

## GROUNDING THEORY METHOD: AN OVERVIEW

**Dr. Tayyaba Zarif**

Education Department

Newports Institute of Communications and Economics (NICE)

Karachi

### **Abstract**

*The grounded theory method (GTM) symbolize a extensively functional and accepted method .At the same time, theoretical and conceptual matter of grounded theory method are continuing theme to discussion .This paper brief the overview of GT method by exploring the important aspects of the grounded theory method i-e establishment of Grounded Theory, School of thought of Grounded theory , Nature of Grounded theory, Requisite Features and attributes of grounded theory, means of the method of grounded theory, Demands , threat and intimidation of grounded theory. The main focus of the paper is to provide the comprehensive understanding of the method of grounded theory to the reader keeping in view the qualitative research.*

**Keywords** *Grounded theory, method, Research, qualitative Research*

### **1. Introduction**

Glaser and Strauss founded and invented the grounded theory which represents the method of development of theory is based (“grounded”) on ,Initially and primarily ,qualitative data .Grounded theory is not suppose to be a theory in fact it stand for method .Grounded theory is also referred to as a Grounded Theory Method (GTM) . For clarity purpose here we can consider GTM as method and GT as result. The main focus of this work is giving an overview of GTM. The overview clarify and explore the imperative aspects of the grounded theory method i-e beginning of Grounded Theory, School of thought of Grounded theory , Nature of Grounded theory, Requisite Features of grounded theory, using the grounded theory method , Demands , threat of grounded theory.

Glaser and Strauss invented the Grounded Theory (GT) which symbolize a method to develop theory this method is based on the systematic generating of theory from data ,that is gained scientifically from social research .

The foundation on the method is

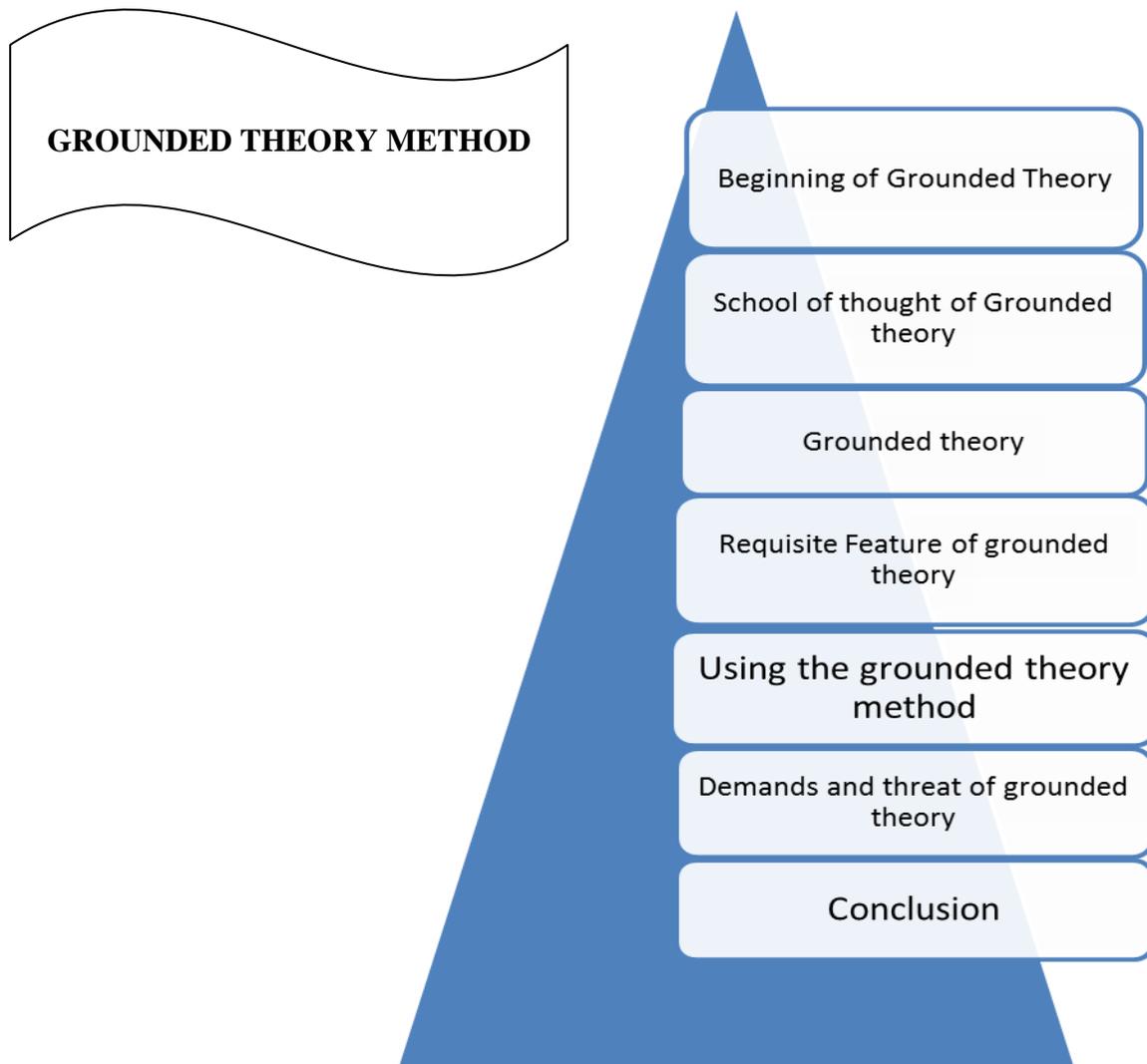
“systematic generating of theory from data, that is systematically obtained from social research, and offers a rigorous, orderly guide to theory development that at each

stage is closely integrated with a methodology of social research” (Glaser, 1978, p. 2).

The method formerly developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was designed to construct a new theory that is useful for the area of study that light up a particular phenomenon .The construct are “ grounded” in the specific set of data the study bring together and consequent research can be tested the effectiveness of the construct .(Gall et al.,1996)

This GTM is a valuable qualitative method for the reason that it facilitate to grow the building blocks for generalizable empirical research .This paper walk around grounded theory method with highlighting on different areas of GTM.

Below diagram illustrates the structural areas of paper:



## 2. Beginning of Grounded Theory

The grounded theory method developed in significance and gratitude over the years from the seminal work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967). These two sociologists come from diverse setting and their joint work melds primary background in sociology (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992; Glaser, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

On the one hand, Herbert Blumer, Evert Hughes and Robert Park trained Anselm Strauss in symbolic interaction at the University of Chicago's school of qualitative research, wherever Strauss was prejudiced by the pragmatist philosophical tradition (Charmaz, 2001; Glaser, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Additional Barney Glaser was trained in quantitative methodology and qualitative mathematics at Columbia University by Paul F. Lazarsfeld, a trendsetter of quantitative methods (Glaser, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Glaser was also trained in theory construction by Merton; particularly in theoretical coding, which Merton learned from Talcott Parsons and others (Glaser, 1998). Furthermore, Glaser acquired training in explication of text at the University of Paris (Glaser, 1998).

The grouping of the diverse conditions of Strauss and Glaser, whereas functioning jointly during the early 1960s, created the constant comparative method presently recognized as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## 3. School of thought of Grounded theory

The originators of grounded theory continued to build up the method over the years independently of each other. Their separated pathways led to what now is recognized as the 'Straussian' and 'Glaserian' descriptions of the grounded theory method currently there are two school of thought of grounded theory the 'Glaserian School' and the 'Straussian School' (Stern, 1994).

**Table 1:** This discussion has been rented from Onions (1996)

‘GLASERIAN’	‘STRAUSSIAN’
Commencement with broad wonderment (an empty mind)	Having a general idea of where to begin
Emerging theory, with neutral questions	Forcing the theory, with structured questions
Development of a conceptual theory	Conceptual description (description of situations)
A basic social process should be recognized	Basic social processes need not be recognized
The researcher is passive, exhibiting disciplined restraint	The researcher is active
Theoretical understanding (the ability to recognize variables and relationships) comes from interest in the data	Theoretical understanding comes from methods and Tools
The theory is grounded in the data	The theory is interpreted by an observer
The credibility of the theory, or verification, is resulting from its grounding in the data	The credibility of the theory comes from the rigour of the method
Coding is less rigorous, a constant comparison of incident to incident, with neutral questions and categories and properties evolving. Take care not to ‘over-conceptualise’, recognize key	Coding is more rigorous and defined by technique. The nature of building comparisons varies With the coding technique. Labels are cautiously dexterity at the time. Codes are derivatived
Data reveals the theory	Data is prepared to divulge the theory

#### 4. Grounded theory

Grounded theory has established an eternally accepted selection of methodology for social researchers since its growth in the 1960s, with more than 3,650 journal articles published, equally on the methodology itself and coverage research conclusions. Over time, the deviating approaches and situations accepted by the founding fathers, Glaser and Strauss, have aggravated a large amount of conversation (Corbin, 1998). The subject of which theorist has broadened the methodology in a way that is realistic to its innovative objective of developing theory from data has been systematically debated (e.g., Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004; Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Grounded Theory method builds up by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It is a broad methodology for mounting theory that is grounded in data scientifically collected and analyzed (Strauss and Corbin 1994). Theory develops and evolves through the research procedures due to the interchange among data collection and analysis stages. It is essential to note that the result of a Grounded Theory study is the generation of a theory, on the basis of concepts and sets of concepts instead the information is often presented with little comment from a researcher as other ethnographical methods.

A Grounded Theory is a theory which is inductively resulting from the phenomenon it symbolize and assemble four essential criteria: fit, understanding, generality and control (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Fit necessitate that the theory fits the substantive data. Understanding necessitate that the theory be graspable to all concerned in the area of study. Generality necessitate that the theory is appropriate in a variety of contexts. Control implies that the theory should supply control with regard to action toward the phenomenon. Grounded theory provides a organized method connecting numerous stages which is used to 'ground' the theory, or narrate it to the authenticity of the phenomenon under consideration (Scott 1996). A Grounded Theory is derived from the phenomenon under study. This contrasts with the hypothetico-deductive method, where theories are generated from cyclical testing and sanitization of a formerly constructed hypothesis. In Grounded Theory studies, theory emerges from the logical and systematic assessment of the phenomenon.

A further comprehensive description promoted by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is as follows:

*.....A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship to one another Grounded theory research is discovered empirically, through induction, not deduction. The focus of grounded theory research, on support from evidence (p. 23) .*

#### 5. Requisite Feature of grounded theory

Theoretical sensitivity is an essential requisite of grounded theory which relates to the comprehending the nature and refinement of data and refers to a intellectual capacity with personal quality of the researcher.

As Glaser (1978) illustrated the Theoretical sensitivity as the procedure of developing the approach by means of which a researcher comes to the research circumstances. These circumstances should be theoretical rather than concrete. It is frequently referred to as a creative

aspect of grounded theory method. Through theoretical sensitivity the research will be capable to distinguish significant data and originate conceptually dense theory.

## 6. Using the grounded theory method

Instead following the usual research steps of formation of hypothesis, evidence of methodology data collection and analysis at the end testing of hypothesis in the light of analyzed data grounded theory method acquire a diverse approach of interpretation of data on the basis of refinement of collected concepts .With the help of grouping of all concepts eventually explain the main concern of the respondents which verified formulated hypothesis.

According to Glaser

“It is important to understand grounded theory as a package of research methods, which includes data collection, coding and analyzing through memoing, theoretical sampling and sorting to writing, using the constant comparative method ”(Glaser 1998, p.12).

This indicate that in the research process steps of techniques of sampling , data collection ,data analysis and interpretation supposed to be measured as separate procedural steps but ss an alternative need to be consider as a continuous cycle of collection of data, analysis of data and sampling technique. The researcher applies a form of analysis recognized as selective coding. The researchers not only continuously review and analyzed data keeping in view the selective coding even review the categories constantly and make sure that data is not being enforced into categories. This energetic connection between data collection and analysis facilitates to the researcher to make sure if groundwork results remain constant when more data is collected.

Usually Theoretical sampling is acknowledged as a critical characteristic of grounded theory (Webb 2003; Becker 1993). However, relationship between theoretical sampling with data analysis shows the understanding of theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling is defined as:

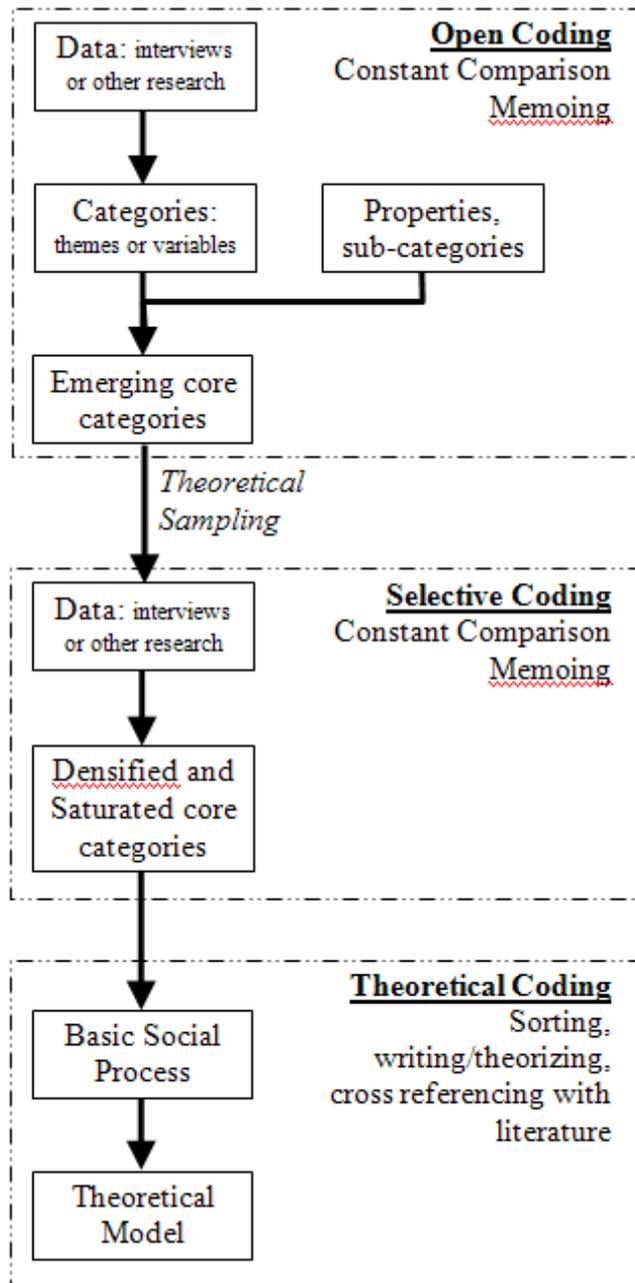
*...the process of the data collection for generating theory Where by analyst jointly collects, codes, analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.45).*

An additional significant aspect of grounded theory research method connected with the data analysis is that of memoing. Glaser (1998; 1978).

Theoretical memos are defined as the following:

“Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about Codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst While coding” (Glaser 1978, p.83).

The process summarized by following figure which is illustrated by (Jones and Alony, 2011, p.8).



**Figure 1:** The Process of Grounded Theory by Jones and Alony (2011)

GT should not be judged according to its validity but rather according to its fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

A GT is by no means right or wrong, it in a minute has more or less fit, relevance, workability or modifiability

.....**Fit** has to do with how closely concepts fit with the incidents they are representing, and this is related to how thoroughly the constant comparison of incidents to concepts was done.

**Relevance.** A relevant study deals with the real concern of participants, evokes "grab" (captures the attention) and is not only of academic interest.

**Workability.** The theory works when it explains how the problem is being solved with much variation.

**Modifiability.** A modifiable theory can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data. A GT is never right or wrong, it just has more or less fit, relevance, workability and modifiability \*

## 7. Demands and threat of grounded theory

Each methodology presents precise demands as grounded theory.  
Walter said in his study;

.....I strongly concur with the advice provided by Glaser (1978; 1998; 2001), based on his own experience and discussions with other grounded theorists that the grounded theorist must:

1. Tolerate confusion – there is no need to know *a priori* and no need to force the data;
2. Tolerate regression – researchers might get briefly ‘lost’ before finding their way;
3. Trust emerging data without worrying about justification – the data will provide the justification if the researcher adheres to the rigour of the method;

---

\*Wikipedia (2012) Grounded theory. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grounded\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grounded_theory). Accessed 15.08.2012

4. Have someone to talk to – grounded theory demands moments of isolation to get deep in data analysis as well as moments of consultation and discussion;
5. Be open to emerging evidence that may change the way the researcher thought about the subject matter, and be willing to act on the new evidence;
6. Be able to conceptualise to derive theory from the data. This is perhaps the most important risk, as some people may experience difficulty conceptualising what is going on in the field; and
7. Be creative in devising new ways of obtaining and handling data, combining the approaches of others, or using a tested approach in a different way (walter , NY , Chapter 6 ).

Grounded theory is easier to apply when the researcher is sensitive, through having professional experience or knowledge & Skills, to the field under study (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## 8. Conclusion

This paper expresses numerous intrinsic worth of the grounded theory method. Grounded theory as a method recognize the primary construction in what people do and say.

Grounded theory seems to be produced specific, comprehensible, reasonable and logical theory that fulfils the standard of Sciences and at the same time can be utilized to explain and predict the phenomena. Additional researchers can construct theory-building studies ‘which are functional, appropriate and up-to-date’ (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

The main focal point of discussion was application for the grounded theorist means transporting concrete benefits to the professionals.

As Glaser said,

*....When the field experts can understand and use a theory by themselves then our theories have earned their way. Much of the popularity of grounded theory to sociologists and layman alike is that it deals with what is actually going on, not what ought to go on (Glaser, 1978, p. 14).*

Grounded theory desires to be understood as a package of research methods that comprises the use of simultaneous data collection and stable relative analysis, theoretical sampling and memoing. A grounded theory method, therefore, give valuable means of generating theory grounded in the authenticity of everyday.

## References

- Boyчук Duchscher, J. & Morgan, D. (2004). Grounded theory: Reflections on the emergence vs. forcing debate. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(6), 605-612.
- Charmaz, K. (2001). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 675-694). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gall, M. D., Borg, W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). *Educational research* (6th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory—Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Heath, H., & Cowley, S. (2004). Developing a grounded theory approach: A comparison of Glaser and Strauss. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 41, 141-150.
- Jones, M. & Alony, I. (2011). Guiding the use of Grounded Theory in Doctoral studies – an example from the Australian film industry. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 6 (N/A), 95-114.
- Onions, P.E.W. (2006). *Grounded theory application in reviewing knowledge management literature*. Retrieved from [http://www.lmu.ac.uk/research/postgradconf/papers/Patrick\\_Onions\\_paper.pdf](http://www.lmu.ac.uk/research/postgradconf/papers/Patrick_Onions_paper.pdf)
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., (1987) . *Qualitative Analysis* . N.Y : Cambridge University Press .
- Stern, P. N. (1994). Eroding grounded theory. In J. Morse (Ed.), *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, D. (1996). Making judgements about educational research, In:, *Understanding educational research*. (Scott, D. and Usher, R. eds.). Routledge.

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

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded Theory methodology: An overview, In: *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin, N., K. and Lincoln, Y.,S., Eds.). Sage Publications, London, 1-18.

Walter D. Fernández, NY , The grounded theory method and case study data in IS research: issues and design . (Chapter 5 ) . School of Business and Information Management. The Australian National University, Retrieved from [http://epress.anu.edu.au/info\\_systems/part-ch05.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/info_systems/part-ch05.pdf)