



THE NEW UNDERSTANDING AND ANALYSIS OF FEATURES AND CONTENTS OF GROUNDED THEORY

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Abstract

For the social researching field, qualitative research, especially the grounded theory has always been attached with great importance. This theory requires on plenty of literatures, with effective data and information. It has also the systematic procedure as feature, as well as value the perspective of the researchers and interviewees very important and precious. The theoretical sampling method, use of literature with flexibility and belief of functions of personal interpretations are all the fundamental idea of grounded theory. There is also a specialty of grounded theory to use memorandum into qualitative research.

Keywords: *grounded theory; narration; qualitative methodology.*



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Various scientific research methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, as well as different expertise areas. A different method often means the researcher has chosen a different researching idea. Meanwhile, the selection and use of the method stems from the nature of the research topic, so it is a necessary condition for valuable conclusions to integrate research questions and methodology appropriately. For the social researching field,

qualitative research has always been attached with great importance which is the study on the social living skills in a natural setting, exploration of the verbal and nonverbal behaviors, collecting data with participant observation and deep interviews, and also analyzing and using information and data sources besides the written documents, but the data collection is relatively non-structured, and the structure is formed in the final report and analysis process, rather than in the information collection stage. As an important qualitative researching methodology, grounded theory has been paid attention and widespread used by social science and other subjects' researchers, for its pertinence and accuracy with effectiveness in the researching process.

Grounded theory methodology has been created by Glazer and Strauss originated from dealing with the dying patients in a hospital in the 1960s. The features of this methodology as attaching great importance on data and interaction enable researchers to collect data with making use of continuous, close interaction and close observation (Layder, 1983, p87). The main realizing way of this methodology in the educational researching field is in-depth case survey, which makes investigations and surveys in educational issues and life experiences. This could enable researchers to access the explanation and description of educational phenomenon from interviewees, and the authenticity, validity and richness of data can be ensured in the research process by researchers through multiple feedbacks with full communication (Li, 2007).

1. The premises and requirements of using grounded theory.

(1) The requirements on literatures

The general opinion is the dependence on literature by the grounded theory methodology should be very limited as it is a technology summarizing theories from phenomenon, and on the contrary, plenty of literature resources might also play a negative role as disrupting researchers' thinking. In fact, the literature analysis is also an integral part of grounded theory methodology, which is mainly reflected in the following two aspects: on one hand, researchers are able to identify the propositions or definitions with theoretical gaps or mistakes, or if the existing theory really can not effectively explain the phenomenon based on the literature reviews and analysis, and both of them are the premise of selection of

researching direction; on the other hand, each social phenomenon has a link with each other, which means there is not completely isolated phenomenon or theory (Weng, Xu & Huang, 2000, p13). Therefore, the final conclusions abstracted from grounded theory method should be compared and examined with the existing theories, which can also enrich the grounded theory results, not to mention some of the concepts and categories of grounded theory analysis may also be directly cited from the literatures.

(2) The requirements data and information

At the same time, the requirements of grounded theory on the richness and representativeness of the data and information makes it very important of the case selection. The qualitative research must have the sampling with depth, wide-ranging and multi-faceted reflection of researching phenomenon, and not like quantitative research which select representative individuals and deduce them to the sample of the whole population. The sample of the quantitative research focuses on the representation and tends to meet the required amount of the statistical inference and emphasize on the random nature of samples, while the qualitative research focuses on abundant information and profound connotation of the samples. The data collection of case study generally has three methods, such as interviews, observations, and corporate documents, of which the method of interviews is the most important way of contacting with enterprises directly and, the most effective means of obtaining first-hand information. Interviews have the features of discerning the main points of issues and problems timely and a high degree of flexibility. Meanwhile, interviews are also instructive, during which researchers be stimulated with new ideas and new practices, and even the interviewees could also realize the spark of thought, which can be made explicit, principled and systematic by researchers, and then elevated to the theoretical level (Weng, Xu & Huang, 2000, pp12-15). Therefore, interviews may increase the opportunity for researchers to explore the theoretical gaps, and are suitable for the in-depth study of new phenomena and new matters, which just to meet the requirements of seeking for new and interesting theory or issues by grounded theory study.

In order to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of information and data, the validity of the information needs to be confirmed through a variety of data aggregation and mutual

authentication in the process of data compilation. Next, the specific analysis of information and data includes the three main stages as open, axial and selective coding, which are most unique and most critical parts of grounded theory.

2. The features of grounded theory.

(1) The systematic procedure. The “systematic procedure” includes scientific procedures as recording, analysis, translation, taking notes and writing report. The qualitative research methodologies include not only observation, interviews, case research and document analysis, but also notes, transcripts, audio, video and other technologies, which could meet some of the standards of scientific research, such as finding out significance, coordination of observation and theory, generalization of the findings, reproducibility, accuracy, rigor, and verification, if researchers can perform these procedures carefully (Li, 2007). In short, the grounded theory provides a program for the establishment of theories in order to prevent researchers from the limitation of the existing theoretical framework, and make them to develop and establish theories with a more creative way based on the original materials.

(2) From the perspective of the researchers and interviewees.

The personal position of researchers and the principal interviewees or narrators has been emphasized by grounded theory, which advocates the role and responsibility of interpretation afforded by researchers, who should not only report or describe view point of the interviewees or narrators, but also make theoretical analysis. Researchers, who are in the use of grounded theory research methodology, can clearly feel the links between the researching activities and the personal life experience and background, so it can be said that the research activities and interviewees have not alienated or separated from each other, but there is also the integrated use of personal experience and background (Li, 2007). In addition, the vivo concept, established from the data collection, is based on the saying and narration of the interviewees and narrators, which could better demonstrate the concept construction and view point of them.

3. The fundamental idea of grounded theory

(1) The primary task of grounded theory.

The primary task of grounded theory is to establish a substantive theory that applies to a

specific time and space between grand theory and micro-operational assumptions, but without ruling out the construction of the universal formal theory. However, the formal theory must be built on the basis of substantive theory, and the formal theory may be set up based on all kinds of relevant substantive theory only when the substantive theory is established on the basis of abundant data and materials, the reason of which lies in the consideration of grounded theory that knowledge is an accumulated process with the constant evolution from the facts to the substantive theory, and then to a formal theory (Li, 2007). Therefore the construction of formal theory requires a lot of information and data sources, and the intermediary as substantive theory. There are likely a lot of loopholes generated directly from a data source to a formal theory construction, which has a huge jump in the process. In addition, the formal theory does not have to a single constitution form, but can contain many different substantive theories, and integrate and concentrate many different concepts and ideas into an integral whole. This kind of intensive formal theory, which is more abundant in its implication than those with single formal theory, can provide definitions and explanations for a broader phenomenon field.

(2) The theoretical sampling method.

During the process of data analysis, the initially generated theory from materials could be regarded as the standard of data sampling in the next step. These theories can guide the data collection and analysis in next step, such as data and materials selection, code setting and the encoding and archiving system establishment (Alheit, 1999, <Grounded theory>). Each theory presented in each step could play a guiding role to researchers and determine the direction and form of research work in the next step. Therefore, the data and material analysis should not just stay in the surface of mechanical language coding, but with theoretical coding. Researchers should put forward assumptions the contents of the data and materials constantly, and draw out theories from of the repeated comparisons between data and assumptions, and then encode data and materials with these theories.

(3) The use of literature with flexibility.

The use of the relevant literature can broaden our horizons, and provide new concepts and theoretical framework for data analysis, but at the same time, the previous theories should

not be used and referenced too much, otherwise, the predecessors' thinking may bound our thinking, which results in us intentionally or unintentionally apply mechanically the previous theories by others to our own data and materials, or in other words, apply mechanically our own data and materials into the previous theories by others.

(4) The belief of functions of personal interpretations

Grounded theory believes that the personal interpretations by researchers can also play an important role in the theory construction in the meanwhile of proper use of the previous theories (Li, 2007). The understanding of data and information by researchers is because the researchers have brought their own experiential knowledge into their understanding process, and the materials generated from theories are actually the result of interaction and integration between the materials and personal interpretation by researchers. The original data and materials, the individual existing knowledge of researchers as well as the results of previous studies are actually a triangular interaction which requires researchers to combine the original materials and data with their own personal judgments in the use of literature. Researchers themselves should develop the habit of asking themselves and being asked by themselves to listen to multiple voices in the text, in order to understand the interactive relationship between the original data and literatures.

4. The specialty skill of using grounded theory with memorandum

As the cornerstone methodology of in-depth interview research, the grounded theory has two key areas as coding and memorandum in the process of researching analysis and text writing in depth interviews. If the coding procedures are the beginning of the formation of grounded theory with the summarization and classification of data and materials from interviews, the memorandum is the key aspects of the formation of grounded theory with the analysis and synthesis of the interviews contents and materials. The memorandum is the development of the thinking and writing stage of grounded theory. During the interviews and documentation process, grounded theory requires researchers to develop the habit of writing memorandums to keep records of their own thinking, especially the inspiration and confusion about certain or special individuals, concepts, categories or events. It is believed that a more comprehensive and systematic thesis writing form and habit could be realized with writing

memorandums with orderly, repeated and constant thinking by researchers.

Strauss and Corbin have described three basic forms of memorandum: the operational notes, code notes and theoretical notes. The operational notes record the information and data about the narrators, interview process and contents, the code notes record related code and information and thinking of related concepts, while the theoretical notes summarize and consider the conceptual categories, as well as their relationship. The function of memorandum is to contact the different characters, stories, concepts and categories together to explore and discuss the logical relationship among them, so as to construct the rational understanding of the social life and the social experiences of the interviewees and narrators based on the investigation on the data and materials of interviews. The dated should be attached when writing memorandum to show the context of thinking and the progress of achievements. Each section of the memorandums shall be marked with themes, so that they could be sorted with order, summarized generally and collated in the process of analysis and writing (Hu, 1996, p157).

Grounded theory has been mentioned more and more nowadays in the qualitative researching field. Its pertinence and accuracy have also showed its attractiveness to most social science researchers. In the daily using and data analyzing process with this methodology, it is necessary to master a certain amount of literatures, effective data and information. The researching process should be based on the systematic procedure, and the perspective of the researchers and interviewees should be always paid much attention to and be regarded as the first hand researching materials for the latter work. The theoretical sampling method, the use of literature with flexibility and belief of functions of personal interpretations should be all integrated into the normal use of grounded theory, as the fundamental notions. It is also an important and good researching habit to use memorandum into qualitative research. The grounded theory could only be practiced and applied in the daily qualitative researching process based on these fundamental researching ideas and points.

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