

Chapter 4

A Set of Principles for Doing and Evaluating Classic Grounded Theory Research in Information Systems

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ABSTRACT

Grounded Theory (GT) is a latent pattern recognition research method discovered by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Due to GT's power and transcendence many research papers across several academic disciplines including Information Systems claimed to have used GT when in fact they have used pseudo GT methods. It is argued in this paper that any other research method which adopts the GT label without following orthodoxy of the authentic GT research method should not be called GT. All of the pseudo GT methods make the false assumption that GT is a sub set of Qualitative Data Analysis. This is a false assumption because authentic GT can use either quantitative or qualitative data and it is a general research methodology and produces empirically grounded but modifiable propositions. Within the Information Systems (IS) research community it is therefore not surprising that many, who claim to use GT, have used different types of pseudo GT. They have adopted vocabulary of the GT without following its original tenets. This paper explains how authentic GT can be carried out in an information systems context by trusting in emergence rather than forcing the data.

INTRODUCTION

There are number of theories from other disciplines such as social sciences and others being adopted for use in Information Systems (IS) (Gregor, 2006; Truex et al, 2006). While some are adopted as they are, some are modified and some are mixed to fit within the IS discipline. Such, combinations erode

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the known procedures and methods. In other words, there is likely repeating of the same mistakes made from the original disciplines (Truex et, 2006). One of these theories is the Classic Grounded theory, which was developed from the background of Sociology discipline (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the recent years, classic grounded theory (CGT) has been used in information systems researches, and various Information Systems researchers claim to use CGT methodology in their researches. Unfortunately, many of the claims of the use of GT research by IS researchers should be more accurately described as pseudo GT methods. There are many researchers who mix CGT with other theories such as Quantitative Data Analysis (QDA). This is noted as wrong, as Glaser (2003:1-2) argues that “Mixing *QDA and GT* downgrades or erodes the *GT* goal of conceptual theory through the process of default remodelling”. CGT becomes remodelled as another QDA method with all its descriptive baggage. This is because there are confusions on doing and evaluating classic grounded theory. This paper fills this gap, by outlining necessary way for doing and evaluating classic grounded theory in Information Systems. It also processes the principles for Classic Grounded theory research.

The paper has three main sections; a clarification as what grounded theory is, an overview of the prior use of the grounded theory method amongst the IS research community and how to do authentic grounded theory research in an IS context.

CLARIFICATION OF THE MEANING OF THE GROUNDED THEORY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Classic Grounded theory methodology is faithful to the original formulation and follows all the original tenets of Grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It has been further elaborated by Glaser (1978, 1992, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011). Classic Grounded theory methodology is a general inductive research method designed to reveal deep seated latent patterns of human behaviour and how the main concerns are being continually being resolved [Glaser, (1998)]. Glaser (1978:93) argues “the goal of GT is to generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved... the goal is not voluminous description, not clever verification”

CGTM provides IS researchers with a means to build theory relevant to the discipline as in Matavire and Brown (2011). Lyytinen and King (2004) argues that building theory for the field would help strengthen it. In the IS discipline opportunities exist to build theory in both emerging fields and well-researched ones as outlined by Matavire and Brown (2011). As Glaser (1992) states, in domains where a large body of knowledge already exists, new concepts and categories may not emerge, but CGT will still contribute to a better understanding of the basic social processes at play. Many authors refer to having used classic grounded theory in their studies, when in fact what they mean is that they have been influenced by the idea of a grounded theory without following all the procedures (Bryant, 2002). In this paper we caution against such incorrectly labelled GT protagonists as pseudo GT. They simply use Classic Grounded theory vocabulary and avoided following all the tenets of the method. As Glaser (2009) explains in his rebuttal of Bryant and Charmaz (2007) that these researchers only use the words of GT without the essence of GT as a result force the data rather than let emerge. The seeds of the major source of confusion concerning the use of the GT method can be directly traced to the publication by Corbin and Strauss (1990). When this book first appeared Glaser wrote to his old collaborator Anselm Strauss and asked that he either withdraw the book or publish it under another title. Strauss declined to do this

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