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CRITICALLY EVALUATE AND SYNTHESIZE THEORIES AND CONCEPTS IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract
This research aims to deepen the ability to critically evaluate and synthesize theories and concepts in business and management—a key distinguishing feature of doctoral researchers. Theories and concepts are not taken-for-granted truths, but rather constructs of thought born within a specific context, with implicit assumptions and accompanying strengths and weaknesses. Critically evaluating means tracing their origins, examining their logical foundations, testing their suitability, and identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Synthesizing means bringing together the best insights from different theories into a more complete, deeper understanding that better explains complex business phenomena than any single theory alone. This research employs a critical review and theoretical synthesis approach. Several key theories in business and management are examined in depth, systematically evaluated, and then synthesized into a more complete and balanced framework of understanding. The analysis focuses on uncovering implicit assumptions, comparing views across theories, exploring points of convergence and conflict, and developing new insights that address the weaknesses of previous theories. The research findings demonstrate that seemingly contradictory theories often explain different aspects of the same reality. Critical evaluation reveals that the weaknesses of one theory can often be complemented by the strengths of another. The theoretical synthesis produced a richer, more balanced, and more robust understanding of dynamic business phenomena. A Critical Theory Evaluation and Synthesis Framework, along with a step-by-step guide, was developed that researchers can use to examine, assess, and synthesize various theories in the fields of business and management.

Keywords: Critical evaluation; theoretical synthesis; business theory; management theory; literature review; conceptual framework; doctoral research

INTRODUCTION

Business and management science has grown and developed through a variety of theories and concepts born at different times, in different contexts, and from different perspectives. Some theories emphasize rationality and efficiency; others emphasize human values; others focus on internal forces; and still others focus on the external environment. [1]This diversity of perspectives is both a wealth of knowledge and a challenge. If these theories are studied in isolation, applied piecemeal, or accepted without examination, the resulting understanding will be partial, unbalanced, and at risk of error when applied to the complex real world.

Theories are essentially designed to help people understand the various phenomena that occur in organizations and business activities. Theories provide a framework for explaining why a situation occurs, how decisions are made, and what factors can influence an organization's success or failure. [2]Therefore, theories should not be viewed as absolute truths applicable to all situations. A theory may provide a strong explanation under certain conditions, but it may not necessarily produce the same results when applied to different environments, organizations, or situations. Differences in company characteristics, resources, organizational culture, market conditions, technological developments, and consumer behavior can cause the application of the same theory to

[1] Mohammad Adjan Rojabi. (2025). Management : Theory , practice , and dynamics in the era of disruption . Bogor: Afdan Rojabi Publisher.
[2] Gede, IK, Hosea, E., Ratnaningsih, R., Hendriana, TI, Hulu, D., Judijanto, L., ... & Wahyuni, NNT (2024). Business Management Research Methodology: Theory and Complete Guide for the Best Scientific Work. Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

produce different consequences.[3] This situation demonstrates the importance of the ability to critically evaluate theories. Critical evaluation does not mean rejecting a theory simply because it contains weaknesses. Critical evaluation is a process of understanding the theory's origins, its purpose, the assumptions used, the concepts developed, and the conditions under which the theory emerged. [4]Through this process, one can identify the limitations of a theory and determine whether it remains relevant to explaining the problem at hand. Thus, theories are not only studied based on their definitions and concepts, but also understood within the context in which they arise.

Doctoral researchers are required to possess abilities beyond simply knowing and citing theory. Doctoral researchers must be able to critically evaluate theories: where they originate, on what basis they are built, what their assumptions are, what their strengths are, what they don't explain, and under what conditions they become weak or invalid. Furthermore, doctoral researchers must be able to synthesize theories: bringing together the best insights from diverse perspectives, even seemingly contradictory ones, into a new, more complete understanding that better explains reality.

In reality, many studies still passively use theory, selecting one and then using it as if it were absolutely valid and without flaws. Yet, every theory is built on limited assumptions, and each theory certainly has its own scope and explanatory limits. The absence of critical evaluation renders research insensitive to the weaknesses of its theoretical foundation. The absence of synthesis leads to narrow understanding and inadequate to address the ever-multidimensional nature of business problems. Therefore, this study compiles and demonstrates how to critically evaluate theories and synthesize them in depth, so that the various existing theories are no longer a collection of separate perspectives but rather a unified and balanced understanding.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories and Concepts in Business and Management

A theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions designed to explain a particular phenomenon. A theory is not a copy of reality, but rather a construct of thought that simplifies reality to make it more understandable. [5]Each theory deliberately focuses on certain aspects and ignores others. Therefore, no theory can completely explain everything. Each theory has its own scope and limits of explanatory power. Understanding this essence is the first step before evaluating or synthesizing any theory.

Criteria	Question Critical Questions Submitted
Origins and Context	When and in situation What theory This born ? Is past findings Still valid moment This ?
Assumptions Implied	What is considered Already certain and not proven ? Is it assumptions the Still in accordance with fact moment This ?
Logic and Consistency	Whether his reasoning sequentially and mutually support ? Is it There is conflict in it ?
Scope Explanation	Phenomenon What only one can explained ? What is it that is intentionally No explained or considered No important ?
Compliance with Fact	Whether the explanation proven in accordance with experience real ? In matter What just the explanation deviant ?
Strength Explanation	How much depth and extent of the theory This capable explain cause and effect ?
Limitations	In condition What theory This become No valid or not enough appropriate ?

Table 1. Critical Evaluation Criteria for Theory

Critical Evaluation Criteria for Theory

[3] Waty, E., Anggraeni, AF, Apriani, A., Ibrahim, H., Sari, A., Manafe, HA, ... & Hadiya, Y. (2023). Business research methodology: Theory & practical guide in business research. Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.
[4] Arie Ambarwati. (2021). Organizational behavior and theory. Malang: Media Nusa Creative.
[5] Sijabat, EAS, Djollong, AF, Judijanto, L., Forijati, F., Noor, F., & Rachmawaty, R. (2026). Qualitative Research Methods: Theory, Concept, and Application. Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

A good theory should at least meet the following criteria. Critically evaluating it means assessing the extent to which the theory meets these criteria and identifying any implied weaknesses:

Critical Question Criteria Asked

- Origins and Context When and under what circumstances was this theory born? Are past findings still valid today?
- Implied Assumptions What is taken for granted and not proven? Do these assumptions still reflect current reality?
- Logic and Consistency Is the reasoning sequential and mutually supportive? Are there any contradictions within it?
- Scope of Explanation What phenomena can be explained? What is intentionally left unexplained or considered unimportant?
- Correspondence to Reality Does the explanation correspond to actual experience? In what ways does the explanation deviate?
- Explanatory Power How deep and to what extent is this theory able to explain cause and effect?
- Limitations Under what conditions does this theory become invalid or less accurate?
- The main principle of critical evaluation: no theory is perfect and no theory is completely wrong. Every theory has advantages that are its strengths and weaknesses that are its limitations. The goal of evaluation is not to reject or praise a theory, but rather to determine exactly what the theory can explain and what it cannot.

The Nature and Benefits of Theoretical Synthesis

Synthesizing a theory means combining insights from different theories into a unified understanding [6]. Synthesis isn't simply summarizing or listing opinions. It means finding common threads, parallels, complementarities, and a unified perspective that transcends the perspectives of each theory individually.

The benefits of theoretical synthesis include:

- Overcoming partial weaknesses: The weakness of one theory is often the strength of another theory.
- Broadening horizons: Complex business phenomena can be viewed from multiple perspectives at once.
- Perfecting understanding: What is incomplete in one theory can be completed by another theory.
- Generates new insights: Confluence of insights gives rise to richer and deeper understanding.

METHOD

This research employs a critical review and theoretical synthesis approach. Several key theories in business and management are examined in depth, systematically evaluated, and then synthesized into a more comprehensive and balanced framework. The analysis focuses on uncovering implicit assumptions, comparing perspectives across theories, exploring points of convergence and conflict, and developing new insights that address the weaknesses of previous theories. [7]Theoretical synthesis is conducted by collecting and comparing relevant theories, then identifying similarities and mutually reinforcing insights. Next, the researcher understands the differences between the theories and determines whether they are truly contradictory or merely explain different aspects of the phenomenon. The next step is to identify complementary elements, using the strengths of one theory to offset the weaknesses of another. These insights are then compiled into a comprehensive and balanced framework. Finally, the researcher needs to state the limitations of the synthesis results and any remaining unexplained issues.[8]

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[6] Mareta, A., Fitrisia, A., & Fatimah, S. (2024). Theoretical thinking in science: Foundations of scientific theory and its implications. Citizen: Indonesian Multidisciplinary Scientific Journal, 4(4), 227-234.

[7] Rahman, A., Sari, NMW, Sugiarto, M., Abidin, Z., Ladjin, N., Amane, APO, ... & Haryanto, E. (2022). Social Science Research Methods. Bandung: Widina.

[8] Erlianti , D., Hijeriah, EM, Suryani, L., Wahyuni, L., Sari, N., & Hartutik, D. (2024). Research Methodology: Theory and Its Development. Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Critical Evaluation of Major Theories

Theory	Key Insights	Strength	Limitations/Implicit Assumptions
Scientific Management (Taylor)	Efficiency and best methods are the keys to productivity	Finding effective and measurable ways of working	Assuming that humans move solely for the sake of: ignoring feelings, social relationships and personal growth
General Administrative Theory (Fayot)	Management can be learned from general principles that apply widely.	Provide an orderly and comprehensive framework	Assumes a relatively stable environment: principles become rigid when conditions change rapidly.
Mayo's Human Relations Theory	Attention to people increases morale and results.	Discovering the importance of social relationships, recognition and participation	Tends to ignore necessary structures, rules and material rewards
Systems Theory	An organization is a unit that is interconnected with its environment.	Seeing the whole picture and the interrelationships between factors: not looking at things in isolation	Too general and broad: difficult to apply in detail in everyday decision making
Contingency Theory	There is no absolute best way, it depends on the situation.	Identifying bigotry in one method: demanding context sensitivity	Sometimes too flexible that it loses clear and consistent guidelines.

Key Insights Theory Strengths Limitations / Implicit Assumptions

Scientific Management (Taylor) Efficiency and best methods are the key to productivity Finding the most effective and measurable way of working Assuming humans are driven solely by money; ignoring feelings, social relationships, and personal growth. [9]Taylor sought to find the most effective way of working through observation, measuring time, dividing work, and systematically selecting and training workers. With this approach, work is not done simply based on habit, but based on methods deemed most efficient. This theory made a major contribution because it introduced the importance of measurement and standards in work. However, its weakness is its view of humans which tends to be too simplistic. Workers are seen as primarily motivated by economic or monetary rewards. Factors such as feelings, social relationships, job satisfaction, the need for recognition, and personal development receive less attention.

General Administrative Theory (Fayol) Management can be studied from broadly applicable general principles Provides an orderly and comprehensive framework Assumes a relatively stable environment; principles become rigid when conditions change rapidly Henri Fayol believed that management can be studied through general principles that can be applied across organizations. Fayol developed a number of management principles related to the division of labor, authority, discipline, unity of command, coordination, and the allocation of responsibility. [10]This theory provides a more orderly framework for understanding how organizations should be managed. The advantage of Fayol's theory lies in its comprehensive nature, which allows it to be used as a basis for running an organization. However, this theory tends to assume that the organizational environment is relatively stable. In rapidly changing conditions, applying the principles too rigidly can make the organization less able to adapt.

Human Relations Theory (Mayo) Attention to people increases morale and work results. Finds the importance of social relationships, recognition, and participation. Tends to ignore the structure, rules, and material rewards that

[9] Rizaludin, D., & Astuti, D. (2025). Literature Review: Human Resource Efficiency to Increase Productivity and Profitability in the Industrial Sector. Journal of Business Economics and Management | E-ISSN: 3063-8968, 1(4), 990-994.

[10] Sihombing, IHH, Sawitri, I., Murah, H., Tanjung, A., Handayani, PD, Putri, DA, ... & Adhiyani, OR (2026). Management: Concepts, Principles, and Applications. Yogyakarta: Star Digital Publishing.

are still necessary. The Human Relations Theory developed by Elton Mayo emerged as a critique of approaches that overemphasize productivity and economic aspects. This theory asserts that attention to people can increase morale and work results. Social relationships, recognition, communication, and worker participation are considered to have an influence on motivation and productivity.[11]

Systems Theory Organizations are interconnected entities with their environment. See the whole picture and the interrelationships between factors; do not view them in isolation. Too general and broad; difficult to apply in detail in daily decision-making. [12]Systems Theory views organizations as a whole consisting of various parts that are interconnected and interact with the environment. Changes in one part can affect other parts. This approach helps managers see the organization as a whole and not view problems in isolation.[13]

Contingency Theory There is no absolute best way; it depends on the situation Avoids fanaticism in one method; requires sensitivity to context Sometimes too flexible, thus losing clear and consistent guidelines. Contingency Theory argues that there is no one absolute best way to manage an organization. Management methods must be adapted to the situation, environmental conditions, organizational characteristics, and the problems faced. The advantage of this theory is that it makes management more flexible and not fixated on one method. However, too much flexibility can cause an organization to lose clear and consistent guidelines in making decisions.

Comparison and Complementary Disclosure

The results of the critical evaluation show that the above theories appear to be different but actually complement each other:

1. The Relationship and Complementarity Between Management Theories

   Essentially, various management theories cannot be viewed as stand-alone and completely contradictory. Each theory arose from specific circumstances and problems, thus having a different focus in explaining how organizations should be managed. Therefore, although each theory has its weaknesses, they are actually complementary. The weaknesses of one theory can be strengthened by another. By understanding this relationship, management can be understood more comprehensively than just one perspective.

   Scientific Management, developed by Frederick W. Taylor, made significant contributions by emphasizing efficiency, productivity, the division of labor, and the use of optimal methods for completing tasks. This approach taught that work needs to be carried out systematically and measurably so that the resources used can produce optimal results. [14]This thinking remains relevant in modern organizations, particularly in the management of time, costs, labor, and production processes. However, the weakness of Scientific Management lies in its tendency to view humans mechanically. Workers are too often viewed as tools for achieving productivity and are considered primarily driven by economic factors. However, humans have social and emotional needs, as well as a need for recognition. This deficiency was later addressed by Human Relations Theory.[15]

   Elton Mayo's Human Relations Theory places people as a crucial element in organizational success. This theory suggests that social relationships, leadership attention, recognition, communication, and participation can influence employee morale and productivity. Thus, this theory complements Scientific Management by focusing on previously underappreciated human aspects. However, if an organization solely emphasizes human relations, it is likely that organizational structure, division of authority, rules, and procedures will be overlooked. This is where General Administrative Theory provides a complement.[16]

   Henri Fayol's General Theory of Administration emphasizes the importance of order, division of labor, authority, responsibility, discipline, coordination, and unity of command. Organizations require a clear structure so that everyone understands their duties and responsibilities. This structure allows for focused work and facilitates the achievement of organizational goals. However, overly rigid application of administrative principles can be problematic when organizations face rapidly changing environments. Principles previously

[11] Sudirwo. (2025). Introductory Management Textbook. Banjarmasin: Lambung Mangkurat University.

[12] Junaidi, RR, Widyawati, W., Syafrinadina, S., Saleh, L., & Aziza, N. (2025). Research Methodology Reference Book. Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

[13] Muhammad Anwar. (2022). Introduction to Basic Management Science. Second Edition. Jakarta: Prenada Media.

[14] Sari, NI, Nada, RA, Wahyuni, R., Qadafi, MI, & Hadiati, E. (2024). Building a human resources competency base with a targeted job analysis approach. Jurnal Media Akademik (JMA), 2(12).

[15] Hodi. (2022). Introductory Management Teaching Materials. Yogyakarta: Deepublish.

[16] Senny Handayani Suarsa, Rere Paulina Bibiana, Akhmad Supriyanto,…. & Lutfiyanto , Mustika Kusuma Basir , and Arifin. (2025). Introductory Management Textbook. Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

considered appropriate may not be appropriate under new conditions. These limitations can then be addressed by Systems Theory and Contingency Theory.[17]

Systems theory views an organization as a unified whole consisting of interconnected parts that interact with the environment. Decisions or changes in one part can impact other parts. This approach encourages management to look beyond isolated issues and instead seeks to understand the relationships between people, structure, technology, the environment, resources, and organizational goals. However, systems theory tends to be general in nature and does not always provide detailed guidance on what actions to take in specific situations.

These limitations can be addressed through Contingency Theory. This theory asserts that no single management method is best for all situations. The way an organization is managed must be tailored to the situation, environmental conditions, job characteristics, resources, and the problems faced. This approach makes management more flexible and adaptable to change. However, too much flexibility can also create problems, as the organization may lose its standard and consistent guidelines.

2. Critical Disclosure

From this relationship, it can be understood that no single management theory is completely wrong. Each theory has its merits, as each attempts to address specific organizational issues. Scientific Management teaches the importance of efficiency, Human Relations Theory emphasizes the importance of people, Administrative Theory provides structure and order, Systems Theory provides a comprehensive overview, and Contingency Theory teaches the importance of adapting to the situation.

Thus, the weaknesses of one theory can actually be the strengths of another. If management relies solely on Scientific Management, the organization can become too mechanical. If it prioritizes only human relations, structure and discipline can weaken. If it uses only administrative principles, the organization can become rigid. If it uses only a systems approach, its application can be too abstract. Meanwhile, if it uses only a contingency approach, the organization can lack consistent guidance.

Therefore, a more accurate understanding of management is not to choose one theory and dismiss others as unnecessary, but rather to combine the strengths of each according to the organization's needs. Efficiency is still necessary, but it must be accompanied by attention to people. Structure and rules remain important, but they must be flexible enough to face change. Organizations must be understood as interconnected systems, but their application must also be adapted to real-world conditions. In this way, management theories can be used together to produce more balanced, effective organizational management that is able to cope with various changes.

CONCLUSION

Good management is: Developing efficient working methods (Scientific insight), building adequate structure and order (Administrative insight), paying attention to human welfare and participation (Human Relations insight), always seeing the interrelationships between parts and environmental influences (System insight), and adapting all these steps to the situation faced, without being rigid and without following only one method (Contingency insight) and The results of this synthesis are not new theories that replace previous theories, but rather a richer understanding that takes the truth from each theory, places it in its proper place, and avoids the weaknesses that arise if each is used separately. This is the essence of critical evaluation and synthesis: enriching understanding without losing the strengths of each view .

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