

# Deploying and Modifying the Grounded Theory on Management Study : Experience from the Conducted Researches on Business Resilience in China and Japan

Weng Xuanbin\*, Takaura Yasunari\*\*

## Abstract

Research deployed by the Grounded Theory methodology mainly focuses on the field of medical-related disciplines and sociology, while leaving business sectors rarely touched on this subject. As clinicians figure out problems of the human body by direct observation, health indicator measurement, the grounded theory can apply to conducting first-hand-data-required business resilience research. Nevertheless, to contribute to the applicability of the grounded theory as a research methodology for business resilience research in China and Japan, some questions need to be considered and exemplified. For example, could the grounded theory have developed to the current stage, regardless of its subsystem, being applied to business resilience researches as the way of waiving medical and sociological research? Does there exist a possibility that a specific, grounded theory can be further evolved for business resilience researches in East Asia social context?

Grounded Theory, as known as GT, was initially proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, later known as Classic Grounded Theory, by their famous work of *THE DISCOVERY OF GROUNDED THEORY: strategies for qualitative research*. In the very beginning of the book, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.1) defined the term as 'We believe that the discovery of theory from data-which we call grounded theory-is a major task confronting sociology today, for as we shall try to show, such a theory fits empirical situations, and is understandable to sociologists and layman alike.'. Then followed by the purpose of the theory generated from data as 'Most important, it works-provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications.' (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p.1). Meanwhile, Glaser and Strauss (1967) highlighted the ideal circumstance to apply grounded theory in the social research-comparative analysis as follows :

1. In case that the mission of a researcher is purely transforming the qualitative data into a quantifiable one, the data process approach is to code the data at first and then proceed to analyze.
2. In case that the task of a researcher is to formulating theoretical thoughts, the coding process and analyzing process can take place simultaneously because a researcher will renew the conceptions of the theory that

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\* Assistant Researcher, Zhejiang Financial College

\*\* Graduate School of Economics and Management,  
Associate professor of Economics, Tohoku  
University

would be generated while extracting the qualitative data.

3. To reveal a more structured theory without the adversities of the previous two types, a mixed approach that consists of 'an analytic procedure if constant comparison, the explicit coding procedure of the first approach, and the style of theory development of the second.' (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p.102).

4. To uncover a theory that is holistic, accurate, generalized, and specified to a phenomenon, analytical induction is applicable.

However, Charmaz (2014) articulates that researchers are encouraged to possess pre-conceptions on their research questions for a better understanding of research reality. Moreover, constructivist grounded theory enables researchers to have flexible views on various issues. To the latest review, Charmaz (2016, p.299) summarizes the critical differences of the constructivist grounded theory to the classic grounded theory as follows :

1. Assuming a relativist epistemology ;
2. Acknowledging your and your research participants multiple standpoints, roles, and realities ;
3. Adopting a reflexive stance toward your background, values, actions, situations, relationships with research participants, and representations of them ;
4. Situating your research in the historical, social, and situational conditions of its production

In the case of finished researches on business resilience in China and Japan, business visiting, including interviews with senior managers, is the appropriate method of data collection for qualitative researches. In other words, the conducted researches were presented in the case study format. The range of research participants includes members from big businesses and SMEs from China and Japan, while micro-businesses are not in the discussion scale. Further, business field research is less likely to launch in the real business world without help from personnel who obtains certain kinds of business connections.

Referring to the methodology for practicing this qualitative research, a mixed package of specific techniques from classic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory is applied to ensure academic credibility and the feasibility of business resilience research in China and Japan. Because either type of the existed grounded theory alone could fit the business resilience research reality in China and Japan.

By briefly reviewing the two branches of the grounded theory and concluding the differences between the two by giving a table, this paper portrays the research landscape and research reality in terms of business resilience research in China and Japan. According to the authors' qualitative research, we spotted that the grounded theory, as a research methodology, can be used in the field of management study, or at least on business resilience research, in China and Japan. The authors propose a revised type of grounded theory in a hypothetical version based on their research experiences.

Note : References applied in this abstract are enlisted in the Reference of the full-text article.

## **Introduction**

The business world needs resilience more than ever. Nevertheless, research deployed by the Grounded Theory methodology mainly focuses on the field of medical-related disciplines and sociology (Rolle-Berg & Linden, 2020 ; Carmichael & Craayestein, 2020 ; Garratt & Patching 2019), while leaving business sectors rarely considered in this subject. As clinicians figure out problems of the human body by direct observation and health indicator measurement, the grounded theory can apply to conducting first-hand-data-required business resilience researches. Nevertheless, could the grounded theory have

developed to the current stage, regardless of its subsystem, being applied to business resilience researches as the way of weaving medical and sociological research? Does there exist a possibility that a specific grounded theory can be further evolved for business resilience researches in East Asia social context, like China and Japan? Such questions are remaining covered, and this research would initiate to act as an ice-breaker to them.

## Literature Review on the Grounded Theory

### Origin : Classic Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory, as known as GT, was initially proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 by their famous work of *THE DISCOVERY OF GROUNDED THEORY: strategies for qualitative research*. In the very beginning of the book, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.1) defined ‘We believe that the discovery of theory from data—which we call grounded theory—is a major task confronting sociology today, for as we shall try to show, such a theory fits empirical situations, and is understandable to sociologists and layman alike.’ Then followed by the purpose of the theory generated from data as ‘Most important, it works—provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications.’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p.1). Meanwhile, Glaser and Strauss (1967) highlighted the ideal circumstance to apply grounded theory in social research—comparative analysis.

Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.101) introduced several approaches for constant comparative methods while researchers are doing qualitative analysis derived from different objectives as below as well as in Figure 1 :

1. In case that the mission of a researcher is purely transforming the qualitative data into quantifiable one, the data process approach is to code the data at first and then proceed to analyze.
2. In case that the task of a researcher is to formulating theoretical thoughts, the coding process and analyzing process can take place simultaneously because a researcher will renew the conceptions of the theory that would be generated while extracting the qualitative data.

Figure 1. Use of Approaches To Qualitative Analysis  
By Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.105)

<i>Ge. erating Theory</i>	<i>Provisional Testing of Theory</i>	
	Yes	No
Yes	Combining inspection for hypotheses (2) along with coding for test, then analyzing data (1) Analytic induction (4)	Inspection for hypotheses (2)  Constant comparative method (3)
No	Coding for test, then analyzing data (1)	Ethnographic description

3. To reveal a more structured theory without the adversities of the previous two types, a mixed approach that consists of ‘an analytic procedure if constant comparison, the explicit coding procedure of the first approach and the style of theory development of the second.’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p.102).
4. To uncover a theory that is holistic, accurate, generalized, and specified to a phenomenon, analytical induction is applicable.

Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduce that field note and documentary as the dominant sources about qualitative data while highlighting the possible incompatibility of the field-originated sources and library sources. While discussing the credibility of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe that grounded theory enables researchers and their readers to observe the research questions closely. Audiences would be more likely to be persuaded by researchers with structured data analysis and logical instructions of the theoretical frameworks. As of the current stage of the classic grounded theory, Glaser (2020) asserts the original picture by re-emphasizing that classic grounded theory research is raised if a researcher preconceives ‘sociological interest’, representing a consequence of data-forcing.

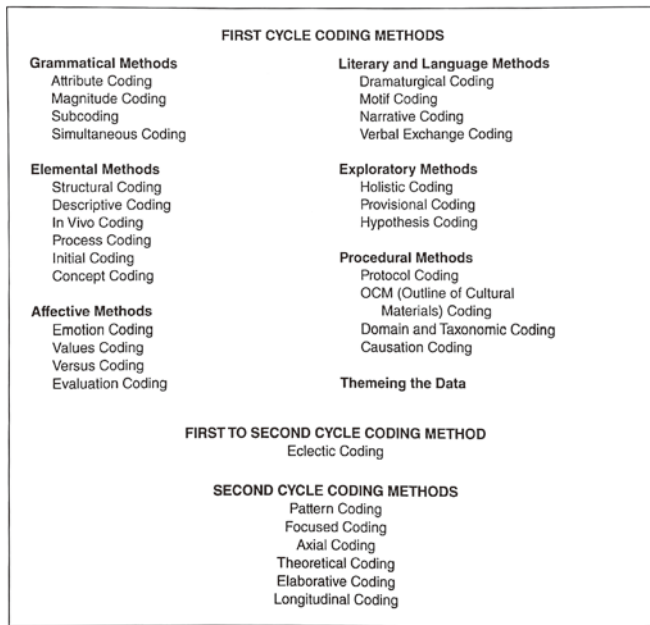
### **Data Coding**

As Glaser and Strauss (1967) state in their ground laying work, coding, as the substantial procedure for forming reliable theories, needs to be selected with caution. Hence, it is necessary to obtain knowledge on the categories of coding approaches, knowledge of the applicability of various coding approaches, and conceptions of supportive method(s) can boost the efficiency of the coding process, if there are any, for researchers. Luckily, Saldaña, an experienced qualitative researcher, provides his insights on coding techniques by his work of *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.

Coding, as a process of interpreting data, outputs code(s). Saldaña (2016, p.4) states that the forms of qualitative data could be presented sorts of formalities, such as ‘interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, open-ended survey response, drawing, artifacts, photographs, video, Internet site, e-mail correspondence, academic and fictional literature, and so on.’. Then the author put the definition of code right after finishing the illustration on qualitative data. Saldaña (2016, p.4) defines ‘code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes or “translates” data (Vogt, Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2014, p.13) and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each datum for following purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes.’.

Before introducing the coding methods systematically, Saldaña (2016) enlightens that during the coding process, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, as known as CAQDAS, could provide significant efficiency and convenience for qualitative researchers. AnSWR, AQUAD, ATLAS.ti, Nvivo, and some other additional computer-based programs are recommended by Saldaña (2016, p.31). Referring to detailed coding approaches, Saldaña (2016) summarized them under several methods, as shown in Fig-

**Figure 2. First Cycle and Second Cycle Coding Methods  
By Saldaña 2016 (p.68)**



ure 2.

Nevertheless, for the better performance of the coding stage, Saldaña (2016) emphasizes researcher should select coding method(s) depend on the attributions of the research questions, and it is less likely that fixed package(s) of coding method(s) could be applied in distinct researches. Moreover, the number of coding method(s) utilized in qualitative researches shall be limited. Confusion, ambiguousness, and contradiction, for some cases, would appear during the coding process, thus losing accuracy of the node(s) if more than six approaches were deployed in an individual research. Though, on the other hand, most of the coding techniques exhibited in Figure 1 can be used to code qualitative data like interview transcripts, the researcher should be advised that additional constraints may exist. The threshold to weaving a theory from qualitative data is necessary to ensure the validity of researches. Hence, Saldaña (2016) suggests that in every single research, in case of more than ten interviews were launched, doing qualitative research implanted by grounded theory could be encouraged.

**Challenge on Classic Grounded Theory : Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Though derived from the classic grounded theory, however, the constructivist grounded theory shows variations. Charmaz (2014) expresses that rather than stress on data collection, those who utilize the grounded theory and simultaneously value the importance of constructing the result of data can be identified as an utilizer of constructivist grounded theory in terms of epistemology.

Meanwhile, Charmaz (2014) articulates that researchers are encouraged to possess pre-conceptions on their research questions for a better understanding of research reality. Moreover, constructivist grounded theory enables researchers to have flexible views on various issues. To the latest review, Charmaz (2016, p.299) summaries the critical differences of the constructivist grounded theory to the classic grounded theory as follows :

1. Assuming a relativist epistemology ;
2. Acknowledging your and your research participants multiple standpoints, roles, and realities ;
3. Adopting a reflexive stance toward your background, values, actions, situations, relationships with research participants, and representations of them ;
4. Situating your research in the historical, social, and situational conditions of its production

#### **Discussion on the Both Grounded Theories**

There is a significant debate between the two subbranches of GT-classic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory (O'Connor, Carpenter & Coughlan, 2018). Since the year 2000, Charmaz, as an advocator of constructivist grounded theory, shown obvious distinctions with representative advocator and one of the founders of grounded theory originated from the discussion on epistemology, as O'Connor, Carpenter & Coughlan (2018, p.91) explain as a 'branch of philosophy that explores the origin, nature, and methods of knowing and the limits of human knowledge.' against Glaser as the followings :

1. Epistemology. Classic grounded theory suggests its epistemology as elastic because it enables the researcher to utilize full sorts of data resources while remaining objectivity. While constructivist grounded theory argues its epistemology as a researcher will construct the results of researches other than purely uncovering, which further enhances the validity between the movement and judgment.
2. Researcher. Classic grounded theory prefers that researchers should not incept any preoccupation before they start the research process, while constructivist grounded theory obtains an opposite view.
3. Timing of doing literature reviews. Corresponding to the two antithetical attitudes of the classic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory, the ideas of the timing of doing literature review are likewise. Classic grounded theory encourages the researcher to postpone reviewing previous works to prevent researchers from any pre-thoughts. Accordingly, constructivist grounded states that it is impractical that researchers can be free from any preconceptions.
4. Setting research questions. Classic grounded theory discourage researchers from clarifying their research questions beforehand ; instead, it advocates researchers to come up with approaches to stimulates research participants to raise their voices. As for applying constructivist grounded theory, researchers should concrete their research questions before kick-off the phase of data collection.
5. Interview techniques. Advocators of classic grounded theory believe that interviews supported by clear-guided manuals could facilitate data bias while constructivist grounded theorists propose that interview guidelines would help novice researchers validate their research questions.

6. Coding process. Qualitative research deploys classic grounded theory has two major coding stages of substantive coding and theoretical coding. However, constructivist grounded theory obtains three stages : initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Meanwhile, the focus of the classic grounded theory is ‘first identifying the relationship between the categories and the core category and then identifying the relationship between categories’ (O’Connor, Carpenter & Coughlan 2018, p.98). As for constructivist grounded theory, it cares about reconciling and integrating the concepts from data.

Although it seems that the classic grounded theory is highly incompatible with constructivist grounded theory, other researchers, quoted by O’Connor, Carpenter, and Coughlan, highlighted that the two styles of grounded theories are not necessarily against each other because it is unrealistic to launch researches by purely depend on one style of the grounded theory (Jacoby, Jaccard & Acock, 2011).

Besides, the advocator of the classic grounded theory, Glaser, has debated on the constructivist grounded theory supported by Charmaz, directly and indirectly. On the one hand, Glaser (2012) criticizes the constructivist grounded theory cannot be considered as a grounded theory approach because he articulates that grounded theorists do not construct stories, and grounded theorists only reveal the objectivity of the emergence from data. On the other hand, Charmaz defends her ground by proving the solidity of research results and the function of explicating core research inquiries in some disciplines (Charmaz, 2017 ; Charmaz 2020).

#### **Data Collection of Business Resilience Researches in China and Japan**

As mentioned as a question in the introduction section, forming a modified type of grounded theory is subject to the social context for the reason of prerequisite data collection in East Asia. Management scholars had long aware of the essence of guanxi (relationship/connection) in the business world under the social context of East Asia (Alston, 1989 ; Yeung & Tung, 1996 ; Dinh & Hilmansson, 2020), while China and Japan, as business societies, are discussed in most relevant researches. In other words, regarding the term guanxi, the attribution of business context and social context of China and Japan is commonly shared in East Asia. With the introduction of business insider(s), business outsider(s) will be more likely to be recognized among certain business circles. Hence, China and Japan are two vivid examples in this regard. However, it is necessary to stress that although the ‘guanxi’ phenomenon is prevalent in East Asia’s business world, it does not imply that each business organization operates under this criteria. Meanwhile, the extent of guanxi dependency may vary among East Asia societies, but it would be another topic to discuss such differences.

To carefully identify, discuss, and examine factors that could impact business resilience under a crisis from the perspectives of business strategy, business resilience, and corporate social Responsibility (CSR), field research is necessary. In the case of finished researches, business visiting, including interviews with senior managers, is the appropriate method to fit qualitative research. In other words, con-

ducted researches practice case study. The range of research participants includes members from big businesses and SMEs from China and Japan, while micro-businesses are not in the discussion scale. Further, business field research is less likely to launch in the real business world without help from personnel who obtains certain kinds of business connections. Hence, two experienced persons contributed to contacting research participant work in businesses in both countries.

Referring to the methodology for practicing this qualitative research, a mixed package of specific techniques from classic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory is applied to ensure academic credibility and the feasibility of business resilience research in China and Japan.

### Applying and Reshaping the Grounded Theory

#### Applying the Grounded Theory Constrained by Management Research Reality

As concluded in the previous sections, grounded theory with different branches is attributed to distinctions on full awareness of utilizing it. In order to grasp the essential points of the differences between the classic grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory, the below table, refined from the previous sections, reveals the distinctions.

Nevertheless, researchers, particularly those who focus on business management in China and Japan by deploying grounded theory as their research methodology, should keep in mind the limitation of the above two types of grounded theory highlighted as follows :

**Table 1. Differences between Classic GT and Constructivist GT O'Connor, Carpenter & Coughlan, 2018, by the authors**

	Classic GT	Constructivist GT
Epistemology	Elastic, utilize a wide range of data with objectivity.	Construct results of data other than only collect data.
Researcher	Should not have any preoccupation before start the research process.	Should have some preoccupation before start the research process.
Timing of Reviewing Literature	Encouraging researchers to delay their review work to prevent raising preoccupations.	Impractical for a researcher to be free from any preoccupation. Reviewing previous works is acceptable even before kicking-off the research process.
Setting Research Questions	Discourage researchers to clarify the questions to raise the voice of research participants.	Concreting the research questions before data collection is preferred.
Interview Techniques	Preventing usage of clear-guided manually to avoid data bias.	Using clear-guided manual help to valid research questions.
Coding Process	Two major codings, stages-substantive coding and theoretical coding.	Caring for reconciling and integrating the concepts from data.



1. Both types of grounded theory were established and evolved in the context of western business society.
2. It is controversial if a business researcher could deploy all prerequisites of one of the above-grounded theory in China and Japan.

Based on the deployment practices of grounded theory in China and Japan for business resilience researches, proposing such limitations is based on qualitative management research. In China, in most cases, potential research participants would require researcher(s) to offer the research proposal of the research project(s) with clear illustration and instruction, or at least with general research guidelines. Then, they first proceed with those documents to judge whether they will involve the project(s) on behalf of their business organizations or not, followed by examining the appropriateness of contents of the questionnaire(s). In other words, before kicking off the data collection, research participants, or interviewees, demand researcher(s) to be clear about the research; otherwise, research participants would be easily confused about the research, consider the research(es) is/are with low validity and organization, and finally refuse to cooperate. Further, regarding the research data collection methods, if researcher(s) prefer the participant(s) to provide qualitative data via the way of face-to-face interview(s), a participant would go-through the research questionnaire(s) before the formal data collection process. A researcher needs to clarify the participant(s)' doubts about the questionnaire(s) to enhance the clarity of the questions and ultimately improve the data validity. Moreover, the process of data collection would operate more smoothly once supported by an on-site research participant visit to confirm the research scenario, as well as checking the participants' understanding are without noticeable deviation from the supposed route.

While practicing grounded theory on management study is an even more challenging research objective to complete. During research on Japanese businesses, business personnel are preferred to connected to the researcher by senior personnel with high credibility of the society; otherwise, it would be demanding that research inquiry could be accepted. At the early stage of preparing supportive research documents for data collection, a researcher must prepare and introduce the research proposes, research questionnaires, and research methods to research participants in the first place. Then Japanese research participants would decide if they will join in or not.

However, this research does not deny the least possibility of conducting qualitative management studies that require face-to-face interviews for data collection in China and Japan. Instead, it only stresses the importance of the social connection between researchers and business personnel that could validate the overall process of conducting on-site business researches.

While doing business researches, data could derive from the same source, but with different methods (e.g., reading a part of the interview script and reading that script with playing the corresponding record), more controversial data could be interpreted by the researcher. Hence, the significance of data

extraction by different data styles with objectivity is concrete as a creed.

As the reality of doing qualitative management research back up by the grounded theory as a research methodology in China and Japan, the timing of doing literature reviews, the timing of setting research question(s), and interview techniques are not subject to the researcher. Instead, the research reality would force the researcher(s) to set everything before they initiate their journey of data collection.

As for the coding process, the only principle aims to deliver findings with an overall research picture. That is to say, the coding process of classic GT is not essentially against the one of constructivist GT; they could complement each other.

Grounded on the research reality, neither the whole system of classic GT nor constructivist GT is the optimal method of doing GT. Thus, a mixed version with the following technique details of GT is introduced for this research based on the feasibility of doing qualitative business management research in China and Japan, as depicted in Table 2.

#### **Proposing Grounded Theory for Business Resilience Researches in China and Japan**

As concluded in the previous section, a hybridized GT version has been applied in this research. Nevertheless, this research finds that researchers' social connections would influence the data quality during the holistic interview journey while applying the GT approach. For example, researchers funded by the government could reach much more critical data than researchers who do not obtain such an advantage. In other words, researchers who share close connections with research interviewees are more likely to discover 'hidden' stories in businesses. Also, by accessing much research data, researchers share strong connections with business insider(s) enjoy a higher possibility than those who do not discover new phenomena, new ideas, and new conceptions with cascading new proposals and theories. That is how social relationship (connection) reveals its significance in influencing the quality and validity of business resilience research data acquired under the deployment of the grounded theory approach. In

**Table 2. Contents of Mixture of Classic GT and Constructivist GT by the authors**

	<b>Mixture of Classic GT and Constructivist GT</b>
<b>Epistemology Researcher</b>	Elastic, utilize a wide range of data with objectivity. Should have some or specific preoccupation before start the research process.
<b>Timing of Reviewing Literature</b>	Reviewing previous works is mandatory before kicking-off the research process.
<b>Setting Research Questions</b>	Concreting the research questions before data collection is necessary.
<b>Interview Techniques Coding Process</b>	Using clear-guided manual help to valid research questions. Practicing two major codings stages-substantive coding and theoretical coding, while caring for the reconciling and integrating the concepts from data simultaneously.

this project’s research practices, the authors contacted the studied businesses with senior personnel in the business field in both countries.

Moreover, social connections could affect the researcher’s role, allowing researchers to connect business with ambiguity. To be specific, researchers who practice neutral grounded theory would obtain the mobility of modifying the designed questions as they keep receiving data from interviewees or even discover new research points and directions in the process of data collection. Neutral Grounded Theory encourages researchers to hold some openness throughout data collection and ultimately try to spot new research topics hidden by methodologies that stress too much on ‘zero ambiguity’ before data collection. Hence, by adding the researcher’s identity based on reality, a new type of GT approach called the Neutral Grounded Theory is proposed in Table 3, as shown below :

Although the Neutral Grounded Theory is refined from research on business resilience studies in China and Japan, additional research practices of the Neutral Grounded Theory need to be deployed by different disciplines to test the Neutral’s generalizability Grounded Theory. Further applications are needed to uncover Neutral Grounded Theory’s generalizability beyond the board of business resilience management.

### Conclusion

By briefly reviewing the two branches of the grounded theory and concluding the differences between the two by giving a table, this paper portrays the research landscape and research reality in conducting business resilience research in China and Japan. According to the authors’ qualitative research, we spotted that the grounded theory, as a research methodology, can be used in the field of management study, or at least on business resilience research, in China and Japan. The authors propose a revised

**Table 3. Contents of Neutral Grounded Theory by the authors**

	<b>Neutral GT</b>
<b>Epistemology Researcher</b>	Elastic, utilize a wide range of data with objectivity. Should have some or specific preoccupation before start the research process.
<b>Timing of Reviewing Literature</b>	Reviewing previous works is mandatory before kicking-off the research process.
<b>Setting Research Questions</b>	Concreting the research questions before data collection is necessary.
<b>Interview Techniques Coding Process</b>	Using clear-guided manual help to valid research questions. Practicing two major coding stages-substantive coding and theoretical coding, while caring for the reconciling and integrating the concepts from data simultaneously.
<b>Social Relationships</b>	Interviewers (researchers) will be more likely to acquire information with more secrets if they share close relationship with interviewees. Relationship closeness dependent.

type of grounded theory in a hypothetical version based on their research experiences, enabling qualitative management researchers to balance the trade-off between research environment and research objectivity.

However, the authors only deployed the Neutral Grounded Theory in the topic of business resilience of the management discipline ; it is still challenging to conclude that the Neutral Grounded Theory can diffuse to various fields. Additional dimensions that can affect the Neutral Grounded Theory components may raise as future research goes. Hence, future qualitative research will test the generalizability and validity of the Neutral Grounded Theory.

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