

The background of the cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the surface. These motifs are simple line drawings of leaves on short stems, some pointing upwards and others downwards.

# **ACTION THEORY**

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**A Primer for Applied Research in the  
Social Sciences**

**Ladislav Valach, Richard A. Young, M. Judith  
Lynam**

 **Greenwood**  
PUBLISHING GROUP

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# Preface

This book is written with the intention of providing readers with an overview of an action theoretical approach to qualitative research. Qualitative research in the social sciences is broad, diverse, and dynamic. Virtually all qualitative research methods endeavor in one way or another to conceptualize, access, and analyze data that are close to human experience. Many undertake this by providing both a framework and methods that allow the findings or results to emerge from the data. In this book we propose an alternative view. Here, the action theoretical paradigm stands as a broad framework in which research problems, explanations, and the data themselves are considered, and hidden assumptions, particularly social representations, are explicated and dealt with. Action theory, research questions, data, and findings are steps in a hermeneutical process requiring the researcher's continuous dialogical exchange. Very broadly, action refers to the goal-directed and intentional behavior of humans. Action theory represents an integrative theoretical and methodological approach rooted in a sound philosophical tradition and made instrumental in empirical research, particularly research that addresses applied issues. This is especially the case in disciplines that require action that is reflective, communicative, symbolic, and practical. Virtually all health professions as well as counseling, teaching, psychology, business, religious ministry, social work, and politics are examples of some of the disciplines for which this approach is appropriate and useful.

This book is grounded in the individual and joint projects of the authors. Ladislav Valach brings to this book an extensive understanding of the social psychology of action and in particular action theory and its application in

health. Richard Young's background is in vocational and counseling psychology, for which action theory is eminently well suited. Judy Lynam, a professor of nursing, adds the particular perspective of an applied discipline and extends the interdisciplinary application of this work.

Action theory is not a common term in Anglo-American psychology and social sciences, although it is found in a variety of theories and metaphors that guide social science research. However, if one thinks of action as an opposing or contrasting term to reflection, one has misunderstood what is intended as the focus of this work. Readers are invited to ground their research in a theoretical or conceptual perspective that is very close to our everyday understanding of behavior, and to incorporate constructs such as goals, intentions, plans, purposes, evaluations, emotions, and feelings, as well as unconscious behavior and social construction.

Chapter 1 is intended to provide an introduction to action theory, including situating it squarely within the problem fields of research; that is, explanation, methods, concepts, and theory. Chapter 1 also outlines a theory of action, encompassing individual and joint action, project, and career, components that make this approach so attractive to researchers in the applied human sciences.

Chapter 2 delineates and describes the research issues and procedures that stem from the action theoretical approach proposed in Chapter 1. Some researchers familiar with action theory may find it easy to skip Chapter 1 and move directly to Chapter 2 for the specifics of using this approach in research. A word of caution to novices to this approach is warranted: Action theory is not simply a series of research procedures that can be implemented without reference to the conceptual approach on which they are founded.

Chapter 3 provides several examples from the authors' research work. Here we have attempted to describe the action theoretical conceptualization on which the research is based and to illustrate various aspects of the research procedures and results. Chapter 3 deals with the possibilities of applying an action theoretical approach in various areas. These short empirical examples, including records and data, provide insight into the research procedures informed by an action theoretical perspective.

Part II of this book contains four chapters in which specific applied topics are described at substantial length, their action theoretical conceptualization is outlined, and, in some of them, empirical material is presented. The research project description in these chapters reaches far beyond a brief description of the research method and procedures, as it includes the conceptualization of the studied processes. To our knowledge neither empowerment, marital transition, suicide, nor rehabilitation has been dealt with in terms of both action theory and goal-directed systems.

In Chapter 4 health promotion processes are addressed and the issue of empowerment is presented from the perspective of action theory. The issue of power in relation to health and illness is an important one (Haug, 1997), and the issue of empowerment is even more salient. It is exemplified in the research project of the family health promotion processes, the results of which are reported elsewhere

(Valach, Young, & Lynam, 1996; Young, Lynam, Valach, et al., 2000, 2001). Its methodology is described and some cases of the empowerment processes are illustrated. Finally, it is argued that the research process informed by the action theoretical conceptualization is itself empowering.

In Chapter 5 the action theory framework is proposed for the investigation of children's adjustment following a divorce or separation. The focus of this chapter is on children's and adolescents' reasoning, with particular consideration of the role of child/adolescent-parent discussion. The action theoretical approach to ongoing communication, on the one hand, and to joint processes, on the other, allows a unique view of the marital transition processes. Two cases exemplify this position. One case is based on a well-monitored parent-adolescent discussion of health-related issues, and the other on a systematic monitoring of a six-month period in which projects related to career development were focussed on. Despite or perhaps even because of the high emotional involvement, particularly on the part of adolescents in this transition, the action theoretical position is particularly appropriate.

Chapter 6 contains a report on a research project dealing with people after a suicide attempt. Using the action theoretical methodology as described in this book and discussing the obtained documents, we argue that suicide processes follow the career-project-action order proposed in the action theoretical conceptualization. Consequently, any professional encounter with people after a suicide attempt can be considered a part of these goal-directed systems. The career-project-action organization is illustrated with two cases obtained in the described project. Some of the issues of this research project were described in more detail elsewhere (Michel & Valach, 1997).

Chapter 7 primarily deals with a conceptual issue. We propose the action theoretical conceptualization for the various processes in rehabilitation. An action theoretical approach can provide an integrating and unifying framework for theorizing in rehabilitation. Broadly speaking, rehabilitation contains organization processes, rehabilitation processes in a narrow sense, and processes of neuropsychological and neurophysiological therapy. Using the action theoretical distinction between action, project, and career, we can accommodate for long-term developmental processes, midterm tasks, and short-term performance. Although this chapter attempts to integrate existing approaches to therapy, rehabilitation processes, and organization development in a common conceptual framework, it is not an armchair construction. These processes are being performed every day in rehabilitation centers and organizations oriented to contemporary thinking in rehabilitation.

Finally, the Appendix is an abridged version of a research manual that resulted from one action theoretical study of health promotion conducted by Richard Young and Judy Lynam. The material provides a step-by-step guide to the implementation of an action theoretical research study. Despite its usefulness to those using this approach, researchers should be alerted that any action theoretical research study requires procedures and implementation that fit the goals and context of that study.

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PART



# Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

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# Action: Problem, Concept, Explanation, Method, and Theory

## **SITUATING THE PROBLEM**

Consider a researcher who faces the task of undertaking research in counseling for family violence. Of course, in her research, she would want to get at the core of the experience, but at the same time is confronted by a number of issues. For example, she wants to insure that the complexity and importance of the treatment of family violence is recognized in her research, and that the research process does not minimize the significance of the topic. Furthermore, she is concerned that the research process may reduce the understanding of the problem to some theoretical or statistical results that may lose meaning for the people who suffer from family violence. She is also concerned that she may be limited in having to define the research problem based on the existing scientific literature in a very narrow and differentiated way, perhaps focusing on a micro issue. Furthermore she anticipates being limited in her ability to incorporate her own understanding of the issues that have arisen from her practice with clients who have perpetrated or suffered from family violence.

Our researcher also soon realizes that the theories about family violence and its treatment (Browne & Herbert, 1997) are segmental and differentiated; for example, there are biobehavioral (Reiss, Miczek, & Roth, 1994), personality (Ammerman & Hersen 1990, 1992), social psychological (Herzberger, 1996; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994), social (Reiss & Roth, 1994; Ruback & Weiner, 1995), structural (Farmer, Connors, & Simmons, 1996), or systemic approaches (Bryant, 1994; Gauthier & Levendosky, 1996; Lehmann, Rabenstein,

Duff, & Van Meyel, 1994; Mones & Panitz, 1994; Mucucci, 1995; O'Keefe, 1994). These theories seem to call for a decision to base her research on one or the other. In considering one theory, she questions whether her research will exclude other theoretical approaches and fail to be integrative. She has come to realize that the various theoretical explanations about family violence themselves determine the way the problem is understood.

It soon becomes evident as our researcher reads the research literature that the theories about family violence are also tied to a range of research methods. Of course, there are the usual quantitative approaches, but she also recognizes that the issue of counseling for family violence can be addressed using a number of qualitative approaches (Bartle & Rosen, 1994; Levendosky, Lynch, & Graham-Bermann, 2000; Murphy & O'Leary, 1994; Newman, 1993; Saveman, Norberg, & Hallberg, 1992; Woodhouse, 1992). In considering the latter, she is concerned that while she may meet her own expectations about meaningful research, it may not be seen as scientific as other research on this topic nor contribute broadly to an understanding of the phenomenon.

In her search for a way to research this problem, our researcher faces a number of dichotomies: She is concerned whether she needs to assume an objective perspective and by doing so relinquish a subjective one; she is also concerned about having to assume an individual rather than a social perspective, if she should use quantitative or qualitative methods, and whether she should focus on conscious or unconscious aspects of family violence.

In this book we propose an approach that may be of assistance to our researcher, an integrative and comprehensive approach that eliminates the need for her to decide between these dualisms. This perspective combines some of the approaches that have recently emerged in areas such as psychotherapy, group behavior, and human interaction; for example, contextualism (Hayes & Hayes, 1992; Pepper, 1942; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996), solution-oriented interventions (O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989), social developmentalism (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986; Brandstädter & Lerner, 2000), and ecological (Schoggen, 1991) and systemic perspectives (Broderick, 1993; Ford, 1987; Jones, 1993). The conceptual framework for this approach is anchored in an action theoretical perspective.

In the next three main sections we address what action theory is, how it relates to issues of explanation that we use and seek in research, and how to gain empirical access to action. In the subsequent three main sections we describe the theory of individual action, group action, and its extensions in project and career. This description of action theory provides a basis for an understanding of its use in research that follows in Chapter 2.

## **ACTION THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION**

Action theory can be seen as a language for use in researching applied tasks that humans engage in in their everyday lives (Valach, Young, & Lynam,

1996; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996). As a theory, it includes, in addition to language, concepts, rules, and prescriptions intended to assist the researcher in accessing human action. Action theory offers concepts distinct from those related to the dynamic of nonliving objects (Frese & Sabini, 1985; George & Johnson, 1985). It is obvious that people use different everyday conceptual language when talking about things than when talking about people. While things lie, stand, or are moved around, people rest, wait, and intentionally go somewhere. This language is shared among groups of people in their belief systems, is rooted in what has been recently conceptualized as social representation (Farr & Moscovici, 1984; von Cranach & Valach, 1983), and is used particularly in the description of action (Heider, 1958; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). The term "social representation" implies that using concepts in thinking and describing what people are doing is shared in communities and also is of social origin (Valach, von Cranach, & Kalbermatten, 1988; Valach, 1990–1991). As such, these concepts also are a part of the linguistic encoding of cognitive processes (von Cranach, Maechler, & Steiner, 1985). They can be ordered and defined for systematic scientific analysis (Kalbermatten & Valach, 1985). An action theoretical conceptualization also suggests that this language and these concepts are a part of our planning, steering, controlling, and interpreting our own action. This conceptualization addresses issues of context; that is, how actions are embedded in situations. In dealing with human behavior, we, as scientists, should utilize and systematize people's everyday conceptualizations about action. By doing so in action theory, it can address the social meaning, manifest behavior, and subjective processes of individuals and groups.

In action theory (von Cranach & Valach, 1983) human behavior is considered as goal-directed action. First, action theory addresses processes of various domains of action. Everything we do as people, from getting up in the morning to tasks associated with our work and leisure time, can be considered as domains of action theory. For example, one can readily understand that helping someone find her way or participating in a self-help group can be considered as goal-directed action.

Second, action can be considered as being organized in a system of interrelated levels. These levels are the level of the social meaning of the action, the level of the cognitive, emotional, and manifest phenomena of the action, and the behavioral level of the action. At the highest level of action organization, the processes rooted in social meaning and their function is social construction. For example, helping a person who is unfamiliar with the streets of one's city is readily understood by participants and observers as goal directed and meaningful. The social meaningfulness of the action is a requirement for any constructive contribution by or for others to join in the action. If one does not understand what is going on, one can hardly contribute to it in more than a random or chance manner. Thus, to act or to engage in action is defined and steered by the goals of agents (Eckensberger, 1996; Pervin, 1989). In observ-

ing someone doing something, lay persons attribute and use goals in making sense of others' movements and behavior. In dealing with a person's behavior as scientists or practitioners, but especially as researchers, we utilize the socially defined concept of a goal in order to segment units of action from streams of behavior. Our family violence researcher is not interested in all of a perpetrator's thoughts and movements, but in those goals and intentions that pertain to violent action. The shared understanding of a goal as reflected in its social definition is relied upon by the actors themselves and by lay persons observing them.

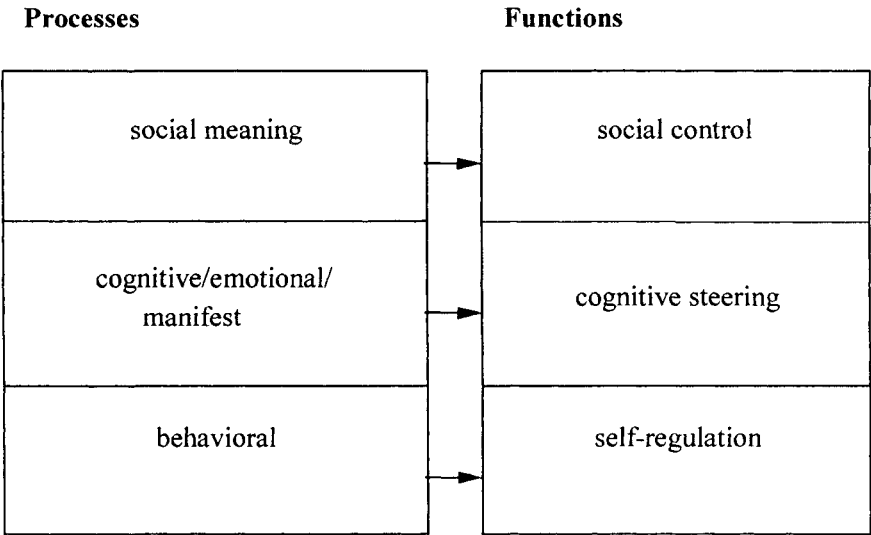
At the intermediate level, action processes are related to the cognitive, emotional, and manifest phenomena of action. Their function is to steer the action based on one's cognitions and to energize it based on one's emotions. In order to help a person to the bus, I might ask her permission—cognitive process of assessing a person in need, emotional process of overcoming one's shyness in approaching a stranger, and actually asking her whether she would like help (manifest phenomenon)—take her luggage, and assist her in climbing the stairs to the bus.

Finally, at the lowest level, behavioral processes can be seen in terms of movements whose function is self-regulation. To continue the example of assisting a person at the bus station, I may find that I have to speak loudly for the person to be able to hear me or find that the heavy suitcase requires more effort and strength on my part than I initially expected, and that I need to lean to the opposite side to counterbalance its weight. Thus, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, in action theory, goal-directed behavior is composed of processes and functions. Action theory integrates molar processes of social relevance with intermediate systems of intrapersonal processes of cognition and emotion as well as behavioral processes mostly analyzed at a micro level of a person's performance. These function to socially control, cognitively steer, emotionally energize, and self-regulate action. Thus we are able to summarize that action theory addresses processes of various domains, at different levels of action, and tied to different functions.

In applying this conceptualization to counseling research, it is possible and beneficial to recognize that counselors engage in actions with people using socially plausible units of behavior. In a counseling discourse a client could address a particular topic and want to make the counselor aware of his or her interpretation of the situation (social meaning level). The client may take certain steps to make his or her agenda clear, apply certain cognitive strategies, and show emotional involvement (the cognitive, emotional, and manifest phenomena levels). Finally, the client may show certain speech and voice features and certain gestures and movements, some of which may be related to the particular situation; others may be habitual (the behavioral level). None of these aspects need nor should be ignored in counseling research.

The action theoretical conceptualization presented in Figure 1.1 enables us to both distinguish three levels of action and integrate them into a coherent

**Figure 1.1**  
**Action Theoretical Conceptualization**



web in which each part deserves equal attention. In doing so, we avoid polarizing behavioral and cognitive theories from each other and these from socially oriented approaches. Action theory can accommodate theories of social influence (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995) and control (Gibbs, 1982), theories stressing the importance of cognitive steering (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Heylighen, Rosseel, & Demeyere, 1990), and theories in which the self-regulatory processes (Zivin, 1979) in a motor action are valued highest (Colley & Beech, 1988; Turvey & Kugler, 1984).

There is a long tradition behind each of these approaches and there have been several attempts to integrate them. We believe that the present effort is more fruitful in several ways. For example, in an applied field such as nursing there are both theories and research that take a social-influence perspective, while others focus on cognitive steering, and still others highlight the motor action (behavior) of patients or nurses. While each of these theories and its corresponding research have made important contributions to the literature on nursing and other health disciplines, action theory provides a means to examine research questions from an integrated perspective. It is not a matter of choosing one theory over another. It is our view that theories in various domains of the applied social sciences emphasize one or other level as either or both process and function, as there are no other levels to focus on.

To extend the example, one may consider the problem of low back pain in nurses. At one level, some researchers examine it as motor and physiological



performance; for example, considering the height of hospital beds in providing care to patients (de Looze et al., 1994; Garg & Owen, 1992; Hellsing, Linton, Andershed, Bergman, & Liew, 1993; Hignett, 1996; Lee & Chiou 1995). Another research and theory-driven approach conceptualizes the evidence for and prevalence of low back pain as related to the performance of tasks connected to attentional and cognitive steering and emotional monitoring; for example, not being aware of the condition under which one might put strain on one's back, not assessing lifting situations adequately, or the adequacy of emotional monitoring in stressful situations (Craufurd, Creed, & Jayson, 1990; Stenger, 1992). Finally, there are those theories that attribute low back pain to the social organization of work situations, the rigid hierarchies, and issues of meaning that derive from such situations (Council, Ahren, Follick, & Kline, 1988; McCreary, Turner, & Dawson, 1980; Schmidt, 1985; Svensson & Andersson, 1989; Turk & Flor, 1984; Turk, Flor, & Rudy, 1987).

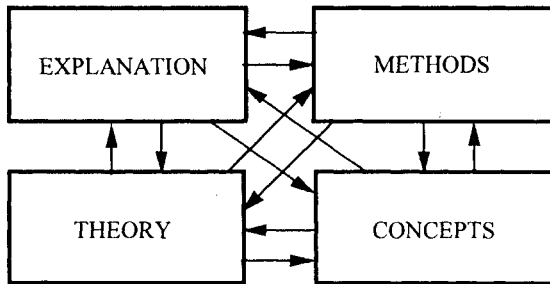
In these examples the theories dealing with the particular problem of "low back pain in nurses" differ in their focus, such as social meaning, action steps and their cognitive steering and emotional monitoring, and motor performance. Each theory attends to a different area of low back pain. We have organized these areas according to an action theoretical conceptualization using the three levels of action organization.

Action theory offers a framework for examining all the levels in an integrated approach. However, before discussing action and action theory in greater detail, the basic features of research inquiry and explanation need to be addressed. For example, a researcher may ask, "Do we understand why people commit suicide?" The researcher may encounter literature that emphasizes explanations, research methods, theoretical concepts, or theories themselves. These four areas—explanation, methods, concepts, and theory—are the problem fields of research; that is, they represent ways in which problems are defined or the starting points for defining research. They are best considered as interrelated and can be understood only in a contextual way (Young et al., 1996). In Figure 1.2 we illustrate the interconnectedness of these fields, which provide a framework for this chapter. The concepts field provided the port of entry for our discussion so far. Explanation, methods, and theory follow in this chapter.

## ISSUES OF EXPLANATION

The "do we understand" of the earlier question represents an explanatory strategy called understanding (*Verstehen*) (Dilthey, 1976). This understanding is based on the assumption that the acting person sees meaning in and behind his or her actions. This meaning influences actions and should be included in research explanations. Although in research the "why" usually represents a nomothetic explanation, an explanation generally is any utterance that answers the question "why."

**Figure 1.2**  
**Basic Issues in Research**

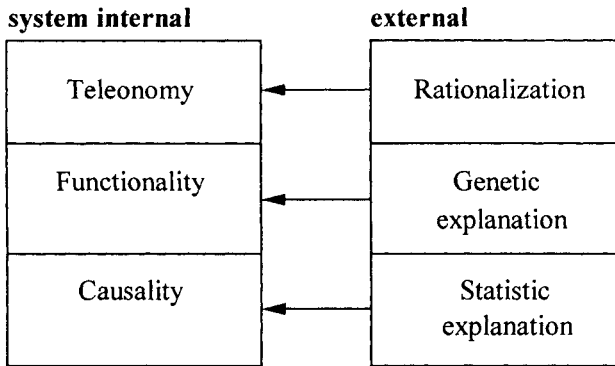


One can readily distinguish among the following types of explanations: empirical, using empirical laws; functional, explaining an event through its contribution to or function for the survival of a system; genetic, explaining the occurrence of an event through the occurrence of previous events;<sup>1</sup> causal, deduction of an event from a causal law and antecedent conditions that constitute a causal complex; rational, rational reasons for an action; statistical, using statistical laws; and teleological, the reason for an event is the goal that should be achieved because of it. Each type of explanation reflects a particular frame of scientific thinking and is seen as incompatible with the others. The complex relationship among these types of explanations (Figure 1.3) is simplified by seeing them in relation to action theory and the levels in which action is organized.

Explanations can be constructed either within the system (that is, they are internal to the system of action-in-process), or from an external stance. Explanations that use a goal as an explanation are internal to the system of action and at the highest level of action organization. At this level of goals, we deal with action in terms of goals we can see. The majority of our actions are guided by goals, either our own or those imposed on us. The goals of the actors or agents define the unit of analysis, a chunk of cognitive processes and behavior. Some would say that to use a goal as an explanation of an action is to provide a teleological explanation; that is, the action is explained by its ends, aims, or purposes. Others may suggest that such an explanation may not be teleological, but teleonomical. In a teleonomical explanation, the naming or identifying of goals are accepted, but there is disagreement that future events (the realization of the goal) can truly explain present action.

At the intermediate level of action organization we deal with steps to the goal. These steps are described in terms of their function in fostering movement toward the goal. For example, we mentioned earlier that asking a person's permission might be a functional step toward helping that person with her

**Figure 1.3**  
**Explanation**



heavy luggage. An explanation based on this level of action is functional. It is important to note that this functional explanation describes the accomplishment of a goal and the success of the action; it is not a function aimed at the survival of the system. Moreover, the relation of action steps to the goal is not simply a rational means–end relationship.

Finally, the lowest level of action organization deals with action elements which are described with physically defined categories. In this case, causal explanations can be used. In describing movement in physical terms, we can, at some point, use observational categories related to the law of gravity and to the ballistics of physical objects when encountering a physical hindrance. When explaining the properties of an action at this level, such as the action of a nurse attending an immobile patient, researchers can refer to distances in centimeters, to positions in degrees, and so on. The explanation that the nearer to the bed the nurse stands the better she may be able to perform the task is causal. Thus, these three types of explanations—teleological or teleonomical, functional, and causal—can be seen as explanations used within the system of action-in-process.

We can now discuss the second group of explanations, those constructed from an external stance. At the first level, if a meaningful dimension of action is subjected to a postaction subjective explanation, rationalization is usually used. When one asks a child why he or she has done something after an interval of time—let’s say a day after the event occurred—his or her explanation can be considered as rationalization. At the third level, empirical data based on a physically defined behavior observation unit are best subjected to statistical explanation. Parametric statistics were designed for dealing with units of such properties. The intermediate level of action organization at which

the succession of action steps is located represents an external perspective that is subject to a genetic explanation. For a genetic explanation, the order of the steps within an action is crucial. A successful social encounter can often be distinguished from an unsuccessful one when the right or optimal order of particular actions steps is performed. This type of explanation is also a part of the external perspective, as we do not experience sequences as an order of equally valued events. In an internal, functional explanation the subjective experience of a sequential order of an action is constructed mostly in the "here and now," although related to the goal. In the external view, though an understanding is developed over a goal attribution and in using an everyday theory of action, the sequential order is clearly represented. Furthermore, from a person's subjective experience the qualitative experience of focusing on what one is doing at the moment is very different from the memory of what one has done previously and what one is going to do subsequently. Looking at this sequence from the external perspective, these steps become equally important.

The issue of explanation is very complex. We addressed it here in only a sketchy way. However, it is important to note that there is a relationship between the way we explain processes and the concepts, theories, and methods. In this way the contextual nature of explanatory processes becomes salient. Conceiving of explanatory processes in the context of concepts, theories, and methods, we speak of contextualizing (Young et al., 1996).

## **EMPIRICAL ACCESS TO BEHAVIOR AND ACTION**

Despite all the research instruments discussed in modern and postmodern psychology, we can basically distinguish between those relying on an external access to psychological processes and those favoring an internal one (Markova, 1987). It is important to note that the terms internal and external are used here in a different way than in the previous section. In that discussion we used the terms internal and external to refer to the locus of constructions of explanations. Here internal and external refer to the access to the person performing an action rather than to the locus of explanations. Internal access refers to using subjective processes and external access to relying on observation. In external access we can distinguish between everyday observation using common sense as advocated in phenomenology (Schuetz, 1962–1966) and symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), and, at the other extreme, the strict scientific observation demanded by the philosophers of the Viennese circle (Carnap, 1956). The latter group postulated that only external scientific observation using conceptualizations stripped of everyday meaning should be employed. In the psychological application of this theory of knowledge, it is assumed that only processes observable in this manner can be of interest. However, internal processes have been traditionally accessed by psychologists by using introspection (James, 1890) and self-reports on internal pro-

cesses, such as used by Gestalt theorists (Duncker, 1945) and more recently by some cognitive psychologists (Snyder, 1979). Phenomenologists and symbolic interactionists also consider subjective processes important, however the uniqueness of their position is in pointing out the value of the everyday knowledge and the social nature of knowledge. These traditions of empirical access to data have been grouped to represent three types, illustrated in Figure 1.4. In clinical practice, these classes of data are used as clinical observation (for meaningful, impression-driven data), objective data (a reliable measurement of “hard” facts), and subjective data (subjective reports of the client or patient on their thoughts, emotions, and experience).

There is no reason to omit any of these perspectives from our systematic research efforts. We do not have any other access, any other sources, or any other possibilities for dealing with human behavior. This book explicates both conceptualization and methods as two sides of the same coin whose relationship must be addressed when undertaking research. As presented in Figure 1.2, explanation, methods, conceptualization, and theory are coconstructed processes. We now realize that the independence of methods and objects of investigation only represents the wishful thinking popular in nineteenth-century physics. Integrating these previously discussed means of accessing action with the research topic does not mean that we will rely on the narrow-minded reasoning of what was considered proper within specific methodological perspectives. That is, it does not mean that we are just comparing three scientific methods that were rigorously applied within different methodological traditions, a strict scientific observation bare of any subjective and social connotations or an unsystematic naïve observation based on purely normative codes and subjective introspection free of any social influences and without any reference to the manifest behavior. Naïve observation should proceed in an organized manner according to the postulate of ecological validity and the focus of the inquiry. Ecological validity refers to the type of construction corresponding to everyday experience. Subjective reports should be related to ongoing actions and rely on acceptable assumptions about knowledge processing and so on. Finally, scientific or systematic observation of human actions and behavior cannot be accomplished by giving up all socially meaningful concepts and insights researchers might have.

## **Everyday Observation**

We recognize that everyday observation is used in applied social sciences research and in practice, although practitioners are not always explicitly aware of doing so. A clinical practitioner uses social representation when considering a client’s or patient’s thinking as a part of the thinking of a culture or an ethnic or social group. In dealing with a client’s idea about other people, a psychologist may use a social cognitive approach. Finally, taking the knowledge achieved in a consensus-building process as the decisive insight, a nurse