working inside pre-existing institutionalised frameworks. Institutional theory has lately been pushed by management researchers to take into account how institutionalised practises first form. Institutional entrepreneurs are people who aid in the establishment of socially constructed practises in a new sector, according to researchers who have studied the formation of new institutional fields and enterprises. A related field of study looks at how leaders and organisations may draw in resources by being aware of and regulating how reputation, legitimacy, and value evaluations are constructed socially.

Numerous scholars have examined the sensemaking and sensegiving behaviours of managers inside organisations by drawing on the social psychology of organising. This line of research examines how leaders and managers affect organisational choices and actions via continual interactions with other members of the organisation, from day-to-day operations to the organization's strategic direction. Another team of academics has investigated the issue of how managers' beliefs affect their ability to make decisions, relying heavily on Weick's work on enactment. a competitive climate and gave

rise to the "social construction of competition" school of thinking. Similar to how institutional theory investigated how organisational forms become accepted as legitimate, this area of study examines how behaviour within rival organisations institutionalises. According to this study, even aggressive behaviour in the marketplace may be somewhat socially produced. The Social Construction of Technological Systems, published in 1987, by Wiebe Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor Pinch combined ideas from the sociology of scientific knowledge with technological studies and showed that even knowledge we take for granted, like physical technology, has been socially constructed as appropriate and appropriate. The QWERTY keyboard, which is the typical arrangement of the letter keys on the keyboard of typewriters and computers, is a famous illustration of a technical system's persistence beyond the efficacy of its technological purpose. In order to keep the typewriter's mechanical arms from clinging to one another, it was made the default arrangement for manual typewriters.

But even after the manual typewriter's extinction, the layout has endured. Researchers in the management profession who are interested in how technology is socially constructed have applied these ideas to how technology is adopted by and used by organisations. This topic has become more well-known as information technology's role has grown to be crucial and important to how organisations operate. The philosophical studies of the nature of knowledge that gave rise to social construction theory over a century ago are still relevant to the problems that managers are now facing. Managers must be skilled at recognising and influencing how social interaction within and among organisations shapes knowledge, practises, and organisational structures in order to manage the opportunities and challenges presented by globalisation, technological change, shifting economic, and political systems.

### III. CONCLUSION

Understanding how social realities and meanings are created via shared perceptions and interactions is made possible by the Social Construction Theory. It casts doubt on the idea of an objective, unchanging reality and emphasises how our perception of the world is dynamic and socially controlled. The theory places a strong emphasis on how language, culture, social processes, and power dynamics influence our beliefs, values, and social structures. Researchers and academics may acquire insights into how social circumstances affect how we view reality, knowledge, and identity by taking a social constructionist approach. It promotes critical thinking on the social injustices and power relationships that are ingrained in our social constructs. The idea emphasises how crucial it is to take into account various viewpoints, cultural settings, and historical influences while attempting to comprehend social processes.

The Social Construction Theory has wide-ranging effects on psychology, sociology, and cultural studies, among other fields. It presents alternative viewpoints that emphasise the social and cultural impacts on human perceptions and behaviour, challenging conventional ideas of truth, knowledge, and identity. The idea recognises that social realities are not set but may be rebuilt via communal efforts, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of social challenges and occurrences and opening up prospects for social change. But it's vital to understand that Social Construction Theory has certain flaws as well. It could ignore personal agency and the possibility of individual social construction resistance. A total denial of objective reality might also result in relativism and diminish the value of scientific data. Although social construction affects how we see the world, certain aspects of reality could still exist without being interpreted by people, according to critics. However, Social Construction Theory provides important insights into how social influences influence our perception of reality, knowledge, and identity. We may promote a more inclusive and socially fair society by critically analysing and dismantling social structures. By acknowledging the impact of language, culture, and power dynamics, we may question prevailing narratives and try to create social structures that are more inclusive and fairer.

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