**CODING EXERCISE**

**by Camilla Burkot**

The following two excerpts are taken from interview transcripts about supervising graduate students who are working on grounded theory studies. Use these excerpts to practice **initial** (or **‘open’**) **coding**.

As you identify initial codes, be sure to practice **constant comparative analysis** to make sure you are picking up on the major ideas and themes in the excerpt.

Continue initial coding until you start to see **categories** forming. What categories are coming out of the text and the codes you have created? Record the categories along with a short description of what those categories include.

As you are coding and developing categories, you may wish to **write a memo** or two, documenting your thoughts about the codes that are emerging, questions that come to mind, or themes that might be important as you develop your grounded theory.

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| Interview Excerpt 1 | Codes | Categories |
| Facilitator: Would you say there's a difference in the process of supervision with a student who's doing a PhD or a Masters using grounded theory?Interviewee: I do. Yeah, I do. I think that the Masters students, I think, go through the motions. Whereas, I think, the PhD students are much more grounded – if you like, to use that expression – but much more, you know, attempt it or address it in a more in depth way. So they get to the theory behind the grounded theory. So that – whereas, I think the Masters students really just follow the methods, rather than wanting to appreciate the methodology.Facilitator: Why do you think that is?Interviewee: I think it's the nature of the beast that they're doing. I think it's the lack of time that they have to really get into it and really understand it. I honestly don't think that they have enough time to go into depth in Masters. Whereas, in PhD they do have that time, they have that luxury of time. Facilitator: I heard someone say once that there isn't enough time in a Masters to do a grounded theory. Would you agree with that?Interviewee: I think to do it justice that may be true. But I think that, you know, what is the purpose of a Masters? It's to show mastery in that particular area of study. Now, you can do that by not having to unpack the philosophical basis of whatever theoretical construct you're using, whatever paradigm you're using, whatever methodology you're using. I mean, I've seen people do so-called phenomenological studies without getting too deep into the theory behind phenomenology, in Masters work. They just go through the motions. It's really an application of the methods that is important there, I think.  Whereas in PhDs, I think you must go into the methodology. You must understand the premise from where those methodologies came from and developed and are still – and in some cases are still developing. I think, you know, most of them are. You see lots of new takes on methodologies, lots of development of methodologies.  |  |  |

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| Interview Excerpt 2 |  |  |
| Facilitator: Okay. Do you find that supervising grounded theory students is any different to students using other methodologies? Interviewee: Yes, because for me the qualitative – and I have been a supervisor of qualitative research. It’s only since my time at Monash that I’ve been working on mixed methods and I’ve taken the qualitative arm of a mixed method project. For me, each of the qualitative methodologies is separate and quite distinct from one another in terms of their history of how the philosophies evolved. So grounded theory comes from a very different base, say, from narrative analysis and from phenomenology, from ethnography and so on, from feminism and so on.  So for me when I’m supervising a grounded theory approach and the student’s working through the various debates between Barney and so on, that they’re aware that everything they do in terms of grounded theory needs to be immersed in those understandings. So I call it congruency. To be highly congruent in the way they actually go about applying that grounded theory approach, they need to have a good understanding of what it is they’re doing, and the kind of knowledge they’re going to generate. As soon as they do that, they can stop being rule-ridden and feel at ease with the approach.  So yes, for me supervising a grounded theory approach is very different from an ethnography or a feminist or a narrative action research, all of those I’ve supervised, grounded theory is different.Facilitator: Okay, different, so you’ve spoken a little bit about the student requirements, but different from your perspective in what ways? Interviewee: I think it provides structure. Facilitator: Okay. Interviewee: I think whereas the others – not so much action research, but certainly feminism works according to a process, phenomenology works according to philosophies and the position you take on things like bracketing and so on. But at the end of the day they don’t necessarily provide much guidance in the actual do this and then that and then that and then that, and then you’ve collected your data, and then do this, this, this and this and you’ve analysed your data.  So I think the structure of how to collect and analyse data is excellent for any researcher, but I think it’s particularly excellent, if that’s possible, for somebody who’s come in new to a qualitative methodology and for larger mixed-methods approaches, too. I know that with the mixed-method approaches, when you’ve got a heap of quantitative data and you’ve got to make sense of that and maybe extend that into a qualitative inquiry, that grounded theory is really good for pulling together large masses of data that can be processed through a grounded theory method.  |  |  |

WORKED EXAMPLES

Below are worked examples of how the 2 excerpts might be coded and categorised and memos that support this process.

However, remember that the wonderful (but challenging!) characteristic of coding is that there are no right or wrong answers. You might have coded the excerpts very differently, and that is OK – as long as you can explain convincingly why your codes, categories, and the resulting theories, make sense.

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| Interview excerpt 1 – WORKED EXAMPLE | Codes | Categories |
| Facilitator: Would you say there's a difference in the process of supervision with a student who's doing a PhD or a Masters using grounded theory?Interviewee: I do. Yeah, I do. I think that the Masters students, I think, go through the motions. Whereas, I think, the PhD students are much more grounded – if you like, to use that expression - but much more, you know, attempt it or address it in a more in depth way. So they get to the theory behind the grounded theory. So that – whereas, I think the Masters students really just follow the methods, rather than wanting to appreciate the methodology. Facilitator: Why do you think that is?Interviewee: I think it's the nature of the beast that they're doing. I think it's the lack of time that they have to really get into it and really understand it. I honestly don't think that they have enough time to go into depth in Masters. Whereas, in PhD they do have that time, they have that luxury of time. Facilitator: I heard someone say once that there isn't enough time in a Masters to do a grounded theory. Would you agree with that?Interviewee: I think to do it justice that may be true. But I think that, you know, what is the purpose of a Masters? It's to show mastery in that particular area of study. Now, you can do that by not having to unpack the philosophical basis of whatever theoretical construct you're using, whatever paradigm you're using, whatever methodology you're using. I mean, I've seen people do so-called phenomenological studies without getting too deep into the theory behind phenomenology, in Masters work. They just go through the motions. It's really an application of the methods that is important there, I think.  Whereas in PhDs, I think you must go into the methodology. You must understand the premise from where those methodologies came from and developed and are still – and in some cases are still developing. I think, you know, most of them are. You see lots of new takes on methodologies, lots of development of methodologies.  | Go through the motionsGoing in-depthTheory Follow the methodsNature of the beastLack of timeLuxury of timeDoing it justicePurpose of degreeTheoretical constructsDeep theory Go through the motionsApplication of methodsUnderstand methodology | 1. Methods vs methodology
2. Going in depth
3. Time
4. Goal/purpose of degree
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INTERVIEW EXCERPT 1 - SAMPLE MEMO

**Memo 09/02 – Masters Vs PhD students and time**

Something that stands out to me in this excerpt is how the interviewee talks about Masters students and that the only real difference is ‘the luxury of time’ that they don’t have. From what s/he is saying, it’s not that Masters students aren’t capable of producing a strong grounded theory study, it’s just they don’t usually have the opportunity to do so because the degree is too short.

This also raises questions about how much time is required to supervise GT. Is it different from the amount of time required for studies of other methodologies? I plan to keep an eye out for this as I continue coding. From the last part of this excerpt, it seems like it’s less about the time that the supervisor has to spend with the student one-on-one, but more about the overall length of time that the student has to go away and study the theories and methodologies.

The description of time as a ‘luxury’ is also notable. What makes it a luxury? Is it an implicit comparison to working life, and how graduates won’t get the same generous amounts of time to really delve into their work after they finish their degree? I can imagine that some people (both students and supervisors) might see having a lot of time as a burden rather than a luxury. What might the difference be between these students and those who regard time as a luxury, and how might supervision styles and needs differ between those two kinds of students?

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| Interview Excerpt 2 – WORKED EXAMPLE | Codes | Categories |
| Facilitator: Okay. Do you find that supervising grounded theory students is any different to students using other methodologies? Interviewee: Yes, because for me, each of the qualitative methodologies are separate and quite distinct from one another in terms of their history of how the philosophies evolved. So grounded theory comes from a very different base, say, from narrative analysis and from phenomenology, from ethnography and so on, from feminism and so on.  So for me when I’m supervising a grounded theory approach and the student’s working through the various debates between Barney and so on, that they’re aware that everything they do in terms of grounded theory needs to be immersed in those understandings. So I call it congruency. To be highly congruent in the way they actually go about applying that grounded theory approach, they need to have a good understanding of what it is they’re doing, and the kind of knowledge they’re going to generate. As soon as they do that, they can stop being rule-ridden and feel at ease with the approach.  So yes, for me supervising a grounded theory approach is very different from an ethnography or a feminist or a narrative action research, all of those I’ve supervised, grounded theory is different.Facilitator: Okay, different, so you’ve spoken a little bit about the student requirements, but different from your perspective in what ways? Interviewee: I think it provides structure. Facilitator: Okay. Interviewee: I think whereas the others - not so much action research, but certainly feminism works according to a process, phenomenology works according to philosophies and the position you take on things like bracketing and so on. But at the end of the day they don’t necessarily provide much guidance in the actual do this and then that and then that and then that, and then you’ve collected your data, and then do this, this, this, and this and you’ve analysed your data.  So I think the structure of how to collect and analyse data is excellent for any researcher, but I think it’s particularly excellent, if that’s possible, for somebody who’s come in new to a qualitative methodology and for larger mixed-methods approaches, too. I know that with the mixed-method approaches, when you’ve got a heap of quantitative data and you’ve got to make sense of that and maybe extend that into a qualitative inquiry, that grounded theory is really good for pulling together large masses of data that can be processed through a grounded theory method.  | Qualitative methodologiesDifference of GTOther methodsStudent awarenessImmersion in literatureCongruencyUnderstanding what they’re doingFeeling at easeGrounded theory is differentStructureOther methodsLimited guidance/directionStructureGood for new researchersStrength of GT | 1. Congruency (student awareness and understanding)
2. Strengths of GT
3. Distinctions from other methods
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INTERVIEW EXCERPT 2 – SAMPLE MEMO

**Memo 02/09 – The core of ‘supervision’**

This excerpt has got me thinking about the process of fostering students as independent scholars – which would seem to drive at the very notion of supervision. What does it mean to ‘supervise’? Sometimes a ‘supervisor’ is seen or referred to more as a manager or ‘boss’ – someone who is dictating exactly what one does and how one works – but here the interviewee seems to be returning to the more literal definition of supervisor as someone who is overseeing – in practice this seems to mean guiding and ensuring that students are reflexive about where previous scholars have gone before them and thus where they can go in their research.

This conceptualisation of supervision is hinted at by several codes in this excerpt – firstly there is the idea of ‘awareness’ and the need for students to really read widely and understand the literature and evolution of theory. It’s not about the supervisor telling the student what to think, it’s about them developing their own understanding. This process is summarised by the interviewee in the concept of ‘congruency’. I think this concept could be really crucial. The interviewee points out that students need to have a thorough understanding of the theory and the limits of what they propose as part of their grounded theory. It seems like a kind of, ‘you need to know the rules in order to break them’ mentality. Not only do the results of a grounded theory study need to be internally congruent (form a coherent theory), but also the process needs to be methodologically congruent. Students need to understand how their work fits with the historical, academic lineage in which they are participating.

That students are put at ease only after they become ‘aware’ also seems to be important in relation to the role of the supervisor – is the idea that supervisors should push students, to make them prove themselves, *before* they can relax a bit? It would be interesting to read more about exactly how supervisors challenge students to achieve this level of understanding (what strategies they use), without ‘telling’ or ‘ordering’ them what to do or read.