Sorting

Barry Chametzky[a, b, *]

[a] Editor, Grounded Theory Review
[b] Fellow, Grounded Theory Institute

* Corresponding author: barry@bluevine.net

Abstract

For some novice Glaserian classic grounded theorists, sorting memos creates great internal confusion because the process seems never-ending. But sorting is a vital component to the design as it helps the researcher slowly discover the emergent theory. The process takes time and a researcher must not try to rush this process; the theory will develop in due course. In this article, the author presents a simple example of sorting and shows how the process develops.

Keywords: sorting, Glaserian classic grounded theory, memoing, constant comparison

Less-experienced researchers in classic grounded theory sometimes ask what sorting is; how is it done and why is it important? The answers to these questions are generally straightforward but, for various reasons, not always fully understood. The purpose of this short paper is to explain sorting in classic grounded theory.

Sorting is the process that takes place as a researcher compares memos one with another to see what connections and type of connections, if any, may exist. This point will be made clearer shortly. Memos are the "preconscious connections might be presented consciously" (Chametzky, 2024, p. 38). Such connections might not be immediately evident so sorting helps uncover those potential connections. If, in your memo sorting you find a memo that is not applicable to the theory, set it aside (Glaser, 2014). Other than the isolated memo or perhaps two, "every memo fits somewhere" (Glaser, 2014, p. 85).

As you sort your memos and write new ones that are constantly compared with the current ones, connections will form, and memos will be combined. This process is time-consuming, so patience is important.

Here is a basic example of how you might work through some codes, memos, and sorting. In this example, you have coded some data and have these five codes (in this example, do not worry that the codes are not behaviors as they need to be in a real situation): flour, eggs, sugar, vanilla, and chicken. Now, imagine that you have written memos on these codes. For this example, I will show very short memos, but in reality, they can be any length and any style you wish.

Flour: a dry ingredient needed for body when making a cake or pie, to be sifted; powdery texture
Eggs: beaten, whisked, maybe with a pinch of salt
Sugar: white and/or brown, different flavors
Vanilla: subtle flavoring, mixed with other wet ingredients
Chicken: baked, white and dark meat, savory

As you compare the five memos of flour, eggs, sugar, vanilla extract, and chicken, consider how each is connected, if at all, to the other. Compare the flour with eggs, flour with sugar, flour with vanilla, and flour with chicken, and write a memo on each comparison. Then, look at what you wrote. In your comparison, you may discover that flour and sugar might go together. Write a memo on this comparison where you might state that the flour needs to first be sifted and then the sugar added in slowly while mixing so as to incorporate the sugar completely into the flour. Do this comparison for all combinations of your memos and see what connections may exist. See how several memos can fit together. What you are doing here is sorting. As you compare the other code words in this fictitious example, you discover that the flour and chicken memo does not fit with the other ones and must therefore be set aside. This is exactly how real sorting of memos takes place in classic grounded theory. Slowly, as you compare the memos, they become more conceptual and you would end up with larger groups (categories). Eventually, you have developed

your theory (making a cake) based on the writing and sorting of your memos.

References

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Disclosures

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