

# **The Grounded Theory Review: An international journal**

**Volume 6, Issue no. 1, November 2006**

**Generalizing: The descriptive struggle**

*Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.*

**Moral Positioning: A formal theory**

*Thomas Aström, Ph.D.*

**Growing Open: The transition from QDA to  
Grounded Theory**

*Astrid Gynnild, Ph.D.*

**From Pathological Dependence to Healthy  
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**Opportunizing: A classic grounded theory  
study on business and management**

*Ólavur Christiansen*

**Sociology Press**

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# The Grounded Theory Review

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# The Grounded Theory Review

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## From the Editor

Preparing this issue of the Review has been a wonderful learning opportunity for me and I trust that reading it will be so for you as well. The issue offers us a preview of Dr. Glaser's new book, **Doing Formal Grounded Theory (Sociology Press, 2006)**. We are pleased to be able to reprint here Chapter 4 (**Generalizing: The descriptive struggle**) in which Dr. Glaser addresses the primary challenge to generating formal grounded theory – the struggle to overcome the impulse to descriptively compare data for similarities, differences and negative cases in favour of conceptual comparison and modification through the generation of new conceptual properties and dimensions. The descriptive override is one that novice grounded theorists often struggle to overcome. Indeed, many of us have encountered the ill-informed challenges to grounded theory intent upon its remodelling to conform to the dictates of qualitative research where description rules. I speak from experience. In my doctoral viva, I encountered an external examiner who could not accept conceptual generalization without the addition of detailed unit descriptions from the research setting. Held hostage by worrisome accuracy, he needed the comfort of detailed description and completely missed the power of abstract conceptual theory to transcend context.

While very few of us have as yet taken on the challenge of doing formal grounded theory, Thomas Aström (**Moral Positioning: A formal theory**) offers us a credible effort in his novice attempt to illustrate the power of conceptual generalization. Aström has taken the core category of his doctoral research in the field of disabilities and conceptually compared it with data from other substantive fields including education, medicine, management, politics, sports, social work and child care. As his resultant theory

illustrates, the general implications of moral positioning are obvious and readily evident in many social situations.

To be a novice, however, is to experience the discomfort of grappling with the unfamiliar, raising issues of confidence and courage in offering up one's efforts for public scrutiny through peer review and publication. Aström expressed his concerns to me in an email message saying, *“As this area of grounded theory is growing and not yet spread and obvious, a formal theorist easily can become unsure and discouraged. I am also looking forward to Barney's next book. It will make it easier, not only for me, to be sure of how to scrutinize and present a formal theory.”* (Email Oct 22-06)

Astrid Gynnild (**Growing Open: The transition from QDA to Grounded Theory**) shares with us another aspect of the descriptive struggle that challenges so many novices. She details her growing awareness of the need to overcome the preconceptions imposed by qualitative data analysis procedures in favour of the openness of grounded theory's “All is data” dictum. Her paper offers us a glimpse into the mind shift that she experienced in making the transition from description to conceptualization and is valuable reading for anyone struggling to transcend the tyranny of descriptive detail.

The descriptive overwhelm of qualitative research can easily seep into writing up a grounded theory study. Even experienced writers can succumb to QDA's worrisome accuracy, aided and abetted by their training and experience in writing to the dictates of the predominant paradigm. As such, they offer up detailed contextual information and face data without the earned relevance required of a grounded theory study. The QDA-trained response is difficult to unlearn. We see this tendency to some degree in Jamieson's paper (**From Pathological Dependence to Healthy Independence: An emergent grounded theory of facilitating independent living**). While offering interesting background into the data used to generate the theory, it is the concepts with earned relevance that interest the reader of a grounded theory. These are, to some extent, diluted by face data

and extensive quoting from interviews throughout the paper. Thus, the elegance of a good conceptual theory can be undermined by the familiar requirements of a qualitative paper.

Christiansen's paper (**Opportunizing: A classic grounded theory study on business and management**) reminds us of yet another persistent problem for those new to grounded theory – the effective use of theoretical coding. Christiansen's core category of opportunizing has brilliant imagery and grab that extends well beyond the substantive area of business and management and his paper offers detailed description of the concept, its properties and dimensions. While offering us a number of possible theoretical codes that might fit with his theory, it seems that he misses the emergent fit of an appropriate theoretical code to enable overall theoretical integration. The basic social process, as a default theoretical code for many novices, doesn't produce here the parsimony and scope that a good grounded theory should achieve. And, one wonders if there is not a typology of opportunizing behaviours or strategies emerging from his theory?

As suggested above, the novice grounded theorist may encounter any number of challenges to writing for peer review and publication. A primary goal of this Review is to encourage and enable novices to publish their papers. The global reach of grounded theory as evidenced in this issue's papers from America, England, Norway, Sweden and the Faroe Islands, also reminds us that for many who undertake grounded theory, writing for publication can mean writing in a second language with all of the challenges that entails for conveying conceptual imagery and theoretical explication. To succeed in doing so often requires patience, persistence, fortitude and the courage to stand one's ground as a theorist.

As editor, it is my privilege to engage with the authors of papers submitted and I wish to acknowledge their patience and diligence in working through the review process, responding to reviewer comments and suggestions, reworking drafts and resubmitting their work. I also wish to acknowledge and thank our peer review



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editors for their time and interest in reading and offering critiques of the papers submitted. While we don't always agree, we work through the differences in perspectives and opinions to offer authors the benefit of our collective experience.

As readers, you are the beneficiaries of the efforts made by both authors and reviewers in a process that can entail several weeks of writing, reviewing and rewriting. The papers in this issue offer readers not only fascinating conceptual ideas but also opportunities to learn, to question what we think we know and to challenge what we assume to be certain. The theories offered here are good as far as they go. No paper is perfect; each could be further improved just as each of us has more to learn.

- Judith Holton

## Submissions

All papers submitted are peer reviewed and comments provided back to the authors. Papers accepted for publication will be good examples or practical applications of grounded theory and classic grounded theory methodology.

Comments on papers published are also welcomed, will be shared with the authors and may be published in subsequent issues of the Review. See our website [www.groundedtheoryreview.com](http://www.groundedtheoryreview.com) for full submission guidelines.

Forward submissions as Word documents to Judith Holton at [judith@groundedtheoryreview.com](mailto:judith@groundedtheoryreview.com)

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## **Generalizing: The descriptive struggle**

*Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D.; Hon Ph.D.*

The literature is not kind to the use of descriptive generalizations. Authors struggle and struggle to find and rationalize a way to use them and then fail in spite of trying a myriad of work-arounds. And then we have Lincoln and Guba's famous statement: "The only generalization is: there is no generalization" in referring to qualitative research. (op cit, p. 110) They are referring to routine QDA yielding extensive descriptions, but which tacitly include conceptual generalizations without any real thought of knowledge about them.

In this chapter I wish to explore this struggle for the purpose of explaining that the various contra arguments to using descriptive generalizations DO NOT apply to the ease of using conceptual generalizations yielded in SGT and especially FGT. I will not argue for the use of descriptive generalization. I agree with Lincoln and Guba with respect to QDA, "the only generalization is: there is no generalization." It is up to the QDA methodologists, of whom there are many; to continue the struggle and I wish them well.

### **The Descriptive Generalization Struggle**

Most, if not all, qualitative research method writers talk of the near impossibility to generalize as they struggle to make descriptive generalizations realistic. Most fail.

There are several dimensions to this struggle which help explain the struggle and then the failure. Their principal concerns of descriptive generalization are worrisome accuracy of descriptions which soon become stale dated, transferability, internal vs. external validity, unit comparisons to determine similarity and differences (not for concepts), unit comparability for transferability, volume solutions (the more units the better), downing abstract leveling of SGT to a local description, and can a descriptive generalization become a scientific law. The reader may think of more, but considering these dimensions will give the idea that the descriptive generalization struggle is never solved

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and it does not apply to conceptual generalization. Indeed, focusing on descriptive generalization in the struggle has two negative consequences: 1. conceptual generalizations are missed or passed over and 2. They leave the substantive fields involved open to speculative theory. I will consider these dimensions in linear fashion keeping in mind they are highly interrelated.

The writers I refer to are Lincoln and Guba (op cit, chapter 5), Ian Dey (op cit, chapter 11), Janet Ward Schofield, "Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research" in Miles and Huberman, *The Qualitative Researchers Companion*, (op cit, chapter 8), Margaret Kearny, "New Directions in Grounded Formal Theory" in *Using GT in Nursing*, (op cit, chapter 12), and Glaser, "Conceptual Generalizing" in the *GT Perspective I*, chapter 7, and Joy L. Johnson, "Generalizability in Qualitative Research," Chapter 10. The many other writers such as Creswell, Silverman, Walcott, Morse, Schutt, etc, on qualitative methodology deal with the struggle to generalize but in less than a chapter focused way. See bibliography for this book.

**Missing conceptual generalization:** One major source of the descriptive generalization struggle is the down leveling of SGT by the remodeling impact of QDA on GT. (See *GT Perspective II: Description Remodeling of GT*). What occurs is that QDA forces a description out of GT and/or GT is taken as description, not as theory. It becomes local to the area of research. Descriptive generalization becomes the problem. The quest is to see if the description applies to another area, if the area is comparable on enough dimensions. The pressure to generalize releases a fearful caution of generalizing descriptions as the research seems particularistic, not general. The fear is turned into keeping the particular description special, possessed, savored and uniquely original. Hopefully it is possessed for colleague respect and career purposes. And by the time the research gets published a year or so later, the description is stale dated, the research site changed, thus even less generalizable.

It is no wonder that conceptual generalizing and general implications of the core category is missed totally as the down leveling descriptive struggle continues. It is no wonder that the enduring grab of GT categories over time and place is lost and their power to explain is lost, since the focus is so strongly on the struggle to use the description elsewhere, or to block it. Keep in mind that SGT is not a site description; it is, when done right, a

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conceptual theory, which generalizes with ease. Missing the conceptual nature of GT in total favor of QDA description is clear in the following critique of GT generalizations by Ian Dey “Thus the logic of discovery justifies procedures that maximize the production of new ideas. But the same procedures do not provide a strong basis for generalizing these ideas to particular populations.” (op cit, p. 38) Further he says “Glaser and Strauss legitimate such generalization by linking formal theory closely with the substantive studies through which it is both generated and applied. Nevertheless, there seem to be problems with the use of grounded theory for generalizations. At least three such problems stand out. One is the preference to sample situation and processes rather than cases. This may make it difficult to locate the resulting theory in its local context, and take this into account when generalizing. A second is the use of theoretical sampling to select these situations and processes. This tends to leave open the question of how representative these may be. A third is the temptation to generalize without reference to the specific spatial and temporal context with which the generalization may apply (ibid, p. 246).

Dey is clearly focused on the requirements of descriptive generalization, and misses that SGT and FGT are conceptual, not descriptive, and deal with conceptual generalization. Criticism “one” clearly focuses on the descriptive need to sample for description for a specific situation or context in order to describe it well. Dey localizes GT, thus losing its conceptual abstraction from time, place and people, by turning it into a description of just what it is abstract of.

Criticism “two” continues this descriptive claim by wanting theoretical sampling for data to abide by the rules of representation clearly for describing a unit accurately. Theoretical sampling is too “anywhere” as concepts drive it to “wherever” for more data, to generate more conceptualization. Again he localizes GT by down leveling it to a description of a unit, which description is not carefully representative by using theoretical sampling. He misses totally the idea that GT is involved in conceptual development and using the interchangeability of indicators and theoretical saturation, to stop the excessive collection of data, required in QDA description.

Criticism “three” acknowledges the pressure to generalize, but cautions against it if the original substantive area was not

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properly described by representative sampling. Once again a QDA requirement for accurate description. He misses the conceptual generation of GT by theory driven sampling and then when applying the concept, conceptually contextualizing it with emergent fit. His contextualizing is down leveling GT to description. Contextualizing comes after the GT generation, not before as a description. After application then contextualizing a concept earns relevance with emergent fit. Remember that SGT and FGT originally come from data, but it gets applied to data when used.

Focusing on descriptive generalization and missing conceptual generalization leads Dey to this confused paragraph. "Thus the problem of producing theory that is complex and parsimonious is not so much resolved as recast in a new guise ... the distinction between substantive and formal theory allows complexity in the generation of theory to be condensed into a more parsimonious formulation at a formal level. Theoretical reduction allows the elimination of superfluous specificity in the construction of generalizations. Focusing on a core category allows the research to set some boundaries to the analysis." (p. 45) Extending the general implications of a core category by FGT does not entail the reduction or increase in complexity and parsimony, or the theory. Description would do this. Conceptualization, as one goes from substantive to FGT, is emergent in either direction. There is no preconceived "trade off between complexity and parsimony in the process of conceptualization" as Dey says. It is emergent.

Dey concludes this chapter with a descriptive conclusion about GT: "In grounded theory the emphasis on comparison across a range of "areas of inquiry" (not cases) may preclude effective study of any particular phenomenon.... Grounded theory offers a way of producing generalizations through comparison." (p. 229) He faults GT for not producing a fully accurate description of an area, missing the conceptual concern of the area, while even mentioning that its focus is on conceptual generalizations, "by reducing the rigor by relaxing the canons of comparative inquiry." So in realizing what GT does, it is critiqued by descriptive canons. Clearly, the struggle for descriptively generalizing dismisses conceptual generalization. Faulting GT with comparative inquiry that conceptualizes instead of comparative inquiry that describes differences and similarities



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again dismisses conceptual work. The power, use and grab of GT, whether SGT or FGT is subverted without cause.

Generalizing in QDA research is tedious and tenuous. The struggle can be so intense that others discount descriptive generalizations as irrelevant. “For some qualitative researchers, questions of generalizability are seen as irrelevant. ‘Naturalists eschew generalizations on the grounds that virtually all social/behavioral phenomena are contexts bound’ (Guba, op cit, p. 81). Generalizability simply is ignored or dismissed as an oppressive, positivistic concept that hampers creative and emancipatory qualitative research.... The tendency to reject generalizability has to be their close alignment with (research) which focuses on the study of unique cultures.” (Joy Johnson “Generalizability in Qualitative Research” in *Completing a Qualitative Project*, (chapter 10, Sage 1997). Joy closes this thought about descriptive generalizing with the bear recognition of conceptual generalization by quoting Guba (1985) “to generalize one must develop abstract theories, yet abstractions are not well grounded in what informants experience and think”. She suggests using GT to obtain these abstractions. This thought is close but does not go far enough to push for FGT.

It is simply true that QDA research gives new perspectives on what is going on in a situation. It gives understanding, if not grounded theory explanation of how the main concern is continually processed. This descriptive perspective is abetted by the natural tendency to over generalize particularistic and speculative views as lessons on supposed patterns, not truly grounded. Over generalizing broad statements, based on particularistic limited assumptions and information, emerge to achieve a credible, but unattainable goal to look like a scientific law. Sometimes findings and criteria from quantitative studies are used to broaden the credibility of the generalizations, since the broad sampling and volume give the appearance of tapping general descriptions. The unwavering rules of quantitative validity when applied to QDA do not, in and of themselves, generate descriptive generalizations that last. These efforts at descriptive struggle for generalization ignore, waylay or dismiss the ease and application of conceptual generalization.

The struggle for descriptive generalizations is described by Johnson as follows: “It is clear that different qualitative approaches are aimed at developing different kinds of knowledge.

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It is therefore inappropriate to assume that it is possible to develop a generic set of procedures for enhancing generalizability across all forms of qualitative research. All approaches and strategies involve assumptions, judgments and compromises: all are claimed to have deficiencies. The challenge for researchers is to be aware of those deficiencies and to refrain from making claims (generalizations) that extend beyond the purview of the research study.” (Johnson, op cit, p. 203) “It is for the researcher to be clear about the aim of the study and how the findings may apply across settings, person and time.” (p. 205) Johnson again closes with a slight recognition of conceptual generalization, when she says. “The theory (referring to GT) if it has been developed in a rigorous manner, is applicable across numerous kinds of person and contexts,” but there is no follow through to fostering doing SGT or FGT.

All the articles referred above show the struggle for descriptive generalization, but the classic one is the chapter by Lincoln and Guba stating the only generalization is that there is no generalization. I said above that I agree and will detail more reasons why in several subsequent sections in this chapter. Here I want to underscore that the L&G struggle fails because they look for unreachable truths and scientific laws as their goal, whereas other strugglers do not. They discuss many ways that QDA descriptions are not possible to generalize. This extreme requirement for descriptive generalizations steers them far from realizing the power of conceptual generalizations.

Additionally their struggle misses conceptual generalization because they reduce GT to a description. They say “GT is local theory as it brings together and systematizes isolated, individual theory. Local understanding, aggregated leads to partial understanding.” Lincoln and Guba reverse the escape from time, place and people of conceptual generalization to wanting to contextualize the GT and make it a unit description. Thus they completely miss GT’s conceptual power of generalization by missing that the constant comparative method yields concepts. It does not yield similarities and differences leading to and for description. They see GT as just another description of a locale or context. What could have saved their struggle for generalization is steered to assure failure of the struggle.

At least Schofield (in Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Research Companion*, Sage 2002, p.191–193) gives descriptive

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generalization a bit of success by saying it is always conditional, provisional and particularistic. She tries to revive the demise of descriptive generalization by such conditions. Her struggle is a stretch to use them, but still a mild failure. Her struggle, as is typical, steers her clear of realizing conceptual generalizations exist and are generated by SGT and especially FGT. She says: "Although qualitative researches have traditionally paid scant attention to the attaining of generalizability, sometimes even disdaining such a goal, this situation has changed noticeably in the past ten to fifteen years. A consensus appears to be emerging that for qualitative researchers, generalizability is best thought of as a matter of the 'fit' between the situation studied and the other to which one might be interested in applying the concepts and conclusions of that study. This conceptualization makes thick description crucial..." So near and yet so far from GT, since comparative description is the goal not conceptualization to as she says "achieve generalizability through the aggregation of extant independently designed case studies." She says "structuring qualitative studies in a way that enhances their implication for the understanding of another situation," but it is all comparative description.

She is so near and yet so far from comparing for generating conceptual generalizations. The descriptive struggle blinds researchers to conceptual ease. The descriptive struggle is the norm and one property of it is that it is perpetual. There are lots of close calls, but the struggle diverts the best researchers to the standard arguments of descriptive generalization, which arguments are then doomed to failure. One among many reasons is that comparisons are not made for conceptualization. They are made for showing differences and similarities among units, thus brought down to pure description. For example, as Schofield says: "there is another approach to increasing the generalizability of qualitative case studies that should not be ignored... finding ways to aggregate, compare or contrast already existing studies." Clearly, she is so close to conceptual comparison, but diverted to descriptive comparisons.

The diversion to descriptive generalizations also have the effect of subverting the GT requirement of letting the problem emerge and not studying the literature of the field before the research so as not to preconceive and force. The descriptive generalization steers researchers to the professional problem and

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to study the literature on it first before the research in order to get a descriptive need for more research to fill in gaps. Fine, this is pure QDA research, which by far outnumbers GT research.

The descriptive quest gets easily framed by the speculative theory of scholarly great men/women which subsequently legitimizes it. In spite of the resulting struggle to generalize, GT is totally subverted by this pattern. And the researcher finds himself working on the speculative concepts of these great men. Paradoxically, the researcher is back to conceptualization. But it is not grounded; rather it is conjecture brought on by the orientation to and requirement of descriptive generalization, for example see Dey (op cit, p.265) on the leveling of abstraction. This leveling poses an interesting problem and paradox, since these QDA authors know descriptive generalizations do not hold up, yet they have no grasp of conceptual generalizations.

I am not saying descriptive generalizations are to be avoided; they are just another focus of research. See Mark Granovetter: "Finding a Job: 2nd edition" (Univ of Chicago Press, 1995) for a masterful comparison of his study to others based on differences and similarities. His writing is laced with conjectural accounting for the findings leading to strained struggle for descriptive generalization. Our focus in this book is the conceptual grounded generation of the general implications of a substantive core category into a FGT which is clearly quite a different research goal. Needless to say under the notion that people generalize naturally, there are those who do it descriptively by nature and those who do it conceptually by nature. And of course, this is another source of scant attention to FGT.

In sum, the unit oriented struggle to descriptive generalization is never satisfactory. It is too absolute, too factual, too philosophical by conjectural accountings, too inclusive in the need to account for everything and too argumentative to try to do it and thusly further driving the researcher to intuitive, conjectural remarks and the borrowings of grand speculative theory. No wonder that some QDA researchers thoroughly dislike descriptive generalizations and seek only pure description. Descriptive generalization never really works. The reader should read the full articles referred to above to witness the struggle for him/herself. In other published sources the struggle is in sections.

I turn now to looking at the elements of descriptive

generalizations which make them so unsatisfactory. These are problems that conceptual generalization does not have. I will deal with transferability, external vs. internal validity, worrisome accuracy and single case studies. The reader should keep in mind I only touch on these topics enough as regards the generalization struggle. I do not give the full coverage the literature does, which the reader can easily search for. I will close this chapter with a section on conceptual comparison contrasted with descriptive generalizing.

### **Transferability**

Generalization implies the transferability of a finding from one context or unit to another as valid. This makes the finding a descriptive generalization. But is transferability possible? It depends. “The level of generalizability depends entirely on the sampling scheme used and on the demographic resemblance between sample and target population” (Dahlgren, p. 50.) Using face sheet data to establish sufficient resemblance between context assumes a relevance that may not exist, hence demographic resemblance between units may be of no relevance.

Using face data is often an effort to not only transfer the finding to a similar unit, but to a larger unit. Thus a small study is generalized to a much larger population based on demographic data. For example, a study of one nursing school is generalized to nursing training throughout the nation. This kind of descriptive generalization is especially jeopardous, since the larger population brings in so much atypicality that the larger population is just largely different even though compared to a few similarities.

How does one make units similar enough to transfer a finding from one to the other? At the other end from demographic similarity is judgment and logical reasoning, which Dahlgren calls “analytic generalization” (op cit, p. 51). There is no demographic resemblance between study unit and target unit. It is the fit of the researched problem to the new unit that is generalized. It is the comparability of the topic or the problem that is of concern. This borders on conceptual generalization, but only if it does not drop to the descriptive level and the problem is fully conceptualized in a GT. In the hands of a QDA researcher it will indeed drop in level of abstraction.

In between demographic and analytic generalizations is

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comparative description of differences and similarities trying to make more of the similarities than the differences to justify transferability. Sometimes different cases are just likened with little comparison. But no matter what technique is used to justify a transfer of a finding from one unit to another, it is never totally justified or works. It is always a struggle with a level of unsatisfactory outcome. The transferred to unit is never known about fully enough to sharpen the similarities. The researcher cannot research every unit fully like the initially researched unit. Thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) are not the answer as it leads to overload of clarity. Furthermore descriptions of units do not stand still, they do not endure; they become stale dated at whatever pace. Thus even a cogent transfer of a finding between units, making it general, is likely to be short lived and of limited enduring value. The effort to make the transfer between unit types based on descriptions is still doomed, since they are destined to become stale dated.

Conceptual generality has none of these problems. It is just applied and conceptually modified by contextualization that varies the categories to fit. Variation in unit resemblance is just grist for modifying the concepts of the theory. For example (and I could give many) our theory of awareness of dying was based on four contexts. Then we went to the premature baby ward and discovered awareness was not an issue, the patients could not hear their prognosis. Thus it was a totally open context and the new concept was the hearability of patients.

Dahlgren et al (p. 52) agree with me, when they say: “In conceptual qualitative research, such as *Grounded Theory*, the results have transcended the empirical data. Here analytic generalizations make sense.” Dahlgren et al, do research on international health problems in which generalizations between very different units are vitally needed irrespective of demographics or similarities and difference, such as the study of spousal abuse in “wherever” nations.

The applicability of GT, especially FGT, can be used wisely by informed laymen, e.g. client, and by other GT researchers using emergent fit in application. The generalizing is located by applicability not by descriptive commonalities. The generalizing is never a factual transfer, as in description, it is just multiple, integrated conceptual hypotheses modified to fit where applied by using constant comparison to conceptualize the modified fit,

workability and relevance.

This kind of generalizing is not only easy with some thoughtful work, but is fun, as it feels good to have a conceptual grasp on what is going on. For example, when one knows the subcore categories of credentializing it is fun to see how they vary in different credentializing contexts. Like, what kinds of reading and lectures are involved, how long is the schooling (2 weeks to 10 years, so to speak), what kinds of final tests, what are entry procedures, how much active experience, what kinds of final legitimating ceremonies and so forth. I have seen the study of worsening progression in many other areas such as chronic illness, acute illness, smoking or other drug excesses, super normalizing denial, excessive exercising and on and on. The conceptual general implications of core categories know no bounds in transferability, and the problems of descriptive generalization for conceptual generalizations are moot.

### **Internal vs. External Validity**

The transferability of descriptive findings to other units brings on the fundamental problem of internal vs. external validity. This demand on transferability usually dooms the descriptive generalization from the start. Internal validity means generalizing from a small study to all the people in the unit or context studied. The boundaries remain the same, thus it is cogent to generalize a finding to all involved. External validity means transferring the finding to a different unit. External validity, as we have seen above on transferability, raises the suspicion that the finding cannot be legitimately transferred because of grave differences in the 'transferred to' new unit.

One author suggests making the new unit typical regarding the finding being transferred or better do multiple studies of numerous new units for description generalization of qualitative data. (RK Schutt, *Investigating the Social World*, Pine Forge Press by Sage 2004, p. 154) This struggle is clear, especially the limited by time and expense approach of doing multiple studies. It is especially clear by Schutt's half page mention of the dangers of qualitative descriptive generalizability compared to six pages on the generalizability of quantitative surveys and experiments using random sampling for participants. Yet volunteer participant experiments are suspect. The argument for external transfers of descriptions increases in intensity the less it is

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doable, therefore suggesting suspicion of or raising doubts of transferability. Regarding external validity, “The criterion of transferability is easily met in GT because Grounded Theory almost automatically transfers findings” (Dahgren, op cit, p. 56). The automatic transfer comes from the emergent fit of fit, workability and relevance achieved by the constant comparative method. The criterion of credibility is to a large degree irrelevant in a SGT and FGT, once the GT is seen to fit work and be relevant in another area.

A student wrote me (Judith Holton, 2/23/03,) “I believe that there is another way in which GT is transferable and in a way that is closer to the notion of external validity. The sociologist as theorist provides this theoretical abstraction in many ways when the theory fits, works and is relevant.” She is quite right. The layman in the know spots these criteria instantly when the theory he hears rings true and relevant. “That’s right, that’s the way it is” are comments we often hear upon presenting SGT to the knowledgeable. These people then transfer the theory and apply it. This is a type of generalizing (transferring) which is done by laymen in the substantive areas which is quite different than the researcher applying a GT for a client by consultation. Here the layman applies it himself. “This aspect of transferability is a very strong advantage for GT.”

Hans Thulesius experiences immediate seeing his GT core category by others all the time when he gives a lecture to other MDs on his GT on balancing palliative care. The MDs see it immediately as “it works” and they want more. It engenders spill relief — that’s what is going on! It engenders an imagery that endures forever. It imbues thought and further interventions. It helps the intelligent layman “go conceptual” without losing site of the ground. This applicability whether by researcher or layman occurs by the reversibility of the interchangeability of indicators in the original GT. That is more indicators of the same latent pattern are seen as the path to the applied to next unit or context, so it applies with conceptual modification. Odis Simmons’ theory of “grounded action” leans heavily on this empirical tie to the next unit.

Qualitative research design planning is sometimes based on the possible future external validity of the yet to come findings. The planning questions are many. What is the best population to interview, how deep should the interviews be, versus more



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extensive coverage, how much direct observation is advisable, what kind of “truths” or goal is desired, what kind of data best suits the wanted generalizations, what kind of qualitative method is best used, should a few quantitative measures be used especially for face sheet data. These are but a few of the questions bearing on external validity.

Furthermore one author added to these routine research design issues, how can the “fit be shown with the reality of the wider world” by “involving a larger number of people” which is a “tension” for qualitative researchers. (see *Social Research: The Basics*: David and Sutton, Sage, 2004, p. 28) These are several of the research design problems for the external validity goal. Internal validity is less problematic, as it seems normal to generalize to a larger number of people in the same population being studied. David and Sutton further talk of depth validity when it comes to internal validity. They say: “qualitative research is associated with the prioritization of depth validity over generalization.” (p. 34) Whatever the take on it, both forms of validity are a struggle.

Maxwell highlights internal validity because he sees the lack of trust in external validity. He says: “Internal generalizability in this sense is far more important for most qualitative researchers than external generalizability because qualitative researchers rarely make explicit claims about the external generalizability of their accounts. Indeed the value of a qualitative study may depend on its lack of external generalizability. Thus internal generalizability is a crucial issue in interpreting interviews.” (Miles and Huberman, op cit, p. 54) He talks of how a researcher cannot observe it all and interview everyone “even in one small setting” thus some sort of generalization to a larger population is needed. Hence internal validity predominates since it is safer to generalize to similar people and situations, rather than take on the challenge of external validity which includes total strangers. Whatever the take on it, both forms of validity are a struggle.

Denzin and Guba detail Sartre, 1981, in their “soft” view of internal validity. They say, “that no individual or case is ever just an individual or case. It must be studied as a single instance of more universal social experiences and social processes.... Thus to study the particular is to study general. For this reason, any case will necessarily bear the traces of the universal. The researcher assumes that the reader will be able to generalize subjectively or

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“naturally” from the case in question to their own experiences.” (“Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry,” Sage 1998, op cit, p. xiv ,xv). All I can say is of course people generalize naturally, BUT that is not science. And the natural generalization is usually conceptual, but D&G do not recognize this. So close a realization to seeing conceptual generalization as the answer, but again a miss.

Denzin and Guba in another paper (p. 288), in reference to “critical trustworthiness” they say, “... critical researchers reject the traditional notion of external validity. The ability to make pristine generalizations from one research study to another accepts a one dimensional cause-effect universe. Many critical researchers have argued that this traditionalist concept of external validity is far too simplistic and assert that if generalizations are to be made — that is, if researchers are to be able to apply a finding of context A to context B — then we must be sure that the contexts being compared are similar.” Again descriptive struggle demands comparative descriptions of similarities and differences.

As D&G say, researchers learn a lot from these comparisons, but cannot safely generalize them. Although they tacitly recognize conceptual generalization by acknowledging “in everyday situations men and women do not make generalization in ways implied by external validity.... They reshape cognitive structures to accommodate unique aspects of what they perceive in new contexts.” (p. 288). So they essentially state that everyday persons contextualize the natural need to generalize. But they miss the power of conceptual generalization, yet are so close. Descriptive capture wins again. (See GT Perspective I, Glaser, 2001)

Anssi Perakyla struggles heroically to make conversation analytic research generalizable in terms of external validity. (“Reliability and Validity in Research Based on Natural Social Interaction”, in Silverman editor, *Qualitative Research Companion*, Sage 2004, p.266–268) First she doubts the generalizability to other cases and then she discovers its possibility if one takes exact descriptions and sees them as comparative possibilities in other units. Thus she comes close to conceptual generalization, but misses it. She says: “A crucial dimension of validity of research concerns the generalizability of research findings. How wide can the results from relatively small samples be generalized. The comparative approach directly

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tackles the question of generalizability by demonstrating the similarities and differences across a number of settings ... whether the results present in studies are in any way generalizable. Are they particular to a site or do the results have some wider relevance. The possibilities of various practices can be considered generalizable even if the practices are not actualized in similar ways across different settings....As possibilities, the practices that are analyzed are very likely to be generalizable, not as a description of what other counselors or professionals do with their clients, but they were generalizable as description of what other professionals can do with his or her clients.” Sure, possibilities on the conceptual level deal in probabilities, but she cannot get off the descriptive level and label her practices conceptually. So there is just struggle ... when she is so near.

Dey’s (op cit, p. 219) approach to external validity is that of bounded generalizations. They are never free of time and place, but always bounded. He says: “Generalization about society or social interaction must always be bounded by space and time. Thus generalizations apply neither to the particular nor to the eternal, but to events within some implicitly bounded space and time in which they are assumed to occur.” Thus on the verge as seeing them conceptually they must be described by a space and time. Descriptive capture wins and we thusly have bounded descriptive generalizations. Bounded generalizations supposedly add to their external validity. Conceptual generalizations get applied to a space and time, they are not described by them. Bounded generalizations reverse contextualization in order to stay with description.

The arguments for or against descriptive validity whether internal or external are legion. The reader need only check the index of any of the myriad of QDA methods books to see the pages on generalization and witness the constant struggle. I have only given examples here to give the reader the image of this struggle. Careful grounded conceptual generalizations apply with ease, or without struggle.

### **Worrisome Accuracy**

In the Grounded Theory Perspective I: Conceptualization *Contrasted with Description*, I discussed at length the QDA methodologist’s concern with the accuracy of data collected in qualitative research. I called it worrisome accuracy. They are

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never sure the descriptions are trustworthy, credible, testable, stale dated or confirmable. They engage in audit and member checks to assure accuracy. They see much of their data as interpreted — the constructivists — and interpretations vary, which confounds any assurance of accuracy. What truths or better yet what version of the truths is the researcher collecting and reporting? What is described as “real” findings can always be challenged. Given these constant doubts, how could a researcher possibly generalize a descriptive finding with any confidence other readers will accept it. What is fact for some is fantasy for others. Transferability and validity of descriptive generalization unit to unit are continually suspect and even seen as stale dated. Dey agrees when he says: “Events are shaped by people with their own particular perceptions, purposes and projects. However GT seems to offer a way out of this impasse.” (p. 213.)

As I said in *GT Perspective I*, p. 50, “this tyranny of the QDA quest for collecting accurate data is replaced in GT by the conceptual coding of interchangeable indicators. The concepts soon become abstract of time, place and people as they emerge. When applied the concepts are easily modified by what ever context they are applied to using the constant comparative method to produce sub concepts. Modification, not verification, yields credibility. The freedom and power of these concepts is amazing and they yield conceptual generalizations, begging for general implications and emergent fit. As I have said many times in this book, core categories can be seen operating virtually everywhere, whether by natural views or by further research for FGT.

One standard strategy to assuage worrisome accuracy is to test the finding. And then of course can the reader believe the test procedure. The struggle continues. Donald Cressey in his book *Other People's Money* (1953, p. 156) rambles over this problem in his conclusions. He says: “the search for negative cases guided the research in all its phases and often a case which is clearly exceptional to the theory has not been located. To the question of whether negative evidence has been neglected or unwittingly distorted, there is no positive answer. The fact that our first hypothesis was revised several times before the final generalization could be formulated implies that the final generalization also must be revised if negative cases appear. In other words, the testing of the theory must remain as somewhat

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inconclusive in a single case study. The final test will be the cumulative results of attempts at proof and disproof in research which follows ... crucial negative cases which, if found, will require revision of the theory toward a more efficient formulation.”

Thus negative finding test, to assure some accuracy, never really works. This type of test just shows the perpetually found inaccuracy of descriptive generalizations. Revision of the theory by new researches is perpetually doomed by comparative description, unlike the modification of a SGT by conceptual comparison. The latter just adds more sub-concepts to the emerging FGT as it is theoretically sampled for in new researches.

Miles and Huberman in their classic book *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Sage 1994, p. 263) talk of several ways of testing or confirming findings for generalization. Their prescriptions are numerous and beyond the resources and skill of most researchers. They say: “Data quality can be assessed through checking for representativeness (1) checking for researcher effects on the case, and vice versa, (2) triangulating across data sources and methods, (3) weighting the evidence and (4) deciding which kinds of data are most trustable. Looking at ‘unpatterns’ can tell us a lot. Checking the meaning of outliers, (5) using extreme cases, (6) following up surprises, and (7) looking for negative evidence, are all tactics that test a ‘pattern’ by saying what it is not like. We can also test our explanations by making if-then tests (9) replicating a finding, (10) ruling out spurious relations and (11) checking out rival explanations. Finally, a good explanation deserves attention from the very people whose behavior it is about—the informants: getting feedback from them.”

What a struggle to be sure one has an accurate description that could be generalized. The finding is doubted from the start to the end. No average researcher could begin to test his findings with such a long list. Credibility of findings is lost to doubt. Thus why transfer a finding to another unit, why generalize under this cloud of suspicion.

Clearly conceptual categories carefully generated by GT procedures do not have this burden of accuracy, nor testing of it, since they are abstract of time, place and people. For example are the concepts of psuedo-friending or worsening progressions

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accurate or not. The question is irrelevant, except for the fact they are grounded concepts nor reified. Reified concepts, that is concepts with no empirical references, are inapplicable, thus inaccurate in this manner.

The QDA methodologists, as close as they come, do not have a clue or thought for FGT generalizing. All they do is struggle over descriptive generalizing and use all kinds of tactics to increase the probability of the generalizing for transferability, validity and accuracy. The criteria of credibility or accuracy defeats transferability and validity from the start.

Increasing the volume of data by increasing the representativeness of the data, the size of the unit or the number of units researched, may increase accuracy, but while this is routine doable for quantitative research, it is very difficult for qualitative research. (See David Silverman, *Qualitative Research*, second edition, Sage 2004, p. 295–299) on the doubts of small samples and need to increase the number studies to generalize descriptively.

Qualitative research deals in small numbers and small units relative to quantitative research and therefore appear more particularistic. As a basic goal of science, generalization does not apply to qualitative research's descriptive generalization. (See Lincoln and Guba, *op cit*, p. 111).

Interestingly enough whether a generalization may be more of less accurate based on the origin of the data from which the generalization is made, may be moot for the researcher doing the study and generalizing. It can be a self fulfilling, self referential process of screening and evaluating the generalization based on the framework used in the research, like it was accurate in the first place. Thus the generalization is based on the generalized framework applied, before hand, to the research so of course one can generalize descriptions. For example if a researcher starts his research on prostitutes with a preconceived framework based on poor self images based on identity theory then he/she will start generalizing about poor self images with his descriptions. Then in fact, who knows if the theory and the findings are accurate and not just self-fulfilling. Often the theory is speculative. The descriptive generalizations that follow from a preconceived theory do not test the theory. They simply continue with support for the preconceived speculation. The conjecture increases non stop until,

if ever, the claims lead to evidentiary and accuracy problems.

The summary of this section is said well by Anssi Perakyla (Silverman, op cit, p. 299) "All serious qualitative research involves assuring the accuracy of recordings and testing of truthfulness of analytic claims." Indeed the only way to get away from this struggle is to turn to conceptual generalization. But realizing this in the face of the squelching by worrisome accuracy of descriptive generalizations is difficult for QDA methodologists.

### The Single Case

A lot can be learned from a small single case when generating concepts from it that name latent patterns and the concepts have general implications. This affirmation somewhat answers Anssi Perakyla's question (op cit, p. 295) "How widely can the results, derived from relatively small samples be generalized." The answer is not widely if they are descriptive generalizations and quite extensively if they are GT categories.

Silverman in *Doing Qualitative Research*, (Sage 2000, p. 102), states referring to case studies, "make a lot out of a little." And this means to make it analytically interesting. However he says "nagging doubts remain." This doubt surfaces in a regular refrain heard from student researchers. "I have so few data, only just one case. How can I possibly generalize about it?" Silverman continues by quoting Stake, "Stake refers to the intrinsic case study where the case is of interest in all its particularity and ordinariness. No attempt is made to generalize beyond the single case or even to build theories." Then Silverman quotes Jennifer Mason who says, "Qualitative research should therefore produce explanations which are generalizable in some way or which have a wider resonance (1996). Silverman then concludes with what the reader now knows clearly: it's a struggle. He says: "the problem of representativeness is a perennial worry of many qualitative researchers. Can we generalize from cases to populations without following a purely statistical logic."

Silverman concludes with four possible solutions to "obtain generalizability: 1. combining qualitative research with quantitative measures of populations, 2. purposive sampling guided by time and resources, 3. theoretical sampling, and 4. using an analytic model which assumes that generalizability is present in the existence of any case." (p. 103) All these solutions focus on obtaining accuracy to the best of one's ability and all are

beyond the resources typically of the lone qualitative researcher in the field, just collecting data.

Using qualitative with quantitative data is hard unless the quantitative literature — article — backs up a qualitative finding. We have touched on research guided by preframing analytic models as being self-fulfilling, unless the model comes from a GT. Purposive sampling and theoretical sampling will work, as we will see in Chapter 5, if the researcher does sampling for conceptualization not description. Silverman is still on the descriptive level trying to achieve accuracy to justify transferability and validity. But he is very close to doing FGT, if he would only turn to constant conceptual comparison and drop seeking similarities, differences and negative cases to achieve descriptive generalizations. But alas, not so. He says: “The comparative approach directly tackles the question of generalizability by demonstrating similarities and differences across a number of settings” (Perhyl, 1997, p. 214) “In this sense the literature review has as much to do with the issue of generalizability as with displaying academic credentials.” The reader would enjoy his chapter. Clearly single case studies put an excessive strain on descriptive generalization.

We are at the point in this chapter where the ideas offered and the literature covered are fairly conclusive in resulting in the struggle for making descriptive generalizations. Now I wish to turn to my section on single case generality in *The GT Perspective I*, Sociology Press 2001, pp. 96–98).

### Case Generality

It seems like a conflict of intent but case studies are conceptually generalizable in many ways. A case study is a study of a specific case, in depth, intensely and descriptively. It is specific, special, unique, yet relevant. Relevance itself implies general significance. The latent patterns within the case, as revealed descriptively, are used as a basis for generalizing conceptually. For example our case study of a patient dying of cancer in hospital brought out many of the general problems of dying in hospital. For example the properties of lingering status passages. (See *Anguish*, Strauss and Glaser, Sociology Press, 1970)

From a FT conceptual point of view, the pressure to generalize aspects of this case was great, WHETHER OR NOT it



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was a typical case or an atypical case, if the generalizing is conceptual. If the generalizing is descriptive, we have the struggle showing similarity between units or if atypical, the contrast.

If the generalizing is conceptual, the privacy and confidence of the case and the people therein is maintained because the conceptualization is abstract of time, place and people. The source remains anonymous. If the generalizing is descriptive, confidence is easily broken, even violated, and most importantly so for well known cases preferring anonymity. GT conceptualization detaches itself from the intensely specific descriptions.

Often case studies are done because there is a special issue involved within the case, such as organizationally produced error, a violation of a normative social process, or an untoward travel disaster because of lack of cautionary control, etc. Yet the very issue and its structural production, has great general implication for what to do in other similar cases. The issue, descriptively, will often be distorted descriptively, by multiple realities, impressions, confusion and by impermeable complexities and changes over time, etc. Again descriptive generality is poor because of inaccuracies in data description. If GT is used to generalize conceptually using constant comparison, the inaccuracies become the data and are conceptualized as part of the issue and are easily generalizable. A theory explaining aspects of concern about the issue is generated. The issue becomes an area of interest, as we say in GT.

A descriptive case study tells the whole story. This is totally unnecessary in GT research, given its delimiting procedures yielding a theory about a concept. But the GT researcher can start with the details of an existing case and constantly compare, generate a core category and their properties on the issue and start a substantive theory about its resolution which has general implications, hence could be taken to a FGT level. The case study and perhaps other cases can be theoretically sampled. The other comparable cases may be only knowledge fragments, but that is all the data that is necessary for theoretical sampling on a category. Again the uniqueness of the case study is lost in its general implications by a GT approach to it.

This is a form of secondary analysis; that is the researcher uses ongoing research on a case as data, while bringing in other

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data from extant case studies for generating a substantive theory. A lot is learned from the case as a result of the secondary analysis. The case study is no longer a concentrated bounded inquiry with a focused description. It starts a conceptualized GT. It becomes both a unique, intrinsically interesting research problem and a start of a substantive theory based on the latent patterns in the case study data, which with theoretically sampled secondary data bring out the main concern of the participants and its constant resolving by a core category. The complexity of the description which may be hard to grasp or relate to other data, becomes organized conceptually and related easily by the GT which provides conceptual handles.

The case's latent patterns become abstracted and generalized using secondary analysis and theoretical sampling. The smallest aspect of the case study can lead to a main concern with great relevance. The unit orientation of the case study with struggle for descriptive generalization to other units changes to a conceptual generalization that can be applied wherever with emergent fit.

For example the study of one adolescent's transition to college can begin to yield a substantive GT theory on the haphazard status passage from high school to college of working class children. (see Toni A William Sanchez, PhD dissertation, 1998). Or, the study of one non-political social movement such as female domestics seeking health care benefits, can lead to generating a GT on non-political social movements.

If a case study is actually one of a class of cases studied, it makes the secondary analysis easier with more varied data. Studying a class of cases — many cases — may appear to yield better empirical generalization because of the survey effect. Yet it is still a struggle to generalize descriptions to other units. A GT generated from relevant categories emergent in the case will always work better.

In summary, the purpose of the case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case. However, the utility of case study research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience: to wit its conceptual generalization. Ultimately, the case study researcher is interested in a conceptual process for a population of cases, not the individual case. Thus GT secondary analysis leads effective particularization

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of a case to valuing conceptual generalization with confidence. The value of a case study is thusly achieved in great measure by a grounded theory approach to it.

Now I would like to summarize as a wrap up of this chapter by quoting a section in the *Grounded Theory Perspective I*, (Sociology Press, 2001, p. 90–94). I beg the reader's forgiveness for the redundancy, but the points are so significant for doing FGT that a little repetition is in order. This section will make a good quote for those researchers who are trying to put forward a FGT for career and colleague purpose, as well as for a contribution. If the reader is total confident in knowing what was said above, this section can be skipped.

### **Conceptual Contrasted with Descriptive Generalizing**

In contrast QDA generalizing differs from GT generalizing substantially, because the former is on a descriptive level and the latter on a conceptual level. QDA generalizing of description is often very difficult and based on assumptions that do not hold. The problem is does a set of findings that hold in one unit, hold in another unit, whether the unit is at the same level or a larger unit. Sufficient commonality dimensions must be ascertained between the units to apply or generalize the findings in one to the other. This is a stretch that is difficult, and even if done, is short lived as the contexts are always changing. For example, does a finding in one nursing school apply to another or in all nursing schools? Particularism impacts at every point.

Generalizing a finding from one unit to another is often done by a subsequent researcher using random sampling to achieve commonalities. It can also be done by replication and testing to a modest degree. This is expensive in time and money, making GT conceptual generalizing faster and more economical. GT can generalize faster and better through conceptual constant comparisons, thus raising the level of generality of the descriptions of both units. Given the short life of description and whatever the qualitative method used, the problem remains of keeping accuracy accurate long enough to generalize descriptively for more time than the short run.

As we have seen above, the problem for description generalization is how PROPERLY to get the descriptions to a generalizing level, SINCE it is so natural to bust the limits of a

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description and see it generally anyway. Using random sampling in another larger unit or roughly equal units, feels good, since piling up units feels general even if the required commonalities are not there. The analysis of commonalities easily becomes conditionally contorted. Using negative or deviant cases or similar dimensions of another unit is standard and works to some degree in the struggle. Selective, bias reanalysis of the case enters to iron out relevant non-commonalities.

Some will combine a qualitative research with a quantitative survey of a larger population that touched on the same finding to indicate how it may be general. The researcher will be lucky to find this backup. He must search the quantitative literature extensively to find such support of generality.

The use of an analytic theory model which assumes that generalizability is present in a particular description is also used. Of course, this easily can compound the lack of grounding if the theory model is speculative. For example one can use traditional self-image identity, role theory, reference group theory to generalize a finding. We find in GT that this is a deductive, conceptual elaboration which is usually dangerously irrelevant, does not fit and only works in the fertile mind of the author. GT researchers love to bust these erudite, speculative myths.

Statistical descriptions accomplish a probability generalizing, but of course, qualitative data lacks statistics. A QDA researcher can by piling up descriptions — use volume — use probability statements that the description is general, but where they get the qualitative statistics who knows. Usually the need comes from a wish to increase the relevancy of “tiny topic” research by an “ought” deduction.

“Tiny topic” research in QDA comes from a preference to study people’s manifest problem rather than a conceptual, latent problem. This can lead to generalizing more with empathy for the manifest problem, yet with little abstraction. The descriptive patterns are reduced to a description of one tiny topic, for example: “Lived Experience in Early Stage Dementia,” (*Qualitative Health Research*, April 2004, p. 453). Generalizing to another unit is a struggle at best, but easily ignored for the specific problem concern. GT generalizing stays on a conceptual level of analysis and is applied to similar structural units with ease.

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“Tiny topic” research also focuses on routine but pressing problems in the medical, nursing, educational and business fields. It is sometimes very hard to look beyond the problem description to the more general, conceptual implications, because it is so important. It is hard to think theoretically, when the data is so significant. For example it was hard for Hans Thulesius to go from studying palliative cancer care to the abstraction of balancing care.

Another QDA researcher says, in the struggle to generalize a tiny topic, “As the numbers of cases is increased, so does the scope of the generalizability.” An example of such descriptive research is that of demonstrating the comforting role of the trauma nurse when the patient is conscious. This descriptor will enable comfort talk to be taught and eventually formally integrated as a part of the responsibility of trauma nursing. The description becomes conceptual and then becomes general to all trauma situations of any sort. Thus GT’s ability to generalize easily gets used by QDA researchers without them really knowing it, in spite of their cautionary statements such as about “limited causal implications.” GT concepts have such grab they break through description capture, the pressure to generalize is so great.

Janice Morse reflects on this pressure and struggle to generalize QDA and its not great success. “In explanatory theory, concepts and linkages are identified and described. These theoretical ideas are complex and important. However, few have been developed from qualitative research because of the limitation inherent in qualitative method in sample size, and the context bound nature of qualitative inquiry.” She suggests “using two or more qualitative studies” simultaneously so that qualitative findings can be broadened and inform quantitative research. Once again the piling up of researched units is used to raise the level of abstraction. She says: “It is the level of abstraction reached, the quality of the interpretation and the use of concepts and principals of abstraction that make the theory generalizable.” Her struggle to generalize description gets so close to conceptual generalization, but never quite reaches it because of descriptive capture. Her journal “Qualitative Health Research” more and more has become a journal of tiny topic research as her dictum for theory generation has been ignored, forgotten or just plain hopeless for so many researchers.

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Others struggle with the pressure to generalize while unawaredly in conflict with the simple properties of QDA description. Listen to Howard Becker, a well known QDA researcher: “Sampling is a major problem for any kind of research. We cannot study every case of whatever we are interested in, nor should we want to. Every scientific enterprise tries to find out something that will apply to everything of a certain kind by studying a few examples, the results of the study being, as we say, ‘generalizable’ to all members of that class of stuff. We need the sample to persuade people that we know something about the whole class.” (Becker, “Tricks of the Trade” 1998, p. 67) Here we see the same generalizing model referred to many, many times in this chapter. Many cases and random representation of one case making it typical of larger cases. Both are too difficult in QDA, not realistic, and so simple persuasion is necessary.

Alasuutari suggests another type of struggle: change words! She says: “Perhaps ‘generalizability’ is the wrong word to describe what we attempt to achieve in qualitative research. Generalization is a word that should be reserved for surveys only. What can be analyzed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand ... extrapolation better captures the typical procedures in qualitative research” (1995, p.156–157). The spin and struggle continues.

In all these solutions the QDA generalizing problem remains a struggle which solutions are never quite believable. Pressure to generalize makes the wish fulfillment “so”, but data and strategy doubts have an easy time in making it not “so”. It is clear that generalizing to a population or a unit is very hard, and often very attackable by those who do not want it applied to them or by them.

The descriptive capture struggle is moot for GT which easily generalizes a conceptualization of a range, typology, process, tolerance limits or any core category. GT procedures can help a QDA description get generalized by doing some theoretical sampling and constant conceptual comparison. It raises the level of description to the abstract general level of conceptualization.

For example a good QDA on stock broker selling of international securities was easily conceptualized as using “story

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selling”. Nonrelevant stories told by the client made him feel comfortable and trusting, whether or not the story was a sharable or unique experience. Thus the client was disposed to buying. Story selling and its compadre story talk is used by all of us to gain comfort, trust and sharing with others. A description was raised to a conceptual level with general implications.

Clearly GT conceptual generalizing applied with ease and emergent fit by constant comparison is the powerful way to go. Description generalization from unit to unit leaves too much to struggle and subsequent doubts.

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In sum, let the QDA methodologists continue the perennial struggle to find solutions to descriptively generalize. There is no real, lasting solution for them. It is their problem. I wish them the best. In this book we focus on conceptual generalization which occurs with ease, is seen everywhere and is applicable with emergent fit, when doing FGT. We now turn to procedures for generating a FGT.





## **Moral Positioning: A formal theory**

*Thomas Aström, Ph.D.*

### **Abstract**

This article presents the main outlines of a theory of moral positioning, contributing to the analysis of moralizing as a social phenomenon. It is a formal theory in several of its aspects. The discovered patterns help to explain social interaction in conflicts and how ordinary people use these patterns in relation to others. Moral positioning is frequently occurring in social situations where imbalances and conflicts arise among individuals and groups. Moral positioning is here theorized concurrently with a supporting conceptualization of social positioning. The model here presented can be used to explain the positioning process and is possible to use in order to become aware of, and in a better way, manage a conflict.

The core variable in moral positioning theory has the form of a triadic pattern, built on the moral positions Good, Evil and Victim (GEV-pattern). The moralizing process is easily understood as socially and dynamically constructed patterns of positions. Those identities are related in three basic and complementary dimensions of meaning; Existence, Interest and Moral dimensions (EIM-pattern), each one with its own conflict pattern. The classic grounded theory method was used and the results were first presented in my dissertation in 2003.

**KEY WORDS:** Conflict, Moral, Positioning, Identity, Interaction, Grounded theory.

### **Introduction**

Originally the purpose of this project was to find out why there are so many complicated relations in a disabled person's life. In my first attempts to research the psychosocial aspects of being disabled and belonging to a family with a disabled child, I met a barrier that prevented me from entering that field and getting access to field data. The strong gate-keeping from officials in bureaucracy that protected persons living their lives with or

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near disabilities also “protected” them from researchers, without even giving them the option to take a standpoint of their own.

Being an experienced therapist, I was well aware of the field’s debates and controversies, and I was also aware of some tabooed areas where the dialogue on psychosocial matters was restricted even among professionals. Some of the professionals I interviewed felt uneasy answering this type of questions. The resistance among professionals to open insight was surprisingly strong. Why is that? Wouldn’t a search for knowledge about these problematic issues benefit the clients? Why were the obstructions to openness so strong and feelings of conflict so tense? Why were well informed and experienced professionals afraid of such issues?

But on the other hand, parents and persons with disability were often ready and sometimes anxious to give their version. An example referred to by a researcher from an interview with a grown man with disabilities: *“One day one of the participants asked me how far I dared to go in my report. He was worried that I in overdone consideration to parents and staff, or because of my personal fear and cowardice, didn’t dare tell about all the hard stuff that had happened in his and the others ... life.”* An urge for plain speaking.

In contrast I met the hesitant attitude in the claims of professionals I interviewed on anonymous cases of psychosocial problems: *“Can you assure me you will burn these tapes afterwards?”* and another: *“I don’t want to be quoted!”* or a third: *“I feel nasty telling you about this”*. Information control seemed to be central in the interaction on such intricate matters. I could later use bureaucrats’ and other professionals’ reactions on the subject as useful data. They indirectly told me what I ought to figure out. And I went on collecting and analyzing more data on the forces in the field of handicap. It became more and more obvious that information control is run by the forces in different types of moral positioning.

In this paper, moral positioning is presented as a theory about the process in which an ordinary person gives moral meaning and identity to subjects and objects. It offers an interactive perspective on the moral issue. Moral positioning isn’t dealing with morality as a religious or philosophical matter on human behaviour; it’s not regarding the normative issue in

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defining what is good or bad. In this project, I focus on how people manage different types of conflicts and how moralizing is used. *Moral positioning* emerged as the core category of what is obviously a very common basic social process.

There are several patterns of moral positioning found in data. The patterns are flexible and can be used by any party in any type of conflict. They show the possible variation and dynamics in the moral positioning processes. By using moral identities the participants are defined through questions like: Who was to blame? Who ought to do what? Who is regarded as Evil or Good? Who runs the risk of becoming a Victim? Whose interest is Evil and whose Good? A lot of different analytic questions could be picked from this social positioning model. It displays a multi-perspective view of a conflict and opens up locked and established illusions.

Moral positioning is, as I said, not about what's morally good and bad. It's about the way we use morality in daily life. Instead of trying to straighten out moral matters, this research is focused on the ongoing, implicit and omnipresent moral patterns and moralizing processes and how they work. In theorizing its dynamics and properties I discovered and theorized several subprocesses like *competitive moral positioning*, *locking of moral positions*, *moral gate-keeping*, and other basic social processes that have important elements of moral positioning like *superhabilitating* and *becoming overdependent* (Aström, 2003). Those processes became important in finding out how participants use moral identities in their field of activity.

Giving moral meaning to something includes the conflict being moralized. The subject of conflict is about existential and/or interest matters. Analyzing conflicts in interaction as a social positioning process involves several implicit patterns. These patterns are of a general nature, each one belonging to its specific dimension of meaning, Existential, Interest or Moral (Aström, 2003). This extended model of interrelated dimensions and positions is a model for social positioning analysis, and it seems to serve well in the analysis of meaning and identities. The morality of an action is always related to meanings in existence and interests and will change in relation to context and situational factors in a dynamic way.

Researching with the classic grounded theory method

enabled me to discover, explore and develop concepts that might be helpful in dealing with conflicts. Moralizing is obviously a central aspect in the course of events in social conflict interaction, both overt and covert. The discovery of the theoretical core pattern, the GoodEvilVictim-pattern, was decisive for analyzing and theorizing these processes. Some major discoveries will be described more extensively since they are obviously very important for the main feature of the theory.

### Method

The research method was classic grounded theory (Glaser, 1971, 1978, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005) used in a consistent way following the steps in the emerging of a core process, relevant data sampling, a substantive theory, sampling of differential but relevant areas and finally a formal theory. The cyclic procedures, constantly supported by comparing and writing up, let the theory emerge first as a substantive theory mainly built on data from the field of disability - and then as a formal theory grounded on data from several different fields including education, child care, management, politics and sports.

The first major step in the analysis was the emerging of five substantive subprocesses presented in my dissertation (Aström, 2003): *Competitive moral positioning, locking of moral positions, moral gate-keeping, superhabilitating and becoming overdependent*. Observations and interviews were done with persons with impairments in different ages and life situations, parents and professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists, nurses, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, personal assistants, social workers, work managers and teachers. These conceptualized processes exposed moral positioning as a significant core process in numerous social interactions. The result of this analytic work was a theory of moral positioning.

The second major step was to compare the conceptualizations from the first analysis in the field of disability with completely different fields, searching for possible formal qualities in these conceptualizations. The theoretical core, the GoodEvilVictim-pattern, turned out to be generally applicable in completely different areas and circumstances and to have obvious formal qualities. It was natural to let a formal theory emerge from the comparing of moralizing in a variety of contexts and

situations. Moral positioning emerged as a formal theory.

### Sources of formal theory

As the substantive theory seemed to be easy to use in other areas it was near at hand to go forward to formal theory. It seems that people easily apply this theory in their thinking of other cases where they see moral positioning. Starting with substantive theory, the next step was further comparing in other fields of social activity and conflicts found in social services, school, preschool, education, child care, management, working life, politics and sports. Data were continuously collected with theoretical sampling in several different areas of conflict through interviewing, observation, media and research reports. This was followed up by comparing the results with relevant theoretical works including Berger and Luckmann (1966); Berne (1959, 1964); Blumer (1969); Bourdieu (1991, 1994); Braaten (1982); Buber (1970, 2002), ; Elias (2000); Gibson (1977) ;Giddens (1984,1994); Glaser and Strauss (1965,1971); Goffman (1959, 1963); Harré and van Langenhove (1999); Harré and Moghaddam (2003); Lewin (1951); Mead (1932, 1934, 1937); Piaget (1965); Simmel (1955), among others.

### Results

During the analysis of the phenomena of moralizing, two interwoven conceptualizations emerged. The way people interacted by giving and taking identities could be described sufficiently by the concepts and structure of an emerging *social positioning model*, which supported the emerging of a *theory of moral positioning*. These results are about how ordinary people use patterns of meanings and patterns of identities in social interaction. This theory will explain to some extent how, while not aware of how these patterns work, we all instinctively use them to familiarize ourselves with a situation and to gain desired life qualities and capital. The use of these patterns represents a natural way of processing information in a conflict and of positioning oneself in the field of action. Such patterns are important parts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1991), integrated during socialization processes.

### Part I: Social positioning – an analytic perspective

To understand ‘positioning’ in moral positioning one has to recognize the concepts of the analytic tool social positioning

analysis. The emerging of this tool was parallel to the emerging of a theory of moral positioning and as moralizing is best understood as a positioning process, I will start with a short presentation of social positioning.

A 'social position' is as a concept sometimes perceived as one's place in a social hierarchy, a field of business or other contexts and sometimes as in taking a personal standpoint when certain matters are at stake. But the concept of 'social positioning' is used here in a much wider sense. Social positioning is elsewhere developed as a theoretical perspective by Rom Harré, Luk van Langenhove, Fathali Moghaddam et al. (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). My use and theorizing of the concept of social positioning emerged from a grounded theorizing and didn't follow prime theorists' ideas. Instead, it led to a theoretical tool that differs significantly and, as a theoretical perspective, points in another direction.

*Social positioning* emerged as a useful and generative theoretical code during the analysis from which the conceptualization of 'moralizing behaviour' and its connected aspects emerged into a theory of moral positioning. Confluent with the conceptualizing of moral positioning, the analytic tool here called *social positioning analysis* was emerging and contributed a lot to the understanding of moralizing. *Social positioning is a perspective that uses positions and their linkings to display patterns of meaning.* The central concepts in social positioning analysis are 'position' and 'linking' that build 'pattern' for social meaning and identities. It's used to describe the 'positioning' that realizes personalized 'constellations' in social interaction. Further, the activation of a position comes through a 'propositioning'. The reply will be the result of an 'impositioning process' where both the person's 'disposition' and the character of the proposition will be the means and forces that form the answer and establishes positions in a current constellation. *The complexity in social interaction could legibly be exposed and divided into separate dimensions of meaning by using a model built on the three combined dimensions, Existence, Interest and Moral (EIM).* The concepts and properties in social positioning will recur in the text below, interwoven in the presentation of the theory of moral positioning.

The analysis indicates that one can't explain moral behaviour solely by regarding the patterns of moral positioning,

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because any moralizing requires an existential and interest matter to make sense. That's why this form of positional analytic structure has to be based on these three dimensions that in an efficient and powerful way can decompose and explain social meaning in interaction. We seem to constantly use the three inherent EIM-dimensions to express, differentiate, combine and interpret meaning.

What is meant here with Existence, Interest and Moral as dimensions? Even if it's quite easy to sort the meanings we give to phenomena according to these categories, it is difficult to give a precise definition of these domains. The *moral dimension* is the dimension that is easiest to define; it's roughly about what we regard as right or wrong in giving meaning to personal behaviour, or any subject or object we perceive. *The concern is to locate moral identities and properties.* *Interest* is the dimension that deals with the resources we strive for, compete over or share. Interest is about socially recognized values. *The concern is to get hold of the appropriate capital.* This includes a wide capital concept. *Existence* is the dimension that contains a vast variety of life qualities concerning survival, development, feelings, health, well-being, ageing, growth/decline, learning/forgetting, etc. to an extent that is difficult to fully describe. The content will be clearer as the core pattern becomes more obvious to the reader. *The concern is to reach the desired life qualities that satisfy one's needs.* By regarding existence, interest and morals as 'dimensions', I note that though each one has a character of its own, their extensions are so immense that it is impossible to make a complete description of them.

A moral standpoint as well as flowing moralizing behaviour of others is always related to conflicts in the existential and/or interest dimensions, and the relations between such positions are mutual and work together. By regarding interaction from a moral positioning perspective, one might understand the way we try to manage existential and interest conflicts. For example: Being robbed of your money (interest), you will be angry (existence) and define the perpetrator as evil (moral). I claim that this three-dimensional meta-structure (EIM) and its implicit functions aren't recognized in many ethic and moral discussions. The relations between the three EIM-dimensions are keys to understand how meanings/identities are constructed and how important the influence from that structure is. The EIM-pattern

will be further described below.

### **Part II: Moral positioning**

It is almost impossible to imagine a society without the phenomena of moralizing. Morality is a powerful social force used in a lot of implicit and unaware interactions. Through analysis, it could be easier to recognize its use and misuse.

#### *Persistent issues of good and evil*

Moral positioning is dealing with Good and Evil as commonly used categories with an immense variety of representations. The analysis shows how moralizing works, no matter what is regarded as Good or Evil. The question of what should be defined as Good or Evil is mostly a philosophical matter and that question isn't dealt with here.

However, while everyone in daily life, and in many social processes continuously deals with the question of what is good and what is evil, it is done according to specific patterns. And while we all have to solve daily controversies we have to make more or less temporary judgement on what constitutes good or bad deeds. We also try to co-construct a local moral order in coherence with ethics in society, and we regularly have to transmit or explain moralities to our children. Everyone is expected to take moral stances in a lot of daily existential and interest conflicts. We must try to master the moral issues in our lives. We use moral positioning because it is useful in our lives.

This research on moral positioning has analyzed morality in relations and in different situations and searched for their interactive and dynamic properties. The analysis is focused on why and how moralizing is used and activated in conflicts. It's obviously a social tool in the way that it keeps drives, needs and competition in check in order to protect the society and individuals. *Different moral orders will therefore be in conflict as people have different drives and interests and a moral order works as a hindrance to certain interests and satisfying of needs.* That's why the moral order itself will represent different interests and accordingly sometimes be an object of bitter competition.

There are obviously no consensual rules of what is good in all situations and contexts. But somehow *the GoodEvilVictim (GEV)-pattern survives the harshest competition, and even conceptual fights, and will always be revived.* The moral conflict pattern is



durable and resumes even after the moral issues are neglected or scorned. There seems to be a drive to practice moralities in a mutually coordinated way. One could say that a moral order is used in relation to its utility in the long run: *'What is good for people is good moral*. But moralizing is also based on local (or individual) interests, egocentric or ethnocentric, like: *'What is good for me (us) is morally good'*. Collectively speaking, moralizing is a way to keep the group together, to protect and uphold group member rights and responsibilities. Individually speaking, *moral positioning is also a way of levelling emotional and other intrapsychic unbalances* by defining the relation to others. We use morality at all levels to make a normative appraisal of the situation by giving moral identities to the participants.

As the morally good is depending on what is existentially good for people, the basic benchmarks will be 'access to life qualities'. We continuously compare our access to life qualities with others, but as there are conflicts in interest and existence the question of what really is Good or Evil seems to remain contestable.

*Defining the threats around us*

Moralizing is one way of defining the threats around us. When someone experiences a precarious or threatening situation in any form, either in existence or from interests, that person will usually activate moral positioning to give meaning to the situation. As a mode of describing social interaction, moral positioning is built on patterns of moral positions. The moral conflict pattern has a triadic form and is composed of the positions Good, Evil, Victim – the GEV-pattern. From that pattern we model constellations to use in social situations by personalizing these positions.

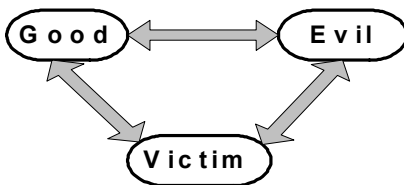


Figure 1. The GEV-triad or the moral conflict pattern

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When the moral dimension is activated anyone feeling threatened may position the threat as the Evil, for example pointing out an evil person. If someone is about to become a Victim and cries out for help, the rescuer will be the Good. By that, the threatening situation is moralized through the GEV-pattern in a personalized constellation. This is an example of a constellation with three persons, but since a pattern of positions isn't the same as a constellation, one person can also hold two of the GEV-patterns positions, for example by simultaneously being the Victim and the Good, as in: *"You are mean to me in spite of the fact that I always try to help you"*, (you= evil, I= victim + good). In many flowing dialogues such as in everyday quarrels or disputes, the participants alternate in all three moral positions.

Anyone can be in a helpless stage, for example stricken with disability or illness. When someone needs help and the help comes natural, like anyone supporting her child without moral reflections, the moral dimension will probably not be activated. *Doing what does good is often natural, with existential rather than moral meaning.* But if participants overrule the local moral order, such as when negligent parents don't support their child, it might trigger an emotional atmosphere and start a moral positioning according to the GEV-pattern. Neglecting may primarily be experienced as a moralized conflict of how to react to helplessness, but is based on unsatisfied existential needs and interests not provided for.

To uphold his/her right the needer may have to fight for it. Rights are in the interest of the needer and if the needer can't force the bystander to help, moral positioning might start. A supporter that intervenes will, as soon as the situation is moralized, probably be valued as the Good, the neglecter as the Evil – and the needer will keep, unimpelled or not, the victim-position, until the conflict fades out. Even a negligent bystander will finally try to recapture a good-position in defining him/herself.

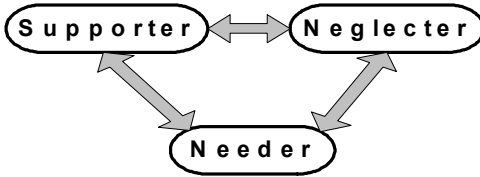


Figure 2. A constellation associated with the GEV-triad. The pattern behind could be found as multidimensional, also communicating existential and interest meaning.

An anxious helper usually tries to keep the good-position as it constitutes important social capital, but inner doubts of one's own good character or identity may also lead to a compelling evilizing of others. Sometimes even a diffuse feeling of unease or discontent might activate a search for someone else to blame. It's sometimes expressed in a self-revealing way as: "*I needed a culprit*" and "*He became my scapegoat*". The force to fulfil the pattern in current moral constellations arises from the syntagmatic character of the GEV-pattern. *One activated identity in the GEV-pattern will start a force of fulfilling the whole pattern.* It is an entity.

As long as a threat is experienced, the GoodEvilVictim-pattern (GEV) will impel even if the constellation alters. One can't be sure that a specific constellation will last because new actions or circumstances might change the identities knitted to GEV-positions. The more convincing a person label others as Evil, the more confirmed will that person's own identity as Good or Victim appear. The winner of the good-position in moral competing confirms the others as somewhat Evil and/or Victim. This might have a decisive influence on individuals dependent on those who are more resourceful (Swart, & Solomon, 2003; Mitchell, 1981).

Identities will be formed with reference to the dimensions and patterns in the EIM-model, with moral meaning as well as existential or from interest. Will we, for example, still feel sorry for the beggar when he turns out to be threatening and obstinate? Could he be an actual threat to our life qualities and interests? Do we find him more of a perpetrator than a victim? Our current moral constellation will, as we capture it in a threatening situation, lead to repositioning and changes in our own acting. Perhaps later, in a reflective mood, one may find other moral standpoints from a wider existential perspective, including the

beggar's life story, disadvantages and social distress. Moral positioning and its formal conflict pattern can be instantly activated and also deactivated as soon as the threat is gone. When feelings of fear no longer are at their peak, one might be ready, for example, to explore the existential and interest conflicts of the beggar's life story.

*Conflicts in suffering*

Suffering is a conflict in itself, existentially speaking. The conflicts we experience in embodied suffering have an existential character and will work in different levels of our existence. Pure bodily pain, emotional and psychic suffering and psychosocial discomfort are all basic aspects of an existential status. The sufferings of others often become moralized conflicts in a society, conflicts that some escape and others confront.

Persons stricken with illness or disability will easily be pitied with "poor him" or "poor her" as a persistent identity. The sufferer expects to meet compassion and will probably need it. But a person stricken with a lifelong disability will have a devastating social life if he/she is always pitied. A bodily suffering might be bearable, but not pitying social attitudes. To repel over-compassionate attitudes, without being regarded as unthankful, one has to perform a difficult act of social balancing. On the other hand, lack of compassion from the bystander will be regarded as heartlessness and bad behaviour - and activate a moralized conflict. The existential conflict will thereby be moralized and the stricken person will become the Victim.

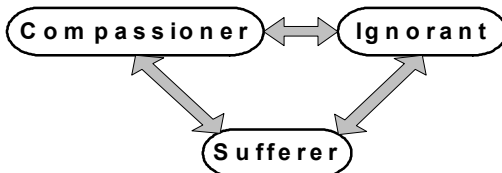


Figure 3. A constellation associated with the GEV-triad.

Especially in a context of guilt, there will be an urge to take a standpoint in favour of the sufferer. The social moralizing is then near at hand and *moral competing* on who is the 'best in being Good' will sometimes occur as, for instance, when participants overdo their compassion in order to be on the safe side. Relations sometimes become unnecessarily cautious and tense as if interacting in an avalanche risk zone. There is a *moral*

*balancing* between the compassionate and the ignorant attitude to the sufferer. Being too good isn't Good, trying to be the only person that is good isn't Good either.

It is sometimes suggested that children who are frequently pitied and victimized during his/her upbringing, runs the risk of integrating these identities as dominant. It would work like a habituated GEV-pattern that imposes the person in a dominant way to interpret and construe the situation from the self-identity as 'poor creature' and 'Victim'. A dominant self-positioning from these identities proposing 'I have been mistreated' will in any conflict tend to give others moral positions as Good or Evil. *When a GEV-pattern is repeatedly proposed from any taken position, it will be imposing and unpleasant for others and often a hindrance in social life.*

As there might be many social consequences connected to a person's disability in interaction with fellow-creatures, daily conflicts might be near at hand. An oversensitized moral disposition will in that situation become a problem. Practically everyone meets unsolved existential and interest conflicts by taking a moral standpoint, but the level of moral affection and action differs a lot.

Sometimes we meet a conflict by proposing a moral good-alliance, with a clear-cut Evil on the outside, before any analysis or problem solving. The fear of losing control can make us lock such a conflict constellation. Persons or groups that are evilized are of course excluded from the togetherness in a good-alliance. *Moral gate keeping* is effective in drawing the line between 'us and them'. Taking possession of the good-position makes it possible to capitalize on it in several ways. The good-alliance can also be formed and kept together with rules like: *'If you aren't with us, you are against us'*, or *'Only our enemy's enemy can be our friend'*. Such rules serve to lock a moral constellation. *Model power* (Braten, 1982; Aström, 2003) is about having a social capital that gives the power to actualize, activate, establish or dissolve a constellation. *Moral threatening* is a way to exercise moral model power, and it can be combined with the threats in interest and of existential bereavement in social processes like *expelling, stripping of rank, excommunication and freezing-out.*

*The helpful other*

*"I sometimes let them help me, though I don't like it. But it*

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*makes them feel good*”, says one woman with motor impairment. Moral obligations obviously aren’t one way even, if we sometimes think so and it’s not always clear who is helping whom.

To make someone else feel well is usually morally good. Feeling well when making others feel well is also common. But it doesn’t mean that the moral dimension actually is activated. Feeling well is a life quality, and as such an existential matter. One may feel well by doing good. But on the other hand one may also feel very well by gaining capital in a morally dubious way. The social identity of a ‘good’ person is what our doings look like in the eyes of others, not what he feels like. If the social moral identity is important for a person’s self-esteem, the current moral order will impose on a person’s social positioning.

When not being able to help, one may feel helpless and even fall into a self-positioned, self-blaming Evil identity. When the inward moralizing becomes unbearable, one turns to moral positioning outwards, and projects the unwanted identity on others. One mother cried over the child she couldn’t help. She felt helpless and no good at all. Perhaps someone else could do this better she said, “someone who could save my child to a better life”. This mother had low self-esteem, devaluing herself as being ‘not-able-enough’, and even ‘not-good-enough’ in a self-moralizing way. Parents’ moral identities sometimes seem to be more crucial for their self-esteem than their existential identity even if they coalesce. It’s expressed in a comment: *“I’m not perfect but I will fight for my children’s future”*.

*Being unhelpful or neglectful is usually Evil in a local moral order.* Being an ‘unable parent’ is sometimes mixed up with being a ‘bad parent’ or an ‘evil parent’, because the practical insufficiency is moralized in a devaluating way. Separating these identities is sometimes crucial for the support of a parent’s self-esteem in a faltering parenthood. In most contexts, existential aspects like suffering seem to connect to moral identities. We will search for the cause of the suffering, and we often prefer to personalize it - to point out a culprit. But there are also contexts where the interaction is kept strictly professional, in a morally neutral way; for example, when the task is strictly medical - to save life whoever is stricken – or when someone keeps up a ‘strictly business’-attitude, with no existential or moral considerations. Another example an attitude of ‘none-of-my-business’ as a way to mark one’s limited moral responsibility,

ridding oneself of moral obligations and emotional involvement in the other.

### *Fear and defence*

The activation of moral positioning has several alternative drives, but fear and bereavement are of great importance. Moralizing is a means to regulate behaviour to be acceptable and unharmed, and will therefore be frequently used. *Moral recruiting* is sometimes used to assemble support for 'a good cause', like things that correspond to highly valued life qualities or capital. Arousing fear or anticipated loss might 'gather the troops', and the demonizing of a counterpart will strengthen a constellation modelled from the GEV-pattern. The drives are existential and/or from interests, but work through *moral susceptibility*.

Feelings of fear activate defence and are near at hand when individuals are weakened and exposed as stricken with misfortune, stronger competitors or earlier victimizing. In *moral gate keeping* certain participants mark the border of interest and existential security with the help of a GEV-constellation. Within the borders, there will be one or more objects of protection, thus the presumed Victims. The ward will be protected by institutionalized rules, both formal and implicit moral rules of conduct. The intruder will by all means be kept out, and the object of protection, perceived as vulnerable and helpless, will be kept safe inside. The intruder is evilized as a threat to values of existence or interest, as it arouses feelings of fear as if existence is put in jeopardy. A lot of representations are possible. Moral gate keeping is a basic social process, described in more detail elsewhere together with its subprocesses.

### *Existential fight and interest competition*

Conflict activities within the existence and interest dimensions seem to differ in character. An existential controversy is more or less an animated fight, based on feelings and affects. An interest conflict is basically more of a competitive challenge over a desired capital. It isn't necessarily animated and ruled by feelings, it could as well be a cool, calculative strategic manoeuvring and manipulation to win the capital at stake. Mostly these modes of conflict activity, fight and competition seem to be combined to some extent, but they also occur separately.

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The hierarchy of social status capital in 'Over/Under'-relations is a basic and often ruling identity structure. During interaction, we constantly define others and ourselves as equal, top dog or underdog and we act to keep up or improve our social status, or any other social capital. As a context, the hierarchical social structure seems to represent one type of institutionalized allotment of social capital. There are probably rules for roles, and to what extent these are changeable or possible to equalize. A stiff hierarchical structure may force the participants to have either top dog or underdog positions. Positioning in the hierarchical context may be rooted in the competitive evaluation of things like physical or economic strength. A person's access to important life qualities and social capital are compared. If moral qualities are capitalized and if competition dominates the context, there probably won't be room for all in a good-position. *The context may force the participants to regard others as moral competitors.*

A moral order, local or universal, is a social construction that says what is to be regarded as Good or Evil. Though it's formed to keep up systems of relations in a specific way, it leaves a lot to the participants. We reconstruct it in social relations at any level. Doubts about another party's *moral credibility* make the interaction insecure and unpredictable, rationalizing our interest in moral imprinting on new generations. *Moral order is complex and variable but seems to depend on how positions in the GEV-pattern are perceived as life qualities and reified as capital.*

During analysis, moral positioning was found to be a central aspect in many processes concerning human conflicts. Such conflicts are moralized with varying strength, from aggressive and accusing to subtle and vaguely insinuating. *Moral hinting* represents a covert interaction style that is opposite to open moralizing. Conflicts on moral matters can either be openly recognized and debated or covert with masked moralizing and tabooing. For example, in conflicts in parenthood and caretaking around a disabled child, an area with strong tensions that often displaces staff discourse to informal fora; a matter that is only discussed in secured zones.

### *Patterns and dynamics of a moral conflict*

To understand how moral positioning works in conflicts one has to understand the dynamics of social positioning and the



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force in implicit structures. Even if the pattern isn't fully exposed in all its positions, it is still there implicitly.

The GEV-pattern is easily applied and recognizable as a basic pattern for everyday life. The answer to the moral question 'Who is good (or evil, or victim)?' is always modelled in a constellation that follows the GEV-triad. The pattern is activated even when all positions aren't obvious and clearly personalized. In the sentence '*The mother rescued her child from being abused*', there is also an abusive (implicit Evil) power present in the constellation. Even when someone says: '- *He hit me!*', the good-position is present in the constellation because one regards hitting someone as Evil and the listener is expected to hold the implicit good-position. If the answer is: '*You earned it!*', there would probably be some *moral confusion* about what is right or wrong. Unclear constellations that are built on a pattern like GEV will urge fulfilling questions like '*Who did what?*'.

### *Positions and linking*

With the concept 'position' one can display how meaning is linked to meaning in a specific way. The constellations formed in social interaction use symbolic patterns like GEV. In personalizing positions, we give and take identities in correspondence to the conflicts and concerns with which we deal. A proposed meaning usually has to be accepted to serve social interaction.

In a flow of changing meanings, it's possible to move from position to position to create new constellations perhaps being evil today and being the good guy tomorrow. For changes of moral identities, there have to be structures that aren't locked in sanctifying, demonizing or victimizing. A structure can be both enabling and constraining (Giddens, 1994, 1984). Consider, for example, how table manners work. They make us able to succeed at the dinner table thanks to the restrictions attached. The linkings can be strong in constellations that are often used, like in an institutionalized doctor/patient-constellation. The linkings can be even stronger in a hard conflict that serves the ruling order, powerful interests or significant needs. A stiff-linked constellation can be institutionalized in a context as an important structure.

As positions form the pattern through their links, they also form a specific meaning coming from the specific way they

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connect meanings. That's why a specific type of linking is decisive. The meaning of the whole constellation is decided by the meaning in its linkings. For example, the link between Good and Victim is 'makes good/takes good'. The link between Evil and Victim is 'makes bad/takes bad', and the link between Good and Evil is 'makes good/makes evil'. Moving from one position to another means different things in different links.

When we analyze patterns, we search both positions and links because it's the linking that gives the position its complementary meanings and builds the pattern. One can't understand what Good is without also understanding the complementary meanings of Evil and Victim. In analyzing a constellation, we need to find out what dimension and dimensional positions are active in people's construction and how identities relate to each other. In real life situations we just 'feel it' and 'do it' but are seldom aware of it. If the moral dimension is activated in someone's mind, the GEV-pattern will surface automatically.

As a formal pattern serves a lot of different situations, a pattern of that type resists change in all possible usage and withstands dynamic forces and reconstructions of meaning in interaction. If the Victim is found to be the one who hit first, the constellation will be recomposed after the same basic pattern but maybe with the former Victim as the perpetrator, as long as the moral dimension is activated.

### *Giving and taking positions*

In everyday social interaction we continuously search for and compose meaning and identity (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The social interactors are proposing, more or less impressively, the identities they prefer. We propose our own identities in 'self-positioning' and others in 'other-positioning', to gain capital and life qualities. Others don't always accept a proposed self-identity, thus a person's ability and skill in social positioning will be important to accomplish his/her concerns.

When we take and give identities in constellations, we model all the activated identities into a coordinated meaning in the form of a specific constellation. *The consequence of self-positioning is that we simultaneously propose a complementary identity to others, whether we intend it or not. We continuously identify others in relation to ourselves and ourselves in relation to others.*

*When giving an identity to others, the result of an activated pattern is that you at the same time propose an identity for yourself.* For example, a strong marking of oneself as a morally good person may be taken as an exclusive identity, which offers the positions as Victim or Evil to others - a proposal that may arouse feelings of conflict or competitive action on the issue. Alternatively, if we point out a Victim, there will be an instant filling-out and proposing of who is Evil and who is Good in a personalized constellation, because of the fulfilling character of the triadic GEV-pattern. Not all activated patterns will result in an established constellation, as the perception of a proposed meaning might be transient or abandoned. But some will be accepted as relevant, or imposed as inevitable, and therefore realized as important social identities. In a tense situation and a conflictive context, moral imposing tends to be strong and the position difficult to escape.

The giving and taking of positions are often flexible and mobile. A common and ordinary family tiff might be like a moral merry-go-round in taking and giving positions in Good/Evil/Victim-turns, as an ordinary everyday interaction. At one moment, a member is the good guy - and in the next the bad guy. To gain a good-position one may have to reduce another person's good-capital by blaming them and seizing the victim-position. Snapping the good-position at opportunity often involves active good deeds, but it can be done in different ways. Thus, basic patterns of moral conflict are the same in family conflicts as in higher levels of societal processes.

### *Patterns and constellations*

We continuously use patterns from our social disposition in modelling various constellations for daily life practice, in constellations of persons and objects. Some patterns seem to be old and lasting because of their usefulness, and some are formal and have a form that's basically the same whatever the situation, context or participants. The constellations can be varied on the formal pattern according to personalizing, context, combined patterns, emotional strength, drives, main concerns etc.

A personalized constellation on the GEV-pattern is built on the personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, it, we etc.) and can be combined in all sorts of ways. They are pronominal positions that will be used as basic identities in interaction about who-is-what

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or who-has-what. Patterns like GEV are easily combined with personal pronouns. That's how positions and constellations make sense. We model a constellation in 'I am', 'You are' and 'He/she/it is (or they are)' and others adapt it to patterns they recognize. When the constellations are modelled after the GEV-pattern they take form, for example, in: 'I am good', 'You are a victim' and 'He is evil', as relevant social identities in a specific situation and context.

### *GEV-pattern as an analytic unit*

The basic pattern of moral conflicts, the GEV-pattern, works as a model for social interaction and is repeatedly used in all sorts of situations and levels of abstraction. Its positions bear symbolic social meaning that are easily understood by everyone even when they aren't accepted as identities. In observations of children's play it was obvious that the GEV-pattern is variable and adaptable to uncomplicated meaning in children's play as well as advanced interaction. In children's play relations they interact with opinions like Nice, Nasty and Someone being treated nice or nasty.

The GEV-pattern is also a pattern useful in deconstructing a conflict situation. When participants give the conflict a moral meaning, they have modelled the situation and identities in a certain way. Deconstructing each party's perspective and how they give moral meaning to needs, concerns and interests, may clarify their locking of the conflict constellation. Sacred values, crucial needs, strongly felt interests and demonized opposites can then be exposed to reflection.

The pattern of moral conflict is best understood in combination with the patterns of existential and interest conflicts, the EIM-model, but this limited presentation of pattern for social positioning analysis cannot show the full range of variety. There is usually a dynamic movement between conflict and balance in all three dimensions to take into account, for example when a person gets sick and becomes socially devalued by a morally sensitizing sickness as AIDS/HIV (Gilman, 1988).

### *Dimensions and conflict patterns*

The constellations we form in daily life are based on limited knowledge, habituated patterns of behaviour, personal drives and interests, and will therefore be temporary and situational. They

will be formed in a flow, concurrently influenced by context and situational factors. The constellations of conflict can be puzzled out with the help of the patterns in the EIM-model.

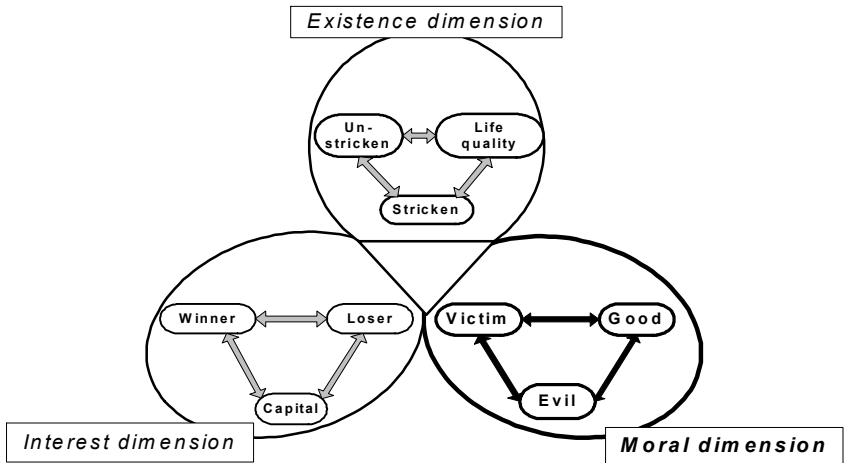


Figure 4. Existence, interest and moral dimensions and the dimensional conflict patterns.

The EIM-model is the result of a grounded theory analysis and offers the possibility to visualize conflict positions in a lot of different applications. Every position in this model is combinable with any of the others in the relevant constellation or combination of meanings, and these dimensional patterns are abiding in transfer into different levels of abstraction.

It is important to point out that in the existential dimension there is a tremendous amount of 'life qualities' that can be termed in different levels, but its basic conflict meaning is caught in the expression 'being vs. not being'. In a similar way, the interest dimension has an enormous variety of 'capital' and 'capitalizing' in social life, and here the basic conflict meaning is 'having vs. not having'. Both 'the need for a life quality' (an existential drive) and 'the interest for a capital' (a capital drive) are concurrent socially constructed dynamics of life. When a new need arises, it usually awakens an interest of capital that can be supportive to satisfaction. This is about how to obtain what supplies or satisfies (capital) a certain need (life quality).

*When a primary conflict in the existential and interest*

*dimension, is reduced or resolved, the moralizing fades out.* The moralizing activity is no longer nourished by a perceived conflict. The patterns we possess in our habituated repertoire are obviously activated when triggered - and inactivated when not needed. It's the emotional imbalance that seems to animate the GEV-pattern even when the conflict is historic or, as in other cases, anticipated.

### Reflections and Discussion

The results of this research are in two main areas: (1) the *discovery of the moral positioning process*, its dynamics and the formal properties of the core variable, the GEV-pattern; (2) the *discovery of a meta-structure (EIM-pattern)* that explains much about how moralizing can be understood as a dynamic force in handling conflicts in existential and interest matters. To make sense the moralizing process has to be related to imbalances in significant aspects of existence and interest, and this can be visualized as a meta-pattern of three cooperating dimensions that implicitly support the participant in giving, making and interpreting meaning and how this can be analyzed, described and visualized as a social positioning process. The limited space available in a single article can't give full justice to the theory.

Social positioning, as a concept emerged from analysis of 'attitudes between persons in social interaction with one stricken by impairment'. It is grounded in two characteristic attitudes: the stricken as a 'risk' and the stricken as an 'object for sympathy'. While analyzing the processes around moral positioning, several processual concepts in line with social positioning emerged. They were urged by the analysis to explain what was going on. Having developed a limited conceptual apparatus for social positioning analysis through a grounded theory analysis, I started to search for references in research literature. Harré and Langenhove had just published their book *Positioning Theory* (1999) but as I didn't know about the articles that preceded this book, this conceptualizing of Social positioning wasn't influenced by those but had, instead, taken another direction though some concepts are quite similar. Their main focus is the positions in storyline in the dialogue; mine is the use of consistent patterns of positions and identities socially constructed. Their alignment is more in describing the dialog and mine is in finding the abstract patterning of positions used in processes of interaction at any level. Though they don't use the concept 'social positioning', these

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two alignments are comparable and probably combinable in many aspects.

As conflicts are both within us and between us, and since balance and conflict are constantly recurring for different reasons, one has to regard positioning as a myriad of positionings, creating a myriad of constellations, sometimes based on socially co-constructed patterns. Social interaction is taking place on several levels at the same time, with several simultaneously ongoing conflicts in all dimensions. Several basic social processes might be activated at the same time, they come and go when needed, possibly with other dimensional systems working simultaneously. Visualizing the social interaction as positional patterns may be regarded as seductive and simplifying; but on the other hand, it may be a virtue in using this as a tool, to be capable of making the meanings and identities in social interaction clear and simple. Actually, there is a potentiality for building a more composite pattern.

The aim has been to find the core concepts that catch what is going on in social interaction when moralizing is activated. The result should be regarded as a proposal, and the patterns and concepts should be scrutinized. But these results can also be used with generative power, other patterns on different levels can be found and explored, due to the social positioning perspective. Its patterns can be applied in real life and tested as tools for a social discourse.

The reasons for moral positioning vary depending on what drives and interests are activated. Already known is that people use moralizing in a lot of different ways and for different reasons. Such reasons are to *reach balance within one's own mind* and emotionally charged world, *promote better positions* for oneself and/or others in questions of interest. That is for *reaching important capital and for gaining positive life qualities*.

When I tried to find out the importance of moralizing in conflicts, I was surprised to discover that the conflicts could be classified and analyzed in a three-dimensional model (EIM) with great coverage in the social field. Moralizing could be understood and expressed with its core pattern, GEV, in relation to activity within the dimensions of existence and interest.

I found that the meta-structure EIM, in a formal way, exposes how moral meanings are related to striving for desired

life qualities and competing for significant capital. The model emerged after repeated use in supervising staffs and persons with disabilities. With this model it's easy to display how separate meanings link together in patterns, through positionings when we interact socially, and how mixed meanings can be separated and clarified. 'Position, pattern and link' were chosen as theoretical codes as they seemed to work, and that's why I talk about meanings as positions. They take form in both lasting core patterns, and in flexible and changeable instant patterns.

### **Why moralizing is easily activated**

*Moralizing is a specific mode of handling a conflict.* The questions why the interaction within fields of suffering so often is socially and emotionally charged could be answered with reference to the multiconflictual situation concerning existential and interest matters. That's not surprising. *Conflicts that can't be solved by a participant will be emotionally charged and thereby easily moralized.* Any conflict could be moralized, but when the participants have other means to handle the situation, the moralizing seems to be unnecessary. It seems like *power is related to moralizing in the way that the less life qualities or capital a person or a group has, the more important moral model power is.* Moralizing is sometimes used to charge an imbalance in life qualities or capital with moral meaning. The struggle about conceptual meanings will be about what is good, evil and victim, and who is holding these separate positions.

Having moral model power (Braten, 1982) is to have capital that makes it easier to keep the constellations the way one prefers. Disabled, sick, poor people will probably have a better chance if the moral order supports their needs and interests, and balances their shortage of such values.

The reason why this type of area is filled with tense relations and psychological tensions seems to be that it contains difficult conflicts that easily activate moralizing. Conflicts of existence and interest are natural and all the time current in all these fields. If it's of great importance to be recognized as good, it gives the social interaction a specific character. When the context is conflictive, the identification of the 'guilty' and evil becomes important, in line with what sometimes is called a 'guilt context'. Guilt is, both as a feeling and a social matter, built on the GEV-pattern. Some of the professionals interviewed felt really uneasy



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answering questions about social and psychological aspects in connection to a guilt context.

The resistance among professionals to open insight is surprisingly strong and often overthrows the problems originating from obstructions to openness. The lack of resources that is the outcome of the unwillingness to speak out about needs for psychosocial help among disabled children isn't morally conflictive; at least not at the same level as the feelings of conflict when talking openly about the situation of these children. It's the conflict perspective that decides what the main moral issue is. The answer to why, in the field of handicap, there is a sort of righteous cautiousness and tip-toeing on matters of social and psychological character is complex but can lean on the theory of moral positioning. Professionals may also have an interest in giving priority to protecting their own capital or life qualities when they come in conflict with clients and that is a choice that either is moralized or is kept out of the moral dimension.

### **Formal core patterns**

A formal pattern can work as an analytic unit in different levels of abstraction and in any relevant area of praxis. The GEV-pattern stays the same for anybody, anytime and everywhere in moralizing, because it's formal. For adults and children, for a carpenter and a bank clerk, for a priest or a criminal, the moral positioning is built and interpreted with that pattern. Its form can be activated from any participant perspective, since it is formal.

The GEV-pattern has a seemingly enduring form. It's a tool that doesn't deform though constellations change in any personalizing of positions. The GEV-pattern helps us to assign important identities of Good, Evil and Victim among participants, in any new situation, in any moment or place. Even if the definition of what exactly is good or evil changes, the pattern will endure. The pattern is combinable to a large number of other patterns in contexts where moral positioning is activated. For example, a moralized conflict can be formed with the GEV-pattern in any combination with existential or interest conflicts.

As a formal pattern, the moral conflict pattern has no obvious limitations. I have interviewed and tried this pattern on persons from different cultures and religions. Since moralizing is used extensively, mostly in conflicts, the GEV-pattern is

applicable in any field of social activity that can be moralized.

### **Emerging of the dimensional EIM-pattern**

When analyzing the term 'victim', that frequently occurred in data and seemed to be significant, I found that the use of it was unclear. It carried actually three differing meanings that could be better termed as 'stricken', 'loser' and 'victim'. This was the initial step in the discovery of the three complementary dimensions, the EIM-pattern that successively emerged from a lot appearances (indicators). In all these appearances, it became more and more obvious that they have had an essential base for the meaning they carry, and that could be regarded as a dimension. In an analysis of meanings, it's possible to scrutinize any terms by asking if there is any hidden existential, interest or moral connotation in the term. When appropriate such analysis results in new triadic patterns, as new discoveries of meanings that are connected and based in respective dimension.

The focus is here on the moral dimension and its moral conflict pattern (GEV). The other dimensional conflict patterns that emerged, belonging to existence and interest dimensions, are extensive and need further analysis, but their main patterns of conflict seem to work and fit very well for analyzing conflicts.

There are probably more than one core pattern for conflict in each of the existence and interest dimensions. To begin with, I found two important patterns for existential conflict. One is 'Stricken/Unstricken/Life quality' and the other is 'Able/Not able/Life quality', and they seem to reflect two sides of a conflict about a life quality. 'Being stricken' with blindness (eyesight is a life quality) is almost the same as not 'being able' to see, but not exactly the same. Stricken is more related to 'impairment' and Not-able is more related to 'disability', two concepts used for differentiation in 'handicap-research'. There is also an important difference in 'I am able to' and 'I am not stricken by'. Secondly, I found that the conflict patterns in the interest dimension are both about 'Having/Not having/Capital' or 'Getting/Not getting/Capital', two sides of the pattern that gives the identities Winner/Loser/Capital. These terms did emerge as concepts when their patterns and properties became visible.

The dividing line between meanings of existence and meanings of interest is to some extent tentative, but so far the differentiation of meanings originating from these three

dimensions seems relevant and working. Some words in ordinary language are pure representations of one of the dimensions (one-dimensional), and other words are representing two or all three dimensions. When used in language some words carry a composite meaning which includes connotations of both existential, interest and moral character (three-dimensional).

One has to bear in mind that a pattern is a simplified phenomenon, probably more effective and communicable when it's simplified, than if a phenomenon's whole complexity was displayed at the same time. When the pattern reaches its simplest form it becomes generalizable. The complexity can be added in showing social interaction with its intensity, amplitude, nuances, associations, compound meaning, combining patterns etc. A formal core pattern is covering both simple and very complex processes. It's the skeleton of a moving body.

### **The theory in practice**

The instinctive way of using these habituated patterns makes us sometimes go wrong considering our ability for social interaction is limited. To begin with, we are constantly driven by conflicts in our social interaction (Simmel, 1955) and the moral positioning theory shows how some inherent structures rule us. Secondly, people act socially in accordance with these patterns of identity, and automatically include several simultaneous intern and extern conflicts, which may contradict logical reasoning and the correspondence with individual concerns. We are not always capable of using all the potentiality in positioning processes that we need to gain our purposes. Consider that we if are in contradictive or collaborative interaction with others whose impact on the structure may be strong, we will be influenced in either a constraining or an enabling way (Bourdieu, 1994; Giddens, 1994, 1984).

There seems to be a continuum of consciousness (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), different modes of activity from 'unaware to aware', from 'reactive to strategic', and most people are mainly unaware and reactive in the social processes of which they are a part. Some people have a better capacity to survey the action field, reflect upon others and their own behaviour, keep track of concurrent conflicts and will therefore more easily act strategically. As an instrument for analysis this model is usable for any persons needs. It may help us not to get caught in

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constellations that drain off positive life qualities and important capital. Anyone can, to a certain extent, learn how to use the core pattern for gaining more model power (Braten, 1982), to understand what is going on and learn how to do strategic positioning.

Using the social positioning analysis is one way of becoming aware of what is going on in relation to other persons. It can be implemented in groups for an analysis of the group members' identities and significant constellations. The Evil vs. Victim constellation can be changed to a not-able vs. stricken constellation, and by that be the start of a development of the relations. To understand the difference in meaning between 'not-able' and 'evil' in a private constellation is crucial for relations blocked by conflicts. A clear division of what is an existential problem and what is immoral behaviour, reduces the tension in a conflict. It makes it easier to understand problematic behaviour of other persons.

I have frequently used moral positioning theory in supervision, seminars and education – as have others. There seems to be an instant grab in several of its aspects, when people recognize and associate to their own experiences. Presentation of the model will sometimes cause laughter, giggling or feelings of embarrassment among audience participants as they become aware of their own covert moral positioning in daily life. Some persons learn very quickly how to understand and apply parts of the model to their own cases, and it will only take a few hours to learn how to use the whole social positioning model as an analytic tool.

In professional groups with complicated tasks, there are often tensions leading to conflicts and certain risks for over moralized interaction. Participants under social and psychological stress, might react by displacing the inner conflict to a moral judgment on the behaviour of others. By introducing the EIM-model to professionals they can learn how to handle these tensions in a way to minimize the moral positioning within a group, and also in relations to clients. People with noticeable disabilities who will meet imposing attitudes can learn how to handle these and secure their self-esteem, self-confidence and model power. As it's easy in an underdog position to become ruled by other people's preconceived opinions, it may be necessary to oppose stereotypes and imposed identities in a clever way. The

social positioning model can be used as a tool for that.

One can learn how to move focus from one dimension to another while scrutinizing the conflict. Asking questions like: What dimension is dominant at the moment? From where come my feelings of unease? In which dimension belongs my own and others acting? Which identities are activated? How is the constellation personalized? Where am I in that? For what life qualities are the others and I fighting? Are they threatened? What similarities and differences are obvious between the parties' perspectives? What sort of solutions and compromises could balance the situation? What life qualities can be agreed on as mutual and basic? What is a fair balance of capital in certain significant aspects? With questions like these, it is possible to expose the way in which the conflict involves morality, existence and interest matters and what sort of problems one has to deal with. As such, the social positioning model offers a structure that allows anyone to produce critical and analytic questions.

Moral positioning seems to work as a stand-by social function and can be activated anytime when significant imbalances are recognized. One possible way of resolving a morally locked situation is to use this model to clear out the person's perspectives, concerns and drives and disentangle the actors from embarrassing moral identities. By balancing existential and interest conflicts one can contribute to morally neutral relations. Controversial moral positions may fade out, if not for good perhaps for a while. As every participant uses social patterns to form his/her best constellation in social interaction, it means that every constellation is both individually and socially constructed, otherwise it wouldn't work. In a social positioning analysis, one needs every significant perspective to be able to understand the use of constellations, how conflicts are constructed and how positioning for balance is enacted.

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## **Growing Open: The transition from QDA to Grounded Theory**

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### **Abstract**

Doing a PhD can principally be carried out in three ways; firstly by applying existing theories on new data, secondly by theoretically comparing existing theories and thirdly by generating a new theory. Choice of approach of course depends on awareness and accessibility of alternatives. In essence, most PhD studies are exploratory journeys in a jungle of descriptive methodologies based on very uniform data. In this paper, the author elaborates the exploratory research process that subconsciously, and later consciously, required a shift from the initial QDA approach to grounded theory. The cutting point was discovering the multifaceted implications of the all-is-data dictum in GT.

### **Introduction**

Data collection and data analysis is crucial for the way research is conducted. It concerns research methods, research settings, data sources, amounts of data collection and what to look for in the data. The implications of "all is data", as conceptualized by Barney Glaser, can therefore not be overestimated. In practice, the "all is data" statement brings us right to the core of grounded theory methodology. Its power in capturing change-in-process, which probably is the only steady aspect of modern work life, is immense and incompatible with any other methodology.

Like many other PhD candidates, I started out with a qualitative approach intended to result in applying existing theories on new data – and ended up with a grounded theory. The area of study was news professionals in multimedia and cross-media companies in Norway, and how they coped with rapidly changing conditions for work. Reflecting back on the exploratory processing that lead to the sudden and definite switch in

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methodology, it appears that the transition from QDA to a grounded theory approach required a parallel process of growing open.

After several months of concentrated qualitative efforts, I had come to a point where I was unconsciously searching for a methodology that could include a more diverse range of data sources than the typical quantitative or qualitative approaches. It was a troublesome period during which a main concern was loss of time and lack of meaningful, productive progress in the study. By the time, I did not know grounded theory. Consequently, options for theory generation instead of descriptive verification of existing theory were out of sight. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will provide some of the reflections and questions that lead to the transition from QDA to a grounded theory approach, followed by a further elaboration of some all-is-data implications.

By the time of methodological shift, the data already collected included hundreds of pages of statements illuminating more facts and details than could possibly be handled in a highly detailed, descriptive dissertation. My initial aim had been to study the development of multimedia journalists in three large Norwegian multimedia houses, descriptively comparing similarities and differences. So far, all the data stemmed from qualitative interviewing of news reporters in these news corporations. The in-depth, semi-open interviews, as the genre is called in qualitative research, were taped and transcribed verbatim. Some of the interviews had been factor analyzed according to q-methodological principles, a branch within phenomenology. Two typologies had come out of analyzing the six first interviews. Now the question was whether to continue on the same track with the 14 next interviews.

### **Incubating**

At this point, I had been through the preparing and concentrating stages of exploratory processing, which is a basic process in any kind of knowledge work. Now incubating was reached, or rather, the chaos stage. I was in a state of confusion and bewilderment, feeling overwhelmed by facts, data, and other kinds of impressions waiting to be sorted. Therefore, I took a long think break. The thought of another mathematical round of data feeding based on forced choice did not contribute to raising my levels of energy. Rather, it was accompanied by restlessness and

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discomfort, a theoretical unrest. What was actually going on? Was this the best way of handling the data? What data was there, actually? The study had come to a crossroads. One option was sticking to it; just continue with more qualitative interviews and develop more “experimental designs”. The other option was a more thorough analysis of existing data, combined with a search for other analytic approaches within phenomenology. A third option was to explore other theories and methods.

The period called for mental and physical withdrawal from the PhD project. Later, when reading grounded theory, I realized that it was a period of intensive subconscious processing. In this phase, I was messing around “not doing proper work”. In reality, I was waiting for the best idea or approach to become conscious. To sort things out, I turned to reflection through wondering (Grendstad 1986). A mind map was made, listing the issues that up till then were registered on the broad topic of journalists and journalism in multimedia settings. A number of thinkable empty spots were uncovered, and finally a crucial question arose: What is the potential of phenomenology in exploring further data in this particular field?

When reading some of the interviews for a second or third time, I was struck by certain patterns that repeatedly emerged. Some traits appeared not to be restricted to the news corporations under study; rather, they seemed to reflect more general patterns in journalists’ everyday work. The impression became even more evident as the interview data was supplemented with written data from books, articles and relevant websites, and also, informal conversations with journalists.

In some matters, patterns did not seem to depend on neither structural conditions of work nor individual age. In other cases, specifically structural conditions or age seemed to be at the fore. I was repeatedly struck by the absence of specific issues when interviewing news reporters. This issues-not-mentioned phenomenon appeared to be a great puzzle. Work tasks and questions taken into consideration, several issues that obviously were on the respondents mind, simply lay “underneath” the exposed levels of data.

Gradually, the awareness of other vague signs during communication with interviewees grew. It was like tiptoeing on a spiral; discovering one sign led to the discovery of the next. The

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signs were exposed as restlessness, engagement, non-engagement, vigorous contributing, active and passive resisting and risk-taking, just to mention a few. They could be expressed in a number of ways. For instance, when talking to journalists who smoked, either at work or at leisure settings, their smoking patterns became interesting to recall. When approaching issues that were really on their minds, they instinctively picked up a cigarette. At meetings in the newsroom, I recalled observing that some people showed up physically every time, but rarely said anything during the daily brainstorming sessions. Others always managed, in some way or other, to position themselves at a physical distance from the rest of the group. I consistently wondered why, and also asked managers and the reporters themselves. The problem was what to do with answers – since they did not come out of any formalized interview situation. Several times, journalists also called off-the-record after interviews. They wanted to talk about things that were not easily mediated in other people's presence.

I was struck by the many layers of communication. One aspect was body language, another aspect was verbal secrecy. They both have to do with social exposure and social cover-ups, with norms of expression and indirect communication. But where could such observations fit in? In short, since a variety of social and verbal signs emerged again and again, how should they be treated? Would it be scientifically ethical to pretend that some signs simply didn't exist? If not, how could all this data be integrated into the analysis?

While working on these thought experiments, it became clear to me that clinging to the descriptive study of three multimedia organizations would not only mean an overwhelming amount of work; it would also limit the research scope and hence the research results. The beginner approach had set me up for a description capture based on very uniform data, a capture from which I was now searching for ways to escape. What did I really want to make a study of? At this point, the dilemma of generalizability still seemed insolvable. How could the general patterns I was on track of be mediated? Phenomenological methods, at least q-methodology, appeared to be too narrow and too rigid for the field of interest, so what could be done? Should the q-findings simply be left behind in order to carry out a restart?

### Eureka

The dilemma was presented to a friend working in another academic field. He asked whether I had heard of grounded theory. His short message was “In grounded theory you go back and forth between data collection, analysis and sorting. Data decides where to go next and you learn how to conceptualize. It’s all concerned with data, what data to look for and how they are to be handled. All is data, you know. Just start reading Glaser’s books.”

At the library, I opened a book where Glaser explains “all is data” this way: “exactly what is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever the source, whether interview, observations, documents. It is not just what is being, how it is being and the conditions of its being told, but all the data surrounding what is being told (Glaser 2001, p. 145). Exactly this paragraph contained all the information that I needed to overcome the data overwhelm and theoretical restlessness manifested during the incubating period.

In reality, by switching to a grounded theory study all the data that so far did not “fit in” were usable and could be incorporated just like other kinds of relevant data. Eureka stage was finally reached. Eureka is known as the moment of discovery, the moment when new insight breaks through. It is a mental state associated with high spirits, exhilaration, relief, glow, and energy. I experienced that when eureka moment is reached, the rest of the task is done with more ease, since energy arousal is a physical sign that one is intuitively heading in the right direction. I was on my way to a grounded theory approach, which in practice meant that I was heading towards the two last stages of exploratory processing, namely elaborating and presenting.

Since a considerable amount of data was gathered before the switch from QDA to grounded theory, the process of integrating the data into the GT approach needs to be explained. First, data sources in relation to the ‘all is data’ concept will therefore be elaborated, followed by some practical aspects of the interrelationship between data, research settings and research methods.

### Reworking Data

The switch to grounded theory methodology yielded a total reworking of data and the preliminary draft. The existing slices of

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data, such as the interviews and the many field observations that up to this point had only been stored in my own mind, provided a rather confusing picture of the research scene. It was a great relief to find out that in ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory’, it is emphasized that a great variety of sources contributes to building a dense and rich theory. Different kinds of data, or slices of data, allow a multifaceted investigation of the research area.

The possible integration of all kinds of data made it clear that all the data collected could be valuable in the generation of a grounded theory. All the interviews, the q-sample and the unwritten observations and questions could be good guides to further work; they were simply different kinds of data. After reading more about grounded theory, the first step in the “new” data analysis was substantive coding of the verbatim interviews. The systematic coding actually revealed what I had intuitively sensed before switching to grounded theory: Much of the same data appeared again and again in various facets.

I realized that now the initial “walking survey” tendencies were grounded in a systematic data analysis. Specifically, this systematic analysis and continuous grounding in a wide array of relevant data is a fundament that separates conceptual research from, for instance, journalism. In several of his books, Barney Glaser points to the fact that with growing experience, most of us are “walking surveys”; the missing link is the systematic analysis of inherent data.

As a researcher, I now experienced that the most important question one should continuously ask is: Where do I obtain the most relevant data, and where should I go next? Which groups and subgroups need to be visited now (Glaser and Strauss 1967)? In practice, such theoretical sensitivity requires the analyst to be constantly on the alert as to what emerges from the data, and flexible enough to switch from one kind of data collection to another as it becomes necessary. The analyst is continuously challenged by the fact that the data decides: “As he collects data his job is to deal with exactly what is happening, not what he would want to happen, not what his own interest would wish the data to be. The data is not ‘truth’ it is not ‘reality’. It is exactly what is happening. The GT researcher has to be oriented to each course of action having its own meaning. And once the GT researcher lets this meaning emerge and sees the pattern, he/she will feel ‘sure’ that this is what is going on. This sureness cannot

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be known beforehand. It emerges conceptually through constant comparison.” (ibid. p.146)

During the study, I experienced a growth in the awareness of what was going on in the empirical field. Glaser points out how theoretical sensitivity is used to uncover data that otherwise might be overlooked: “Grounded theory is based on the systematic generating of theory from data that itself is systematically obtained from social research. Generating theory and doing social research are two parts of the same process. How the analyst enters the field to collect the data, his method of collection and codification of the data, his integrating of the categories, generating memos and constructing theory – the full continuum of both the processes of generating theory and of social research – are *all* guided and integrated by the *emerging* theory.” (Glaser 1978, p. 2)

A couple of times I was really tempted to “cover up” some strategies that news people frequently turn to, both at an individual and a structural level. The cover-up concept, as developed by Argyris (1986), points to a widespread human defense mechanism. When people feel embarrassed or threatened, the tendency is to oversee the phenomenon that causes such feelings. Both individuals and groups cover up. According to Argyris, this simple fact accounts for much of the counterproductive actions in organizations. For instance, if a manager has set unrealistic time limits for an investigative journalism project, it is likely that one or more journalists involved will engage in strategies to cover up the manager’s mistake so as not to embarrass him. They will therefore pretend not to notice.

Like journalists, sociologists are consistently challenged by cover-up actions taking place in various settings. However, during the theory building, I realized that with grounded theory, it is not possible to build a dense and credible theory if you are not totally honest about your findings (Glaser 2001, 2006). So I had to force myself to accept some of the data, although I was quite astonished and actually did not personally welcome what emerged.

Shortly before revising and restructuring the drafts into the final version, most of the collected data was reviewed for a third time. The review resulted in quite a few, new concepts. From this

experience I was reminded of the old dictum that ‘you have to learn to see in order to see, and you have to learn to hear in order to hear’ – and it all takes considerable amounts of focused time to think and structured manual work. However, when carrying out grounded theory, these restructurings are extremely energizing and personally developing. Restructurings help the analyst to uncover higher levels of abstraction in the data. This in turn is practical evidence of how easily grounded theory can be modified at any time. It connects grounded theory with the roots of cognitive processing, the very essence of empirical research.

### **Memoing as Parallel Processing**

A process that took place parallel to the open coding of interview data was the writing of memos. In the beginning, large piles of memos were written; it was like a stream that had been waiting to be released for a long time. The first memos were ideas that came to my mind while coding the interviews. The next memos were based on visual observations in the field, data which so far had not fitted in anywhere in the study. Notes and reflections were jotted down, for instance respondent comments before and after the “official” interviews, gestures at meetings and discussion topics during smoke breaks.

During the whole process of generating the theory, memos have served as notes to myself on ideas and concepts and their relationships. Ideas are like cats; suddenly they are everywhere, and then they are gone and they don’t care about where you are, what you are working on or whether it is day or night. So you have to seize them at once. The good thing about ideas is that as soon as you get them down on a piece of paper, they will not vanish but are accessible for later analysis.

Memo writing is discussed here because it proved to be a necessary tool in grasping several types of data and then keeping the ideas for further analysis. Before ideas come to the surface and can be stored in memos there is always a period of what Glaser has termed preconscious processing. The flexibility of memoing allows the analyst’s pre-consciousness to work on an idea as long as necessary, although any emerging idea can be taken care of when it pops up, irrespective of working hours or other structural conditions. The first round of constantly comparing data slices from interviews, observations, informal talks and reading periodicals for journalists, journals,



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newspapers, analytical articles and other relevant literature clearly suggested that the interviews alone provided rather uniform data. The division between interpreted or properline data, baseline data and vague data in grounded theory is of great value in understanding how uniform data can limit the generation of a dense and rich theory.

Properline data tends to be the easiest accessible data, particularly within preset research frames such as taped interviewing. During interviews, people often say what they think they are expected to say. Sources tend to give the analyst either interpreted information or information they think is appropriate to the situation. Baseline data refers to data gathered when sources are more relaxed and do not have to worry about, for instance, colleagues or managers, but feel free to express what is really on their minds. Unexpected off-the-record phone calls that I received after interviewing are examples of baseline data.

Observations of non-verbal communication, such as body language, positioning at meetings, informal group divisions and the like are examples of vague data. Vague data cannot bear a theory alone, but it can contribute to an initial foothold on theoretical sampling and where to go next. The various layers of relevant data help the analyst to achieve as much diversity in the emergent categories as possible and ensure that the hypotheses are firmly grounded.

In parallel with data gathering in the field, I started systematic readings of journalism magazines and of literature that seemed relevant to the issues involved. The memo processing speeded up. Several theoretical outlines based on the analyzed data were made, but the outlines always stopped at some point. There were holes in the data that could only be saturated by more theoretical sampling.

### **Research Methods and Settings**

The discussion of variety in data collection leads us to the next issue on which we need to shed light, namely research methods and research settings. As elaborated above, where to go and subsequently where to go next are basic questions in theoretical sampling. Grounded theory's applicability to single units as well as to any number of units makes it possible to search for data in any relevant accessible setting. And, depending on accessibility, a multiplicity of data collection methods can also

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be used. The point is to be as flexible as possible in accordance with variations in structural conditions (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In this particular study, methods and settings for data gathering are so closely interrelated that they need to be elaborated together.

The qualitative interviews at the beginning of the research mentioned above were conducted in the newsrooms. To gain admission to the newsrooms the research project was introduced by e-mails to the editors. The interviewees were selected and asked whether they wanted to participate before I entered the newsroom. I suggested interviewing people who held differing views, or at least were of different age and gender and possessing diverse competences. Some names were provided by managers, some by journalists known beforehand, and the final decision on whom to interview was made by me.

### **Flexible Approaches**

In the grounded theory phase of the study, a variety of approaches were tested out to get as close to news reporters and their daily concerns as possible. The abandonment of the research unit meant that relevant data could be gathered in any type of newsroom. It introduced a hectic period of moving in and out of newsrooms during which small and large broadcast media were visited and also online papers and newspapers. A variety of face-to-face informal talks and newsroom observations were the methods mostly used. Some talks could last for five minutes, others for more than an hour.

A phone call or two to editors or managers was usually enough to get free access to observing and talking to news reporters in their daily surroundings in the organizations. Instead of agreeing on dates beforehand, many visits to newsrooms were made just to be “a fly on the wall”. The observations proved important to reveal empty spots in the understanding of what was going on. Such issues were pursued by talking informally to people, in open office landscapes as well as in individual offices.

I also joined lunches with journalists individually or in groups, and of course coffee breaks and other intermissions. Wherever and whenever they had time to talk, it was okay with me. Some people were interviewed by phone, others at cafes before or after work, and sometimes the conversations took place

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at bars in the evening and at night. There was no longer any need for accurate description; what I needed was data that could help to conceptualize patterns of behavior among the people concerned. Consequently, there was no longer a dependency of either notebooks or tapes. As long as a sheet of paper or a napkin was within reach, the memos that were needed could be written. The liberation from accurate description thinking obviously has a favorable practical aspect. It frees the analyst to handle larger amounts of data, and data of all kinds, without experiencing data overwhelm.

A few times during theoretical sampling, I arranged particular dates with multivariate groups of news reporters. The topic that I wanted the respondents to reflect on was introduced, for instance journalistic creativity. The principle of the “pedagogic sun” (Grendstad 1986) was used as a guide to reflections in writing, followed by a plenary discussion on each news reporter’s contributions.

I continuously switched between theoretical sampling, memoing, coding, constant comparison and more theoretical sampling. As the piles of memos grew, the conceptual sorting became more complex. The memos were re-sorted many times during the process; as more and more data was accumulated, the categories and properties that emerged early in the process needed to be modified. In grounded theory, modifications are usually necessary for rich and dense theory generation. The goal is always to conceptualize empirical data through constant comparison of a variety of data.

Since grounded theory is conceptual, the interrelated set of hypotheses that constitutes the theory is independent of time, space and people. Yet it is emphasized that the theory should be grounded in all possibly relevant data. The emphasis on grounded generation rather than verification means that the only testing possible is experienced relevance and fit in the substantive area. In other words: A grounded theory is only good as far as it goes in explaining what’s going on in an area (Glaser 1996). The statement implies that the generation of grounded theory is both a very abstract and a very practical task, and it is always possible to keep correcting, or rather modifying, the categories with more relevant properties.

## **Illustrations**

During the write-up stage of the study I experienced that in conceptual theorization, which is by nature an abstract piece of writing, it is not easy to find the right balance between conceptualization and its illustrations. The first draft of the initial chapters, based on the sorting of conceptual memos, was written very theoretically and with a minimum of illustrations. Feedback from layman co-readers suggested that the theory would be more easily accessible if more illustrations were added. The accessibility aspect is of course very central. A stated goal in grounded theory is that it should be found useful by laymen as well as by experts. The elimination of all illustrations might make the theory very dense and accessible only to theoretical insiders. But also for theoretical insiders, it might be more difficult to understand than necessary. The point is that a lack of illustrations undoubtedly reduces the size of the audience who might find the theory useful.

In reality, the richness and denseness of a generated theory depends to a large extent on successful switching between abstractions and concrete illustrations. Another discovery made when working and reworking the drafts was that the more extroverted the research process became, the more options for illustrations to earn a place in the theoretical outline. I realized that illustrations provide the reader with conceptual breaks. They add a data dimension which makes the theory more meaningful simply because illustrations are what they are, namely slices of empirical data which ground concepts in concrete facts. But illustrations are not examples from reality intended to prove that the theory is correct.

Barney Glaser explains it like this: “The credibility of the theory should be won by its integration, relevance and workability, not by illustration used as if it were proof. The assumption of the reader, he should be advised, is that all concepts are grounded and that this massive grounding effort could not be shown in a writing. Also that as grounded they are not proven; they are only suggested. The theory is an integrated set of hypotheses, not of findings. Proofs are not the point.” (Glaser 1978, p. 134)

## **Problems with Method Mix**

After this discussion of the practical application of grounded

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theory methodology, I will share some other cognitive discoveries made during the transition from phenomenological to a grounded theory approach. Theoretically, phenomenological research can reach the same levels of abstraction as a grounded theory. A dilemma is that phenomenology, with its emphasis on narratives and rich descriptions, invites the researcher to stay at the description level. No matter conceptualizations that come out of phenomenological studies, they are not systematically grounded in the data nor constantly compared and coded. Additionally, narratives and rich descriptions are the basis for phenomenological research.

In the transition phase from QDA to GT, a question that started buzzing around in my head was: How can phenomenology, concerned as it is with individual experiences in time and space, be successfully paired with the abstracts of grounded theory? Once again I had to reflect on my main concern in this dissertation. How did I want to generate data and how did I want to display my findings? “Researchers not clear on the distinction between conceptual and descriptive get easily confused on whether the theory describes a unit or conceptualizes a process within it,” as Glaser writes (Glaser 2001, p 15).

One of the most important aspects of conceptualization is that concepts last forever, whereas descriptions are tied to time and people and are only of value within a concrete setting. When reflecting on these topics, the phenomenological philosophy appeared strong and clear, whereas phenomenology as a research method appeared surprisingly unclear compared to grounded theory. In the area of description versus conceptualization, the paths became blurred.

After reading Barney Glaser’s book on descriptive remodeling of grounded theory (Glaser 2003), it became obvious that a method mix would not work out very well. Mixing QDA with grounded theory would most probably downgrade the goal of conceptual theory into a remodeled version of a qualitative descriptive version. While putting these arguments forward, however, I am perfectly aware that I have tested out only a tiny part of phenomenological research approaches. There are certainly a number of other ways to go both within phenomenology and qualitative methodologies as a whole that could have been profitable in a study like this. But it would have ended up as a different type of study.

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Contrary to QDA, grounded theory is basically free of epistemological categorizations. While methodology researchers have tried to classify grounded theory as symbolic interactionism, Barney Glaser himself resists all attempts at labeling grounded theory as part of any “ism”. He points out that grounded theory is free of ties to any theory of science: Since grounded theory is a hypothesis of the interrelationship between a set of categories, it does not deal with philosophical conceptions of what is “truth” (Glaser 2004).

Researchers start with an area of interest, but with no preconceived view of what problems they will study or how the participants deal with the problems. They are open to what may occur. In grounded theory, the analysts “let the problems and their continued resolving emerge. They trust the fact that the world goes on whether or not they know how and the research issue is to discover a core variable and ensuing theory that accounts for what they are finding is the main concern of the participants.” (Glaser 1996, p. xiii)

Now the reader will probably assert that in this particular study, the analyst could not be totally open and ignorant about the area of interest, since nearly twenty qualitative interviews and a preliminary q-sample were carried out before grounded theory was brought into the research arena. True, a lot of data was collected and partly analyzed. However, the uniform data collection alone suggests that the research frame was still wide and unfocused and that I had little systematic empirical knowledge about news reporters’ main concerns.

### **Use of Literature**

During the study, literature has been used in three ways: firstly as a preview to sensitize the analyst to the research domain, secondly to provide a theoretical background to the theory, and thirdly as data during theory generation. Some of the references included in the introductory part of the dissertation are integrated into the theory of creative cycling; others only provide a historical backdrop with respect to news reporters’ position in media research during the last decades. An overall principle has been to refer to relevant literature successively, instead of devoting a particular chapter to a literature review. According to Glaser (2001), when generating a grounded theory, existing theory and other theory should be treated like any other

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data, and it should only be used to the extent that it earns its way into the developing theory.

The best way to learn about grounded theory and its implications is by reading the original literature. Whenever I have had a problem, I have turned to Glaser's books and found the answers and explanations that were needed. Since all his books are thoroughly grounded in data, the information gives a feeling of "deja-vu" which is instructive and energizing.

A principle applied throughout the study has been to check the original sources of grounded theory first, and to keep this information in mind when subsequently reading other researchers' writings on grounded theory. This way of exploring grounded theory theoretically has provided invaluable insight into analyst accuracy variables and also, the troublesome path methodology researchers start on when their data is not well grounded. Moreover, as a former journalist, I have experienced that misunderstandings and misinterpretations can easily start to live a life of their own if you trust second-hand sources too much. One of grounded theory's great advantages is that the methodology is thoroughly explained from start to end in the original literature.

As for integrating other literature into the theory, I have found it fruitful to seek out outstanding works in fields as diverse as organizational theory, healthcare, personal development, psychology and scientific theory. The wide variety of impulses provided by these sources has been more than necessary in the theory generation process. Data from the journalistic domain has been constantly compared to relevant data from other domains of working life, and it has undoubtedly made the theory richer and more general.

The strategy is recommended in Theoretical Sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) because it "maximizes the avoidance of pre-empting, preconceived concepts which may easily detract from the input and the drugless trip (aha moments, eureka, authors' note). It is hard enough to generate ones own ideas without the 'rich' derailment provided by the literature in the same field. The analyst should not worry about coverage in the same field since this literature will always be there." (p.31)

## **Self Pacing**

The process of finding the right balance between theoretical sampling in the field and the reading of literature took time. It challenged me to test out a variety of working methods and being extremely flexible when planning the daily work. When concentrating only on field data for longer periods of time, I became locked in my own thinking. And vice versa; if I became caught up in reading other theorists' works, my own analytical process was blocked. Sometimes I just became overwhelmed by the endless amount of relevant research, and really had to fight to get sufficiently grounded in empirical data to be able to proceed.

The testing out exemplifies the necessity of theoretical pacing, self-pacing and the development of a personal pacing plan when generating grounded theory (Glaser 1978). Grounded theory not only requires joint action when collecting, coding and analyzing data. It requires that the analyst knows his own temporal pacing and manages to develop a personal plan that takes his research into consideration as well as his temperament and private life.

As a methodology, grounded theory provides the analyst considerable autonomy and freedom to pursue his own study under a great variety of structural conditions. The experience during this particular study is that theory generation is such an absorbing and time-consuming project that it needs to be well paired with other aspects of the analyst's daily life in order to work out. Grounded theory takes the time it takes, and it is hard to make an accurate estimate of the time needed. Restrictions on outer frames must of course always be taken into consideration. But within such frames the analyst is dependent upon finding his own plan so that he can establish realistic deadlines and make continuous progress.

Since grounded theory is above all what Glaser terms a delayed action phenomenon, I experienced that it is very important to set aside enough time for subconscious processing. When data is sampled, coded and analyzed, memoing is the helper that attends immediate to all kinds of ideas that might arise as a result of the previous work. Sometimes a concept appears several months or even years after the analyst started working on it. At other times, conceptualization just goes on and



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on. The essence is that these creative aspects of theory generation demand analytic flexibility and trust in emergence in order to handle the outside world's expectations. Taking breaks, doing things other than studying, developing rituals to enable you to continue when you get stuck in your own thinking - these are all aspects of self pacing which I have found necessary during the PhD process.

For instance, the first three or four categories of the theory emerged very quickly, and the thought was that finding the core category would happen just as fast. However, it took many rounds of theoretical outlining and a long period of subconscious processing before the interrelationship between the core and its categories was discovered.

After many months of structured work and intensive subconscious processing, I woke up at four o'clock one morning and knew that the core category had emerged. I jumped out of bed, picked a pen and a notepad and wrote memos continuously for several hours. The moment was extremely energizing. It sent her on a drugless trip that lasted for a long period of time and gave me the confidence and power that I needed in order to continue with theoretical sampling, coding and analysis of enough data to generate the theory of creative cycling.

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## **From Pathological Dependence to Healthy Independence: An emergent grounded theory of facilitating independent living**

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### **Abstract**

People with mental disorder are admitted to high security hospitals because of perceived risk of serious harm to others. Outcome studies generally focus on adverse events, especially re-offending, reflecting public and government anxieties. There is no theoretical model to provide a better basis for measurement. There have been no studies examining discharge from the perspectives of those involved in the process. This paper begins to fill this gap by generating a grounded theory of the main concerns of those involved in decisions to discharge from such hospitals. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews with staff of various clinical and non-clinical disciplines, some with a primary duty of care to the patient, while mindful of public safety, and some with a primary duty to the public, while mindful of patients' rights. The data were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Their main concern was 'pathological dependence' and that was resolved through the process of 'facilitating independent living'. Clinicians and non-clinicians alike managed this by 'paving the way' and 'testing out'. The former begins on hospital admission, intensifies during residency, and lessens after discharge. Testing out overlaps, but happens to a greater extent outside high security. Factors within the patient and/or within the external environment could be enhancers or barriers to movement along a dependence-independence continuum. A barrier appearing after some progress along the continuum and ending independence gained was called a 'terminator'. Bad outcomes were continuing or resumed dependency, with 'terminators', such as death, re-offending or re-admission, modelled as explanations rather than outcomes per se. Good outcomes were attainment and maintenance of community

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living with unconstrained choice of professional and/or social supports. Although this work was done in relation to high security hospital patients, it is likely that the findings will be relevant to decision making about departure from other closed clinical settings.

**KEYWORDS:** pathological dependence, independent living, grounded theory, mentally disordered offenders, high security (special) hospitals

### **Background**

Most countries have special secure healthcare facilities for people with a major mental disorder thought to pose a serious threat of harm to others, generally after at least one serious criminal conviction. It is difficult, however, to compare outcome studies between different countries because laws, policies, social structures and service availability may each vary widely. Facilities may be entirely within the health services, entirely within prisons, or a mixture of the two. Not all countries provide every level of security, and there may be international differences in definitions of 'high', 'medium' and 'low' security. There is, though, common ground in being held in such a secure institution - in constraints to freedom and autonomy within and outside the unit and long enforced proximity to others with grave health and behavioural problems. In England and Wales, people with a major mental disorder, detainable under mental health legislation and thought to pose a high risk of serious and imminent harm to the public, may be admitted to a high security, or 'special' hospital. Median length of stay there is over six years (Butwell, Jamieson, Leese & Taylor, 2000).

Perhaps the most common ground to date between studies internationally and over time is in choice of outcome measures. Studies in both the United Kingdom and North America, for example, have focused almost exclusively on re-offending (Jamieson & Taylor, 2004; Steadman & Keveles, 1972; Steadman & Cocozza, 1974; Thornberry & Jacoby, 1979; Pruesse & Quinsey, 1977). There is less common ground between nations, however, in definition of offences and base rates of crime, both important to making sense of this type of outcome (SWANZDSAJCS, 2006). Russo (1994), who studied such discharges in Barcelona, Norris (1984) and Steels, Roney, Larkin, Jones, Croudage & Duggan (1998), who studied them in England, also examined mortality

and simple social indicators, such as return to families.

The tendency to focus on adverse events reflects social and political concerns with re-offending. No health care worker wants to be associated with repetition of a serious offence. These concerns have led to an increase in the use of risk prediction tools, although, in prospective studies, even actuarial measures of risk prediction have been shown to perform at about chance levels (Buchanan & Leese, 2001). Attempts to 'allay public anxiety through legal measures have been finely balanced against professional medical opinion' (Symonds, 1998), and remain controversial (Joint Committee on the Draft Mental Health Bill, 2005).

Government responses to a single, rare tragedy often seem to shape the manner in which discharge from high security hospital units is considered. There has been very little attempt, however, to understand the perspectives of those who are active in deciding on discharge, and neither the process nor its evaluation is theoretically driven. It was with this in mind that one of us (LJ) started to consider generating a theory centred on the main concerns of staff involved in the discharge process. A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was chosen. Concerns exist for both the people detained and the people effecting the detention or release from detention. We accept that each might have a different perspective, and we acknowledge the lack of secure hospital service user input as a possible limitation on the theory generated. The reality is, however, that for this group of hospital patients the departure and discharge decisions are made by the sort of people interviewed rather than the patients/service users themselves. On this basis it was considered important to focus on the decision makers.

## **Method**

### **Ethics Committee approval**

This research was approved by the West London Mental Health Trust's Ethics Committee and formed part of the doctoral thesis of the first author. Each interviewee was provided with an information sheet which explained the purpose of the study, together with a consent form to sign, on agreement that his/her data could be used. Signed consent was obtained for every direct quotation that has been included and selected quotations were all validated by the respondents themselves. Four interviewees

wished to clarify or amend certain quotations and this was done in consultation with them. Two quotations which the respondents subsequently considered were inaccurate were withdrawn.

### **Sample selection**

There was no pre-determination of sample size. Its nature was defined by the requirement that participants should have some kind of role with respect to the outcome and rehabilitation of serious offender patients. The candidates for the sample were initially selected on the basis of their capacity and potential for providing data on different aspects of the research question. Thus, as the task was to develop a substantive theory according to the main concerns of professionals about discharge from high security, there was a requirement that the candidates for the sample had knowledge of the hospitals, the full range of other relevant services, their residents and, in general terms, possible outcomes after discharge. Variation in level of security (low, medium and high) in which they worked was sought deliberately, as Glaser & Strauss (1967) suggested that categorical development is slower in a single location. Theoretical sampling helped to maximise the differences in the data and saturate the categories. For instance, participants who would enable variety in perspectives by virtue of training or disciplinary background, or their position in the before and after discharge spectrum (the position of recommending, promoting, or determining discharge or of receiving or observing the discharged patient) were selected.

The final sample was made up of forensic psychiatrists (7) with a range of experience and from a variety of secure settings, a nurse manager, a nurse employed to facilitate transfer of patients, a psychologist, social workers (2), psychotherapists (2), education staff (2), Home Office Mental Health Unit civil servants (3) and a specialist mental health lawyer.

### **Characteristics of the participants**

The first interviewee, who was chosen arbitrarily, was a consultant forensic psychiatrist. The next was chosen from the same professional group to see whether there was within-discipline variation. Participants were interviewed thereafter according to constant comparative analysis. They were from various disciplines and settings. The point at which saturation of categories occurred and there was a high degree of theoretical

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integration between categories was after 20 interviews. Fifteen had been with men and 5 with women. Their length of experience ranged from a few months working directly with special hospital patients, to over 20 years. Thus, the sample included clinical and non-clinical respondents, those whose clientele was explicitly made up of patients while mindful of public safety, and those whose clientele was the public, while mindful of individual patient rights, those with long experience and those with relatively little, and people who had had minimal or maximal contact with special hospital patients. Details of the participants are shown in Table 1. Names have been changed for the purposes of anonymity. Gender-appropriate, but false, names have been given to interviewees.

Table 1 Summary of characteristics of participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Location in the discharge process</b>
STEPHEN	M	Psychotherapist	High security hospital
MICHAEL	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	High security hospital
SIMON	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	High security hospital
STEWART	M	Psychotherapist	High security hospital
LUKE	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	Other inpatient health service
MARY	F	Administrative/ clerical	Community
EDWARD	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	Community
HARRY	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	High security hospital
SAM	M	Administrative/ clerical	Community
BRUCE	M	Administrative/ clerical	Community
MELISSA	F	Psychologist	High security hospital
NEIL	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	Other inpatient health service
ANGELA	F	Nurse Manager	High security hospital
SUSAN	F	Mental health lawyer	Community
MARTIN	M	Education staff	High security hospital
BOB	M	Occupational therapist	High security hospital
KEVIN	M	Social Worker	High security hospital

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FRANK	M	Social Worker	High security hospital
PENNY	F	Nurse involved in the transfer of patients	High security hospital
JOHN	M	Forensic Psychiatrist	Other inpatient health service

### Data collection

Data were collected over ten months from semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed once. Outcome of discharge has typically been measured over long periods of five, ten or more years. The research question was: 'Please will you describe your experiences and knowledge of discharges over a period of about 10 years' follow up?' The interviews were open ended and participants were encouraged to speak openly and freely. Our theoretical interest was in their principal concern with discharge. Shorthand notes were made by the researcher during the interview, and typed up in full immediately, or up to 24 hours later in all but two cases (which were completed within 48 hours).

Data collection ceased when there was a high degree of theoretical integration of the concepts and the data collected provided no new insights to advance the theory. Saturation was tested by continuing to look through the remainder of the data set, returning to what seemed the most divergent examples within the sample, looking for negative cases which did not fit with the theory.

### Data analysis

The data were coded line-by-line using a process called open coding, in which each datum was inspected to generate categories and their characteristics from particular indicators. Key words and phrases that captured the essence of the data were used for the categories, and noted on the margins of the transcripts. These categories were not mutually exclusive, so one category could be illustrated by many indicators or incidents in the data. Data were examined for similarities, differences, and consistencies (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each category was considered in terms of its dimensions or characteristics. Questions were asked such as: 'what category or property of a category does this incident indicate?' Each new instance (indicator) was compared to other instances and to



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categories as they emerged, using the process of constant comparative analysis. Thus dimensions of categories came from the data rather than being logically deduced or forced from previous theory and these emergent distinctions made the concepts rich and sensitive in explanatory power.

During the process of selective coding, important categories were collapsed into a list of more general categories, or, in Glaser's terms, substantive codes. All subsequent transcripts were coded using these categories, and text excerpts were gathered under each category to show the range of variation within each substantive code. The decisive criterion for the core category was that it could encompass and explain the area of interest, namely, the main concern regarding discharge of special hospital patients. Inter-relationships of all categories to the core category were considered.

Records of data collection and analysis were kept in the form of memos, informal notes on the conceptualisations that emerged from each coding session and which served as the building blocks of the theory. Near the end of the analysis, memos were sorted on the conceptual level, which put fractured data back together and was the key to formulating the theory.

A literature review was not conducted until after the substantive theory was formulated. PsychINFO (supplied by OVID) and Medline were then searched for "Grounded Theory studies", "independence/ independent living", "rehabilitation" and "community /community care". The literature was then integrated into the theory.

## **Results**

### **The core concern**

In this study, the main concern centred on movement between pathological dependence and healthy independence. Participants consistently raised themes of 'dependence' and 'independence', with comments about the ideas often entangled, for example: 'Dependence in our society influences everybody – financial, work, relationships. They [the patients] are disadvantaged in all three areas.' (Susan1, 3.12.02, Clinical Psychologist). Pathological dependence was influenced by support. The greater the amount of personal support someone could secure by his or her own efforts, the greater the degree of

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independence that would be attributed to him or her, with acknowledgement of the paradox in 'healthy independence', incorporating mutuality and choice about dependencies and reciprocities in relationships: 'Well, none of us lives independently. We should be encouraging people to use networks – social services, support groups. They need to actively engage' (Mike, 07.02.03, Occupational Therapist (OT)) and 'Everyone is supported by others. Having other people you can relate to and managing an independent environment...you would have a community mental health team. Support. But they would still be living in the community' (Paul, 10.02.03, Social Worker (SW)). Community, however, is a nebulous concept, often evoking scepticism and masking conflicts (Leff, 2001). Entanglements appear in the literature too. A community may exist within an institution (Wing, 1990), even a secure institution. Nevertheless, there is usually a gap between a 'made' therapeutic community, which even in high security may achieve a measure of democracy and flattened hierarchies, and the community inhabited by the wider public, which often demands separation and protection from the very people health care professionals are hoping to integrate within it (Symonds, 1998). There is therefore often a conflict between the need for greater therapeutic independence versus public reflections of the need for protection.

Pathological independence sometimes occurred by default. 'Default independence' occurs, for example, when a patient's detention order is absolutely discharged by a Mental Health Review Tribunal. 'They have been discharged because they are untreatable, not because they are safe. When patients are conditionally discharged, they have conditions - after absolute discharge there is no statutory requirement for supervision' (Helen, 11.10.02, Non-Clinical). 'Absolute discharge' most usually happens for those detained under the legal category of 'psychopathic disorder' or 'mental impairment'. For both, there is a requirement under present mental health legislation for England and Wales that "such treatment is likely to alleviate or prevent a deterioration of [the patients] condition", and if it is determined that this is not the case, the patient must be absolutely discharged from the treatment/hospital order. The concept of treatability was further clarified in Cannons Park. Absolute discharge generally means that the patient returns directly to the community without supervision. Services can and often do cease to offer anything to such people, who, in turn,

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rarely choose to attend services consistently. One feature of pathological independence is being unable to make appropriate use of services and/ or not being able to access them at all, then frequently returning to pathological dependence. 'PDs (patients under the legal category of psychopathic disorder) get "stuck" in security or discharged via Tribunal to the community and fare less well' (Tom, 18.10.02).

The hospital was generally construed as a place of dependency, providing safety or asylum as well as of constraint, and the community, for various reasons as less safe, supportive or protective, therefore demanding different qualities in dependency. For example: 'Special hospitals also provide drugs, therapy, absence from drugs' (William, 03.01.03, CFP). Years of dependence on a protective environment and supervising and treating staff were seen as threatening to leave the patient unable to resolve his or her potential for pathological dependence: 'Patients are scared of freedom and their potential. They need to acclimatise, being seen as different, looking different, being tattooed, looking like they are on medication, not fitting in, not having support networks, food changes, routine, cars drive faster than 10 years ago' (Susan, 12.12.02, Clinical Psychologist).

The participants sometimes spoke of dependence simply in terms of the opposite of independence. They identified three main markers of independence: financial, functional and emotional, including the ability to form reciprocal relationships. Treatment for pathologies of dependence often involved structuring arrangements around degrees of independence, with full independence in one's own home, in a satisfying partnership and in paid employment achieved by few. In this respect, facilitating independent living was a normalisation process, enabling people to be as much in 'the community like anybody else...' (Clive, 29.11.02, non-clinical).

The core concern thus manifested itself both in binary code (dependence v. independence; pathological v. healthy) and as a continuum, with pathologies of dependence at one end and healthy independence at the other. Evidence for the continuum is illustrated in the next section which shows how staff resolve this core concern and the quotations provided demonstrate how participants spoke about 'phased progression' from dependence to independence, 'transition through to the community' and 'return (back up the continuum) to hospital' (dependence). Thus the

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resultant theory is about position and/or movement between these two poles through time.

### **Core category: Facilitating independent living**

The core category in this study was about the resolution of pathological dependence. This was achieved through facilitating independent living. Attainment of the highest level of independence for patients was the principal goal for health professionals: ...' (a good outcome).....is independent living, because that is what we aim for. A bad outcome is not achieving independent living'. (Julian, 08.08.02, Forensic Psychiatrist).

Facilitating independent living refers to the basic social process of helping patients become more independent and move to the community, and appears to occur in two principal phases: Phase I, a pre-discharge phase and Phase II, a post-discharge phase. The process is about overcoming pathologies of dependence and independence. For those who are facilitators, independent living appears as a continuum with full pathological dependence at one end, with the patient incarcerated and full healthy independence at the other, with the ex-patient free in the community, and professional help exclusively at his/ her request.

Facilitating independent living is directed at the goal of increasing independence. It can, however, include temporary increase in dependence. Kaliski (1997), for example, suggests that many patients benefit from lifelong attachment to a forensic unit, which allows for many episodes of independent living interspersed with returns to the unit for stabilisation if there is any indication of deterioration, but before the occurrence of any disastrous event triggered by the illness. Transition into the community could be characterised for some patients as a multiple exit/re-entry/re-exit cycle. Each return is treated as an opportunity to examine and modify the previous clinical plan, and enable the patient to resume considerable self-sufficiency whilst perhaps never attaining complete separation/independence from their forensic unit.

### **Strategies for facilitating independent living**

Early stages in the discharge process of a patient with serious mental disorder involve clinical and social efforts directed at enabling disengagement from exacerbating or undesirable behaviours (e.g. dependence on drugs or alcohol) on the one hand,

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and engagement with clinical and institutional requirements on the other. This is paradoxical, in that such high dependency on clinicians and services would be construed as pathological in the absence of serious illness, but, given illness, it is people who cannot achieve that dependency who are regarded as having a pathology of dependency (i.e. when they fail, in Mechanic's (1995) terms, to give up their usual roles to take on the 'proper role' of a sick person, namely taking on the task of getting well). If there is recovery from the illness, but failure at this point to give up such dependency, then once again dependency per se becomes pathological.

Facilitating independent living is achieved through paving the way and testing out strategies, whereby the management of the 'risk' of deterioration in the patient which might lead to an undesirable outcome is shifted from clinician to patient as part of the normalisation process. Health independence is achieved when the patient makes all major decisions and assumes the consequences. 'Well in some ways we are a nanny institution but we teach patients to take responsibility.....' (Robert, 21.01.03, Education). Patient competency, however, varies over time '...their ability to make decisions for themselves is variable and variable over time. Independent living is where a person is given autonomy to make their own decisions regardless of whether or not they are competent. This varies' (Jim, 17.02.03, SW).

'Paving the way' involved getting people to prepare for post-discharge independence, for example, teaching the person practical skills such as how to budget or cook. Paving the way begins within high security and become less of a feature after discharge. This preparatory process relies on various educational techniques, inclusive of acquiring skills that may help prepare the patient to gain paid employment and/or to 'have a constructive use of leisure time' (Robert, 21.01.03, Education). On pre-discharge wards, working with currencies and shopping takes place – a kind of 'social education rather than literacy. More liberal approaches to escorted leaves' (William, 03.01.03, CFP). Sometimes this strategy just involves encouragement and pushing the patient a little, 'patients are frightened. Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind and force the issue' (Mike, 07.02.03, OT).

Other teaching involves getting people to see themselves as subjects and objects in social situations. 'We also do role-play

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asking what they would do if someone came up to them in a pub and started calling them names. We teach them coping skills.....' (Sarah, 07.01.03, Nurse Manager). Psychotherapy is considered to facilitate independence because it improves self-understanding 'patients who had self-awareness and understanding of their own vulnerabilities, knowing what they need' (Angela, 08.01.03, Non-Clinical). They need to 'become aware of dangerousness of himself to himself' (Michael, 03.10.02, Psychotherapist). Paving the way also involves engaging and informing families who 'hate not being given information. Give them a diagnosis and you empower them.....' (Jim, 17.02.03, SW). The process suggests that the greater the cumulative effect of these strategies, the better the outcome.

The second phase of facilitating independent living involves 'testing out'. Testing out involves a patient being given opportunities within and outside the institution to show to him- or herself and to staff levels of competency with new or re-acquired skills. It involves a tentative switch from pathological dependence to pathological independence by monitoring the effects of exposure to life outside institutional care. A property, therefore, of testing out is its experimental nature. Testing out takes different forms at different stages of the rehabilitation process. Initial tests may include observing a patient cook and clean without prompting from the staff; a next stage test might include escorting the patient to shops outside the hospital. Testing out can be extended when the patient is in another hospital of lower security or in the community. It will be '....probably six months on trial leave before a formal transfer would take place' (Paul, 11.10.02, CFP).

Paving the way and testing out overlap to some extent, and the 'preferred' route to independent community living as a phased progression through ever lower levels of security and active clinical input support might be seen as an indicator of that: 'Medium security is preparation for discharge to the community. There are increasing periods of leaves, escorted and unescorted. They are assessed, targets are met. 'About 70-80% will go through some secure setting as an intermediate stage. About 20-30% will go through all levels of security, i.e. high to medium to low secure/rehab' (Clive, 29.11.02, Non-clinical). These people were said to be 'those with clear mental illness who have responded well to treatment...where it was felt necessary to re-assess risk in

a carefully controlled manner by moving patients to less restrictive settings in a stepwise manner' (Geoff, 28.10.02, CFP).

The process of facilitating independent living continues to assist the patient to relinquish pathological dependence, but also prevent pathological independence, whereby the patient rejects further treatment or support rather than accommodating a reduction of it. Instability in mastery of the underlying core problem (pathologies of (in)dependence) means that re-admission to a higher level of security (back to pathological dependence) can happen soon after the initial transfer to lower security. This can vary by disorder. 'Break down because of change of environment, new team. Could either be people with psychopathic disorder – issues around attachment/ trust/confidentiality or long-term chronic schizophrenics – stress of moving' (Julian, 08.08.02, CFP). It can also vary with the nature of transition. Sometimes patients would have 'to start over with psychologists and prove themselves all over again with a new clinical team' (Angela, 08.01.03, legal representative). Good communication between old and new teams is important to smooth progression along the continuum.

### **Facilitating independent living: Enhancers and barriers**

The facilitating process is affected by 'enhancers' or 'barriers'. Many factors can be either. Enhancers include available support systems or confidence of the clinical team. Barriers include permanent inhibitors which cannot be changed, for example past violence or crime and personal characteristics, and temporary inhibitors which can, like medication compliance or service provision. These are comparable to the fixed dispositional and historical factors and mutable contextual factors described by the MacArthur risk study group (Steadman, Monahan, Applebaum, Grisso, Mulvey, Roth, 1994). While enhancers tend to allow stepwise progression, barriers may prevent, slow or abruptly cut off the process. A barrier appearing after some progress along the continuum and ending independence gained was called a 'terminator'.

Youth was an example of a 'dispositional factor' seen by some as a potential barrier to facilitating independent living, first in securing departure from special hospital. 'I believe the younger remain for longer... [in special hospital]' (Paul, 10.02.03, SW).

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Older, not chronically institutionalised patients were considered to pose low risk of repetition of harm, and so be more safely tested out and gain movement towards independence. Over time patients mature and the personality disorder could be outgrown or mental illness burnt out. 'Special hospitals ..... allow the personal maturation process.' Researcher: 'So are older people more likely to go to the community then? Yes' (William, 03.01.03, CFP). The opposite view was, however, also expressed. 'The elderly or infirm, those who are older' or 'people with severe enduring mental illness. I would say a small percentage never reach the community, about 20-30%' (Sam, 10.09.02, CFP).

The barrier to facilitating independent living may lie as much with others as with the patient: 'There is a resistance to take on PDs or people who have proved difficult/ assaultive in the past. They believe that therapy is impotent to do anything about patients with PD. They see the risk as chronic and it is difficult to measure and assess clinical risk....people with PD are anxiety provoking' (Paul, 11.10.02, CFP). This pessimism about outcome, and fear about the potential of the people with personality disorder to disrupt services is not uncommon (Coid & Cordess, 1992). Others, however, point to a substantial evidence base for explanatory pathways into personality disorder and effectiveness of some treatments (Taylor, Newrith & Meux, 2006).

The nature of the legal constraint is another contextual factor which may be construed both as an enhancer and a barrier to independent living. Under the Mental Health Act 1983, in a higher Court, a restriction order may be added to a hospital order, if the judge considers it necessary for the protection of the public. This has the effect of restricting powers of discharge, but also ensures that clinicians continue to offer appropriate treatment, support and supervision. Transitional arrangements within this framework tend to be particularly highly structured. It was perceived, though, that unrestricted patients would move through the system more quickly '...by definition they are less dangerous so I imagine a greater number would go directly to the community than the restricted' (Helen, 11.10.02, Non-Clinical). Dell (1980), however, found that patients under restriction orders and others with criminal convictions were, in fact, the most readily placed.



### *Enhancers to facilitating independent living*

Personal characteristics, such as compliance, trustworthiness, motivation and insight, with ability to form, build and maintain relationships were cited by the participants as factors in the patient which would enhance the process of facilitating independence. Achievement of awareness of anxieties about living in the community and of personal vulnerabilities was also an indicator of such useful insight: 'Realisation that mental disorder is for life. Insight is vital....' (Helen, 11.10.02, Non-Clinical).

Clinical team confidence in the patient and reciprocal patient confidence were seen as the other enhancers: 'Outstanding thing is a good relationship between the patient and just one member of the clinical team. It must be based on mutual trust. So it becomes a conversation between two people, one with the knowledge of psychiatry, the other with knowledge of themselves' (Angela, 08.01.03, Non-Clinical). Responsibility for beginning the discharge process is borne by the team but, as the patient progresses along the continuum of independence, it transfers to the patient.

Strengths in the patient's own support systems provided another layer of enhancers: 'Yes, we do look for family support. Stable structures. Someone to watch over them. Encouragement. This would help us decide on absolute discharge' (Helen, 11.10.02, Non-Clinical). 'Family support seems to be vital. For example, one patient was discharged to a staffed hostel but his parents are still willing to look out for him' (Sam, 10.09.02, CFP). Conversely, having no family or friends was seen as a potential barrier to facilitating independence: 'The patients with no family are the most reluctant to leave' (Sarah, 07.01.03, Nurse Manager).

### *Barriers to facilitating independent living*

The offence leading to the admission to high security hospital, an immutable factor, was perceived as contributing to the route of discharge and speed of progression. 'Some will go out via medium security/ regional security, others will go to supervised hostels. Researcher: What factors determine this? Answer: The index offence' (Sarah, 07.01.03, Nurse Manager). Lack of a clear link between the illness and the index offence, or a perception that the mental disorder which had been present at

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the time of the offence was untreatable, were both factors which were regarded as barriers to the process. Relationship to the victim was also seen as important, and probably wisely so (Johnston and Taylor, 2003): 'very unusual for anybody to be returned to family, index offence is often against people [in the family]' (Simon, 19.02.03, CFP). Sometimes a high community or media profile, largely secondary to the offence, was thought to pose a further barrier. Pressure from third parties or victims, public hostility, or political sensitivity would have to be managed as well as the actual safety of the patient. 'There are other issues like DSPD [Dangerous Severe Personality Disorder] and sex offenders – those who respond to treatment – but whether they are safe in the community is a different matter. That group needs close support. So stigmatised' (Susan, 12.12.02, Clinical Psychologist).

Some barriers were considered to lie within the patient. These included reluctance to take medication, lack of empathy or insight, resentment of supervision, inability to cope with money and/or to build and maintain relationships. These barriers were all, however, regarded as mutable, and therefore temporary inhibitors. 'They worry that they cannot cope with life out there and money' (Sam, 10.09.02, CFP). Consequences of long-term institutionalisation were also regarded as remediable for many, although not all: 'Patients are scared of freedom and their potential. They need to acclimatise.....' (Susan, 12.12.02, Clinical Psychologist). 'Money is an issue – they don't get paid in an RSU [Regional secure unit]. Daytime activities are another. Integration or not is another....family closeness. Access to the community' (Deborah, 17.02.03, Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN)). By contrast, co-morbidity, here meaning drug or alcohol abuse co-occurring with the main mental disorder, was commonly construed as a problem for life. It was often thought to play a part in terminating independent living. Problems with alcohol are strongly related to re-conviction and re-admission (Norris, 1984), and patients with such co-morbidity are 'difficult to place' because of not falling within responsibilities of one single agency (Johnstone, Owens, Gold, Crow & Macmillan, 1984).

Women patients were said to encounter more barriers to the process of facilitating independence than were men: 'I think females have more problems with consistency of staff; they are more complex and harder to manage' (Deborah, 17.02.03, CPN).

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Also: ‘...often there has been abuse.. . very little thought about what they do need’ (Simon, 19.02.03, CFP).

Another demographic, ethnic group or race was seen as a potential barrier because of a likely mismatch between race of patient and of authority figures: ‘...There is a cultural difference – managers are white, Tribunals have white people. There is a definite disadvantage to being black’ (William, 03.01.03, CFP). This may have similarities with suggestions of such problems in the Criminal Justice System (e.g. Hood, 1992; Fitzgerald, 1993). The NHS generally is not regarded as immune to such problems. Bhui, Stansfeld, Hull, Priebe, Mole, & Feder (2003) found that black people are over-represented amongst in-patients and four times more likely to experience a compulsory admission than white people, although adjusting for diagnosis reduces such difference (Harrison, 2002). African Caribbeans with psychosis are, however, no more likely to be in an English high security hospital than in general psychiatric services (Walsh, Leese, Taylor, Burns, Creed, Higgitt, & Murray, 2002).

External factors were sometimes seen as barriers in themselves, including delays in Home Office approval of plans for restricted patients. Further, some placements require identification of new funding, with delays in locating it. Lack of suitable beds was also raised: ‘..... There may not necessarily be a purpose in sending them to medium security but it is to do with bed availability’ (William, 03.01.03, CFP). A further set of barriers were considered to lie in staff training. Decisions about transferring or discharging patients are influenced by attitudes and philosophies among receiving clinicians, as well as by their knowledge of the patients (Peay, 1989). ‘Many staff are not trained forensically’ (Sarah, 07.01.03, Nurse Manager). For other staff, an “unlearning” of previous experience would be needed (Rawlings, 2001). ‘I think the route you come in can seriously affect your thinking. Some staff come onto the admission ward having worked in the community. People don’t always apply security. I think there is a division between mental health and forensic’ (Mike, 07.02.03, OT). Again, the theme came through that patients with personality disorder might experience special barriers: ‘Inexperience with the community team. They have never been trained how to deal with people with personality disorder. They will be successful with MI. Community psychiatric services do not want to know people with PD so the

team does not get experience. Community Psychiatric Nurses need more training' (Jim, 17.02.03, SW).

### Outcomes

A 'good outcome' of the discharge process was having 'successful accommodation, employment, a lack of drug use, limited alcohol intake, maximised his/her potential, secure relationships of his/her choice, a constructive and contented life, the ability to deal with problems, and being in the most independent placement possible, compliant and not institutionalised'. 'Return to safe responsible 'independent' living that they are happy with' (Helen, 11.10.02, Non-Clinical). Additionally, there must be a lack of re-offending and re-hospitalisation and being free of, or at least untroubled by, symptoms.

'Bad outcome' was characterised by lifelong pathological dependence and institutionalisation, with no self-sufficiency for the patient, long re-admissions to hospital, re-offending, suicide, relapse, or being stuck in an inappropriate placement - 'Staying with no prospect of moving on or moving on to MSU with no rationale for moving there' (William, 03.01.03, CFP). A bad outcome also referred to premature discharge, a form of pathological independence. There was also recognition of high rates of physical ill health 'There is high morbidity due to smoking and lack of exercise. Suicide rate in schizophrenics is about 11%' (Tom, 18.10.02, CFP)

Such good and bad outcomes constitute extreme poles; for most patients, it was more a case of 'As good as it gets....' where this would refer to the very best progress that a patient could make. 'To become as independent as possible recognising that some won't make it to the end' (Tom, 18.10.02, CFP). In this context, 'the end' or the real aim of discharge could be taken to mean healthy dependence. To this end there was recognition of the value of teaching patients to be as dependent as they feel they need be to meet real needs. The dependence only becomes pathological if independence is the healthy, appropriate adaptation and vice versa.

A patient may appear to be living independently, not offend, not be re-admitted, and comply with all requirements but have no quality of life, no job, self-esteem or relationship. 'It doesn't matter what the job is but they need an occupation - it

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could be a porter, whatever, but it needs boring regularity coupled with friends. If there was family support on top, that would be marvellous' (Michael, 03.10.02, Psychotherapist). Occasional relapses would be acceptable: 'Living in the community; 'blips' get noticed perhaps with 'blipping' admissions; low level offending (not violence)' (Simon, 19.02.03, CFP).

### **Summary**

Information derived from interviews about discharge of patients from high security hospitals, undertaken with a mix of clinical and non-clinical staff involved in decisions to discharge, revealed a core concern about pathologies of dependence and independence. This was accompanied by recognition that a measure of dependence could be healthy if freely chosen; examples of pathologies of independence include enforced detachment from services or total rejection of attachment. The emergent theory was of a process of facilitating healthy independent living, with two principal phases, which overlap. These phases are 'paving the way', mainly occurring in the pre-discharge period, and 'testing out' occurring more in the post discharge phase.

Facilitating independent living is an active process by clinicians and other professionals creating movement from full pathological dependence at one end of a continuum, - here, compulsorily detention in hospital - towards healthy independence at the other end - here, when the patient becomes a person who is able to live safely in circumstances of his or her choosing, whether alone or with a partner, family or friends, and with or without professional help. In this model, progress and deterioration are movements up and down a dependence-independence continuum, personal or social network strengths are enhancers of progress towards independence and adverse events, such as relapse of illness or re-offending, barriers to independence, in themselves and in the nature of the responses to them - perhaps return to hospital.

### **Discussion**

The theory generated provides a positive and fresh framework for understanding and measuring outcome on leaving a high security hospital, which fits better with a philosophy of clinical practice and rehabilitation than old methods of focussing almost exclusively on re-offending, or, from time to time, on other

negative events. The majority of people leaving high security hospitals are not now and never have been convicted of a further offence; e.g. in the UK, Buchanan (1998), Jamieson and Taylor (2004), Tennent and Way (1984) and Tong and Mackay (1959); and, in the USA, Steadman and Keveles (1972) and Steadman and Coccozza (1974). If used alone and without context, this is an unsatisfactory marker of outcome because the offences these patients commit tend to have a low base rate, some patients may be violent but escape involvement with the criminal justice system, and both the definition of offences and attitudes to them, including the likelihood of prosecution vary geographically and over time. A model which is less susceptible to social and cultural vicissitudes and which more explicitly puts gains for the patient as well as others at the centre of the rehabilitation process is likely to enhance co-operation between staff and patients and, in turn, the chance of good outcomes.

This perspective fits well with the ethical code of most people providing services for such patients, and may also fit better with community safety than a risk focussed approach. Munro and Rungay (2000), for example, analysed a consecutive series of independent inquiries after homicide by people who had been in contact with UK mental health services, published 1988-1997, and found that even with the advantage of hindsight, only one quarter of the inquiry teams had judged the homicide as having been predictable, but in two-thirds it was considered that it may have been preventable with treatment. In other words, focus on the patients' health and social needs rather than their offending would probably have been more effective in prevention of these tragedies.

Our theory of facilitating independent living also has important implications for the broad social processes of de-institutionalisation and the move towards community care, designed to help patients achieve independent living. One of the guiding principles for the treatment of mentally disordered offenders in the UK Department of Health & Home Office's (1992) Review of Health and Social Services for Mentally Disordered Offenders was that they should be cared for "as far as possible in the community, rather than in institutional settings"; "under conditions of security no greater than is justified by the degree of danger they present to themselves or others" and "in such a way as to maximise rehabilitation and their chances of sustaining an

independent life”. Indeed, the whole concept of ‘community care’ is about providing care for mentally disordered people outside hospital in community residential settings, allowing them the freedom to make their own decisions. The process aims to ensure that some of the protective functions of the institution are fully provided in the community and the negative aspects of institutional care are not perpetuated (World Health Organisation, 2001). Thus, de-institutionalisation is associated with “de-hospitalisation” but not synonymous with it. A package of resources, including health workers and rehabilitation services, general hospital psychiatric beds, other specialist accommodation and home care, crisis support, protected housing, and sheltered employment allows service users more choice in selecting the optimal cluster of resources for their needs. Although terms such as ‘protected’ and ‘sheltered’, however, carry some connotations of dependency, elements of choice on the part of the service user and openly negotiated agreement between clinician and user on the choice of service use implies a substantial measure of healthy independence.

The core problem that this theory articulates is that a complex dynamic exists between pathological dependence and pathological independence. We all are dependent on such things as food, money and relationships in our lives, to various extents, but the level of dependence and independence should interact positively with each other to allow an individual to develop or maximise his/her potential and to have some control over the balance of dependence/ independence. It is a fundamental characteristic of a social being that he or she is not wholly self-sufficient, practically or emotionally. As human beings, we depend on relationships with others to survive, and interaction with others is generally reciprocal.

There is, nevertheless, a general pattern among healthy social animals that they start life as highly dependent on one or both parents or caregivers, and progress towards increasing capacity for independence, including autonomy in choice and actions. Some kind of disruption to this process may be referred to as a pathology of dependence. For people with developmental disorders, such as learning disability or personality disorder, such progression may be slowed or arrested. Among mechanisms for understanding the latter, is disorder of attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Barber M., Short J., Clarke-Moore J., Lougher M., Huckle

P., & Amos T., 2006).

Direction and stability of pathologies of dependence may be affected, such that an individual might be rendered over-dependent at one extreme, autistically separate and without reciprocity at the other, or swinging between the two. Illnesses, disorders which constitute a break in health, may also affect dependence. The nature of care and treatment for such disorders may compound any pathological dependence directly related to the disorder. Where disorder is profound and chronic, and long-term care and treatment has been provided in an institution, this is particularly likely.

The aim that a child should grow up to become confidently independent is synonymous with the aim that he should grow up to be mentally healthy (Bowlby, 1956). There are parallels in the aims of clinicians, and their sometimes parent-like roles in easing a patient along towards independence. While not expressed by any of the interviewees, a difficulty here is the risk of reinforcing a sort of pathological dependency, colluding with a form of infantilization of the patient. Most patients are well over 30 years old by the time of consideration of discharge from high security. Many of them experienced pathological attachments within their family; most would have felt or been pathologically dependent, whether or not that dependence was met, when their mental disorder left them less able to survive independently in the community. Both schizophrenia, which most commonly has its onset late in adolescence, and personality disorder, which has generally affected the individual for the whole of his or her life, interfere with the normal process of gaining independence from parents/parental surrogates. Work with families, with the consent of the patient, is likely to be important.

Forms of dependence can be both natural, as in a mother-child relationship, and pathological from a societal point of view, as in institutionalisation. A further distinction exists between forced dependence, as in incarceration, and free-choice dependence, when deprivation of a particular object, person, or substance or place would cause distress. This can be seen in patients who are distressed when discharge is considered. One way of looking at violence born out of paranoia is that it is a disruption of a former pathological dependence created by a belief system about a perceived persecutor. Treated patients who have been freed from such pathology may experience emptiness



without the beliefs and mourn their loss.

A flawed notion of community at the heart of the process of de-institutionalisation in some respects contributes to the pathology of independence. Communities are complex tapestries of social and political forces, not always welcoming to those who are committed to its care. A more critical awareness of what community actually means in community care is needed.

### **Generalizability**

This theory is substantive because the focus has been on a specific area of inquiry that concerns inter-disciplinary practice. The aim of facilitating independence for people who have been detained in high security hospitals appears to have much in common with the overarching aim for psychiatric patients or other people in institutional care, in which case, the implications are profound for the theory and its generalizability. In order to develop or refine the substantive theory further, resident patient views should be obtained. In order to build formal theory pertaining to the conceptual area of pathology of dependence, the phenomenon should be examined under several types of situations, such as people with mental illness living in the community and within hospital, both before and after treatment. This would have the aim of exploring further how the discharge process affects the pathology of dependence, as entry into the patient role (or sick role) is often a last resort, following extensive delays and repeated attempts at self-care (Mechanic, 1995). Further work could examine Bowlby's (1956) distinction between actual dependence and feeling dependent. It could be that for patients with little experience of survival in the community, the feeling of dependence is hard to overcome and thus a patient may appear to an outsider to be living independently and to be in a free-choice state, but in reality have feel very dependent.

Since this theory was developed, a paper has been published by Draine, Wolff, Jacoby, Hartwell, & Duclos, 2005, who developed a model of prisoner re-entry into the community through interdisciplinary team effort and refined through a focus group process that included advocates, community members and other informants from mental health and criminal justice systems in five states. It illustrates dynamics related to both individuals with mental illness leaving prison and their interaction with the community setting. It also has distinct

parallels with the theory presented in this paper in terms of Enhancers and Barriers as the authors model how resources and needs at both community and individual levels can interact to support or hinder the community integration of individuals leaving prison.

### **Limitations**

The principal researcher (LJ) who conducted all the interviews and the analyses is not a clinician, and had few preconceived ideas about discharge and outcome for high security hospital patients, however, she did regularly attend clinical seminars, and the principal supervisor (and one of the co-authors) is a clinician of long experience at all levels of secure service provision and management. Every attempt was made to approach this material with an open mind, and to reintroduce prior knowledge and research evidence as a final stage of the analytic process, but bias cannot be ruled out.

The theory that was developed is not necessarily the only one that might plausibly have been derived from the data. Sometimes it is possible to account for behaviour by more than one concept. However, the theory derived in this study was the interpretation of the data and all decision-making processes have been made explicit by giving examples of direct quotations. Every attempt was made to ensure that theoretical saturation had been achieved but new information might have arisen had the interviews continued and this is true of any grounded theory study. A grounded theory is never right or wrong but is always modifiable in the light of new information. For example, this study only examined outcome from the perspective of those making discharge decisions. Addition of a service user perspective might result in key modifications.

### **Conclusions**

It was possible, by adopting a grounded theory approach, to develop a substantive theory of facilitating independent living that explains the main concerns with discharge from special hospital, according to mental health staff. After 20 interviews, the theory was saturated. The theory developed was that discharge for special hospital patients is a process of facilitating independent living. Independent living is portrayed as a dependence-independence continuum. The process is facilitated through strategies of 'paving the way' and 'testing out', to each of

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which both patients and others, especially professional staff, contribute. The process is affected by ‘influencing factors’, which may be ‘enhancers’ or ‘barriers’, and these in turn may be in the patient or in their external environment.

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## **Opportunizing: A classic grounded theory study on business and management**

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### **Abstract**

*Opportunizing* emerged as the core variable of this classic GT study on business and management. Opportunizing is the recurrent main concern that businesses have to continually resolve, and it explains how companies recurrently create, identify, seize or exploit situations to maintain their growth or survival. Opportunizing is the recurrent creation and re-creation of opportunities in business. *Opportunizing* is basically what business managers do and do all the time. The problematic nature of *opportunizing* is resolved by a *core social process* of *opportunizing* and its attached sub-processes that account for change over time and for the variations of the problematic nature of its resolution.

*Opportunizing* has *five main facets*. These are *conditional befriending* (confidence building & modifying behavior), *prospecting* (e.g. information gaining), *weighing up* (information appraisal & decision-making), *moment capturing* (quick intervention for seizing strategic opportunities), and *configuration matching* (adjusting the business organization to abet the other activities of opportunizing).

On a more abstract level, opportunizing has three more organizational facets: the physically boundary-less, the value-hierarchical, and the physically bounded. The first of these called perpetual opportunizing. This emerges from the conjunction of conditional befriending and prospecting. The second facet is called triggering opportunizing. It arises from the coming together of weighing up and moment capturing. The final facet is called spasmodic opportunizing. This happens when moment capturing and configuration matching unite.

Thus, the three facets of opportunizing are sub-core variables, while the five facets of opportunizing are sub-sub-core variables.

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The five facets can also be seen as stages of the *core process of opportunizing*. Yet, they are more than stages, because *weighing up* is involved throughout.

Each of the *five facets* of opportunizing also attach to sub-processes that account for the resolving of still more tangible dimensions of opportunizing. For example, *confidence building* and *modifying behavior* are two categories of *conditional befriending*. It is not possible to create opportunities in business without *modifying people's behavior*, but this latter is impossible or difficult without *confidence building*. The model of opportunizing will assist managers in focusing on the most important and problematic. Practitioners will be able to adopt and adapt the theory according to the variation in the data that their individual contexts manifest.

### **Introduction**

The methodology used in this research is the set of “classic” GT procedures that Dr. Barney Glaser originated in the beginning of the 1960s and has maintained since (Glaser, 1978; 1992; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2005). It will be assumed that the reader is familiar with this methodology and its terminology (i.e. conceptual levels, substantive concepts and theoretical codes, types of theoretical codes such as basic social process, basic social condition, amplified causal looping, bias random walk, etc; the distinction between a basic social structural and basic social psychological process, and so forth). A few data incidences will be used as examples to illustrate some of the building blocks of the emergent theory. Literature comparisons will be delimited to just a few.

The empirical data for this research were collected from a theoretical sample of twelve small and middle-sized companies in the Faroe Islands. Most of the data were qualitative and collected by interviews with company managers, owners, board members and employees. The research was sponsored by BP Amoco Exploration LTD (Faroes). Dr. Andy Lowe was the author's methodological coach during the critical phases of the research.

### **The Core Variable of Opportunizing**

The *core variable* that sums up the most important and the most problematic for those being studied and explains most of the

variation in the data, is the concept of *opportunistizing*. It is a new English word, which has been created to capture the meaning of this particular pattern. It is derived from the English word “opportunity”. It is defined as “*the recurrent creation and re-creation of “convenient occasions” [or “convenient” situations, occurrences, moments, conditions, means, places, outcomes, circumstances, combinations, junction of circumstances] for the deliberate pursuit of competitive advantage in the business*”. *Opportunistizing* could also be explained as “*the recurrent seizing of business opportunities*” by the recurrent creation of *actual* out of *potential* business opportunities. It explains how companies recurrently create, identify, appraise, seize or exploit situations to maintain their growth or survival. It sums up and explains the main concern and its recurrent solution of those being studied. *Opportunistizing* emerged as the most clear and stable meaning behind practically all emerging behavioral patterns, also patterns that otherwise were very different. An important high level property of *opportunistizing* is “*economizing*” (i.e. applying the principle of less action or less resistance or less waste) by “*matching*” and/or “*economizing*” by “*influencing*”.

In hindsight, it appears more or less self-evident that “*opportunistizing*” or “*the recurrent seizing of business opportunities*” is a *core variable* in business. However, *opportunistizing* is very different from the “hard core” variables of all commonly accepted theories of business and management. Some readers may be familiar with most of these theories (e. g. neoclassical, game, behaviorist, principal-agent, agency, transaction cost, evolutionary, resource-based, complex systems, value-based, quality pursuit). Yet, *opportunistizing* does not undermine the validity of these other theories or views as representations of multiple realities of business. Instead, the theory of *opportunistizing* adds substance to these other views by adding some new elements. These elements are e. g. the conceptualization of the agenda of business leaders and the importance of conceptual levels when explaining behavior.

### The Main Dimensions of Opportunistizing

The theory of *opportunistizing* is best explained by first explaining the *five main dimensions of opportunistizing*: conditional befriending, prospecting, weighing up, moment capturing and configuration matching. As sub-sub-core variables, they reflect

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five main dimensions of the main concern issue of *opportunizing*, but they also attach to sub-processes that account for the resolving of still more tangible dimensions of *opportunizing*. Together with their lesser-level sub-dimensions (categories) they account for most of the variation in the behavior. The five main dimensions of opportunizing are the following:

Conditional befriending:	Creating business opportunities by confidence building & modifying people's behavior
Prospecting:	Identifying business opportunities, <i>e.g. information gaining</i>
Weighing up:	Appraising business opportunities by information appraisal & decision-making
Moment capturing:	Seizing of strategic business opportunities when quick intervention is critical for the outcome
Configuration matching:	Exploiting business opportunities by adjusting the current business organization to abet the other activities of opportunizing

These five dimensions emerged from the methodological treatment of the data in the same sequence as they have been mentioned. They were found to be exhaustive, i.e. to cover any pattern of behavior found in the data.

### **Conditional befriending**

The pattern of *conditional befriending* may be defined as offering something on conditions or net preconditions that sustains the competitive advantage of the business. Ultimately, it is about *modifying people's behavior* in such a manner that the company's survival or growth is sustained. These people, whose behavior it is important to modify by incitement or prevention, are employees, business partners, customers, suppliers, vendors and other stakeholders. However, such *behavior modification* is impossible or difficult if it is not based on the appropriate *trust*.

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Consequently, in addition to *modifying behavior*, *confidence building* (trust-building) is also a category of *conditional befriending*. Most of the data incidences that indicated *conditional befriending* were actually indicators of *confidence building*. The data indicate that *confidence building* and hence *conditional befriending* is a perpetually occurring activity in a business.

Most of micro-economics is also about modification of people's behavior, and prices have an important role in this. "Pricing" decisions are of course important for company revenue and for modifying customer behavior. However, "pricing" decisions did not emerge as problematic in the studied companies. The more or less automatic forces of supply and demand give the sufficient clues that are needed for "pricing" decisions. Consequently, the "pricing" issue did not emerge as any direct main concern issue. However, cost concern issues as well as product and service feature issues were more problematic issues, and they are related to "pricing". Conceptually, they emerged as different properties of opportunizing, e. g. "economizing", "matching" and "influencing", and their resolutions are conceptually explained by the five dimensions of opportunizing and their sub-processes.

The pattern of *conditional befriending* was very frequently indicated in the data as different varieties of "fostering relationships" - and sometimes as "neglecting or terminating relationships". In many other classic grounded theory studies of special business issues, similar "relationship concerns" have emerged: "cultivating relationships" in a study by Simmons of the milkman and his customers (1993, p. 4-31); the concepts of "keeping clients in line", "pseudo-friending", "affiliating" (a property of *confidence building*) and "obligating" (a property of *modifying behavior*) in a study of veterinarian practices by Guthrie (2000, p. 50-100); the core variable of "default remodeling of relationships" that emerged in a study by Lowe (1998) of the post-merger aftermath. In a study of re-humanizing knowledge work through fluctuating support networks (Holton et al., 2006, p. 4), the first two developmental stages of such support networks were found to be "attracting" and "engaging". These two concepts are also properties of *conditional befriending*. *Conditional befriending* is also reflected in the concept of "networking" (Gummesson, 2002).

### Prospecting

The pattern of *prospecting* may be defined as the identification of business opportunities by e.g. gaining information. *Prospecting* is made possible by *modifying people's behavior* (i.e. *conditional befriending*), but *prospecting* is also necessary for *conditional befriending*. This means that *conditional befriending* and *prospecting* are mutually dependent and each other's "spin-offs". This dependency of *conditional befriending* (confidence building & modifying behavior) also means that *prospecting* in one form or another is a perpetually occurring activity in a business.

Information gaining starts as predetermined searching that occasionally leads to genuine-original information gaining. Thus, the two categories of prospecting are *predetermined prospecting* and *genuine-original prospecting*. Serendipity is a property of the latter. A few data incidences can illustrate the concepts. Indicated or implied concepts are mentioned in brackets:

We keep a large part of our large financial assets liquid. Part of the explanation for this is that we are interested in attracting potential partners for investment. They know it. We prefer that they come to us. They bring knowledge to us. Yet, we are very discriminative. We did not go for.... [*Configuration matching abetting confidence building and modifying behavior that leads to prospecting, (predetermined prospecting possibly leading to genuine-original prospecting), weighing up.*]

Our servicing of [Name of product] has been very important in giving us contact to many businesses and to learn more about them as our potential customers for other products. They are really many. The "spin-offs" of this product has been very important in the generation of the present net worth of the company. [*Accumulated outcome of configuration matching abetting conditional befriending and prospecting (predetermined and genuine-original).*]

### Weighing up

The pattern of *weighing up* is different from the other four dimensions of opportunizing, because *weighing up* is involved in any act of opportunizing. This means that all the other four

dimensions of opportunizing are directly dependent on *weighing up*. The data also indicate that the theoretical code of *company self-identity* is in an overruling relationship to *weighing up* and all categories of *weighing up*. This identity is indicated in some unique characteristics in each company's actual behavior. It means some "path-dependency" for any company. It can be explained metaphorically as some "weights" *a priori* have been put on the "balance" – or that *a priori* some kinds of "weights" will never be put on it. This difference becomes especially noticeable for companies of similar size and within the same industry. How this preconceiving or preconditioning in *weighing up* is actually carried out is also different in different companies. It may, for example, be indicated as differences in their actual balancing or unbalancing of some paired opposite positions in their *prospecting* and *weighing up* activities, as for example the paired opposites of "immediate - distant future", "inductive - deductive", "explicit - implicit", "manifest - latent", "informal - formal".

As mentioned, *weighing up* is defined as assessments of business opportunities that take place as information appraisal and it includes decision-making. What are being *weighed up* are outcomes from *prospecting*. This means that *prospecting* leads to *weighing up*. But like the other four dimensions of opportunizing, *prospecting* is also directly dependent on *weighing up*, which indicates a straight mutual dependency between *weighing up* and *prospecting*.

A distinction can be made between the categories of *weighing up* according to the involvement of *weighing up* in the four other dimensions of *opportunizing*. This means that there are basically four categories of *weighing up*. Each of them is attached to one of the four dimensions of opportunizing. These categories are "*weighing up for match/influence in conditional befriending*", "*weighing up for relevancy in prospecting*", "*weighing up before a moment capturing*", and "*weighing up for configuration matching*". A few data examples can illustrate these four concepts:

During the final negotiations about the license, I was very afraid that they would ask about my formal education and training. I had only had 7 years in primary school. They did not ask. They liked me. They only considered me an ordinary joiner-carpenter with some uncommon

idiosyncrasies..... [*Indicated or implied concept: weighing up for match / influence in conditional befriending*]

“*Weighing up for relevancy is prospecting*” sometimes involves that the “prospector is prospecting on the prospector”. This indicates a linking to *company identity*. This kind of *weighing up* is sometimes facilitated by use of advisors. The data indicate that core foci in this kind of *weighing up* are “matching” and “influencing”. The data also indicate a better performance of companies where “*weighing up for relevance in prospecting*” spans over and/or balances and allows interaction (inter-feeding) among one or several paired opposites such as: “immediate - distant future”, “inductive - deductive”, “explicit - implicit”, “manifest - latent”, “informal - formal”. The category seems to be pivotal among the categories (lesser-level concepts) of opportunizing.

It became a disaster for them. They thought it was close to their logistics business, but what was to be stored and processed were quite different from what they were familiar with. They must have got some wrong information about the quantities and when they could be available, or in any case they have not been able to collect and process this information properly. I know the people that got them interested and maintained their interests..... [*Indicated or implied concepts: relevancy derived from “matching”, weighing up for relevancy in prospecting.*]

We had a competitor in the vicinity using the same iron fittings in a plastic product that we used in our wood product. This factory went bankrupt, and was bought by the bank. Of course, I was interested to buy. Now this bank persuaded me to buy, but on their terms.... [*Indicated or implied concept: weighing up before a moment capturing.*]

My next step was to make ready for the new production. I got advice from a consultant, but I could not use it. It would be far too expensive. I decided to rebuild the hall myself with some hired people. It got it at a fraction of what the consultant had calculated. This, of course, later became very important for my competitive advantage.... [*Some indicated or implied concepts: Configuration matching, prospecting, weighing up for configuration*]



*matching, act of configuration matching, configuration matching abetting conditional befriending.]*

### **Moment capturing**

The pattern of *moment capturing* is defined as the spasmodic seizure of strategic business opportunities where quick intervention is critical for optimal outcome. The pattern of spasmodic *moment capturing* occurs in all units and situations where quick intervention is critical for optimal outcome. As a concept of the theory of opportunizing, *moment capturing* is limited to strategic events, but not just memorable events such as mergers and acquisitions.

The data indicate that there is always a *weighing up* before a *moment capturing*. As a strategic event, a *moment capturing* has consequences for the business organization, and consequently, a *moment capturing* leads to a *configuration matching*. This also secures that any opportunity being created due to *moment capturing* subsequently reaches its full potential.

While an event of *moment capturing* is spasmodically occurring as a single point event, the concepts of moment capturing also involves a process with some stages or categories. Besides the single point event, two categories of *moment capturing* emerged. Firstly, there is a *perpetual awareness of the moment capture concept* that may affect *weighing up* predispositions.

In 1971, when I was producing on small scale, I became aware of some iron fittings that could revolutionize my production. I tried to get a license for production, but the local market was considered too small for production, and they instead gave me the sole sales agency in the area for the products with these fittings. This did not suit me particularly well. I continued to pursue a license for my own production. It took a long time and it was not easy. Finally, I got it in 1975. *[Some indicated or implied concepts: genuine-original prospecting, weighing up, perpetual awareness of moment capture concept, moment capturing.]*

Secondly, the data also indicate the significance of a *weighing up of weighing up regarding past moment captures* that also may affect *weighing up* predispositions.

He made some wrong decisions concerning investments in hardware (buying used cheaply), unaware of the speed in obsolescence nowadays. He also aimed at some wrong people in management. It became a disaster for the company.....We proceeded from that. [*Some indicated or implied concepts: moment capturing & weighing up of weighing up, company identity issues.*]

These two categories of *moment capturing* are closely related to the categories of *weighing up*. The data also indicate that these two categories, together with *company identity*, have an overruling affect on *weighing up* predispositions. This means, on the one hand, that *moment capturing* via these two categories is closely related to *weighing up*. *On the other hand, moment capturing* is also via its single point event closely related to *configuration matching*.

### **Configuration matching**

The pattern of *configuration matching* is defined as the spasmodic adjustment or fitting of the tangible business organization to facilitate the other activities of *opportunizing*. This also means that *configuration matching* differs from the other five dimensions of *opportunizing* because it attaches to a *basic social structural process*. The other four facets of *opportunizing* are attached to *basic social psychological processes*.

The accumulated outcome of *configuration matching* is the tangible structure and organization of the business, within which the other processes of *opportunizing* are abetted. The accumulated outcome of *configuration matching* is thus a structure for the recurrent exploitation of business opportunities.

Basically, *configuration matching* is the main concern and the consecutive process of *matching* the internal organization of the business to the organizations of suppliers, customers, employees and/or strategic partners. The *social structural process* of *configuration matching* is the spasmodic adjustment of this structure by *acts of configuration matching* and by relying on *signs of matching/influencing in configuration matching*. These latter are the two categories of *configuration matching*.

### **Some Indicated Theoretical Codes**

Each of the *five dimensions* of *opportunizing* can be

conceived as substantive concepts or main concern issues. However, they can simultaneously be conceived as theoretical codes that explain the resolving of these main concern issues.

### **Basic social processes**

*Conditional befriending* and *prospecting* together with their attached *weighing up* categories are perpetually activated in a business. The event of *moment capturing* only occurs spasmodically and the same applies for an event of *configuration matching*. It has also to be taken into account that the *accumulated outcome of configuration matching* in the form of the physical structure and tangible organization of the business upholds the other activities of opportunistizing, which operate “within” this structure. *Configuration matching* just means the adjustment of this structure to abet these other activities of opportunistizing.

This means that one of the five dimensions of opportunistizing, *configuration matching*, is attached to a *basic social structural process*. This process has three main sequential stages that form a loop, and the stages are “*act of configuration matching*”, “*signs of matching/influencing in configuration matching*” and “*weighing up for configuration matching*”. This loop will be explained later. *Moment capturing* can also be conceived as a distinct theoretical code or a variety of a *basic social psychological process*, and the same applies for *weighing up*.

*Conditional befriending* and *prospecting* can be conceived as two closely related *basic social psychological processes*. Each of them has three main sequential stages that also form a loop. The stages of *conditional befriending* are “*confidence building*”, “*modifying behavior*” and “*weighing up for match/influence in conditional befriending*”. The stages of *prospecting* are “*predetermined prospecting*”, “*genuine-original prospecting*” and “*weighing up for relevance in prospecting*”. These two loops will be explained later.

The five dimensions of opportunistizing can also be conceived as five stages of the *core process of opportunistizing*, and this process forms a loop. Inside this *core process* there are sub-processes as loops, or loops within a loop. The stages of the process may be sequential, but may also be simultaneous and serendipitous. Starting with *conditional befriending*, the sequence may be, but not necessarily, as follows: *conditional*

*befriending, prospecting, weighing up before moment capturing, moment capturing, configuration matching that abets conditional befriending, conditional befriending, prospecting, and so forth. A sequence may also surpass a moment capturing and be as follows: conditional befriending, prospecting, weighing up for configuration matching, configuration matching facilitating conditional befriending or prospecting, conditional befriending, prospecting, and so forth. Other sequences are, of course, also possible.*

Without being able to *modify people's behavior* effectively, no company can survive or grow. This is the dimension of *conditional befriending* that also includes the category of *confidence building*. However, the other four dimensions of *opportunizing* can be considered as equally important. They are also stages of the core process-loop, and achievements or lack of achievements in one of the dimensions will affect the other dimensions.

### **Amplified causal looping**

The theoretical code of *amplified causal looping* is also indicated in the data. Thus, as consequences continually become causes and causes continually become consequences, one sees either worsening deterioration or improving progression. The data indicate that such a looping may become triggered by *confidence building* directed towards key business partners or towards the employees of the company. However, it cannot be ruled out that *amplified causal looping* can be triggered anywhere else in the model of *opportunizing*. Efficient *confidence building* may lead to efficient *behavior modification*, which in turn leads to efficient *prospecting*, which leads to efficient *weighing up*, which leads to efficient *moment captures*, (including bolstering of *company identity*), which leads to efficient *configuration matching*, which then leads to efficient *conditional befriending*, which leads to efficient *prospecting*, and so forth. If the looping is triggered by “negative” *confidence building*, the outcome may be worsening deterioration instead of improving progression. Here are some illustrative data incidences (indicated or implied concepts in brackets):

The founder of this trading and fishing company started his business by buying a fishing ship [moment capturing] in partnership [*“saming” in confidence building*] with a

captain with a very good fishing and management record [*“distinguishing” in confidence building that affects modifying behavior that affects prospecting & weighing up*], and the captain was closely related to the founder [*“saming” in confidence building*]. The founder’s wife had good insight into business and was his closest advisor [*“saming” and “distinguishing” in confidence building that affects modifying behavior that affects prospecting & weighing up*]. The ship was chosen selectively [prospecting & weighing up] and was better suited and equipped than similar ships [*configuration matching*]. The profits were high, also because good crews are attracted to good fishing captains and good ships [configuration matching that affects conditional befriending (*confidence building & modifying behavior*)]. He repeatedly did the same again in partnerships with different other captains with good fishing and management records and became the owner or co-owner of a large fleet. [*Amplified causal looping: efficiency in conditional befriending, prospecting, weighing up, moment capturing and configuration matching*]. He also diversified successfully.....

### **The PDCA-cycle as a basic social process**

Before the basic social processes of configuration matching, conditional befriending and prospecting are explained, it may be helpful to explain a theoretical code that connects their respective categories. This is the PDCA-cycle “or Plan-Do-Check-Act” cycle. It is not among the theoretical codes that are listed by Glaser (Glaser 1978, pp. 73-82; Glaser 1998, pp.170-175; Glaser 2005, pp. 7-30). The PDCA-cycle has been emphasized in quality management activities where people are confronted with successive data outcomes, and in investigating, learning, continuous improvement, or innovation activities. Its four stages have been explained as follows by Deming (1993, p. 135): “PLAN: Plan a change or test, aimed at improvement. DO: Carry out the change or test (preferable on a small scale). CHECK: Study the results. What did we learn? What went wrong? ACT: Adopt the change, or abandon it, or run through the cycle again, i.e. return to PLAN.” The importance of being consciously aware of all the stages of this loop has been stressed, as well as the importance of not skipping lightly over any of the stages, and especially not the

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“ACT” and “PLAN” stage. Even though it may appear to be natural, effortless and innate to follow the steps of the PDCA-loop, it can be just as natural, effortless and innate to not be consciously aware of the PDCA-cycle or its stages, or to put less or different emphasis on some of its stages. This innateness therefore justifies its conception as a theoretical code, and as a theoretical code it also fulfils the requirement of being a basic social process (Glaser, 1978, pp.100-102).

The use of the PDCA-cycle is also a question about using induction, deduction or inductive-deductive balance for increasing the efficiency of a task. Without some minimum of both, no activity is possible, yet the balance between them may be very different in different contexts. This balancing may be different for different people, and it may be dependent on company culture or identity. One manager relies on an MBA for logical deductions regarding expansion plans, using the three dimensions of “old or new customers”, “new or existing products/tasks” and “new or existing employees”. In another company in the same industry, the manager takes a very different perspective and puts more emphasis on induction:

As a manager, I always start collecting information from where I am positioned at the moment. This means, based on the previous information that I have. And each time I gain more information, I will combine it with what I know so far for obtaining the best use of it for my next decision. This allows me to achieve a more advanced position each time. I learned this in working with practical technology (error-testing), and I use it in my management of people as well as in partnerships and relationships to customers.

A more definite interpretation of the stages of the cycle with regard to induction and deduction is as follows: The DO stage of the PDCA-cycle seems to be entirely neutral regarding induction or deduction. It is just an execution stage subsequent to the PLAN stage. The CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle is a stage of immediate prospecting and seems to give unlimited room for both deductive and inductive reasoning. Hence, it can also be conceived as neutral with regard to induction and deduction. The ACT stage of the PDCA-cycle may be the major stage of induction. This is the stage where decision is made regarding “a test’s” consequences for a “hypothesis” or for a “theory” that has been deduced a priori. This is a stage where deductive reasoning

coincides with inductive reasoning and where even deductive mindsets in a sense become inductive. Thus, in a sense, use of induction is forced into this stage, and it is also a stage of weighing up. The PLAN stage of the PDCA-cycle may be the major stage of deduction. It is positioned before the DO stage, and PLAN in anticipation of DO without some logical deduction for prediction regarding possible outcomes seems less likely at this stage. Thus, in a sense, deduction is forced into this stage, and it is also a stage of weighing up. This means that the ACT & PLAN stages are also stages of weighing up. This means that the PDCA-cycle also can be conceived as a three main-stage cycle of DO, CHECK and WEIGHING UP.

### Three Types of Opportunizing

The close connectedness between the perpetual occurring processes of *conditional befriending* and *prospecting* has been explained. Similarly, the close connections between the categories of *weighing up* and the non-spasmodic categories that attach to the spasmodic event of a *moment capturing* have been explained. Also, the close connection between spasmodic event of a *configuration matching* and the most immediate consequences of a spasmodic event of a *moment capturing* has been explained.

These connections indicate that on a higher conceptual level (i.e. sub-core level) *opportunizing* may have three more organizational dimensions. The first of these emerges from the conjunction of the perpetually occurring processes of *conditional befriending* and *prospecting*. It may be called *perpetual opportunizing*. It also signifies the *physically boundary-less* organizational facet of opportunizing, as well as basic social psychological processing.

The second of these arises from the coming together of *company identity* (a theoretical code), the categories of *weighing up*, and the non-spasmodic categories that attach to the spasmodic event of a *moment capturing*. These categories account for *weighing up* that triggers the acts of opportunizing. It may be called *triggering opportunizing*. It also signifies the *value-hierarchical* organizational facet of opportunizing.

The third of these happens when *moment capturing* and *configuration matching* unite, i.e. when the immediate consequence of a spasmodic *moment capturing* lead to a

*configuration matching*. It may be called *spasmodic opportunizing*. It also signifies the *physically bounded* organizational facet of opportunizing as well as basic social structural processing. In a similar classic grounded theory study by Ng (2005) on “managing collaborative synergy” (or “mutually opportunizing”) among companies within the crane industry in the Far East, the junctions between these three main dimensions of *opportunizing* seem to emerge.

### **Triggering opportunizing**

A company’s self-identity (a theoretical code) and its attachment to the two non-spasmodic categories that attach to the spasmodic event of a moment capturing (“weighing up of weighing up regarding past moment captures” and “perpetual awareness of moment capture concept”), seem to have a superseding role in triggering opportunizing.

The other categories of *triggering opportunizing* are the four categories of *weighing up*. Among these four categories, the category of “*weighing up for relevance in prospecting*” seems to be pivotal. It is triggered by needs of output from *prospecting* as input to *weighing up*.

The remaining categories of triggering opportunizing are “weighing up just before moment capturing”, “weighing up on configuration matching”, and “weighing up for match/influence in conditional befriending”. These are dependent on outcomes from prospecting that have been through a “separating out” process of “weighing up for relevancy in prospecting”. Practices studied by Andriopoulos et al (2000) for enhancing organizational creativity can be seen as special procedures for handling this joint sub-process of *prospecting* and *weighing up* (i.e. “*weighing up for relevance in prospecting*”) without bringing the main process of opportunizing in these companies out of balance.

The categories of triggering opportunizing are of a different kind than the categories of perpetual and spasmodic opportunizing. This is partly because of their involvement in the other acts of opportunizing, and partly because of their superseding and value-hierarchical nature.

### **Spasmodic opportunizing**

As mentioned, the immediate organizational consequences of a spasmodic *moment capturing* lead to or are tantamount to a



*configuration matching*. This also means that *spasmodic opportunizing* can be explained as a *configuration matching*.

The social structural processing of spasmodic opportunizing (or configuration matching) can be explained by the PDCA-cycle as a theoretical code. The category “*act of configuration matching*” represents the DO stage of the PDCA-cycle. The category “*signs of matching/influencing in configuration matching*” represents the CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle. Finally, the category “*weighing up for configuration matching*” represents the ACT & PLAN stages of the PDCA-cycle. An *inductive stage* of this *weighing up* process (ACT) precedes a *deductive stage* (PLAN). The *inductive stage* of the *weighing up* process relies on *prospecting* outcomes that by their nature are *inductive*, while the *deductive stage* relies on *prospecting* outcomes that by their nature are *deductive*. The data indicate a better performance of companies with an inductive-deductive balance.

### **Perpetual opportunizing**

The two mutually dependent sub-processes of *perpetual opportunizing* are *conditional befriending* and *prospecting*. The social psychological processing of these two processes can also be explained by the PDCA-cycle as a theoretical code. The processing of conditional befriending with its three categories of “confidence building”, “modifying behavior” and “weighing up for match/influence in conditional befriending” can be explained as follows:

The ultimate goal and desired outcome of conditional befriending is to modify people’s behavior in such a manner that the company’s survival or growth is sustained. To modify people’s behavior by intervention without basing the intended behavior modification on generated trust is impossible or ineffective. Consequently, the main means to obtain this modification of behavior is confidence building, and confidence building is a perpetual activity in business. Consequently, the category of “confidence building” represents the DO stage of the PDCA-cycle, and the category of “modifying behavior” represents the CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle. Finally, the category “weighing up for match/influence in conditional befriending” represents the stages of ACT (inductive) and PLAN (deductive) in the PDCA-cycle. Individual managers and companies differ regarding the

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inductive-deductive balance in their weighing up, as well as in noticing signs or patterns of behavior modification in the CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle.

The processing of prospecting with its three categories of “predetermined prospecting”, “genuine-original prospecting” and “weighing up for relevance in prospecting” can be explained as follows. Prospecting begins as predetermined prospecting. Occasionally, outcomes of prospecting are gained in genuine-original prospecting. Thus, the essential “doing” in prospecting is the unavoidable and perpetual predetermined prospecting with a main aim of obtaining occasional changeover to genuine-original prospecting for obtaining prospecting outcomes that are genuine-original. Consequently, the category of “predetermined prospecting” represents the DO stage of the PDCA-cycle, and the category of “genuine-original prospecting” represents the CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle. Finally, the category “weighing up for relevance in prospecting” represents the stages of ACT (inductive) & PLAN (deductive) in the PDCA-cycle. Individual managers and companies differ regarding the inductive-deductive balance in their weighing up, and in noticing signs or patterns of gains in their genuine-original prospecting outcomes in the CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle.

The mutual dependency between the conditional befriending and prospecting sub-processes of perpetual opportunizing is explained as follows: (1) Conditional befriending triggers prospecting by modifying behavior into predetermined prospecting. (2) Via the connected weighing up categories, prospecting triggers conditional befriending as a means for facilitating prospecting.

The close linking between the two perpetual opportunizing processes of conditional befriending and prospecting may alternatively be explained as follows: (1) The CHECK stage of any PDCA-cycle can be conceived as its immediate prospecting stage. However, the requirement for a prospecting outcome for “weighing up for match/influence in conditional befriending” may be of such a scope that the conditional befriending PDCA-cycle triggers a subsidiary and separate prospecting PDCA-cycle. (2) The requirement for prospecting may be of such a scope that a prospecting PDCA-cycle triggers a subsidiary conditional befriending PDCA-cycle to modify some people’s behavior in order to facilitate prospecting. Thus, as perpetual opportunizing,

conditional befriending and prospecting are each other's spin-off.

**Confidence building and modifying behavior as two related sub-processes of conditional befriending**

Before some possible consequences of the model of opportunizing for quality improvements in business are explained, it may be helpful to elaborate on the model of *conditional befriending*. As mentioned, the aim of the process of *conditional befriending* is an outcome of *modified behavior* in such a manner that the company's survival and growth is sustained. The two categories of *conditional befriending*, *confidence building* (DO stage of the PDCA-cycle) and *modifying behavior* (CHECK stage of the PDCA-cycle), are two main concern issues, but they also attach to two distinct "bias random walk" like sub-processes for the processing of these two main concern issues.

**The sub-process of confidence building**

The confidence building sub-process of conditional befriending has the four elements of "direction", "saming", "transparency" and "distinguishing", and the outcome is "trust". The element of "direction" signifies the group of people (e.g. employees, customers) or the issue, which a given confidence building (and consequently also behavior modification) is aimed at. "Saming", "transparency", and "distinguishing" are general trust-building techniques or trust-building constituents. Together with direction they become the four main dimensions or constituents of trust. This means that the concept of trust has to be conceived as multivariate with four main dimensions, and each of them may have many sub-dimensions.

"Saming" signifies e. g. some kind of common identity, unity or sameness of interests, as well as the notion of "win-win", and it also implies some kind of predictability. "Transparency" e. g. means that there are no hidden agendas or absence of obscureness. "Distinguishing" means different and better and is the possession, exhibition or formation of highly regarded or excellent features embedded within trust, and the opposite are features that withdraw *trust*. Any sub-dimension of "saming" can be conceived as having negative values, as for example seen in "management by fear". The same, of course, applies for "transparency" and "distinguishing". Some sub-dimensions of saming and transparency may even need to have "negative"

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values in order to modify behavior. These four constituents of trust are interdependent when combined, and some combinations may become very powerful. This especially applies for some combinations with high saming and distinguishing values. Confidence building occurs in a “bias random walk” like manner by the mixing of these four elements to create an appropriate multivariate trust to facilitate behavior modification. Some data incidences indicating these concepts are as follows:

He had obviously a very high regard for the community. [saming with direction]. He was a very socially conscious man. [saming with direction]. Everybody could see that. [transparent]. His accomplishments speak for themselves [distinguishing, transparent]. Even as the main owner and manager of the company, his lifestyle was not much different from his employees. [saming]. He was simple, yet he was complicated. He had some idiosyncrasies that everybody knew about. [idiosyncrasies make distinct]. He received many distinguished orders....[distinguishing].

I have never hesitated in being open about my religious conviction. I have always gained respect for that, also in my affairs with foreign suppliers. At our annual meeting and breakfast before Christmas I do the same. [*idiosyncrasies make distinct and transparent*]. I also make no secret that all my employees are in my daily prayers. [*saming*]. I also deliberately treat everybody in the same way, high as low [*saming*].

When foreign partners visit us, we always give them at least one moment that they will never forget. [*distinguishing*]. We....

What characterized this company is that many families through many generations have been attached to it as employees [*saming*]

### The sub-process of modifying behavior

The modifying behavior sub-process of conditional befriending has the elements of “trust” (outcome from confidence building) and “intervention”, and the outcome is modified behavior. On the basis of the created trust, behavior is modified by some intervention or some kind of “obligating”. However, without the appropriate trust, this modifying of behavior becomes

an impossible or an ineffective task.

### **Some Possible Research Implications for “Quality Management”**

It is e.g. obvious that most of the speaking and most of the behavior of a politician is confidence building with the aim of modifying behavior, and especially the behavior of his/her targeted group of voters when they will cast their votes at the ballot box. It is equally obvious that much of the behavior of business managers is also confidence building with the aim of modifying behavior of some targeted group of people, but these managers have obviously not consciously conceptualized and understood their activities in this manner.

Some years ago, quality management was a hot topic in business management. Why do some business managers focus on this issue? The answer to this question is simply that quality management programs as change programs are for confidence building with the aim of modifying the behavior of some groups of people in such a manner that the company's survival and growth is sustained.

Thus, in this case, “confidence building” may be replaced with the term “quality building”, and the concept of trust may be replaced with the term quality. The concept of quality may also be the most important property of the concept of trust. However, in this case quality has to be conceived as a multivariate concept with the four main dimensions of direction, naming, transparency and distinguishing. This means that quality in this context cannot be conceived as a univariate concept as it usually is (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). Such a different conception of quality is supplementary to other definitions of quality, or perspectives on quality, and it does not replace them. Because the eventual aim of quality building is to modify customers' behavior via modified behavior of employees, partners and suppliers, it may also require that business managers modify their own behavior in their confidence building that is directed towards their employees, partners or suppliers. This means that the concept of quality, like the concept of *trust*, also applies for people's relationships in business. This is usually forgotten by quality management experts.

It may be crucial for the effectiveness of any change program

in business that it is closely attached to the main concerns of those persons, who are mostly involved and have most at stake in its implementation. If this is not the case, then these people could care less about it. The theory of opportunistizing suggests that these main concerns and their recurrent solutions are expressed by the concepts of the model of opportunistizing. Consequently, it is suggested that the implementation of such change programs should be aligned with these concepts and their relationships. The model of opportunistizing could be used as a device for practitioners to skip trivia and to focus on the most important and problematic issues. The underlying, but often unexpressed, aim of business managers, interested in implementing quality programs in their businesses, has often been the notion to trigger some beneficial version of amplified causal looping in their business. The data in this study indicate that amplified causal looping is triggered by the conditional befriending sub-process of confidence building by some particularly efficient mixtures of direction, saming, transparency and distinguishing.

One issue within quality management theory and practice has been that of minimizing the variation around a target in process control of items in mass production. When items with the targeted physical properties, and with minimum variation around them, are assembled to make the final product, a perfect fit will secure maximum reliability and durability of the product. This is the “six sigma” issue within quality management. This aspect of *quality* can be defined quantitatively.

The other issue within quality management theory and practice has been what kind of management practices in general should be used to manage a system of interacting parts, when the objective is *quality*. Most seem to agree with the view that the system outcomes mainly are made in the interactions between the parts of the system, and that the same applies for quality. However, it is not so straightforward to define or to quantify these aspects of *quality*.

So far, it has not been possible to unify these two issues of quality management by a theory that uses the same concepts (Deming, 1986; Aguayo, 2000; Deming, 1993). The model of opportunistizing could provide a solution to this problem. For example, to minimize the variation around a target (increasing predictability) is explained by the concept of “saming” within the model of opportunistizing. Other concepts of the model of

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opportunizing, including the concepts of *direction*, *saming*, *transparency* and *distinguishing in confidence building*, may sum up and explain many issues that are described in the quality management literature. However, this is a topic for another article.

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