What is Grounded Theory?

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Grounded theory

- The aim of grounded theory is:

  'to generate or discover a theory'

  (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

- Grounded theory may be defined as:

  '*the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research*' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 2).

When would you use it?

Focus of the methodology is uncovering basic social processes

• Ideal for exploring integral social relationships and the behaviour of groups where there has been little exploration of the contextual factors that affect individual's lives.(Crooks 2001)

'get though and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on, so that professionals can intervene with confidence to help resolve the participant's main concerns' (Glaser 1978)

History of GT

- Developed in the School of Nursing, University of California San Francisco by sociologists Glaser and Strauss – Awareness of Dying

- Influenced by Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969: 2)
  - Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them
  - The meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows
  - These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the thing he encounters.

History of GT

- 1960's move from natural science as the foundation of social research – new ways of investigating the social world

    – Denzin and Lincoln's – Modernist moment

        • Realist ontology

        • epistemology–objective truths, generalisable, testable and verifiable theory

        • Place of the researched and the researcher

            – *'discovery of theory'*

    The move in social science towards postmodernism and post-structuralism has resulted in GT being attacked for its objectivist and positivist foundations.

    In later works Glaser and Strauss, take on the language associated with interpretivisum - ? change in foundation

Development of GT

There are 'probably as many versions of grounded theory as there were grounded theorists' (Dey 1999: 2)

1980's division between Glaser and Strauss

- Basics of Qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin 1990)

- Glaser (1992) suggested this did not extend understanding of grounded theory but had gone on to develop another method entirely - full conceptual description.

  – 1998 (2nd edition) whilst not responding directly to Glaser's criticisms, was less prescriptive.

- it is not clear whether these two schools of thought are actually different, or whether they are just expressing a similar idea in different ways (Melia 1996)

Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz)

[b]y adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach, the researcher can move grounded theory methods further into the realm of interpretive social science consistent with a Blumarian (1969) emphasis on meaning, without assuming the existence of a unidimensional external reality (Charmaz 2000: 521).

- This theoretical perspective may then be able to answer some of the criticisms of modernist grounded theory

- As in other constructivist methodologies, a constructivist GT arises from interaction between the researcher and participants, the researcher's perspective being part of the process.

Features of Grounded Theory

Charmaz (1995, 2002) identifies a number of features that all grounded theories have:

- simultaneous collection and analysis of data

- creation of analytic codes and categories developed from data and not by pre-existing conceptualisations (theoretical sensitivity)

- discovery of basic social processes in the data

- inductive construction of abstract categories

- theoretical sampling to refine categories

- writing analytical memos as the stage between coding and writing

- the integration of categories into a theoretical framework.

Doing GT?

Unlike many other qualitative methods we have some idea

- how to start the research (identifying area of interest, avoiding theoretical preconceptions and using theoretical sensitivity)

- how to do it (through analytical procedures and sampling strategies)

- how to stop (when theoretical saturation is reached)

(Dey 1999)

Data collection methods

'all is data'

- In-depth interviews
  - Most commonly used
  - Relies on open ended questions
  - Questions can be modified to reflect emerging theory

- Observational methods

- Focus Group
  - Can be used

Interviews

- Start with topic guide – Broad question (prompts and probes)

- Concurrent data collection and analysis

  - development of categories and components of the theory

  - narrowing down to area of interest and concern to participants - fill out categories

  - Topic guide will change

Theoretical sensitivity

- Researchers will become theoretically sensitive by immersing themselves in the data and trying to understand what the participants see as being significant and important.

- Concurrent data collection/analysis allows the researcher to become theoretically sensitive to the data.

- Begin with as few predetermined ideas as possible

  - Existing literature and theory, and prior knowledge and experience of the researcher, can also be used to inform the development of categories, but the categories should not be forced to fit the literature, and should not be used to create categories.

The role of the literature review

- To achieve theoretical sensitivity, the researcher must begin with as few predetermined ideas, particularly hypotheses, as possible so he or she can be as sensitive to the data as possible.

  – This does not mean that the researcher must start with a tabula rasa, as is often assumed.

- An open mind not an empty head (Dey 1999)

  – it is how prior knowledge is used that makes the difference; - used to inform our analysis rather than to direct it.

- Literature can be used as 'data' and constantly compared with the emerging categories to be integrated in the theory (Glaser 1992)

Theoretical sampling

Glaser and Strauss (1967) indicate that theoretical sampling

- is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop theory as it emerges (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 45).

- Charmaz (1990) suggests that theoretical sampling is best used when some key concepts have been discovered. Initial data collection is commenced with a fairly 'random' group of people, who have experienced the phenomenon under study, to begin to develop concepts. Theoretical sampling is then used to generate further data to confirm and refute original categories.

Analysis

- For theoretical sampling to be implemented successfully, there needs to be concurrent data collection and analysis.

- The ongoing analysis informs the direction of the next interview or group of interviews and is explicitly aimed at developing theory

- Glaser (1978) and Charmaz (1995) identify a two step coding process in data analysis

  - Line by line, open coding (substantive)

  - Theoretical coding

Theoretical coding conceptualises how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypothesis to be integrated into a theory (Glaser 1978:72)

Analysis

Open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998)

- open coding refers to the process of generating initial concepts from data

- axial coding to the development and linking of concepts into conceptual families- coding paradigm

- selective coding to the formalising of these relationships into theoretical frameworks

Analysis

Keeping the codes active using the constant comparative method asking

- What is actually happening here?

- Under what conditions does this happen?

- What is this data a study of?

- What category does this incident indicate?

(Glaser 1978)

Data Analysis: Memo Writing

- The codes and categories go some way towards analysis, but until the analysis has been fully written up it is not complete

- Memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and the first draft of your completed study

  - hypotheses and ideas recorded during analysis

  - not be treated as complete and fixed, as they are initial analytical thoughts and can be altered as thinking changes

- Useful to go back to the field to test out some of the assumptions developed in the memo

- Documents the development of theory – audit trail

The development of the core category

- Glaser (1978) highlights the importance of the core category for grounded theory:

  [t]he generation of theory occurs around a *core* category. Without a core category an effort of grounded theory will drift in relevancy and workability (Glaser 1978: 93).

- The core category accounts for most of the variation of data and therefore most other categories relate to it in some way.

- The core category is a more highly abstracted category but still must remain grounded in the data. The major categories are related to the core category and these categories show how the core category works in the lives of participants.

- How it is developed is a bit vague!

Saturation of concepts

- Theoretical saturation of concepts is the point at which the data collection and analysis cycle can conclude

- 'saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop the properties of the category' Glaser and Strauss (1967: 61)

- Does not mean exhaustion of data sources (which Dey labels sufficiency rather than saturation) rather than full development of a category.

Saturation of concepts

- How to judge when theoretical saturation has been reached

    – new conceptualisation may be waiting just round the corner or new data or a re-examination of current data may throw up a new conceptual perspective

- Research is often governed by practicalities – resources and time

- Theoretical narrowing during data collection, using theoretical sampling and sensitivity, with all properties of a category being explored, will limit the unpredictability of new theoretical developments being identified to some extent.

Rigour

- 'Weaknesses in *using* the method have become equated with weaknesses inherent in the method' (Charmaz 1990: 1164).

- Grounded theory has its own criteria for assessing the rigour or quality of the study (Glaser 1978):

  - Fit and relevance - how well do the categories relate to the data and derives from constant comparison and conceptualisation of the data

  - Workability – refers to the integration of the categories into the core category that emerges

  - Modifiability – refers to ensuring that all the concepts that are important to the theory are incorporated into it by the constant comparison process. A modifiable theory can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data

'plausible stories' (Strong 1979; Melia 1987).

'Between you and me': Patients' views of nurses' competence

Calman L. (2006). Patients' views of nurse competence. *Nurse Education Today*, 26, 719-725.

Data generation

- Four Stages
  - Defining key concepts – preliminary data collection and analysis, eight interviews with patients in acute clinical areas
  - Making sense of the first eight interviews
  - Development of theoretical sampling strategy - focusing the interview
  - Theoretical sampling in action – 19 interviews with experienced patients - further theoretical generation Social processes emerging from study after preliminary interviews

Overview of Theory

'KNOWING THE SCORE'/ BECOMING A PATIENT	**RECOGNISING GOOD NURSING: ACTIONS, ROLES & VALUES**	**REFLECTING ON PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: DOES THE NURSE KNOW BEST?**

'BETWEEN YOU AND ME' –PERCEPTIONS OF COMPETENCE: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE.

A CORE CATEGORY

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