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Exploring the application of Grounded Theory and its extension into Local Theory - through a Bush Mechanic Action Research Process aimed at developing and supporting exemplar projects

BMARPAux3 - Auxiliary Paper 3: Applying Grounded Theory and its extension Local Theory to Bush Mechanics

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Paul Wildman
Mob 0412027818
V3 04-01-2007 comm. 15-01-05 3000 words

Backgrounding Grounded Theory and its application to the Research Task

Grounded Theory

The classification of field records undertaken in this research project follows the lines of Grounded Theory e.g. Glaser B. & Strauss A. (1967), and Dick (2000). Grounded theory where the text is studied and classified in themes which grow out of the text itself. These were for me the most apparent classes into which our texts naturally fitted.

Overviewing Grounded Theory

Grounded theory begins with a research situation. Within that situation, your task as researcher is to understand what is happening there, and how the players manage their roles. You will mostly do this through observation, conversation and interview. After each bout of data collection you note down the key issues: this I have labeled "note-taking".

Constant comparison is the heart of the process. At first you compare interview (or other data) to interview (or other data). Theory emerges quickly. When it has begun to emerge you compare data to theory.

The results of this comparison are written in the margin of the note-taking as coding. Your task is to identify categories (roughly equivalent to themes or variables) and their properties (in effect their sub-categories).

If this is all a bit abstract, some examples later will help.

As you code, certain theoretical propositions will occur to you. These may be about links between categories, or about a **core category**: a category which appears central to the study. As the categories and properties emerge, they and their links to the core category provide the theory. You write yourself notes about it -- memoing.

As the data collection and coding proceeds the codes and the memos accumulate.

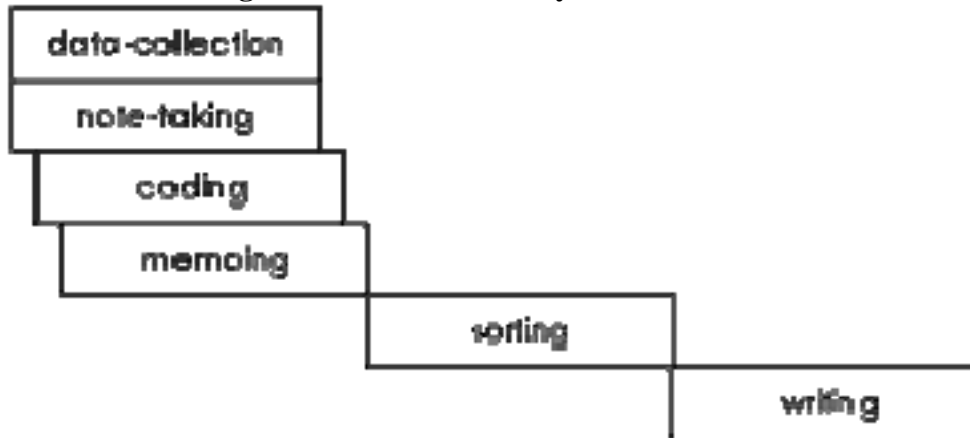
You add to your sample through theoretical sampling. This is purposive sampling which increases the diversity of your sample, searching for different properties. In your core category and its linked categories saturate; you no longer add to them or their properties. This is a sign that it is time to move to sorting. You group your memos, like with like, and sequence them in whatever order will make your theory clearest.

The literature is accessed as it becomes relevant. It is not given special treatment. Glaser makes the point that most research including qualitative research is hypothesis-testing.

The order of your sorted memos provides you with the skeleton, and many of the words, of your thesis. You begin writing.

Over time, a grounded theory study works through the following mostly-overlapping phases. To summarise graphically ...

Table 1 The 6 stages in Grounded Theory



Source: B Dick (2000)

Reflective praxis as Action Research is a form of local theory that can be based on relationships and patterns between categories of learning insights over an extended period of praxis as such it can be seen as a local theory development from the application of Grounded Theory

A meta process whereby action oriented reflection enters a transformational relationship with a period of extended practice with an eye to generating meta meaning and learning insights that lead to new current praxis. [P Wildman (1997)]

Or more technically:

A meta process whereby action oriented reflection enters a transformational relationship with a long-run period of practice through a specifically designed research orientated short-run cycle of action & reflection with an eye to generating through this re- processing of ones long-run praxis: meta meaning; efficacious action &, learning insights that lead to redesigning current as well as future praxis. [P Wildman (2005)]

Table 2 Exploring the attributes of Reflective Praxis

| No | Definition | Comment |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | A meta process where by action oriented reflection | Deep reflection with a view to learning insights and associated action changes that arise |
| 2 | Enters a transformational relationship | The learning insights transform present action ie. praxis |
| 3 | With a period of extended practice | A decade or so |
| 4 | With an eye to generating | The purpose of RP is to see(k) patterns and insights from the period of practice ie 3 |
| 5 | Meta meaning and learning insights | That is the reasons for choosing the research question itself as well as patterns or chreode consciousness in terms of issues brought to bear on the research topic/question |
| 6 | That lead to new current praxis | That is current action is modified and understanding thereof deepened through this process |
| 7 | This praxis seen as reflexive praxis (10 years) can manifest as project, process or exemplar project (3 years) | Artificer learning and Bush Mechanicing suggest that innovative exemplar prototype development type project is of crucial importance in the success of ones praxis |

Source: P Wildman 6-2-01

Table 3: Crosswalk between Grounded Theory research stages and the Bush Mechanic Research Project with its associated Tableised coding

| No. | Grounded Theory Stages [Dick (2000)] | Grounded Theory Field Research Tool – this Project | BM Research Project Table No. |
|------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Grounded Theory Application | | | |
| 1. | Data Collection | Compilation of Learning Insights LI | Table 2 |
| 2. | Note Taking | Explication column in Learning Insights | Table 2 |
| 3. | Coding | Learning Insights LI | Table 2, 2b |
| 4. | Memoing | Meta Lessons ML | Table 3 |
| 5. | Sorting & cross-walking | [PW addition] | Table 5a |
| 6. | Categorisation | Bush Mechanic Criteria BMC | Table 5b |
| 7. | Triangulation | [PW addition] cp. LI, ML, BMC | Table 6, 6a, b, c |
| 8. | Write up | Creative Synthesis | This report |
| Local Theory | | | |
| 1. | Emergent Local Theory of BM from step 7 above | Table 6d: Emergent Relationships from Grounded Theory Meta Meta categories Table 6e: Σ A Local Theory of Bush Mechanics in four Principles: derived from the above Emergent Proto-Theoretical Relationships | Table 6d, e |
| 2. | Write up | | This report |

Source: P Wildman 01-2005 Please see Appendix B for a list of Tables

‘Chunking up’ Grounded Theory categories

Once the key categories have been determined using Grounded Theory the key is to discover the category that links these categories and that the grounded categories relate to. In effect establishing higher levels of aggregation i.e. categories through applying a systems analysis methodology of ‘chunking up’. The critical aspect of higher level categories is that they needs much incorporate the other categories and the other

categories refer to them. Over a period of time this process of aggregation and analysis and synthesis undergoes several iterations (even up to 5) until eventually the researcher has a key or meta meta category to which all the other categories relate. This category and its subsequent derivative relationships to subsequent categories can now comprise the basis of a local theory of X or Y i.e. whatever the actual research project was about.

For instance the theories of community often come from a social science perspective. The theorists take a stance as outside observers describing the community or system in objective terms. Participatory researchers, activist theorists, indigenous mythists and some other observers take a different approach. They aim to describe each community from an insider's point of view ie. from the lived life of the community – an intersubjectivist cp. objectivist approach. Rather than working to construct a ‘universal’ social theory that can describe all communities, or ‘communitas’ in general, and then be applied to a certain particular community, we seek to inquire into, and describe, a specific and particular community using the actional and theoretical understandings that are used by the members of that community.

Exploring the development from a Local Methodology to Local Theory

From Grounded Categories to Local Theory

As I understand it, ‘Local Theory’ is theory, which applies to a local situation (that is, no claims are made about generalisability). Further Local Theory is constructed the language of the participants. Grounded theory on the other hand is a methodology which (in at least Glaser's form of it) suspends theoretical ideas so as to generate theory from the research situation. Most grounded theory (i.e. a methodology) can generate Local Theory (i.e. set of related concepts), but doesn't have to. As the terms are used here, grounded theory is a research methodology and local theory is the product of research.

Most members of most communities do not write explicit theories of their own community. But ordinary members of communities do the things they do as community members because they have knowledge and skills, which are relevant to the life of the community. This may be the knowledge of how to do very ordinary everyday tasks, or it may be specialised knowledge used in community life; however this knowledge constitutes an implicit theory, called local theory or indigenous theory.

It is this approach to theory building that this projects seeks to operationalise.

We've will be exploring the notion that action research generates a form of grounded theory: theory grounded in experience. A number of elements of such a Grounded Theory the:

- Alternation between practice and theory in this order
- Resemblance of each action research spiral to a form of ‘thinking and doing and thinking’ experiment e.g. Often presented in results and comparative tables, categorisation and taxonomies

- Abstraction of concrete experiences and outcomes from these categories often linking the categories in some form of basic model
- Nature of the theory in addressing action.

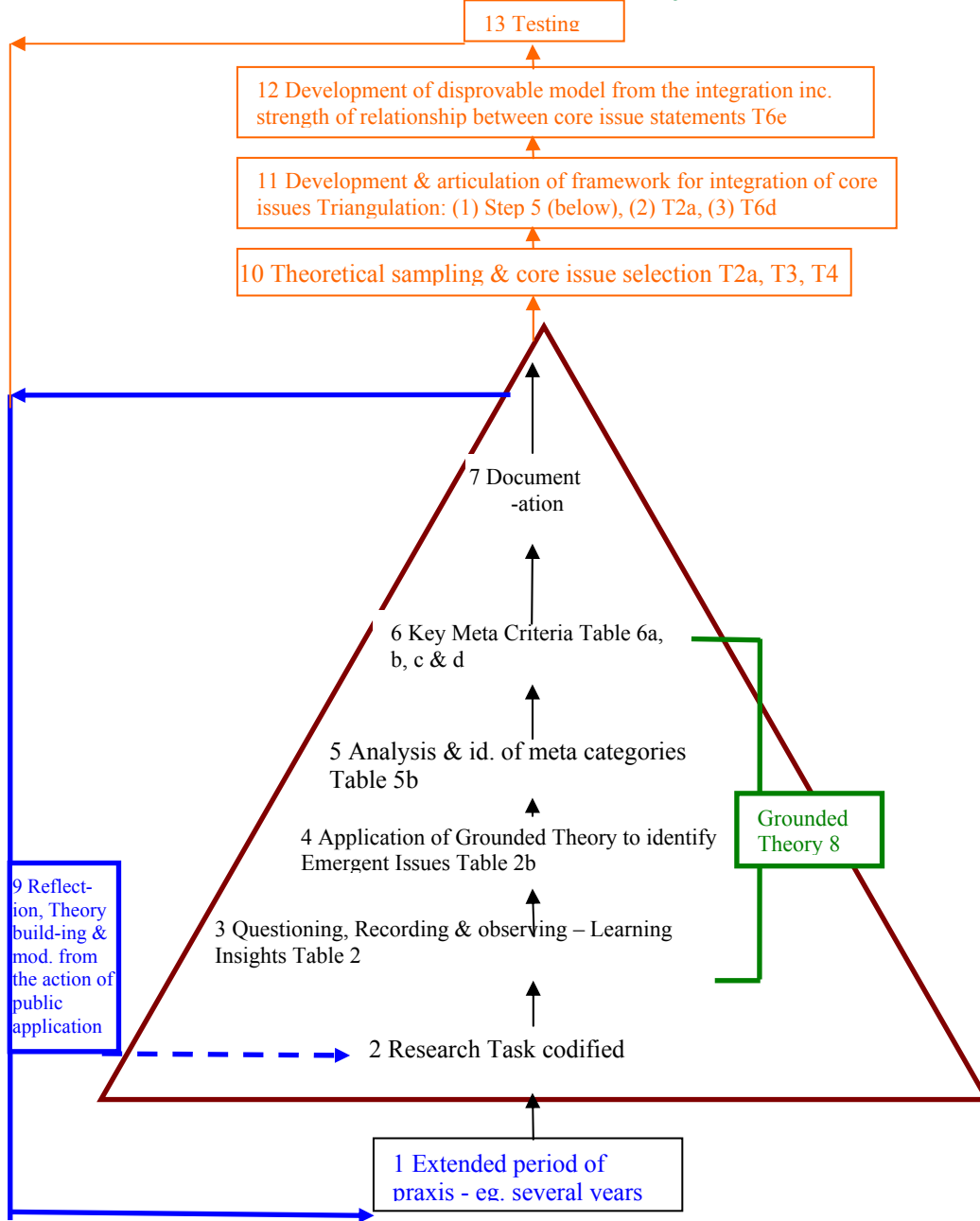
In situation S, to produce outcomes O1, O2, ..., try actions A1, A2, If outcomes O1, O2, ... occur it may well be because of interactions X, Y, Z between O1, O4 and A2, A3 and A 6

In this research project I further develop and explore further some of the features of this form of locally grounded theory.

First, it seems to me that in this form, theory can to some extent integrate the local and the global. It emerges from the local, because it is often local evidence and understanding that builds it. Yet as it grows it becomes stated in general terms. It is framed in a way that allows it to be tried and tested in other settings.

Second, it can to some extent integrate the subjective and the objective. The participants invest the theories with their own values and meanings. At the same time the theories gain objectivity in its most pragmatic sense by being tested against reality through action.

Local Theory Model
Reflexive Praxis
Action Inquiry Pyramid
Grounded Theory



Source: Wildman Q3 2005. based on Krimm (1988); and developed by Wildman (1995, 2002)

Conclusion

This is the theory now to wait for a suitable project. This paper was written in 2002 and it was to be 3 years before a suitable project (the Bush Mechanic Grounded Theory Project - Exemplar Marine Project) came along, in all quite prescient.

Acknowledgements

Bob Dick, Ian Hughes, Richard Mochelle

Appendix A: The Bush Mechanic – Nomothetic or Idiographic

Records of a discussion between Paul Wildman and Bob Dick early 2005
See also Dick, B. (2000). Grounded Theory: a thumbnail sketch, Bob Dick.
However motivation is studied, certain fundamental debates have typified the positions taken by researchers. One such debate concerns the question of whether it is better to study groups of individuals and attempt to draw general conclusions about group behaviour (termed the **nomothetic approach**) or to study the behaviours that make individuals unique (termed the **idiographic approach**). Although both approaches have added to the understanding of motivational processes, the nomothetic approach has dominated motivational research.

From Bob Dick Greetings from Lismore. 19-01-2005

Thanks for the question. I hadn't thought about it before. My first reaction is that nomothetic/idiographic isn't a particularly relevant categorisation to apply to GT. Of the qualitative methods Idiographic is closest to being positivist in approach.

But let me think aloud for a few paragraphs ...

GT tends to work with multiple people rather than single people, and to develop theories which apply to all of them. There is attention to individual differences, but by building them into categories and properties. In that respect it's more nomothetic than idiographic.

When GT moves from "local theory" (applying to a few folk in a particular circumstance) to "substantive theory" (applying to a particular group of people) to "formal theory" (more abstract and applying more widely) it becomes even more nomothetic.

However, in both cases I regard the intention of GT as somewhat idiographic. It does take individual differences into account, even if indirectly. There's a strong expectation that it will make sense to the people who are the objects of the research and that it will work in practice. I think these are idiographic qualities.

I don't have a copy of the Howard and Myers paper and don't recall what they say about agentic. My recollection is that they were regarding idiographic and agentic approaches as related.

GT is almost never done participatively (though it could be). So in that respect it doesn't attribute much agency to the participants. They are informants only. So in a sense they are objects to be studied. The researcher builds the theory.

On the other hand grounded theories are oriented towards action.

The central interest tends to be how the informants cope with their situation. There is an agentic flavour there. Brisbane 10-03-2005

Appendix B: Register of research project coding tables

Learning Insights

Table 2: Learning Insights – Field Notes

Table 2a: A comparison of Artificer | Phronesist | Cognitivist @ 7.00am 14-04-04

Table 2b: Learning Insights towards generating an Artificer Algorithm – 50*

Characteristics of an Artificer – Muriel Stanger, Don Miller, Richard Mochelle, Robert Pope - 04-02 to 01-05

Experiential Meta Lessons

Table 3: Meta Lessons from the Bush Mechanic Research Project 2003-2004

Bush Mechanic Criteria developed iteratively and experientially 03-2005

Table 4: Bush Mechanic Criteria

Crosswalk from Field notes through Learning Insights to Meta Categories

Table 5a: Crosswalk: Application of Grounded Theory to BM research project field coding reports (2002-04)

Table 5b: Grounded Theory List of Meta categories

Coding outcomes aggregated and categorised

Table 6 Coding Outcomes – Bush Mechanic Grounded Theory – identifying key attributes of a Local Theory of Bush Mechanics moving towards a General Theory of same

Table 6a: Meta Meta Categories from Grounded Theory Coding

Table 6b Grounded Theory Emergent Category (GTEC) content

Table 6c: Summary Table Meta Meta Bush Mechanic Attribute Categories (MMC)

Table 6d: Emergent Relationships from Grounded Theory Meta Meta categories

Table 6e: Σ A Local Theory of Bush Mechanics in four Principles: derived from the above Emergent Proto-Theoretical Relationships (EPTR's – Table 6d) which were developed from the Meta Meta Bush Mechanic Attribute Categories coding (Table 6c) which in turn were developed from Tables 6a&b: Meta Meta Bush Mechanic Attribute Categories (MMC) which in turn were developed from Grounded Theory Coding [Table 5] based on Learning Insights coding [Table 2; Meta Lessons Table 3 and Bush Mechanic Criteria Table 4]code grouping of learning insights recorded progressively over the past 2 years for the duration of the Bush Mechanic Grounded Theory Action Research Project - in priority = More General (though not universal*) Bush Mechanic Theory

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