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Reading Grounded Theory: The value of exemplifying

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## **Reading Grounded Theory: The value of exempling<sup>1</sup>**

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I designed the [Grounded Theory] troubleshooting seminar to help candidates complete their dissertations. Candidates have many questions that need answering when doing a GT dissertation to get it moving and finished. The seminar focuses on exactly where the candidate is and tries to move him/her to the next step. Problem coverage is achieved by participant-candidates listening to the troubles of eleven other participant-candidates, and after listening, then engaging in an extensive free and open discussion of all the participants' views of what to do within the GT procedural framework. Of course, I keep the discussion, as best I can, on track and guided by GT procedures. The freedom to talk openly about the problems is often hard to control, BUT always very helpful to the candidate whose particular problem is being considered.

The motivation to participate in these seminars is provided by the critical aspect of doing a dissertation to become a PhD. Candidates are committing themselves to this critical career juncture of changing their status from student to doctor. The value enhancement is tremendous. They invest immense resources of time, energy and trust in becoming a PhD. It is a high value achievement. It is a "mystique" passage to surrounding laymen who see with awe only the magic and value involved in the passage.

At the dissertation stage of their graduate study, these candidates worry whether or not they can truly accomplish a GT dissertation. They are highly motivated to find answers to their GT questions, to get the dissertation done and then get on with the career opportunities commensurate with the PhD. The promised career rewards will be a significant change in

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an excerpt from Dr. Glaser's Introduction to **The Grounded Theory Seminar Reader** (Barney G. Glaser & Judith A. Holton, Eds.) Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, pp.vii-xi.

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their lives, which is highly motivating at the candidate stage.

The troubleshooting GT seminar has proven very successful. Subscription to each seminar fills up quite quickly. People come from all over the world. They travel great distances for the help of the seminar. I give them in London, New York City and Mill Valley each year and sometimes in Sweden, France, Scotland and Canada. A few of the countries that candidates come from are Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Malaysia, China, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, England, Canada, Spain, Poland, Germany, Iran and, of course, the U.S.A. - mainly the eastern seaboard and Midwest. Some of my more advanced students themselves have given troubleshooting seminars.

The success of these seminars principally comes from the many PhDs that have been accomplished with its help. The seminar also provides help to the many minus mentorees who have chosen to do a GT dissertation and are studying in a department or context where no one knows GT procedures to help with the research. Also, the seminar helps candidates undo the anti-GT help, given by supervisors who actually think they know GT, but do not. Participation in the seminar often legitimates the GT researcher in a departmental context that does not know how to evaluate GT research and may be doubtful as to its merits. And, the GT troubleshooting seminars have generated a worldwide network of GTers discussing GT issues at a moment's notice and sharing working papers through the internet.

After participating, candidates will often return as observers at the next seminar to further and continue their learning and to experience the open discussion on the myriad problems that emerge in GT research. They may return a second, even third time for more troubleshooting participation as their dissertation research advances. Some will often continue to participate as seminar observers after achieving the PhD, returning to share their success in becoming a PhD and further network in person with old friends.

The papers in this Reader will indicate to the reader a sample of the dissertation product successes of the seminar approach and thereby its total success. Yet the reader can be

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his/her own judge. The papers are parts, sections, extracts or even chapters of the resulting dissertations. It is my hope that candidate-readers of this volume will be inspired to do a GT dissertation, and that PhD readers will be inspired to try GT research and “ok” their students in doing GT research.

This reader has a progressive part in my history of doing readers. It is the sixth reader that I have edited and each has a progressive purpose for learning and doing GT:

**Organizational Careers** (1968): As the reader may or may not know, in the late 1960’s Anselm and I were intrigued by the general implications of a GT core variable. Core categories naturally have general implications, just waiting for doing formal grounded theory, by expanding the GT research on the core category to many substantive areas. (See: B.G. Glaser, **Doing Formal Grounded Theory**, Sociology Press, 2006). We were fascinated by the power of awareness context theory. Anselm wrote a paper, “Awareness Contexts and Grounded Formal Theory” (Ch 17, in **More Grounded Theory Methodology**, Sociology Press, 1994). Together, we also wrote a formal theory of status passage (Glaser & Strauss, 1971) to put over the idea of formal grounded theory. It was originally stimulated by our book, **Time for Dying** (Sociology Press, 1968).

At the same time, it occurred to me to do a reader on **Organizational Careers** (1968), for the purpose of showing 63 articles of research and thought on organizational careers. The reader could then see how the articles were compared to generate concepts for a formal theory on organizational careers. I said, “In general, organizations obtain work from people by offering them some kind of career within their structures. The operation of organizations, therefore, depends on people’s assuming a career orientation toward them.” (Glaser, 1968, p.1) As so much of what we all do is linked with organization, I considered an organizational career as a core category with immense general implication needing a formal grounded theory understanding of it patterns. Indeed, 63 plus other authors agreed. This was my first reader.

My second reader, **Examples of Grounded Theory** (1993) came 25 years later, with a clear and present and

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needed purpose. I said, "In writing **Basics of Grounded Theory** (Sociology Press, 1992), it became obvious to me that what was needed by the myriad GT readers, researchers and users throughout the world was a book of examples of GT papers and chapters. Researchers need models for how the various facets of GT look when brought together into an integrated piece. This applies to both analysis of qualitative and particularly quantitative data. This reader is designed to achieve this purpose." (Glaser, 1992, p.1). Many of the papers in the Examples Reader were written a long time ago, but remain good examples. Their core categories have lasting qualities. With modification for new times and places, the cores still work and are relevant today. They show that cores and the theories that embody them are truly abstract of time, place and people. Their relevance and grab persists. They endure with fit, workability and relevance. The reader of this Reader can also clearly see that the theory in these articles could not have been predicted or forced beforehand, and especially so by the preframing requirements of Strauss and Corbin.

My third reader, **More Grounded Theory Methodology** (1994) was a sequel to "Examples", to help continue the corrections to Strauss and Corbin's **Basics of Qualitative Research** (1990) as explicated at length in my book, **Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis** (1992). My "Basics" book was received virtually all over the world with success for its critique of Strauss and Corbin by helping to clarify the confusion over the conflict that left so many researchers paralyzed in their research, especially candidates doing dissertations and facing a dissertation committee.

It tried to show how Strauss and Corbin had simply bypassed the scholarship necessary to truly advance GT methodology. They did not take what was said previously on GT methodology and then take it a step further to advance GT. It shows how other authors have deep impressions of GT and how their scholarship is used in an effort to extend GT methodology to adjust it to current concerns. These articles revitalize GT as it was originated in contrast to the Strauss and Corbin remodeling.

My fourth reader, **Grounded Theory, 1984 to 1994**

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(1995), was a two volume work of 48 articles and papers. I started the Reader with the caveat, “I can create GT methodology, I can write GT and I can teach GT, BUT I cannot control how GT methodology is used.” (Glaser, 1995, p.3). The Reader clearly indicated this simple fact. The articles in this Reader put into relief both the gains of emergence and the banes of forcing techniques that still remain, so that researchers can get on with giving up forcing for total emergence.

The articles show how GT can be used quite well, from beginning to end, to its fullest extent but forcing and preconception are still permitted to insert themselves at various juncture in the studies. What these articles show is not so much that forcing operations still remained in 1984-94, but the importance of shedding routine research forcing techniques so that the generation of theory could truly emerge. As such, the articles are models to be used as learning challenges to giving up forcing.

What came at some surprise to me was that the articles also showed that GT is used all over the world and how widespread its use had become in many disciplines. It also came as a surprise to me how much human resources of time and money were going into GT research and how many careers are based on its starting with the dissertation. GT has emerged as a high impact methodology, changing the perspective of many researchers and beginning to change the perspective of many disciplines. GT had come to stand on its own as a theory of method.

My fifth reader, **Gerund Grounded Theory: The Basic Social Process Dissertation** (1996), followed through on the emergent relevance of GT for dissertation research, which I had learned doing the 1984-94 Reader. The preponderance of use for GT appeared to be for masters and doctoral theses and dissertations; this because of GT's ability to explain high impact dependent variables. The researchers doing dissertations and theses were continually asking me for help on a myriad of issues they faced in their research and with their committees.

It is my observation that studying dissertations in one's

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field is the best way to learn how to do one, to write one and to see what one looks like. In short, reading dissertations is a modeling phenomenon on many dimensions. The purpose of “Gerund GT” was to provide models for GT dissertations based on the basic social process theoretical code model. The Reader was to be used as a normative model to emulate.

What was modeled in this Reader of actual dissertation extracts is the conceptualization of the dissertation, the core process and several of the properties and bents and uses of GT methodology by the writer. The Reader helped those who read it to argue their choice of doing a GT dissertation to a doubtful dissertation committee committed to another methodology inimical to GT. The Reader was used to verify, sanctify and legitimate the GT dissertation. I personally know the value of the papers included since all but one author participated in my GT seminars held at University of California, San Francisco.

This, of course, gave me the idea to do the present Reader of papers and articles written by students who have participated in my troubleshooting seminars held over the past 10 years. These indicate the fecundity of my seminars and GT successes in PhD awarding and journal article publications that have come from the seminars. They indicate, as I said above, the spread of GT throughout the world by various disciplines concerned with explaining high impact dependent variables. As models, however varied, they are excellent. So, dear reader, I invite you to read, enjoy and think.

Lastly, to further the “doing of GT”, we begin each paper with a brief introductory paragraph on the general implications of its core category. I trust this will further the interest in generating formal theory; at least in formal GT which takes a substantive GT to a more general level. (See, Glaser, **Doing Formal Grounded Theory**, Sociology Press, 2007) The Reader will see that the papers in this Reader are rich in general implications that can easily spawn the generation of formal theory. The reader should bear in mind as well that these papers are but a few of the many papers coming from the GT troubleshooting seminars. The papers are presented in no particular order. Given the richness of their general implications which run to so many areas of social behavior, they are not bounded by any one discipline or field of study.

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