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Abstract

Recently developed and growing in popularity in Europe, Multi-Grounded Theory is seldom used in the United States today. In order to promote the research method, this article traces the academic origins of Multi-Grounded Theory and, via a personal reflection, provides an example of successful employment of this approach. Multi-Grounded Theory is recommended to strong, organized doctoral candidates and other researchers who are able to navigate the combination of qualitative and quantitative data encouraged by this approach.

Utilizing Multi-Grounded Theory in a Dissertation: Reflections and Insights

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Recently developed and growing in popularity in Europe, Multi-Grounded Theory is seldom used in the United States today. In order to promote the research method, this article traces the academic origins of Multi-Grounded Theory and, via a personal reflection, provides an example of successful employment of this approach. Multi-Grounded Theory is recommended to strong, organized doctoral candidates and other researchers who are able to navigate the combination of qualitative and quantitative data encouraged by this approach. Keywords: Grounded Theory, Multi-Grounded Theory, Doctoral Dissertations, Qualitative Research

Introduction

My experience as a doctoral student was influenced by my circumstances and the culture of my institution: a large, public land grant university in the Southeastern region of the United States. Faculty in my department, largely educational psychology faculty, provided the qualitative and quantitative research training not only for the college housed in my department, but also for the university at large. My first doctoral advisor had expertise in quantitative research methods and some familiarity with qualitative research as well. Thus, I was provided with a strong theoretical foundation appropriate for the research I undertook. There was a bias in my department in favor of quantitative research—despite the fact that both quantitative and qualitative research can be considered forms of empirical research as "empirical research is based on observed and measured phenomena and derives knowledge from actual experience rather than from theory or belief" (La Salle University, 2017, para. 1). Despite this bias, however, I took two courses in qualitative research methods; one surveyed basic theoretical foundations, and the other required me to collect data. At the time I began my dissertation, I had not yet engaged in data analysis, major research projects, or work requiring peer review. Thus, this article reflects the experiences of a young researcher with a thorough theoretical grounding in research methods but a need for the advice of a mentor in actual data analysis.

The work of the academic is based on tradition. In the academe, adherence to style guides, organizational conventions, and time-honored research methods is the norm; deviation is seldom tolerated. Yet simultaneously, the work of the researcher depends on the discovery of something new. At times, the quest for new knowledge can overrule the traditions of academia, making way for new research methods that allow for more knowledge acquisition. One such new method is Multi-Grounded Theory. Because this method has not yet been extensively used in the United States, it is understandable that doctoral students, faculty advisors, and other researchers might be hesitant to employ it.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to assure graduate students, faculty, and other researchers of the benefits of Multi-Grounded Theory. The history and definition of Multi-Grounded Theory are provided for context, demonstrating Multi-Grounded Theory's similarities to familiar methodological approaches. I then provide my own experience as an example for researchers interested in employing Multi-Grounded Theory (MGT); this account of my own experience provides a description of the research process, noting the benefits and challenges inherent to the approach.

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Review of the Literature

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The Development of Grounded Theory

In 1967, sociologists Glaser and Strauss published the seminal work describing and defining Grounded Theory: *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The premise of this work is that researchers can derive theory directly from data, rather than interpreting data through the lens of a pre-established theoretical framework. In Glaser and Strauss' words,

> Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. *Generating a theory involves a process of research.* (1967, p. 6)

Indeed, Glaser and Strauss (1967) write that "theory as a process" (p. 9) is the essence of Grounded Theory (GT). Only if theory proceeds from data can researchers be truly applying GT. Thus, foreign to the idea of GT is the practice of making assumptions or forming hypotheses before collecting or analyzing data. This does not mean, however, that GT researchers follow a process completely different to that of other forms of qualitative research. Like most other qualitative research methodologies, GT requires a number of steps, including formation of a research question, selection of data, data collection, data analysis, and formation of a conclusion (Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014).

With their development of GT, Glaser and Strauss (1967) worked diligently to overcome the idea that qualitative research was less rigorous and less systematic than quantitative research. They accomplished this by requiring a strict focus on the data themselves, as well as by outlining a specific coding and categorizing process by which to analyze the data. By insisting that theory must be formed from data, they also encouraged pragmatism and practicality; this approach requires that theories unsupported by data be discarded in favor of theories that are supported by what researchers can observe.

Despite the obvious benefits of such an approach, Kenny and Fourie (2014) report that even the development of GT could not reverse the stigma against qualitative research during the 1960s—the prevailing attitude condemned qualitative research as a pseudo-scientific practice lacking in objectivity and rigor, and this attitude remained in force until the 1980s. However, GT, an indisputably rigorous, systematic approach to qualitative research, eventually served as a catalyst for a major paradigm shift across academic disciplines. That is, GT proved qualitative research to be academically rigorous. Indeed, it is now one of the most commonly utilized qualitative research methodologies (Chenail, 2009).

Ironically, soon after the publication of *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss began to show unmistakable symptoms of an ideological divide. Kenny and Fourie (2014) document the separate publications of Glaser and Strauss during the 1970s and 1980s. Each researcher possessed a different voice and a different conception of GT, which became particularly apparent when Strauss collaborated with Juliet Corbin to produce a book describing Strauss' view of GT that departed from Glaser's in that Strauss allowed for a review of relevant literature before data collection and analysis and, more importantly, according to Kenny and Fourie (2014), Strauss and Corbin created "a highly analytical and prescriptive framework for coding, designed to deduce theory from data systematically" (p. 4).

In response, Kenny and Fourie (2014) report that Glaser vigorously defended his own viewpoint, regularly asserting that Strauss had appropriated GT and changed it almost beyond recognition. In addition to calling on Strauss to recall his 1990 publication *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Glaser soon emerged with a rebuttal

book, designed to demonstrate the differences between his conception of GT and Strauss'. The purpose of this 1992 publication, indicated by its title, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence vs. Forcing,* was to stress the importance of allowing theories to emerge naturally from data and the detriments of imposing "artificial" categories on the data under analysis. According to Kenny and Fourie (2014), Glaser's view came to be known as classic GT, while Strauss' was eventually called Straussian GT. In the early 2000s, these viewpoints were joined by a third, known as constructivist GT. This variant of GT, developed by Kathy Charmaz, who had studied GT with both Glaser and Strauss, posits that researchers do not "discover" theories from data; they construct them from the data, filtering them through the lens of what they already know and understand. This approach to GT may, however, render it more difficult for researchers to address researcher bias, which is a factor to be considered in any usage of GT (Wyatt, 2013).

Kenny and Fourie (2014) conclude that although each variant of GT is distinct from the others, all varieties resemble each other closely enough to be termed "Grounded Theory." Indeed, since Glaser, Charmaz, and Corbin are still living and publishing, the ideological debate continues to simmer. It is apparent that GT is still changing and developing.

The Development of Multi-Grounded Theory

One significant development of GT is the emergence of MGT. In 2010, Goldkuhl and Cronholm outlined a qualitative data analysis method that had clearly been developed from GT, but that differed from it in certain essential aspects. Drawing on Strauss' "important steps away from a pure inductivist position" (p. 192), Goldkuhl and Cronholm envisioned MGT as an opportunity to draw on existing theories while still inductively analyzing data—allowing the data to speak for themselves, drawing the researchers gradually toward a conclusion, yet still permitting the influence of existing theories that do not conflict with the data at hand.

MGT is so named because qualitative research following this model must be grounded in three different aspects, as described by Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010):

- empirical data (preferably mainly through an inductive approach)— empirical grounding;
- preexisting theories (well selected for the theorized phenomena)— theoretical grounding; and
- an explicit congruence within the theory itself (between elements in the theory)—internal grounding (p. 192).

Classical GT makes use only of "empirical data" grounding and requires researchers to delay the study of relevant literature (Thornberg, 2011). Goldkuhl's and Cronholm's (2010) MGT allows researchers to ground their research in previously developed theories, then examine the validity of the theory they have developed directly from the data. Though these additional groundings represent significant departures from classical GT (Glaser, 2014), Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010) intended to harness the strengths of GT—which they described as its "systematic procedure of data analysis," its "theoretical sampling process, whereby new data are gathered that enrich the evolving theory," and its "automatic" grounding of theory in data (p. 191)—while leaving behind its weaknesses in the creation of MGT. The weaknesses left behind in the transformation of GT to MGT include, in Goldkuhls and Cronholm's (2010) words, "slavery to the data," (p. 190), or the uncritical acceptance of data as accurate, and the reality that "if one ignores existing theory, there is a risk of reinventing the wheel," (p. 191) or ignoring the potentially useful work other researchers have already done. In its essence, therefore, MGT is not GT. However, MGT incorporates GT, in that MGT allows researchers

to immerse themselves in data, search for themes while coding, and develop or discover theories directly from the data. MGT extends beyond GT in its emphasis on utilizing outside sources to achieve triangulation and to enhance the researcher's understanding of the data at hand. While discussing the use of established theories, Cronholm (2004) states, "We claim that theory development should aim at knowledge integration and synthesis" (p. 2). Cronholm's (2004) view of theory generation in MGT is that the great strength of GT, an inductive approach, and the antithesis of GT, a deductive approach based on previous theory, should be harnessed together in the production of theory.

Cronholm (2004) writes that "theory generation embraces the stages of inductive coding, conceptual refinement, building categorical structures and theory condensation" (p. 1). Cronholm (2004) explains the origins of the basic tenets of MGT. Inductive coding, Cronholm (2004) writes, is incorporated from GT; this allows MGT researchers to benefit from the opportunity to approach the data with an "open mind" and "without constraints from pre-categorisations" (pp. 1-2).

Conceptual refinement, according to Cronholm's (2004) explanation, is an opportunity for researchers to critically evaluate the data that they have gathered rather than dutifully believe everything that research subjects report. This may be taken as a reaction against the tendency of GT researchers to be completely subservient to their data.

Cronholm (2004) writes that the next stage of theory generation, building categorical structures, is parallel to the axial coding step of GT. In order to build categorical structures, MGT researchers must organize their data into a defined set of categories. Unlike the GT process, researchers do not invent their own categories during this phase.

Theory condensation, according to Cronholm (2004), is similar to the process of GT's selective coding. The MGT stage of theory condensation is rather self-explanatory, as researchers at this stage have already identified recurring themes in the data; now they must distill these themes into a single, over-arching theme from which the theory will emerge. Once MGT researchers have generated a preliminary theory, they must then compare it against existing theories, according to Cronholm (2004). If a new theory is out of step with the existing theories, researchers may choose to alter or discard it (which is possible because theories generated via MGT are still malleable at this stage).

After comparing the new theory with previous theories, Cronholm (2004) writes, "[MGT researchers must validate the new theory. This can be accomplished by ensuring] that the theory is in accordance with empirical observations of the world" (p. 3). Only after researchers have determined that their newly generated theory is both internally valid (that is, consistent and fully explainable by the data) and externally valid (that is, in line with what the researchers know of the world outside of their data sample) have they finished the work of MGT.

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One Researcher's Experience

For this paper, I use my experience as a case study and an example of how MGT may be appropriately used. While I am aware that I am not the only researcher to have employed MGT in a doctoral dissertation (De Feo, 2015; Gwilliam, 2013), and though MGT is an appropriate research method for research well beyond the doctoral dissertation (Coursaris, Van Osch, & Balogh, 2013; Goldkuhl & Lind, 2010; Skinner & Mansour, 2008; Rittgen, 2007), I

share my experience here as a means of illustrating how others may become competent in applying MGT.

In this study, I provide my own insight and perspective on utilizing MGT in my doctoral dissertation. Little is known about MGT, an approach recently developed in Europe and seldom yet used in the United States. Consequently, as one of the first individuals to utilize MGT, I have provided my experiences to demonstrate the results of using a novel approach in a dissertation. I believe that the experience of conducting research utilizing MGT is a valuable one for doctoral students completing their dissertations and focusing on novel methodological approaches. Since this method is beginning to attract interest, it is also worthwhile for other researchers to familiarize themselves with it. Thus, the recounted story is intended to encourage future scholars, students, professionals, and others to understand and how and when to utilize MGT appropriately. While it is impossible to recall the in-depth memories used as resources for this paper in perfect detail, my experiences focus less on the process of utilizing the theory, and more on what I accomplished with the theory and how I accomplished it. My ability to tell the story of why I used MGT, how I used it, and what the outcomes were for my dissertation are less affected by time and human error than my recollections of a specific memory would be (i.e., a narrative recounting my completion of a manuscript dissertation). To ensure that the information was accurate and reliable, I performed an interview conducted by one of my graduate students. They developed and asked questions based on their understanding of the dissertation process and the knowledge they knew about MGT. I also reviewed documents such as my dissertation and notes during the time of my dissertation development process. I ensured a high standard of relational ethics by not including the names of the individuals that I discuss in the next section of this report.

Deciding a Study Topic and Appropriate Methodological Approach

When I first began to think about the topic for my dissertation, I identified three distinct purposes for my study. The first purpose of the study was to investigate the core knowledge and competencies needed for executive leadership in higher education administration as perceived by the university presidents who had earned doctoral degrees with specializations in higher education leadership. The second purpose was to gather information on university presidents' perceptions of their training related to their preparation for the university presidency. The final purpose was to propose a theoretical model of program development in higher education leadership. I needed to find a methodology that would enable me to address all these areas. Though I was familiar with phenomenology, case studies, GT, and other qualitative methodologies, none of those approaches would enable me to address the complex problems I was trying to solve. GT seemed to be the closest match, given that it would enable me to create a theory. However, GT felt limiting because it did not give me the freedom to use previous information from other sources to develop the theory. After engaging in a literature search that was focused on finding information related to GT, I stumbled across Cronholm and Goldkuhl's 2003 conference paper, "Multi-Grounded Theory–Adding Theoretical Grounding to Grounded Theory." Excited about the discovery of this methodological approach, I ran over to my initial dissertation chair's office to share what I had found. Once my advisor had had an opportunity to read the paper, he told me "now you're becoming a real researcher." That was an "aha" moment for me; I had not only learned to locate and apply an appropriate methodology for my project—I had also begun to understand research methods in a more sophisticated sense. Though other students may have experienced opposition, I was encouraged in my decision to use MGT.

One of the hallmarks of a strong researcher is the ability to make an independent selection of the appropriate methodological tools for any given study. Although I doubt that I

possessed particularly strong skills in comparison to my other student colleagues when entering the dissertation process, I was determined to produce a high-quality dissertation. In my case, one of the significant factors allowing me to do so was the ability to identify the optimal methodological approach for my study. Certain approaches are simply inappropriate for particular investigations; sometimes quantitative tools are required to answer a question, while at other times only qualitative tools will provide the answers the researcher seeks. So, when I identified a primarily qualitative research approach that was appropriate for my study, one that would allow me to gain the information I needed to answer my questions, my professor reviewed the methodology, saw that it was sound, and enthusiastically allowed me to move forward. Because I demonstrated that I had a thorough understanding of MGT I gained the opportunity to utilize a cutting-edge methodology developed only a few years prior to the time I began my dissertation and used very seldom in the United States (MGT was developed in Europe in the early 2000s; I earned my doctorate in 2011). Though I was initially unsure whether utilizing a unique methodology would help me or negatively impact the way in which my work was evaluated, I am now glad to report that my work has never been viewed adversely as a result of its reliance on MGT.

Inductivism in the Design of Theory

In my dissertation study, the initial "inductive research phase" of MGT involved analyzing quantitative data provided by the American Council on Education's (ACE) study published as *The American College President: 2007 Edition*. There were 2,148 presidents who participated in this study. Of these, 891 identified themselves as having earned a terminal degree in education or higher education (American Council on Education Center for Policy Analysis, 2007). After sorting out these two groups, I conducted a secondary analysis to ascertain if and how these differences in educational backgrounds related to the participants' perceptions of their preparedness for the presidency.

In addition to other questions, the ACE study included the question, "In which of the following areas did you feel insufficiently prepared for your first presidency? The question included 17 variables: (1) Academic issues (e.g., curriculum changes), (2) Accountability/ assessment of student learning, (3) Athletics, (4) Budget/financial management, (5) Capital improvement projects, (6) Community relations, (7) Crisis management, (8) Enrollment management, (9) Entrepreneurial ventures, (10) Faculty issues, (11) Fund raising, (12) Governing board relations, (13) Government relations, (14) Media/public relations, (15) Personnel issues (excluding faculty), (16) Risk management/legal issues, and (17) Strategic planning. These competencies have been identified, developed, and refined over 20 years through interviews and feedback from college and university presidents.

I worked with one of my instructors to conduct a t-test to determine the extent of the differences and the degree to which these two groups of presidents believed they were prepared for their first presidency in these seventeen competency areas. As I had limited skills in quantitative data analysis, my instructor assisted me in running this test utilizing SPSS data analysis software. The results concluded that out of the 17 variables in the study, presidents with doctorates in education or higher education felt statistically significantly more prepared than presidents with doctoral backgrounds in other disciplines to address issues related to enrollment management. In contrast, presidents with doctorates in education or higher education felt statistically significantly less prepared than presidents with doctoral backgrounds in other disciplines to address issues related to fundraising.

While not statistically significant, presidents with a terminal degree in education/ higher education felt more prepared to assess student-learning outcomes versus presidents who held a terminal degree outside of education. A chi-square analysis indicated that presidents with a

terminal degree in education/higher education felt statistically significantly less prepared for fundraising versus presidents who held a terminal degree outside of education. Findings also indicated that presidents with a terminal degree in education/higher education were statistically significantly more prepared for enrollment management duties versus presidents who held a terminal degree outside of education. This information served as the basis of the inductive part of my study.

Deductivism in the Design of Theory

The second unique aspect of MGT is that it also permits a deductive approach, allowing researchers to use other conceptual and theoretical frameworks within the approach. While researchers must still ask questions to generate a theory based on the results of the data, this process is not as limiting as a pure GT approach. Researchers are able to apply outside information and literature to inform their data collection processes, utilizing data and theoretical frameworks beyond their own research. In my dissertation I identified several key conceptual frameworks outside my own work that represented the deductive approach for the study. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks included in this study derived from Stuver's (2006) student expectations, Fink's (2005) curriculum design, Hammons's and Miller's (2006) presidential perceptions, and Herdlein's (2004) graduate preparation of new professionals. The information from the inductive and deductive aspects of my dissertation provided me with a starting point from which to think about my topic. However, as I would have if I had utilized traditional GT, I relied on the initial phases of research inherent to my methodology instead of a comprehensive literature review, which gave me a sufficient sense of the directions my qualitatively-oriented dissertation could take.
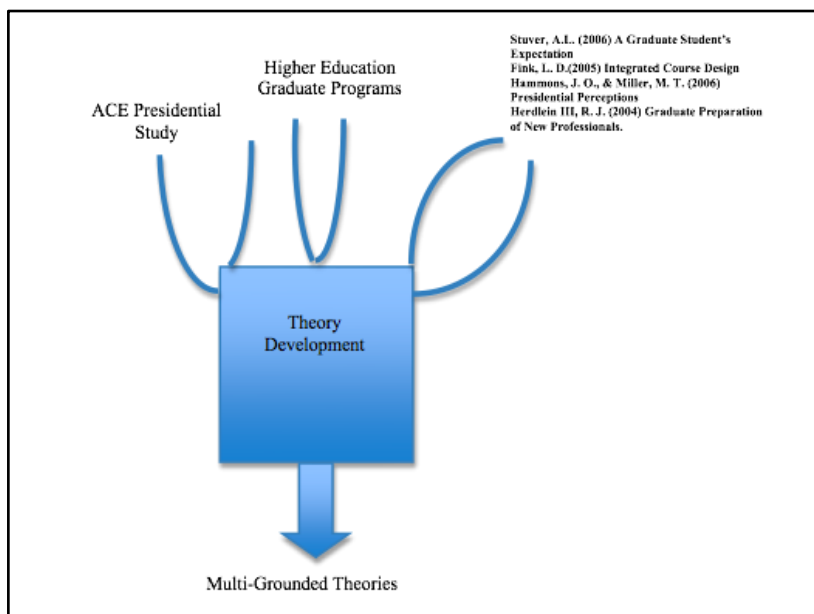

Figure 1. Empirical data (ACE Presidential Study), Research Interest (Higher Education Programs) and Existing Conceptual Frameworks based on Goldkuhl and Cronholm, (2003).

Grounding the Theory

To ground the theory, I utilized multiple data sources to confirm the data results. Using multiple sources enhanced the study by allowing for structural corroboration. Eisner (1998)

describes structural corroboration as "the confluence of multiple sources of evidence or the recurrence of instances that support a conclusion" (p. 55). The sources I used were field notes taken during participant interviews, memoing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) ideas developed during the research process, audiotaping, and videotaping the interviews.

All data from the participants' interviews, my journal entries, and relevant literature were used as a priori codes. These were combined into a single Rich text document and then imported into TamsAnalyzer, an online qualitative data analysis software. From the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, I compiled a start list of codes to look for in the data. There was a total of 80 "a priori" codes that were found to be applicable to the study. These issues were identified from the "deductive" theories as important to curriculum development and presidential leadership. These codes were numbered, and all instances were coded in the data. The start list included: skills, knowledge, competency, program characteristics, development, curriculum, and professional development. As data were coded, the start list began to emerge. Recurring themes not included on the start list or in the relevant literature were coded as emerging codes as well.

In addition to using the start list, the "coding incident to incident" approach advocated by Charmaz (2006) was implemented. This process allowed me to compare like incidents experienced by different participants. This procedure helped to further corroborate ideas developed earlier in the coding process. These "axial" codes, which are codes that emerge out of the data, helped to solidify the identity of emergent properties. Emergent codes were compared to one another to further narrow down the amount of redundant codes and therefore create substantive codes. The results of this process allowed for theoretical coding, which Charmaz (2006) describes as substantive codes being integrated together creating a theory.

I journaled from the beginning of the dissertation process to the end of the study's analysis. I was admonished to write down notes throughout the analysis process. These notes were written particularly for my own use. During the process, I wrote about my presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process. The self-reflective journals entries helped me reflect on my decisions. Throughout the study, I reviewed my journal entries to examine my personal assumptions and goals. That allowed me to be able to honestly present my belief system and subjectivities to the reader.

It was important that all aspects of my research design were validated. The ACE survey that I used had been pilot tested and administered for more than 20 years, so no tests for validity or reliability were required. However, to validate the interview protocol I enlisted the expertise of three senior academic administrators and faculty to review pilot questions for evidence of content validity. After making revisions based on the expert panels' response I conducted field interviews with six academic administrators. I also conducted two focus group interviews, which included both higher and adult education faculty and higher education administration students who were considered at "ABD" status.

In qualitative research it is commonly not the goal to seek generalizability. However, in the case of GT, generalizability can be partly achieved through abstraction. Abstraction is a process used by the researcher where they separate key themes throughout the data. The abstraction process is conducted throughout the entire course of the research. The more abstract the concepts, the wider the theory's applicability. GT outlines the conditions through which a phenomenon has been found in the data. A series of the situations to which the data applies, or references is identified and then specified in the study. In using the developed theory, future practitioners or others may encounter somewhat different or not-quite-the-same situations. Future practitioners or others still may wish to incorporate the theory to inform and guide the development of their own epistemological approaches. They will discover on their own the extent to which the theory applies to their particular setting. A grounded theory is reproducible in the limited sense that it is verifiable. Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggested that,

One can take the propositions that are made explicit or left implicit, whatever the case may be, and test them. However, no theory that deals with social psychological phenomena is actually reproducible in the sense that new situations can be found whose conditions *exactly* match those of the original study, although major conditions may be similar. (p. 15)

In my dissertation I decided to use a themed argument approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The themed argument approach allowed me to share the theory that emerged from the data. Evidence of the data was illustrated by presenting several examples addressing each identified theme. I developed a substantive-applied theoretical framework in my dissertation, which is a grounded theory that addresses a specific area of social science research (Charmaz, 2006). However, the actual findings from those interviewed may not be generalizable in the traditional sense of the word.

I used two triangulation methods to assist in validating the study. The methods were analyst triangulation and theory/perspective triangulation. Patton (2002) describes analyst triangulation as using multiple (two or more) outside analysts to evaluate the study findings. This was conducted by inviting two faculty mentors from my dissertation committee to review the results of the analysis.

Theory/perspective triangulation is described by Patton (2002) as using multiple lenses or theories to interpret the data. This process was completed during the data collection stage when I used several conceptual frameworks to inform the data collection process discussed in the deductive phase of the study. Those frameworks were then used to provide priori codes to inform the analysis process.

In addition, follow-up email interviews were conducted for purposes of member checking and data validation. By conducting a member check, the presidents had the ability to review the researcher's observations to ensure that it correctly reflected the presidents' feelings and responses. The second interview allowed me to ask additional questions based on the responses from the initial interview.

There were some limitations associated with my study. The first was that my dissertation was limited to the university presidents that had earned doctoral degrees with a concentration in Higher Education. The dissertation included only presidents who served regionally accredited academic institutions that used "university" in their names. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to presidents at all institutions. The research instrument used to collect data was face-to-face qualitative interviews, which allowed me to assess opinions and feelings of the participants in-depth. This approach, however, could have allowed me to inadvertently include my personal bias in questioning. Although I used standard processes to overcome any bias, this is still a limitation in this type of research.

I addressed the following research epistemological perspectives. They included the traditional scientific research criteria, and the social construction and constructivist criteria. The traditional scientific research criteria approach generally emphasizes rigorous and systematic data collection procedures, using multiple coders and calculating intercoder consistency to demonstrate the validity and reliability of theme analysis (Patton, 2002). MGT addressed each of these concerns by using a thoroughly outlined process that includes unitizing and coding. The other approach that this study addressed is the social construction and constructivist criteria. This approach required the researcher to provide information acknowledging bias, establishing trustworthiness, and showing that at least one of four triangulation methods were conducted.

Challenges of the Dissertation Process

The process of writing a doctoral dissertation is inherently challenging. Much of the difficulty is due to the fact that this is generally the student's first time leading a major research project. Students are transitioning from novice to expert throughout this process. They are expected to move from seeking the counsel and assurance of their professors to being successful in defending their own choices, as was the case in my own research process. Although mastering any research methodology requires commitment and effort, MGT may present unique challenges to the novice researcher because of the magnitude of the studies it tends to inspire.

The qualitative side of my study took some time to execute, as I faced the challenge of raising funds (from different units within my university) to travel and interview presidents face-to-face at their institutions or at academic conferences. In all, I traveled to five states and interviewed 13 presidents. This sometimes-entailed road trips and multiple interviews on the same day; at other times, it necessitated flights and hotel stays. Yet it taught me, as a novice researcher, that many individuals in the academy are willing to help and support doctoral students if they ask, whether in financial matters or in other ways (i.e., help with transcribing, assistance with funds for travel to conduct your research, etc.).

Although the methodology I selected did not prove frustrating or discouraging to me, I did experience my share of struggles while performing research (as I believe I would have if I had employed any other method). The analysis of the data itself was a challenge, as I had little previous experience in analyzing data. Once I had collected the data and reviewed the information, I was unsure of how to proceed. Because my classes had been theoretical in nature, rather than applied, it was difficult for me to wrap my mind around analyzing data and making sense of it. By that time, I had switched dissertation advisors, as my previous advisor was in the midst of completing his tenure process that year. He felt that he was no longer in a position to guide such an ambitious project (upon completion, my dissertation was 415 pages long). Therefore, I recruited another dissertation chair, a respected faculty member who had recently stepped down as dean of my college. We clicked immediately; soon I began working with her weekly to learn what I needed to know to employ MGT successfully. She became my dissertation committee chair after I had defended my proposal (i.e., a draft of my first three chapters of my dissertation, which included introduction, literature review, and methodology sections). Because of the relationship I had with her throughout my doctoral studies, she was intimately familiar with my dissertation topic and the methodological approach I was attempting to use. Of particular note, she was well-versed in GT, giving her a foundation from which to understand the nuanced differences between GT and MGT. Though I normally worked well with my her—she knew me to be a driven, enthusiastic, "in your face" student who would voluntarily set up regular weekly meetings to share progress updates—I began avoiding her after about a month of working with her. Two weeks of avoidance led her to believe that something was amiss, so she called me to find out what the problem was. Embarrassed, I admitted that I was having difficulty analyzing my data. I was not suffering from writer's block; rather, I was facing mounds of data with no clear idea of how to process them. My advisor, who happened to be one of the foremost scholars in the area of mentoring in educational leadership, as exemplified by her many awards and publications in this area, then brought me into her office and sat with me, shoulder to shoulder, showing me how to think about and analyze the data I had collected. She did not code the data for me; rather, she demonstrated how experienced qualitative researchers think about their data as they code it and develop themes. Later, I also found that I was not as proficient in quantitative data handling as I would have liked to be; I learned that I needed to rely on a more experienced faculty member for guidance and help with the basic equations I used. Students who are not comfortable

performing both qualitative and quantitative research may encounter similar difficulties, finding themselves in positions where they must seek outside assistance in order to use MGT effectively.

Very little was known regarding the perceptions of graduates of higher education doctoral programs related to the quality of preparation for leadership. This is another reason I chose MGT for my dissertation study. Given the dearth of scholarship in the area and virtually no scholarship to compare it too, the dissertation provided an opportunity to theorize what an effective higher education doctoral program could be based on the perceptions of presidents who were graduates of these types of programs.

Though my research method was well received, as I stated earlier, I did encounter detractors to my research topic and questions. At the time I wrote my dissertation, there was a heavy emphasis on comparisons, especially in qualitative research—comparisons of one group to another. For example, I interviewed college presidents with degrees with a specialization in higher education, rather than interviewing college presidents with doctoral degrees in different fields. Some professors I met through academic conferences would have liked me to interview presidents with degrees from other fields to facilitate a comparison, reasoning that comparing various groups would broaden the appeal and applicability of the study beyond a small group of faculty members. However, comparison was not my goal; I wanted to explore in greater depth the opinions of college presidents with specific training for their positions, as this formed an important gap in the literature. Thus, I answered my detractors by explaining that such comparisons between college president groups would be interesting fodder for a follow-up study, but that this was not the focus of my present study. As my advisor agreed that conducting a comparative study did not meet the goals of dissertation, I proceeded with my study as I had envisioned it.
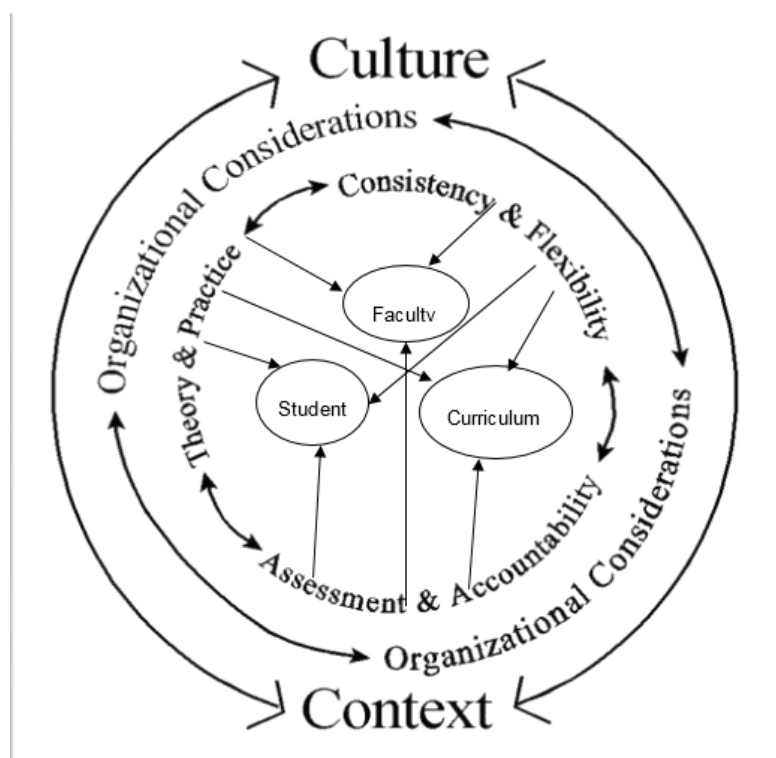

Figure 2. Freeman's Model of Higher Education Leadership Development in Academic Preparation Programs (Freeman & Kochan, 2014).

Reflections and Advice to Students, Faculty, and Other Researchers

As I reflect back on the process of writing my manuscript dissertation, which was comprised of several different publication-ready articles, I am secure in my choice of MGT as a research method. I would choose this method again because it was the best fit for my study. It allowed me to use other resources—theories, conceptual frameworks, and other data—to inform my research. From my present vantage point, if I could do it again I would study more deeply and invest even more time learning about how it could be applied to other types of studies, but I would not change my methodological approach for my dissertation. Indeed, the novel approach never caused problems for me in my professional development.

I know that I could have engaged in an interpretive phenomenological study instead, because it would have enabled me to investigate the "contextual features of an experience in relation to other influences such as culture, gender, employment or wellbeing of people or groups experiencing the phenomenon (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015, para. 5). In the case of this study the phenomena would have been presidents who earned a doctorate with a specialization in higher education. This approach, however, would have produced limitations in creating a theoretical framework utilizing grounded propositions. I also could have chosen to investigate my study using a GT approach, but that approach would have constrained me from acknowledging and incorporating existing information by utilizing both inductive and deductive approaches. My doctoral committee supported me in my decision to utilize MGT, and when it was time for me to submit the articles comprising my manuscript dissertation for publication, I framed them each as slightly different in methodological approach, which allowed me to reanalyze the data utilizing various methodological paradigms (such as case studies or phenomenological approaches, depending on my research questions). I believed that these nuanced approaches would pose fewer potential hindrances for me in the publication process. However, I did explicitly use MGT in my first book; it appeared in a chapter titled "Toward a Theoretical Framework for a Doctorate in Higher Education" (Freeman & Kochan, 2014). In that chapter, I realized that I needed to be careful to avoid claiming that I had created or generated a theory—this would have left me open to challenges. One such challenge might have been that my theory was based on too small a sample size, as I had only 13 study participants. It is often hard to attract participants that are famous or serve in elite positions to participate in studies. They often are asked to be interviewed by many people and are unable to accept all invitations. University presidents are considered elites so although there was a total population of 150 university presidents who fit the criteria for the study (serving a 4-year university). Only thirteen presidents agreed to participate in the study. Though my dissertation committee determined that 13 participants provided an adequate sample for my study, citing Creswell (2002), who advises that data saturation can be met by including 3–5 participants in case study projects and 15–20 in GT projects and Maxwell (1998), who proposes that a small sample size is acceptable in qualitative research because it is a rigorous and systematic methodology, I avoided claiming that my work resulted in a new theory. However, MGT helped me to produce work that could be refined over the years, eventually leading *toward* a theory or theoretical framework for higher education.

Speaking from my experiences as a student and as a professor, I would advise students who wish to utilize MGT to come to a firm understanding of GT first. GT itself is considered to be one of the most highly recommended qualitative research paradigms. In order to engage in an adaptation of this approach, it would be advisable to have a strong understanding of GT first. From that understanding, students should be able to build up to a thorough understanding of MGT. Students should be familiar with inductive and deductive approaches to research, while also having a firm understanding of the basics of quantitative research—if they use quantitative data to inform their approach, students should be able to understand that data for

themselves. When I mentor my own qualitative research students, my goal is to help them become confident in various areas of qualitative methodology; I encourage them to learn about all different methodological approaches, but to become experts in at least one method. This is necessary because when they become faculty members—or researchers of other types—they will need to communicate to others a confident understanding of the research paradigm they are presenting. Their audiences will need to know that they understand what they are doing. Consequently, it is important to ensure that students are familiar with as many paradigms as possible, enabling them to decide which approach is most appropriate to address the questions they would like to ask or problems they are trying to solve. If students happen to employ manuscript-style dissertations, as I did, I would advise them to use differentiated methodological approaches for each manuscript included in the dissertation, as the questions and problems for each paper should be different. Distinct questions may require distinct methodological approaches.

Many doctoral students are not yet confident in their methodological approaches because their dissertations mark the first time they have undertaken major research projects. As with my analysis, the problem might be more of a lack of understanding of how to analyze the data than difficulties in understanding the methodology. Some students understand their methodological approaches in theory, but struggle to put them into practice. Others understand their approaches from a practical standpoint but cannot grasp them from a theoretical standpoint. In order to succeed, though, students must have a firm grasp on both the theoretical and practical aspects of the methodologies they choose. They need to be able to use their approaches confidently and with precision. Students will be able to develop the skills they need only by gaining experience in data analysis. This is a vital skill in and of itself, one that must be honed through practice and refined through coaching and guidance by an experienced researcher.

At this point, none of my graduate students have yet employed MGT. It is still such a novel method that I would like to inform more researchers of the method so that they can begin using it. Although I wholeheartedly promote the usage of MGT, I would still only recommend its use to the strongest of students. There are so many "moving parts," involved—qualitative data collection, quantitative data, and other theories and conceptual frameworks—that MGT is unsuitable for students with limited time and commitment. For those who have the requisite resources and personal organization, however, MGT would be an exciting and rewarding research method. In other words, individuals who wish to utilize this approach will need to have appropriate support, which includes access to an experienced qualitative researcher, qualitative data analysis software, a sufficient population and sample size, and the organizational skills to manage the various parts of the process.

Discussion

Utilizing MGT provided me with an opportunity to show who I was as a researcher, and to show my competency in the field of research. While MGT can have elements of quantitative research, this primarily qualitative methodology requires a strong and confident student to engage in it. Something that I learned from my experiences within MGT was the idea that students need to understand GT well, and MGT even better. MGT is gaining traction in the United States, but in order to allow students to have an understanding of this approach, we need to teach them to become experts in the methodology. Consequently, I structure my classes in such a way that students are trained to be knowledgeable in all research methodologies and experts in a particular one (which, for the right student, could be MGT). Educating doctoral students in this way allows them to understand what a given approach entails and how they can become experts in it. Though MGT will not be the best approach for

every student, study, or program, it should not be written off because of difficulties associated with it. MGT simply requires confidence in the approach and in oneself—and a willingness to learn from the entire process.

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