Grounded Theory - Core Elements | Part 2 - Qualitative Data Analysis

What are the core elements and I'll go back to talk about some of these terms in a bit more detail in the moment. But here's the core elements. Inquiry is shaped by the aim to discover social and psychological processes. And I have to say, I mean, that's what Glaser and Strauss say, but of course we don't need to restrict it to that, it can be applied and has been applied in a whole host of other allied areas. Health research areas, you know, law, economics and so on, business studies and so on, it's popular in those areas as well. So, you don't have to be a sociologist or psychologist to do it, but it can be used in a variety of areas.

Second, I think fairly distinctive feature of the approach is this combination of data collection and analysis at the same time, the two things proceed simultaneously. So, the idea is that you collect some data, you do an interview or two perhaps, or you go do some ethnography and then you start analyzing before you finished your data collection. And I'll say something about that in a minute because it reflects on things like saturation and so on. But certainly, the idea here is analytic work alongside data collection work.

The analytic process itself prompts Theory discovery and hence the term the discovery of grounded theory. The idea here is to produce new explanations of the data, of the phenomena you've investigated, what your data is about through the analytic process and then lots of bits of advice and techniques that can be used to develop that theory. And hence, as I said earlier on, it's an inductive approach, you don't start with the hypothesis and then try and test it out as we did in analytic induction, for example, last week, it's one where you create new ideas as you go through your data.

Another key term that's used in the approach is, is theoretical sampling and theoretical sampling is about an approach to taking or getting your sample of choosing who you're going to interview or where you're going to go to get your data, which is based or rather is led by your ideas about who you need to -- what kinds of people you need to interview what kinds of settings what kinds of backgrounds and so on. So, the sampling approach is led by your theoretical ideas. So your developing understanding of the situation will lead you to say, ah, I need to look at these kinds of people, I think this could be an important variable here, important factor in the explanation in the theory I'm developing, so I need to go and interview some of those or I need to go and observe that particular situation and so on.

So theoretical sampling is sampling that is led by your developing theory, your developing understanding or developing explanation as you go through. And this goes back to the point about they going on simultaneously. The idea here is that you start with some idea about the kinds of individuals you want to interview for example, and you go out and interview some of them, you come back and then you start to analyze that data and you realize there's a category of person you

haven't included, maybe we need to talk about these, you know, I don't know -- let's say age becomes an issue. You've focused on young people and suddenly you think, ah, what they're saying suggests that maybe if you're over 40 it's different or if you're over 40 what happens here? So therefore, you go out and start including some more people in your sample who are over 40, so you expand your sample, you include new people based on that theoretical idea. So, theoretical sampling is a kind of sampling you can do alongside the analysis work. In fact the analysis generates your ideas about what that sample should be.

And lastly this idea of progressively more analytic levels. As you'll see later on, there are different views about what those levels are, I'll focus on Strauss and Corbin's idea, they have three different levels, but Charmaz, for example, has two levels, but nevertheless, they do share this view that there's a progressive move, which I did talk about a couple of weeks ago when I talked about coding, a progressive move from very descriptive coding and understanding through to more analytic or theoretical kind of analysis and coding of the data. So, you've got more abstract or more analytic levels of understanding towards the end of the project and that's what the process is about going from one to the other. So, these are some of the distinctive features of grounded theory then.

Let me just take a bit of time to talk about -- a bit more about some of these. I've actually -- I've probably said most of this already about theoretical sampling, but just to recap, in grounded theory, data analysis and sampling and the collection of data proceed together at the same time. And the early data analysis does develop those ideas about what you need to look at. And of course, just to emphasize that point, it can be different kinds of cases, depending what you're doing that could be more people of different kinds or it might be different settings. Maybe you decide this, you know, I'm in this office, I need to look at another office. Or it could be a different event, I've looked at this event that's going on here, perhaps you're doing a study of, I don't know, local elections and you look at one local election, you think hang on a minute, I need to look at other elections, maybe it's going to be different for European elections as it compared with local elections. So, you then begin to introduce other kinds of cases of that sort. Which cases, which kinds of cases depends very much on the kinds of theoretical issues that your analysis is throwing up really. So, that's theoretical sampling.