



**Book Review: Using Grounded Theory:
How to Develop Theory for Managed Change by Helen Scott**

Reviewed by Michael K. Thomas, PhD
University of Illinois Chicago

Helen Scott's *Using Grounded Theory: How to Develop Theory for Managed Change* (Grounded Solutions Ltd.) is a welcome and timely contribution to the Classic Grounded Theory (CGT) literature. Having taught qualitative research methods in general and classic grounded theory in particular for many years, I've been waiting for a book like this. Written in a friendly, practical, and accessible voice, this book serves as an invaluable resource for novice grounded theorists and applied researchers looking for a clear guide to doing theory-building research in the classic "Glaserian" tradition (Scott, 2025). The book's orientation, tone, and layout make it especially helpful for graduate students, practitioner-scholars, and organizational researchers interested in developing substantive theory that can inform and support systemic change.

Scott is not only an experienced grounded theory methodologist but also a co-founder of Grounded Solutions Ltd., a UK-based consultancy that offers training and support in Classic Grounded Theory (CGT). I first met her in the early 2000s in New York City at a grounded theory seminar conducted by the co-creator of grounded theory, Barney Glaser. Even then, her intellectual clarity and commitment to preserving the core values of CGT were evident. In this book, she draws from two decades of experience teaching CGT across disciplines and professional settings, and the result is a clear, example-rich, and actionable guide for conducting grounded theory research that stays true to its origins while attending to contemporary concerns, applications, and nomenclature.

The book contains nine chapters, plus front matter, an epilogue, and references. Each chapter systematically leads the reader roughly through the stages of CGT. The preface is a primer on using the book with some important background information and history. Chapter 1 answers the question “What is Grounded Theory?” providing helpful analogies and advice for beginners as well as a short list of the grounded theory urtexts. The second chapter provides readers with a sense of where we are going when we dive into the practice of grounded theory. We are, again, offered specific examples with links and QR codes that point readers to extra-textual material. By taking advantage of new technological affordances, Scott guides contemporary readers in a friendly and accessible way. It is notable that the examples offered are related to prosocial global concerns connecting the methodology of classic grounded theory to tangible and relatable issues we all struggle with. The third chapter focuses on collecting data. This is a particularly rich chapter that maps out the grounded theory process. Again, we are treated with many helpful examples, this time from the world of art and art history. There is also a clear and concise section on conducting interviews and writing field notes and/or producing transcripts. Chapters four and five dive into the thorny problem of analysis. This is where I have found that my students struggle the most. I’m delighted to see that complex material is illuminated with diligence and compassion for the novice researcher. Coding and memoing are defined and explained with examples and clarity that are a hallmark of Scotts warm and accessible approach. Chapter six explores the notion of “conceptual integration.” It helps to answer the question of how concepts are related to other concepts in grounded theory. Related to this are the use of theoretical coding and sorting memos. The seventh chapter sheds light on the final stages of grounded theory work which involves situating and illustrating a grounded theory and evaluating grounded theory in terms of its workability, relevance, and modifiability. Chapter

eight is on integrating grounded theory within a research degree. I wish I had this chapter 20 years ago! Scott provides invaluable advice for researchers who need to communicate their work to broader communities of other researchers, academics and other professionals. Chapter nine gives us parsimonious advice and guidance for moving forward with our research work using the notions of synergy and dissonance as lenses for looking upon grounded theory methodology as a conceptual tool that may be used by anyone.

There is an appendix to the book that contains a reprint of Scott's earlier article that appeared in the grounded theory review (Scott, 2009). This is a helpful elucidation of coding, memoing, finding participants' main concern, and how they continually seek to resolve the main concern. This is a distilling of Glaser's advice for grounded theory researchers learning to step into the field with a high degree of theoretical sensitivity while using tools that aid in conceptualization over description.

In short, this book is exciting. Each chapter is enriched with diagrams, tables, examples from the author's consulting practice, and reflective prompts to help readers deepen their understanding of the method. The book contrasts meaningfully with Kathy Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed., 2014), a well-respected text grounded in a constructivist adaptation of the methodology. While both books offer strong guidance for beginning researchers, their philosophical and methodological orientations are quite different.

Charmaz's version of grounded theory is influenced by social constructivism and emphasizes the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant. Her work situates grounded theory within the interpretive tradition, and her writing includes careful attention to issues of reflexivity, positionality, and social justice. Her second edition builds on

these themes and invites readers to think critically about power and representation in the research process.

By contrast, Scott's book follows the Classic Grounded Theory approach articulated by Barney Glaser. In CGT, the emphasis is on discovery—on allowing theory to emerge from data through constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and memoing, without the overt imposition of the researcher's worldview. Scott's prose is notably pragmatic and non-theoretical in tone. She avoids philosophical tangents and keeps the reader grounded—pun intended—in action: how to code, how to memo, when to sample, and how to write up findings as theory.

Where Charmaz's book reads as a rich engagement with constructivist epistemology and qualitative methodology, Scott's reads like a training manual for building theory in action-oriented contexts. The contrast is not one of quality, but of purpose and orientation. Charmaz is deeply embedded in academic discourse and qualitative traditions. Scott, while equally rigorous, is more practitioner-facing, with a keen eye toward organizational relevance and change.

Both authors, importantly, advance the legacy of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, co-founders of grounded theory. Their collaboration in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) introduced the method to the social sciences, but they later diverged in approach. Glaser championed emergence, theoretical sensitivity, and neutrality; Strauss—along with Juliet Corbin—moved toward more structured coding frameworks. Charmaz further evolved the method through constructivist epistemology. Scott's work, however, is firmly anchored in Glaserian CGT, offering a much-needed resource for those who want to practice grounded theory as Glaser envisioned it.

Helen Scott's contributions are not limited to this volume. She has authored and co-authored grounded theory studies in leadership, change management, and organizational

development. Her firm, Grounded Solutions Ltd., provides training that reflects this book's structure and values. Through workshops and coaching, she has helped thousands of professionals—many outside academia—develop and apply grounded theories to real-world challenges.

As a faculty member who has taught qualitative research at the doctoral level since 2003, and whose own scholarship focuses on culture, identity, technology, and learning, I find Scott's book highly compatible with practitioner-oriented dissertations and applied education research. My own published work often intersects with themes of educational equity, cultural psychology, and narrative methods—areas where CGT offers a powerful framework for discovery and interpretation. I regularly work with doctoral students navigating complex educational systems, and this book will now be at the top of my recommended reading list for those using CGT.

Finally, it is worth noting Scott's tone and approach. The book is personable, accessible, and grounded in practical wisdom. It feels like being coached by someone who knows the terrain intimately and genuinely wants you to succeed. That tone—combined with methodological clarity, visual aids, and a strong alignment with CGT values—makes this book not only a methodological guide but also a pedagogical companion.

In summary, *Using Grounded Theory* is a vital resource that fills a gap in the CGT literature. For beginning researchers, it offers a guided path. For experienced scholars, it provides a helpful tool for mentoring others. And for the grounded theory community more broadly, it affirms the enduring value of the Glaserian tradition while responding to contemporary demands for usable, credible, and theory-driven change. *Using Grounded Theory: How to Develop Theory for Managed Change* is an invaluable resource for novice grounded theorists, applied researchers, and anyone seeking a clear, example-rich introduction to Classic Grounded Theory.

It is not a substitute for Glaser's original works, nor does it attempt to be. Instead, it is a bridge: from theory to practice, from data to insight, from novice to practitioner. Helen Scott has given the CGT community a workhorse of a book. It is at once accessible, pragmatic, and true to its roots.

I want to emphasize that this book is not a replacement for the classic grounded theory urtexts such as *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978), *Doing Grounded Theory* (1998) and several others. It is, however, an excellent complement for both novice and more advanced researchers alike. This book truly cuts through the noise around GT to bring clarity to the process of doing GT. Scott takes the position that GT is neutral conceptual tool that can be used with any theoretical/philosophical perspective. She focuses on the practical matters of how to generate relevant and useful theory whatever the perspective the researcher takes. I expect to use this book with my students for many years to come.

References

- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine De Gruyter.
- Scott, H. (2009). Data analysis: Getting conceptual. *The grounded theory review*, 8(2), 89–112.
- Scott, H. (2025). *Using grounded theory: how to develop theory for managed change*. Grounded Theory Online.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

© Michael K. Thomas, 2025