

Topic: Theory, Issues & Boundaries

Present: Laurie Mook, Felice Perlmutter, Nuno Themudo, Graham Dover

The conversation was framed by the paper written by John Whitman – Theories, Issues and Boundaries.

The group discussed the relationship between theories, issues and boundaries - for example, does theory frame issues and define boundaries or does theory emerge out of issues? Much depended on how each of these concepts are defined. For example, did boundaries refer to differences between the sectors or to the boundaries of theories? More broadly, the relationship between theory and practice was explored – questions included:

- What should drive our theoretical interest?
- How much should theory be orientated to solving practical problems or offering a lens to thinking more generally about the world?
- What makes a good theory? Is it about operationalization – finding quantifiable ways to test it?
- How generalizable should it be – should we be exploring more focused (? localized) theories?
- How do we use theories – as a way of exploring the world providing us and others insights and perspectives that change over time or do we see theories as somehow discovering fundamental truths?
- How might theories enable and constrain particular ways of thinking and practice?
- How might our ideology shape our theoretical approach and vice versa?

The group discussed the purpose of TIBS and the importance of continuing to explore the connection between theory and practice. The diversity within ARNOVA provides an opportunity to engage a variety of theoretical and practical perspectives. The group considered:

- What connects the theoretical and practical perspectives of the growing ARNOVA membership?
- How might the heterogeneity in ARNOVA membership – reflective of the nonprofit sector – assist or challenge the development of particular theories?
- What is the goal of theoretical development for ARNOVA scholars – to translate dominant theories from other disciplines, generate sector specific theories or create

theories that reach across sectors (or all of the above)? How might this be encouraged and facilitated?

For a more accurate and fuller account please contact the participants!

Many thanks

Graham