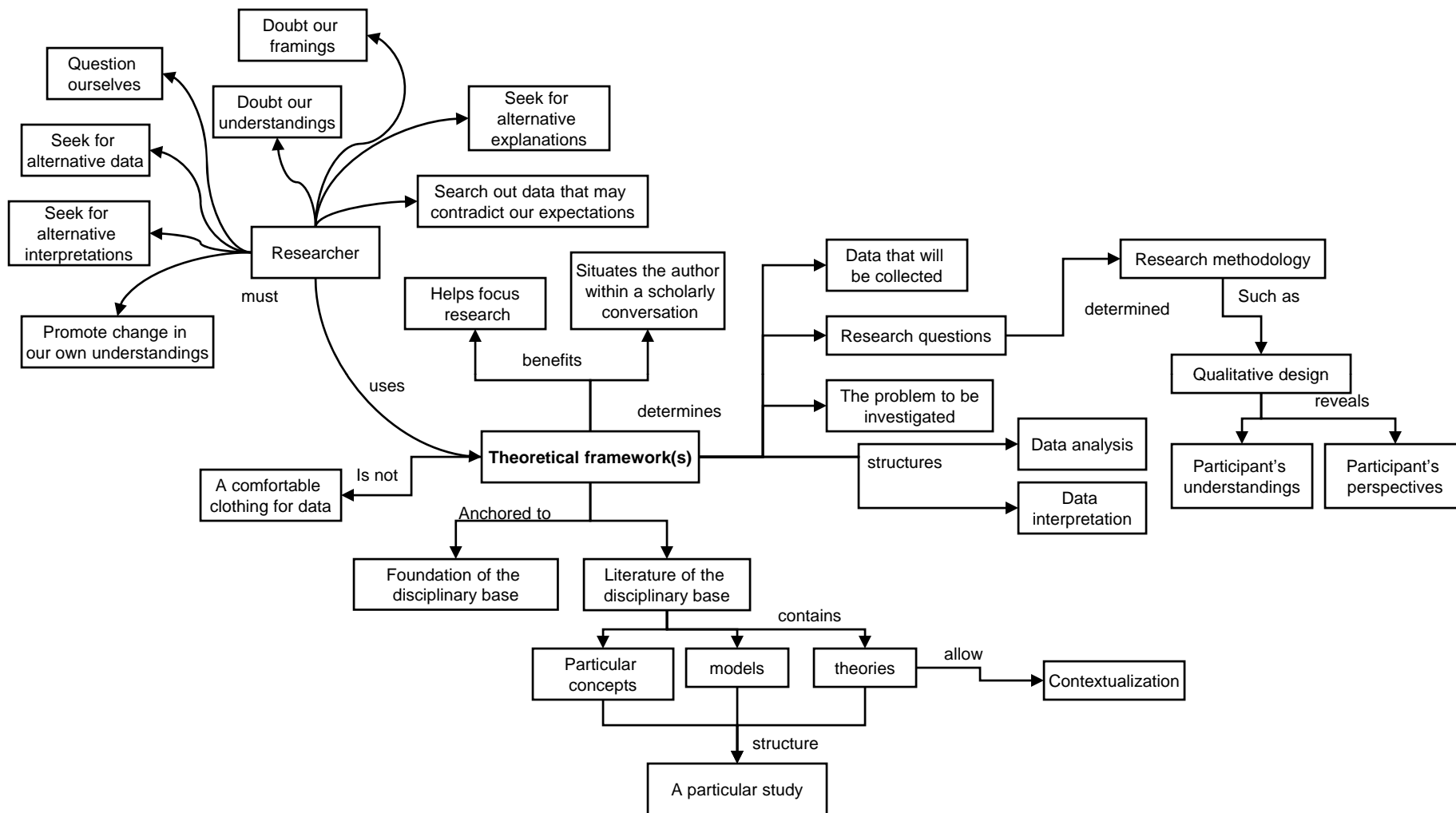


The Role of Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research



Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research

Author	Purpose of the study	Theoretical framework used	Data collection method	Data analysis method	Role of the theoretical framework	Benefits of the Findings
Merriam	to understand how meaning is constructed in the lives of those diagnosed as HIV-positive To identify if the perspective transformation is sustained over time.	The theoretical framework lay at the intersection of adult learning theory, in particular transformational learning, and adult development theory. It is called transformational learning theory	Interviews conducted with 14 participants of the original 18 that were interviewed two years ago	Constant comparative method, an inductive analysis of the data	For this particular case, the theoretical framework tailored all the research. The theoretical framework to be used was selected first since it was a continuation and follow-up of a previous study conducted two years ago.	The findings of this study provided: a) A clearly delineated description of the meaning-making process b) Revelation of unique contributions that underscore the centrality of meaning-making in transformational learning.
Fowler	To assess the extent to which the educational community was correct in believing that the law had been rammed through the legislature with little or no input from educators	Tim Mazzoni's two "arena models" of policy innovation in education. In particular, the author used the Mazzoni's concept of decision-making arenas and shift from his first to second model	The main data collection method was document analysis and 20 in-depth semi structured interviews form actors of both arenas.	The author used qualitative case study as the research method.	The theoretical framework took a very important role in identifying the research questions. Basically, what the author tried to do was in a certain way test such theory.	The findings of this study were: a) author who concluded that the first model did not fit the Ohio's data. b) the author identified some of the weaknesses of Mazzoni's theoretical framework.
Bettis, Mills	To focus on faculty's understandings of their professional identities in a new academic department.	The concept of Liminality was used as the theoretical vehicle to make sense of the dynamic interaction between individual faculty members' responses to changes in their work lives and identities and the changing political, economic, and social landscape of higher education.	Journal analysis of five faculty members focusing on guiding questions. Focus groups were also employed as a way of data collection.	From the description of how they conducted the analysis, it seems they used open coding techniques	The role of the theoretical framework was mostly used in the data analysis and interpretation phases	The researcher's goals were: a) To describe the reality of academic reorganization and faculty identity b) Explain and describe why faculty held particular perceptions of reorganization and their professional identities
Mills, Bettis	The focus of the research was on questions of identity and identification in a shifting organizational context.	For this study the authors had the broad framework of social construction and identity. Under that umbrella the authors selected theories of organizational identity and identification	Journal analysis of five faculty members focusing on guiding questions. Focus groups were also employed as a way of data collection.	They used inductive and inclusive form of coding	The role of the theoretical framework was mostly used in the data analysis and interpretation phases. For the case of this study, the theoretical framework played a role in the data collection as well. The entries in the journals were influenced by the framework.	The findings and analyses highlight: a) The dysfunctional interaction patterns of the newly created department b) Lack of trust among the members c) Fragmentation within the unit.
Karpiak	The purpose of the research was to identify the ways in which social workers traverse this developmental period, what changes they might undergo, and how these changes might be expressed in their personal lives and their professional practice.	The data was analyzed using Jung's model of personality development, Levinson et. al model of midlife transition and Prigogine and Stengers theory of chaos and complexity	Survey and interview of 11 women and 9 men between the ages 35 and 55.	The analysis consisted of searching for patterns and major themes	The theoretical framework supported the author's interview methods. Also, the framework was used to analyze the data by employing a theoretical template based on theory. It also helped on the interpretation of the findings. In addition, one of the theories, the theory of Becoming, provided the author a metaphor and model for exploration.	The author was able to identify that: a) There is no single way in which midlife change occurs b) Change appears to come about in several distinct ways that relate to the nature of events that individuals experience at midlife and the responses of those events
Kearney Hyle	The purpose of the study was to identify individual, change-related emotions in organizations.	The theoretical framework used was Kubler-Ross grief construct, which provides five stages of grief that are directly associated with specific emotions.	Four-phase process including participant-produced drawings and follow-up interviews and surveys.	They organized the data into emotional clusters. They used open coding and then compared the clusters to the categories provided by the model	The use of a grief construct was used in finding direction for collecting and understanding the data.	The authors of this study found that: a) Employees who had experienced organizational change as well as who anticipated organizational change at a local level present grief reactions. b) Proposal to modify the framework to the development and refinement if the theory and its application to organizational change

Discussion of chapters 2 to 7 of the Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research

For this particular journal entry, I will highlight the process each of the authors followed in incorporating the theoretical framework to their own study, in some cases I will contrast and compare each of their own definitions of the role of the theoretical framework.

For the case of **Merriam** (2006), the theoretical framework was the “tailoring” component in the study. In this case, the theoretical framework determined the problem to be investigated, the specific research questions asked, the particular data that was collected and how the data was analyzed and interpreted.

From this article I like very much how the author explains the philosophical roots of the framework they used and how it guided the complete design of the study. Of great interest was how their findings not only confirmed some aspects of the theoretical framework used, but also how it expanded others. This is a clear example of what Mills and Bettis (2006) talk about in chapter 5 when they conclude that “the framework directs the study in two directions –both toward and away from the perceptions and concepts of the framework” (pp.83)

Similarly the overall goal of **Fowler** (2006), was to “test a theory”. The research questions were derived directly from the theoretical question. Basically, the research questions were: To what extent did the Ohio events conform to Mazzoni’s first arena model? To what extent did the Ohio events conform to Mazzoni’s second arena model? Interesting to me were the findings of the author who concluded that the first model did not fit the Ohio’s data. Further more, the author was able to identify some of the weaknesses of Mazzoni’s theoretical framework.

What I appreciate the most from the author is how she provides the background of the American political system in order to contextualize the model she used. She described all the historical aspects that shaped such model as well as the justification and arguments on why she decided to use it for this particular study. The result in my case was a sense of trustworthiness that the theoretical framework was correctly used and applied for the case of the Ohio’s data.

On the other hand, what strikes me is the way on how it happened that she used the same theoretical framework with her dissertation data. For this particular case, the theoretical framework did not determine the design of the study because the data was already collected. However, this new framework provided a different lens under which the data will be analyzed and interpreted.

Finally, in relation with this article, the author has made me reconsider the importance of the review process every scholar should go through. She initially commented on how her committee had many discrepancies with her initial theoretical framework, and at the end of the article she describes once again how a blind reviewer and an editor pointed out the discrepancies of the model she had used.

The cases of **Bettis and Mills** (2006), and **Mills and Bettis** (2006), were very interesting in the sense on how the same data was analyzed under two different lenses and how these could be possible because of the different training of two of the participant-researchers. This particular first case is interesting because from the readings I could identify that the authors employed Grounded Theory and from the data analysis they identified different ways in which they could make sense of it. The authors again pointed out the shortcomings of the theoretical framework and explain how it is natural that the data do not have a perfect fit. In finding those “not perfect fits” is when our field is expanded, because we find new paths to explore, test, and eventually confirm or reject.

In the second paper the authors turn their shift to describe a departmental faculty that had substantial difficulty working together toward important collective decisions because of “truncated communications, conflict avoidance, dysfunctional decision-making processes, and withdrawal from participation in the unit” (Mills & Bettis, 2006, p. 74). For this case the authors situated their study under the umbrella of organizational culture. Organizational culture sets the context for organizational identity. The authors, through a literature review and by describing “who they are”, they justify the reasons of selecting such theoretical framework, and again, they provide us with an argument to trust their selection. However, it is interesting to see the struggle they went through and clearly point out the limitations of the framework “... in the analysis phase of the project, when it became clear that the theories were not rich enough to explain some aspects of the finding” (Mills & Bettis, 2006, p. 76).

Discussion contd.

I also consider that an important part of deciding the theoretical framework used to analyze and interpret the data was the unit of analysis selected. In this case, the unit of analysis was the five faculty members rather than the department or college as a culture. Therefore the focus was more on their perspectives and experience of the new organization (I would have used phenomenography as the methodological framework as well). The authors also discussed how they were questioned about the use of other literature and frameworks to interpret the data, but they clearly stated from the beginning which sides of the disco ball they were looking at. The authors conclude "the use of different frameworks allowed us to have greater breath in our analyses of the situation we studied" (p. 82). These two interpretations were merged at the end when the authors discussed how they faced the two different types of problems during sense making in organizations: a) the lack of imagined alternatives and b) the wealth of alternatives.

I find very useful the discussion the authors lead at the end of the chapter about being aware to turn our analyses toward conclusions that could be theorized even before the research began. They conclude that only when we direct the study toward and away from it, we "push our analyses to more nuanced stages that go beyond what our frameworks provide us" (p. 83). And only when we have done this, we can be assured of the restored trustworthiness of our data and analyses.

In the chapter written by **Karpiak** (2006), is little bit different from others. The author devotes the major part of it in describing the theoretical framework. While reading his descriptions I have just realized that General Systems Theory is closely related to Systems Dynamics and Systems Thinking, a topic that has been of my interest for a long time (and probably the topic of my preliminary exam next month). I appreciate from this author how he discusses how Chaos and Complexity are somehow in the same page as the purpose of qualitative research.

As the other authors, Karpiak discusses the limitations of the framework. He argues that "one limitation of the framework arises from the nature of complexity itself" (p.95), and how, by citing Murphy (2000), this complexity requires from the researcher an ability to accommodate the unpredictability and uncertainty of the findings.

Definitely my favorite part of this article is when the author discusses the article entitled: A new Sense of Order, a New Curriculum, and some of my favorite quotes are:

"Learning would occur not in the zone of comfort, but in the zone of confusion"

"Teaching would rest not on student compliance, but on student challenge"

"The goal of teaching would be not to transmit knowledge, but transform it"

"The role of the teacher would be not to instill the know, but to inspire the desire to explore the unknown and to keep the dialogue going."

In their article, **Kearney and Hyle** present us with a different application of Kubler-Ross theoretical framework. The authors first identified a topic they wanted to investigate, then they identified the theoretical framework they wanted to use and then they looked for the site that fits that particular situation of organizational change. As the authors comment, the Kubler-Ross construct was critical to their finding a place to start with analysis. The theoretical framework provided as well an initial plan for the researchers to follow. By looking into the data collection model and the stages of grief, it provided a scaffold or guideline to collect the data.

I found very asserted from the authors the way in which they found a gap in the area of organizational change, and also how it was not prevalent in the current research literature the use of any individual grief model in an organization. In addition, to test the usefulness of the theoretical framework, the authors decided to include a fourth research task: assess the usefulness of the Kubler-Ross grief cycle for understanding change in organizations.

The authors, faced with the problem of not being able to classify some emotions of the framework went back to the literature and followed the same procedure for classifying the initial ones. They formed a panel of experts in the area and asked them to classify the new emotions into the framework. Furthermore, they were more rigorous in such a process in relation with the percentage of agreement of responses of such panel. Also, the researchers were faced with the problem of classifying positive emotions (i.e. pleased, positive, happy), and therefore suggestions of extending this theory were made.

Finally, I would like to comment on the criticize the authors received in relation with applying the theory in a priori within the context of qualitative theory. I personally have never thought of using the theory in such a way. As an instructional designer and engineer, I have always thought of my research as a way to identify a problem or solve some need and at the same time contribute with something new in my area. This means, my intend in doing my research is basic and applied. For this case however, the idea the authors had in mind was to contribute with basic theory, which I think it is also valid.