

Qualitative Methods and Grounded Theory

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Why Qualitative Methods?

- *When* qualitative methods
- *When* quantitative methods

When is a method?

Convergence of skills, languages, type of questions to be asked

Trust and Chains of Inference

- All social science questions require choosing *indicators* to stand for human action, human states, relationships
- Question: what is the nature of the indicators chosen?
- Question: how long, and how sturdy, is the chain of action? (Includes provenance, tests of strength)

How to assess chains of indicators

- Who creates them?
- Are they inherited, conventional, purchased, or invented?
- How are they tested?
- What are the weak links in the chain?
- Where have they proven reliable, and for what purposes?

Why Grounded Theory?

- Or, *when* grounded theory?
- Good for inventing indicators
- Good for testing them in small groups, against other data
- Good for creating short, reliable chains
- With software support, chain may be carefully lengthened

Why *not* grounded theory?

- If indicators already established, trustworthy
- If focused on arrangements of indicators already agreed to by community of researchers (e.g. survey research, sociolinguistic work, conversation analysis)

Open Questions

- Can grounded theory be used to construct, reliably, *part of* a longer chain of indicators? If so, then how? How long?
- How to take strengths of g.t. into new methodological domains: leave open construction of indicators (variables, spaces in between)
- How *not* to take these strengths anywhere: if indicators (and variables) already known, dominant