

Grounded Theory - Open Coding Part 4

Another suggestion they make, and this also comes out -- similar kinds of ideas come out from Charmaz as well is, this questioning approach, questioning -- asking questions. As you read the text, you start saying to yourself the "W" words, who, when, where, what, a couple of "H" words, how, how much and so on, why, about the text, almost kind of a mantra almost, you know, as you read a paragraph or a passage you know, who's this? When do they do it? Where are they doing it? Why are they doing it? What are they doing? What are they trying to achieve? And so on. You know, how are they doing it? etc. And to give you an example of that, Strauss and Corbin actually give this passage certainly in the first edition of their book. Somebody, one of the patients saying about the pain of arthritis "Pain relief is a major problem when you have arthritis", the woman says. "Sometimes the pain is worse than other times, but when it gets really bad, whew! It hurts so bad, you don't want to get out of bed. You don't feel like doing anything. Any relief you get from drugs that you take is only temporary or partial." That's what she said.

And they say, well, you know, ask questions about that, you know, use those "W" questions. It's clearly about pain experience, it's about the varying intensity of pain that's in there, about pain sometimes being bad, sometimes not so bad, sometimes really bad. It's about her activity being limited, she can't get out of bed, doesn't feel like doing things and so on. And it's also about pain relief, it's about using the drugs to get relief from pain, even that sometimes not working, it's about how long it lasts, about how many drugs she has to take and so on. And then you can ask these kind of "W" type questions, that who provides the relief, where did she get it from, you know, is it the doctor or you know, is it somebody helping her and so on and so forth? Is it just drugs or other things you can do to relieve it [inaudible] for example, things of that kind. How is the pain experienced, how does she talk about it, what does she say about it, how does she react to it, and so on. How is the relief given, does she take the drugs only when she wants to or just take them on a regular basis and so on and so forth. When do the pain occur, why is pain relief important. And because you start -- once you're asking those kinds of questions, you begin to kind of dig in to just a short passage, you've suddenly got enormously fertile kind of range of ideas that can come out of that short passage. And of course, you then be looking elsewhere in the interview or in other cases even, other interviews to see those kinds of answers, to look for those kinds of answers to coming up. So, it's a constant questioning approach that's being used and that's another one of the heuristics if you like or the advice given by Strauss and Corbin. Sorry, did I miss one there?

Another suggestion I have of trying to get to this sensitivity, this idea of what's in the text, is the analysis of a word or phrase or a sentence. Pick out one word that seems significant and dwell upon it, list all possible meanings of what's going on there and then go back to the text and see if you can find that kind of thing going on in the text. That word, you know, might just pick out one single word I don't know of -- let's see, so you're doing some interviews about people working in an office, and going back to my example from last week, just been some new automation some new technology been involved in the office. And a lot of them are talking about the technology and talking about, you know, in some say, you know, not working, it's gone bust, it's kaput and so on, so dwell upon that. What does it mean when

people say the technology isn't working or is kaput or is bust and so on? Do they actually mean that when they switch it on, it doesn't work? Probably not, but they mean other things by it. So, you dwell upon the various dimensions of that concept of what it means for them. Does it mean it doesn't achieve what they want to do, does it not achieve what the company wants them to do? And so on. So you begin to tease out the variations on the answer to that question, what that concept of, you know, being kaput or being bust means.

Another bit of advice that I have, another idea, you know, being sensitive to what's in the text, is the flipflop technique, where you compare extremes on one dimension. I've given the example here of the young and old, so something is happening, someone's doing something, I don't know, maybe we're doing a study on young athletes and you're talking about how they work and how they do things, how they train and so on. Maybe it's useful at some point, okay, maybe -- what would happen if they weren't in their early 20s, what if they were 40 years old, what if they were 50 years old, would that change things, are there things that only they can do because they're young people, or are these common issues that come up every time? You know, things like injury and stuff like that might be important to them. But maybe other things aren't so important that would be important for older people, so just breaking through, that kind of comparison. Bringing out certain dimensions to what the young person, young sports person experiences, like that is highlighting, what's in sense not being said, that comparison can bring in the taken for granted assumptions of the situation because you're making a comparison with a way out dimension here.

We can go even further than that with the way out. I like this one. Again, this is from Strauss and Corbin, the what if's. What if the weightlifter was a violinist? I mean again, let's imagine we're talking about, you know, I don't know, top competitive weightlifters, you know, world class weightlifters and their lives, what do they do and how do they train and how do they compete and so on? How they combine together the various kind of demands of family life and competitive life and so on. Well okay, maybe we should think about what if the weightlifter was a violinist. Now you don't think of violinist lifting weights, but they have to practice, they have to travel to performance on in the same way as the weightlifter goes to competitions. On the other hand, they aren't competing in the same way, they're competing in different kinds of ways. Their competition is for jobs perhaps, for contracts to play at certain times and so on. The weightlifter is competing in a scored competition, a different kind of competition. So, as you begin to kind of play out those two differences, you begin to ask question, well actually, you maybe even ask silly questions, violinists have to get to read music, they have to be experts at that kind of thing. Does the weightlift have to do anything like that, is there anything the weightlift has to know about that's not about lifting weights. I don't know, but maybe there is something, maybe they need to know a lot about physiology, for example, in order to train properly and know what they're doing properly. So those kinds of questions are raised by these kind of way out comparisons that you might do.

And there's even this one here which Strauss and Corbin called Waving the red flag. If you've come across respondents saying things like, that never happens here, we don't do that, oh no that's not the kind of thing that happens in so and so. The never, or even the opposite, the always, we always do that, oh that's always the case. Those I say are the red flag, they're the red flag to you, because that should then start your inquisitiveness, your questions go, hang on, does it really mean never or do they mean it

shouldn't happen here? Do they mean always or do they mean almost always, but sometimes we get it wrong and it doesn't happen? And actually suddenly the exceptions become much more interesting. Looking closer at the text, you might discover that actually there are other things going on here. What you're actually getting to is, not a simple statement of fact, but rather the expression of some kind of taking for granted rule in the situation. It's not that things like that never happened, it's just that we act as if they'd never happen, we don't allow them to happen, we don't want them to happen, because in our situation we don't behave like that and so on. That's what's being said to you.

So, it's a clue about a social process or a social regulation if you like, rather than about a factual statement of something not happening, so good for that investigation to look into. And Strauss and Corbin suggests that these techniques, all these kind of techniques I've looked at, the comparisons and the flipflops and the way outs and the red flags, etc., all of these, the line by line coding, all of the good things to use at the early stages or for the first interviews or if you're puzzled and stuck and so on, all the ways try to break through things, if you really haven't got any kind of inventiveness left.