Grounded Theory in Practice

Instructor: Prof. Dr. Fred Niederman (Saint Louis University) E-mail: niederfa@slu.edu
Time: Oct. 1st - Nov. 12th, every Tuesday, 9:00-12:15

Description

This workshop will focus on the concepts and applications of grounded theory (GT). As a workshop the emphasis will be on student ability to perform the tasks leading to successful GT investigation. The educational model is loosely based on experiential learning that centers around a sequence of stating hypotheses or expectations, testing these through some experience or activity, discussing and interpreting resulting observations, then reflecting and forming increasingly sophisticated understandings. Students will have the opportunity to develop an overview understanding of GT through directed readings and discussion, planning and execution of related tasks, receipt of feedback and opportunities for correction and improvement on initial efforts, and reflection on each task/activity. It is expected that students will read one of three main books on this topic and at least 5 of the example articles to be chosen according to the topical interest of each student.

Grading will be based on two essays written by each student and submitted at the end of the course. These essays will be comprised of the following:

1) a short reading summary of one of three books (students may select any of the three – Glaser and Strauss 1967, Locke 2000, or Charmaz 2006). This first essay will address three questions in approximately 2 double spaced pages each (there is no firm upper limit to length of answers, but the stated length is intended as a general expectation or guideline):
   - What existing issues in IS would be appropriate for grounded theory and why?
   - Under what conditions would you foresee excellent research conducted that does not follow all indicated GT steps and procedures?
   - What weaknesses, even given a general positive view of GT, do you see in how the author presents this approach and what might remediate these?

   This essay will account for 30% of the grade in the course.

2) the second essay will be presented at the end of class and will be expected to be approximately 10 double spaced pages. In this essay, each student will describe the major steps during the semester that they personally took in regard to the GT activity. This will include participation in group events such as brainstorming the interview protocol, lining up an interview, conducting the interview, transcribing the interview, and individual coding. The description should include statements about what actions were taken but also what observations and conclusions the student draws from these. The paper should also contrast their own actions with what was described as the procedure in one of the five articles they have read. It is expected that their own experience will be more detailed than what was described in the paper. Finally, the essay should include their personal observations regarding the key difficulties and opportunities in using GT, how they might apply it in a
study in a topic of interest in the IS domain, and how where GT as a method might be enhanced.

This essay will account for 70% of the grade in the course including 35% for the essay itself and 35% for completing the action items of the course such as individual interview, transcription, and first level of coding.

The course content will address the formal Glaser and Straus formulation of grounded theory but acknowledge variations that have evolved over the years. The seminar will be organized in a workshop format. The workshop will involve hands on application through development of a sample protocol, individual conduct of interviewing relevant subjects, transcription, coding, and data analysis. This exercise should reflect all of the relevant steps necessary for the conduct of a full scale GT project. Because the focus will be on the semantic and meaningful comments of subject/participants, supporting software will be discussed but not emphasized. Students can do all the work needed using Microsoft Word tables and will be shown ways to do this quickly and efficiently. Microsoft Excel would serve as an equally viable resource. The purpose of this seminar is to not only bring awareness of the methods of GT to participants but also to provide an introductory level skill base for future research activity as well as competence and understanding for evaluation and review of the GT work of other scholars.

It is expected that the production of a genuine research level paper will be one result of this course. With the guidance of the instructor, it is anticipated that the collective results of project structuring, data gathering, and systematic coding analysis, the core of a publishable paper will be created. As a result, students will experience genuine research activity from conception through execution, rather than observe a simulation. Should the level of production rise to that sufficient for publication students will have an opportunity to reflect upon the outcome of such work as well as the steps involved. In the eventuality that the effort falls short of producing publishable results, students will be able to reflect upon the degree of effort needed for publication, analyze gaps between performance needed and experienced and gain valuable lessons regarding the real world of research production.

Prior to the start of the program, students will be asked to read one of the three books listed below. Those who end up working with grounded theory in doctoral theses or for publication will eventually need to be familiar with all three of these.


Although this is the longest book it is the most fundamental to GT research and is advocated for those who are likely to pursue GT research in their own studies knowing that they will over time have to enhance their reading with additional sources on this method


This is both the shortest book and the one most oriented toward business research. It tends to be pragmatic, but some reviewers want every detail to align with the original conceptualization.

This is an updated version that covers the basics from an alternative perspective.

**Sessions**

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Readings¹</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>1</strong> Precursors</td>
<td>All sessions will start with discussion regarding the similarities and contrasts in the views of Glaser and Strauss, Locke and Charmaz pertaining to that day’s topic</td>
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<td>Defining the domain and population</td>
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<td>Part 1 – what constitutes appropriate topics for GT? Part 2 – definitions, background, purpose, Adoption of technology dynamics – sample problem</td>
<td>Why and when would the building of new theory be important? How does grounded theory aim to go about building theory? What does the theory look like when it is derived from grounded theory methods? What are the basic components of grounded theory?</td>
<td>Gregor Suddaby</td>
<td>Interviewing</td>
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<td>Develop and pilot test protocol (homework)</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong> Background knowledge</td>
<td>Why is it necessary to prepare for a GT study? What are the goals and objectives of prior literature search? How does one extract key data from particular articles and organize that data meaningfully?</td>
<td>Webster and Watson, de Vreede, Jones, &amp; Mgaya Urquhart, et al., Levina &amp; Vaast Orlikowski</td>
<td>In class practice using ABI Informs, Science Direct, and/or ACM digital library</td>
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<td>Literature review -- the “spreadsheet method”</td>
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<td>Review and integrate protocol</td>
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<td>Analysis of GT papers, Analysis of topical papers (homework)</td>
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¹ All readings are recommended to aid in understanding the course content
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| 3 Study realities | What makes for an ethical use of human subjects?  
How does one recruit “subjects” or participants?  
What issues arise during an interview? | | Review of lit reviews  
Locate “subject”, recruit individual, conduct and transcribe interview (homework) |
| 4 Coding practice | How does one prepare data for analysis?  
What are the steps in coding and what happens at each step?  
What is memoing and constant comparison? | | Review of transcripts  
Coding demos and feedback  
Coding individual data sets (homework) |
| 5 “Making the photo from the dots” -- interpretation | How are insights gained while coding recorded and saved?  
How are conflicts in interpretation resolved? | | Review of individual coding  
Collective discussion of coding choices and strategies |
| 6 Evaluating the built theory  
Reviewing GT papers and evaluating method | How do we know at each stage if we’ve done a good job?  
How do we know that the proposed theory has value?  
What if our findings mirror existing theory? | Eisenhart, Lee and Hubona  
EJIS special issue on grounded theory | The larger picture of proposing and supporting IS theory  
Responsibilities to the community |
| 7 Finalization | What goes into preparing a GT paper manuscript?  
How much discussion of method is needed?  
How are best method practices documented?  
Selecting journals, referencing papers from target journal; requesting editors/reviewers | Urquhart, Lehmann, and Myers | A review of all steps and furthering the program to actual submission |
GT and Theory Readings – All readings are optional, students are encouraged to read those of particular content interest


GT Example readings


