Entrepreneurship Research and Grounded Theory
Some Methodological Reflections

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on one important area of business and management research, that of the concept of entrepreneurship. It considers the researching of entrepreneurship through the application of grounded theory methodology. Like much business and management research it advances the contention that entrepreneurship research should both embrace the complex processes of enterprise activity and the inherent contextual factors that effect entrepreneurial behaviour. Recent accounts from other fields of social inquiry have conveyed the worthiness of grounded theory methodology in phenomenological studies. Literature and experiential discussion convey the on going debate as to the faithfulness of grounded theory to generate explanations to socially constructed incidents. The theory puts forward a process for enlarging entrepreneurship research methods whilst adhering to the underlying principles of scientific canons of inquiry. The paper concludes that, with some necessary and important considerations, grounded theory is a practical inductive research approach to revealing the complex characteristics of entrepreneurship and associated business and management linkages.

**INTRODUCTION**

Measuring in real organizational terms means first of all getting out, into real organizations. Questionnaires often won’t do. Nor will laboratory simulations... The qualitative research designs, on the other hand, permit the researcher to get close to the data, to know well all the individuals involved and observe and record what they do and say. (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 586)

The following discussion on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) seeks not to discount the quantitative paradigm in entrepreneurship research but to enrich potential methodological approaches and subsequent understanding of the field. It is not to defend opposites as contradictories, but to consider them as complimentary (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The paper considers the grounded theory approach to researching entrepreneurship
against the canons of accomplishing worthy social-science inquiry (for example: trustworthiness, generalisability, consistency and reproducibility). It addresses grounded theory as a means of emphasising how socially constructed experience is created and given meaning. Whilst in complimentary contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.4).

The paper advances a deconstructive perspective of grounded theory's development and its ‘fit’ within entrepreneurship. Due to its critical focus (and natural constraints) it does not replicate that which can be found adequately elsewhere by narrating through the methodological stages of grounded theory. It accepts the process as a given and centres on a critical appraisal of grounded theory as a valuable contributor to the development of entrepreneurship understanding. Some comparative analysis of the interpretations of the methodology (Glaser, 1992; 1998) and method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998) are discussed with a subsequent evaluative examination of processes.

**GROUNDED THEORY**

For the past 35 years or more sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss have developed in detail, and brought to prominence, new perspectives on social science research. Championing their argument for the inductive discovery of theory – ‘grounded’ in a systematic approach to data analysis – they were initially stimulated by their discontent for the dominant logico-deductive approach to research practices being carried out amongst many of their early peers. What has emerged from their critiques of established methods is enlightenment as to what can be available to researchers of phenomena – potentially in any field of social inquiry.

Some application of grounded theory beyond sociology has been applied (if somewhat limitedly) over subsequent years, [for example: Connell and Lowe, 1997 (tourism and hospitality management); Charmaz, 1990 (medical studies); Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995 (psychology); and lastly, business and organization studies. This latter broad field of academic inquiry has seen grounded theory applied, if again limitedly [Locke, 2001 (management research); Lowe, 1995 (innovation), 1998 (business mergers); Partington, 2000 (management action)]. The concluding author raises the limitation of application of the theory and its inductive principles of theory generation:
...there is little dedicated methodological guidance for builders of theories...and few exemplars of research conducted beyond the level of procedural detail. In much qualitative management research, important ontological (what counts for reality) and epistemological (how knowledge of reality may be established) issues are often either artfully avoided, taken for granted or ignored. (Partington, 2000, p. 92)

As an early conclusion therefore, there remains an absence of published accounts of the application of grounded theory within the broad (multifaceted) academic field of entrepreneurship research.

Glaser and Strauss (1965, 1967) drew much inspiration from the comprehensive theoretical underpinnings of early 20th Century American pragmatists (for example: John Dewey, William James and Charles S. Peirce) and later the theories of symbolic interactionists (particularly Herbert Blumer, 1969). Grounded theory is depicted as a meticulous research process that reveals understanding of human action from the perspective of the agent (emic) rather than from dominant nomothetic inquiries and etic interpretations (Luthans and Martinko, 1987). Data gathered primarily (but not exclusively) from interviews and field notes are analysed using coding structures and theoretical sampling procedures. The conclusion to the application of grounded theory is the emergence of conceptual categories and resultant, empirically grounded, inductive theory or theories. Such conclusions highlight theoretical explanations for human behaviour, within the bounds of a chosen substantive social investigation. The emergence of meaning from data, but not data themselves, predicates grounded theory on a scientific footing in gaining significant understanding to a particular social phenomenon.

What is pertinent to social research, through grounded theory, is that it seeks to approximate to the context of that being studied, that is (for example) the small enterprise, its actors, their interactions and interrelationships; thus conveying a conceptual understanding of issues that make up their naturalistic world (Van Maanen, 1979). Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that grounded theory can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They argue that their grounded theory conveys a processual method that directs the social researcher into opening-up the ‘black box’ of unknowns. Whilst Glaser (1992) remains an adherent to the seminal grounded theory methodological principles (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), his traditionalism irrespective of a distain for the later revisionist method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998), assures the qualitative researcher of the values of grounded theory in developing answers to socially purposeful questions of what is happening and why.
ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH AND GROUNDED THEORY

The successful carrying out of small enterprise phenomenological research is neither an easy nor a straightforward operation. As Curran and Blackburn remind us:

…the apparent simplicity of the small business has tripped up a lot of researchers. Small does not mean simple. Neither is a small business merely a scaled-down version of a large business. A small number of human beings engaged in a common endeavour can create very complex, subtle interactions…Much small business research, for example, concentrates on the motivations and actions of just one person, the entrepreneur or owner-manager, but invariably others are involved who also shape the enterprise and its destiny. (Curran and Blackburn, 2001, p.5)

The qualitative researcher must satisfy epistemological and methodological requirements to gain countenance for his/her approaches to research inquiry. Qualitative research reports are typically rich with detail and insights into participants’ experiences of the world. In studying human relations within a small enterprise, the unit of analysis can be highly complex. As Curran and Blackburn (2001) highlighted, the unit of analysis is not necessarily the company itself as an entity, nor may it necessarily be individual actors as separate units of analyses, including that of the entrepreneur or owner-manager. Through the application of grounded theory, what is typically emergent, is the social relations and systems of (inter-) behaviours of actors and their interactive relationships (dyadic, triadic, groupings) as being emergent units of analyses.

Entrepreneurship studies have increasingly concentrated on only one actor, the entrepreneur (or owner-manager), as contended by a number of contemporary writers (Curran and Blackburn, 2001; Davidsson and Wiklund, 2000; Davidsson, et al, 2001). Any qualitative research, including that of grounded theory, should not avoid the fact that other actors, both within and without an organisation, will (have various measures of) influence on the behaviour of the central principal (entrepreneur). This realisation will, over time, develop contributions to enriching research findings beyond individual firm level attention. However, one must not either reduce research attention being concentrated on the important character of the entrepreneur. For example, a specific focus of research on that of the entrepreneur may well be countenanced if one was, say, researching a number of ‘like’ entrepreneurs in order to, for example, discover any similar emergent theoretical concepts. Nevertheless, even in such a scenario, influences that modify entrepreneurial behaviour are more likely to be found closer to home (for example: co-owner, employees, external advisor, bank manager). The centrality of this paper being a discourse on the study of actors in a real world context (a small enterprise) with the aim of developing a better
understanding of all participants (be they: entrepreneur, owner-manager, employees, etc.), and the social processes as identifiers of causal explanations and meanings, embeds its antecedents in the premises of symbolic interactionism:

*Human group life consists of the fitting to each other of the lines of action of the participants; such aligning of actions takes place predominantly by the participants indicating to one another what to do and in turn interpreting such indications made by others; out of such interaction people form the objects that constitute their worlds; people are prepared to act towards their objects on the basis of the meaning these objects have for them; human beings face their world as organisms with selves, thus allowing each to make indications to himself; human action is constructed by the actor on the basis of what he notes, interprets, and assesses; and the interlinking of such ongoing action constitutes organizations, institutions, and vast complexes of independent relations.* (Blumer, 1969, p. 49)

Therefore the research design must take account of understanding participants’ behaviours from their points of view, their interpretations, their dynamics and properties of interactions, contextualised within their worlds – grounded theory declares such principles.

Developing grounded theory outcomes from entrepreneurship research data, organizing it, fragmenting it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for and constructing patterns, discovering what is emergent and for conveying outcomes to readers, are all integral parts of the processes of analysis and theory building. Inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes surface from the data (Patton, 1990), requires some element of creativity to organise raw data into logical, meaningful categories and to examine them in holistic and interactive ways. Such organising of amassed data can literally involve hundreds of pages of interview transcripts, field notes and related documents. Handling large quantities of qualitative data can range from physically sorting and storing pieces of paper and card to using computer software programs that have been designed to aid this process (Barry, 1998; Kelle, 1997).

As inferred, Glaser and Strauss over the years following their seminal work tended apart in their views on approaches to grounded theory. Glaser (1992) selects an area (for example, an organizational enterprise or activity such as entrepreneurship) for study and allows issues to emerge in the course of the research process. He therefore supports a methodological framework that is flexible to meeting disparate and freely emergent phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin (1990) are more specific and prefer to identify (rather than allow for emergence of) a phenomenon or issue for study (for example, a small firm’s marketing strategy or an entrepreneur’s leadership style). Strauss and Corbin believe in
conforming to a given process, a method, irrespective of the instances of disparity between phenomenons.

Thus Glaser’s approach to the identification and specification of the research issue to be addressed is entirely dependent upon the perceptions of actors and researcher. Strauss and Corbin permit the researcher to predetermine the general subject of enquiry before entering the research site. Glaser also prefers an analytical method that is more general in its frame of reference, while Strauss and Corbin opt for a somewhat more structured set of analytical steps. Glaser (1992) regards Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) analytical method as forcing, rather than allowing materialization of theory, in grounded theory we do not know, until it emerges (Glaser, 1992, p. 95). In this respect, Glaser’s methodological approach relies primarily upon the constant and iterative comparison of different incidents, perceptions, relationships, and issues, with the aim of identifying inconsistencies, contradictions, gaps in data and emerging consensus on key theoretical conceptual categories, their conceptual properties and their relationships.

Strauss and Corbin are significantly more detailed, structured and prescriptive in specifying the steps to be taken by a researcher in open, axial and selective coding, and following their paradigm model (identifying codes as causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/inaction strategies, consequences) for theoretical framework development. The Glaser adherent can allow for the central concept to emerge inferentially from the coding process – reflecting the key issue or problem as perceived by the actors being studied - the researcher initially in terms of the organization’s general management of the firm could approach a small enterprise. Alternatively, following the Strauss and Corbin approach, the researcher could elect in advance to focus observation, interviews and archival data gathering on a particular issue such as management-employees communication. Coding is then oriented around this issue, with a central concept then sought to represent the interplay of subjects’ and researcher’s perceptions of the nature and dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation. The Glaser devotee would allow for the core theme, and interlinked conceptual categories, to emerge.

One major arguable advantage of the Strauss and Corbin approach lies in its more structured and practically oriented steps for generating grounded theory. Indeed, this is the primary specified purpose indicated in Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) preface to their text – assisting the researcher to analyse qualitatively and make sense of a usually large volume of gathered field data. Thus Strauss and Corbin offer procedural advice that is more
specific than previously articulated in Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) publication. Guidance is provided for commencing a study, maintaining theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, coding techniques, use of memos, writing up study findings, and criteria for evaluating the empirical grounding of the study. Alternatively, Glaser and Strauss’ approach gives the researcher choices in investigation methods and data interpretation.

As a critique of the Strauss and Corbin’s (1990, 1998) revisionist method, if emergences of conceptual themes are not allowed to freely surface then a true ontology could be argued as never materialising (Glaser, 1992). In essence the grounded theory researcher is left with a basic choice between Glaser’s advocacy of a less specific analytical approach, and Strauss and Corbin’s provision of more detailed operational guidelines. The latter offers greater potential assistance to the field researcher, who must nevertheless take particular care to avoid imposing concepts that reflect the researcher’s own epistemological predilections, rather than those emerging from interaction with the study site and its participants.

Whilst the debate continues as to the intrinsic worth of the two camps, the issue of which method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998) or methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1992) the entrepreneurship researcher should follow, also, has no clear guidance. Nevertheless, when seeking understanding to particular naturalistic events, the predetermining of what the researcher actually focuses on (beyond generalized parameters) could be argued as inhibiting the true emergence to questions of what and why entrepreneurship phenomena have occurred. To research an entrepreneur’s leadership style in an attempt to discover his or her managerial failings by applying the grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1990) may possibly inhibit the emergence of the true source of an entrepreneur’s limitations. The less processual Glaser (1992) methodology would allow for the flexibility of approach and freedom of focus to iteratively develop emergent conceptual categories. Therefore focusing on an entrepreneur’s leadership style may not reveal limitations in an entrepreneur’s decision-making, for example.

Whether one elects to apply method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998) or methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1992) the researcher needs to articulate one’s rationale for application and reflexive factors. Given the divergent approaches of Glaser, and, Strauss and Corbin, and the degree of choice articulated by both sets of authors, it may be neither conceptually possible nor arguably desirable to outline or require allegiance to a ‘purist’ or ‘traditionalist’ Glaser camp or a ‘revisionist’ Strauss camp.
Entrepreneurship research studies may best be represented through the justification of approach chosen by the researcher and the subsequent understanding and support from a readership.

In discussing grounded theory’s usefulness in entrepreneurship inquiry one needs to consider the application of method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998) or methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1992; Douglas, 2005) in developing an authentic account, and meaningful interpretation, of entrepreneurship phenomena. Classical rational economic explanations (Kirzner, 1973; Casson, 1982) and psychological-behavioural accounts (McClelland, 1961; Schumpeter, 1934) have been advanced as to why enterprises occur. The underpinning pivotal philosophy of the economic explanation, that of equilibrium and optimum size of the firm being regulated by market forces, has been challenged (Penrose, 1995) and asserted that more ‘human’ explanations needed to be taken into account. However, the psychological-behavioural aspects of the so-called entrepreneur have also been argued as indicators of why businesses fail. Human deficiencies are maintained as being important factors in the downfall of enterprise.

Whilst much academic attention has been given to this person, the entrepreneur, for more than two centuries, contemporary scholars have considerably expanded research of the concept. The debates have been dominated by attempts to articulate what identifies this special person, the entrepreneur, and makes him or her different from other people generally and other small business owners especially. Personality characteristics have been considerably argued (Casson, 1982; Kirzner, 1973; Knight, 1921; McClelland, 1961; Rotter, 1966; Schumpeter, 1934; Shackle, 1966). Such personality explanations have also been contextualised within philosophical arguments focusing on power, bureaucracy and legitimacy (Clegg, 1975; Lukes, 1986; Weber, 1930). However, attempts at the personality explanation have also come under rising criticism (Chell, 1985, 2001; Chell, et al, 1991).

Therefore, whilst the economic and the psychological explanations appear not to be without fault, the cognitive explanation, as an attempt at pursuing another avenue of research explanation also has its argued limitations. The cognitive approach, as exemplified by the works of, amongst many others, Carland et al (1996) and Kirzner (1973), have attempted to consider the so called psychological ‘trait’ explanation with that of the (arguably) unique cognitive functions of the entrepreneurial character, in what could be described as a gestalt of personality factors.
The present overarching critique of the various attempts to psychologically and behaviourally explain the phenomenon of entrepreneurship has resulted in a general agreement that a meta-model of entrepreneurship is probably an appropriate means of understanding this complex area of research. This approach is somewhat synonymous with an appropriate \textit{modus operandi} of researching and understanding the complexities of the domain of enterprise as a whole – as it ranges from the macro-level socio-economic-political attention to the micro-level activities of the owner-manager-entrepreneur.

A methodological argument may however be put forward, that any attempt to gain macro level explanations for entrepreneurial behaviour (as worthy a pursuit as it is) will remain illusive or fabricate a superficial product. Arguably the only true ontological explanation for entrepreneurial behaviour lies at an individualistic level (the entrepreneur and that which affects entrepreneurship activity). The uniqueness of the entrepreneur (Brazeal and Herbert, 1999), however conceptualised, warrants investigation at a micro level of (entrepreneurial) activity. In such instances the qualitative paradigm naturally assumes prominence in its epistemology and methodology - with grounded theory offering an approach that was developed to enhance understanding of such socially centred phenomena - entrepreneurship \textit{is} a human condition.

Grounded theory offers the entrepreneurship researcher appropriate inquiry processes with which to address entrepreneurship research issues at the micro-level of entrepreneurial activity - rather than attempting to claim entrepreneurial explanations to the broad economic domain. Investigating, in minute detail, \textit{the} entrepreneur and his or her immediate environment are well suited to the grounded theorist. Grounded theory research is methodologically appropriate for researching the entrepreneurial domains of the economic explanation theories of entrepreneurship and the psychological-cognitive-behavioural explanatory perspectives. Setting aside the debate as to which grounded theory method or methodology to follow for both processes support the central tenet of social inquiry. Therefore entrepreneurship research, ergo, human group life inquiry, is synonymous with that from which grounded theory originally emerged.

\textbf{DISCUSSION}

A fundamental question that requires addressing by the researcher is the notion of trustworthiness in one’s interpretations of one’s research - \textit{How can an inquirer persuade...}
his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to? (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290). A general but enduring view remains to-date of the scientist as someone who rigorously applies experimental methods of inquiry. Controlled experimentation is the underlying practice in the establishing of scientific principles and positivistically derived ontologies. Such methods thus proffer the notion of the Baconian thesis being firmly established and can offer no better practices and philosophical beliefs in the establishing of truth. However, to hold this limiting belief would thus exclude, say, pure mathematics, from being within the purview of scientific practice.

To hold such a limiting belief would therefore preclude the applied scientific practices of, say, the astronomer or geologist. In reality these scientific practitioners only observe consequences of phenomena and circumstances over which they have no control. Whilst, for example, the notion of a ‘black-hole’ remains an unobserved theoretical construct, science based argument appears to give credence to the concept amongst the astronomical community. It is a debatable statement that scientists work in ways that result in deductively derived at claims of truth established in nature – which can in fact be no more or less than that which they believe to be in existence from their observations. Experimentation may distinguish science from precursory spiritual, religious and metaphysical claims of ways to establish knowledge but it does not fully and realistically describe scientific method.

Having the conviction that science arrives at truth by logical inferences from empirical observations, and is thus the benchmark underpinning scientific standards of practice – is defended on the premise of induction, and the belief that what has been observed to occur many times is almost certainly to occur again. Thus such ontological conclusions may be accepted as a basic fact or even a law on which a fundamental structure of theory may be established and reaffirmed. From it one can deduce a number of practical procedures, such as the testing of theory by 'predictions' of the results of future observations, and their subsequent confirmation. The importance of speculative thinking is acknowledged, as long as it is restrained by adherence to facts.

This positivist approach to empirical observation is to assign the label 'true' to statements that satisfy given criteria. However, the logico-deductive approach does not allow room for scientific error. Realistically, the scientist will only arrive at partial and incomplete knowledge. Arguably, experiments that are carried out under laboratory
conditions are not truly scientific, however honestly pursued. One can be zealous to science, and one can be zealous to one’s research approaches, without pretending to hold an unassailable notion of what science really is and what one’s research really tells us above that of the work of others. Human reasoning whilst for the so-called natural scientist would normally be supported by mathematico-deduction, the inevitable interpretation of data is a human functioning process. Such deductive or for that matter inductive human ontological conclusions are thus human attempts at the approximation to truth at a given time. Thus, is science not only (sic) the application of intellectual discipline that one would expect to see applied in any intellectual pursuit of knowledge?

Science is not simply published knowledge and information. Anyone can make a claim based on observation, propose a hypothesis – scientifically arrived at knowledge needs to be more than this. Peer review, critical study and testing by other competent peers require the universal establishing of claims to be feasible. The goal of science is to seek consensus of rational opinion. Scientific research is a socially embedded activity. The scientist learns by imitation and experience, and applies conventions that reflect social relationships. However, what is latterly described here is replicable in any academic discipline.

How does the scientist defend his/her derived at theories and knowledge claims within peer social relations? The evolution of scientific methodological canons has developed the scientist’s arsenal. Canons such as the following (and more) have prevailed: significance, reliability, precision, compatibility, validity, reproducibility, generalisability, determinism, theory-observation and compatibility, systematic empiricism, parsimonioy, testability, confirmability, authenticity and trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, transferability).

However, when judging qualitative work, the usual canons of ‘good science’...require redefinition in order to fit the realities of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 250). Theory building is not a perfected product [but an] ever-developing entity (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 32). One of the requisite properties of grounded theory is that it be sufficiently general to be applicable to a multitude of diverse situations within the substantive area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 237). It is not necessary to insist that the product of qualitative inquiry be a theory that will apply to a large number of diverse situations. Naturalistic inquiry is always a matter of degree and so
the extent to which researcher reflexivity conditions response from the interviewee and imposes categories on the data creates uniqueness (Patton, 1990). As earlier iterated, the readership of grounded theory's entrepreneurship research findings may best be the judge of the generalisability canon.

Inductive theory generation is embedded in explanation of phenomenon, rather than generalisability. The explanatory power of the grounded theorist is to develop predictive ability – to explain what may happen to an enterprise or an entrepreneur given incidents that tend towards replicating previous grounded theories. Naturally, the wider the theoretical sampling frame develops the more embedded the theory becomes, and whilst generalisability in the naturalistic world of enterprise requires circumspection, general theories can emerge from within the qualitative paradigm. Transferability (for the positivist: External Validity) within the naturalistic paradigm depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred. The researcher cannot specify the transferability of findings; he or she can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Stake (1978, p.6), a proponent of case study methods, refers to this as naturalistic generalization.

Connected to the countenance of grounded theory, Case study research holds common associations. The grounded theory style of handling and interpreting data may be incorporated into case studies (Locke, 2001, p. 19). In the area of organization studies, Post and Andrews (1982) contend the usefulness of applying grounded theory in the creation and analysis of cases. Strauss also supports the link between the two presentational methods, In the grounded theory style of analytical presentation, case studies are constructed not very differently than by most qualitative researchers (Strauss, 1987, p. 218).

Setting aside the debate as to whether the case study is a reporting style or research method (or methodology), in addressing the canon of consistency through grounded theory it is contended that external triangulation (with other methods) can test the consistency of findings. Internal consistency is verifiable through grounded theory’s levels of abstraction and saturation of theoretical constructs. Therefore, consistent with interpretive theoretical meaning and definitions of a situation (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118) to entrepreneurship inquiry beyond that of the sole entrepreneur (Curran and Blackburn, 2001) gives accounts
and meanings to incidents beyond the two primary interactive individuals (namely the respondent and researcher).

The canon of reproducibility is usually interpreted as meaning a particular study can bear replication of research processes. Replication of process and matched results gives credibility to original research findings. Credibility (for the positivist: Internal Validity) for the naturalistic researcher assumes the presence of multiple realities and attempts to represent these multiple realities adequately. Credibility depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher. Credibility can be enhanced through triangulation of data (Patton, 1990). The progressive move towards saturation of data sources from a wider, but associated actors’ perspectives, beyond that of the entrepreneur, is an example of grounded theory’s processes of establishing ontological emergence of theoretical concepts beyond singular perceptions of phenomena (namely those conveyed by the entrepreneur alone).

Reproducing socially constructed entrepreneurship phenomena is arguably problematic, if not impossible. Whilst the natural scientist would contend that reproducibility of processes are possible (to some degree) within controlled laboratory conditions, thus verifying credibility, it may be countenanced by the social scientist that reproducibility, due to the complexity of human variables, is not (ever) wholly attainable. However, reproducibility of entrepreneurship phenomena is unfeasible as the researcher cannot replicate original conditions or control all the possible variables of human group life under study. Researching in the naturalistic world of enterprise requires another perspective on the notion of reproducibility.

In following the original guiding principles of grounded theory, generating a substantive theory of a phenomenon, with the assumption of similar conditions, does offer other entrepreneurship researchers credible reproducibility potential. Variation from original findings should not be regarded as undermining original phenomenological interpretations, but enriching and deepening understanding of similar incidents. Socially embedded inquiry will always have uniqueness. However, wide discrepancies can often be explained through the re-examination of data. It is from the accumulation of replication and interpretation that grounded theory can develop entrepreneurship understanding from localised substantive theories to the maturity of formal and general theories that have meaning across a wider population.
To conclude this discussion almost where it started, on grounded theory’s trustworthiness and the canons of scientific inquiry, a closing but important point needs to be addressed. The debate as to the appropriateness of the revisionist approach to grounded theory as propounded by Strauss and Corbin (1990) against the original and traditionalist approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) does continue to beleaguer any agreed establishment of grounded theory’s ontological countenance. To the new grounded theory user the revisionist approach to theory building is well delineated and overtly applicable to entrepreneurial inquiry.

The traditionalist approach is iterative and requires creativity which is probably more likely to find its usage by the established qualitative researcher. The traditionalist approach, due to an abandonment of *a priori* research questions, produces long periods of ambiguity and uncertainty. However, the abandonment of preconceived conditions within the unit of analysis (be it the entrepreneur or the enterprise) does aid in understanding particular individually centred events within their naturalistic settings (idiographic). From an ethnographic analytical perspective, the idiographic standpoint will encourage the development of theory that is emergent from the informant (emic). This somewhat non-prescriptive process gives strong argument for the emergence of theory from a circumstance that has had minimal conditioning from the researcher (Glaser, 1992). Conversely, the prescriptive principles of the revisionist method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) propose a more controlled environmental context by the researcher, with consequential researcher centrality (etic).

The traditionalist versus revisionist debate continues. Whilst it can be argued that the traditionalist methodology allows for iterative reflection and working with data until they become *saturated* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and cease to reveal anything new, and conversely the revisionist method that takes the researcher along a linear path to a more arguably programmed conclusion - both options necessitate detailed researcher interaction with data. Therefore, whilst it can be argued that gathered data could be different through processual choice of approach in developing entrepreneurship theory, the researcher would be advised (as a feature of establishing validity and reliability) to preface one’s findings by describing the method(-ology) adopted and underpinning epistemological and methodological rationale. Moreover, when seeking to develop and replicate nascent
entrepreneurship theories of other researchers, whom have applied grounded theory, replication of original process would demonstrably be appropriate.

CONCLUSION

This paper started out by contending that grounded theory, within the qualitative paradigm, seeks to compliment existing entrepreneurship understanding through the application of an alternative, yet elsewhere established, research process. Therefore, as part of that contention the scope of grounded theory needs to be rationalised. Where existing theory is well developed, then deductive methods could arguably be more useful in developing entrepreneurship understanding, particularly at a macro level. However, this discussion has countenanced in-depth micro level studies of entrepreneurship activity through the meticulousness embedded in grounded theory application.

The argument put forward for the support of entrepreneurship inquiry, through grounded theory, contends that micro level concerns such as complexity, contextuality, opaqueness, interdependencies, time-frames and other unique variables, necessitates (and gravitates towards) applying research methods that explicate interpretive understanding as to what is happening and why. Grounded theory particularly orientates towards eliciting improved understanding of theoretical-conceptualisations of processes of social interactivity. Entrepreneurship, however the term is encapsulated (behavioural, economic, cognitive, etc.), is a socially constructed activity. Therefore, entrepreneurial processes are conceptual constructs that are arguably dynamic by nature and interactive by necessity. Grounded theory has the ability to extrapolate, amongst other outcomes, these processes.

Grounded theorists contend that by cross cutting the boundaries of units of analyses, say, the entrepreneur or singularly associated actors, the development of a web of such interactive units will give conceptual ‘faithfulness’ of a substantive area of inquiry and subsequent credence, comprehensibility and verstehen (Strauss, 1987, p. 219). Grounded theory generation must be literally grounded in the emergent conceptual phenomena, rather than (mis-conceptually) within the data. Entrepreneurial focused phenomena is an ontological ‘golf bag’ of; processes, events, states of being, objects, interactions and relationships, and other unique factors; which interplay in a substantive
inquiry. It is this uniqueness of the interplaying of contextual factors from which emerge rich accounts of entrepreneurial behaviour.

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