Rejoinder: Moving the Management Field Forward

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Abstract

It has become essential and urgent that significant actors in the management field of research become aware of the current rejection of previously accepted philosophical caricatures. The unrealistic though "tidy" paradigmatic dichotomy, positivism/quantitative/deduction versus interpretivism/qualitative/induction, is being rejected. Instead, a growing and "untidy" consensus is emerging that helps to position grounded theory (GT) in the research landscape. This growing consensus includes perspectives that range from nomothetic to idiographic and highlights data-driven exploratory approaches in opposition to theory-driven confirmatory approaches. While the foundational pillars of GT (emergence, theoretical sampling, and constant comparison) have to be respected when conducting a GT study, there certainly is plenty of room for creativity in the implementation of a data-driven exploratory GT approach. GT is not limited to an all-encompassing method for qualitative or interpretive research: It is much broader and may be applied from various philosophical perspectives that range from nomothetic to idiographic.

Keywords

grounded theory, qualitative research, philosophy of science, research design

In this rejoinder, some members of the original Orlando panel react to Corley's, Dougherty's, and Locke's comments. Then, all panel members propose an answer to the original question that motivated the 2013 Orlando GT panel symposium: They highlight a consensual definition of what grounded theory is.

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The Necessity of Avoiding Philosophical Caricatures While Assessing Grounded Theory: A Reaction to Corley's Comment (By Isabelle Walsh)

Over the past few decades, what Bryman (1998) termed philosophical "caricatures" have been emerging (for more on this issue, please see Walsh, 2014). These caricatures are positioned at either end of a continuum: At the positivist end, the focus is on deduction, confirmation, hypothesis testing, and use of quantitative data/methods/techniques; at the interpretive end, the focus is on induction, exploration, discovery, and use of qualitative data/methods/techniques. These two extremes of the continuum are neat, tidy, and reassuring ... !

For quite a while, researchers using mixed data have been fighting for the idea that qualitative data/methods/techniques are not synonymous with interpretivism and quantitative data/methods/techniques with positivism. Kevin Corley's comment acknowledges that this "paradigmatic dichotomy" (Walsh, 2014, p. 5) is invalid, but appears to create a new dichotomy that equates positivism with deductive research and interpretivism with inductive research. However, in my reading, this is just another facet of the philosophical caricatures summarized above: Who or what forbids a researcher looking for universal laws to use an inductive approach? After all, and as the story goes, Newton's gravity law was discovered inductively from an apple falling on his head! And many so-called positivist, hypothetico-deductive researchers are "guilty" of HARKing (hypothesizing after the results are known), hence an inductive approach, even though this (of course and unfortunately) is not reflected in their work (Garst, Kerr, Harris, & Sheppard, 2002): As Deborah Dougherty illuminated in her commentary, "confirmatoïds" scrub this kind of detail away as irrelevant....

As highlighted by Fritz (1960), the clarity of the difference between induction and deduction is deceptive. He proposes to differentiate between inductive reasoning versus deductive reasoning and inductive arguments versus deductive arguments. He argues that while there is a clear distinction between inductive and deductive reasoning, it is less so for arguments. Fritz defines reasoning as "the general process of arriving at conclusions from evidence." He highlights the term "argument" as much narrower than "reasoning" and refers to it as "the inference from a set of premises to the conclusion implied (or purported to be) by those premises" (p. 127). In a deductive argument the evidence provided by the premises for the conclusion is deemed complete; in an inductive argument, the evidence is not so.

Some other researchers highlight the difficulty in reconstructing reasoning patterns (Lawson, 2005) and go as far as claiming that human processing of information and reasoning are, mostly subconsciously, hypothetico-deductive by nature (Lawson, 2003).

Still, if we ignore this debate and take the traditionally accepted view of deduction as going from general (universal laws) to particular and induction from particular (empirical observations) to general (Amsteus, 2014; Fritz, 1960), and if we take the purpose of induction as adding new beliefs and deduction as drawing implications from what is already believed (J. S. B. Evans & Over, 2013), there is indeed little doubt in anybody's mind that a GT approach implies an overall inductive research approach, as has been made clear since Glaser and Strauss's original seminal 1967 text (Amsteus, 2014; Dey, 1999). However, this certainly does not mean that it restricts GT to an interpretive philosophical stance. Also, if along the way, and to build their theories, grounded theorists have to use some deductive arguments, this should not automatically disqualify them as grounded theorists.

This being said, in between the two extreme caricatures of positivism and interpretivism, a number of more realistic (and less tidy ...) philosophical stances have been emerging (e.g., postpositivism, pragmatism, critical realism), which have been reconciling many researchers on some basic issues. Some of these issues were already highlighted in 2004 by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (reasoning is relative and varies among people; observation is an approximation of reality; a single set of
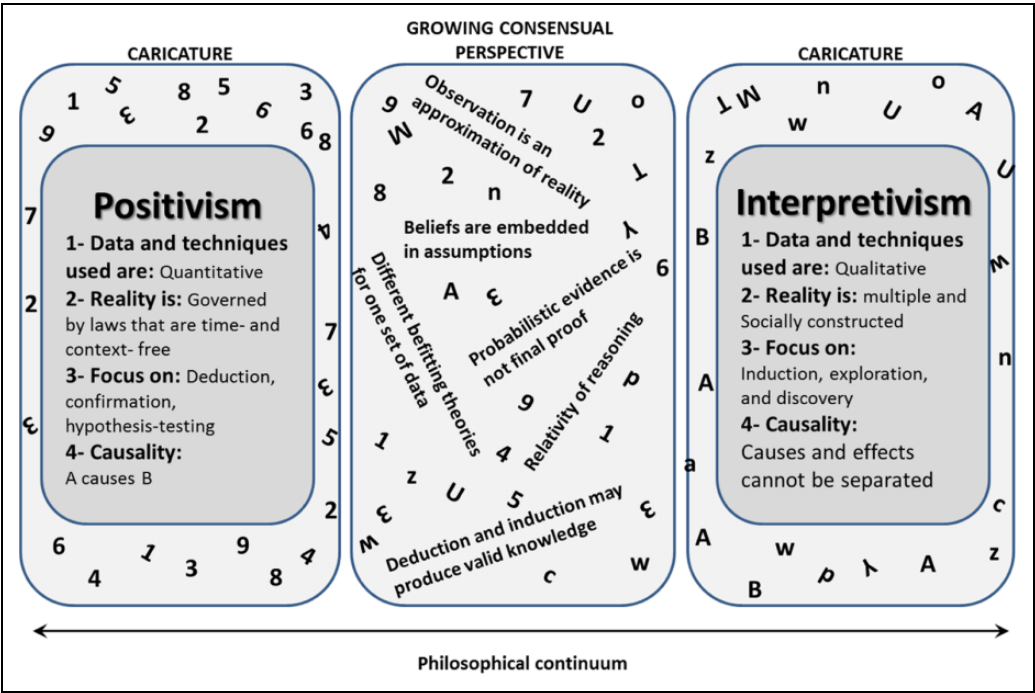
Figure 1. "Tidy" philosophical caricatures and "messy" philosophical reality.

empirical data can yield different befitting theories; hypotheses are linked to assumptions; probabilistic evidence is not final proof; and researchers' beliefs are embedded in their communities' assumptions) and in 2014 by Walsh (both quantitative and qualitative methods and data are important and may be useful in a research project). We could then add a further issue to this growing consensual perspective: Both induction and deduction may produce valid knowledge. This is summarized in Figure 1.

Therefore, instead of debating about induction versus deduction being suitable to a GT approach, we would propose to highlight the debate of data-driven exploration versus theory-driven confirmation, which is simpler and clearer: Data-driven exploration is most definitely a necessary stance when doing GT; however, it may accommodate either the search for universal laws or, alternatively, for theories that apply to only a given setting/context.

If we are to talk about the philosophy of science (one of Barney Glaser's pet hates!), and philosophical stances, let's talk about ontology (what exists for the researcher) and epistemology (what is considered valid knowledge). Whether a researcher considers that reality is governed by universal laws (which would infer a nomothetic research perspective) or that reality is multiple, socially constructed, and context-dependent (which would infer a more idiographic research perspective), what exists for a grounded theorist is made up of the patterns that emerge from empirical data. As for knowledge, it is valid if GT procedures are applied to help these patterns emerge.

Hence, and whether the researcher's approach is nomothetic or idiographic, she or he may definitely claim to adopt a GT approach. This is summarized in Figure 2, while building on Natalia Levina's previously proposed graphical representation; it helps to better position grounded theories in the current research landscape (any grounded theory would be positioned in Quadrants III or IV) and represents an attempt to organize the growing consensual perspective of our field. Those researchers whom Dougherty names "discover-whees!" in her fascinating and enlightening commentary would
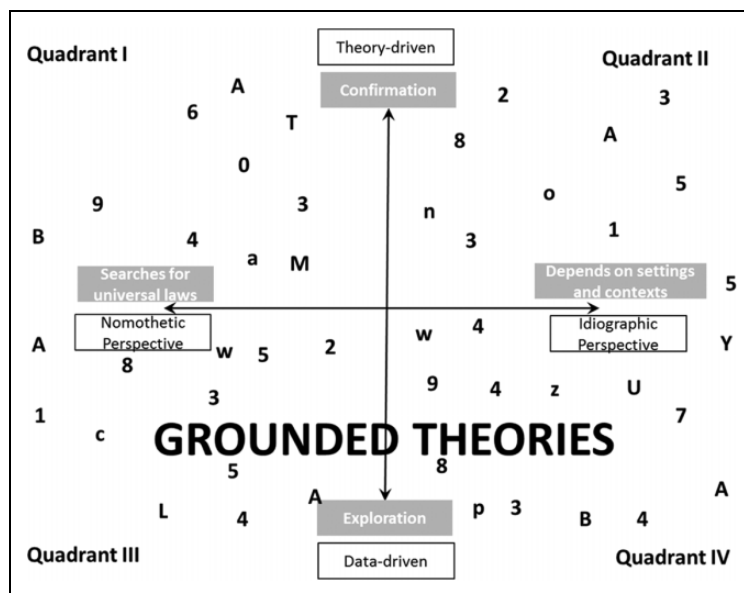
Figure 2. An attempt to organize the growing consensual perspective.

no doubt operate from the bottom two quadrants (III and IV), while true "confirmatoïds," as she describes them, would most probably operate from Quadrant I.

However, when all is said and done, and to be useful (and published in top-tier journals), all theories aim somehow at being generalizable through a more nomothetic perspective (Quadrants I and III) even though most researchers have accepted by now that few (if any) universal laws may be found.

As I have highlighted previously (Walsh, 2014), GT as described by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 has been emerging as a metatheory of research design aimed at discovering new theories. There is, indeed, plenty of room for creativity to express itself in the original guidelines that were provided and this metatheory has been applied and interpreted with different philosophical stances. However, much to Barney Glaser's distress, it has sometimes been "remodeled" (to use his own terminology) as some authors appear to neglect some of what he considers as GT founding principles (emergence, theoretical sampling, and constant comparison), which are highlighted by Judith Holton in the original panel symposium that led to this special issue.

Claiming that GT, because of its overall inductive approach, cannot be considered in a positivist stance is another type of remodeling. And such a remodeling rests on arguments, which are far from the current growing consensus described above and summarized in Figures 1 and 2. It is particularly important that significant actors, who take the role of "gatekeepers" in the management field of research, be made aware of the growing philosophical unrest of our field and its rejection of previously accepted philosophical caricatures.

Reflections on Dougherty's Reflections on the Reflective Conversation (By Lotte Bailyn)

All of us on the original Orlando panel, though we come at the issues from somewhat different perspectives, generally agree with what Deborah Dougherty has to say, and appreciate her wise words. So let me reflect on the reactions I had to her piece. Full disclosure: I am not a GT person per se. My

approach is exploratory and idiographic, not tied to any extant theories, and uses data from surveys and interviews, only occasionally from observation.

Therefore, it is no surprise that I agree with her view that data are data. Period. And I do enjoy her distinction between discover-whees! and confirmatoïds. I could add one particular peeve I have with the latter. It's one thing when they want to confirm established theory—that at least provides some links to something that might be of interest. But when all they want to do is to fill a gap in the literature—that stops me. What could be more boring? So my first reflection is to thank Deborah for alerting us to the importance of surprise and passion in the research process. There has to be a "whee!" from whichever side one is working.

And I resonate strongly to her idea that journals, particularly journals that deal with methods, should be willing to print articles that are transparent about the continuous testing and retesting of ideas with the data in hand, even if they do not produce an "Ah! Ha!" result. It would be a boon to students and would surely start a number of constructive conversations.

And let me also reflect on "building." I like the gerund, the emphasis on process. But since there is no recipe, it highlights the importance of creative imagination in the research process. Our thought processes are just as important as the data—indeed they constitute each other. To be brutally frank, I worry less about validity and generalizability than about the ability to say something interesting, perhaps counterintuitive, which has not been said about a phenomenon. Something that gets us thinking, that starts a stream of research in various modes and which, in the end, aids our understanding of the world around us.

Reflection on Locke's Comments: Grounded Theorizing Versus Classic Grounded Theory (By Judith A. Holton)

Classic grounded theorists do not confine grounded theory to an interpretivist paradigm. For us, the term "grounded theory" refers to a specific set of fundamental principles and guidelines for applying those principles to the discovery of theory from empirical data—any type of data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We highlighted these principles in our symposium panel and in our article—emergence, theoretical sampling, and constant comparison. While classic grounded theory welcomes the use of any type of data, it is important to recognize that some data collection methods (e.g., interviews following a predefined and set protocol) and analysis techniques (e.g., predefined thematic analysis) commonly associated with qualitative research contradict these fundamental principles. Published accounts that neglect or apply in some marginal way these principles abound in scholarly journals, as does advice offered in texts intended to guide the development of such studies.

Perhaps most frequently undermined is the fundamental principle of emergence. While espousing grounded theory's inductive nature, the authors of such advice fail to recognize that advice, such as framing a study through an initial literature review, conceptual framework, prespecified research questions, and interview protocols, essentially precludes emergence. We have all seen such elements required of "grounded theory" studies by doctoral committees and journal peer reviewers and editors. While not disputing the value of such work or its contribution to management theory, the issue is one of respecting grounded theory as it was intended and differentiating it from any number of subsequent variations that have blurred the boundaries between grounded theory and other research approaches.

Locke's admonishing classic grounded theory as advocating "naive empiricism" is frankly surprising in that it ignores grounded theory's subtle and nuanced technique of theoretical sensitivity. Classic grounded theory does not ignore extant theory pertaining to the phenomenon under study, nor does it privilege its relevance in advance. While acknowledging that researchers are going to bring their own onto-epistemological beliefs to any research study, grounded theory guides researchers to stay open by avoiding preconception and, instead, allowing the emergent theory to discover

what is significant in the area under study. Doing so offers greater potential for a novel theoretical contribution than that offered by framing the study at the outset and thereby settling for an incremental contribution to extant theory.

And surely Locke is not suggesting that classic grounded theory papers are any more likely to be rejected than papers espousing other methodologies. In my experience as both a peer reviewer and an editor, some of the most lamentable papers are those that enthusiastically declare their use of grounded theory while incorporating a vast range of methods and techniques that violate classic GT foundational principles and that serve only to limit the potential for theory discovery. Such results can most certainly fall short of exciting theory and the efforts exerted may well leave researchers frustrated and confused (G. L. Evans, 2013; Fendt & Sachs, 2008). This muddling of approaches is a disservice to all.

I do like Locke's term "grounded theorizing," although she appears to use the term as synonymous with grounded theory. This blurring of terms is at the heart of the persistent "rhetorical wrestle" (Glaser, 1998) surrounding grounded theory. Yet I suggest that the term could move our conversation forward, if, as a community of management researchers, we might agree to its use in describing the numerous "evolved" approaches (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Locke, 2001; Morse et al., 2009; Partington, 2002) and as a means of differentiating these from classic "grounded theory." Making this distinction would be helpful not only to novice researchers in their understanding of various "grounded" approaches but equally for peer reviewers and editors in recognizing what constitutes the classic approach of grounded theory with its fundamental principles and its systematic application of techniques applied to any data while also acknowledging a broader range of other approaches for grounded theorizing.

Collegial Conclusion (By Lotte Bailyn, Walter Fernandez, Barney Glaser, Judith A. Holton, Natalia Levina, and Isabelle Walsh)

The conversation related in this special issue was initiated by a simple question that has obviously been burning the mind of many researchers, for many years, before it was actually put on the Academy of Management listservs: "Whoever said that grounded theory is only a qualitative method?"

Due to the significant reaction we received, we thought that the debate that resulted from this simple question was worth sharing with others, first through a panel symposium at the Academy of Management meeting in Orlando, and then through an article summarizing this panel symposium, which led to the present special issue: We felt that airing this debate would gain precious time for some researchers, free the mind of others, and enlighten the "gatekeepers" of the management field of research with the boiling turmoil that is currently "agitating" the grounded theory world.

This reflective conversation has been a valuable opportunity to exchange perspectives on a topic that has sustained considerable interest, discussion, and most certainly a level of controversy within the grounded theorist community and beyond. Exchanging formally and occasionally with other researchers is one thing; truly sharing a community of spirit and thoughts in an ongoing "conversation" is another. It proved to be a fabulously enriching experience that helped us start answering what seemed a simple question but which, in fact, was not simple at all.

We see this conversation as an important vehicle for illuminating a more nuanced understanding and hopefully fostering deeper appreciation of grounded theory as a powerful approach to theory generation, whatever the researcher's philosophical stance may be. Indeed, the scope and reach of grounded theory and the range of grounded theorizing approaches that have subsequently evolved are reasons for honoring and celebrating the seminal work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and its contribution to management research.

Putting all contributions of this special issue together leads us to propose a simple and consensual definition of what grounded theory is:

"GT is the systematic generation of theory from data that has itself been systematically obtained" (Glaser, 1978, p. 2). GT's exploratory approach may be adopted irrespective of the researcher's philosophical positioning. It may include qualitative or quantitative data, or both.

We do hope that our conversation will be useful for other researchers, open the way to new enthralling theories, and encourage researchers to start other important conversations to help move the management field forward.

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Isabelle Walsh received her PhD and HDR (Habilitation to supervise research) in Management from Paris-Dauphine University in France. She also has extensive corporate and consulting experience. She is full Professor at Neoma Business School, France. Her research deals with sociocultural aspects and methodological issues within the Information Systems and Management research fields. Her research works have been published in various research outlets including European Journal of Information Systems, Grounded Theory Review, Journal of Strategic Information Systems; Management & Avenir and Systèmes d'Information et Management.

Judith A. Holton is Associate Professor of Management with the Ron Joyce Centre for Business Studies at Mount Allison University, Canada. She completed her PhD in Management Studies at the University of Northampton, UK. Her research interests include grounded theory research methodology, leadership and management of complex systems, and learning and innovation in knowledge work. She is a Fellow of the Grounded Theory Institute and former Editor of The Grounded Theory Review, a research journal dedicated to GT research. She has published in The Learning Organization, Leadership and Organization Development Journal, Advances in Developing Human Resources, The Grounded Theory Review, and The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory. She is a frequent collaborator and co-author with the methodology's originator, Dr. Barney Glaser.

Lotte Bailyn is the T Wilson (1953) Professor of Management emerita at MIT's Sloan School of Management. For the period 1997-99 she was Chair of the MIT faculty, and during 1995-97 she was the Matina S. Horner Distinguished Visiting Professor at Radcliffe's Public Policy Institute. Her research deals with the relation of organizational practice to employees' personal lives, with a particular emphasis on gender equity in business organizations and academia. Among her publications are Breaking the Mold: Women, Men, and Time in the New Corporate World (Free Press, 1993) and its new and fully revised edition Breaking the Mold: Redesigning Work for Productive and Satisfying Lives (Cornell, 2006), and Beyond Work-Family Balance: Advancing Gender Equity and Workplace Performance (Jossey-Bass, 2002), of which she is a co-author. She is the 2012 recipient of the Scholar-Practitioner Award from the Academy of Management.

Walter Fernandez is a Professor at the School of Information Systems, Technology and Management at the University of New South Wales Australia. His research focuses on the management of major projects, ICT-enabled organizational change and modernization, achieving value from ICT investments, and qualitative research methods. He is a founding president of the Special interest Group on Grounded Theory Method of The Association for Information Systems. He serves in several international journals as reviewer, associate editor and senior editor and has been appointed as an "assessor of international standing" for the Australian Research Council's College of Experts. His works appears in top information systems and project management journals and well as first tier international conferences. Over the last decade, he has participated as chief investigator in research proposals that obtained more than $5,000,000 in funding.

Natalia Levina has received her PhD in Information Technology from MIT's Sloan School of Management (2001) and is an associate professor at New York University Stern School of Business. She uses practice theory to understanding how people span organizational, professional, cultural and other boundaries in the process of building and using new technology and the social dynamics that ensures. Together with Walter Fernandez she has co-founded Association of Information Systems (AIS) Special Interest Group (SIG) on Grounded Theory (GT) Method and has co-edited Special Issue of European Journal of Information Systems on GT. Her research appeared in Information Systems Research, MIS Quarterly, Organization Science, and Academy of Management Journal among others. She serves as a senior editor of Information Systems Research and on the editorial board of Information and Organization.

Barney Glaser received his PhD from Columbia University in 1961. He then went to University of California San Francisco, where he joined Anselm Strauss in doing the dying in hospitals study, published in 1965 as Awareness of Dying. This study led to the publication of Discovery of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a methodological treatise. He has continued to publish additional books and papers elaborating on the classical approach to grounded theory including Theoretical Sensitivity (1978), Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis (1992), Doing Grounded Theory (1998), The Grounded Theory Perspectives (I-III, 2001-2005), Doing Formal Grounded Theory(2007), Doing Quantitative Grounded Theory (2008). In 1998 he received an honorary doctorate from Stockholm University, Sweden. He remains active in publishing and teaching classic grounded theory through his international grounded theory seminars.