

A Strategy for Delayed Research Method Selection: Deciding Between Grounded Theory and Phenomenology

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Abstract: This paper presents a strategy for delayed research method selection in a qualitative interpretivist research. An exemplary case details how explorative interviews were designed and conducted in accordance with a paradigm prior to deciding whether to adopt grounded theory or phenomenology for data analysis. The focus here is to determine the most appropriate research strategy in this case the methodological framing to conduct research and represent findings, both of which are detailed. Research addressing current management issues requires both a flexible framework and the capability to consider the research problem from various angles, to derive tangible results for academia with immediate application to business demands. Researchers, and in particular novices, often struggle to decide on an appropriate research method suitable to address their research problem. This often applies to interpretative qualitative research where it is not always immediately clear which is the most appropriate method to use, as the research objectives shift and crystallize over time. This paper uses an exemplary case to reveal how the strategy for delayed research method selection contributes to deciding whether to adopt grounded theory or phenomenology in the initial phase of a PhD research project. In this case, semi-structured interviews were used for data generation framed in an interpretivist approach, situated in a business context. Research questions for this study were thoroughly defined and carefully framed in accordance with the research paradigm's principles, while at the same time ensuring that the requirements of both potential research methods were met. The grounded theory and phenomenology methods were compared and contrasted to determine their suitability and whether they meet the research objectives based on a pilot study. The strategy proposed in this paper is an alternative to the more 'traditional' approach, which initially selects the methodological formulation, followed by data generation. In conclusion, the suggested strategy for delayed research method selection intends to help researchers identify and apply the most appropriate method to their research. This strategy is based on explorations of data generation and analysis in order to derive faithful results from the data generated.

Keywords: research method selection, qualitative research, grounded theory, phenomenology

1. Introduction

Research methods are '*traditionally*' chosen prior to data generation based on the nature, aims and goals of the research project. However the '*traditional*' process of a research method selection may limit flexibility in revising or changing the selected research method at a later stage. This can lead to potential implications, such as shortcomings in the research design and hence results of the study. In addition recent studies often fail to detail the process of research method selection while being excellent in describing them. They rather critique the methods conventionally applied and emphasize on the negative aspects instead of proposing alternatives or innovative solutions.

Such shortcomings, paired with the need for rigorous and relevant research to address the needs of various stakeholders, suggests more attention be paid towards the research methods selection. In addition, multiple stakeholders such as academia, practitioners, and industry partners increase the complexity of research demands, objectives and expected results. Furthermore, practitioners and industry partners tend to look for tangible results that can be easily transferred and applied to practice. Thus, academia must not be neglected in striving for rigor and relevance (Robey and Markus 1998) Rigorous research in particular, can be achieved not only through carefully selecting and applying the research method but also detailing its execution.

Research method selection is dependent on the circumstances and objectives of the research rather than deriving from philosophy (how we think about it) or methodology (how we study it) (Hammersley 1999:80). Selecting the most appropriate research method must be driven by the research question and current body of knowledge in the area researched (Wynekoop and Russo 1997) as well as the data accessible to the researcher. Unfortunately, researchers are often confronted with an overwhelming number of research methods and regularly struggle to decide on the most suitable one.

Their selection is often based on assumptions about the expected results, influenced by their previous experiences or the supervisory team in the case of PhD or research students. This applies particularly to interpretative qualitative research, where it is not always immediately clear what is the most suitable research method to use as the research objectives shift and crystallize over time. Positivist research on the other side for example often does not have this issue and is usually more controlled and straightforward.

Given the multiple research methods available, choosing the most appropriate research method is not an easy task. Even when limited to qualitative interpretative methods, there are still numerous options (Miles and Huberman 1994) to be considered. Basically each possible research method has advantages and disadvantages (Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead 1987) which need to be taken into account. Other than the knowledge and background of the researcher, the influence of the research team and the capability of human information processing can be a limitation as well. According to von Wright (1979) the human short term memory is restricted to 5 +/- 2 observational units which limits our taxonomy. On the other hand, Tesch (1990) refers to 27 qualitative research methods. These might be perceived in different ways by different people in the same manner as different disciplines favor different types of methods as well as the use of different vocabulary for qualitative research. This reason further highlights the need for a strategy to select the most appropriate research method.

Mason (2002:26) suggests the creation of an overview of potential research methods and data sources in the initial research stage including the ones which might be rejected. She further highlighted that by generating data and analysing data paired with the experience gained by researcher throughout this process the research most appropriate method could be selected. In this study a strategy for delayed research method selection will be firstly detailed followed by describing the application of an exemplary case. The paper there after concludes with a discussion and outlook to future research.

2. Strategy for delayed research method selection

The strategy for delayed research method selection aims to help in the process of selecting the most appropriate research method related to the problem and stakeholder's interests, in order to derive faithful results. Attention is thereby paid firstly to the research setting and research question, secondly on the mode of data generation and lastly the most suitable research method to be selected based on the data generation and data pre-analysis (pilot study). The difference to the *'traditional'* research method selection is in the sequence, and consideration of the before mentioned aspects.

2.1 Research setting

Prior to applying the strategy for delayed research method selection, the research context as well as the purpose and expected representation of research findings have to be clearly articulated and defined. This includes fundamental considerations encompassing the current state of art in the field of investigation, related literature, background, experience and knowledge of the researcher. The research purpose explains the research objectives and if existing requirements of the research project sponsor or partner are applicable. Further the intended unit of analysis being for example an individual, organization, artefact or specific circumstance need to be clearly defined and stated. The ability to access and generate useable data is a key consideration to the research method selection. An additional element is the evaluation of the generated data in terms of its composition in quality as well as quantity. Special attention has to be paid thereby to sampling, which needs to be thoroughly aligned with the research paradigm requirements. Consequently available data has to be clearly evaluated prior to pre-selecting an appropriate research method.

2.2 Research question

The definition of research questions is the most important step when undertaking any research (Yin 2003:7) as they give direction to the research method applied. In order to delay the research method selection, research questions are suggested to be kept as broad as possible and as detailed as necessary. Concurrently, the research questions need to be aligned with the research paradigm and requirements of the later pre-selected research methods. An exploratory approach to examine and narrow down the research objective is therefore appropriate. This requires an open-mind while framing the research question. At the same time, the researcher is required to familiarize with potential research methods and build awareness of their requirements. Hence the guiding research questions initially remains on a high level.

2.3 Mode of data generation

Multiple data sources are suggested to be used rather than only one source to capture the contextual complexity of the area under investigation. Yin (2003:86) suggested the convergence of the ‘Six sources of Evidence’ namely documentation, archival record, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artifacts. Besides the dominant mode of data generation, other sources should be considered to capture the contextual complexity. Triangulation of data sources and different modes of generation thereby enable the researcher to observe the object of investigation from different angles (Neuman 1997:151). The interview technique (Kvale 1996; Patton 2002) is commonly used in qualitative studies. Interviewing is often seen as synonymous to qualitative inquiries, while having similar constructions irrespective of the methodological position (Wimpenny and Gass 2000). However the form and format of the interview conduct varies dependent on the research paradigm and to the selected research method. There are significant differences in design, conduct, role of the researcher, formulation of questions and analysis, depending on the research method. These need to be carefully considered as even slight deviations might impact the research results. Most important factor in the mode of data generation is the availability and the access of appropriate data. These two factors can determine a research program especially as qualitative research is dependent on rich and faithful data form the sources available. The focus of qualitative researcher is thereby not to ‘simple’ find data in a collectable state, instead the focus is on how to generate data from the chosen data sources (Mason 2002).

2.4 Pre-selection of research methods

“Qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context sensitive” (Mason 2002:24). By considering the research setting, research question and mode of data generation, two to three research methods should be pre-selected for the pilot study. A comprehensive overview of qualitative research methods is given by Tesch (1990) or Miles and Hubermann (1994). When comparing the pre-selected potential research methods, special attention is paid to the expected results, the mode and conduct of data generation as well as requirements for data analysis. Following to the pre-selection of research methods, a pilot data generation and pre-analysis is conducted to test their suitability and alignment.

2.5 Data generation

Data generation is initially conducted with a meaningful pilot sample (n=3-5). A certain degree of formalization is suggested, including procedures such as a detailed protocol outlining the steps (Howard-Grenville) and data gathered (what) during the interviews or on-site visits. “In each case, you will need to ask yourself whether you have generated data of appropriate order, from the relevant range of sources, and with adequate coverage, to fashion the kind of argument you desire” (Mason 2002:174). Throughout data generation the researcher is encouraged to revisit the requirements of all pre-selected research methods in order to ensure they are strictly followed. In the case of any deviation the conduct of data generation has to be stopped and adjusted. This phase ensures that the set of requirements determined by the pre-selected methods regarding the data quality and quantity is met.

2.6 Data pre-analysis

The data pre-analysis phase concentrates on applying each of the pre-selected research methods to the data sample from the pilot study, to compare the results and their representation with the research objectives. This stage is to pilot and confirm the suitability and appropriateness of collected data as well as to ensure that the requirements of pre-selected research methods are met. This includes: Are the questions phrased according to the research methods principles? Are the collected data suitable for further analysis? Any misalignment would lead to either a de-selection of the method or an unusable data sample.

2.7 Delayed selection of the research method

After the generated data is revisited and its quality checked and analyzed, results are carefully compared with the prerequisites and requirements of the pre-selected research methods. The focus is thereby to evaluate which of the pre-selected research methods is most appropriate for the data analysis and subsequently the conduct of the study. Next the quality and quantity of the generated data is evaluated. Derived research findings are assessed against the expected quality and

representation. In addition, emerging themes and priori results can be reported at the same time. The final stage of the strategy for delayed research method selection is to select the most appropriate and suitable research method. This process differs from the 'traditional' approach where in contrast the formulation of research questions and consideration of the research setting is followed by determining the research method prior to data generation and analysis. In the following Figure 1 illustrates the process of the strategy for delayed research method selection.

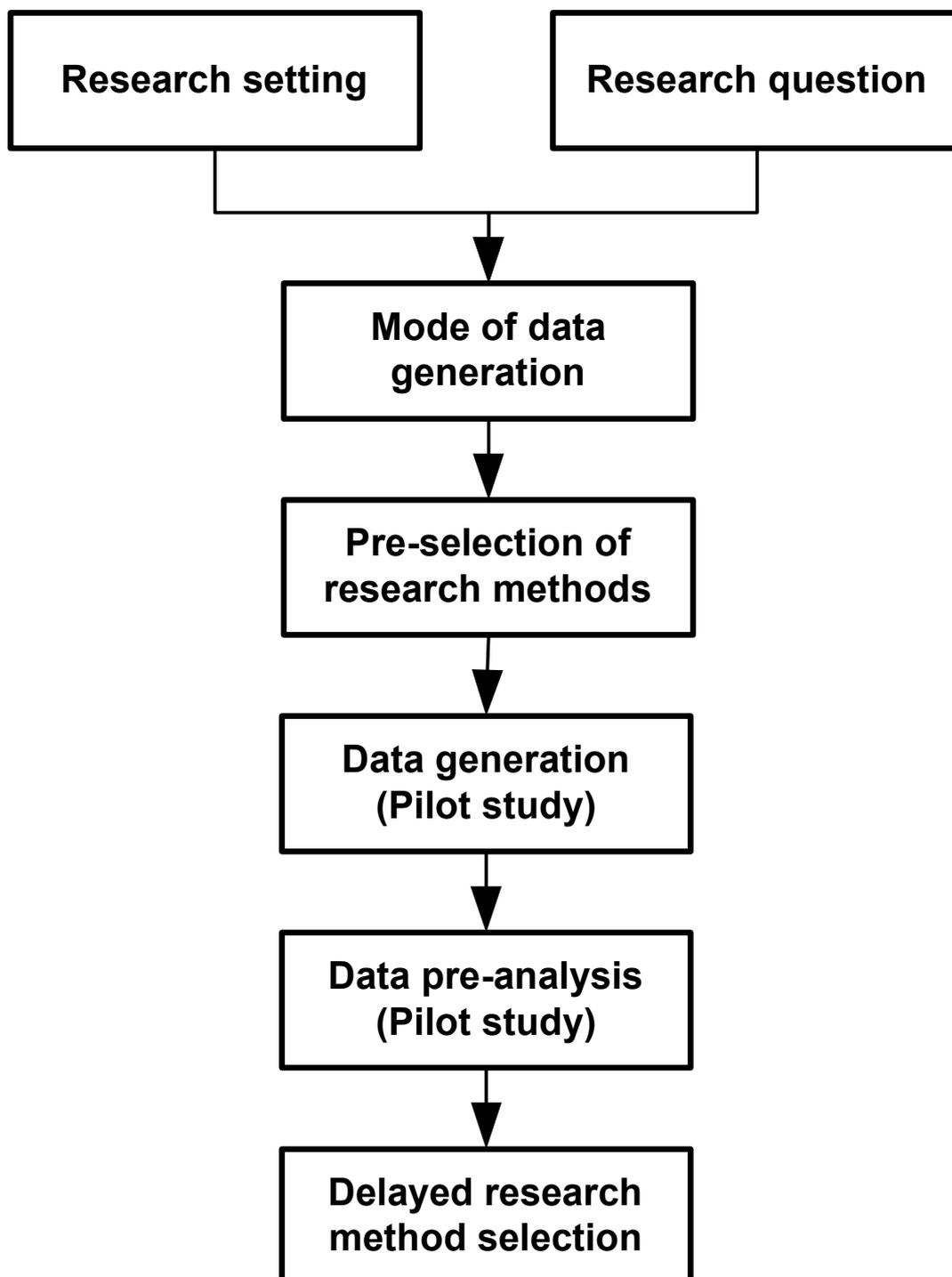


Figure 1: Process of strategy for delayed research method selection

3. Case

This section details an exemplary case of a qualitative study following the interpretive tradition (Klein and Myers 1999) and reveals how the strategy for delayed research method selection assists in

deciding on the most appropriate and suitable research method in the initial phase of a PhD research project.

3.1 Research setting

The exemplified research project is situated in a business context aiming to derive a narrative framework or a set of propositions applicable to both academia and practitioners. An exploratory investigation aims thereby to discover theory of cultural effects and their interaction on global projects. More specifically, it is aimed to first understand the complex construct under investigation, being global projects. Second is to explain occurring cultural effects and its interactions on global projects whereby the unit of analysis being the global project. In the first stage, the area under investigation is determined and narrowed down. A high-level preliminary literature review is conducted across both academic and practitioner sources to identify knowledge gaps and current challenges as well as the needs expressed by the research and practitioner community. The literature review aimed to firstly to better understand the field of investigation and secondly revise and define the research objectives and guiding research questions. The chief investigator (first author) acknowledges his biases of domain knowledge in the area under investigation given his substantive professional working experience working with multinational organizations on global projects. At the same time he was a novice researcher when embarking this research program, guided by his supervisory team (co-authors) and learning's from coursework on qualitative research methods.

3.2 Research question

Research questions for this study were initially kept broad to accommodate the requirements of both potential research methods. An exploratory approach was chosen to examine the occurring effects and their interaction in global projects. This required flexibility and an open-mind to frame the research questions. By comparing qualitative research techniques, the researcher became more aware of the requirements of inductive qualitative interpretative research methods such as the need not to be biased by existing theories and research. Hence the guiding research question remained at a high level, such as: *'What are the cultural effects experienced by senior management practitioners working on global projects?'*

3.3 Mode of data generation

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for data generation, due to the explorative nature of the study and excellent access to interviewees. Interviewees were selected based on their expertise and background of working on global projects to ensure that they represent the targeted interviewees group (Leedy and Ormrod 2005:147). Access to data in form of multiple individuals in senior leadership positions working for various multinationals or professional service firms was given and exceeded initial expectations of the research team. Priority while selecting interviewees was set on quality, having only a few but therefore more powerful interviewees rather than quantity.

3.4 Pre-selection of grounded theory and phenomenology

Research method selection is crucial, *"qualitative research designs invariably need to allow for flexibility, and for decision-making to take place as the research process proceeds."* (Mason 2002:45). Independent of the research outlet being a peer-reviewed conference or journal the rigor in the execution of research has to be shown. In particular doctoral research asks for a rigorous, stringent and clear process from the research problem identification over the description of the research setting, research questions, data generation and research method selection as well as the execution and presentation of findings. For the conduct of this study and guiding through the PhD research project, grounded theory and phenomenology were pre-selected after investigating the research questions and research setting given they are both inductive and their initial steps are almost identical. These characteristics allowed a pilot study and delay of the definite research method selection. For this study both methods were interpreted as interpretative qualitative research aiming to discover theory (Grounded theory) respectively meaning of lived experiences (Phenomenology). A third method considered initially being ethnography was neglected in the early stage as no multinational organization running a global project was accessible to the research team for full-time observation and interview purposes.

Grounded theory evolved in the 1960's with *'The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research'* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It is *"an inductive theory discovery methodology that*

allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of the topic, while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observation of data” (Martin and Turner 1986:141). In grounded theory, theory emerges from the data in a natural setting; it is “a logically consistent set of data collection [generation] and analysis procedures aimed to develop theory” (Charmaz 2001:245). “Phenomenological research is the study of essences” (van Manen 1997:10). Phenomenology is concerned about experiences in human life; “We can only know what we experience” (Husserl, 1913). Phenomenology emphasizes on understanding the experience of people involved, whereby the research methods are the methods of philosophy (Wilson 2002). Phenomenology also stresses the nature of human experience and the meaning that people are attached to their experiences. In other words, phenomenology is about the experience of others.

The mode of data generation and design of interview questions is fairly similar for both research methods in the early stage, with the core issue being the generation of rich and faithful data. The objectives for data analysis are different, even though marginal in the initial phase. Grounded theory aims to enquire and state how actors interpret reality, rather than testing hypotheses (Suddaby 2006) and is thereby more attentive to how theory emerges from subjective experiences. Phenomenology on the other side is more concerned about the individual’s experience (Suddaby 2006; Patton 2002:104). Both methods are commonly seen as appropriate for management studies (Ehrich 2005; Fendt and Sachs 2008). Table 1 below gives an indication of criteria against which grounded theory and phenomenology in this study were compared. However the criteria may heavily depend on the research setting and pre-selected research methods and potentially need to be modified for other studies.

Table 1: Comparison of grounded theory and phenomenology

What	Grounded Theory	Phenomenology
Research question	<i>“What theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed?”</i> (Patton 2002:133).	<i>“What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?”</i> (Patton 2002:132).
Representation of findings	Theory about ... (Morse and Richards 2002:36).	In-depth reflective description of the (experience) ... (Morse and Richards 2002:36).
Data generation	Interviews, observing social interactions by listening to what informants say about themselves and others. The selection of participants and other data sources is a function of emerging hypotheses, the sample size a function of theoretical completeness (Baker, Wuest and Stern 1992).	In-depth, unstructured lengthy interviews which are more similar to a conversation rather than a typical interview talking the interviewee and listening the researcher (Leedy and Ormrod 2005:139). The interviewee and the researcher often work together during the interview <i>“arrive at the heart of the matter”</i> (Tesch 1990:147).
Data analysis	Prescribed and systematic method of coding the data into categories and identifying interrelationships; continual interweaving of data generation and data analysis; construction of a theory from categories and interrelationships (Leedy and Ormrod 2005:144).	Search for <i>‘meaning of units’</i> that reflect various aspects of the experience; integration of the meaning units into a <i>‘typical’</i> experience (Leedy and Ormrod 2005:144).
Literature review	Not extensive literature review prior to the study <i>‘only’</i> after theory is emerging from the data. But grounded theory is no excuse to ignore literature (Suddaby 2006).	Review of professional and research literature to prepare for the study. The focus is thereby prior relevant studies; distinguishes their design, methodologies, and findings (Moustakes 1994:111).
Background of the researcher	Experience in the field can be an advantage, however it has to be distinguished between knowledge and influencing an interviewee through knowledge during data generation (Fendt and Sachs 2008).	The researcher can have personal experience in the phenomenon of investigation, while broadening his own understanding by the experience of others the researcher can than generalize from a insider perspective <i>‘what something is like’</i> (Leedy and Ormrod 2005:139).

3.5 Interview conduct

Semi-structured interviews are for both grounded theory and phenomenology the most common mode of data generation. Interview questions therefore were carefully phrased according to their requirements. The early stage of interviewing is fairly similar for both pre-selected methods by phrasing questions such as *'Please describe your experience ...'* in order to unfold the field of inquiry. In continuance phenomenological interviewing tends to be dialogical, rather than observational, the meaning of lived experience is a result of co-creation between the researcher and the researched (Wimpenny and Gass 2000). In difference to grounded theory, where the first instance of interviewing aims to recount the interviewee's experience (Glaser and Strauss 1967:75-76), while subsequent interviews during theoretical sampling will be more focused and tailored to the emerging theory. No matter what stage of research both methods of phenomenology and grounded theory require interview questions, which do not impose any view of the phenomenon under investigation to the interviewee.

Pilot interviews (4) were conducted, in-person and via telephone. Special emphasis was firstly put on not biasing the interviewee. The researcher's role is thereby seen as *'distant expert'* (Glaser 1992) or *'co-producer'* (Charmaz 1995) for grounded theory, while for phenomenology the researcher is supposed to suspend any preconceived notions as well as personal experiences called *'bracketing'* (van Manen 1997:175). Secondly, when conducting interviews, attention was paid to changes through rewording and re-sequencing of questions during the interview as this can lead to problems when comparing responses (Patton 2002:349). Interview questions were carefully phrased, such as: *'Please describe effects related to culture you experienced while working on global projects?'*

3.6 Pre-analysis of interviews

The utmost important criteria for any research is the means of data analysis. In this case as both methods are of inductive qualitative nature, categories will emerge from data (Morse and Richards 2002:134). Grounded theory is thereby more attentive to how theory can emerge from subjective experiences, while phenomenology is more concerned about the individual's experience (Suddaby 2006).

In the first step, interview summaries were written immediately after each interview (Yin 2003:76; Miles and Huberman 1994), while audio recordings were verbatim transcribed and analysed in sequence. Following to this, the interviews were analysed prior to conducting the next interview. This allowed the incorporation of findings, adjustments of questions e.g. if questions were not understood in consecutive interviews. The cycle of data generations and analysis was in-line with grounded theory, in other words each interview was analysed before the following was conducted. This approach seemed to be appropriate in the given research setting being explorative, while allowing to adjust direction throughout research conduct.

The data generated was in the first pass analysed by *'open coding'* following grounded theory, where the researcher finds as many categories as possible by labelling the text of each interview as defined by Glaser (1992:38). A second pass through the data was undertaken in accordance to phenomenology approach by searching for the *'meaning of units'* reflecting various aspects of the interviewees experience (Leedy and Ormrod 2005:144). To *'bracket'* own experience and knowledge is thereby crucial, in order to understand the data collected, such as experience of the participants (Patton 2002:485). Bracketing was achieved by writing down all related experiences of the researcher prior to conducting the interview. Thus, the researcher can enter the interview without presupposition as they were put aside to ensure that the *'true'* phenomenon was revealed (Morse and Richards 2002:47). This allowed segregating between the researcher's experience, which is beneficial for understanding the research context and the emerging findings from the data generated.

Table 2 compares grounded theory and phenomenology regarding: When does abstraction occur? Where does abstraction occur? How is abstraction done? and What is the goal of abstraction?

Next to the methodological questions the findings gained from the pre-analysis of the generated data help to further understand the research setting and its context. Emerging findings reported to and verified by both amongst scholars and in the practitioner community yield to be insightful. In addition the researcher familiarized himself with both phenomenological and grounded theory data analysis its principles and limitations.

Table 2: Abstraction of grounded theory and phenomenology adopted from Morse & Richards (2002)

Abstraction	Grounded Theory	Phenomenology
When	Abstraction is from the data but can be informed by previously derived theories.	Not until one has the data: Previous ideas and knowledge are bracketed.
Where	Categories derived from data (observation or line-by-line analysis of text); constant comparison with other situations or settings.	Themes and meanings in accounts, texts.
How	Theoretical sensitivity; seeking concepts and their dimensions; open coding, dimensionalizing, memo writing, diagramming.	Deep immersion, focus, thorough reading.
What	To identify a core category and theory grounded in the data.	To describe the essence of a phenomenon.

3.7 Delayed selection of grounded theory as appropriate research method

The strategy for delayed research method selection helped in particular during the process of data generation and data pre-analysis of the pilot study to decide on the most appropriate and suitable research method. Grounded theory thereby crystallized to be the more suitable research method for this PhD research project. The reasons for choosing grounded theory over phenomenology are discussed in the following.

Data generation showed that interviewees provided additional direct and indirect data next to the data gathered through semi-structured interviews, the main source of data. This included project documentations or reports (direct) or references (indirect) provided by the interviewee, as well as documents and information retrieved by researching the organization, project, and the interviewee (indirect). This appeared to benefit the grounded theory method, which infers from listening, observations, readings or ones past experiences (Baker, Wuest and Stern 1992). In other words everything is data to the grounded theorist (Stern, Allen and Moxley 1982), allowing the flexibility of utilizing different data sources. Phenomenology on the other hand concentrates on having interviewees, which experienced the effects and their interactions on global projects as only legitimate source of data (Baker, Wuest and Stern 1992). The strength of grounded theory is the combination of the depth of inquiry and the unimpaired interplay of theoretical and empirical data (Gibson, Gregory and Robinson 2005). Even though we were aware of these differences between grounded theory and phenomenology prior embarking this study, we did not anticipate such support and openness of the interviewee's in answering the questions posed in the first instance.

The sampling further suggested applying the grounded theory method, given that almost all carefully selected interviewees agreed to participate, having 38 interviewees to date. Multiple interviewees even recommended colleagues with a similar background and experience to the research team for this study providing a small pool of quality data sources. This supported the argument "*The selection of participants and other data sources is, therefore, a function of emerging hypotheses and the sample size, a function of theoretical completeness*" (Baker, Wuest and Stern 1992). This is in contrast to the phenomenology method where the sample size is kept on purpose small. Moreover the requirement of phenomenology joint collaboration and repeated interviews over time appeared to be not feasible due to time and access limitations. Limitations in time occurred because not all interviewees could commit to further interviews and interviewees identified were predominantly independent individuals rather than groups. This development couldn't be predicted as the initial planning was to conduct two to three in-depth longitudinal case studies in an organizational setting.

During the data pre-analysis of the pilot study two more aspects underlined the decision to choose grounded theory over phenomenology. Firstly the circumstance that grounded theory provides clear guidelines for both the conduct of the research and interpretation of the results is very helpful for a novice researcher (Fendt and Sachs 2008; Charmaz 2001). Despite the experience and seniority of two supervisors with both methods, the clear guidelines of grounded theory were more appealing and compatible than the vague defined instructions of phenomenology to the chief investigator and PhD candidate. In fact grounded theory does not rely on descriptive accounts compared to phenomenology and it is more flexible (Fendt and Sachs 2008). Secondly, the approach of constant

comparison, development of emerging themes followed by purposeful data generation for theoretical sampling as suggested by grounded theory.

Looking for specific data, for specific purposes appeared to be more promising to derive faithful results. *“Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection [generation] for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges”* (Glaser 1978:36). In addition this is aligned with the overall research setting and the available pool of data sources, having numerous ‘significant’ individuals (interviewees) sharing their experiences of managing and working on global projects.

Results depicted during the pre-analysis of the pilot study exploring the effects and its interaction on global projects refined the research direction, while at the same time research objectives were further detailed. These results suggested on building up the emerging themes and further detail and verify them in proceeding interviewees till theoretical saturation is reached. The alignment between the findings of the data pre-analysis, a ‘theory about ..’ and the emerging research objective a theory of effects impacting global projects, suggested to apply grounded theory over phenomenology to this study. Grounded theory aims to answer the ‘what’ questions in the explorative theory development phase and the ‘how’ questions in the theory refinement phase (Morse and Richards 2002:36).

The ‘delayed’ decision on the most appropriate and suitable research method helped by taking considerations into account as highlighted above, which evolved during the study and were not anticipated prior to commencing the study. Consequently it would not have been possible to consider them by applying the ‘traditional’ approach of research method selection. In the same way the research objective further developed and the scope crystallized throughout the pilot study conduct, while simultaneously deriving first results for discussion and retrieving feedback.

A combination of phenomenology and grounded theory as suggested by Annells (2006) or Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) was considered. However limitations in terms of time and resources raised constraints of feasibility. In addition a multi-method approach would not ensure a higher accuracy and relevance of results.

In summary the strategy for delayed research method selection helped firstly to gain a profound understanding of grounded theory and phenomenology, their characteristics and applications prior to deciding on one method. *“You will need to ensure that your methods of the data generation, and your research practice in general, enable you to adopt the appropriate forms of data analysis here.”* (Mason 2002:178). Unlike the ‘traditional’ approach, requirements of the study were taken into account and addressed by selecting grounded theory as the most appropriate research method. Secondly conducting a pilot study, including data generation and data pre-analysis provided insight to quality, representation and relevance of priori results. Trailing both research methods proves to be beneficial by experiencing the data generation and getting a feeling for the data, prospective results as well as the research setting. Moreover it allows to better argue and justify the selected research method given the gained experience with both in particular its suitability or unsuitability to this data set, respectively. Lastly the researcher gained time and flexibility to refine and further reduce the research scope as well as address stakeholder’s requirements more appropriately without being limited by a pre-defined research method. In comparison to the ‘traditional’ approach, the proposed strategy for delayed research method selection allowed the researcher to get familiar with the research method at the same time as conducting the pilot study. The pilot study thereby allowed testing of the pre-selected research methods upon their appropriateness, while deriving the first results.

3.8 Associated benefits and further notes

The chief investigator was untrained in conducting interviews from an academic perspective while in his professional background he had deep experience coping with individuals and organizations in and from multiple and diverse cultural settings. Throughout the interview conduct he acquired further domain knowledge which was build up to improve his skills in interviewing such as how to interact with the interviewee or the different modes of interview conduct e.g. in-person, telephone or video and its appropriateness. These reasons are in-line with experience described in literature (e.g. Myers and Newman 2007). It could be argued that a more precise preparation and introduction to qualitative data generation would have been appropriate as described by the examples of Mason (2002). Howsoever

the benefits of generating data and gaining experience in qualitative interviewing outweigh even when there was a risk in generating data not useable for analysis. In addition generating data helped to better understand the field and gain subject matter expertise.

The utilization of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in this case the NVivo8 software provided invaluable assistance to capture, save and compare data in comparison to the 'old-fashioned' and manual way of cards and post-its or multiple spreadsheets. This is due to the fact that both methods of phenomenology and grounded theory can be easily compared and contrasted. In addition, CAQDAS also allows multiple coders' ensuring intercoder reliability, which is another benefit. A potential imitation to be taken into account is the time required to familiarize with the CAQDAS package but this is also the case for manual approach.

4. Discussion of delayed research method selection

Time and delivery of results as well as rigor and relevance remain to be the core factors for research projects driven by stakeholders, supervisors and the engaged business. *"Ultimately, what you do must depend upon the way you have framed your research questions, the philosophical and methodological posture which they encapsulate, the way you have designed your project to support these, and the realities of the research process that you have pursued"* (Mason 2002:203). In contrast to the urgency of project completion, patience helps researchers to derive rigorous and potential relevant results in research. The proposed strategy for delayed research method selection enables researcher to achieve this by at first reviewing potential research methods followed by data generation and pre-analysis of the pilot study, before subsequently selecting the most appropriate research method. This accommodates in particular the circumstances that research questions and objectives developed over time might even change in the initial phase of research projects. On the other hand the research setting solidifies and demands evolved during the conduct of a pilot study. At the same time, more rapid development of suitable questions and the engagement with the research partners, maintains their interest and commitment to the study.

Advantages of the proposed strategy for delayed research method selection are numerous. It guides the researcher, while the researcher at the same time explores capabilities of various research methods and their limitations during the research method pre-selection and the pilot study. In addition the strategy for delayed research method selection discloses unforeseen prospects for data analysis. Moreover even though not directly related to the research objective the strategy for delayed research method selection provides a continuous training for the researcher of comparing and contrasting various research methods of similar nature. This helps to know the differences between similar research methods, their application, limitations, obstacles and presentation of results. This is in comparison to the 'traditional' approach of a stringent and inflexible plan for execution, which might need to be revised later during the research conduct. Furthermore it allows adaptation to requirements by taking the collected data into account as well as unforeseen circumstances such as opposing findings evolving during the data analysis.

5. Conclusion

This paper suggests a strategy for delayed research method selection that intends to support researcher to identify and apply the most appropriate method for data analysis. The objective is thereby to derive faithful and relevant results from the data collected in a rigorous, repeatable and traceable manner. A reported case study shows this exemplary, although admittedly very brief. The strategy for delayed research method selection is suggested to be applied when choosing between similar research methods rather than opposing ones. It is anticipated that novice research, especially PhD, or research students in their initial stage, which often do not have a solid knowledge and background experience in multiple research methods as well as their selection will benefit from applying this strategy. Moreover this strategy is open-minded and not biased by any particular research methods based on previous experiences.

Philosophical positions are not detailed in this paper, however these will be taken into account in forthcoming work. In the same manner the selection of multiple research methods for data analysis and their potential combination of multiple paradigms (e.g. Lewis and Grimes 1999) will be considered in future work. The proposed strategy of delayed research method selection is expected to benefit multifaceted large scale research projects in their initial phase where different aspects need to be taken into account, or research which is combined differently on purpose to frame questions for later

analysis with multiple methods. Furthermore the proposed and innovative strategy is expected to be applicable to interdisciplinary sector across multiple applications in various fields of research.

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