

# Chapter 2

## Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research: An Example of Grounded Theory Data Analysis

**Rifat Kamasak**

*Bahcesehir University, Turkey*

**Meltem Yavuz**

*Istanbul University, Turkey*

**Altan Kar**

*Yeditepe University, Turkey*

**Sibel Baykut**

*Bahcesehir University, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter aims to elaborate different research methods that can be employed in organizational studies. Since the complex and indivisible relationships between the constructs and nature of the social content about the phenomena can be understood better through qualitative methods, importance of qualitative investigation is mentioned and a detailed explanation of grounded theory data analysis as a qualitative method is provided. Grounded Theory mainly suggests that theory can be discovered in qualitative data. The theory employs a specific method that follows symbolic interactionism in viewing humans as active agents in their own lives who create meaning in the processes of action and interaction. Grounded Theory which deems researchers as active participants in the construction of knowledge leading to generation of theory has been used in organizational research widely. Therefore, the chapter also offers an example of the application of grounded theory by using several extracts from the sample transcripts of interviewees.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The selection of a research methodology is crucial since it guides the conduct of the research and affects the quality and the accuracy of research results (Creswell, 2014; He & van de Vijver, 2016; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012; Scandura & Williams, 2000). Remenyi et al. (1998) stress the critical role of an appropriate methodology choice in obtaining thorough knowledge about a specific problem. The extant research methods literature provides two major research paradigms: positivism and phenomenol-

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ogy (Collis & Hussey, 2013; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The term research paradigm has emerged from Kuhn's (1962) view and has been used "to denote a particular worldview that constitutes a researcher's values, beliefs and methodological assumptions" (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016, p. 3).

The assumptions of each paradigm show differences in terms of researchers' ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Eriksson & Koalainen, 2008; Howell, 2016). While positivism describes ontology as being objective, phenomenology describes subjective (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; Saunders et al., 2012). Typically, positivist research is equated with quantitative research but qualitative research is linked phenomenology paradigm. Therefore, different labels for these paradigms are frequently used in the methodology literature. While rationalist, normative, and quantitative terms are interchangeably used to describe the positivism paradigm, phenomenology is often termed as social constructivism, interpretivism and qualitative research.

Positivists suggest that "exploration can only be based upon observed and captured facts using direct data or information" because of the concrete and external nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002, p. 25). However, the phenomenology paradigm posits that "the real world is determined by people rather than by objective and external observable facts" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002, p. 26). Truth and reality are deemed as social phenomena that do not act independently from social actors. Dynamics of social events along with the human activity make the social world too complex to be explained in simple positivist terms. Obviously, this complex world cannot be explored without discovering all details of social relations, events, situations and the mechanisms behind such situations (Collis & Hussey, 2013; Remenyi et al., 1998).

In the phenomenological paradigm, human activity was concerned with "a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning" (Maqsood, 2006, p. 93). In a similar line, Blustein et al. (2005) and Wilig (2013) state that phenomenological paradigm is especially relevant for the studies where work is embedded in complex layers of social, cultural, and political meanings. Therefore, the phenomena can only be analyzed and understood through "assessing the meanings that participants assign to them" (Rastrick, 2008, p. 54).

Empirical work and theoretical knowledge are often seen as the most interesting, valuable and prestigious part of a scientific study. But lack of theoretical contribution was frequently mentioned by scholars in most of the organizational research (Ayutug et al., 2012; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2016). According to Alvesson and Kärreman (2013), "the empirical and theoretical elements are not always engaged in a productive interplay" (p. 2), since the most appropriate methodology that can bridge this gap was not always selected by researchers.

## **BACKGROUND**

There is still an ongoing argument among the defenders of positivist and phenomenological paradigms about the usability of these research methods. According to positivists, qualitative data do not exist since "everything is distinctively measurable, either 1 or 0, black or white" (Maqsood, 2006, p. 93). However, phenomenology paradigm researchers oppose this view by claiming that "all data are basically qualitative and so they attach meaning to raw experience, words or numbers" (Maqsood, 2006, p. 93). Such arguments have been continuing for a long time in the research methodology literature. Main distinctions between two different research paradigms are outlined in Table 1.

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