

LECTURE: Grounded Theory

Agenda:

Theory / Methodology

Salmer fra kjøkkenet

Feedback on Interviews1

Salmer fra Kjøkkenet – discussions about the questions:

- How would you describe the research paradigm of the Swedish fieldworker (positivist, interpretive, critical)? Justify your choice.
- What kind of field study is the Swedish fieldworker conducting: qualitative / quantitative?
- What kind of data is the Swedish fieldworker (supposed) to generate?
- What is assumed to be activities in a kitchen? - What is happening in the kitchen?
- Has this to do with the difference between description / prescription?
- Do you see a particular focus of observation (on event, person, place, object) in the movie?
- What kind of communication is taking place in the movie (talk, and.....)?
- How would you describe the interaction and dynamic between observer / observed?
- What is happening and how?
- What does such interaction and dynamic teach you (as a researcher) about the conduct of field work and engagement in the field?
- Did you observe something interesting you would like to share with the class?

On observation:

Observe what is happening, e.g.:

- Activities: planned, unplanned, where, how
- People: characteristics, groups (e.g. embedded, organizational)
- What people say / do / not do
- How do people interact: with whom, how, where, frequency, direction and forms of communication, formal and informal
- Focus of observation: event, person, place, objects, or mix

Feedback on INTERVIEW 1

- Where did the interview take place, and where in this setting did interviewer / interviewee e.g. sit (place in location, opposite each other)?
- What time of day was it? - What day of the week (weekend or during the week after a long days work)?
- Other people present at the time of the interview? (what are they doing?)
- Ask questions around the topic (some might be intimidated by direct questions when the topic is on identity -- how would you describe yourself in relation to x, in what way does it positioning you in relation to x, are there other relations that partake in shaping who you are or how you see yourself?)
- Include non-verbal items such as any long pauses, gestures, facial expressions (remember Salmer fra Kjøkkenet)
- Follow the interviewee if he / she mentions something of interest related to the topic. In many cases interviewees can offer information that you could not have know about or prepared in advance.
- Reflections: how do you think the interview progressed? Are there any techniques you used that worked well? Anything you will do differently next time around?

Silverman 6, 7 - Research questions and Using Theory

Research questions are important, they:

- Organize the project, provide direction and coherence
- Narrow down the project, show its boundaries
- Keep the researcher focus
- Provide a framework when you write up your research

- Point to the methods and data that will be needed (see Silverman p. 77)

Three research 'tendencies':

Simplistic inductivism (naturalism, the field will reveal aspects important. Ignores the theory-saturated nature of any observation).

To diminish SI:

- Use concepts as sensitizing resources (historical evidence, political situatedness, contextual awareness)
- Follow up findings from other studies - what have other researchers done, can it be modified into a new study?
- Introduce a third variable (e.g. exploring the identity of teenagers, you might pose it as a question of relation to parents, school or where, how, when).

Kitchen-sinkers (broad scope rather than deep and focused).

To diminish KS:

- Draw a flow chart (visual outline of key concepts and how they relate)
- Find a puzzle - what am i really trying to solve, what interest me? - how can it be that mobile phones are talked about in terms of identity among young people?
- Look through a zoom lens (narrowing down by scaling in - later you can scale out - the point is to get you focused, not to fall into reductionism)

Grand Theorists (detached from the (empirical) subject studied).

To diminish GT:

- Ignore fashions. Stick to your work and do not let the pitfall of distraction of shiny novelties get you - read up when you're about to done with your work and use the readings to reflect on the implications and limitations of your position
- Find some data (observe, conduct interviews).

Strategies for all researchers

- Find a workable (not just narrow) research topic
- Recognizing 'feedback loops' between topic(s) and data analysis
- Understand that your categories (or variables) are always theoretically saturated

Questions for discussion:

What is meant by theory?

How does that differ from hypotheses?

Silverman delineates the following basic research terms:

* **Model** = An overall framework for looking at reality, could be.....

- Ethnomethodology: Concerned about how people make sense of their social world(s). Rather than assuming the social as orderly ethnomethodology rests on the assumption that the social is dynamic and unpredictable - within this unpredictability, social order is established by continual "repairs" in accordance with the ongoing activities. (e.g. Suchman & Trigg 1991)
- Phenomenology: Concerned with understanding phenomena from the perspective of the participants (in a society/culture) and describe the environment (surrounding world) as it is experienced by the participants. Focus on the knowledges and meanings of the participants (e.g. Thoresen 1999)
- Hermeneutic: Concerned with interpretation and the hidden or deeper meaning of texts (culture can be read as texts). The relationship between researcher and texts is a dialog in which the researcher seeks the meaning communicated by the texts. Phenomena can be read in different ways (e.g. Geertz 1972)

***Concept** = An idea deriving from a given model - e.g. collectivity member (participants in a society, ethnomethodology)

***Theory** = a set of concepts used to define and/or explain some phenomenon (without a theory phenomena like death, tribes, families cannot be understood) - theoretical propositions.

***Hypothesis** = a testable proposition

***Methodology** = A general approach to studying research topics, could be:

- Grounded Theory (generating theoretically based generalizations from qualitative data)
- Conversations analysis (qualitative approach to describe how people produce orderly talk-in-interaction)

***Method** = interview, observation, probes, etc.

Next time we'll look at the the above theories within 'model' and relate them to that which Silverman calls 'idoms'.

Grounded Theory - Thoresen

Silverman emphasizes that it's important to:

- recognize the 'feedback loops' between topic(s) and data analysis - how does this relate to GT?
- understand that your categories (or variables) are always theoretically saturated - how does this relate to GT?

What is GT? (discussion)

- data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then proves it. Rather, one begins with area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (Strauss & Corbin 1990, in Thoresen).
- "Grounded theorists gives priority to developing rather than verifying analytical propositions" (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995:143)
- Theory should be grounded - to take an existing (...) theory or a set of pre-defined concepts as point of departure (...) is a risky endeavor. It means that an external structure is imposed on the data.
- Within GT it's important to generate grounded theory -- how come?
- Difference between substantive (single context) and formal theory (similar phenomena occur in different context)

Techniques of grounded theory:

- Asking questions aimed at exploring properties, connections, similarities and dissimilarities.
- Open coding (process of analysis - breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, categorizing data) reading data carefully to identify and form ideas, themes, or issues provided by the data - generation of analytical categories
- Axial coding (process analysis - focus on the phenomena's relationship to the context in which they occur + their relationship to each other) - relate the (above separate) pieces of data
- Code notes (memos - writing / forming theoretical propositions - focus on phenomena - breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and putting together data in new ways) - locating series of phenomena, topic or categories
- Open and axial coding serves to make complexity visible and systematic.

Example of useful questions when examine field material:

- What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?

(Emerson et al. 1995:146 - See also Silverman chap. 12.)

Critique of GT

- Theory (model) and the generation of data cant be separated.

- We bring theory to the field - data do not stand alone, analysis unfold in all phases of field research (observations, when recording fieldnotes, when coding the notes in analytical categories and Shaw (1995))
- A systematic coding of data does not (in itself) lead to theory - the bibliography of the researcher plays a role in the analysis - data do not talk and reveal (Thagaard (1998))

NEXT WEEK

Readings for Wednesday October 10th:

Silverman chapter 8 + 9 + 10 (course book)

Baskerville, R. and Wood-Harper, T. (2002): A Critical Perspective on Action Research as a Method for Information Systems Research. Ch 8 in Myers and Avison (eds) "Qualitative Research in Information Systems". (What is AR? Why use it) (Handout)

OPTIONAL: Avison, D., Lau, F., Myers, M., Nielsen, P.A. (1999): Action Research. Communications of the ACM. Jan 1999, vol 42, no. 1, pp. 94-97. (What is AR?). Available online.

OPTIONAL: Kalleberg, K. (1992): Konstruktiv samfunnsvitenskap. En fagteoretisk plassering av "aksjonsforskning". ISO Rapport nr. 24, 1992, Institutt for Sosiologi, UiO. (about AR's role in sociology). (Handout at IFI library)

IMPORTANT DATES:

Observation 1 – submitted on September 12th

Interview 1 – submitted on September 19th

Observation 2 – submitted on September 26th

First draft of the research proposal – to be submitted October 3rd

Interview 2 – to be submitted October 10th

Revised research proposal – to be submitted October 24th

Final research proposal – to be submitted November 16th

Presentation of your research proposal – November 21st and 28th

Exam – takes place on December 12th