



# Grounded Theory Method: a classic approach

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## Agenda

- The Grounded Theory Method
  - Introduction (what is it?)
  - Methodological approach
  - Issues, risks and considerations
  - Q&A



## The Grounded Theory Method

- 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 observations of data”  
Martin and Turner (1986 p.141)
- A grounded theory “is not findings, but rather is an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses” (Glaser, 1998 p.3)  
This set provides a conceptual representation of the behavior and processes enacted by the participants in the substantive area of research



## When to Adopt GTM?

GTM can help when you:

- Have a novel problem or an old problem in a new context (thus the potential for emerging middle-range theory)
  - Usually this problem is of social or psychological nature (socio-technical in IS)
- Need a systematic approach, with a rigorous coding process
- Need an efficient method of research (and you are an effective researcher who can learn and follow a methodology!)
- Have valuable professional experience and need to deal with the bias aspects of this experience
- Are able to be immersed in data
- Want to increase the likelihood of relevance/impact



## GTM's Research Tradition

### Symbolic interactionism

(William James, John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, G.H. Mead, Herbert Blumer)

- Humans act toward things in accordance to the meaning those things have for them. The meaning of those things is created by the social interaction between human actors who, via an interpretive process, assign, accept or modify the received meaning through their own interactions with those things (Blumer, 1969).

### Quantitative methodology and middle-range theories

(Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert King Merton - Columbia University)

- Lazarsfeld was interested in a number of data analysis techniques, including: sampling surveys to gather quantitative data, multivariate analysis, qualitative interviewing, accounting models of sociological factors, and content analysis of communications (Barton, 2001).
- Merton was an expert in middle-range theories applicable to substantive fields. From Merton, Glaser learned theory construction, in particular theoretical coding, which Merton learned from Talcott Parson and others (Glaser, 1998). Glaser also received training in explication of text at the University of Paris (Glaser, 1998).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated the limitations of these traditions in 'closing the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research.'



## Why Grounded Theory?

- Applies a systematic and rigorous coding processes that helps to eliminate speculative, unfounded, assumptions (Martin and Turner 1986; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1997; Sarker et al. 2001; Orlikowski 1993; Urquhart 2001)
- Guards against preconceived ideas and bias (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Urquhart 1997; Glaser 1998; Sarker et al. 2001; Urquhart 2001)
- The researcher does not need to ignore pre-existing theories as in ethnomethodology (Sarker et al. 2001)
- It is a general approach that allows access and processing of a rich variety of data (Glaser 1978, 1998)

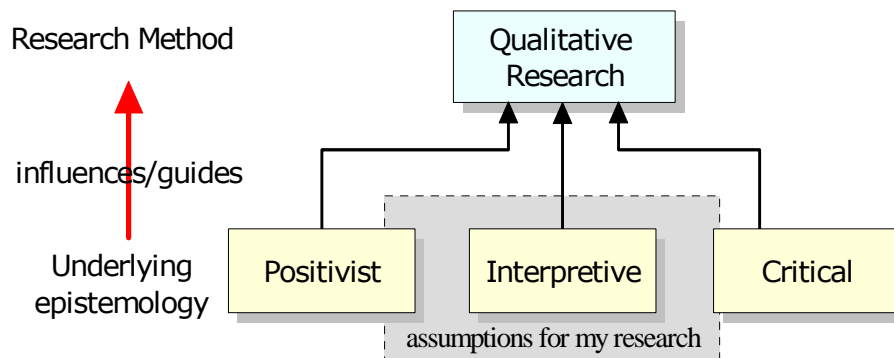


## Why Grounded Theory?

- Values the professional experience of the researcher (Glaser 1998, Urquhart 2001)
- Provides an effective and appropriate way of researching emerging phenomena in its own organisational and human context (Van de Ven & Poole 1989, Orlikowski 1993)
- It is an efficient method of research; efficiency is built into the methodology (Lehmann 2001)
- It can contribute to practice by providing "conceptual grab" to knowledgeable people in the substantive area, contributing to a superior understanding of their own situation (Martin & Turner 1986; Glaser 1998)
- It aims at achieving rigour *and* relevance (Glaser 1978, 1998; Fernández & Lehmann 2004,)



## Epistemological Assumptions



(based on Myers 1997)



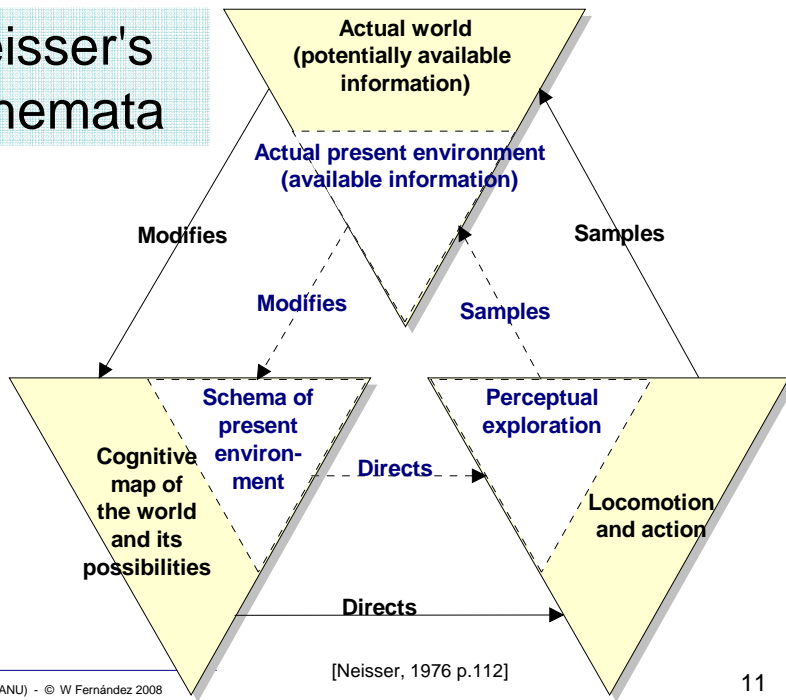
## Two Critical Tenets

- The research must not **start** with a theory to prove
- Grounded theory is discovered through *Constant comparison* between incidents and properties of a category

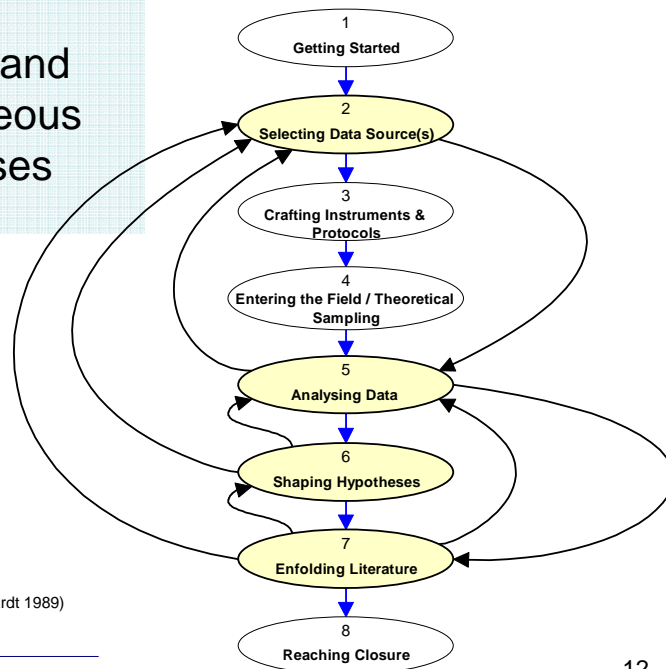


## Part 2: a GTM Research Model

# Neisser's Schemata



# Iterative and Simultaneous Processes



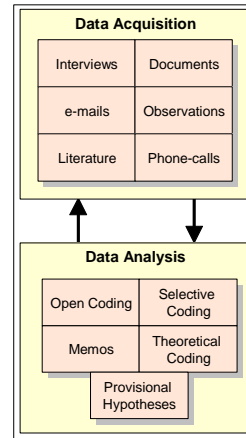
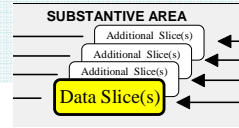
(Following Eisenhardt 1989)





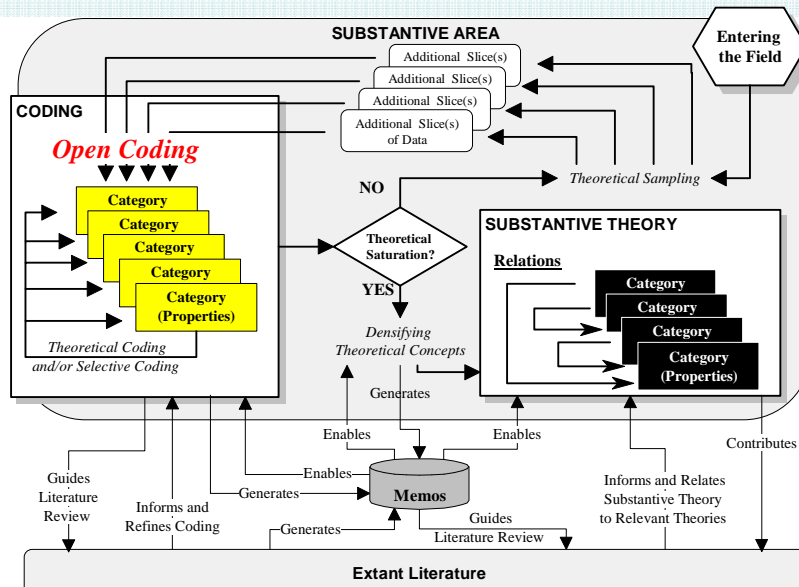
# Data collection example

- Interviews (15 interviews)
- Surveys (MLQ and MLQTeams)
- Phone interviews and phone conferences (15+)
- Project documents (807 documents)
- Electronic correspondence (>4000 e-mails)
- Direct observations (7 major events + many minor events)
- Extant literature



Saturation is important, no numbers

# Open Coding

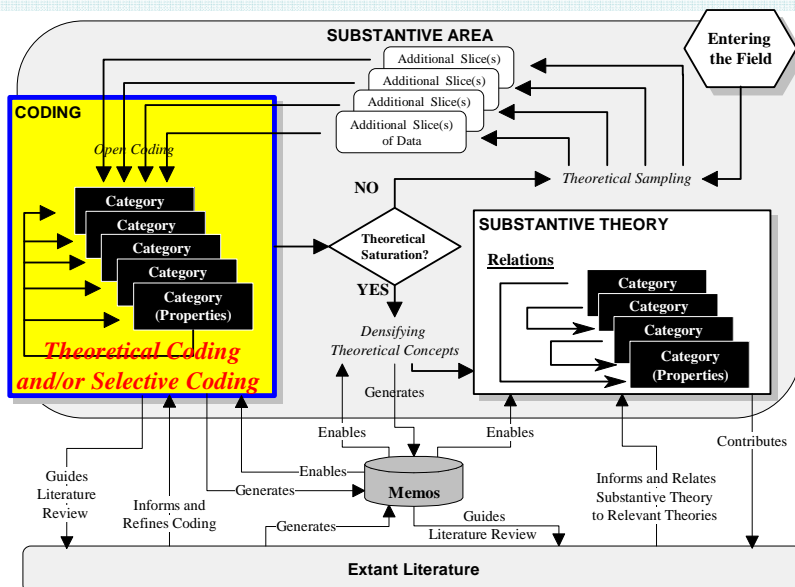


## Example of Open Codes

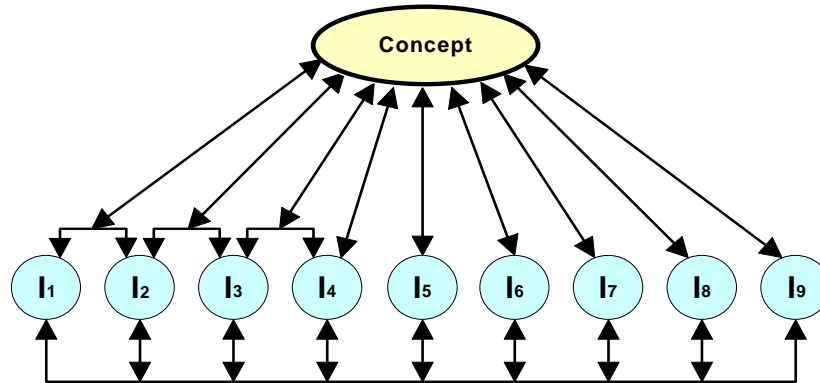
Communication	Complaining	Deliverables - delay
Communication - barriers	Complexity	Deliverables - fixing
Communication - Body-language	Conflicting requirements	Delivery-focus
Communication - Decentring	Conflicting views	Directing personnel
Communication - delay	Confrontational/adversarial attitude	Disagreement
Communication - face-to-face	Consulting with SMEs	Disagreement-intrateam
Communication - filtering	Contempt	Disagreement - Dealing virtually
Communication - how	Contract negotiation	Distance
Communication - immediate access	Controlling change	Documenting
Communication - indirect	Cost of adapting	Dogmatic approach
Communication - informal	Cost of resolving the issue	Emotional behaviour
Communication - Language barriers	Cost of virtual communication	Erosion of patience
Communication - meetings	Crying-wolf	Escalating
Communication - need based	Customer-awareness	Evolution
Communication - openness	Customer focus	Exaggerating
Communication - richness	Customer satisfaction	Expectations
Communication - skills	De-skilling	Explaining
Communication - task-bounded	Dealing with advice	External influences
Communication - Transparency	Dealing with uncertainty	Extra effort
Communication - Virtual	Defects	
Company's interest at heart	Deliverables - Acceptance	
Competitive advantage		



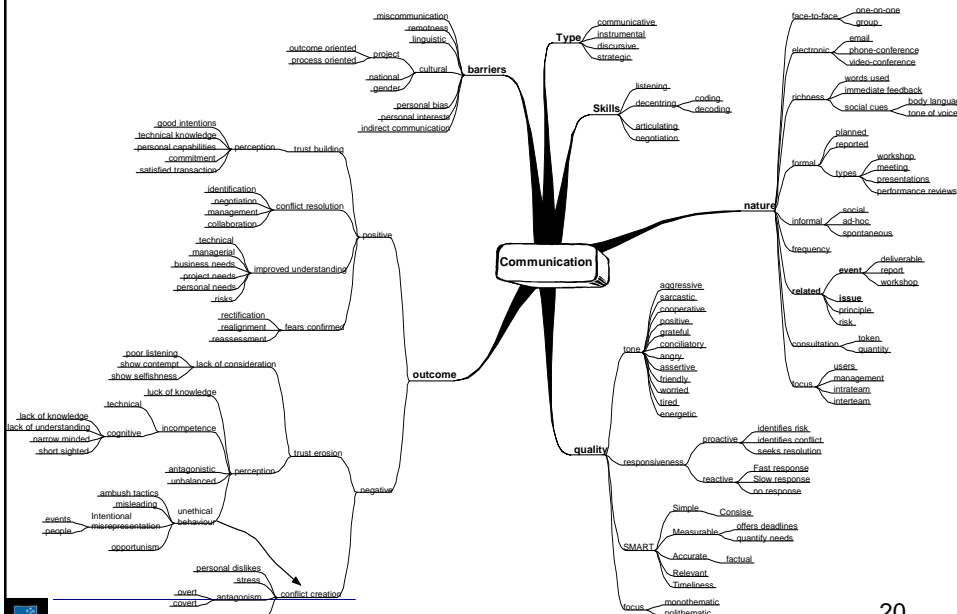
## Theoretical and Selective Coding



# The concept-indicator model

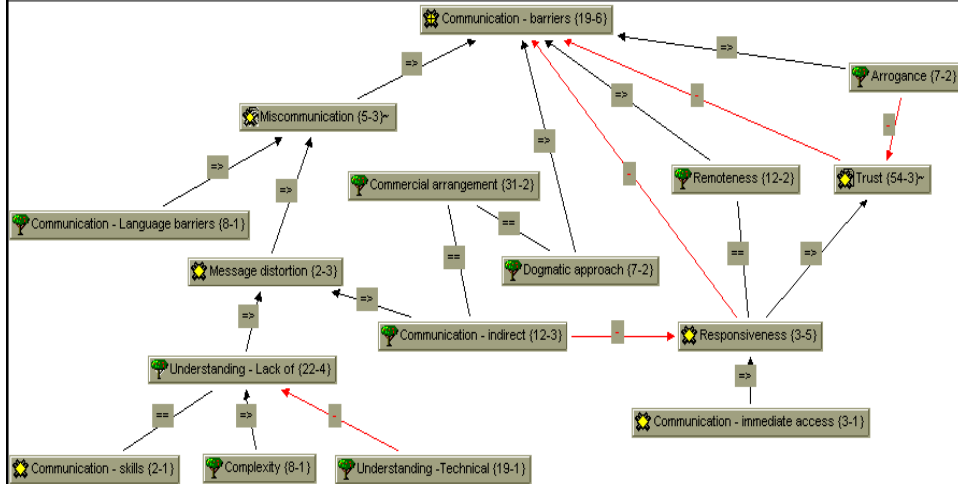


# Mindmap of "Communication"



# Conceptual relationships

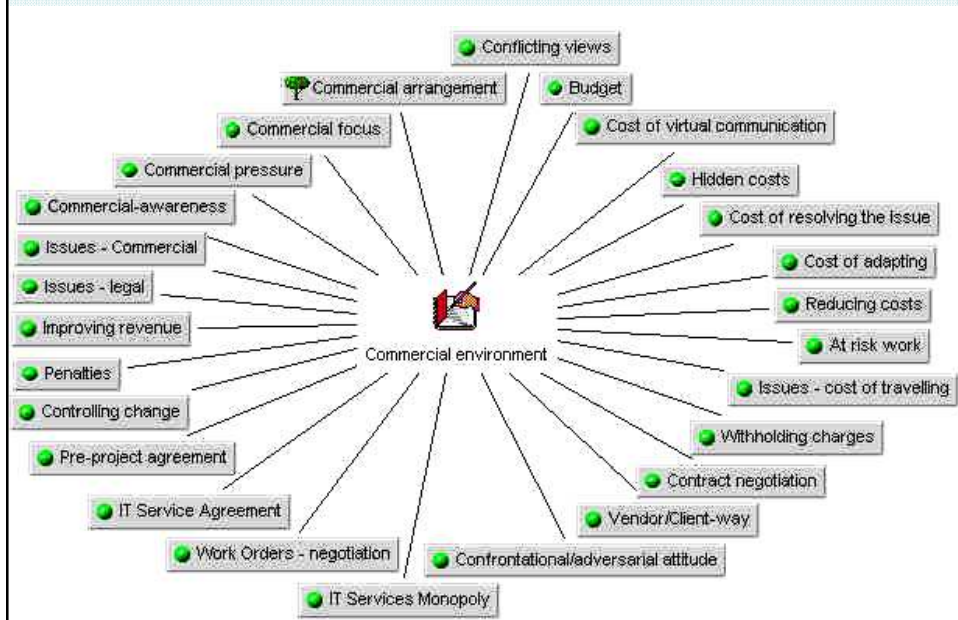
Network view (Atlas.ti)



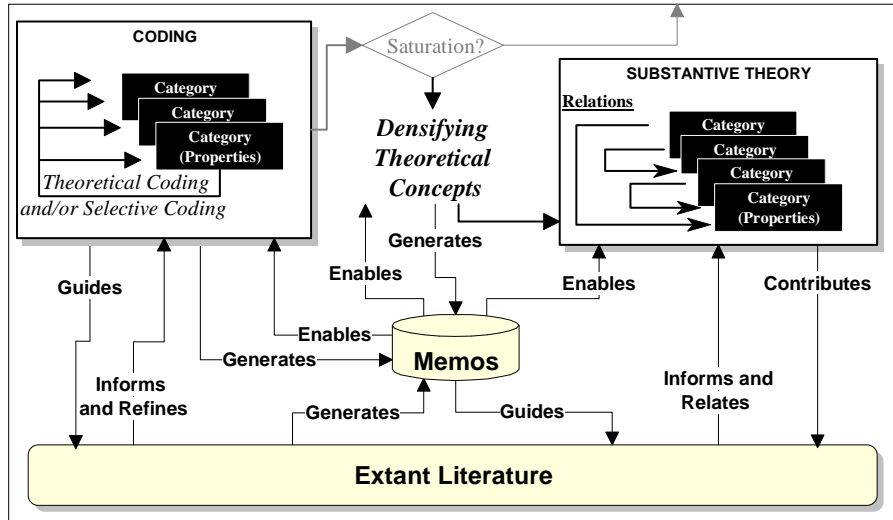
**Key:** "=>" causes  
 "==" is positively related to  
 "-" is negatively related to



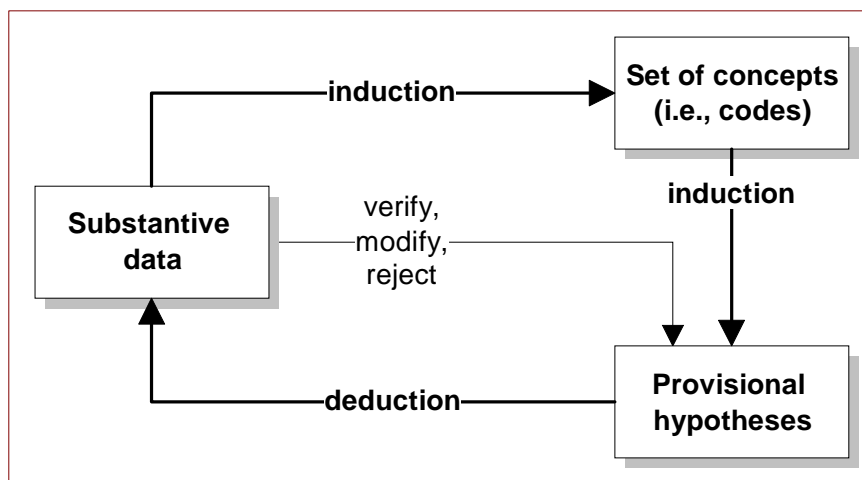
# Example of focused network (Sorting)



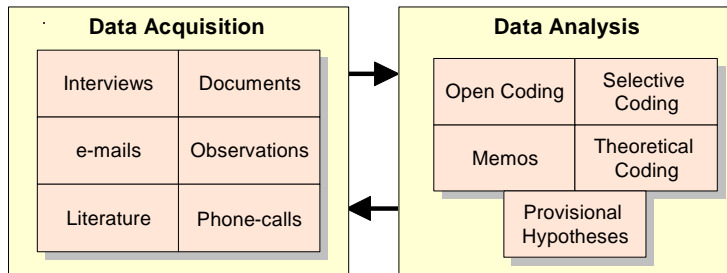
## Extant literature and memos



## Induction and Deduction



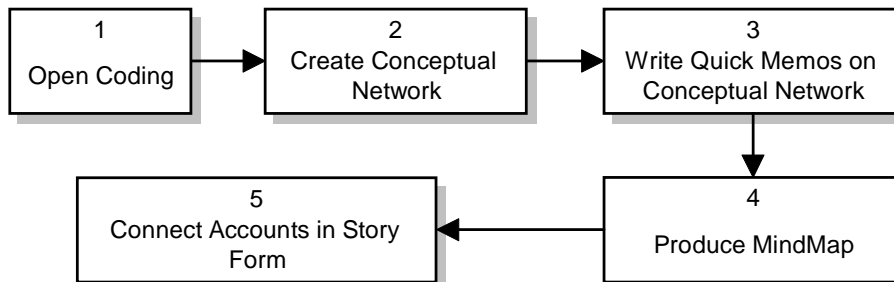
## Iterative data collection & analysis



Sampling is theoretically driven: you are sampling for converging and diverging data to test your emerging propositions and to *saturate* concepts



## Analysis Steps: example only

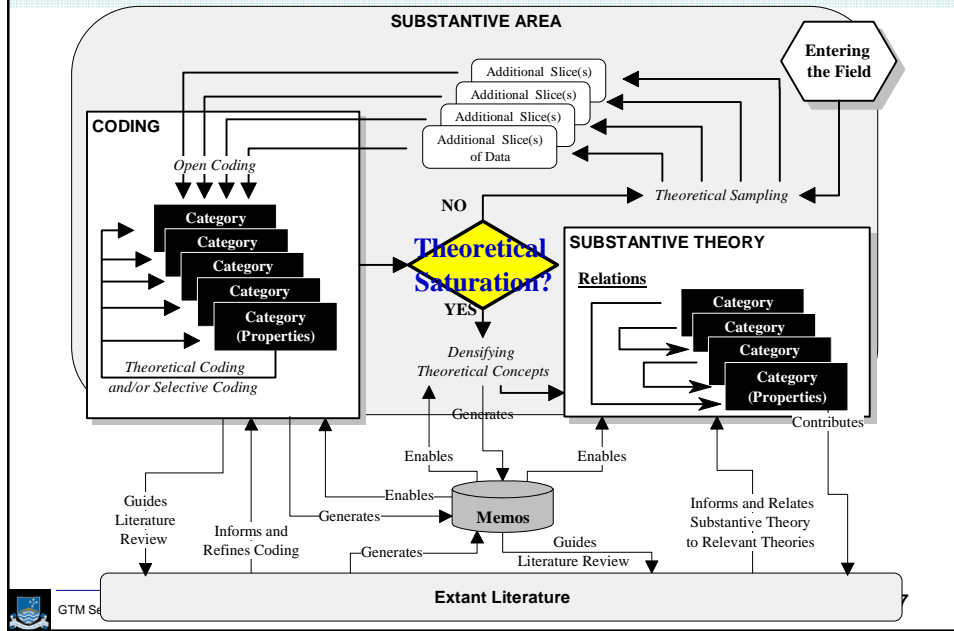


1. Open Coding - Memoing
2. Theoretical Coding - Memoing
3. Memoing
4. Sorting - Memoing
5. Conceptual relationships – theoretical formulation

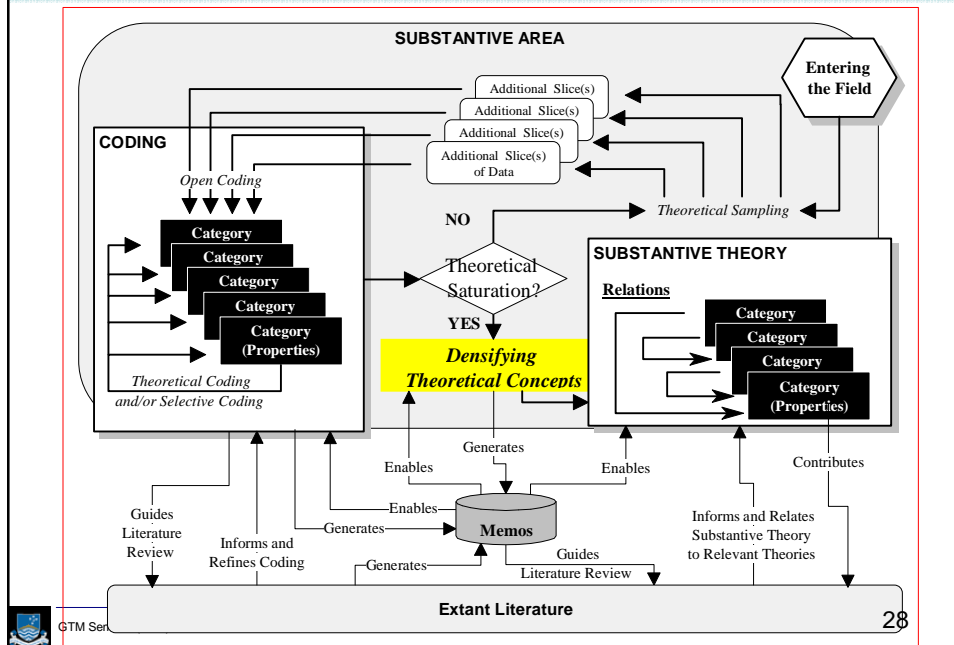
**What's going on?**



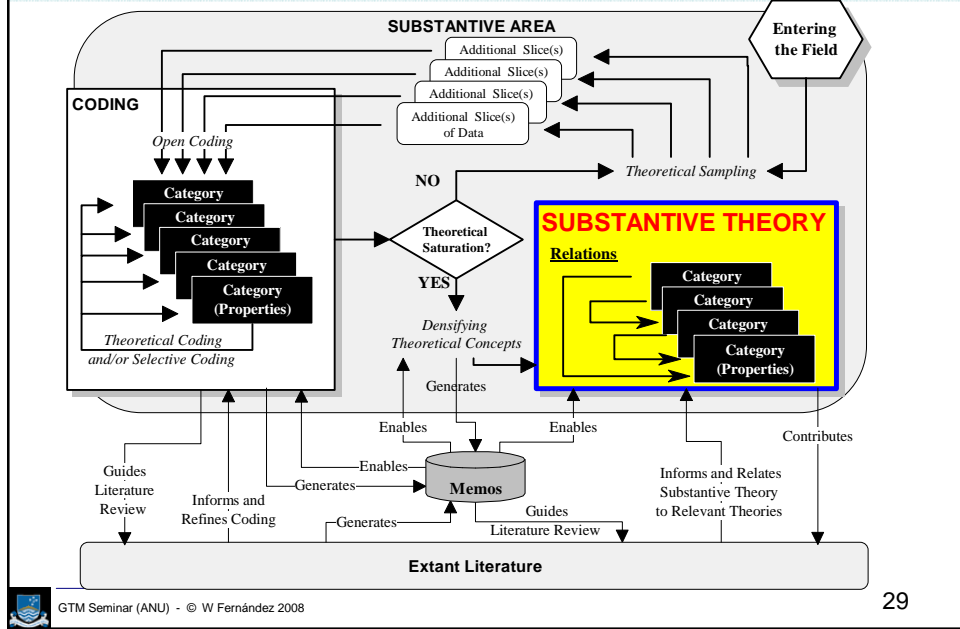
# Theoretical Saturation



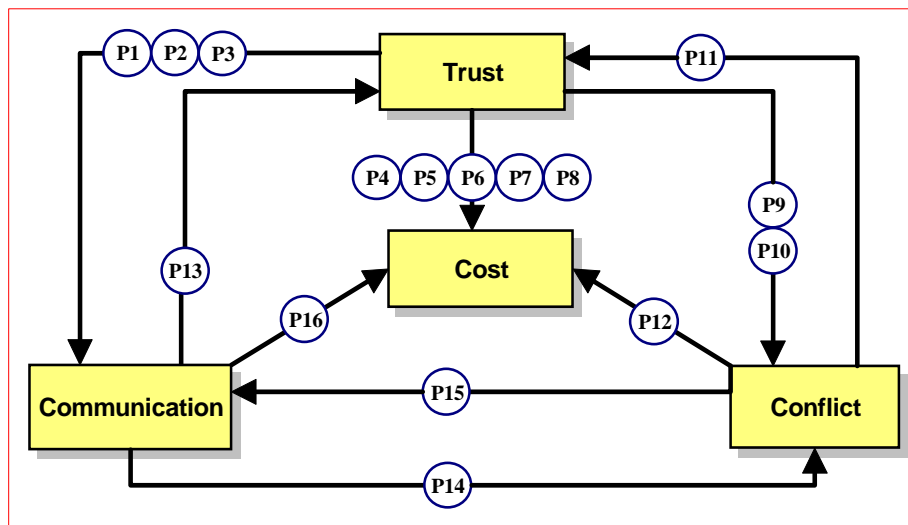
# Theoretical Densification



# Substantive Theory



# The Emerging Model (example only)



## Part 3: Issues, misconceptions & risks

### Demands & Risks (Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001)

- tolerate confusion
- tolerate regression
- trust emerging data without worrying about justification — the data will provide the justification if the researcher adheres to the rigour of the method
- have someone to talk to
- be open to emerging evidence, and ready to act on the new evidence
- *be able to conceptualise - to derive theory from the data*
- be creative —devising new ways of obtaining and handling data, combining the approach of others, or using a tested approach in a different way

## Two Extra Risks

- The researcher's ability to deal with intensive, time consuming and all-absorbing work
- *Minus-mentoring* - Stern (1994)
  - networking with GT researchers – external supervisor?
  - participating in relevant discussion groups
  - reading the wide Grounded Theory bibliography



## GTM sources from Glaser & Strauss

- Glaser, B.G. *Organizational Scientists: their professional careers* The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis, 1964, pp. xvii, 140.
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## The key Classic GTM Texts

Glaser, B.G., and Strauss, A.L. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* Aldine Publishing Company, New York, 1967, pp. x, 271.

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## Conclusion

- GTM appropriateness
- GTM cycle
- GTM Risks and Requirements



???



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