

GROUNDING THEORY METHOD IN SPORT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

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Context

As sport management research has evolved to embrace a range of sophisticated research methods, investigators increasingly move from examining basic to more advanced research problems. Sport management researchers are more regularly using qualitative approaches including the Grounding Theory Method (GTM) (e.g., Smith & Shilbury, 2004). The GTM, originated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), particularly is gaining increasing popularity in sport management research, as academics seek to develop theoretical constructs to better explain the social processes of sport management. Like all research methods, GTM has developed from its original inception, and as a result, has adapted and evolved to best suit the research needs of the area of study (Melia, 1996). During its evolution, GTM has been linked to a variety of philosophical and epistemological positions, ranging from positivism, post-positivism and, more recently, the development of a constructivist GTM.

Method

This paper uses examples drawn from two research projects in ‘sport development’ and ‘conflict of interest’ that employ the same processes and procedures, found in the GTM. While techniques such as coding, constant comparison and memoing are used by both projects, they are premised on two different philosophical assumptions (post-positivist and constructivist). The most common form of post-positivism, *critical realism*, assumes there is a reality independent of our thinking about it that science can study. It recognises that all observation is fallible and all theory is revisable (Trochim, 2002). In other words, the post-positivist person is *critical* of our ability to know reality with certainty. The constructivist paradigm of inquiry perceives the nature of reality as a “local and specific mental construction formed by a person and multiple mental constructions collectively exist regarding reality (relativism)” (Annells, 1996:385). In essence, constructivism assumes the *relativism* of multiple social realities, recognises the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understandings of subjects’ meanings (Charmaz, 2003). The purpose of this paper is to illustrate that regardless of the philosophical position of the researcher, GTM is a viable and useful qualitative method for sport management research.

Results

The presentation will demonstrate that researchers using GTM should make the fundamental philosophical assumptions of their research clear, conduct their research in a manner consistent with that position, and present their findings in a way that allows them to be evaluated appropriately.

Discussion/Implications

The paper discusses the implications of adopting different philosophical stances to the emerging theory. For example, post-positivist GT rejects the idea that an individual can see the world as it really is perfectly, and so objectivity in post-positivist research is an inherent social phenomenon. A constructivist GT recognises the interactive nature of both data collection and analysis. This approach to GTM acknowledges that data are narrative constructions; but they are reconstructions of experience, not the original experience itself. In conclusion, both post-positivist and constructivist approaches to grounding theory reaffirm studying people in their natural settings and redirect qualitative research away from positivism. Sport management researchers embarking on GTM should be mindful of the different paradigms used in the method as well as the pertinent consequences to their research.

References

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