

Excerpts from:  
*The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for  
Qualitative Research* by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L.  
Strauss

[Andrew J. Cerniglia](#)

August 1, 2008

## Contents

<b>1 The Discovery of Grounded Theory</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 Grounded Theory</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 Theoretical Sampling</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4 From Substance to Formal Theory</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5 The Constant comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6 Classifying and Assessing Comparative Studies</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7 New Sources for Qualitative Data</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>8 Theoretical Elaboration of Quantitative Data</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>9 The Credibility of Grounded Theory</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>10 Applying Grounded Theory</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>11 Insight and Theory Development</b>	<b>17</b>

# 1 The Discovery of Grounded Theory

For many sociologists, however, undoubtedly there exists a conflict concerning primacy of purpose, reflecting the opposition between a desire to generate theory and a trained need to verify it (p. 2).

We also believe that other canons for assessing a theory, such as logical consistency, clarity, parsimony, density, scope, integration, as well as its fit and its ability to work, are also significantly dependent on how the theory was generated (p. 3).

Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research (p. 4).

What clash there is concerns the primacy of emphasis on verification or generation of theory — to which heated discussions on qualitative versus quantitative have been linked historically. We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory (p. 17).

In many instances, both forms are necessary — not quantitative used to test qualitative, but both used as supplements, as mutual verification and, most important for us, as different forms of data on the same subject, which, when compared, will each generate theory (p. 18).

## 2 Grounded Theory

In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories, or their properties from evidence, then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept (p. 23).

In short, the discovered theoretical category lives on until proven theoretically defunct for any class of data, while the life of accurate evidence that indicated the category may be short (p. 24).

The researchers in specific studies do not seem to have focused directly on how their theory emerged; as a result, they have not explored how their they could have generated more of it more systematically, and with more conceptual generality and scope. A focus on testing can thus easily block the generation of a more rounded and more dense theory (p. 27).

The generation of theory through comparative analysis both subsumes and assumes verifications and accurate descriptions, but only to the extent that the latter are in the service of generation. Otherwise they are sure to stifle it.

This situation is in contrast to the risk of testing a logico-deductive theory, which is dubiously related to the area of behavior it purports to explain, since it is merely thought up on the basis of *a priori* assumption and a touch of common sense, peppered with a few old theoretical speculations made by the erudite (p. 29).

Indeed, the market, corporate, and government fact-finding agencies can easily outdo any sociologist in researched descriptions through sheer resources, if the care to. Where the sociologist can help these agencies is by providing them with theory that will make their research relevant (p. 31).

Our strategy of comparative analysis for generating theory puts a high emphasis on *theory as process*; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not a perfect product (p. 32).

Our approach, allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own, enables the analyst to ascertain which, if any, formal theory may help him generate his substantive theories. He can then be more faithful to his data, rather than forcing it to fit a theory. He can be more objective and less theoretically biased. Of course, this also means that he cannot merely apply Parsonian or Mertonian categories at the start, but must wait to see whether they are linked to the emergent substantive theory concerning the issue in focus (p. 34).

The logico-deductive theorist, proceeding under the license and mandate of analytic abstraction, engages in premature parsimony when arriving at his theory (p. 35).

A category stands by itself as a conceptual element of the theory. A property, in turn, is a conceptual aspect or element of a category (p. 36).

Working with borrowed categories is more difficult since they are harder to find, fewer in number, and not as rich; since in the long run they may not be relevant, and are not exactly designed for the purpose, they must be respecified. In short, our focus on the emergence of categories solves the problems of fit, relevance, forcing, and richness (p. 37).

As one thinks about the broad spectrum of social life, one realizes that sociologists (with the focused aid of foundations) have really worked in only a small corner of it when posing the larger questions of deviance, social problems, formal organizations, education, mental health, community government, underdeveloped countries, and so forth (p. 38).

The type of concept that should be generated has two, joint, essential features. First, the concepts should be *analytic* — sufficiently generalized to designate characters of concrete entities, not the entities themselves. They should also be *sensitizing* — yield a “meaningful” picture, abetted by apt illustrations that enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one’s own experiences (p. 38).

In the beginning, one’s hypotheses may seem unrelated, but as categories and properties emerge, develop in abstraction, and become related, their accumulating interrelations form an integrated central theoretical framework — *the core of the emerging theory*. The core becomes a theoretical guide to the further collection and analysis of data (p. 40).

Joint collection, coding, and analysis of data is the underlying operation. The generation of theory, coupled with the notion of theory as process, requires that all three operations be done together as much as possible. They should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of an investigation to its end (p. 43).

### 3 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges (p. 45).

The basic question in theoretical sampling (in either substantive or formal theory) is: *what* groups or subgroups does one turn to *next* in data collection? And for *what* theoretical purpose (p. 47)?

Our logic of *ongoing inclusion* of groups must be differentiated from the logic used in comparative analyses that are focused mainly on accurate evidence for description and verification. That logic, one of preplanned inclusion and exclusion, warns the analyst away from comparing “non-comparable” groups (p. 50).

This effort of purification is made for a result impossible to achieve, since one never really knows what has and has not been held constant (p. 50).

The sociologist developing substantive or formal theory can also usefully *create* groups, provided he keeps in mind that they are an artifact of his research design, and so does not start assuming in his analysis that they have properties possessed by a natural group (p. 52).

However, only a handful of survey researchers have used their skill to create multiple comparison subgroups for discovering theory. This would be a very worthwhile endeavor (p. 53).

Thus, anyone who wishes to discover formal theory should be aware of the usefulness of comparisons made on high level conceptual categories among the seemingly non-comparable; he should actively seek this kind of comparison; do it with flexibility; and be able to interchange the apparently non-comparable comparison with the apparently comparable ones (p. 54).

*This control over similarities and differences is vital* for discovering categories, and for developing and relating their theoretical properties, all necessary for the further development of an emergent theory. By maximizing or minimizing differences among comparative groups, the sociologist can control the theoretical relevance of his data collection (p. 55).

When maximizing differences among comparative groups (thereby maximizing differences in data) he possesses a more powerful means for stimulating the generation of theoretical properties once his basic framework has emerged (p. 57).

*Saturation* means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category (p. 61).

When saturation occurs, the analyst will usually find that some gap in his theory, especially in his major categories, is almost, if not completely filled (p. 61).

Saturation can never be attained by studying one incident in one group. What is gained by studying one group is at most the discovery of some basic categories and a few of their properties. From the study of similar groups (or subgroups within the first group), a few more categories and their properties are yielded. But this is only the beginning of a theory. Then the sociologist should try to saturate his categories by maximizing differences among groups. In the process, he generates his theory (p. 62).

In theoretical sampling, no one kind of data on a category nor technique for data collection is necessarily appropriate (p. 65).

But when different slices of data are submitted to comparative analysis, the result is *not* unbounding relativism. Instead, it is a proportioned view of the evidence, since, during comparison, biases of particular people and methods tend to reconcile themselves as the analyst discovers the underlying causes of variation (p. 68).

*Core* theoretical categories, those with the most explanatory power, should be saturated as completely as possible. Efforts to saturate less relevant categories should not be made at the cost of resources necessary for saturating the core categories (p.70).

To pace the alternating tempo of these three operations, the sociologist soon learns that the analysis can be usefully accomplished at various times: immediately after leaving the field; during the evening between successive days of data collection; and during two- or three-day, or weekly, respites from data collection (p. 73).

At the beginning of the research, interviews usually consist of open-ended conversations during which respondents are allowed to talk with no imposed limitations of time (p. 75).

Later, when interviews and observations are directed by the emerging theory, he can ask direct questions bearing on his categories. These can be answered sufficiently and fairly quickly (p. 76).

## 4 From Substance to Formal Theory

There are at least two “rewriting” techniques for advancing a substantive to a formal theory that is grounded in only one substantive area. The sociologist can simply omit substantive words, phrases or adjectives: instead of saying “temporal aspects of *dying* as a nonscheduled status passage” he would say “temporal aspects of nonscheduled status passage.” He can also rewrite a substantive theory up a notch: instead of writing about how doctors and nurses give medical attention to dying patient’s social value, he can talk of how professional services are distributed according to the social value of clients (p. 80).

While the process of comparative analysis is the same for generating either substantive or formal theory, it becomes harder to generate the latter because of its more abstract level and the wider range of research required (p. 82).

The above examples are taken from our research; however, as we noted earlier, anyone can begin generating formal theory directly from published theory (p. 88).

This kind of scrutiny and illustrative extension of Goffman’s theory suggests that an important strategy in generating formal theory through theoretical sampling is to begin with someone else’s formal theory. That theory may be developed less abstractly than Goffman’s and may be tied much more closely to firsthand research. The strategy consists of asking, first of all, what comparisons the author has forgotten or “thrown away” because of his initial focus; second, what comparisons he has suggested in passing but has not followed up; third, what comparisons are suggested directly by his analysis; and fourth, what comparisons are suggested by one’s own reflections on the theory (p. 90).

The more prestigious style of logico-deductive, systematic “grand theorizing” is, in the hands of its most brilliant practitioners, more than merely esthetically satisfying: it also gives impetus to considerable useful, precise verification of hypotheses. But it provides no directive — any more than it did a century ago when Comte and Spencer were its spokesmen — to closing that embarrassingly noticeable gap between highly abstract theory and the multitude of minuscule substantive studies so characteristic of current sociology (p. 97).

Grounded formal theory is thus also highly useful in predictions and explanations when we are consulted about substantive areas where we have no theory, and no time or inclination to develop one. Explanations and prediction from logico-deductive formal theory are used mainly where they will do no harm; that is, in the classroom, as “tacked-on” explanations of accomplished research (as mentioned in Chapter 1), and as hypotheses (prediction) in the service of the perennial testing of parts of a formal theory with the eternal hope that it can be modified to fit reality (p. 98).

## 5 The Constant comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis

Rather, the constant comparative method is designed to aid the analyst who possesses these abilities in generating a theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data — and at the same time is in a form clear enough to be readily, if only partially, operationalized for testing in quantitative research (p. 103)

We shall describe in four stages the constant comparative method: (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory (p. 105).

1. *Comparing incidents applicable to each category.* The analyst starts by coding each incident in his data into as many categories of analysis as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit an existing category (p. 105).

To this procedure we add the basic, defining rule for the constant comparative method: *while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category* (p. 106).

As categories and their properties emerge, the analyst will discover two kinds: those that he has constructed himself (such as “social loss” or “calculation” of social loss); and those that have been abstracted from the language of the research situation. (For example, “composure” was derived from nurses’ statements like “I was afraid of losing my composure when the family started crying over their child.” (p. 107)

At this point, the second rule of the constant comparative method is: *stop coding and record a memo on your ideas.* This rule is designed to tap the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in his thoughts (p. 107).

From the point of view of generating theory it is often useful to write memos on, as well as code, the copy of one’s field notes (p. 108).

2. *Integrating categories and their properties.* This process starts out in a small way; memos and possible conferences are short. But as the coding continues, the constant comparative units change from comparison of incident with incident to comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents (p. 108).

3. *Delimiting the theory.* As the theory develops, various delimiting features of the constant comparative method begin to curb what could otherwise become an overwhelming task. Delimiting occurs at two levels: the theory and the categories (p. 110).

By reduction we mean that the analyst may discover underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties, and can then formulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts (p. 110).

Thus, with reduction of terminology and consequent generalizing, forced by constant comparisons (some comparisons can at this point be based on the literature of other professional area), the analyst starts to achieve two major requirements of theory: (1) *parsimony* of variables and formulation, and (2) *scope* in the applicability of the theory to a wide range of situations, while keeping a close correspondence of theory and data (p. 110).

4. *Writing theory.* At this stage in the process of qualitative analysis, the analyst possesses coded data, a series of memos, and a theory. The discussions in his memos provide the content behind the categories, which become the major themes of the theory later presented in

papers or books (p. 113).

When the research is convinced that his analytic framework forms a systematic substantive theory, that it is a reasonable accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use — then he can publish his results with confidence (p. 113).

By *diversity* we mean that each incident is compared with other incidents, or with properties of a category, in terms of as many similarities and differences as possible. This mode of comparing is in contrast to coding for crude proofs; such coding only establishes whether an incident indicates the few properties of the category that are being counted (p. 114).

To make theoretical sense of so much diversity in his data, the analyst is forced to develop ideas on a level of generality higher in conceptual abstraction than the qualitative material he analyzed (p. 114).

## 6 Classifying and Assessing Comparative Studies

Some comparative analyses are made in the service of theories that are accepted as so correct and so useful that researchers wish merely to contribute to them in minor ways (p. 125).

The great complexity of comparative analysis turns out to be “manufactured” complexity of theoretical organization, rather than a genuinely “understood” complexity of the world of events (p. 130).

The very proliferation of footnoted sources and commentaries, plus the variety of time and place drawn upon for illustration, can be translated into an implicit language of verification (p. 137).

*Circumstantial sampling* leads to much less satisfactory integration than would theoretical sampling (p. 138).

Of course, Shibutani and Kwan also are interested in differential patterns that stem from differential conditions — and discover many — but a focus on similarity and resemblance, to the exclusion of an explicit focus on difference, eliminates one potentially fruitful aspect of an otherwise admirably conducted inquiry (p. 141).

Doubtless his reactions to alternate theories of magic and witchcraft affected some of his field operations; but the very numbers of original categories, their properties, and the relationships — and the degree of integration achieved by cumulative analyses — evinces how grounded in data his theory is. It is grounded — and extensive in scope — precisely because he used comparison carefully and skillfully (p. 150).

Another tradition exists, especially in field work: namely, to initiate the research using only a very general framework with no intention of using a given theory. The assumption is that one's data will be sufficiently rich to stimulate the generation of good theory. If this new theory can be joined with received theory, well and good; if not, then it can stand itself (p. 152)

## 7 New Sources for Qualitative Data

The extremely limited range of qualitative materials used by sociologists is largely due to the focus on verification. For many, if not most, researchers, qualitative data is virtually synonymous with field work and interviews, combined with whatever “background” documents may be necessary for putting the research in context (p. 162).

When someone stands in the library stacks, he is, metaphorically, surrounded by voices begging to be heard. Every book, every magazine article, represents at least one person who is equivalent to the anthropologist’s informant or the sociologist’s interviewee. In those publications, people converse, announce positions, argue with a range of eloquence, and describe events or scenes in ways entirely comparable to what is seen and heard during field work. The researcher needs only to discover the voices in the library to release them for his analytic use (p. 163).

Various procedures, or tactics, available to the field worker for gathering data have the analogues in library research (p. 164)

Most caches that would be useful for sociologists take other forms: collections of letters (published and unpublished), a collection of speeches or sermons, a set of proceedings, a symposium, or collection of articles on a single topic by one or several authors (p. 167).

Since generation is most effective when it rests upon the search for comparative materials, caches can hardly be the chief source of data — any more than a bundle or two of interviews (no matter how extensive or on how numerous a population) can suffice for the field theorist (p. 168)

Perhaps we should warn that the discovery of a cache can actually restrict the development of a researcher’s theorizing. Some caches are so esthetically lovely in themselves, so interesting, that the researcher hates to leave the material (p. 168).

How should he proceed in the library? The answer is that he should use *any* materials bearing on his area that he can discover (p. 169).

But comparative method should be brought to bear from the outset. Thus, one should think about regional novelists, about novelists of different ethnic groups, about novelists who wrote for different generations of Americans, about novelists who emigrated from America, and who emigrated here from different parts of the world. One should think of novelists who portrayed rural life and those who pictured city life, those who focused on men and those who were most interested in women (p. 169).

Of course, novels are not the only source of categories; any materials that force a range of comparisons will be useful: letters, diaries, newspaper accounts, or other miscellaneous non-fiction (p. 170).

So the researcher needs to cultivate functional synonyms for his topic in order to explore relevant categories fully (p. 171).

In short, a calculated strategy of search and scrutiny for data on off-beat groups is a necessity and will be exceptionally rewarding (p. 173).

“Pinpointing,” a procedure that tends to be used relatively late in one’s inquiry, pertains mainly to integrating theory through the checking of detailed points suggested by specific hypotheses. It is an equally valuable tactic when used with library data (p. 173).

In closing this section on procedures, we cannot refrain from reminding sociologists that the writings of sociologists, of any era, as well as the writings of other social scientists, are fair game for comparative researchers (p. 173).

From our own experience, library research is faster than either interviewing or field research, when these enterprises are personally conducted (p. 179).

Whether he is interested in substantive or formal theory, the rule is: maximize those comparison groups! That rule may lead to the library (p. 179).

The *first* stricture that must be made against library materials is that some groups or institutions evolve and disappear without leaving much, if any, documentary trace (p. 180).

A *second* possible disadvantage of library materials, for some theorizing, is that information yielded by the writer (whether about himself or events described) can be purposely misleading (p. 181).

A *third* potential disadvantage is that library sources may be deficient if events reported by observers are simply inaccurate renditions of those events. By contrast, the field worker has been trained to make careful observations, to note precisely which of his observations can be given more credence than others — and why, and to report his observations accurately in his field notes (p. 181).

A *fourth* potential disadvantage of library materials is that by comparison with careful field notes, they may not always afford a continuity of unfolding events in the kind of detail that the theorist requires (p. 182).

Library research has a *fifth* disadvantage when compared with the field, or even interview, research. Sometimes field researches are precipitated when the researcher realizes that he is already a participant in, or a privileged observer to, some interesting group's activity. He would be denying the richness of his own experience with the group if he chose not to study it in preference to doing library research (p. 183).

## 8 Theoretical Elaboration of Quantitative Data

However, some of our best monographs based on quantitative data indicate that they can be a very rich medium for discovering theory. In these monographs, discovery cannot be stopped, but breaks through both verifications and preconceived conceptual schemes to provide us with very interesting and important theory (p. 185).

When the sociologist consciously starts out to suggest a theory plausibly, rather than test it provisionally, then he can relax many rules for obtaining evidence and verifications that would otherwise limit, stultify or squelch the generation of theory (p. 186).

Secondary analysis, then, is uniquely well suited for the generation of theory but is often severely limited for description and verification — for which it is still mostly used, with a typical preable about “limitations” (p. 189).

But when theory is the purpose (as stated in Chapter II), there are two reasons why the representativeness of the sample is not an issue. First, the direction of a relationship used to suggest a hypothesis is assumed to exist until disproved, in both biased and unbiased populations; and, second, theoretical (not statistical) sampling guides the choosing and handling of the data (p. 189).

Further, crude indices need only be dichotomized to obtain comparative groups, not cut into several groups (p. 191).

If the index “works” — that is, if it is consistently related to a whole series of variables that, when put together, yield an integrated theory — this is validation enough of a core index. Integration of the theory is, in fact, a more trustworthy validation of an index than the standard method of merely showing that an obvious relationship exists between the index and another questionnaire item, and that therefore the index must measure what it is supposed to measure (p. 192).

The theoretical relevance of the concept is soon demonstrated by whether or not its index actually works in a multitude of cross-tabulations (p. 193).

Indeed, the rule for generation of theory is *not* to have any pre-set or valued hypotheses, but to maintain a sensitivity to all possible theoretical relevances among the hundreds of possible runs afforded by large surveys (p. 194).

In order to saturate all possible findings for suggesting hypotheses, the analyst may take his core concepts and run them with literally *every* other questionnaire item in the survey that seems remotely relevant to his area of interest (p. 194).

A consistency index is a list of single questionnaire items which all indicate the same category, such as cosmopolitan, and all relate separately to the core index in the same consistent direction (p. 197).

“Canceling out” means that the relationship may be positive under one condition and negative under another; so that when combined the partial relationships cancel themselves out to result in a weak general association. However, it is theoretically very relevant and interesting to be able to say how conditions minimize, maximize, or cancel out a relationship. Also, even if partials are weak, the theoretical relevance of a weak relationship between two indices may be the *weakness* itself (p. 201).

The absence of a relationship becomes just as important as an increase above the consistent

percentage level, for any degree of association (or lack of it) may be part of the theory (p. 202).

The previous section presented the first step in our style of theoretical analysis of quantitative data: saturating core indices with all possible two-variable runs; discovering relationship among the runs with theoretically relevant consistency indices, summation indices and single questionnaire items; then analyzing the findings with theoretical inferences. The next step, which cannot be neglected, is *elaboration analysis* — to make three or more variable analyses in order to saturate categories further by developing their properties and thereby achieving a denser theory. Thus, the discovery of relationships among indices provides the analyst with beginning suggestions for a theory, plus a theoretical direction and focus for its elaboration (p. 205).

By “elaboration” we mean that the two-variable associations, which are the basis of theoretical hypotheses, must have their structural conditions specified; their causes and consequences sought, with possible spurious factors checked for; and their intervening variables (delineating processes between the variables) discovered (p. 205).

Theoretical ordering of variables occurs by two strategies: (1) running all possible three-variable associations with each theoretically relevant two-variable association; and (2) running particular tables to fill in gaps or to answer questions, which emerge as the theory develops, by arranging elaboration tables according to the dictates of the theory (p. 207).

Theoretical ordering of variables by all possible three-variable associations on core two-variable relationship is done by comparing the partial association percentage differences to the percentage difference of the original relationship. When the partials vary above and below the original relationship, then the analyst discovers conditions that minimize and maximize his core relationship (p. 208).

When both partials are less than the original relationship (they never completely disappear), then the analyst must theoretically suggest whether the third variable is (1) an intervening variable, thus suggesting a theoretical process between two core variables, or (2) an antecedent variable (p. 208).

With imagination and ingenuity he can theoretically order his variables by time, structural complexity, conceptual generality, or in any other theoretical manner. His job is to suggest a theory based on both the *theoretically relevant order* of elaborated relationships and on the *content* of the variables he employs (p. 209).

## 9 The Credibility of Grounded Theory

The theory that emerges from the researcher's collection and analysis of qualitative data is in one sense equivalent to what he *knows systematically* about his own data (p. 223).

The evolving systematic analysis permits a field worker quite literally to write prescriptions so that other outsiders could get along in the observed sphere of life and action (p. 226).

Finally, it is worth special mention that those field workers who do not really believe in their own hard-won substantive theory are tempted toward a compulsive scientism. Because they do not trust themselves — their own ability to know or reason — they rely in addition upon questionnaires or other “objective” methods of collecting and analyzing quantified data. When used for this purpose, those methods do not necessarily lead to greater credibility, but they do permit the insecure researcher to feel greater security in his “results” without really considering what specific queries do or do not need this additional “hard” data (p. 227).

In addition, the constant comparative method's requirement of keeping track of one's ideas increases the probability that the theory will be well integrated and clear, since the analyst is forced to make theoretical sense of each comparison. Making sure the categories of the theory and their properties are meaningfully interrelated is difficult enough; keeping all the interrelations clearly delineated is an added difficulty. The integration and clarity of the theory will, however, increase the probability that colleagues will accept its credibility (p. 230).

Such reader qualification of the theory we may term “the discounting process.” Readers surely discount aspects of many, if not most, published analyses (whether they rest upon qualitative or quantitative data). This discounting takes several forms: the theory is *corrected* because of one-sided research designs, *adjusted* to fit the diverse conditions of different social structures, *invalidated* for other structures through the reader's experience or knowledge, and deemed *inapplicable* to yet other kinds of structures (p. 231).

The researcher and his readers thus share a *joint responsibility*. The researcher ought to provide sufficiently clear statements of theory and description so that readers can carefully assess the credibility of the theoretical framework he offers (p. 232).

## 10 Applying Grounded Theory

The first requisite property is that the theory must closely *fit* the substantive area in which it will be used. Second, it must be readily *understandable* by laymen concerned with this area. Third, it must be sufficiently *general* to be applicable to a multitude of diverse daily situations within the substantive area, not to just a specific type of situation. Fourth, it must allow the user partial *control* over the structure and process of daily situations as they change through time (p. 237).

Clearly, a grounded theory that is faithful to the everyday realities of a substantive area is one that has been carefully *induced* from diverse data, as we have described the process. Only in this way will the theory be closely related to the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas, and so be highly applicable to dealing with them (p. 239).

A grounded substantive theory that corresponds closely to the realities of an area will make sense and be understandable to the people working in the substantive area (p. 239).

Their understanding the theory tends to engender a readiness to use it, for it sharpens their sensitivity to the problems that they face and gives them an image of how they can potentially make matters better, through either their own efforts or those of a sociologist (p. 240).

In deciding upon the conceptual level of categories, the sociologist generating theory should be guided by the criteria that the categories should not be so abstract as to lose their sensitizing aspect, but yet must be abstract enough to make his theory a general guide to multi-conditional, ever-changing daily situations (p. 242).

The person who applies theory becomes, in effect, a generator of theory, and in this instance the theory is clearly seen as *process*: an ever-developing entity (p. 242).

Because he is severely limited in meeting the varied conditions and situations typical of the total picture, the person who applies a quantitatively derived theory frequently finds himself either guideless or trying to apply the inapplicable — with potentially unfortunate human and organizational consequences. This kind of theory typically does not account for enough variation in situations to allow appreciable institution and control of change in them. Also, such theory usually does not offer sufficient means for predicting the diverse consequences of any purposeful action on other aspects of the substantive area, which one does not wish to change but which will surely be affected by the action (p. 243).

The substantive theory must enable the person who uses it to have enough control in everyday situations to make its application worth trying. The control we have in mind has various aspects. The person who applies the theory must be enabled to understand and analyze ongoing situational realities, to produce and predict change in them, and to predict and control consequences both for the object of change and for other parts of the total situation that will be affected (p. 245).

First, the theory must provide controllable variables with *much explanatory power*: they must “make a big difference” in what is going on in the situation that is to be changed (p. 247).

*Access variables.* A grounded theory to be used in practice must also include access variables. These are social structural variables that allow, guide, and give persons access either to the controllable variables or to the people who control them (p. 248).

## 11 Insight and Theory Development

The root sources of all significant theorizing is the sensitive insights of the observer himself (p. 251).

The first corollary is that the researcher can get — and cultivate — crucial insights not only during research (and from his research) but from his own personal experiences prior to or outside it (p. 252).

A related corollary is that such insights need not come from one's own experience but can be taken from others. In this case the burden is on the sociologist to convert these borrowed experiences into his own insights (p. 252).

If we can do this [gain insight from their experience] with an interviewee or an informant, why not with the author of an autobiography or a novel (p. 253)?

A third corollary pertains to how fruitful insights can be gotten from existing theory (p. 253).

Some men seem to handle the precarious balance between the two sources by avoiding the reading of much that relates to the relevant area until after they return from the field; they do this so as not to interfere with personal insights. On the other hand, some read extensively beforehand. Others periodically return to one or the other source for stimulation. There is no ready formula, of course: one can only experiment to find which style of work gives the best results. Not to experiment toward this end, but carefully to cover "all" the literature before commencing research, increases the probability of brutally destroying one's potentialities as a theorist (p. 253).

A more systematic method (one to be recommended heartily) is that the researcher regard all statements about events pertaining to the area under study as being data. This means that the statements and writings of colleagues are data as much as those of laymen. Sociologists also must be considered as part of the social structure; and a developing theory must therefore take them and their statements into account as a slice of data (p. 254).

Any contest between insights and existing theory becomes a comparative analysis that delimits the boundaries of the existing theory while generating a more general one (p. 255).