

## How to use Grounded Theory Method (GTM) as a Research Tool for Qualitative Research and the problems associated with it.

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### Abstract:

*The advent of The Grounded Theory Method for conducting qualitative research seriously challenges the still conventional hypothesis-oriented “quantitative canon” that has predominates research for a long time. This article sets to clarify how research should be conducted using grounded theory method. The grounded theory as used in this article will refer to the outcome of research being conducted using grounded theory method while the grounded theory method will be used to refer to the method itself. This paper examines the origin of grounded theory method, why it came into use and the difficulty in applying it to conduct research that is grounded in theory. Grounded theory method, with its emphasis on research founded on directly gathered data, rather than initial hypotheses, offered a route whereby researchers could aim to produce insights in the form of substantive theories- that is conceptual statement or models that provided deep and practical insights into specific contexts but that required further work. It is hope that this article will provide a pathway to anyone attempting a qualitative research phenomenon to use Grounded theory method as a research tool that would create the rigorous phenomenon that has for long claimed to have devoid of qualitative research.*

### Keywords

*Grounded Theory Method, qualitative research, quantitative canon, hypothesis-oriented, research*

### Introduction

A researcher is open to different principles when conducting research, either he/she adopts the positivist principle (positivism) or post-positivist stance (post-positivism) a realist or action learning stance but they are both useful and important means of conducting research but they are mutually exclusive (Anon, 2010) Saunders et al (2008). The Grounded Theory Method came into being as a result of different biases that have been levelled against qualitative research. According to Bryant (2014) for many researchers especially for many disciplinary and research gatekeepers researchers ought to be quantitative. To understand the origin of this syllogism the epigram of Lord Kelvin (Sir William Thompson) is often (mis) quoted in this regard: “if

you cannot measure it, you cannot (control) improve it.” A more serious version runs as follows

In physical science the first essential step in the direction of learning any subject is to find principles of numerical reckoning and practicable methods for measuring some quality connected with it. I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind; it may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely in your thoughts advanced to the state of science, whatever the matter may be. (PLA, vol. 1, “Electrical Units of Measurement,” 1883-05-03) available at <http://zapatopi.net/kelvin/quotes/>. Accessed July 26, 2012

The same Lord Kelvin, according to Bryant (2014) also argued that radio has no future and that “X-Rays will prove to be hoax.” Very much too often researchers have made the mistakes of measuring what can be measured, rather looking into the real issues or causation of occurrence (Bryant 2014). This is erroneous because Glaser and Strauss could have easily counted the number of patients who died at various hospital wards they investigated and they could have also looked at the number of days and hours that elapsed between admission to hospital and the patients demise. These might have produced some positive outcomes or results but the concepts of “awareness” and “time” would not have come out from such studies. According to Bryant (2014) Kelvin’s longer quote expresses the view that qualitative studies are ‘at best’ a preliminary to true knowledge (which must always be quantitative) but the results of burgeoning of qualitative research has developed at least since 1960s indicate something very different. The outcomes of qualitative research can be poor, ill-defined, lacking in rigor, and of little practical use but so too can the outcomes of quantitative research. Thanks to many researchers such as Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz, Bryant and many others who have effortlessly contributed to innovation in research practice in many disciplines--- qualitative research can be carried out in the right stead, with clear and coherent trajectories, that will lay foundation for rigorous claims to knowledge and conceptual and theoretical innovation. When

conducting any research, a researcher must follow a research trajectories or method or methodology. No research is conducted in isolation of methodology be it qualitative or quantitative. According to Descombe (2003) contends that the process of doing a good research cannot be achieved by following a set of rules or edicts about what is right and wrong. The social researcher has much variety of options and alternative. According to Denscombe (2003) the choice a researcher takes has its own advantages and disadvantages because there is no 'one right' decision to take, but some paths are better than others because they suit the issue being researched. Available to the researcher at any given time to carry out a research are, survey, case study, internet research, experiment action, research ethnography, Grounded theory, phenomenology (Denscombe, 2003). But Suddaby (2006) enthuses that they are require different research analysis.

As already indicated Grounded theory method, came into being to counter the lopsided allegation against qualitative research. Accordingly qualitative research was decried variously as 'impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic and biased' (Charmaz, 2006, p.5). Grounded theory method, with its emphasis on research founded on directly gathered data rather than initial hypotheses, offered a route whereby researchers could aim to produce novel theoretical insights in the form of substantive theories-that is, conceptual statements or models, that provided deep and practical insights into specific contexts but that requires further work if they were to provide the basis for more general purposes. The overall impact of this means that there are firm justifications for the preparation of research proposals that can indeed eschew hypothesis testing as the starting point of research instead specify objectives based on developing new conceptual models, framework, or theories. These outcomes can be evaluated using Glaser and Strauss' criteria of fit, grab, work, modifiability. Consequently, the view that research is somewhat based on existing theories, offering the alternative proposition whereby theories and hypothesis can be the result of research project. Thus, posits Bryant (2013) that this is not to suggest that the latter viewpoint eclipse the former, but rather that the sequence of "theory then hypotheses then research" can be supplemented or replaced by the sequence "research then theory and hypotheses."

However critical in doing a qualitative research and using The Grounded Theory Method, the research should have the temerity of being grounded in theory, with no preconceived hypothesis (es), statistics, mathematical equation, and does not led itself in impact studies, comparison or experiment of any kind and above all must allow the data to inform the theory, therefore the researcher must not submerge h/herself in substantive extant literature

before data collection. However all research whether it is qualitative or quantitative data complement each other. As stated by Strauss (1988) no research is entirely quantitative or qualitative. Therefore it very much often the case that any form of research would accommodate figures, illustration, graphic and computational analysis. These are sometimes carried out for illustrational and computational analysis purposes only.

## Origin of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory Method came into being as a reaction against a view of research --- quantitative and hypotheses - oriented ---- which was prevalent among the social science research community in the United States of America at the time. It is imperative that the advent of Grounded Theory Method (GTM) Bryant (2014) enthuses that GTM was marked by its innovation claims and contribution to research practice than it was by its critical position with regard to standard practices. The term Grounded Theory Method as a research tool first came into prominence in the 1960s following the publication of the discovery of Grounded Theory, by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. Since grounded theory many other related approaches of conducting research that reach across many discipline such as medicine, social science, psychology, management and many others. Invariably the term grounded theory according to Bryant (2014) refers to the outcome of a research process that has employed the use of grounded theory method, while grounded theory method is simply the method that was applied. It is quite common for researchers and writer to refer to the method simply as "grounded theory" with the context clarifying the meaning. Some of the early research on Grounded theory method was not only co-authored by Glaser and Strauss also by Jeane Quint (Strauss et al 1964) later known as Jean Quint Beloliel, who transformed the practice of care for the terminally ill in the course of her professional career as a nurse.

In fact, in the Discovery, it is revealed that grant by the Public Health Service Research, to Strauss and Glaser provided the platform for them to publish Awareness and Discovery and later book , Time for Dying (Glaser and Strauss 1968).

There is no doubt the research, would have afforded the basis for effective practice, would have immensely influenced Quint. Both Strauss and Glaser had personal bereave experiences, the personal trajectories of both Strauss and Glaser are critical in understanding their contributions, joint efforts and later different opinions as regard to Grounded Theory Method. In the 1960s, Glaser and Strauss had started to collaborate producing Awareness in 1965, as well as various earlier papers as can be seen as pre cursors of GTM. Awareness

included a brief appendix entitled “Methods of Collection and Analysis of Data.” This is an early important stage in the development of Grounded Theory Method (GTM). It reveals that both Strauss and Glaser had experienced bereavements in the year prior to their research. Strauss’ experience in the death of his mother had led him to understand the importance of people expectations of the ‘certainty and timing of dying’ (1965, p. 287).

He had set up a preliminary study and was joined by Glaser, whose father had recently died. Both had argued right from the onset that anyone contemplating or using the GTM, to avoid substantive extant literature before data collection, confident to plunge into the field work from the onset, generating hypotheses in subsequent stages as the research progresses, and the “blurring and intertwining of coding, data collection and data analysis” ( p.288). Strauss is adjudged to be the pioneer of GTM and Schwartz (2009) summarises the contributions as including “legitimising the concept of nursing research, establishing today’s most prominent qualitative research methodology and, supplying much of the ammunition informing the most significant public discussions about health over the past half century, from women’s health and health disparities to aging and the impact of science and technology. With the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) many of Strauss’ students from the early years have gone on to further enhance the method, including Kathy Charmaz, Juliet Corbin, and Adele Clarke.

### **Grounded Theory Method (GTM) Application**

According to Dunne (2011) Grounded theory, is a research methodology primarily associated with qualitative research. The use of grounded theory in conducting research came into prominence in 1967 when Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their book ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory’ laid down the procedures for conducting qualitative researchers for would be grounded theorists. Before Glaser and Strauss (1967) qualitative research was labelled variously as lacking in vigour, compatibility, impressionistic (Allan, 2003). But this changed after Glaser and Strauss (1967) book ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory’. Therefore, it will not be a wrong assertion if Glaser and Strauss are credited the fathers of grounded theory and today nearly different types of researchers are adopting the grounded theory research method to conduct their research.

Grounded theory has been the subject of multiple definitions and interpretations. According to Charmaz (2006, p.9) in its nascent stage Glaser and Strauss “invited their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way”. According to

Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.2) the aim of grounded theory is: ‘to generate a theory’. They define grounded theory (GT) as: ‘the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967. p.2).

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, P.1) grounded theory constitutes an innovative methodology, fascinating ‘the discovery of theory from data’. This implies, enthused Dunne (2011) that in grounded theory, the researcher is not embroiled on testing hypotheses taken from existing theoretical frame works, but rather develops a new ‘theory’ grounded in empirical data collected in the field. According to Charmaz (2014) grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Charmaz (2014) enthuses that a researcher constructs a theory ‘grounded’ in their data.

Grounded theory begins with inductive data, involves interactive strategy of going back and forth between the data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved your data and emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 2014, p.1). Grounded theory is one of a number of powerful qualitative research traditions that include ethnography, phenomenology, case study, narrative research (Creswell 2003) and according to Mello and Flint (2009) it is a research tradition relying heavily (although not exclusively) on depth interview, observation, and document analysis in search of processes people use to address important problems they face. It is systematic approaches to qualitative research that facilitates theoretical abstraction from field data through a process of constant comparative analysis.

Grounded theory is unique in its methodological usage. It has unique methodological elements such as constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling that differentiates it from other forms of research (Dunne, 2011). Unlike most research methods grounded theory demands that data collection and analysis occur concurrently rather than in a linear sequence, this makes Payne (2007) to say that “one of the unique features of grounded theory analysis lies in its dynamic interplay of data collection and analysis.” (p.68)

### **Controversy**

The unique nature of grounded theory makes it difficult to use and one of the most problematical issues relates to how and when an extant or existing literature should be used during a grounded theory study. Glaser since 1990 has not been particularly very happy with the diverse interpretations of the methodology, a fact which resulted in ideological split between the two founders, Glaser and Strauss in the 1990s. This is a controversy that has split

researchers who favour substantive literature review before primary research interview is carried out and those who believe in open mindedness or a plain slate of mind. The founder or originator of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss sparked off the controversies. More recently, Glaser and Holton (2006) outlined the differences between grounded theory and qualitative data analysis from their perspectives, arguing that those who do not recognise these differences are compromising grounded theory as it was originally developed. Morse (2006) however argues that the introduction of any research methodology into the public domain leaves it open to being adopted and employed differently in how the originator(s) envisaged. Strauss and Corbin (1994, p.283) brought this home when they said ‘a child once launched is very much subject to a combination of its origins and the evolving contingencies of life’. As the consequence of the diverse theory and different interpretation surrounding its use, Dey (2004, p.80) posits, ‘there is no such thing as “grounded theory” if we mean by that a single, unified methodology, tightly defined and clearly specified’. Strauss and Corbins (1999) discourse on grounded theory methodology, which nonetheless is a shift from Glaser’s and Strauss’ (1967) by allowing some extant literature before data collection which is a deviation from the original path in Discovery 1987.

### **Analysing Grounded theory**

On issues regarding data analysis the two progenitors were to differ in their view on how to go about data analysis in Grounded theory method. Glaser’s ideal method is sorting out ideas instead of the line by line method which Strauss and Corbin favour. Straus and Corbin (1998 pp. 65-68) recommended coding by “microanalysis” which consists of analysing data word- by- word and “coding the meaning found in words or groups of words”. This analysis technique of coding by microanalysis of the data, word- by- word and line-by – line had for me two drawbacks. Further reference to grounded theory literature reveals the two great school of thought of grounded theory research methodology Glaser and Strauss concerning the most appropriate to coding grounded theory research. Glaser (1992 p.40) discharges Strauss’ (1998) micro coding approach as producing an “over – conceptualisation”.

### **Objective of Grounded Theory**

The Objective of grounded theory according to Suddabay (2006) is to build mid-range theory. In case of this research would enable a theory to emanate from the data of perceptive interviews conducted. The emphasis enthuses Suddabay (2006) is on building effective and complex theory,

grounded in data, at various levels of generality, characterises its most important purpose. It’s most common and appropriate use is in exploratory research into a phenomena about which little theoretical knowledge has been developed (Suddabay, 2006). Grounded theory is predicted on the idea that social science theory can be built from data systematically obtained in a social setting” (Robrecht, p.170). Theory emerges from very deep and contemplative analysis of data obtained in the field rather than from prior assumptions developed before the research begins.

According to Dunne (2010) the grounded theory researcher aims to develop theories that enable the explanation of behaviour, are available in practice, and provide hypotheses that can be verified because qualitative research is subject to verification because of its dynamism; the result therefore never remains static. There are two features that helps set grounded theory apart from other form of qualitative methods, they are: a, it is not limited to description of the phenomenon, but seeks to develop a theoretical concepts and b, it is not bound to a particular unit of analysis, time or place. This allows researchers to develop grounded theory and apply and test it in area outside the original study.

The prospect of what constitute a ‘theory’ is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 15) as a “set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated frame work that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” Theory is constructed from conceptual categories (abstract, higher order concepts under which other concepts can be grouped through underlying, shared uniformity) and their properties (general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category to be defined and given meaning).

### **Theoretical Phenomena (Grounded Theory)**

Grounded theory for research is most valuable and it is often used and is an ideal for exploring integral social relationships and the behaviour of groups where there has been little exploration of the contextual factors that affect individual’s lives (Crooks, 2001). It is also used to get through, and beyond conjecture and preconception to exactly the underlying processes of what is going on, so that professionals can intervene with confidence to help resolve the participant’s main concerns’ (Glaser, 1978). It main thrust is to generate theories regarding social phenomena: that is, to develop higher level of understanding that is “grounded” in or derived from, a systematic analysis of data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) state grounded theory is the ‘discovery of data systematically obtained from

social research” (p.2). Crowell (2003) elaborates on this definition by Glaser and Strauss by noting that grounded theory is a strategy “in which the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (p.14). According to Glaser and Strauss, Grounded theory is useful to “researchers and practitioners in field that concern themselves with issues relating to human behaviour in organisations, groups, and other social configurations” (p.14).

According to Lingard et al (2008) grounded theory is appropriate when the study of social interactions or experiences aim to explain a process, not to test or verify an existing theory. This assumption is approached by researchers with vary degree of their disciplinary interests, background and assumptions (sensitising concepts) and an acquaintances with the literature in the domain, but they neither develop nor test hypotheses. The theory rather emerges through a close and careful analysis of the data. The key features of grounded theory are its interactive study design, theoretical (purposeful) sampling, and system of analysis, where analysis informs the next cycle of data collection. It is by keeping with interactive design, the sampling process proceeds on theoretical grounds: the sample is not set at the onset but it is selected purposefully as the analysis progresses; participants are chosen for their ability to confirm or challenge an emergency theory.

The central objective of data analysis in grounded theory research is constant comparison because as issues are noted in the data, they are compared with other examples for similarities and differences. Through the process of constant comparison, for which a number of formal approaches are available, emerging theoretical constructs are continually being refined through comparison with “fresh” examples from on-going data. (Lingard et al, 2008). Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that grounded theory is the discovery of data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2) Crowell (2003) elaborates on their definition by noting that grounded theory in the views of participants in a study” (p. 14). The nature of grounded theory is useful to “researchers and practitioners in field that concern themselves with issue relating to human behaviour in organisations, groups, and other social configurations” (Glaser, 1992, p. 13). The nature of grounded theory is to ensure a perfect “fit” the situation being studied and that it will “work” in terms of describing the behaviour being observed. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 3) It follows from this, then, that for theory to be useful for understanding social phenomena and behaviour, the best way to develop theory is to “ground” it in data. In using the grounded theory method to develop theory, one begins with an area to emerge from data. Therefore two key characteristics

define grounded theory: a de-emphasis on the verification of theory and an emphasis on generalisation of theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed grounded theory as a way to counteract the preoccupation with the verification of theory in both qualitative and quantitative research that had dominated social science since 1940, some of the weaknesses of qualitative theory and to allow for the development of theory that would be meaningful to both practitioners and scholars. They argue that scholars were too concerned with verifying with “grand theories” bestowed on us by great men such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. After the 2nd World war, there was significant growth in the development and distribution of quantitative methods for example survey research that could be used to test and verify these theories. The discovery of Grounded Theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) offer a polemic against Robert and Positivist approach:

His reasoning necessarily leads to the position that data should fit the theory, in contrast to our position that the theory should fit the data [emphasis in the original] (p. 261)

While grounded theory acknowledges that verification of theory is important, it argues that the task should be subordinate to the generation of theory. Glaser and Strauss also proposed grounded theory as a way of strengthening qualitative research. They argue that qualitative research suffered from over emphasis on verification, but more importantly were increasingly labelled as “impressionistic” and criticised for not being rigorous or systematic enough. As a direct consequence of this quantitative research methods, overtime gradually overtake qualitative approaches to studying and gaining insight about social phenomena. However with the publication of Discovery of Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, they tried to formalized “Grounded” theory and qualitative methods more generally as a legitimate form of inquiry in social science phenomena. However, their approach was unique in the real sense that they did not discount the importance and benefits of scientific rigor that had been showered in quantitative research which was devoid of qualitative research method.

It is vital to note that the fundamentals of Grounded Theory, the underlying analytic methodology, are very large measure drawn from the analytic methodology and procedures of inductive quantitative analysis laboriously discovered by researcher and students in the department of sociology and the Bureau of Applied Social research at Columbia University in the 1950’s and 1960’s (Glaser, 1992, p.7)

Perhaps the most important difference between grounded theory and other approaches to qualitative research is grounded theory emphasis on theory

development. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that the growth of positivism and emphasis on verification of theory rather than generation of theory resulted in a significant gap between theory and empirical research. Theory that was “granted” in data, they proposed would contribute toward “closing the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. vii).

Over the past years researchers in sociology, psychology, information science, cybernetics, education, health, business and commerce, economics and a lot of other discipline have made use of grounded theory as a means of exploring social relationships and phenomena. As said above both Glaser and Strauss were to fall out over how best to interpret grounded theory, the division leads to different approaches to conducting grounded theory research, therefore it is imperative for researchers to understand the different approaches because they impact on data collection and analysis by researchers, and ultimately the kind of theory that will result from the research. I will now posit below the rationality behind grounded theory from positivist stance.

### **Rationale for purist position**

The question to ask regarding this purist idea; in what ways might an initial literature review in the substantive research area be detrimental to the overall research process. For Glaser the fundamental concern is based on the premise that a detailed literature review conducted at the onset may ‘contaminate’ the data collection, analysis and theory development by leading the research to impose existing frameworks, hypotheses, or other theoretical ideas upon the data which would in turn undermine the focus, authenticity and quality of grounded theory research.

This concern however, is not exclusive to grounded theory, as posited by Heath (2006), p.519). Glaser (1992) argues that grounded theorists must ‘learn not to know’, which includes avoiding engagement with existing literature prior to entering the field. McCallin (2003, p. 63) puts it succinctly ‘the fundamental concern that ‘the researcher may be side tracked by received knowledge and interpretations that support taken-for-granted assumptions, which are not relevant in the new area of study’.

Furthermore Glaser (1998, p.68) argues that a literature review may result in external ‘rhetorical jargon’ impinging upon the research. In support of this Charmaz (2006, p. 165) suggests that the delaying of literature review would avoid a researcher imposing a preconceived ideas into the research process. She went on to say that delaying the review encourages articulation of ideas by a

researcher. Glaser (1998, p.68) continues to argue that exposure to substance literature at the outset of one’s research would leave the researcher “owed out” by the work of others, hence undermining the sense of self-worth and competent in the realm of theory development. But Strauss and Corbin view literature as a sensitising and vehicular instrument directing a theoretical sampling.

Lastly Glaser (1998) on a more pragmatically level, specifically argues that the unpredictable nature of grounded theory, the researcher may not know the literature which most relevant to h/her at the out-set. Therefore conducting a time consuming, elaborate and extensive review of publications in a specific substantive area may be wasteful and inefficient.

This point was also articulated and echo by Dick (2007) and Locke (2001). It important for me to stress here that Glaser and other ‘purists’ are not calling for a blanket ban on engagement with existing literature. As stated above the fundamental issue relate to when, and not if, engagement with extant knowledge should occur. From the purists’ perspective, their concerns relate a literature review in the substantive area of study at an early of the research process, while openly acknowledging the important role of extant literature in later stages of a grounded theory. Specifically, their stance advocates that ‘researchers integrate existing literature on the substantive topic into their thinking as the theoretical categories and frame work stabilise’ (Locke, 2001, p. 122). Stern (2007) puts it beautifully, a literature review which ensues from the emergent grounded theory is essential not only for academic honesty, but in order to demonstrate how the study builds on and contributes to extant knowledge within the field. A grounded theory research must be analysed building on codes, concept and categories and must be an interactive form. Therefore below is an explanation of grounded theory analysis.

### **Data analysis in Grounded Theory**

According to Wartz et al (2011) there are five ways of doing qualitative analysis, phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research and intuitive inquiry. The choice a researcher chooses very much depends on the researcher’s preferences and the type of research that is being conducted. The debate about Glaserian’s (purists) verse versa, the Straussian’s stance on the methodology of grounded theory can be characterised as falling within two categories. The first of these is what Glaser (2001) calls “conceptualisation” contrasted with “description”.

As far as Glaser (2001, p.13) is concerned, the essential comparative difference between other types of quantitative research and grounded theory is that it “exists on a conceptual level and is composed of

integrated hypotheses”. While other qualitative methods produce description of phenomena that may or not be conceptual in nature. Glaser (2001, p.13) maintains that while concept can be related to other concepts as hypotheses, “description cannot be related to each other as hypotheses since there is no conceptual handle”.

According to Mellow and Flint (2009, p.116) this is because description does not allow abstraction from specific times, places, and so on; description is a situation specific. In contrast, Strauss and Corbin (1968) consider description to be basic to “conceptual ordering”. This refers to organising data into categories according to their properties and dimension and then using description to further build those categories. Strauss and Corbin’s approach is always to code for dimensions of categories, and to break categories into subcategories. Strauss and Corbin (1968) see subcategories as serving to specify a category further by identifying information such as when, where, why, and how a phenomenon is likely to develop. Sub categories also have properties and dimensions that refer to conditions (set of events that create the situation, issues, and problems within a phenomenon), actions/interactions, and consequences, further delimiting the category’s properties. To Strauss, dimensions enable researchers to differentiate items between the within classes and thus show variation along a range. Glaser sees this as too restrictive.

The use of dimensions also becomes an issue in selective coding and the other two areas of coding, open and axial. Selective coding is essential to grounded theory. It is used according to Strauss (1987) to systematically link subordinate categories with the core category. The integration of a core category with other categories and their properties takes grounded theory to a higher conceptual level (Strauss 1987) Strauss and Corbin (1998) integrate categories along their dimensional levels to form a theory. Glaser on the other hand integrates categories through their properties and therefore limits selective coding to a smaller set of variables than do Strauss and Corbin. The defining difference between Glaser and Strauss regarding theory generation is in the level of any analysis used in generating theory. Glaser maintains that such levels as subcategories and dimensions of properties are unnecessary layers of analysis that result in a description of the phenomenon rather than formulation of theory about the phenomenon. For Strauss these additional levels of analysis are useful to the researchers to enable h/her understands what is going on in the phenomenon and to enable the researcher to more clearly differentiate variations among time and place when and where the phenomenon occur.

A second area of departure between Glaser and Strauss is what Glaser (1992) calls “emergence

versus Forcing” of theory. The crux of this disagreement revolves around Glaser’s argument that Strauss uses a preconceived model, that is; the coding paradigm, while his own model is one of emergence (Glaser, 1992). In what Glaser terms “orthodox”, grounded theory analysts follow “a few simple rules of constant comparison and emergence” while in what Glaser calls Strauss’ “full conceptual description”, the analyst must follow a myriad of fractured, forcing rules which are very hard to follow and very derailing for productivity.

Glaser point here is that in grounded theory, categories, properties, and their theoretical codes must emerge, and this cannot be done through forcing conceptualisation on data. Glaser went on to say that in theoretical sensitivity there are eighteen coding families. The eighteen coding families, he said, “any combination of which may be applicable to any phenomenon” (1978, p.73). Glaser develops these codes to help the researcher see pattern in the data, but warn the researcher not to focus on a “pet” code, but rather to take cues from the data” (1978, p.73). Strauss tends to see these categories as almost always being applicable to social research and as such, theoretically relevant codes that do emerge would fall into one of the categories in his “paradigm”.

In addition with issues with Strauss’ coding paradigm, Glaser (2001) argues a number of techniques proposed by Strauss (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) that it actually takes the researcher away from the data because they lead the researcher in directions not indicated by the data. The argument Strauss has for the use of these techniques is that it takes away the researcher from the traditional modes of thought to allow for conceptualisation at a higher levels and for making connection which was not apparent to the researcher. Strauss and Corbin, proposed other techniques which they thought might be helpful to the researcher and open the researcher imagination, among these techniques are “far-out comparison” and the “conditional/ consequential matrix”. The choice of research methodology by a researcher, whether Glaser’s or Strauss’s depends very much on the researcher, and the type of research being undertaken or conducted. For clarity on this point I have below research design that I used.

## Limitations

Grounded Theory is a difficult concept to grasp, needless talking about its use. One major concern is whether this scheme of things, such as the findings of this study is transferrable. Glaser and Straus (1967) the main originator of grounded theory do not directly discuss the issue. They write;

The reader’s judgement of credibility will also rest upon his assessments of how the researcher came

to his conclusions. He will note, for instance what range of events the researcher saw, who he interviewed, who talked to him, what diverse groups he compared, what kinds of experiences he had, and how he might have appeared to various people whom he studied” (p.231).

Locke (2001), however, notes that by gathering diverse data observations, the general applicability or analytic generalizability of the theory can be extended.

Grounded theory is a process that really embroiled the researcher in its use; hence the issue of subjectivity becomes a problem in grounded theory research. Therefore the researcher becomes the primary measurement instrument in the investigative process in contrast to quantitative research where the researcher tries to be detached from the research process (Caudle, 1994). In grounded theory we must allow theory to emerge from the data, this is not easy considering the fact that researchers bring into being their own set of biases and expectations to research. It is not all researchers that are conscious of these biases and expectations inherent in them which can distort or have potential damage the research but an astute grounded theorist recognises these biases and expectations and is sensitive to bias. In order to counteract research bias, a researcher needs to present evidence that corroborates the data (Caudle, 1994).

One way of overcoming this is to gather multiple perspective and documents about the same incident (Eisenhardt, 1989). When this done, validity is enhanced because one is relying on more than one source or person to provide an understanding of the event at hand. Also a devil advocate should be asked to examine the research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A third concern relates to the research process and document analysis. Once interviews are granted, the whole resolves turn to one of fear and anxiety of being able to move beyond ‘scripted’ responses in order to get to the ‘real’ story. Therefore identification and gaining access to the documents and analysis of data become a serious problem, and another concern is whether or not the documents reflect reality. That is do they accurately reflect decision process and decisions or were they written to protect individuals? For example whether minutes are taken in a way that reflect discussion or if too much cursory information has been written.

Perhaps the final concern is with the issue of reliability and dependability of the research (Neuman, 2003). However replication can solve this concern of reliability in grounded theory study. However in qualitative research study nothing remains static, as reality is always changing, making application difficult. For example it is difficult to replicate semi-structured interviews. Qualitative researchers argue that processes are not stable over

time and the research process is supposed to be dynamic because the world we live in is in itself dynamic, therefore the preoccupation of ‘positivist’ researchers with regard to replication do not hold (Neuman, 2003). Indeed, in grounded theory Chenitz and Swanson (1986) point out that replication is not important. They advocate that the main thrust is that the researcher is able to use the grounded theory to explain, understand and predict phenomenon, on the other hand quantitative methods were being seen as rigorous and “more scientific”.

Perhaps its limitation is still the reserve which some people still have for grounded theory qualitative research. These people nor less Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that qualitative approaches suffered from an overemphasis on verification, more importantly were being increasingly labelled as “impressionistic” and criticized for not being rigorous or systematic enough rigor in data analysis and interpretations. On the other hand quantitative methods were being seen as rigorous and “more scientific”. Although to overcome these problems Strauss and Corbin (1998) came out with their answers, with their coding methods and Glaser’s eighteen coded methods. The advent of computer aided QSR Nvivo, QSR 5, QSR 6, Atlas/ti computer aided tool, has helped to bring or dampen the issue of rigor to a large extent. Although these packages can assist with coding by allowing themes to emerge from the interviews, nevertheless the interpretation of the interviews is still by the researcher. However the issue of rigor is still a baggage in qualitative research.

## Summary

Glaser and Strauss posit that grounded theory is the “discovery of data systematically obtained from social research” (1967, p.2). This further elaborated on by Creswell (2003) by nothing that grounded theory is a strategy “in which the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (p.14) There is no doubt that grounded theory as a comprehensive research methodology offers an escape route for a comparable research with quantitative research if not better but its usage is perhaps the most difficult and difficult to master In using the grounded theory method to develop theory, one begins with an area of study and allows what is relevant to that area to emerge from the data. What distinguish grounded theory method from other forms of qualitative research is theory generation and the nature of grounded theory is to ensure that the theory being generated will “fit” the situation being studied and it will “work” in terms of describing the behaviour being observed (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.3). Consequently, for theory to be



useful for understanding social and behavioural phenomena theory must be “grand” in the data.

According to Hoflund (2013) in using the grounded theory method to develop theory, one begins with an area of study and allows what is relevant to that area to emerge from the data. There are two basic key characteristics that define grounded theory: de-emphasis on the verification of theory and an emphasis on the generation of theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed grounded theory methodology as a tool to overcoming the verification phenomenon that has preoccupied both qualitative and quantitative research since 1940.

GTM as a research tool widely became the most widely claimed of any qualitative method, used and in some areas according to Bryant (2014) it eclipsed all other methods--- qualitative and quantitative----- taken together. The outputs were very much frivolous and Editors and Reviewers were perplexed by some of the GTM –oriented papers seemed to indicate that GTM amounted to nothing much more than stages of data gathering--- usually in the form of open –ended interview-----followed by analysis of the data to produce codes or categories, which then mysteriously led to the “emergence” of some end result. (Bryant 2014). This result itself was sometimes termed a “grounded theory,” often its theoretical claims seemed at best weak and often non-existent. Often writers of such account often lay claim that they deliberately ignore any literature shed light on the generic research area and had set off on their research “without any preconceptions” or have discounted any potentially relevant experiences, ideas, or pre-existing knowledge, that might influence their investigations. Terms such as “theoretical sensitivity,” “emergence,” “theoretical sampling”, and “theoretical saturation”---- sometimes accompanied by fleeting references to “grab,” “fit,” “work,” were used often to pass some rigor and substantiation but the overall effect on many reviewer is one of bewilderment and suspicious.

These overall claims led to GTM to be regarded as methodologically frivolous or near vacuous. Those positivists in Lord Kelvin’s vein labelled GTM as lacking in any firm foundation (no hypotheses at the outset) and deficient in terms of rigor. Conversely those with interpretivist predisposition saw GTM as naïve and simplistic given the terms used by its progenitors then parroted by users-of term such as data,” “emergence,” and “Induction.” Lois Wacquant (2002, p. 1481) drove this home when he described the method as one founded on “an epistemological fairy tale” (P.1481). Glaser and Strauss remain mute to these accusations and negative labelling but by the mid 1990s Cathy Charmaz begun to articulate what she termed a “Constructivist” form of GTM, and in the second

edition of the Handbook of Qualitative Research (Charmaz, 2000) developed her argument, contrasting “Constructivist” form of GTM with “Objectivist” GTM, as espoused by Glaser. Charmaz contends that GTM had to take account of the active role of the researcher moving from data collection through analysis to coding, then iterating through further stages of collection and analysis and coding. Therefore codes and categories did not “emerge” but were the product of deliberate interpretation by researcher(s).

## Conclusion

I have introduced how grounded theory begins and in particular concentrated as my central discourse the role of extant literature in grounded theory. In doing this, the objective has been to inform readers of the on-going debate around the topic and to examine the rationales informing both sides of the debate. In the process the use of reflexivity was used to assuage and bridge the differences or gap between both sides. For me, I must recognise my stance on the matter. While the concerns articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) continue to be valid I believe that the call for abstinence from reading in the substantive area prior to data collection which is a measure not only disproportionate but one which can detract from the overall quality of the research is however a misconception to assume that extant literature must be excluded before empirical work in grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue for a link between substantive theory or the theory associated with a particular subject area, and the generation of formal theory:

“We believe that although formal theory can be granted directly from the data, it is more desirable, and usually necessary, to start the formal theory from a substantive one. The later not only provides a stimulus to a ‘good idea’ but it also gives an initial direction in developing relevant categories and properties and in choosing possible modes of integration. Indeed it is difficult to find a grounded formal theory that was not in some way stimulated by substantive theory” (p.79)

Grounded theory is not easy to master and Janesick (1998) uses the dance as a metaphor to describe qualitative research. Grounded theory exemplifies the metaphor of a dance in that it is an interactive process, which lends itself to exploration and experimentation of concepts about using grounded theory. There are many things which I think all contemplating the use of qualitative grounded theory must be aware of.

First, grounded theory is a complex process and not easy to master.

There are few prescriptions on how to conduct grounded theory research and Suddaby (2006) is

very much right when he enthuses that; “The seamless craft of a well-executed grounded theory study --- is the product of considerable experience, hard work, and creative and, occasionally, a healthy dose of good luck (p. 639). This is going without saying that the use of grounded theory technique in conducting research improves overtime and with experience with researchers. Therefore learning to use grounded theory requires patience, flexibility, and the ability to tolerate ambiguity and time. The movement of data analysis and data collection requires patience. Therefore a researcher must be comfortable with ambiguity to the research process. However, this does not mean that to use grounded theory method (GTM) is a preserve of experienced researchers but provided one has a good grounded theory expert as supervisor; grounded theory could judiciously be used meaningfully.

Second, grounded theory research also requires a process. One of the advantages of conducting grounded theory research is that it leads to a fresh insight of the social phenomenon under investigation. Consequently if researcher is to achieve this, there is the need for flexibility, patience, intuitive and open mindedness. This does not mean that when conducting grounded theory research that ‘everything’ and ‘anything’ goes (Suddaby and Noble, 2007). Here there seems to be a conflict between creativity and rigorous application of the former rule of conducting grounded theory and the perception that grounded theory is to ignore and throw methodological rigour out of the window is for me sad and wrong. Suddaby (2006) contends that in evaluating grounded theory, he checks to ensure that a researcher has followed the core analytic tenets of grounded theory, including theoretical sampling, constant comparison, sensitivity and the technical language employed by the researcher to describe the research process is correct because he believes that “there is a clear connection between rigour in language and rigour in action”. (640)

Thirdly, in grounded theory research one is inundated by voluminous data information and to process these tons of data can be nightmares. Though qualitative software is helpful, it, all the same still very fatiguing and mental deranging. Some people much often the aged might not find computer aided gadgetries very helpful.

Glaser and Corbin (1998) outline the characteristics of grounded theory and elaborate that these skills are not to be developed prior to engaging in grounded theory research

- The ability to step back and critically analyse situation.
- The ability to recognize tendency towards bias.
- The ability to flexible and open to helpful criticism.

- Sensitivity to the words and actions of respondents.
- A sense of absorption and devotion to the work process (p. 7).

However it is important to know that Grounded theory approach and qualitative methods helps the new researcher to develop and design interview questions and guides and conducts interviews.

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