

Introduction

Pick up and read any qualitative research article in the domain of management and organization studies, and the chances are very high that you will find a citation to Glaser and Strauss (1967). Their work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, is a familiar landmark to most organization scholars who perform and/or who read qualitative studies. Perhaps because the book is widely cited, it is through the idea of grounded theory that many quantitatively trained researchers gain their introduction to qualitative methods. But, why should there be a book about it?

First, during graduate school, exposure to the procedural details of grounded theory is limited. While formal coursework in qualitative methods is increasingly appearing in Ph.D. programs in organization and management, it is still the case that many graduate students do not have access to training in qualitative methods and to focused coursework on the grounded theory approach. Similarly, compared with quantitative approaches, there are few faculty members in departments of organization and management who have pursued qualitative research in general and the grounded theory style in particular. There are also few qualitative management and organization scholars (myself included) who have been exposed to either of the originators, Barney Glaser or Anselm Strauss, or to any of their students, as a research mentor. This means that, although grounded theory as a qualitative research approach is quite visible in organization and management studies, there are limited opportunities during graduate training for in depth exploration of its research logic and procedures.

Second, citing practices indicate that organization and management scholars may not be aware of the full scope of grounded theory resources available to them. For example, methodological discussions of the grounded theory approach by the originators have appeared intermittently over a more than 30-year time period, yet, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Locke, 1997), the original 1967 monograph is often the only methodological reference to appear. In a more recent twist, Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) more formulaic account is appearing as the single methodological reference to grounded theory. Other works by the originators do not seem to be considered. Related to this, resources for conducting grounded theory are spread across a number of domains, for example, sociology, nursing, education and psychology, making it

difficult for organization and management scholars to track them down.

Third, as approaches and ideas are taken from one domain and put to use in another, they undergo transformation; this has been the case with grounded theory. As I shall discuss in the book, it appears that many management and organization researchers have selectively taken up grounded theory's logic and procedures, adapting and integrating them with the logic and practices from other qualitative analytic styles. To a degree, its informing logic and operational practices appear to have fractured as they have been adapted to the purposes and constraints of specific research situations and have been blended with other procedures. Certainly, the school of thought, namely symbolic interactionism, that informed the understanding of social reality expressed in grounded theory's research practices, appears to have been left behind.

In summary, even though the grounded theory approach to qualitative research is apparent through its being widely cited, the scope of work that comprises the relevant body of methodological work is, in large part, invisible. My impetus for writing this book is to restore and reveal more fully the grounded theory approach in organization and management studies. I imagine you, the readers, as graduate students and others who are interested in conducting qualitative studies of organizational and managerial life and who want to learn more about the grounded theory style of qualitative research. The creative theory building purposes of the approach are broadly appealing to many researchers whose introduction to research methods in professional schools (and the business school is certainly in that category) has strongly emphasized a logico-deductive approach executed through quantitative analytic tools. I expect that this book will be useful to those of you interested in exploring this dimension of research but who have had little exposure to grounded theory, except as a citation in publications. It will also be useful to those of you who perhaps have read one or two methodological discussions of it but have not explored the approach further. More seasoned researchers who are also interested in grounded theory but who have had little exposure to qualitative research approaches in general or this research style in particular will also find it useful.

This book, then, attempts to restore the grounded theory style of qualitative research, especially in and for scholars of organizations and management. I have borrowed the idea of restoration from Susan Leigh Star (1991), a student of one of the originators, Anselm Strauss. She characterizes the central theme in Strauss's scholarship as making visible all the work that goes into maintaining the realities of work and life that we take for granted. For the purposes of this book, restoring is interpreted in two ways. First, it involves detailing the disciplinary school of thought and procedural details of the grounded theory approach as they have been articulated by the originators, their students, and by scholars in other disciplines, including organization and management studies

over the past 30 years. Second, it involves describing and discussing the use of grounded theory in studies of organization and management over the same time period. By pulling together in one place the broadly dispersed discussions of grounded theory's logic and practices in sociology, in nursing research, in education, in psychology, and also in organization and management studies, I hope to restore and reveal more fully much of the work that has gone into articulating this qualitative approach. I also hope to more fully disclose the analytic and personal work that building grounded theory requires. Similarly, by describing grounded theory in organization and management studies, including the phenomena that have been investigated, the translations of the approach's logic and procedures, and the written products that constitute grounded theories, I hope to more fully reveal the possibilities and challenges of the approach for this domain.

Organization of chapters

This book is organized into three parts. Part One of the book aims to reveal several important features of the context for the grounded theory style of qualitative research. One way to distinguish qualitative researchers is by their interest in context. We believe that it is impossible to comprehend fully a phenomenon without understanding the context in which it is expressed. Chapter 1 begins by describing the historical development of qualitative research; it explains the various paradigms of inquiry in which qualitative researchers work, locating the grounded theory approach within them. It concludes by describing other styles of qualitative research that are popular with organization and management researchers with which grounded theory co-exists. Chapter 2 continues the focus on context, taking a more disciplinary point of view. It introduces American pragmatism and the symbolic interactionist school of thought that inform this approach; it describes the sociological context in which grounded theory was articulated, and it reveals a little of the personal biographies of its originating authors. From this, I hope that readers will be able gain a sense of the history and domain of qualitative research in general (and of the organization and management area in particular), appreciating grounded theory's place in it. Further, I hope that they gain understanding of the relationship between the character of the grounded theory style of research and the features of time and its disciplinary context.

Part Two is concerned with the research approach itself. Before explicating the operational details of the approach, Chapter 3 first outlines some of its distinguishing features and clarifies the kinds of theoretical outcome grounded theory building is intended to achieve. It also introduces readers to the language terms used to speak about such theories. Chapter 4 focuses on the research logic and basic operational procedures

as they were initially articulated. It details the processes through which meaning is assigned to qualitative data and data sampling is executed. It also provides some of the criteria by which grounded theories are evaluated. Chapter 5 brings Part Two to a close by delineating procedural developments in grounded theory analysis that have followed during the last 30 years (including divergence in these developments on the part of the originators), and by considering some of the personal tensions researchers face when they execute this research approach. I hope that readers will take away from this section a basic understanding of the procedures of grounded theory. Of course, while important, this understanding is nothing without researcher experience. Researchers will have to embark on their own grounded theory studies, breathing life into the words through which the procedures are described with the details of their own experience. I also hope that readers will seek out and draw on the many methodological discussions referenced, deepening their understanding of the approach.

Part Three moves more fully into revealing grounded theory in the domain of organization and management studies, examining how it has traveled and been translated as it has been adopted and adapted here. The particular features of grounded theory building that make it suitable for studies in our domain are suggested in Chapter 6. It also describes and demonstrates how grounded theory has been adopted, and it details the ways in which management researchers have adapted it, integrating new procedures and orienting schools of thought into the approach. The kinds of theory organization and management researchers have developed are illustrated, and Chapter 6 closes by considering possible constraints that the study of corporate organizations and management might impose on grounded theory procedures. Chapter 7 examines grounded theory in studies of organization and management as a composed research product. Here the book pays particular attention to the crafting of a grounded theory journal article. It describes the character of grounded theories in management and organization studies and examines how they are textually presented. I hope that readers will take from Part Three a sense of the challenges and opportunities associated with using this style of research, and that they will be inspired by the breadth and variety of published work that has drawn on it.

A note on the perspective of the author

Before concluding this introduction, a final note on the perspective I bring to this project and to methodological accounts in general. I began qualitative studies as an undergraduate when working with a group of ethologists. I learned to make systematic and detailed observations that were then converted into frequency data – very much in the tradition of

more modernist content analysis practiced today. I came later in graduate work to the issue of meaning and interpretation, and have since adopted an interpretive perspective in my work. With the focus this perspective provides on how realities are constructed, I am aware of the constructed character of methodological accounts. Descriptions of particular methods of research obviously take place as retrospective accounts. They are reports written after the bulk of research practices have been concluded, rather than being narrated moment by moment within the stream of acts that comprise the research method in-use (Vidich and Lyman, 1994, p. 24). As such, they condense what was originally experienced into a set of coherent images that often omit much of the *ad hoc*, opportunistic, and problem solving nature of the inquiry process. Knorr-Cetina's work (1981) that provides a description of how research chemists, for example, fashion a textually linear account out of a nonlinear research process as they prepare their work for formal publication highlights this. Specifically, it brings out the discrepancies between the coherence articulated in representations of research processes and the disjointedness of research as an act in progress.

Furthermore, the disembodied, general and technical language displayed by such texts conforms very closely to the rhetoric traditionally associated with all 'scientific writing' (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997; Selzer, 1993). The language and the research processes they describe easily take on the form of textbook ideals (Vidich and Lyman, 1994).

I have made some deliberate choices in writing this book to highlight the constructed character of our research efforts. The decision to devote a whole part of the book to grounded theory's historical, disciplinary context and to include the biographies of the originators was made *not* to write the procedures as disembodied, impersonal, and a-historical, but to place them in a time, location, and in particular 'bodies.' I have also made some deliberate choices in the language that I use to describe the research process. Specifically, when talking about analysis, I have chosen to use wording that highlights the agency of researchers who actively compose their analytic categories and research findings. This contrasts with the language of the originators, so prevalent at the time in which they wrote their monograph, which suggests a more passive role in which some external reality might be 'discovered' by application of the appropriate procedures. And, I have chosen to reveal my own agency in writing this text.