

Chapter 26

The Grounded Theory Methodology in Organization Studies Within Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that the grounded theory (GT) approach works best for researchers who are concerned about the gap between academic and practical research because of the importance they place on applied research. The chapter aimed to explain the GT methodology and identify its application in organizational research context. In this regard, the theory-research-development-practice cycle, the factors affecting the choice of organization research methodology, and the types of qualitative research methods have been studied by comparing four qualitative methods of case study, GT, phenomenological study, and content analysis. Also, in this regard, the four main GT schools including Glaserian classic GT, Straussian GT, Charmazian constructivist GT, and Clarkeian situational GT, as well as the GT process involving the phases of data collection, coding, memo-ing, sorting, and validation are discussed in detail.

INTRODUCTION

Grounded Theory (GT) is recognized as an influential methodology for research inquiry of much academic debate aiming at providing practical explanations. Because the GT approach is interdisciplinary, it is not expected that it will be possible to develop mature theoretical frameworks within specific academic areas. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of accessing the tacit knowledge of different organizational actors. According to Burden and Roodt (2007), the GT approach was used until the 1970s in the studies related to management and organizational behavior which were published in major journals, and GT is one of, if not the most important, approaches cited in qualitative studies used in these fields.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3881-7.ch026

The GT approach since its introduction in 1967, and then its application in the fields of management and organization in the 1970s, has gradually become a research method of interest in the toolkit of analysts. The best application of the GT is to understand the social processes and subsequent psychological consequences inherently associated with organizational change in a seemingly turbulent environment. Rather than describing what is happening, the process of theorizing in GT ensures that it explains what is actually happening in practice as a strength of this method. In addition to expanding the perspective, this approach can help participants learn how to manage their lives in the current environment and with future organizational challenges. Therefore, this method is very suitable for organizational research. According to Kenealy (2008), GT is applicable to areas that have not been explored before and there is a research gap and new perspectives are needed to identify areas of management involvement and improvement. Until recent times, most organizational and management research training focused heavily on quantitative techniques specially in UK universities, that has caused ignoring qualitative methods, particularly GT. There is still a lack of experienced grounded theorists and GT training although despite the growing trend of applying qualitative research and teaching them.

Organizations are very complex and diverse environments involving complex entities that operate in different ways within them. Therefore, the use of multilateral approaches that can provide a broad, dynamic analytical picture of organizational hierarchy should be valuable to researchers and organizational consultants. In this regard, research methods should be more aware of the complexities of organizational environments and, as far as possible, rather than simplify them, consider them in order to achieve more accurate results. As the theorist should approach an inquiry with a fairly open mind it is likely that a kind of general theoretical account will be emerged in the particular investigation during the grounded initially approaches. In the organizational context, the research related to the pilot stages of large scale survey inquiries, the case studies of organizational behavior in order to produce more than an impressionistic account from their inquiries, the research related to the world organizational features as corporate cultures, that are well-suited particularly to qualitative investigation, and the studies concerned about detailed, locally based fact collection and interpretation essential to perform excellent organizational research can be appropriate subjects in which the GT approach can be implemented (Martin and Turner, 1986).

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology of GT and to identify its application in organizational research. In this way, the theory, research, development, and practice cycle, the factors affecting the choice of organization research methodology and the types of qualitative research methods have been studied by comparing four qualitative methods of case study, GT, phenomenological study, and content analysis. Also, in this regard, the four main GT schools including Glaserian classic GT, Straussian GT, Charmazian constructivist GT, and Clarkeian situational GT, as well as the GT process involving the phases of data collection, coding, memo-ing, sorting, and validation are discussed in detail.

ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES AND GT

In order to study all types of organizations, it is possible to use the GT approach. Research conducted based on the applied methodology of the GT approach, leads to an increased understanding of the research situation and the underlying problems affecting the research topic. All aspects of human resource management, from employment planning through the recruitment and selection of employees, appraisal and rewards, to motivation and career planning can be involved with such issues. The researcher during

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