Welcome to Wikitheoria

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This document provides a concise, printable alternative to watching the "Welcome" Prezi. Here we will introduce you to the basic ideas behind the system. The purpose of this short intro is to pique your interest about a new way to make and use theories—a simple, low-investment, no-nonsense approach that benefits you, the theory, and the field of sociology. (It's actually kind of revolutionary!)

We'll be covering: **(1) what Wikitheoria is, (2) why we need it, (3) why it's cool, (4) how easy it is, and (5) why we believe you'll like it.** We'll end by pointing you to the **next step**.

(1) Wikitheoria is a new way to share and collaborate on researchable ideas in sociology. It uses a form of web-based crowd-sourcing. This means lots of people each contributing only a small effort to enhance whatever part of the system interests them the most.

There is peer-review, but not the way journals do it. There is a library, but it bears no resemblance to static collections of published objects. It erases the boundaries between readers and contributors, instructors and students, insiders and outsiders. It sharpens the focus on what really matters: sharing ideas, and striving to improve them using a solid foundation of reason and evidence.

Wikitheoria provides infrastructure for organizing the work of a virtually limitless number of contributors, and useful tools for making their work efficient and cumulative.

For the long run, the goal of wikitheoria is to have a user-friendly, ever-improving, discipline-spanning, integrative and efficient, sociological knowledge base.

(2) We need wikitheoria to … foster sensible standards for building and communicating theories in sociology. This is because, in a nutshell, good theories are crucial for progress. Good theories embody a subject area's most reliable and valid knowledge. They inspire new questions and solutions, and they guide our research

However, there's a problem in sociology: We have no shared standards for building, expressing or evaluating theories. To address this problem, Wikitheoria adopts basic scientific standards for theory-building – standards that most of us should be able to agree on.

For instance, the system encourages contributors to define their terms so readers will interpret their work accurately, and to check their logic to avoid contradictions and leaps—problems that occur more often than you may realize. We ignore these standards at our peril. Unfortunately, data are simply wasted on a bad theory—one that's ambiguous or logically invalid.

Wikitheoria offers a neat solution that promotes best practices, in turn fostering greater efficiency in theoretical development, testing and application. It was designed from the ground up to breathe life into theories.

(3) Wikitheoria is cool because... it's a new way to build theories based on the engineering concept of modularization. A modular theory is a small, explicit, minimalized chunk of theory, built with an eye toward potential integrations with other modules. Larger, more complex theories can then be built by searching Wikitheoria's library for relevant modules and taking them off the virtual shelf as needed.

We and our students have shown that theory modularization works.

If adopted more broadly, it will improve how we collaborate, as well as the ways we teach, disseminate, test, evaluate and apply the knowledge that we and others have accumulated. In short, modularization is a potential game-changer for sociology.

(4) Wikitheoria is easy to use. This is because modules are parsimonious, using minimal terms and propositions to assert their claims. Because they are small and manageable, modules are easy to create, and evaluate, and easy to improve upon or repair if there are problems. We provide users with guidelines for each of these activities.

Modularization applies simple tools to complex problems. It's used everywhere—furniture, robotics, satellites, homes, and of course the computer you're using right now. Individually, modules accomplish little or nothing. But, an integrated set of modules, working in concert, will be able to do seemingly impossible things never envisioned by the creators of those modules—things that we now can only begin to imagine.

(5) Lastly, you'll like using Wikitheoria. Sure it has some obvious collective benefits, but what can it do for you?

First, a module can be on any topic that grabs your interest. It can distill an idea you got from Durkheim, or express your own original, cutting-edge contribution, or add incrementally to the work of a colleague.

Second, it weaves your work into a fabric of knowledge. The earlier in time a module is contributed, the greater its potential to become the basis for subsequent work.

Third your ideas become part of a collaborative process. Interested colleagues will work with those ideas, rate them highly, enhance them, apply them, and integrate them with other modules for new and creative solutions.

Finally, because modules are peer-reviewed, if you contribute one to Wikitheoria, you've added a new line to your publication list.

Next Steps. Please consider taking the next steps and contributing just a bit of your time to the wikitheoria effort.

First, please bookmark the homepage.

Second, view or read Building A Theory Module, which will provide you with details on how to create a module or to participate in other ways.

Finally, feel free to contact us at barry@sc.edu with any questions or comments. We'd love to hear from you.

We hope that you'll consider having your ideas represented in this system, or applying your interests and skills in other ways at this early stage of Wikitheoria's evolution.

Thanks!