

## Chapter 9

# Using Grounded Theory to Develop a Framework for an Information Society in Southern Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*Grounded theory has not been widely used in the information sciences, despite it being one of the methods or designs employed for generating theories in the humanities and social sciences. However, with the increase in research that aims to generate information science theories, more researchers and students are exploring the use of grounded theory methods to conduct their studies. This chapter intends to simplify the conceptualisation and application of grounded theory methods for research within the information sciences. It discusses its origins, philosophical groundings and assumptions, as well as its methodological approaches. The chapter describes the foundations of the grounded theory methods providing some insights into some of the methodological approaches through an example study that constructed a theoretical framework for building information societies for development in Southern Africa. This chapter enhances the example with the practical lessons that the author learned in the conduct of the study.*

### INTRODUCTION

Grounded theory should be considered as one of the indispensable research designs within the information sciences discipline to ensure that the discipline, particularly in Africa, succeeds to generate its theories. Whatever procedures a researcher applies in their research should not be considered grounded theory unless they generate a theory. Despite the generation of theory continuing to be relevant in the information sciences, grounded theory is not as widespread in the field as other research designs (Ngulube & Ukwoma, 2019; Ullah & Ameen, 2018). For this reason, there remains room to advocate for the

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consideration of its use and expose its potential to address research problems within the discipline. This chapter presents the author's perspective on grounded theory that could be applied within the information sciences.

In order to ensure the exposure to grounded theory, this chapter provides an overview of the design with a perspective on its philosophical groundings and assumptions. Juliet Corbin, suggests that grounded theory is a collection of different methods, aimed at the construction of theory from data and sharing common procedures. There are different approaches to conducting grounded theory, each with its philosophical foundation and approach to data gathering and analysis (Corbin, 2009, p. 41). Notwithstanding Corbin and others' use of the term method to refer to grounded theory, this chapter considers grounded theory to be a design as discussed in the next two sections. In some instances, this chapter refers to grounded theory as a method in line with the cited source to ensure readability and avoid confusing the reader.

The impression gained from the reading on grounded theory is that this approach is predominantly applied within a qualitative perspective. Despite noting the quantitative potential of grounded theory, one of the recent exposition of this method by Flick (2018, pp. 20–21), emphasises the qualitative nature of the design. The potential to utilise grounded theory within both the qualitative and quantitative traditions is highlighted to ensure that researchers in the information sciences do not remain in the single-track and fail to consider the method when the research problem so demands.

The approach adopted is expected to ensure that the achievement of the objective of this chapter which is to explicate grounded theory and its possible use within the information sciences based on an example to generate a theoretical framework for building information societies for development in Southern Africa that was undertaken by the author for his doctoral studies (Sehlapelo, 2018). This chapter should benefit the reader with the following:

- An understanding of the grounded theory research design;
- A consideration of what makes grounded theory relevant for application in the information sciences;
- Approaches to the construction of theories using grounded theory; and
- A recognition of the potential for utilising grounded theory to address information science research problems.

These aspects are discussed in a sequential logic from the most abstract theoretical perspective to the most practical activities related to the research, as shown in the map of the research methodology in Figure 1. An outline of the research paradigm, inclusive of the philosophical assumptions, alongside the relevant ontology, epistemology and methodology as applied to the research, based on the nature of the problem is provided. The way the design was applied in the example study, in order to respond to the research questions, is also discussed. Following that, the chapter presents aspects related to research methods, sampling, data collection instruments, as well as data collection and analysis procedures. Next, the chapter discusses the quality as well as the ethical considerations related to a grounded theory study.

## **DEFINING GROUNDED THEORY**

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed grounded theory which they publicised in 1967 in their book titled, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Babbie, 2014, p. 315; Charmaz, 2006, p. xi; Urquhart,

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