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Management Research and Grounded Theory: A review of grounded theorybuilding approach in organisational and management research

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Abstract

Grounded theory is a systematic methodology for the collection and analysis of data which was discovered by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's. The discovery of this method was first presented to the academic community in their book 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory' (1967) which still remains a primary point of reference for those undertaking qualitative research and grounded theory in particular. This powerful research method has become very popular in some research domains; whilst increasing in popularity it is still less prevalent in the field of organisational and management research particularly in its original form. This self reflexive paper sets out to explore the possibilities for this imbalance which takes the discussion onto the areas of methodological adaptation and training. It also enters the debate about access to research subjects and provides a succinct argument supporting the notion that grounded theory should simply be viewed as a method that develops empirically grounded conceptual theory.

Key Words: Grounded Theory Approach, Inductive Research, Research Methods.

Introduction

By examining the dominant research paradigms in the organisational and management research field, linked with a review of grounded theory origins, this desk study serves to understand how and why organisational and management researchers contextualise and locate the methodology within contemporary qualitative research. It then allows the authors to build on this platform to show how grounded theory is viewed in the organisational and management research field, particularly from a novice researcher's perspective.

Paradigms and Perspectives

Review the literature and it's not difficult to find the common threads by which researchers classify research methods. The most common distinction is to classify research as either qualitative or quantitative. Denzin and Lincoln's work (2005) provides a valuable comparison of the two methods; "qualitative verses quantitative research".

Quantitative research methods, originally developed and used in the natural sciences, formed the basis and accepted methodology that has become the norm in social science research and subsequently organisational and management research. Encompassing such techniques as surveys and laboratory experiments, it generally leads to numerical data collection facilitating mathematical and statistical modelling.

Qualitative research, on the other hand, was specifically developed in the field of social sciences to enable researchers to study socially derived phenomena and once again adopted by organisational and management researchers. Huberman and Miles (2002) in the introduction to their text "The Qualitative Researchers Companion" explained how they witnessed the explosive growth of qualitative research methods between the 1980's and the 1990's. This increase manifested itself in increased publications of qualitative based research material in professional journals, taking on various forms ranging from case study research, ethnography and discourse analysis to narratives and symbolic interaction studies using techniques such as observations, interviews and questionnaires to collect data. Each method has its own traditions governed by its own genres with its own preferred forms of presentation, interpretation, trustworthiness and textual evaluation (Becker, 1986). Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people, the psychological effects and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Glaser (1998) as did Miles and Huberman (1994) argue the advantages of understanding a phenomenon from the participants perspective, pointing out that particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified.

Further distinctions adopted by researchers are to classify research methods as objective (e.g. positivist, empiricist) or subjective (e.g. anti-positivist, idealist) (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The major alternative to positivism in management science is that of the interpretive (and the closely related constructive) paradigm, an umbrella term for a range of approaches that reject some of the basic premises of positivism (Denscombe, 2002).

Positivists generally assume that reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties which are independent of the observer (researcher) and his/her instruments. In a positivist framework, researchers seek to discover the laws imposed on actors; they believe reality already exists in itself. It has an objective essence, which researchers seek to discover, they aim to explain reality (the object). Positivist studies generally attempt to test theory, in an attempt to increase the predictive understanding of phenomena. A subject's observation of an object does not alter the nature or essence of that object. The positivist vision of reality leans towards explanatory research, to answer the question 'for what reason'.

Interpretive researchers interpret reality; they start out with the assumption that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Consequently, qualitative researchers engage a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods to explain reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Interpretive studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that

people assign to them. They seek to understand how actors construct the meaning they give to social reality. Rather than explaining reality, they try to understand it through actor's interpretations, drawing clear distinction between understanding and explaining. Such studies do not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focus on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) place grounded theory firmly in the interpretive paradigm albeit this methodology inductively draws concepts from empirical data.

It should be clear from the above why interpretivism has become synonymous with qualitative research and positivism with quantitative methods. The dominance of the positivist paradigm in management science research stems from the early perspectives of social science research where there was a belief that facts can only be discovered through measurement and the mathematical relationships between them, an approach modelled on traditional sciences (Coolican, 1999; Denscombe, 2002). The main objection pointed towards the positivists is that they use highly controlled procedures and exact quantification of operationalised variables which can be restrictive and may stymie the development of knowledge within a human behaviour context, limiting the potential for new perspectives to emerge (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Coolican, 1999; Robson, 2001) whereas interpretivists (qualitative researchers) study people in the field in their natural environment.

Probably, the most pertinent philosophical assumptions are those which relate to the underlying epistemology, which guides the research. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with understanding how we know the world; it refers to the assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained or created (Hatch, 1997).

There are an abundance of texts that provide an account of epistemology in a global sense, that is, from a social sciences perspective, of which management science is only one. There are considerably less that provide perspectives purely from an organisational and management research stand point. The work and subsequent text produced by Hatch (1997) provides some clarity on the varying perspectives relating to organisational theory. Hatch (1997) suggests four underlying epistemologies in organisational theory: classical, modern, symbolic interpretive, and post-modern. Whilst these four research epistemologies are philosophically distinct in the practice of organisational research, they are not always clearly defined and established in their short history. This could be due, in part, to the temporal differences between organisational theory and that of other disciplines. Quite often, perspectives influencing other disciplines take time to migrate across to the organisational and management research domain, causing a natural delay before they are applied to the study of organisational and management science.

Hatch (1997) provides a refreshing framework that identifies specific historic periods when the aforementioned perspectives became recognisable within the field. Classical emerged from the 1900's onwards, modern was the 1950's onwards, symbolic interpretive 1980's onwards, and post-modern was the 1990's onwards. These periods are more indicative of when perspectives

became influential on organisational theory and not when they started to emerge in social science in general. Hatch (1997) considered the four periods in terms of the central issues or subject of concern, the preferred method for conducting research, and the sort of results produced.

The classical period considered the effects of industrialism on society (the social approach) or how to make organisations more efficient and effective (the managerial approach). The methods adopted by the researchers of this period relied upon observation and historical analysis, resulting in typologies and theoretical frameworks accompanied by prescriptions for management practice.

The modernist perspective (labelled by others as the positivist paradigm) changed its focus from society and management to the organisation itself; taking an objective epistemological position (looking at the organisation as an object with dimensions that can be measured); it sought explanation for the various forms that organisations take, along with their achievements (e.g. performance, profitability and control). Modernist research methods relied more on descriptive measures and correlation amongst standardised measures, leading to comparative studies and statistical description from analysis (it's easy to understand why some label this the quantitative approach).

The symbolic interpretive perspective is similar in some respects to the modernist perspective in so far as it looks at the organisation itself. The significant difference here is that it adopts a subjective epistemological stance. It treats the organisation as a subject whose meanings are to be appreciated and understood. Symbolic interpretive research methods adopt ethnographic techniques leading to narrative descriptions and case study analysis. The key feature of the ethnographic approach is that it is based on what are termed naturalist modes of inquiry (interviewing and observation), within a predominantly inductivist framework (Gill and Johnson, 2002). Interpretive and inductive methods are widely referred to as qualitative methods

The post modern perspective changes the focus once more. This time it moves from the organisation to organisational theory and theorising. Its research methods are more akin to deconstruction leading to self reflexive theorising. Whilst this paper has so far been concerned with the historical development of qualitative based research methods and more specifically that of grounded theory, it provides the essential understanding and background to that which is about to be disclosed.

Locating Grounded Theory within Contemporary Qualitative Research

The background material presented in the opening sections provides for a suitable platform from which to build perspectives on grounded theory methodology. This section serves to understand how and why organisational and management researchers contextualise and locate the methodology within contemporary qualitative research. Starting with its origins, it looks at the originators backgrounds and how their history and previous training contributed to the discovery

of grounded theory, ultimately providing some perspectives on grounded theory, locating it within contemporary qualitative research.

Glaser (1967,1998) repeatedly tells his audience that grounded theory is a general method that works well with qualitative data collection approaches that involve inducting insights from field based, case data. He refrains from saying it is a qualitative research methodology *per se*. Indeed he goes to great lengths to drive home the message; grounded theory was not discovered or developed specifically to foster a qualitative ideology. There are many examples in the field of management research (Locke, 2001; Goulding, 2002) where grounded theory is categorised purely as a qualitative methodology and condoned as anything else, least of all a general methodology. This is due in part to Strauss and Corbin's views on grounded theory and where it should be located within the research paradigm (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The Origins of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has its roots firmly in the social sciences. It was developed by sociologists for sociologists (Goulding, 2002). Developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 60's, grounded theory was first embraced by the nursing profession for its ability to decipher and explain what is actually happening in real-life situations, rather than simply describing what is going on. Despite its origins, Glaser suggests (1978) that grounded theory could be used by any discipline interested in generating theory, citing nursing, education and business as the main disciplines that have used the method successfully.

The origins of grounded theory have been well documented. Most qualitative research methods material (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Robson, 2001; Huberman and Miles, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) now reference Glaser and Strauss (1967) which records the authors reasons and thoughts that led to its discovery and details the processes for applying its methods.

Glaser (1998) concedes that the path leading to the discovery of grounded theory was not linear and not one that was initially, specifically embarked upon. He cites the strong links to quantitative methodology, qualitative mathematics and the teachings of Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University as the main influences. He also places his confidence in the constant comparison of incidents particularly in the aspect of 'explication de texte'. Explication de texte is the intensive and exhaustive scrutiny and interpretation of written work, often word for word (Guralnik, 1982) and is the French predecessor of the English version of 'close reading'. Other influences came from Robert Merton's teachings of theory construction (Glaser, 1998).

Strauss's training, on the other hand, lay in the field of symbolic interaction, qualitative research and pragmatist writings that emerged from his time at the University of Chicago. His influences came from Herbert Blumer, Robert Park, John Dewey and Everet Hughes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1998). Strauss (1990) believes his background contributed to the notion that individuals play a role in shaping the world they live in; therefore, to understand 'what is going

on' one needs to get out into the field placing emphasis on the importance of theory grounded in reality.

Wrestling Grounded Theory

Glaser sees grounded theory as a simple inductive approach where all is data. As a general methodology, grounded theory can be very multivariate using all kinds of data from various sources, tables, performance data, and statistically derived results as part of the grounded theory analysis process. Therefore, he sees attempts to marry it to another methodology as futile, merely diluting and complicating the methodology (Glaser, 1998).

Despite Glaser's attempts to keep grounded theory in a category of its own by labelling it as a general methodology and implying it is neither qualitative nor quantitative in its true form, it is not difficult to see why management researchers continually attempt to classify grounded theory as qualitative. One only has to look closely at the language used by Glaser (1967; 1978; 1998) and that of Strauss and Corbin in their texts (1990; 1998) to see how and why this has happened. Glaser himself (1998) identifies grounded theory as an inductive methodology, using deduction to implement theoretical sampling, implying that the methodology calls on cannons from other qualitative methods. Indeed Strauss and Corbin in their texts (1990; 1998) cut straight to the chase and directly identify grounded theory as a qualitative approach.

This is not the only area where Glaser and Strauss fail to agree. Since their original work, Glaser and Strauss (1967) have disagreed on how to carry out grounded theory. Whilst Glaser has remained faithful to their discovery, Strauss has moved away from the basic premise that makes grounded theory so unique and powerful to develop, instead, a method that is more rigid and structured in its implementation. The now well documented differences have caused two schools of thought. This means that academics and practitioners involved with or using grounded theory fall into one of two categories. Classic Grounded Theory, sometimes referred to in the literature as 'Glaserian' Grounded Theory, for those who follow the original techniques discovered by the originators Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Structured Grounded Theory, sometimes referred to in the literature as 'Straussian' Grounded Theory , for those who follow the more structured techniques proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Grounded Theory: A qualitative inductive approach

Grounded theory is an inductive approach which also uses an element of deduction to allow theoretical sampling to take place. Located at the end of the modernist phase (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) grounded theory follows a symbolic interpretive epistemological perspective.

Goulding's work (2002) provides an excellent account of the historical influence of ethnography and symbolic interactionism on the development of grounded theory. Specifically with these approaches the researcher tries to immerse himself or herself in a setting and to become part of the group under study in order to understand the meaning and significances that people place upon the behaviour of themselves and others (Easterby-Smith et al., 2003). This could be

construed as an over generalised view that is more particular to qualitative methods in general terms rather than to grounded theory specifically. Glaser's view is that the value of grounded theory is that concepts emerge quickly without the researcher needing to spend too much time in the field and running the danger of the researcher influencing the research subjects (Glaser, 2007).

Grounded Theory and Organisational Research

Since its inception in sociology in 1967 and its subsequent migration to the field of management and organisational research in the 70's grounded theory has slowly developed to become a respected methodology in the analysts armoury. Grounded theory methodology is based on the belief that, as individuals within group environments comprehend events personally, common patterns of behaviour are revealed (Glaser, 1998); as a group interacts together people do in fact make sense of their environment despite apparent chaos. Grounded theory is well suited to understanding the social processes and the consequential psychological effects inherent in organisational change dynamics in what is seemingly a chaotic environment. Its strength is that the process of theorising ensures that it explains what is actually happening in practice rather than describing what is going on. It helps to develop perspectives and to learn how participants manage their lives in the context of existing and future organisational challenges; it is therefore well suited to organisational behaviour inquiry. It is particularly useful for research in areas that have not previously been studied, where there is an obvious gap, and where a new perspective could identify areas for management involvement and improvement.

This method is particularly suited to looking at rarely explored phenomenon where extant theory would not be appropriate. In such situations, a grounded theory building approach is more likely to generate novel and accurate insights into the phenomenon under study than reliance on either past research or office bound thought experiment, (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Irrespective of whether the analyst adopts the classical grounded theory methods developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) or the more regimented approach advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998), the method is increasingly being adopted by managerial and organisational researchers. Most commentators (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 2001; Huberman and Miles, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) writing on the subject of qualitative research methods discuss the merits of grounded theory and increasingly papers are published in the management science arena based on research developed using this methodology (Carrero et al., 2000; Holton, 2007; Kenealy and Cartwright, 2007; Raffanti, 2005; Schwarz and Nandhakumar, 2002); yet frequently manuscripts claiming to be grounded theory analysis very often tend to be written in a fashion that would be more consistent with that used for other methodological frameworks (Goulding, 2002).

It is difficult to find examples of research in the organisational and management field that follow the exact tenets of classical grounded theory such as that by Raffanti (2005), Holton (2007) or Kenealy and Cartwright (2007). Most appear to be an adaptation of the method. This view is

underpinned by Locke's (2001) perspective that there is an inclination to adapt and adopt grounded theory methods within the management research field; a direction to which Glaser (1998) is strongly opposed. This adaptation includes the integration of other qualitative research methods into the grounded theory methodology. Locke (2001) cites Sutton and Callahan (1987) and Eisenhardt (1989) as examples of this adaptation.

Closer inspection of the language used in grounded theory based management research publications (Sutton and Callahan, 1987; Eisenhardt, 1989) demonstrates the prevelance of Straussian methods within this domain. Qualitative research should be conducted systematically and rigorously and not tackled with a casual or ad hoc approach. Procedural rigour, however, should not be confused with rigidity or structure which is generally inappropriate with qualitative research (Mason, 2006).

Nevertheless, there is a propensity for organisational and management researchers to favour the more structured methods of Strauss and Corbin (1990). This can, in part, be attributed to the strong influences of the positivist paradigm within this field and the regimented processes that positivist methods invariably attract. Without labouring the point too much, grounded theory's processes of 'constant comparison' and 'theoretical sampling' violate longstanding positivist assumptions about how the research process should work; that is, constant comparison contradicts the requirements of a clean separation between data collection and analysis whilst theoretical sampling violates the ideal of hypothesis testing in that the direction of new data collection is determined, not by prior hypotheses, but by ongoing interpretation of data and emerging conceptual categories (Suddaby, 2006)

This may also help to understand the popularity of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) structured guidance as demonstrated in the research methods material, where there is a tendency to cite more examples from Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) than Glaser's textual accounts. Notably, the identification of, and the levels of, theoretical sampling strategies; Easterby-Smith et al. (2003), Locke (2001), and Goulding (2002) all appear to use descriptions of Strauss and Corbin's 3 tier coding ('Open', 'Axial' and 'Selective') in their text as their coding strategies.

Product Proof and Scientific Rigour

Because grounded theory falls outside normal organisational and management research traditions, researchers still find it necessary to continually defend the choice of methodology used, what Glaser refers to as 'product proof', which results in unwarranted rhetoric about its suitability over that of other methods. Whilst understandable, this is not necessary, as well done grounded theory justifies itself (Glaser, 1998). This could be, in part, because some researchers cite Glaser and Strauss or indeed Strauss and Corbin against research that purports to be grounded theory when in reality they are using it as a guise to hide what appears to be a mess (Suddaby, 2006).

This stems from modernist perspectives regarding scientific rigour. Modernist qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) sought respectability. The stumbling block and therefore the area of the greatest debate has been the perceived inability of qualitative based research, particularly grounded theory to demonstrate scientific rigour (Lincoln and Guba, 1987; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Easterby-Smith *et al's*. view (2003) is that grounded theory has been criticised as being suspect because of its lack of clarity and standardisation of methods, citing the positivist perspectives in respect of the importance of 'finding the truth' as the culprit. The adaptation of positivist cannons such as reliability, validity, generalisability, and objectivity, to judge the processes of qualitative research, has been ill founded. Goulding (2002) goes a long way to construct parallels between grounded theory and other qualitative approaches suggesting that all too often the validity of qualitative research is wrongly assessed according to quasi-positivistic criteria. Given the paradigm dominance within the field of managerial and organisational research this is hardly surprising. Goulding (2002) cites Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative insight as the more realistic model when working in the area of grounded theory. They considered attending to four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as key to assessing trustworthiness. Here the goal is to demonstrate that the enquiry was carried out in a way which ensures that the subject of the enquiry was accurately identified and explained.

Glaser (1998) is quite specific on the criteria for judging and carrying out grounded theory and offers a four point check: fit, workability, relevance and modifiability. *Fit* according to Glaser (1998) is another word for validity. Does the concept adequately express the pattern in the data which it purports to conceptualise? *Workability* also refers to the concept. Are the concepts and the way they are related to the hypotheses sufficiently accounted for? How are the main concerns of participants in a substantive area continually resolved?

Relevance makes the research important because it deals with the main concerns of the participants involved. To study something that interests no one except a few is probably to focus on non-relevance or even trivia. Relevance, like good concepts, evoke instant grab.

Glaser (1998) places great importance on *modifiability*. He suggests that the theory is not being verified as in verification studies and thus never right or wrong. It simply gets modified when new data is available to which it can be compared. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) criteria for assessing and judging grounded theory studies are based on a seven point criterion check list: *Criterion 1* – How was the original sample selected? What grounds? *Criterion 2* – What major categories emerged? *Criterion 3* – What were some of the events, incidents, and actions (indicators) that pointed to some of the major categories? *Criterion 4* – On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed, that is how did theoretical formulation guide some of the data collection? After the theoretical sampling was done, how representative did these categories prove to be? *Criterion 5* – What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations (that is, among categories), and on what grounds where they formulated and tested? *Criterion 6* – Were there instances when hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually

seen? How were the discrepancies accounted for? How did they affect the hypotheses? *Criterion 7* – How and why was the core category selected? Was this collection sudden or gradual, difficult or easy? On what grounds were the final analytic decisions made?

It has already been argued that the dominance of positivism in management research has caused many researchers to seek rigid structure negating the true value offered by classic grounded theory. What is interesting is that unlike Glaser's (1998) criteria, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that their criteria should not be read as hard and fast evaluative rules merely as guidance, accepting that new areas of investigation may require modification to fit the circumstances, also suggesting that researchers should indicate what their procedural operations were.

Grounded Theory and the Novice Researcher

Review the literature and it is easy to see that the odds are stacked against the qualitative researcher getting qualitative studies published. Most journals within the field of organisational management and psychology research are positivist and quantitative in nature. Symon and Cassell's (2006) work shows the neglecting perspectives relating to published qualitative studies in this area. After a review of the published work in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology (JOOP) and what it has to offer to its readership, they suggest that there is a tendency to overlook insights that could be gained from alternative perspectives. 'Alternative' here means methods other than quantitative studies. This is by no means the first time that this debate has arisen. Symon and Cassell (2006) point to other debates (Symon and Cassell, 1998; Johnson and Cassell, 2001) regarding this disparity. They even point to past editors of JOOP (Sparrow, 1999; Arnold, 2004) who have argued that the journal would benefit from publishing a wider range of relevant research. The point here is that it is a difficult, painstaking process for the novice researcher to get work recognised by way of publication, let alone overcoming the additional hurdle of persuading publishers of the value and contribution of qualitative studies. Add to this the inclusion of grounded theory methods in your work and the chances of getting published are reduced further. Most research literature advocates adopting research methods that fit the aims and objectives of the research, which means differentiating between exploratory or investigatory research and hypothesis or validity testing. Obstacles such as these will only discourage the novice researcher from attempting qualitative studies and grounded theory methodology in particular.

When it comes to grounded theory, Glaser's advice (1998) is simple; "just do it". This is sound advice, too much time can be spent studying the methodology but experience only comes from doing it. For the novice researcher, however, there is a need to gain an understanding of the methods principles before they can start. This is particularly so for the researcher working against specific time restrictions such as those relating to a PhD research programme where there are always concerns about wasting precious time. Grounded theory research demands particular qualities of the researcher that have to be learned before one gains confidence. For one, it requires the strength of character to rely on the data; that theory will emerge without forcing the

data. It also requires creativity; creative in the sense that the researcher must focus on generating ideas that fit and work, the data takes considerable thought (Glaser, 1978). Most important of all, it requires experience; it requires the experience of understanding what research is meant to achieve and the experience of applying grounded theory tools.

Considering all the reasons mentioned above and the fact that most doctoral researchers, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK) are 'minus mentors' (Stern, 1994); it begs the question; are enough novice researchers embracing the methodology to establish and secure its future within the field of organisational and management research? Research methods used and indeed honed as a trainee will invariably form the backbone of future research projects. Consideration should therefore be given to the accessibility of grounded theory research methods material, particularly to the novice researcher.

Most organisational and management research training, particularly in UK universities, until recent times focused heavily on quantitative techniques, to the detriment of qualitative based methods (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2003) and especially grounded theory. Whilst there is an increase in qualitative research and qualitative research training there is still a lack of experienced grounded theorists and grounded theory training. It is this perspective that is the likely cause of grounded theory being rarely adopted by the novice researcher, particularly those who are 'minus mentor'. Combine this with the inconsistency of the methods literature, partly caused by the two schools of thought (Glasserian and Straussian) and the result is a low up take of the method.

Glaser's approach to grounded theory (1992; 1998) starts by looking at the particular area of study. This being either a process or a specific activity where the relevant issues are allowed to emerge during the course of the research process based entirely upon the participant perceptions. In essence, he advocates starting without preconceived ideas.

The appeal of Strauss and Corbin's approach (1990) is that it is more specific, they suggest identifying a phenomenon or looking for specific issues on which to focus the study. It is more in line with other research methods (both qualitative and quantitative) in so far as it allows preconceived ideas of what the subject of inquiry should be, akin to the researcher's area of interest before data collection starts.

The confusion is further exacerbated by the tendency of organisational and management researchers to adapt and adopt (Locke, 2001); not forgetting the unorthodox fashion by which most organisational and management grounded theory manuscripts are presented (Goulding, 2002). Considering all these points, it's hardly surprising why the novice researcher finds other methods more appealing, rather than embarking on the seemingly uncertain path of grounded theory.

Another concern expressed by a number of commentators (Locke, 2001; Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2003) writing on the subject of grounded theory is the question of access. They see access to

managed organisations as difficult and problematic, suggesting that some assumptions of grounded theory have to be amended to deal with difficult situations. Most business managers, if indeed they are willing to allow access, need to plan the research activity into the normal operational activity in such a way as to limit the impact to the business itself. With this in mind, the researcher seeking access would have to demonstrate how they intend to conduct their research in the form of an access proposal. The structure of the proposal would, amongst other things, present the reader with envisaged interview dates, interview durations and participant groups; i.e., gender, age, department, job role, job grade and/or location. This sort of detail may be difficult for the grounded theorist to present before data collection starts, dependent on which school (Glasserian or Straussian) is being adopted by the researcher. The very essence of the method, more specifically 'theoretical sampling', means that parallel processes of data collection and analysis itself determine how and where to find more data as the research process progresses. From an organisational perspective, it would not be practical for researchers to access participants on an ad-hoc basis nor would business managers be able to accept this practice in their organisations.

There is no doubt; access may pose many difficulties to the researcher. For many, the deciding factor is the duration of access. The uphill battle to gain access could be swayed by the amount of access requested by the researcher. Obviously, the shorter the access, the more chance one has of persuading business managers to allow the project to go ahead. Grounded theory does not start with a preconceived idea of sample size or a fixed duration for interviews. The interviews continue until 'saturation' is reached and each interview continues until the participant has exhausted their story. It would be difficult to persuade a business leader to give access without first furnishing details of sample size and how long the interviews will be. If the researcher has reached the stage where he/she is generating an access proposal, one would assume that they have already been through the initial approach or even the initial meetings and discussions. The aim next is to make sure the door that has now been opened is firmly wedged open. Gaining access is a critical juncture in any empirical research project and without the guidance of colleagues or in the case of a PhD student, a supervisor, the novice could fall at a very important hurdle. For the experienced grounded theorist, an assessment can be made based on previous experience. Experience can help to provide an approximation of the number of interviews required, along with an approximation of duration of each interview. Identifying exactly which group of participants the researcher would like to interview is a little more difficult. One solution, as with any other research project, would be to identify the group that the researcher feels (at the planning stage) would make a valuable contribution. Once access has been established it is always easier to renegotiate a short extension later. With grounded theory, it is always much easier to finalise access requirements after theoretical sampling is well advanced. For those who do manage to gain access, limiting disruption and access time is important. For most grounded theory projects within the field of organisational management research, there is an inclination to follow the hermeneutics practices of tape recording then transcribing interviews in their entirety. According to Glaser (1998), this is a very time consuming and fruitless exercise,

contemporaneous field notes would help to reduce access time. Most novice researchers, particularly those following a doctoral research programme tend to be overly cautious about the potential of losing data, let alone the concerns about collecting data and finding that the net result is very little or no contribution to the area of study. Consequently, they see taping and transcribing as the safest option. Trying to persuade the novice researcher otherwise may be futile. Strauss and Corbin's stance (1990) on tape recording and transcribing is quite different to that of Glaser. They suggest taping all interviews but only transcribing what is needed. This may mean full transcription initially and then partial transcription as the focus becomes more acute.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion this section draws on all the points developed in the paper to present a synopsis view of grounded theory methodology within the organisational and management research field, culminating in a concluding view of the novice researcher and grounded theory.

There is a great deal of confusion caused by the rhetorical discourse between the contradicting views of Glaser (1992) and that of Strauss and Corbin (1990). This paper has discussed some of the differences particularly in relation to the start of a study where Glaser (1992; 1998) advocates starting without preconceived ideas whilst Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest identifying a phenomenon or looking for specific issues on which to focus the study.

It is difficult for the novice researcher to accept that the research method that purports to be grounded theory has two accepted yet contradictory principals on how to apply its methods. That said, apart from the terminologies, basic tenets of grounded theory from both perspectives remain the same; both stick to the basic premise that grounded theory serves to generate theory that is grounded in the data; both agree on the importance of getting out into the field and in the constant comparison of incidents related to participant stories; both agree with coding, memoing, conceptualising and theorising. That said, some would argue that Strauss and Corbin's research methods have moved away from the basic tenants of grounded theory and can therefore no longer be considered grounded theory in its pure form.

The novice researcher would be well advised to consider following the guidance of one method over the other (Glaserian or Straussian grounded theory), taking care not to adapt the method too much. This will allow him/her to develop a greater level of understanding of the skills required to conduct a grounded theory study without the incumbency of deciphering the rhetoric wrestle.

There are many challenges facing the novice researcher considering the grounded theory approach. One such challenge discussed in this paper is the issue of gaining access to participants within organisations. The problem of gaining access is not peculiar to grounded theorists but the methodology accentuates the problem. This paper describes, in some detail, the difficulties of providing essential information to support an application for access. Such information includes the identification of access boundaries that can clearly demonstrate the access period start and

finish. The very nature of grounded theory makes it difficult to identify appropriate interviewees, the number of interviews required and the interview durations at the study planning stage.

The burden of understanding grounded theory methods and gaining access to subject organisations is not the only problem discussed in this paper. The difficulty of achieving publication of manuscripts that use qualitative data, and grounded theory in particular, was discussed. In summary, as long as the novice understands these hurdles he/she can plan and devise strategies for overcoming such difficulties ultimately leading to a successful period of study and publications. Certainly the work carried out by Symon and Cassell (2006) amongst others (Symon and Cassell, 1998; Sparrow, 1999; Johnson and Cassell, 2001; Arnold, 2004) paves the way towards levelling the playing field such that different kinds of philosophical commitments may live side by side with equal weighting in the teaching, research and publication of material (Beatty and Lee, 1992).

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