

A practical guide for conducting qualitative research with grounded theory

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. Sage publications. ISBN 978-1-4129-9746-1

(book review)

Reviewed by Yuntong Peng

Grounded theory, a theory development approach in qualitative research, has become increasingly popular in recent years. In contrast to a deductive approach to theory development, grounded theory researchers employ an inductive way of theory development that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005). Grounded theory most often stems from qualitative data sources (Birks & Mills, 2011); various types of data sources can be used, such as interviews, observations, videos, journals, diaries, drawings, internal documents and so on (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A grounded theory study can be applied to identify general concepts, to develop theoretical explanations and to offer new insights into various experience and phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Tracing back to the source, grounded theory was first developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser during their collaboration in researching the dying experience of hospital patients. In 1967, they published *The discovery of grounded theory*, which leads to the later prominence of the grounded theory. Among the collection of books on grounded theory, *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* written by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin remains classic. Since the first publication in 1990, this book has been revised for several times, with the basics remaining the same.

Now in 2015, here comes the forth edition, *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (4th edition)*, the latest and most updated one. Within this edition, the book has been revised to be more easily understandable to beginners. Each chapter has been re-examined and added with new headings and additional examples. Some of the denser chapters have been split apart to make each chapter more focused and understandable. Meanwhile, “Insider insights” has

been added to some chapters as a new section which provides readers with experiences and viewpoints from other grounded theorists.

The book consists of three parts. **Part one** (Chapter 1–11) comprehensively includes all the important information about grounded theory and essential steps and techniques to conduct grounded theory research. It covers background information, theoretical foundations, important concepts, ethical issues, and steps from data collection, theoretical sampling, data analysis to integration, as well as important techniques such as writing memos and diagramming. With the procedures and techniques introduced, in **part two** (chapter 12–16), by using their Vietnam war experience research data, the authors focus on demonstrating the application of those procedures and techniques to analyze different types of data. Therefore, the abstract explanations of methods can be connected to actual analysis; just because of this, the authors also suggest readers to read the second part together with the first part. As for the **third part** (Chapter 17–19), it provides advice about writing theses, monographs, and dissertations, presenting the research and evaluating the quality of the studies. It also offers answers to questions asked by students and other grounded theory researchers. With all the comprehensive and practical information included, just as stated by the authors, they hoped to make this book “teachers-mentors in absentia”.

As a beginner who wants to apply grounded theory in my own research, I have found this book very helpful. **Firstly**, it introduces the background information and theoretical foundations of grounded theory, which provides the readers with a better position to understand grounded theory within the broader context of scientific research and also to distinguish grounded theory research with other qualitative research. **Secondly**, it offers very comprehensive and practical guidelines for conducting a grounded theory study, from the very beginning – choosing a research problem, to framing research questions, writing proposals, data collection and analysis, theory integration, and to the final steps, writing and presenting the research results. With explicit explanation and various examples, the authors make the complicated process easily understandable. **Besides**, numerous resources and links are provided at the end of each chapter to support my further reading.

Noteworthy, although the authors have provided very clear and elaborative steps for researchers to follow while conducting a grounded theory study, they still emphasize the importance of the researchers’ development of independent thinking as well as the art of interpretation. They point out that the researchers should not be obsessed with the set of procedures, and that this book provides techniques and procedures that can be used as tools but not directives. The qualitative analysis process should be of fluid and dynamic nature and be driven by insight gained through interaction with data. Therefore, the authors stated that this book is less about a specific

methodology and more about teaching persons how to think more self-consciously and systematically about data.

Overall, this book is a very practical guide for conducting qualitative research with a grounded theory approach. Students or researchers who are interested in carrying out grounded theory studies can benefit from it. I would definitely recommend this book.

References

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