GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY AS A RESOURCE FOR PLURALIST INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH

Research paper

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Abstract

MIS Quarterly recently published an extensive review of the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) in Information Systems research (Wiesche et al., 2017). Our paper contributes to the IS research methods literature by reflecting on, commenting on, and elaborating on their review. Even though our paper is a commentary to a single paper, we provide it as a general argument in support of pluralist GTM research practice. Specifically, we argue that Wiesche et al. have omitted paradigmatic assumptions from their considerations, which hides their positivist/functionalist single-paradigm framing. Paradigmatic assumptions are important, because what it is means for a 'theory' to be 'grounded' is a matter of ontology and epistemology. We make four arguments to advance GTM pluralism: 1) identification of different GTM generations may not be purposeful; 2) abduction should be acknowledged in addition to induction; 3) GTM procedures are resources not necessities; and 4) theorization should be grounded in local meanings in the context of explanation.

Keywords: research methods, grounded theory methodology, pluralism, pragmatism.

1   Introduction

Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) was invented in mid-1960s by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). GTM was created as a methodological afterthought following an extensive nursing project where Glaser, Strauss and nurse Jeanne Quint (later Benoliel) studied dying patients (Glaser and Strauss, 1964; Glaser and Strauss, 1965; Quint, 1967). From 1980s onwards (Strauss, 1987) and especially after early 1990s (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992), researchers from different research domains (e.g. psychology, social sciences, Information Systems) and various paradigms (e.g. objectivistic, constructivist, pragmatic) have adopted and used the GTM (Annells, 1996; Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2017). In IS research, Matavire and Brown (2013) emphasized the importance of making ontologies and epistemologies explicit, in order to understand the GTM's nature and compatibility to different paradigms. However, in the original work of Glaser & Strauss (1967), the authors do not even mention the words 'ontology', 'epistemology', or 'paradigm'. Regardless, scholars widely agree that GTM can be applied in any research paradigm (Annells, 1996; Matavire and Brown, 2013). For example, Urquhart (2001, p. 19) argued that GTM "is primarily a method, and can be used in several different paradigms."

In the September 2017 issue of MIS Quarterly, the leading journal of the Information Systems (IS) discipline, a review paper by Wiesche et al. (2017) was published. Considering the weight and prestige of the journal, their review titled *Grounded Theory Methodology in Information Systems Research*, will most probably set the scene for future research employing GTM in Information Systems (IS) research. Nevertheless, this is the first time that MIS Quarterly publishes a paper with "grounded theory" in its title. From this perspective, Wiesche et al.'s (2017) paper opens for further considerations and debate about GTM in IS research.

Essentially, Wiesche et al.'s (2017) paper explicates that the tradition of adopting GTM in IS-research, has heavily relied on either Glaserian (Glaser, 1992) or Straussian (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) approaches to study various IS phenomena, including online collaboration behaviors (Gasson and Waters, 2013), and the role of CASE tools in organizational change (Orlikowski, 1993), among other topics. Furthermore, others such as Urquhart et al. (2010), Matavire & Brown (2013), and Birks et al. (2013) have focused on profiling and characterizing the application of GTM in IS.

Although we highly appreciate Wiesche et al.'s review of GTM studies in our field, in this paper we would like to point out some of its blind spots and problematic classifications. Wiesche et al. discuss the variations in the *coding paradigm*, but they are silent about the more general paradigmatic issues such as ontology and epistemology. We interpret their view of GTM to signal a single-paradigm mindset, orienting heavily towards positivist science. We wish to advocate GTM studies to be more inclusive for pluralism (Deetz, 1996; Goles and Hirschheim, 2000; Pozzebon et al., 2014), rather than stuck in a single paradigm. Related to this pluralist mission, we also challenge Wiesche et al.'s classifications of GTM generations, induction, procedures and theory.

With pluralism, we refer to the awareness of – and openness to – a variety of philosophical assumptions such as ontology and epistemology (Fitzgerald and Howcroft, 1998; Chen and Hirschheim, 2004). Acknowledging pluralism in GTM will guide scholars towards a more reflexive account on the application of the methodology. This is important to the practice of grounded theory. Essentially, the meaning of the two important words – a 'theory' that is 'grounded' – is very much a matter of epistemology and ontology. Thus, choosing a paradigm is not trivial and has implications throughout the research process.

Our call for pluralist sensitivity takes inspiration from the rise of pragmatism in the mainstream GTM literature during the last decade (Joas, 1987; Reichertz, 2007; Kelle, 2007; Star 2007; Strübing 2007; Suddaby 2006). In this paper, we are especially focusing on pragmatism, but we acknowledge that many other philosophical groundings are possible. Bryant (2017) outlined a wide re-consideration of the GTM in the light of a pragmatist perspective, by re-introducing essential concepts of the GTM (e.g. coding, analysis, memoing) from a pragmatist account of GTM. Bryant (2017) addresses the importance of pragmatism by pointing out some of GTM's adherents (Joas, 1987; Reichertz, 2007; Kelle, 2007) and arguing that the Anselm Strauss (co-founder of GTM) was trained in the pragmatist tradition. Pluralism is needed to facilitate a space where the extant IS GTM tradition (Wiesche et al., 2017) and the pragmatist GTM movement (Bryant, 2017) can live side by side.

Therefore, in this paper, we provide a pluralist account of the GTM. We review Wiesche et al's (2017) paper and address its paradigmatic blind spot. In particular, we base our notion on a pragmatist backdrop and emphasize the following arguments:

1) Identification of different GTM generations may not be purposeful
2) Abduction should be acknowledged in addition to induction
3) GTM procedures should be resources not necessities
4) Theorization should be grounded in local meanings

Our contribution is to direct the IS GTM literature towards a more a pluralist approach. We will thus constitute the rest of this paper by first introducing the connection between GTM and pragmatism. Secondly, we will introduce our review of Wiesche et al's (2017) MISQ-paper. Deriving from this background, we will then start elaborating our proposed arguments. Finally, we will provide concluding remarks to our discussion.

2   A brief history of GTM and its connection to pragmatism

GTM was invented in 1960s by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, initially in collaboration with nurse Jeanne Quint (Glaser and Strauss, 1964; Stern, 2012). The method resulted from an end-of-life nursing project initiated in 1962 (Glaser and Strauss, 1964; Glaser and Strauss, 1965; Quint, 1967). The method first found its way to an Information Systems (IS) journal in 1985 (Huff and Munro 1985). Eight years later appeared Orlikowski's *"CASE Tools as Organizational Change"* (1993), which Urquhart (2007)

identified as "responsible for giving grounded theory widespread legitimacy". In late 1990s and afterwards, GTM became a regular occurrence in IS forums (Birks et al., 2013; Matavire and Brown, 2013; Wiesche et al., 2017).

Following this development of GTM in IS research, this present paper in particular, considers the space with divides the pragmatist GTM (Bryant 2017) and Wiesche et al.'s (2017) position of GTM in IS. Therefore, we provide a brief history about pragmatism, and its connection to GTM.

Pragmatism is an American philosophy founded by Peirce, James, and Dewey (Misak, 2013). Its central ethos is the primacy of human action within social practices. Pragmatism argues for fallible inquiry with ethical ends-in view (Martela, 2015). Ontologically, pragmatism takes a this-world antirepresentationalist perspective (Rorty, 1999). Pragmatists view that there is no "view from nowhere" we can reach as spectators and no ontological layers; we are already in the reality (Pihlström, 1996).

After James died in 1910 and Peirce in 1914, Dewey was the main carrier of the pragmatist tradition for many decades. After Dewey's death in 1952, pragmatism was in limbo (Bernstein, 2010). Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty, 1980) brought new life to pragmatism (Bernstein, 1992). Pragmatism has made a significant return into scholarly communities during the last decades (Morgan, 2014; Dépelteau, 2015; Farjoun et al., 2015).

The connection of pragmatism and the early founders of GTM dates back to the mid-1930's, where Anselm Strauss had been introduced to the philosophy of American pragmatism at the University of Virginia (Bryant, 2017). Strauss studied in University of Chicago until 1944 under Herbert Blumer, a great influence to Strauss, and protégé of pragmatist George Herbert Mead (Baszanger, 1998). Towards the end of his life, Strauss (1993) identified pragmatism as the "red thread" in his research career. Nevertheless, despite the acknowledgments of pragmatism by Strauss himself, pragmatism has had a latent status within the history of GTM (Bryant, 2009).

Bryant (2009) addressed pragmatism in GTM as a "curious case" by referring to an incident in a Sherlock Holmes book. Considering Anselm Strauss' pragmatist education and his life-long commitment to the study of human action, it is strange that pragmatist ideas were not made more explicit in most of the canonical GTM literature. Suddaby (2006) identifies the pragmatic roots as follows:

> *"Like most difficult subjects, grounded theory is best understood historically. The methodology was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a reaction against the extreme positivism that had permeated most social research. They disputed the view that the social and natural sciences dealt with the same type of subject matter. Specifically, Glaser and Strauss challenged prevalent assumptions of "grand theory," the notion that the purpose of social research is to uncover pre-existing and universal explanations of social behavior. In making their challenge, Glaser and Strauss looked to the pragmatism of Charles Saunders Peirce (1839–1914) and early symbolic interactionists, particularly George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and Charles Cooley (1864–1929), each of whom rejected the notion that scientific truth reflects an independent external reality. Instead, they argued that scientific truth results from both the act of observation and the emerging consensus within a community of observers as they make sense of what they have observed. In this pragmatic approach to social science research, empirical "reality" is seen as the ongoing interpretation of meaning produced by individuals engaged in a common project of observation."* (p. 633)

It is however only during the last decade that the pragmatist roots of GTM have become widely acknowledged (Reichertz, 2007; Strübing, 2007; Bryant, 2009). This shift towards pragmatist GTM signals a broader pragmatic turn in social sciences (Bernstein, 2010), as recently materialized in the extensive method book *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing: Pragmatism in Research Practice,* by Bryant (2017). After the publication of Bryant's book (2017), we find it probable that pragmatism will enjoy a tailwind within the general GTM discourse. However, we fear that the rigid positivist/functionalist standards in IS-discipline, also promoted by Wiesche et al. (2017), will not get us to the promised land of pluralism. In the next section, we describe our theoretical framework that helps us in articulating our paradigmatic position.

3   Theoretical Framework

Wiesche et al. do not discuss paradigmatic issues such as ontology and epistemology. We interpret this omission to signal a single-paradigm mindset, orienting heavily towards positivist science, which Burrell and Morgan (1979) defined as the functionalist paradigm. Epistemologically, the paradigm "seeks to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements." (Goles and Hirschheim, 2000, citing Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Ontologically, the paradigm embraces realism: "the universe is comprised of objectively given, immutable objects and structures. These exist as empirical entities, on their own, independent of the observer's appreciation of them." (Goles and Hirschheim, 2000). Considering this, we want to advocate GTM studies to be more inclusive for pluralism (Deetz, 1996; Goles and Hirschheim, 2000; Pozzebon et al., 2014), rather than remaining trapped inside a single paradigm.

In order to elaborate a pluralistic account towards GTM in the IS-discipline, we adopt two sensitizing concepts from Reed (2010): *context of investigation* and *context of explanation*. Reed (2010, p. 22) defines the two concepts as follows:

> *"The context of investigation refers to the social and intellectual context of the sociologist herself. The context of explanation refers to the reality that she wishes to investigate, and in particular the social actions she wishes to explain and the pieces or aspects of those actions' surrounding context that she uses to explain them."*

Reed developed these concepts as a synthesis of Reichenbach (1938), whose "context of *discovery"* and "context of *justification"* Reed combined within the context of investigation. Reed views that ever since Kuhn (1962), it has been without a basis to keep these separate as they both involve "social, psychological, and historical aspects … [that] might change over time, involve social pressure and social learning, and even involve something akin to a "worldview" held by particular scientists" (p. 21). Reed also elaborates that these concepts have congruence with Geertz' (1988) concepts of "being here" (investigation) and "being there" (explanation).
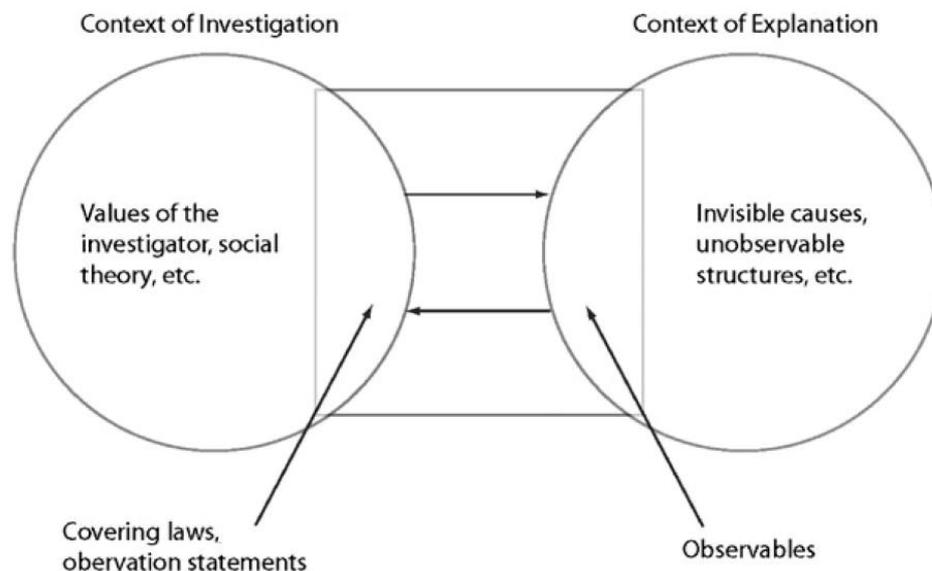

Figure 1 - Positivist epistemology (adopted from Reed (2010, p. 25))

A key motivation behind these concepts is the realization for the difference between the natural sciences and the social sciences. Whereas natural sciences constitute of an asymmetrical order between a human studying an objective nature, social sciences are symmetrical between the researcher and the subject of study. Both the context of investigation and the context of explanation are social. Natural sciences adopt a positivist epistemology (Figure 1). In Fig 1, the middle box visualizes positivism's "rationality via

exclusion": "the production of truth is reduced to methodology in the strict sense, since the idea is that theoretical knowledge is just the accumulation of verified generalizations" (Reed, 2010, p. 24). As positivism disregards any contextual aspects that do not fit its mold, it "robs philosophy of its potential for reflection and criticism" by narrowing its own interests into questions of operationalization and measurement (p. 25).

An alternative paradigmatic view is possible, acknowledging that the context of investigation is inherently social and this "influences the knowledge that the researcher produces" (Reed, 2010, p. 34). Reed provides five points that constitute a symmetrical post-positivist epistemology (p. 35):

1. Meanings orient social action.

2. Social actors are oriented by remarkably different or "local" meanings.

3. The meanings that orient social investigators are the relatively esoteric ones called "social theories," which tend to be abstract and have been explicitly developed for the purpose of understanding the meanings that orient others' actions.

4. These meanings (social theories) intersect with the meanings present in the context of explanation in the production of social knowledge. Specifically, they help the investigator "ferret out" the meanings that matter for action in a specific case.

5. Thus, the meanings that orient others' actions are brought out and represented in the context of investigation.

This social science conceptualization (Fig. 2) provides a symmetry between a meaningful theory and a meaning action. The responsibility of a researcher is thus in constructing cultural explanations in the intersection of the two contexts. Consequently, researchers "must reference *other actor's concepts*" that "may reference all sorts of things, in all sorts of ways, that do or do not 'exist' (e.g., God, justice, the white race, America…)" (Reed, 2010, p. 36).
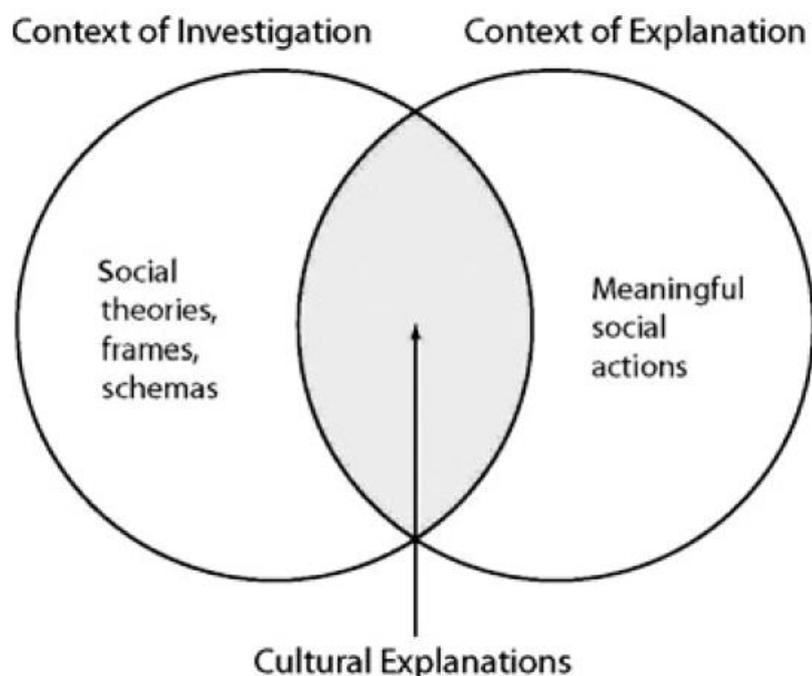

Figure 2 - Meaningful theory / meaningful action (adopted from Reed (2010, p. 36)

4 Towards Pluralist GTM in IS: A Commentary on Wiesche et al. (2017)

Wiesche et al. (2017) recently conducted a review of GTM papers in major IS journals. Their paper captures and classifies the GTM studies in IS journals. Wiesche et al. had also conducted interviews with GTM paper authors, illustrating the practicalities of applying GTM beyond what has been reported in the publications. The "behind-the-scenes" revelations are unique in Wiesche et al., and an important contribution.

In general, we approve and applaud most of the descriptive aspects in Wiesche et al. (2017). However, we disagree its normative aspects. Wiesche et al (2017) provide no treatment of paradigmatic assumptions of GTM in IS-research. Neither do they explicitly declare ontological and/or epistemological groundings of their reviewed papers. Rather, they exhibit the utility of GTM in IS-research from a descriptive perspective, which provides a limited notion about the nature of GTM in IS-research. For instance, they (Wiesche et al., 2017) do not highlight the use of GTM from a pragmatic backdrop, whereas Bryant (2017) heavily emphasizes GTM as fully incorporated by the pragmatic school of philosophy. Furthermore, Wiesche et al. (2017) do not provide any explicit implications on, whether or not, GTM is limited to certain type of knowledge interests in IS-research (e.g. design interests), or if GTM is compatible with a broader scope of IS issues.

Finally, although Wiesche et al. (2017) themselves do not embed any explicit paradigmatic assumptions into their own scope of work - in terms of literature review, analysis, discussion, and so forth - they do have a positivistic undertone to their approach of framing the nature of GTM in IS-research (Fig. 1). We address this as a blind-spot of Wiesche et al.'s (2017) conception of GTM in IS research, and discuss its consequences subsequently.

4.1 Glaserian, Straussian and "Second-generation" GTM

Wiesche et al. (2017) categorize GTM approaches into three: Glaserian, Straussian, and Second-Generation. This kind of a taxonomy is common in literature (Kenny and Fourie, 2015). However, we argue that this categorization is problematic.

Wiesche et al. (2017) state that "Following their joint book on GTM (1967), Glaser and Strauss independently developed the 'Glaserian' and 'Straussian' approaches." This claim is either unspecific or incorrect. Glaser and Strauss collaborated before and after the publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Their first coauthored book was *Awareness of Dying* (1965). After 1967's *Discovery* (1967) came *Time for Dying* (1968), *Anguish* (1970), and finally *Status Passage* (1971). The two did not collaborate after this, and Glaser did not get another academic job after he lost his tenure track job at UCSF due to "disharmony" in late 1970s (Covan, 2007). The two worked separately after mid-1970s, Glaser through his own publishing house *Sociology Press* (e.g. Glaser, 1978). This division resulted in some conceptual differences between their texts (Kelle, 2007), but there was no fighting. Until the early 1990s, the two thought they were still advancing the same method.

The 1992 publication of Glaser's Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis (Glaser, 1992) that effectively caused the separation of GTM into Glaserian and Straussian variants. Glaser assigned his own version to be "the classic GTM," that was targeted against the methodological guidance of Strauss and Corbin Strauss and Corbin (1990). This quote from the first page of Glaser's book (1992) gives an impression of his furious anger towards Strauss:

> *"Therefore I demand that you withdraw the book pending a rewriting of it. And then you and I sit down and go through each page of the book and iron out what I consider to be the misconceptions and then rewrite the book by mutual consent."*

In other words, the collaboration between Glaser and Strauss ended in 1970s. Yet, the actual split happened in early 1990s, not earlier. It is therefore an anachronism to claim that either Glaserian or Straussian approach – separately – would represent the first generation of GTM. This is regardless of the Glaserian claim to the original pure version of GTM.

Wiesche et al. (2017) describe that the differences between the two approaches are between the "unambiguous process guidance" of Strauss and the "flexibility in procedural guidelines" of Glaser. Yet there is little evidence that Straussian analyses would lead to "forcing" and Glaserian analyses to "emergence" (Kelle, 2007; Seidel and Urquhart, 2013). These two differences are also a clear simplification. It is beyond the purposes of this paper to go through all these differences, but they have been summarized in a table in Bryant (2017, pp. 219-220). Especially interesting is how Bryant (2017, p. 224) notes that the "Glaser-versus-Strauss/Corbin issue may well be largely irrelevant in practice. They each offer distinctive paths through a serious aspect of research, but with regard to GTM in use, researchers for novices to experts seems to be far more insightful and so require less guidance than might at first sight appear."

Additionally, it is worth pondering for a moment that in which generation should Wiesche et al. (2017) itself be categorized? Is it a second generation GTM, or perhaps the third?

The label 'second generation' is also problematic, because it already has an established but different meaning within the GTM community. The label already exists in the title of the book edited by Morse et al. (2009). In that context, "second generation" refers to scholars who were the students of Glaser and Strauss. These grounded theorists include Phyllis Stern, Adele Clarke and Kathy Charmaz. In this interpretation, a student of Kathy Charmaz would be part of the third generation of GTM. The label "second" or "secondary" has also the meaning of "inferior quality".[1] We do not see any reason why pragmatist GTM (Bryant 2017) – or any other paradigmatic position of GTM – is better or worse in quality in comparison to other GTM variants. They are simply different.

The problems of the "generational" categorizing are further highlighted by the recent wave of pragmatist GTM. Being the "second-generation" would imply that the pragmatist variant was introduced after the original one. Yet, the careful work by Bryant (2009; 2017) and others (Star 2007; Strübing 2007; Suddaby 2006) have focused on identifying pragmatism in the origins and even in the prehistory of the method (Glaser and Strauss, 1964; Strauss, 1964).

4.2   Acknowledging Abduction

The first sentence of the introduction in Wiesche et al. (2017, p. 686) reads as follows: "Grounded theory methodology (GTM) is designed to enable the discovery of inductive theory." The rest of the paper does not mention the word 'induction' other than in the reference list. The paper does not mention 'abduction' either. The authors do not elaborate on the mode of inquiry, other than it produces "a theoretical account" that is grounded "in empirical observations or data" (cf. Martin and Turner, 1986).

The word "induction" was indeed frequently present in the early works of Glaser and Strauss. Inductive generalization is based on the idea that theories are "*imported* from the context of explanation to the context of investigation. These covering laws can then be brought to bear on a new situation in the context of explanation." (Reed, 2010, p. 24). Yet, as Bryant (2017, p. 265) observes, the GTM founders were concerned with not aligning with the dominant existing theories, but instead developing a sensitivity to the local context of explanation:

> *"Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their initial work on grounded theory characterized the method as inductive, largely in contrast to what they saw as the dominant or classical mode of research, which they described as deductive, predominantly involving deducing or deriving hypotheses from the existing theories of the day. To paraphrase Karl Marx The ruling theories are the theories of the ruling theorists".*

GTM scholars have long understood that one does not go far with pure induction. Already in 1994, Strauss and Corbin (1994) realized the problems associated with induction (p. 277):

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[1] One of the reviewers disagreed with us on this matter, stating this "simply isn't true in standard English usage." However, in some GTM literature there is a clear tendency to reclaim the "classic" position in contrast to later "inferior" approaches. See, for example, Martin, V. B. and A. Gynnild (2012). *Grounded Theory : The Philosophy, Method, and Work of Barney Glaser*. Boca Raton, FL, USA: Brown Walker Press.

> *"Thoughtful reaction against restrictive prior theories and theoretical models can be salutary, but too rigid a conception of induction can lead to sterile or boring studies. Alas, grounded theory has been used as a justification for such studies. This has occurred as a result of the initial presentation of grounded theory in The Discovery of Grounded Theory that had led to a persistent and unfortunate misunderstanding about what was being advocated. Because of the partly rhetorical purpose of that book and the authors' emphasis on the need for grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss overplayed the inductive aspects."*

The move from "data" to "concepts" is a much more complex leap than what is advocated by pure induction (Klag and Langley, 2013). The Glaserian approach downplays this leap by using a rhetorical trick of "emergence." Glaser claims that categories "emerge from data", which according to Bryant (2017, p. 168) blurs the agency, "disguises the complexities of the actual process, largely obscuring or under-playing the interaction between the active researcher(s) and the context, including the data." Furthermore, Bryant (2017, pp. 95-96) argues:

> *"Far too many texts on GTM make the claim that it is "an inductive method," but few if any actually go on to substantiate this claim, let alone demonstrate familiarity with critiques of the term. This is unfortunate as it feeds into the credibility gap that surrounds GTM, so simple statements along the lines of "GTM is an inductive" method, will either be seen as misplaced, unsubstantiated, or ill-conceived—possibly all three."*

Nowadays, it is quite common that the inquiry in GTM is defined as abduction not induction in the methods literature (Richardson and Kramer, 2006; Czarniawska, 2014; Bruscaglioni, 2016). Abduction is a cognitive type of reasoning. The idea of abduction, as "the process of forming explanatory hypotheses," originates from the work Peirce (1839-1914), one of the founders of the pragmatist movement.

We would like to note that even Eisenhardt, who is a leading expert of inductive methods and theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt et al., 2016), agrees that abduction may be a "technically more correct" term. Yet, she argues that researchers use the word 'induction' out of habit:

> *"I think that the field has long used the term induction, making it the familiar and most used term. Abduction may technically be more correct but I think that induction is used in a way by most scholars that subsumes abduction. Overall, I think it is a question of semantics/word choice, not a deep concern or rift. I personally could easily use one or the other."* (Eisenhardt, 27 April 2017, personal communication)

In sum, we suggest to use the word 'abduction' in situations where it best characterizes the mode of inquiry taken (see also Tavory and Timmermans, 2014).

4.3   Procedures as Resources

Wiesche et al. (2017, p. 698) recommend, "whether theory development is the primary goal … the maximum number of GTM procedures should be deployed." Nevertheless, when taking in consideration that GTM researchers should perform constant comparison, it is practically impossible to make this decision a priori. In fact, Czarniawska (2014) argues that knowing in advance "exactly which steps needed to be taken and their results … is clearly an impossible task for any researcher." Following this line of thought, Bryant (2017, p. 350) quotes Einstein: "If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"

According to Urquhart and Fernández (2013), the biggest myth of grounded theory is that of researcher as a "blank slate." This refers to the false requirement of having no knowledge of existing literature before the data collection. However, what is central to GTM is openness to serendipity (Bryant, 2017, p. 350). In Reed's (2010) terms, without openness to serendipity, the researcher will only see the reflection of the context of investigation when she looks at the context of explanation.

It is interesting that on the second page of the *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to Merton's (1968) notion of serendipity: "an unanticipated, anomalous, and strategic finding gives rise to a new hypothesis." Glaser and Strauss however claim that Merton was "concerned with grounded modifying of theory, not grounded generating of theory" (p. 2).

Here we would like to refer to Suchman's (1987) idea of plans versus situated action. If GTM procedures are plans and situated action refers to the course of empirical study, planning is important for the researcher to have the necessary toolkit to enter the field. Yet, as no map can prepare a wanderer to all conditions in the terrain, no plan is sufficient for situation action (Schmidt, 1999). It also works the other way around: a too large commitment to procedures (plans) will distract away from serendipity, from noticing the unexpected and uncommon. To paraphrase Maslow: if your only tool is a hammer, you treat everything as if it were a nail.[2]

Suchman (1987) did not argue *against* plans but replaced plans as *resources* for situated action. Plans are needed but are not enough when people act. Similarly, we suggest in line with Bryant (2017, p. 350) that doing research is "a series of situated actions, in some cases based on an initial plan."

4.4   The Notion of Theory in GTM

Wiesche et al. (2017) categorize the possible outputs of GTM studies as rich descriptions, models and theories. They define models and theories using the following three references: Sutton and Staw (1995), Whetten (1989), and Markus and Robey (1988). Of course, Glaser and/or Strauss never used any of these references, but it needs to be underlined that Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original notion of 'theory' in GTM, differs from Wiesche et al's (2017) notion. The former had two conceptions for theory: substantive theory (Glaser and Strauss 1965) and formal theory (Glaser and Strauss 1971), whereas the latter divides their notion into theories, models, and descriptions (Wiesche et al., 2017). The variables-centric requirements the authors (Wiesche et al., 2017) pose for a theory, have the unfortunate implication that the original grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1965) - the theory for the awareness of dying - would not be a grounded theory. Wiesche et al. (2017) acknowledge thus this in the limitations section of their paper, recognizing that their classification of "theory, models, and rich descriptions may not reflect all aspects of the ongoing theory discussion in IS" (p. 697).

We would like to go one step further and address a theory from the pragmatist perspective, where a theory is considered as a tool. We should not therefore, give theory an ontological primacy in the way Gregor (2006, p. 615) does, by declaring that theory has "an existence separates from the subjective understanding of individual researchers." Additionally, it is also worth noting that Glaser and Strauss' (1965) concept of "Awareness", promoted the view of substantive theory as one that demonstrates its practical usefulness before being "rigorously tested." Theories are however only one type of conceptual outcome, whereas other conceptual outcomes such as models, concepts, methodologies, and processes, are also considered (Alter, 2017) as useful in practice. Wiesche et al (2017) do however not explicate any distinction between different kind of conceptual outcomes. Neither do they provide any claimed view on the role and function of theories, whereas Godin (2015) for instance addresses scientific models in general, as having a both scientific and rhetorical function, where it is pure scientific propaganda to call a conceptualization or narrative or tool, a model or theory. Further works on different notions of theory in GTM, needs therefore to open up for a debate considering the nature of GTM-theories in IS-research, and what distinguishes them from other notions of theory in general. Doing so, the GTM in IS-research may be used through a pluralistic account, which incorporates different notions of conceptual outcomes (e.g. theories, models, processes) and thus provide IS-researchers a freedom to use the GTM more pragmatically depending on their local meanings in the context of their investigation (Reed, 2010), rather than only relying on a narrow meaning of what theory is (Abend, 2008).

5   Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have proposed a pluralistic account of the GTM in IS-research, by reflecting, commenting, and elaborating on Wiesche et al's (2017) recent MIS Quarterly paper. Through this research, we have identified a set of blind-spots within Wiesche et al's (2017) consideration of the GTM in IS-research (shown in Table 1). We have addressed these blind-spots through four different arguments: 1)

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[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_the_instrument (Accessed 14 March 2019)

the identification of different GTM generations may not be purposeful for the future of GTM in IS-research; 2) we IS-researchers should be talking about abduction, rather than induction, when using GTM in IS-research; 3) GTM-procedures are resources, rather than necessities; and 4) theorization should be grounded in local meanings in the context of explanation.

Identified blind-spots in Wiesche et al. (2017)	Our response
Three categories Glaserian, Straussian and 2nd Generation GTM	Are these generations necessary at all?
No consideration of paradigmatic assumptions	Making paradigmatic assumptions explicit
Induction	Induction and abduction
Importance of Procedures	Procedures are resources, not necessities
Theories, models and rich descriptions	Theorization grounded in local meanings

Table 1 – Identified Blind-Spots and Response

There are several limitations of this paper that we would like to consider as potentials for further studies. One potential limitation concerns our process of inquiry, where we mainly have been focusing on Wiesche et al.'s (2017) paper. We are aware of relevant GTM issues that are not addressed in our paper or in Wiesche et al. (2017). One such thing is the rise of computational and quantitative approaches in theory development (e.g., Berente et al., forthcoming). Another potential limitation concerns the magnitude of our pluralistic account, because we did – due to the page limitations of this paper - not have wider possibilities of elaborating our arguments to the degree of framing and testing it within an empirical horizon. But we consider this as an issue for further research to address and thus believe that this research is an initiating step toward considering and using the GTM in IS-research through a pluralistic account.

Acknowledgements

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