Grounded Theory - Core Elements | Part 1 - Qualitative Data Analysis

Okay, so as I said, focusing very much on grounded theory -- and before I say what it is and how it's used, I should say that it's probably by far the most common and popular analytic technique in qualitative analysis. That might be changing. Other techniques are obviously coming in and the balance is changing. But the one bit of evidence I have of this, apart from the fact that there's an enormous number of books published on it, is that I did a survey -- it must be almost five years ago now, an online survey of researchers doing qualitative analysis. Part of a project we had at the time. And we got something like 250 responses from around the world actually, mainly UK, but a lot from the States and from other parts of Europe and so on. But very much worldwide response, almost entirely from researchers. There were probably about a third of the respondents were postgraduate students doing PHD's, one or two others, but other than that most of them were researchers on research contracts of various kinds, so research associates, research fellows, senior research fellows, that kind of post or their equivalents in other countries.

We asked them a whole battery of questions about their research methods and in particular, we ask them what analytic approaches they were using. And well over half of them mentioned Grounded Theory. Not as the only source -- only approach necessarily, they may be doing that and something else, but they certainly did mention it as one of the approaches they were taking in their current project. And that was well and above what anyone else was doing. [I mean], other popular ones with things like ethnography and some of the phenomenological approaches, like IPA, for example, along with discourse analysis. But they came well down the list, they were in the 10% response whereas Grounded Theory was over 50% using it. So, you can see it's become an extremely popular well used kind of approach to qualitative analysis. Hence the reason for focusing on it today.

What is it? Well, it certainly an inductive approach. So, in contrast to what I talked about last week Grounded Theory aims to be inductive. In other words, the idea is to generate or their terms actually, discover theory and there's a story behind that which I'll come to later on as well. The initial book written by Glaser and Strauss, Barney Glaser on Anselm Strauss, the two American academics that founded the approach, so to speak, call the book The Discovery of Grounded Theory. And there's even actually ambiguity about what Grounded Theory is. Grounded Theory is not actually a kind of a method, as such, the equivalent of [inaudible 0:03:03] Analysis perhaps, but it is a way of discovering grounded theory. It's a way of doing things, so the theory you discover will be grounded. But, I have to say, people often talk about Grounded Theory as if it were the method itself, but actually it's about a way of discovering theories that are grounded.

So, it is inductive, it's focusing on generating these theoretical ideas, these explanations, these understandings of the data from the data. And in fact, as you'll see later on, it takes a pretty extreme view of saying, at least for some, that you should try and start with no preconceptions, try and clear your mind. So, it's inductive and its grounded, so it's derived from the study of the phenomena it

represents. So, the idea of Grounded Theory is, it's grounded in the data. So, it's got some strong advice and techniques for making sure you stay with what there is evidence for in your data. And that definition actually is taken from Strauss and Corbin, the same Strauss of the original Glaser and Strauss pair who developed the theory, the approach. [Juliet] Corbin joined Strauss some years later to write this book which has turned out to be probably the most successful text on doing qualitative analysis. It's now, I think, its third edition in Strauss and Corbin. So, you can get some idea how popular book has been, one often quoted by people who are using the technique and learning it.

Okay, key focus is, reflective reading of the text and application of codes. So, it's a coding approach this, unlike some the approaches I talked about last week, it does involve doing coding the text. So, some of the things I've said already in the coding session will apply to Grounded Theory as well.