GROUNDED THEORY REVIEW
An international journal

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November 2006

Grounded Theory Review, Vol 6 (Issue #1), 61-78

The online version of this article can be found at:

https://groundedtheoryreview.org

Originally published by Sociology Press

https://sociologypress.com/

Archived by the Institute for Research and Theory Methodologies

https://www.mentoringresearchers.org/

Growing Open: The transition from QDA to Grounded Theory

Astrid Gynnild, Ph.D.

Abstract

Doing a PhD can principally be carried out in three ways; firstly by applying existing theories on new data, secondly by theoretically comparing existing theories and thirdly by generating a new theory. Choice of approach of course depends on awareness and accessibility of alternatives. In essence, most PhD studies are exploratory journeys in a jungle of descriptive methodologies based on very uniform data. In this paper, the author elaborates the exploratory research process that subconsciously, and later consciously, required a shift from the initial QDA approach to grounded theory. The cutting point was discovering the multifaceted implications of the all-is-data dictum in GT.

Introduction

Data collection and data analysis is crucial for the way research is conducted. It concerns research methods, research settings, data sources, amounts of data collection and what to look for in the data. The implications of "all is data", as conceptualized by Barney Glaser, can therefore not be overestimated. In practice, the "all is data" statement brings us right to the core of grounded theory methodology. Its power in capturing change-in-process, which probably is the only steady aspect of modern work life, is immense and incompatible with any other methodology.

Like many other PhD candidates, I started out with a qualitative approach intended to result in applying existing theories on new data – and ended up with a grounded theory. The area of study was news professionals in multimedia and cross-media companies in Norway, and how they coped with rapidly changing conditions for work. Reflecting back on the exploratory processing that lead to the sudden and definite switch in

methodology, it appears that the transition from QDA to a grounded theory approach required a parallel process of growing open.

After several months of concentrated qualitative efforts, I had come to a point where I was unconsciously searching for a methodology that could include a more diverse range of data sources than the typical quantitative or qualitative approaches. It was a troublesome period during which a main concern was loss of time and lack of meaningful, productive progress in the study. By the time, I did not know grounded theory. Consequently, options for theory generation instead of descriptive verification of existing theory were out of sight. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will provide some of the reflections and questions that lead to the transition from QDA to a grounded theory approach, followed by a further elaboration of some all-is-data implications.

By the time of methodological shift, the data already collected included hundreds of pages of statements illuminating more facts and details than could possibly be handled in a highly detailed, descriptive dissertation. My initial aim had been to study the development of multimedia journalists in three large Norwegian multimedia houses, descriptively comparing similarities and differences. So far, all the data stemmed from qualitative interviewing of news reporters in these news corporations. The in-depth, semi-open interviews, as the genre is called in qualitative research, were taped and transcribed verbatim. Some of the interviews had been factor analyzed according to q-methodological principles, a branch within phenomenology. Two typologies had come out of analyzing the six first interviews. Now the question was whether to continue on the same track with the 14 next interviews.

Incubating

At this point, I had been through the preparing and concentrating stages of exploratory processing, which is a basic process in any kind of knowledge work. Now incubating was reached, or rather, the chaos stage. I was in a state of confusion and bewilderment, feeling overwhelmed by facts, data, and other kinds of impressions waiting to be sorted. Therefore, I took a long think break. The thought of another mathematical round of data feeding based on forced choice did not contribute to raising my levels of energy. Rather, it was accompanied by restlessness and

discomfort, a theoretical unrest. What was actually going on? Was this the best way of handling the data? What data was there, actually? The study had come to a crossroads. One option was sticking to it; just continue with more qualitative interviews and develop more "experimental designs". The other option was a more thorough analysis of existing data, combined with a search for other analytic approaches within phenomenology. A third option was to explore other theories and methods.

The period called for mental and physical withdrawal from the PhD project. Later, when reading grounded theory, I realized that it was a period of intensive subconscious processing. In this phase, I was messing around "not doing proper work". In reality, I was waiting for the best idea or approach to become conscious. To sort things out, I turned to reflection through wondering (Grendstad 1986). A mind map was made, listing the issues that up till then were registered on the broad topic of journalists and journalism in multimedia settings. A number of thinkable empty spots were uncovered, and finally a crucial question arose: What is the potential of phenomenology in exploring further data in this particular field?

When reading some of the interviews for a second or third time, I was struck by certain patterns that repeatedly emerged. Some traits appeared not to be restricted to the news corporations under study; rather, they seemed to reflect more general patterns in journalists' everyday work. The impression became even more evident as the interview data was supplemented with written data from books, articles and relevant websites, and also, informal conversations with journalists.

In some matters, patterns did not seem to depend on neither structural conditions of work nor individual age. In other cases, specifically structural conditions or age seemed to be at the fore. I was repeatedly struck by the absence of specific issues when interviewing news reporters. This issues-not-mentioned phenomenon appeared to be a great puzzle. Work tasks and questions taken into consideration, several issues that obviously were on the respondents mind, simply lay "underneath" the exposed levels of data.

Gradually, the awareness of other vague signs during communication with interviewees grew. It was like tiptoeing on a spiral; discovering one sign led to the discovery of the next. The

signs were exposed as restlessness, engagement, non-engagement, vigorous contributing, active and passive resisting and risk-taking, just to mention a few. They could be expressed in a number of ways. For instance, when talking to journalists who smoked, either at work or at leisure settings, their smoking patterns became interesting to recall. When approaching issues that were really on their minds, they instinctively picked up a cigarette. At meetings in the newsroom, I recalled observing that some people showed up physically every time, but rarely said anything during the daily brainstorming sessions. Others always managed, in some way or other, to position themselves at a physical distance from the rest of the group. I consistently wondered why, and also asked managers and the reporters themselves. The problem was what to do with answers – since they did not come out of any formalized interview situation. Several times, journalists also called off-the-record after interviews. They wanted to talk about things that were not easily mediated in other people's presence.

I was struck by the many layers of communication. One aspect was body language, another aspect was verbal secrecy. They both have to do with social exposure and social cover-ups, with norms of expression and indirect communication. But where could such observations fit in? In short, since a variety of social and verbal signs emerged again and again, how should they be treated? Would it be scientifically ethical to pretend that some signs simply didn't exist? If not, how could all this data be integrated into the analysis?

While working on these thought experiments, it became clear to me that clinging to the descriptive study of three multimedia organizations would not only mean an overwhelming amount of work; it would also limit the research scope and hence the research results. The beginner approach had set me up for a description capture based on very uniform data, a capture from which I was now searching for ways to escape. What did I really want to make a study of? At this point, the dilemma of generalizability still seemed insolvable. How could the general patterns I was on track of be mediated? Phenomenological methods, at least q-methodology, appeared to be too narrow and too rigid for the field of interest, so what could be done? Should the q-findings simply be left behind in order to carry out a re-start?

Eureka

The dilemma was presented to a friend working in another academic field. He asked whether I had heard of grounded theory. His short message was “In grounded theory you go back and forth between data collection, analysis and sorting. Data decides where to go next and you learn how to conceptualize. It’s all concerned with data, what data to look for and how they are to be handled. All is data, you know. Just start reading Glaser’s books.”

At the library, I opened a book where Glaser explains “all is data” this way: "exactly what is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever the source, whether interview, observations, documents. It is not just what is being, how it is being and the conditions of its being told, but all the data surrounding what is being told (Glaser 2001, p. 145). Exactly this paragraph contained all the information that I needed to overcome the data overwhelm and theoretical restlessness manifested during the incubating period.

In reality, by switching to a grounded theory study all the data that so far did not “fit in” were usable and could be incorporated just like other kinds of relevant data. Eureka stage was finally reached. Eureka is known as the moment of discovery, the moment when new insight breaks through. It is a mental state associated with high spirits, exhilaration, relief, glow, and energy. I experienced that when eureka moment is reached, the rest of the task is done with more ease, since energy arousal is a physical sign that one is intuitively heading in the right direction. I was on my way to a grounded theory approach, which in practice meant that I was heading towards the two last stages of exploratory processing, namely elaborating and presenting.

Since a considerable amount of data was gathered before the switch from QDA to grounded theory, the process of integrating the data into the GT approach needs to be explained. First, data sources in relation to the ‘all is data’ concept will therefore be elaborated, followed by some practical aspects of the interrelationship between data, research settings and research methods.

Reworking Data

The switch to grounded theory methodology yielded a total reworking of data and the preliminary draft. The existing slices of

data, such as the interviews and the many field observations that up to this point had only been stored in my own mind, provided a rather confusing picture of the research scene. It was a great relief to find out that in 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory', it is emphasized that a great variety of sources contributes to building a dense and rich theory. Different kinds of data, or slices of data, allow a multifaceted investigation of the research area.

The possible integration of all kinds of data made it clear that all the data collected could be valuable in the generation of a grounded theory. All the interviews, the q-sample and the unwritten observations and questions could be good guides to further work; they were simply different kinds of data. After reading more about grounded theory, the first step in the "new" data analysis was substantive coding of the verbatim interviews. The systematic coding actually revealed what I had intuitively sensed before switching to grounded theory: Much of the same data appeared again and again in various facets.

I realized that now the initial "walking survey" tendencies were grounded in a systematic data analysis. Specifically, this systematic analysis and continuous grounding in a wide array of relevant data is a fundament that separates conceptual research from, for instance, journalism. In several of his books, Barney Glaser points to the fact that with growing experience, most of us are "walking surveys"; the missing link is the systematic analysis of inherent data.

As a researcher, I now experienced that the most important question one should continuously ask is: Where do I obtain the most relevant data, and where should I go next? Which groups and subgroups need to be visited now (Glaser and Strauss 1967)? In practice, such theoretical sensitivity requires the analyst to be constantly on the alert as to what emerges from the data, and flexible enough to switch from one kind of data collection to another as it becomes necessary. The analyst is continuously challenged by the fact that the data decides: "As he collects data his job is to deal with exactly what is happening, not what he would want to happen, not what his own interest would wish the data to be. The data is not 'truth' it is not 'reality'. It is exactly what is happening. The GT researcher has to be oriented to each course of action having its own meaning. And once the GT researcher lets this meaning emerge and sees the pattern, he/she will feel 'sure' that this is what is going on. This sureness cannot

be known beforehand. It emerges conceptually through constant comparison." (ibid. p.146)

During the study, I experienced a growth in the awareness of what was going on in the empirical field. Glaser points out how theoretical sensitivity is used to uncover data that otherwise might be overlooked: "Grounded theory is based on the systematic generating of theory from data that itself is systematically obtained from social research. Generating theory and doing social research are two parts of the same process. How the analyst enters the field to collect the data, his method of collection and codification of the data, his integrating of the categories, generating memos and constructing theory – the full continuum of both the processes of generating theory and of social research – are *all* guided and integrated by the *emerging* theory." (Glaser 1978, p. 2)

A couple of times I was really tempted to "cover up" some strategies that news people frequently turn to, both at an individual and a structural level. The cover-up concept, as developed by Argyris (1986), points to a widespread human defense mechanism. When people feel embarrassed or threatened, the tendency is to oversee the phenomenon that causes such feelings. Both individuals and groups cover up. According to Argyris, this simple fact accounts for much of the counterproductive actions in organizations. For instance, if a manager has set unrealistic time limits for an investigative journalism project, it is likely that one or more journalists involved will engage in strategies to cover up the manager's mistake so as not to embarrass him. They will therefore pretend not to notice.

Like journalists, sociologists are consistently challenged by cover-up actions taking place in various settings. However, during the theory building, I realized that with grounded theory, it is not possible to build a dense and credible theory if you are not totally honest about your findings (Glaser 2001, 2006). So I had to force myself to accept some of the data, although I was quite astonished and actually did not personally welcome what emerged.

Shortly before revising and restructuring the drafts into the final version, most of the collected data was reviewed for a third time. The review resulted in quite a few, new concepts. From this

experience I was reminded of the old dictum that 'you have to learn to see in order to see, and you have to learn to hear in order to hear' – and it all takes considerable amounts of focused time to think and structured manual work. However, when carrying out grounded theory, these restructurings are extremely energizing and personally developing. Restructurings help the analyst to uncover higher levels of abstraction in the data. This in turn is practical evidence of how easily grounded theory can be modified at any time. It connects grounded theory with the roots of cognitive processing, the very essence of empirical research.

Memoing as Parallel Processing

A process that took place parallel to the open coding of interview data was the writing of memos. In the beginning, large piles of memos were written; it was like a stream that had been waiting to be released for a long time. The first memos were ideas that came to my mind while coding the interviews. The next memos were based on visual observations in the field, data which so far had not fitted in anywhere in the study. Notes and reflections were jotted down, for instance respondent comments before and after the "official" interviews, gestures at meetings and discussion topics during smoke breaks.

During the whole process of generating the theory, memos have served as notes to myself on ideas and concepts and their relationships. Ideas are like cats; suddenly they are everywhere, and then they are gone and they don't care about where you are, what you are working on or whether it is day or night. So you have to seize them at once. The good thing about ideas is that as soon as you get them down on a piece of paper, they will not vanish but are accessible for later analysis.

Memo writing is discussed here because it proved to be a necessary tool in grasping several types of data and then keeping the ideas for further analysis. Before ideas come to the surface and can be stored in memos there is always a period of what Glaser has termed preconscious processing. The flexibility of memoing allows the analyst's pre-consciousness to work on an idea as long as necessary, although any emerging idea can be taken care of when it pops up, irrespective of working hours or other structural conditions. The first round of constantly comparing data slices from interviews, observations, informal talks and reading periodicals for journalists, journals,

newspapers, analytical articles and other relevant literature clearly suggested that the interviews alone provided rather uniform data. The division between interpreted or properline data, baseline data and vague data in grounded theory is of great value in understanding how uniform data can limit the generation of a dense and rich theory.

Properline data tends to be the easiest accessible data, particularly within preset research frames such as taped interviewing. During interviews, people often say what they think they are expected to say. Sources tend to give the analyst either interpreted information or information they think is appropriate to the situation. Baseline data refers to data gathered when sources are more relaxed and do not have to worry about, for instance, colleagues or managers, but feel free to express what is really on their minds. Unexpected off-the-record phone calls that I received after interviewing are examples of baseline data.

Observations of non-verbal communication, such as body language, positioning at meetings, informal group divisions and the like are examples of vague data. Vague data cannot bear a theory alone, but it can contribute to an initial foothold on theoretical sampling and where to go next. The various layers of relevant data help the analyst to achieve as much diversity in the emergent categories as possible and ensure that the hypotheses are firmly grounded.

In parallel with data gathering in the field, I started systematic readings of journalism magazines and of literature that seemed relevant to the issues involved. The memo processing speeded up. Several theoretical outlines based on the analyzed data were made, but the outlines always stopped at some point. There were holes in the data that could only be saturated by more theoretical sampling.

Research Methods and Settings

The discussion of variety in data collection leads us to the next issue on which we need to shed light, namely research methods and research settings. As elaborated above, where to go and subsequently where to go next are basic questions in theoretical sampling. Grounded theory's applicability to single units as well as to any number of units makes it possible to search for data in any relevant accessible setting. And, depending on accessibility, a multiplicity of data collection methods can also

be used. The point is to be as flexible as possible in accordance with variations in structural conditions (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In this particular study, methods and settings for data gathering are so closely interrelated that they need to be elaborated together.

The qualitative interviews at the beginning of the research mentioned above were conducted in the newsrooms. To gain admission to the newsrooms the research project was introduced by e-mails to the editors. The interviewees were selected and asked whether they wanted to participate before I entered the newsroom. I suggested interviewing people who held differing views, or at least were of different age and gender and possessing diverse competences. Some names were provided by managers, some by journalists known beforehand, and the final decision on whom to interview was made by me.

Flexible Approaches

In the grounded theory phase of the study, a variety of approaches were tested out to get as close to news reporters and their daily concerns as possible. The abandonment of the research unit meant that relevant data could be gathered in any type of newsroom. It introduced a hectic period of moving in and out of newsrooms during which small and large broadcast media were visited and also online papers and newspapers. A variety of face-to-face informal talks and newsroom observations were the methods mostly used. Some talks could last for five minutes, others for more than an hour.

A phone call or two to editors or managers was usually enough to get free access to observing and talking to news reporters in their daily surroundings in the organizations. Instead of agreeing on dates beforehand, many visits to newsrooms were made just to be "a fly on the wall". The observations proved important to reveal empty spots in the understanding of what was going on. Such issues were pursued by talking informally to people, in open office landscapes as well as in individual offices.

I also joined lunches with journalists individually or in groups, and of course coffee breaks and other intermissions. Wherever and whenever they had time to talk, it was okay with me. Some people were interviewed by phone, others at cafes before or after work, and sometimes the conversations took place

at bars in the evening and at night. There was no longer any need for accurate description; what I needed was data that could help to conceptualize patterns of behavior among the people concerned. Consequently, there was no longer a dependency of either notebooks or tapes. As long as a sheet of paper or a napkin was within reach, the memos that were needed could be written. The liberation from accurate description thinking obviously has a favorable practical aspect. It frees the analyst to handle larger amounts of data, and data of all kinds, without experiencing data overwhelm.

A few times during theoretical sampling, I arranged particular dates with multivariate groups of news reporters. The topic that I wanted the respondents to reflect on was introduced, for instance journalistic creativity. The principle of the "pedagogic sun" (Grendstad 1986) was used as a guide to reflections in writing, followed by a plenary discussion on each news reporter's contributions.

I continuously switched between theoretical sampling, memoing, coding, constant comparison and more theoretical sampling. As the piles of memos grew, the conceptual sorting became more complex. The memos were re-sorted many times during the process; as more and more data was accumulated, the categories and properties that emerged early in the process needed to be modified. In grounded theory, modifications are usually necessary for rich and dense theory generation. The goal is always to conceptualize empirical data through constant comparison of a variety of data.

Since grounded theory is conceptual, the interrelated set of hypotheses that constitutes the theory is independent of time, space and people. Yet it is emphasized that the theory should be grounded in all possibly relevant data. The emphasis on grounded generation rather than verification means that the only testing possible is experienced relevance and fit in the substantive area. In other words: A grounded theory is only good as far as it goes in explaining what's going on in an area (Glaser 1996). The statement implies that the generation of grounded theory is both a very abstract and a very practical task, and it is always possible to keep correcting, or rather modifying, the categories with more relevant properties.

Illustrations

During the write-up stage of the study I experienced that in conceptual theorization, which is by nature an abstract piece of writing, it is not easy to find the right balance between conceptualization and its illustrations. The first draft of the initial chapters, based on the sorting of conceptual memos, was written very theoretically and with a minimum of illustrations. Feedback from layman co-readers suggested that the theory would be more easily accessible if more illustrations were added. The accessibility aspect is of course very central. A stated goal in grounded theory is that it should be found useful by laymen as well as by experts. The elimination of all illustrations might make the theory very dense and accessible only to theoretical insiders. But also for theoretical insiders, it might be more difficult to understand than necessary. The point is that a lack of illustrations undoubtedly reduces the size of the audience who might find the theory useful.

In reality, the richness and denseness of a generated theory depends to a large extent on successful switching between abstractions and concrete illustrations. Another discovery made when working and reworking the drafts was that the more extroverted the research process became, the more options for illustrations to earn a place in the theoretical outline. I realized that illustrations provide the reader with conceptual breaks. They add a data dimension which makes the theory more meaningful simply because illustrations are what they are, namely slices of empirical data which ground concepts in concrete facts. But illustrations are not examples from reality intended to prove that the theory is correct.

Barney Glaser explains it like this: "The credibility of the theory should be won by its integration, relevance and workability, not by illustration used as if it were proof. The assumption of the reader, he should be advised, is that all concepts are grounded and that this massive grounding effort could not be shown in a writing. Also that as grounded they are not proven; they are only suggested. The theory is an integrated set of hypotheses, not of findings. Proofs are not the point." (Glaser 1978, p. 134)

Problems with Method Mix

After this discussion of the practical application of grounded

theory methodology, I will share some other cognitive discoveries made during the transition from phenomenological to a grounded theory approach. Theoretically, phenomenological research can reach the same levels of abstraction as a grounded theory. A dilemma is that phenomenology, with its emphasis on narratives and rich descriptions, invites the researcher to stay at the description level. No matter conceptualizations that come out of phenomenological studies, they are not systematically grounded in the data nor constantly compared and coded. Additionally, narratives and rich descriptions are the basis for phenomenological research.

In the transition phase from QDA to GT, a question that started buzzing around in my head was: How can phenomenology, concerned as it is with individual experiences in time and space, be successfully paired with the abstracts of grounded theory? Once again I had to reflect on my main concern in this dissertation. How did I want to generate data and how did I want to display my findings? "Researchers not clear on the distinction between conceptual and descriptive get easily confused on whether the theory describes a unit or conceptualizes a process within it," as Glaser writes (Glaser 2001, p 15).

One of the most important aspects of conceptualization is that concepts last forever, whereas descriptions are tied to time and people and are only of value within a concrete setting. When reflecting on these topics, the phenomenological philosophy appeared strong and clear, whereas phenomenology as a research method appeared surprisingly unclear compared to grounded theory. In the area of description versus conceptualization, the paths became blurred.

After reading Barney Glaser's book on descriptive remodeling of grounded theory (Glaser 2003), it became obvious that a method mix would not work out very well. Mixing QDA with grounded theory would most probably downgrade the goal of conceptual theory into a remodeled version of a qualitative descriptive version. While putting these arguments forward, however, I am perfectly aware that I have tested out only a tiny part of phenomenological research approaches. There are certainly a number of other ways to go both within phenomenology and qualitative methodologies as a whole that could have been profitable in a study like this. But it would have ended up as a different type of study.

Contrary to QDA, grounded theory is basically free of epistemological categorizations. While methodology researchers have tried to classify grounded theory as symbolic interactionism, Barney Glaser himself resists all attempts at labeling grounded theory as part of any "ism". He points out that grounded theory is free of ties to any theory of science: Since grounded theory is a hypothesis of the interrelationship between a set of categories, it does not deal with philosophical conceptions of what is "truth" (Glaser 2004).

Researchers start with an area of interest, but with no preconceived view of what problems they will study or how the participants deal with the problems. They are open to what may occur. In grounded theory, the analysts "let the problems and their continued resolving emerge. They trust the fact that the world goes on whether or not they know how and the research issue is to discover a core variable and ensuing theory that accounts for what they are finding is the main concern of the participants." (Glaser 1996, p. xiii)

Now the reader will probably assert that in this particular study, the analyst could not be totally open and ignorant about the area of interest, since nearly twenty qualitative interviews and a preliminary q-sample were carried out before grounded theory was brought into the research arena. True, a lot of data was collected and partly analyzed. However, the uniform data collection alone suggests that the research frame was still wide and unfocused and that I had little systematic empirical knowledge about news reporters' main concerns.

Use of Literature

During the study, literature has been used in three ways: firstly as a preview to sensitize the analyst to the research domain, secondly to provide a theoretical background to the theory, and thirdly as data during theory generation. Some of the references included in the introductory part of the dissertation are integrated into the theory of creative cycling; others only provide a historical backdrop with respect to news reporters' position in media research during the last decades. An overall principle has been to refer to relevant literature successively, instead of devoting a particular chapter to a literature review. According to Glaser (2001), when generating a grounded theory, existing theory and other theory should be treated like any other

data, and it should only be used to the extent that it earns its way into the developing theory.

The best way to learn about grounded theory and its implications is by reading the original literature. Whenever I have had a problem, I have turned to Glaser's books and found the answers and explanations that were needed. Since all his books are thoroughly grounded in data, the information gives a feeling of "deja-vu" which is instructive and energizing.

A principle applied throughout the study has been to check the original sources of grounded theory first, and to keep this information in mind when subsequently reading other researchers' writings on grounded theory. This way of exploring grounded theory theoretically has provided invaluable insight into analyst accuracy variables and also, the troublesome path methodology researchers start on when their data is not well grounded. Moreover, as a former journalist, I have experienced that misunderstandings and misinterpretations can easily start to live a life of their own if you trust second-hand sources too much. One of grounded theory's great advantages is that the methodology is thoroughly explained from start to end in the original literature.

As for integrating other literature into the theory, I have found it fruitful to seek out outstanding works in fields as diverse as organizational theory, healthcare, personal development, psychology and scientific theory. The wide variety of impulses provided by these sources has been more than necessary in the theory generation process. Data from the journalistic domain has been constantly compared to relevant data from other domains of working life, and it has undoubtedly made the theory richer and more general.

The strategy is recommended in Theoretical Sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) because it "maximizes the avoidance of pre-empting, preconceived concepts which may easily detract from the input and the drugless trip (aha moments, eureka, authors' note). It is hard enough to generate ones own ideas without the 'rich' derailment provided by the literature in the same field. The analyst should not worry about coverage in the same field since this literature will always be there." (p.31)

Self Pacing

The process of finding the right balance between theoretical sampling in the field and the reading of literature took time. It challenged me to test out a variety of working methods and being extremely flexible when planning the daily work. When concentrating only on field data for longer periods of time, I became locked in my own thinking. And vice versa; if I became caught up in reading other theorists' works, my own analytical process was blocked. Sometimes I just became overwhelmed by the endless amount of relevant research, and really had to fight to get sufficiently grounded in empirical data to be able to proceed.

The testing out exemplifies the necessity of theoretical pacing, self-pacing and the development of a personal pacing plan when generating grounded theory (Glaser 1978). Grounded theory not only requires joint action when collecting, coding and analyzing data. It requires that the analyst knows his own temporal pacing and manages to develop a personal plan that takes his research into consideration as well as his temperament and private life.

As a methodology, grounded theory provides the analyst considerable autonomy and freedom to pursue his own study under a great variety of structural conditions. The experience during this particular study is that theory generation is such an absorbing and time-consuming project that it needs to be well paired with other aspects of the analyst's daily life in order to work out. Grounded theory takes the time it takes, and it is hard to make an accurate estimate of the time needed. Restrictions on outer frames must of course always be taken into consideration. But within such frames the analyst is dependent upon finding his own plan so that he can establish realistic deadlines and make continuous progress.

Since grounded theory is above all what Glaser terms a delayed action phenomenon, I experienced that it is very important to set aside enough time for subconscious processing. When data is sampled, coded and analyzed, memoing is the helper that attends immediate to all kinds of ideas that might arise as a result of the previous work. Sometimes a concept appears several months or even years after the analyst started working on it. At other times, conceptualization just goes on and

on. The essence is that these creative aspects of theory generation demand analytic flexibility and trust in emergence in order to handle the outside world's expectations. Taking breaks, doing things other than studying, developing rituals to enable you to continue when you get stuck in your own thinking - these are all aspects of self pacing which I have found necessary during the PhD process.

For instance, the first three or four categories of the theory emerged very quickly, and the thought was that finding the core category would happen just as fast. However, it took many rounds of theoretical outlining and a long period of subconscious processing before the interrelationship between the core and its categories was discovered.

After many months of structured work and intensive subconscious processing, I woke up at four o'clock one morning and knew that the core category had emerged. I jumped out of bed, picked a pen and a notepad and wrote memos continuously for several hours. The moment was extremely energizing. It sent her on a drugless trip that lasted for a long period of time and gave me the confidence and power that I needed in order to continue with theoretical sampling, coding and analysis of enough data to generate the theory of creative cycling.

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