

Qualitative Research Method: Grounded Theory

Shahid N Khan¹

¹ Department of Management, Monash University, Australia

Correspondence: Shahid N Khan, Department of Management, Monash University, Australia. E-mail: shahid.khan@monash.edu

Received: August 21, 2014

Accepted: October 8, 2014

Online Published: October 22, 2014

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v9n11p224

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v9n11p224>

Abstract

In this literature review paper, the researcher has done some efforts to identify and further to elaborate the basic components of a research methods chapter that are integral part of any research paper while conducting grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is one of the data collection approach in qualitative research methods which is totally based on data rather than try to emerge theory from data. There are bulk of books and research papers written by world renowned researchers and authors but the aim of this paper is to help the early stage researchers in conducting their projects in grounded theory approach. In this paper, the researcher has shed light on history of grounded theory, how this theory rather approach works, target population, sampling technique, data collection methods and the role of a researcher in this whole research process, and another essential part of a qualitative research, ethics which play a crucial role while conducting and gathering a qualitative data, have also been discussed in this paper.

Keywords: grounded theory, inductive reasoning, theory building, theoretical sampling, ethics

1. Introduction

Studies that incorporate grounded theory approach are basically a step towards conceptual thinking and theory building rather than empirical testing of the theory. Hence, a qualitative research approach is used in these types of studies. Particularly it is conceptual thinking and theory building that's why the researchers usually are going to conduct an inductive, constructivist 'Grounded Theory' approach. As it is the systematic development of theory in social settings and it depends upon inductive approaches which is appropriate for the study mainly aim on theory development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Furthermore, the research questions and literature review by it-self leads and support for conceptual thinking and theory building rather than empirical testing of the theory and this type of study follows an inductive theory building approach. Gray (2009) argued that deductive reasoning moves towards hypothesis testing to verify, refuse or modify a theory based on empirical data, whereas inductive reasoning seeks to discover a binding principle and to construct generalizations, relationships and even theories by analysing the data collected for this purpose. However, he also emphasized that the inductive process may still have some pre-existing theories or ideas when approaching a problem. Nonetheless, it does not pursue to approve or negate the existing theories, but endeavours to create outlines, stabilities and significances by collecting data (Gray, 2009).

1.1 The Research Philosophy of the Study

Conceptual thinking and theory building is interrelated with the qualitative research method approach – grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Qualitative research is used to explore the potential antecedents and factors about which little has been known and explored (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This has further been elaborated by Guba and Lincoln (1983) that it is a naturalistic paradigm and assume that the reality is manifold and inter-related and it links the researcher with the subject. Qualitative research is based on three paradigms and main paradigms within the qualitative research are positivist, interpretivist, and critical paradigms (Punch, 1998). Neuman, defined paradigm as...

'A paradigm is a framework or a set of assumptions that explain how the world is perceived where 'the paradigm of a science includes its basic assumptions, the important questions to be answered or puzzles to be solved, the research techniques to be used, and examples of what scientific research looks like'(Neuman, 1991, p. 57).

Kuhn (1970) is famous as a first researcher for using paradigms in the context of a framework to understand inquiry. He sees paradigms as...

‘A set of values and techniques which is shared by members of a scientific community, which act as a guide or map, dictating the kinds of problems scientists should address and the types of explanations that are acceptable to them’ (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175).

These paradigms are further based on three perspectives. These perspectives are epistemology, ontology and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Punch, 2013). The epistemological perspective is concerned with the way knowledge is acquired. It totally depends upon the relationship between researcher and how the researchers perceive that reality (Creswell, 2007; Gratton & Jones, 2004; Punch, 1998). Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality. The reality is perceived as subjective and depends how researchers and participants perceive it (Creswell, 2007; Punch, 1998). Methodology is concerned with process and method through which the researcher acquires knowledge about the world (Creswell, 2007; Edwards & Skinners, 2009; Punch, 1998, 2013).

Neuman (1991) differentiated the interpretivism and positivism philosophical paradigms. He said that the positivist view of the world is objective where behaviour and cause and effect can be measured and human activity can be predicted. In this regard, he added that...

‘For a positivist researcher, the purpose of research is to understand, ‘how the world works so that the events can be controlled or predicted’ (Neuman, 1991, p. 58).

An interpretivist view of the world is subjective, where individuals form their own reality of the world in different contexts through interactions with others. Every individual perceives the world differently and views it in different contexts. Therefore, their actions and behaviours are unpredictable. Both philosophical paradigms have their own strengths and weaknesses as described by Cavana, Delahaye, and Sekaran (2001) that positivism is considered superficial while, interpretivism is considered too subjective. Irrespective of the fact, that both approaches have their own strengths, the most important thing in considering methods for inquiry is based upon the research requirements and research objectives (Cassell & Johnson, 2006; Cavana et al., 2001).

Ultimately, this type of research which’s aim is conceptual thinking and theory building, is based upon an interpretivist approach as the researcher wants to see the social world from the participant’s perspective and consider the participant’s perception of the world (Edwards & Skinners, 2009). This is further explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 296) that an interpretivist approach depends upon both, the participant’s view and the researcher’s view of reality, so that the researcher can...

‘Find meaning in an action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requiring that one interprets in a particular way what the actions are doing’.

1.2 Research Design

1.2.1 Qualitative Research Design

‘We can never achieve a complete ‘scientific’ understanding of the human world. The best we can do is to arrive at a truth that makes a difference that opens up new possibilities for understanding’ (McLeod, 2001, p. 4).

The methodological framework is qualitative approach and further in qualitative research, this type of study is focused on ‘grounded theory approach’ as it is conceptual thinking and theory building rather than theory or hypothesis testing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is usually done in quantitative research approach. Qualitative research is an interpretive and naturalistic approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to (Creswell, 1998, p. 15)...

‘Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting’.

Qualitative research is based upon the observations and interpretations of people’s perception of different events and it takes the snapshot of the people’s perception in a natural setting (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Newman, 1994). In a ‘grounded theory’ approach in which the researchers try to highlight and explore employee’s perception regarding some phenomenon e.g. abusive supervision (Khan, Qureshi, & Ahmad, 2010; Tepper, 2000) in an organization, qualitative data gathered through face-to-face, focus group, telephonic etc. interviews. Further, to refine the construct and to answer the research questions, the researchers have to get data and analyse it and then again and again repeat this process until and unless new data stop emerging or the data saturation occurred (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the grounded theory approach is an appropriate way to study human behaviour on a sensitive topic even in a different cultural context (Wolcott, 1980). In table 1.1, the researcher tried to differentiate the grounded theory approach from the rest of the qualitative approaches.

Table 1. Contrasting characteristics of five qualitative approaches

Characteristics	Narrative Research	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study
Focus	Exploring the life of an individual	Understanding the essence of the experience	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases
Type of problem best suited for design	Needing to tell stories of individual experiences	Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon	Grounding a theory in the views of participants	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases
Discipline background	Drawing from the humanities including anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology	Drawing from philosophy, psychology, and education	Drawing from sociology	Drawing from anthropology and sociology	Drawing from psychology, law, political science, medicine
Unit of analysis	Studying one or more individuals	Studying several individuals that have shared the experience	Studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals	Studying a group that shares the same culture	Studying an event, a program, an activity, more than one individual
Data collection forms	Using primarily interviews and documents	Using primarily interviews with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered	Using primarily interviews with 20 – 60 individuals	Using primarily observations and interviews, but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in field	Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, artifacts
Data analysis strategies	Analysing data for stories, “restoring” stories, developing themes, often using a chronology	Analysing data for significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural description, description of the “essence”	Analysing data through open coding, selective coding	Analysing data through description of culture-sharing group; themes about groups	Analysing data through description of the case and themes of the case as well as cross-case themes
Written report	Developing a narrative about the stories of an individual’s life	Describing the “essence” of the experience	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure	Describing how a culture-sharing group works	Developing a detailed analysis of one or more cases

Source: Modified by Creswell (2007; P. 78-79).

2. Grounded Theory

The qualitative research approach ‘grounded theory’ has been developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2009; Strauss, 1987). They defined ‘grounded theory’ in these words as ‘The theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 12). Grounded theory is all about data collection and analysis. In this approach the aim is to construct a theory that is grounded in the data (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser &

Strauss, 1967, 2009; Strauss, 1987). According to Glaser (1992) grounded theory deals with only inductive approach rather than deductive approach of inquiry. Further, (Punch, 1998, p. 163) defined the grounded theory approach very briefly in these words as...

‘Grounded theory is not a theory at all. It is a method, an approach, a strategy. In my opinion, grounded theory is best defined as a research strategy whose purpose is to generate theory from data. ‘Grounded’ means that the theory will be generated on the basis of data; the theory will therefore be grounded in data. ‘Theory’ means that the objective of collecting and analysing the research data is to generate theory. The essential in grounded theory is that theory will be developed inductively from data’.

While Charmaz (2014) added that grounded theory is focused on inductive strategies for data analysis. It starts with abstract concepts and to explain and understand data. The journey of theory development in grounded theory approach starts and ends with the data. This journey is best explained by the (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12) as...

‘Data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another...the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data...grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action’.

2.1 Evolution of Grounded Theory

Since the grounded theory development in 1967 by Glaser & Strauss, it's in the process of amendments by its instigators and others academic researchers for the last four decades. This theory is further split into two ‘versions’ by its originators and that is called the Glaser's version (Glaser, 1978, 1992) and that of (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) version. Glaser kept on focusing on the earlier concept and remained consistent with it, the one he discovered with the Strauss. They defined grounded theory as ‘...a method of discovery, treated categories as emergent from the data, relied on direct and, often, narrow empiricism, and analysed a basic social process’. While, Strauss (1987) moved the method towards verification, rather than focused on the earlier version of grounded theory. Despite a lot of criticism, (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) version of grounded theory is more famous than the earlier version of grounded theory. Their book serves as a powerful tool for conducting grounded theory approach and has instructed graduates students all over the world (Charmaz, 2014). He, Charmaz (2006, pp. 5-6) further mentioned in his book rather cited the (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) defining components of grounded theory practice in these words as...

‘Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis. Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses. Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis. Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis. Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps. Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness. Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis’.

He, Charmaz (2003, p. 250) further summarized the grounded theory history, since its inception in 1967, in the appended below words...

‘What grounded theory is and should be is contested. Glaser and Strauss and Corbin have moved the method in somewhat conflicting directions (Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). Glaser's (1978, 1992) position often comes close to traditional positivism, with its assumptions of an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data. Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) stance assumes an objective external reality, aims towards unbiased data collection, proposes a set of technical procedures, and espouses verification. Their position moves to post-positivism because they also propose giving voice to their respondents, representing them as accurately as possible, discovering acknowledging how respondents' views of reality conflict with their own, and recognizing art as well as science in the analytic product and process’.

2.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

The Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) work turned the direction of grounded theory from positivist paradigm towards a more constructivist paradigm. This is best illustrated in the mentioned below paragraph by (Anells, 1996, p. 279)...

‘A theory is not the formulation of some discovered aspect of a pre-existing reality ‘out there’. To think otherwise is to take a positivist position...theories are interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted or researched by researchers. To say that a given theory is an interpretation – and therefore fallible – is not at all to deny that judgments can be made about the soundness or probably usefulness of it’

While, Charmaz (2003, pp. 272-273) defined it in more detail and tried to differentiate between the true and real in grounded theory perspective...

‘A constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true. The constructivist approach does not seek truth – single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds...the constructivist approach assumes what we take as real, as objective knowledge and truth, is based upon our perspective...thus the grounded theorist constructs an image of reality, not the reality – that is, objective, true, and external’.

3. Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is an integral part of the grounded theory approach as it lead the researcher what to collect next. In this regard, the important definition of the theoretical sampling presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45) that what theoretical sampling is and what is its role in grounded theory approach. According to them, theoretical sampling is...

‘The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges’.

Similar definition of theoretical sampling has been reported by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 202) in these words, as...

‘[Theoretical Sampling] rather than being predetermined before beginning the research, evolves during the process. It is based on concepts that emerged from analysis and that appear to have relevance to the evolving theory...the aim of theoretical sampling is to maximise opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions’.

The adequate theoretical sampling is important for development of diverse and wide range of theory while, inadequate theoretical sampling can lead the theory development process towards weak, thin and not well integrated base of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The importance of theoretical sampling is further elaborated by (Charmaz, 2003, 2006) that theoretical sampling plays an important role in getting pertinent data that is important in the process of emergence of theory. It plays an important role in refining theory development process and the theory by itself by leading the researcher towards relevant data and this data collection process continues until and unless new data stop emerging. He further differentiated the initial sampling from the theoretical sampling as the researchers usually mixed it up. In this regard, he added that...

‘Initial sampling in grounded theory is where you start, whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go’ (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100).

To further explain it, Charmaz (2006, p. 101) cited in his book an interview with Jane Hood, understanding theoretical sampling. Jane Hood commented that...

‘Very few people do [understand it]. I really think it’s a craft ... you need somebody to give you feed-back as you’re trying to learn how to do this because there is a subtle difference between theoretical sampling and other kinds of purposeful sampling. Theoretical sampling is purposeful sampling but its purposeful sampling according to categories that one develops from one’s analysis and these categories are not based upon quotas; they’re based on theoretical concerns. And – the authors of text-books don’t get it. The authors of textbooks typically say [something like], ‘Oh, you don’t have enough women; go get more.’ No, that’s not theoretical sampling. That’s basically quota sampling or sampling on demographic characteristics. There’s nothing wrong with starting out that way but that’s your first step. Theoretical sampling really makes grounded theory special and is the major strength of grounded theory because theoretical sampling allows you to tighten what I call the corkscrew or the hermeneutic spiral so that you end up with a theory that perfectly matches your data. Because you choose the next people to talk to or the next cases to find based upon the [theoretical] analysis and you don’t waste your time with all sorts of things that have nothing to do with your developing theory’.

4. Unit of Analysis

The most important part of any research is the unit of analysis as the whole research based upon the unit of analysis. According to the Neuman (2011, p. 69) the unit of analysis is...

‘The units, cases, or parts of social life that are under consideration. They are key to developing concepts, empirically measuring or observing concepts, and using data analyses. It ‘refers to the level of aggregation of the data collected during the subsequent data analysis stage’.

The unit of analysis could be individuals, dyads, groups, and organizations. The determination of the unit of analysis during the initial stage of research is crucial as the conceptual framework; data collection techniques

and sample size are each depends upon the unit of analysis (Cavana et al., 2001). Further Neuman (2011) highlighted the units of analyses that it includes individuals, peoples, groups, organizations, movements, institutions, countries and so forth. He explained it through an example that the concept of aggression can be applied to several units: an individual, group, organization, or country.

4.1 Qualitative Data Collection Methods

It is very important to explore the research for conceptual development, clarification of constructs and further its operationalization. Through the academic literature, the identification of the constructs and further its nomological network to these constructs to the development of the conceptual framework is an important step before selecting a qualitative data collection method. Exploratory research is usually conducted for exploring the constructs and fields when limited information and research is available on the subject area (Cavana et al., 2001). Qualitative research is the best method for exploring research (Creswell, 2007). He, Creswell (2007) has identified four techniques of qualitative data collection which researchers can adopt. These are field work, observation, interviews (including group interviews and focus groups), and document analysis.

Therefore, for qualitative research data collection especially in a grounded theory approach, the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups can be used to get data. Here the aim of data collection and analysis is to identify and explore the antecedents and factors associated with the phenomenon of the study according to the employees' perception. The interview data will be transcribed and analysed through coding and constant comparison process, keeping in view the constructivist grounded theory approach. Analysed data of interviews along with the literature will be used to integrate and for the development of conceptual thinking and theory building.

4.1.1 Selection of Participants

Basically, Sampling is a method of deducing information about whole population instead of going to measure every unit of the population. Only appropriate and proper development of the sampling technique will lead to the authenticity of the results. The importance of sampling in any type of research is highlighted by Punch (1998, p. 193) as...

'We cannot study everyone, everywhere doing everything. Sampling decisions are required not only about which people to interview or which events to observe, but also about settings and processes.'

He further added that the sampling plan and sampling parameters are interrelated with the purpose of the study and research questions of the study. He further stressed upon this point that the research questions and purposes should be align with the sample, if not then it needs further development. While, Neuman (2011, p. 240) stressed on the element of representation that sample is 'a small set of cases a researcher selects from a large pool and generalizes to the population'. He, Neuman (2011, p. 67) further cited in his book (Howard Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*) as...

'Sampling is a major problem for any type of research. We cannot study every case of whatever we are interested in, nor should we want to. Every scientific enterprise tries to find out something that will apply to everything of a certain kind by studying a few examples, the result of the study being, as we say, 'generalizable'.

He distinguished it from the population in these words that 'The abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from a sample are generalized' (Neuman, 2011, p. 241).

Now the question is that what should be the size of sample, it depends upon the type of research we are going to conduct whether its quantitative or qualitative research. The researchers have defined different criteria for quantitative and qualitative research but the common thing is that it depends upon the population characteristics, types of data and its accuracy likes its degree of confidence. It's not the matter of small or large but the representativeness (Neuman, 2011). Regarding the qualitative research sampling he cited in his book (Flick, 1998, p. 41) that 'It is their relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness which determines the way in which the people to be studied are selected'.

Ideally, sample represents the whole population on the characteristics of interest (Burns & Grove, 2009).

4.1.2 Interviews

The type of interviews range from structured, semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face, telephonic, one-on-one, computer-assisted interviews, group interviews, and focus group interviews etc. interview 'provides a unique opportunity to uncover rich and complex information from an individual' (Cavana et al., 2001, p. 138). It is very important for data gathering through interviews (Willis, 2007, p. 17) that...

‘The world view within which you are conducting research plays a defining role in how you prepared for the interview, who you choose an interviewee, what questions you ask, how you structure the interview, and how you interpret the data’.

He further cited (Fontana & James, 1994, p. 364) who mentioned the most important points as a guideline to conduct structured interviews. These are very important points which describe what interpretivist research are not. In these guidelines, simply delete the ‘never and don’ts’ and you would get the essence of interviewing in the interpretivist world. These are:

Never get involved in long explanations of the study; use the standard explanation provided by the supervisor.

Never deviate from the study introduction, sequence of questions, or question wording.

Never let another person interrupts the interview; do not let another person answer for the respondent or offer his or her opinions on the question.

Never suggest an answer or agree or disagree with an answer. Do not give the respondent any idea of your personal views on the topic of the question or survey.

Never interpret the meaning of a question; just repeat the question and give instructions or clarifications that are provided in training or by supervisors.

Never improvise, such as by adding answer categories, or make wording changes.

4.2 Characteristics of Qualitative Research

According to Burns and Grove (2009), qualitative research is a systematic and subjective approach to highlight and explain daily life experiences and to further give them proper meaning. Further, Holloway and Wheeler (2002) briefly discussed the qualitative research in these words that it allows the researchers to deeply explore behaviours, different perspectives, and life experiences. And further to find out the complexities of the situation through a holistic framework. According to Creswell (2007) qualitative research got a distinct method to explore a social or human problem or phenomenon. It conducts studies in natural setting.

4.3 Role of the Researcher

The researcher plays a role of ‘lens’ through which data are gathered and interpreted. In this process the researcher play a very neutral role as to avoid the biasness in data collection and further its interpretation so as, to present the unbiased result of the study. As, Glaser (1999, p. 838) briefly discussed the grounded theory researcher in these words...

‘The grounded theory researcher has three important characteristics: An ability to conceptualize data, an ability to tolerate some confusion, and an ability to tolerate confusion’s attendance regression. These attributes are necessary because they enable the researcher to wait for the conceptual sense making to emerge from the data. This is just a fact...students who attempt grounded theory but cannot tolerate confusion and regression, and who need to continually feel cognitively in control, fall by the wayside. They get fed up’.

4.4 Data Collection Procedures

For data collection the employees can be approached after or during office hours and should be given information regarding the nature and rationale of the research. The respondents should be guaranteed of the privacy and secrecy of the data and results. As, earlier mentioned that the researchers while conducting a ‘grounded theory’ approach and for the first round, they can distribute structured questionnaires to have employee’s perception of the phenomenon of interest in an organization. If it exists in the organization then the researcher can conduct face-to-face, in-depth, open ended and semi-structured interviews and focus groups interviews. In these types of interviews, the researcher has better chance to get their opinions, views and experiences in detail. The pattern of semi-structured interviews allow and enable the researcher to have prepared a topic guide or relevant questions to be covered with each participant in one setting (Polit & Beck, 2008). Further the face-to-face interview allows the researcher to deeply observe the participant for any non-verbal communication but also allows both the interviewer and the interviewee (participant) to clarify the ambiguities and necessary points. The researchers did not mention any specific time duration for interviews but can be last for 60 to 90 minutes however, these questions and times are merely a guide and estimation for the interview sessions; the interview time and duration depends upon the participant’s responses which can extend and prolong the interviews sessions.

The interviews can be audio-taped with permission from the participant to ascertain an accurate account of the interview which can be replayed for analytic purposes and anonymity should be assured during the course of the

recording. Participants should be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study or terminate the interview at any time before commencing the session.

4.5 Ethical Issues

‘Ethics begins and ends with you, the researcher’ (Neuman, 2011, p. 143). Ethical issues are important for both quantitative and qualitative research, but ethical considerations are more important in qualitative research as qualitative research approaches often intrude in participant’s lives (Punch, 1998). That’s why Neuman (2011, p. 143) made the individual researcher responsible for research ethics. He added that ‘It is the moral and professional obligation of the individual researcher to be ethical even when research participants are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics’.

In the whole research process, the researcher is the one who knows the potential benefits and losses involved in an on-going research project. While collecting any kind of information or data from participants, the researcher should disclose all benefits and losses that may affect the participants (Punch, 1998). Some general ethical issues in research that result in some prohibitions are: never cause unnecessary or irreversible harm to participants, secure prior voluntary consent when possible and never unnecessarily humiliate, degrade, or release harmful information about specific individuals that was collected for research purposes. These are minimal standards and are subject to interpretation (e.g., what does ‘unnecessary’ mean in a specific situation?). Participation in any kind of research must be voluntary, and the researcher must inform participants regarding all aspects of research studies. In this regard, this is pertinent to note that the researcher has got an informed consent statement signed by the participants, inform them of their rights and provide brief information about the research study (Neuman, 2011).

To avoid the organisation’s involvement in data collection, from the ethics approval perspective, the researcher can avoid recruiting participants through their organisations. Rather, individuals can be contacted, using a snow-ball sampling technique, through the researcher’s personal contacts and social networks. To get the full essence of the study, the researcher should get the participant’s confidence, consent and approval before proceeding in an interview with the participant. Before approaching participants for data collection through interviews, prior informed consent should be obtained from them and they should be informed that they can withdraw anytime during the interview. To avoid any kind of identification of individuals, supervisors or organisations, the research can be based on employees’ past experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon. Participants should be motivated to share their experiences of the phenomenon but not the specific individual supervisors or organisations. If advertently or inadvertently the participants identify any individual supervisors or organisation, the researcher should immediately remind them that the researcher do not wish them to disclose such information. And while transcribing the audio recordings any individual supervisors and organisation identification should be replaced with pseudonyms or omitted altogether. And at the end of the interview, the researcher should assure the interviewee of the confidentiality of interview data. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic for employees and the fact that the researcher would be discussing issues that may raise some painful memories for the participants, the researcher should identify support or other information services in advance that individuals can access in their area should they feel the need to after conversation, and should provide these details to each participant.

After data collection, all the data in any form, e.g., printed transcripts or audio recordings, should be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office and any electronic data (NVivo) files should be stored in password-protected computers.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher has highlighted the qualitative research methods approach – grounded theory which is not a theory by itself but play an important role in developing and building a theory from data. Its history and evolution and the two schools of thoughts e.g. Glaser’s version and Strauss and Corbin’s Version have also been discussed. Further the author stressed and emphasised on the later version as it is getting more popularity and is more inclined towards constructivist approach rather than positivist approach. There are some other integral parts of the qualitative research methods while conducting grounded theory approach, have also been included and elaborated in this paper e.g. theoretical sampling, unit of analysis, sampling, target population, role of the researcher, data collection procedures and techniques and ethics etc.

References

- Anells, M. (1996). Grounded theory method: Philosophical perspectives, paradigm of inquiry, and postmodernism. *Qualitative Health Research*, 6(3), 379–393.

- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/104973239600600306>
- Burns, N., & Grove, S. K. (2009). *The Practice of Nursing Research: Appraisal, Synthesis, and Generation of Evidence*.
- Cassell, C., & Johnson, P. (2006). Action research: explaining the diversity. *Human Relations*, 59(6), 783–814. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726706067080>
- Cavana, R. Y., Delahaye, B. L., & Sekaran, U. (2001). *Applied Business Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods* (1st ed.). US & Australia: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd
- Charmaz, K. (2003). *Grounded theory: Obejectivist and constructivist methods*. In N. K. D. Y. S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed., pp. 249–291). London: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Construting Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, K. N., & Lincoln, S. Y. (2003). Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, (Eds.), *Qualitative Research* (3rd ed., pp. 1–32). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Edwards, A., & Skinners, J. (2009). Research Paradigms in Qualitative Sports Research Management. In A. E. J. Skinners (Ed.), *Qualitative Reseaerch in Sports Management* (1st ed., p. 439). UK & USA: Elesiver Ltd.
- Flick, U. (1998). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (1st ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Fontana, A., & James, F. (1994). The Art of Science. In N. a. Y. L. Denzin (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 361–376). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory* (Vol. 2). Sociology Press Mill Valley, CA.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Emergence vs forcing: Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. (1999). The future of grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(6), 836–845. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/104973299129122199>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery grounded theory: strategies for qualitative inquiry*. Aldin, Chicago.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers.
- Gratton, C., & Jones, I. (2004). Analyzing data II: Qualitative data analysis. *Research methods for sport studies*, 217–227.
- Gray, D. E. (2009). *Doing Research in the Real World* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Guba, E. G. (1990). *The paradigm dialog*. Sage Publications.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1983). *Effective evaluation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. D. Y. S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holloway, I., & Wheeler, S. (2002). Qualitative Research in Nursing (p. 296).
- Khan, S. N., Qureshi, I. M., & Ahmad, H. I. (2010). Abusive Supervision and Negative Employee Outcomes. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(4), 490–500.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The Structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McLeod, J. (2001). *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy*. SAGE.
- Neuman, W. L. (1991). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Neuman, W. L. (2011). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. USA: Allyn and

Bacon.

Newman, W. L. (1994). *Social research methods*. Boston Allyn and Bacon.

Polit, F. D., & Beck, T. C. (2008). *Nursing Research –Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice*. (pp. 1–816). Retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/Nursing-Research-Generating-Assessing-Evidence/dp/1605477087#reader_1605477087

Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (1st ed.). London, Thousand Oaks California, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Punch, K. F. (2013). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Sage.

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=y16ww5ZsJ0AC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Tepper, B. J. (2000). Consequences of abusive supervision. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(2), 178–190. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1556375>

Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. Retrieved 11 May, 2013, from http://www.amazon.com/Foundations-Qualitative-Research-Interpretive-Approaches/dp/1412927412#reader_1412927412

Wolcott, H. F. (1980). *Ethnographic research in education*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).