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REVISTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN

# The construction process of grounded theory in administration

*El proceso de construcción de la grounded theory en administración*

Darlan José Roman<sup>a,\*</sup>, Marilei Osinski<sup>b</sup>, Rolf Hermann Erdmann<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of West of Santa Catarina State, Brazil

<sup>b</sup> Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the process of grounded theory, from the report of a research practical experience performed in Southern Brazil. It presents conceptual and structural aspects of grounded theory, focusing is on the description of the research process, from a fieldwork, which was carried out in order to understand the implementation phase of performance improvement programs in organizations. The study presents the research process of grounded theory, highlighting the use of analytical tools and research steps, considering the reality of the administration area. The study analyze the use of grounded theory from a real problem faced by organizations. From the results, it is possible to provide some important tips about the way of conducting the method considering the specificities of the organizational studies.

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*JEL classification:* M1; M16

*Keywords:* Qualitative research; Grounded theory; Administration

## Resumen

Este estudio tiene el objetivo de analizar el proceso de conducción de la teoría fundamentada en datos, desde el informe de una experiencia práctica de la investigación llevada a cabo en el sur de Brasil. El estudio presenta los aspectos conceptuales y estructurales de la grounded theory, centrándose en la descripción del proceso de investigación de campo sobre el fenómeno de la implantación de sistemas de mejora del rendimiento

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\* Corresponding author.

*E-mail address:* [darlan.roman@unoesc.edu.br](mailto:darlan.roman@unoesc.edu.br) (D.J. Roman).

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en las organizaciones. El estudio presenta el proceso de investigación de la grounded theory, destacando el uso de herramientas de análisis y pasos de la investigación, teniendo en cuenta la realidad del área de administración. El estudio analiza el uso de la grounded theory abordando un problema contemporáneo que enfrentan las organizaciones.

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*Códigos JEL:* M1; M16

*Palabras clave:* Investigación cualitativa; Grounded theory; Administración

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## Introduction

The grounded theory has its origin in the scope of the sociology area and it is being presented as an interesting alternative for the qualitative studies on organizational phenomena. The research in administration is methodologically characterized by the balancing between qualitative and quantitative methods. The studies that follow the qualitative way focus in the use of the case study strategy and, on a smaller scale, in the utilization of action research (Marchi, Dellagnelo, & Erdmann, 2011; Roman, Marchi, & Erdmann, 2013). Quantitative methods, as grounded theory, however, have been gaining space in the scope of the discussions in academic disciplines and in the realization of empirical research.

In this sense, the intention of this study is not only presenting the grounded theory as a possibility of qualitative research method in administration, but to go a bit beyond. It means to present a description of an empirical experience about the utilization of the method, highlighting some advantages and constraints, as well as introducing some implications of the method in the research process in administration. In the literature, there are some studies with the similar intention. Pinto and Santos (2012), for example, presented a study that shows results from a fieldwork guided by the grounded theory method. Other papers with similar proposal (Freitas & Mello, 2013; Halaweh, 2012; Kempster & Parry, 2011; Martin & Woodside, 2011; McCreaddie & Payne, 2010; Papathanassis & Knolle, in press; Pinto & Santos, 2012) can be found in the literature.

Although other studies have been done with the proposal of describing the research process with grounded theory, this paper shows some innovative aspects, like the focus in a contemporary empirical problem in the administration area. It is used the method proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008), which, because of its characteristics, allows presenting to the reader a detailed guide of the main necessary steps in order to build the grounded theory.

It is also noticed that the concern of a great part of the authors revolves around the discussion on generic and abstract aspects of the grounded theory. In rare moments one finds operational and concrete tips about the difficulties and facilities that researchers may face during the process of building grounded theory. In this way, it is intended to provide more knowledge about the effective use of a research method relatively new in the area and encourage qualitative researchers, especially beginners in the method, to explore the world of grounded theory.

Based on the above considerations, this paper was structured in order to present initially the grounded theory method, highlighting the pioneering authors Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as well as the reasons of the appearance of the method and its objectives. In sequence, it presents the report of an empirical experience that is a result of a doctoral thesis related to the implementation of performance improvement systems in organizations, trying to

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