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Constructivist Grounded Theory in Management Sciences:

A Methodological Framework for Social Entrepreneurship Research in the Global South

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Abstract

Qualitative research in management sciences has expanded significantly, yet methodological clarity remains underdeveloped - particularly in non-Western and emerging-economy contexts. This paper argues that Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), as systematised by Charmaz (2006), offers a rigorous and contextually responsive methodological framework for management research. Three research gaps motivate this paper: the absence of epistemological coherence in many qualitative management studies; the insufficient articulation of CGT's specific contributions to management sciences; and the lack of methodological guidance for researchers studying social entrepreneurship and cooperative management in Global South contexts. This paper makes three original contributions. First, it positions CGT within the broader paradigm landscape through two comparative tables. Second, it identifies five specific contributions of CGT to management research. Third, it develops an original argument for CGT's suitability to social entrepreneurship research in the Global South, with Morocco as an illustrative context. The paper includes a process figure, explicit limitations, managerial implications, and a seven-step operational guide. An ongoing study on youth empowerment in rural Morocco (El Bousserghini and Lebzar, under review) serves as an illustrative application.

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1. Introduction

The question of methodological appropriateness is rarely at the centre of management sciences debates. Most doctoral and post-doctoral research in management adopts a methodology almost by convention - surveys because they are quantifiable, case studies because they are familiar, and qualitative interviews because they are accessible - without engaging deeply with the epistemological commitments that each choice entails. This tendency toward unreflective methodological selection has been documented and critiqued extensively (Gephart, 2004; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Sandberg, 2005) but remains persistent, particularly in research conducted in non-Western and emerging-economy contexts where imported analytical frameworks are applied without interrogating their contextual fit.

The broader qualitative paradigm debate in management and social sciences has produced a rich, if contested, landscape of methodological options. The so-called "paradigm wars" (Gage, 1989) between positivist and interpretivist epistemologies, and subsequent developments in critical realism, constructivism, and post-structuralism, have expanded the methodological vocabulary available to management researchers. Yet this proliferation of options has paradoxically reinforced rather than reduced methodological unreflexivity: faced with an abundance of frameworks, many researchers default to whichever methodology their supervisor used, whichever appears most publishable in their target journal, or whichever requires the least epistemological commitment (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

This paper intervenes in that gap by making a sustained case for Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), as systematised by Charmaz (2006) from the foundational work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), as a methodological framework that offers genuine epistemological coherence, theoretical rigour, and contextual responsiveness for management research. CGT represents a distinct methodological architecture within qualitative inquiry. It is a complete methodological architecture that positions the researcher as a co-constructor of knowledge, treats data collection and analysis as iterative and simultaneous processes, and generates theory inductively from the field rather than testing pre-existing frameworks. These features make it particularly well-suited to management research in contexts where phenomena are embedded in cultural, territorial, and institutional specificities that standard frameworks systematically distort.

1.1. Research Gap

> *Despite the growing use of qualitative methods in management research, there remains a significant lack of methodological clarity and epistemological coherence, particularly in studies conducted in emerging and non-Western contexts. Existing literature has not sufficiently articulated the specific contributions and operationalisation of Constructivist Grounded Theory in management sciences, especially in relation to social entrepreneurship and cooperative research in the Global South. Most management studies that claim to use CGT either reduce it to a generic thematic analysis, conflate it with classical or systematic GT variants, or apply it without addressing the epistemological implications of non-Western research contexts. This paper addresses that triple gap directly.*

This paper contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it provides a conceptual clarification of Constructivist Grounded Theory and its epistemological foundations. Second, it demonstrates its relevance and applicability within management sciences, particularly in the study of complex and context-dependent phenomena. Third, it proposes an operational methodological framework adapted to research in social entrepreneurship and Global South contexts.

1.2. Contributions of This Paper

This paper contributes to the methodological literature on qualitative management research in three ways. First, it provides a conceptual clarification of CGT - distinguishing it from classical and systematic GT variants and situating it within the broader paradigm landscape through two comparative tables (Tables 1 and 2). Second, it demonstrates how CGT can be operationalised in management sciences research, covering sampling logic, data collection, multi-stage coding, saturation, and trustworthiness criteria, with specific attention to non-Western and multilingual field contexts. Third, it develops an original argument for the specific suitability of CGT to social entrepreneurship and cooperative management research in the Global South. A conceptual process figure (Figure 1), practical managerial implications, and an explicit treatment of CGT's limitations complete the contribution.

A note on scope: this article is explicitly positioned as a theoretical and methodological contribution rather than an empirical study. It does not generate or analyse primary data; instead, it proposes a conceptual framework and operational guide for conducting CGT research in management sciences. This design choice is deliberate and consistent with the conventions of methodological papers in management science journals (Edmondson and McManus, 2007): the article's purpose is to equip researchers with the tools to design and implement rigorous CGT studies, not to report findings from one. The distinction between the methodological framework proposed here and its empirical application is made explicit in Section 7, which presents illustrative material from an ongoing field study in rural Morocco as a vignette - a concrete demonstration of how the framework operates in practice - rather than as the primary evidential basis of the article's theoretical claims.

2. Qualitative Research in Management: The Paradigm Landscape

Understanding the place of CGT in management research requires situating it within the broader ontological and epistemological landscape of qualitative inquiry. Management sciences have historically been dominated by a positivist paradigm - the assumption that social and organisational phenomena can be studied through methods analogous to natural science, that reality exists independently of the researcher, and that the goal of inquiry is objective explanation and prediction. This paradigm has shaped the field's preference for large-sample surveys, structural equation modelling, and hypothetico-deductive research designs (Gephart, 2004; Tsang, 2014).

The legitimacy of qualitative research in management has been hard-won. The interpretive turn (Rorty, 1979; Burrell and Morgan, 1979) challenged the positivist hegemony by arguing that social phenomena are inherently meaning-laden and can only be understood from the perspective of the actors involved. Interpretive management research - including phenomenology, ethnography, and discursive approaches - produced rich accounts of organisational life that quantitative methods systematically missed. However, interpretive research was frequently criticised for lacking systematic analytical procedures and for producing findings too contextually specific to contribute to broader theory (Lee, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Constructivist approaches, including CGT, occupy a distinctive position in this landscape. They share the interpretivist commitment to understanding meaning from the actor's perspective, but add an explicit theory-building ambition and a systematic analytical architecture that addresses the critique of interpretive impressionism. Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the three main paradigmatic orientations relevant to qualitative management research, positioning CGT within this landscape.

Table 1. Comparative overview of major paradigmatic orientations in qualitative management research

Dimension	Positivism	Interpretivism	Constructivism (CGT)
Ontology	Realist: reality exists independently of the observer	Relativist: reality is socially constructed through meaning	Constructivist: reality is co-constructed between researcher and participants
Epistemology	Objectivist: researcher is separate from the researched	Subjectivist: researcher interprets meaning from within	Intersubjective: knowledge is produced through the research encounter
Role of researcher	Neutral instrument of measurement	Interpretive vehicle for understanding meaning	Reflexive co-constructor of knowledge
Data	Numerical, measurable, generalizable	Narrative, contextual, experience-near	Narrative, iteratively analysed to generate theory
Goal of inquiry	Explanation, prediction, generalization	Understanding, thick description, contextual insight	Theory generation from within the field
Output	Statistical models, hypotheses confirmed or rejected	Rich interpretive accounts, case studies	Grounded theory: substantive conceptual frameworks
Quality criteria	Validity, reliability, replicability	Trustworthiness, authenticity, transferability	Credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
Management application	Surveys, experiments, SEM	Ethnography, phenomenology, discourse analysis	Grounded theory, constructivist case studies

Source: Authors, adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1994), Charmaz (2006), and Denzin and Lincoln (2011).

This comparative framing is important because it foregrounds the key differentiator of CGT: it is neither purely descriptive nor purely explanatory. It occupies the productive methodological space between rich contextual description and theoretical abstraction - generating substantive theory that is grounded in specific contexts while being conceptually portable to comparable situations. This is precisely the kind of contribution that management sciences research in emerging economies most urgently needs.

3. From Classical to Constructivist Grounded Theory: An Epistemological Trajectory

3.1. The Original Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

Grounded Theory was introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their landmark 1967 work The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Their fundamental argument challenged the then-dominant positivist assumption that qualitative research was inherently inferior to quantitative inquiry because it could not produce generalisable theory. Glaser and Strauss demonstrated that rigorous, systematic qualitative analysis could generate theory - not merely describe phenomena - provided the researcher followed a disciplined set of analytical procedures.

Classical GT rests on three core commitments: theory must emerge inductively from data rather than being deductively tested from prior literature; data collection and analysis must be iterative and simultaneous through theoretical sampling; and theoretical saturation defines the endpoint of data collection. These commitments represented a genuine methodological innovation, producing a framework in which qualitative researchers could claim to be doing science - generating theory - rather than merely providing illustration or description.

Despite its significant contribution, classical GT was not without limitations. The aspiration to objectivity - the claim that a sufficiently rigorous researcher could derive theory from data without imposing prior assumptions - has been widely critiqued (Charmaz, 2006; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Kelle, 2005). As constructivist epistemology developed within the social sciences, it became increasingly untenable to argue that researchers are passive observers who simply discover pre-existing patterns in data. Moreover, the subsequent divergence between Glaser and Strauss on the nature of GT itself - culminating in Glaser's (1992) critique of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) systematic revision - revealed the internal tensions of the original framework.

3.2. Strauss and Corbin's Systematic Revision

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) introduced a more structured analytical framework to guide the coding process, including the paradigm model and conditional/consequential matrices. While this revision offered valuable methodological clarity and increased the accessibility of GT for novice researchers, it was criticised for being overly prescriptive - transforming the generative, flexible logic of GT into a set of mechanical procedures - and for reintroducing positivist assumptions about the existence of a correct analytical pathway (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser (1992) himself argued that Strauss and Corbin's approach forced data into pre-existing conceptual categories rather than allowing theory to emerge genuinely from the field.

3.3. Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory

The most significant epistemological development in GT was Kathy Charmaz's constructivist revision, developed progressively across her 2000 chapter, her 2006 monograph Constructing Grounded Theory, and the expanded 2014 edition. Charmaz repositioned GT within a constructivist ontology and epistemology, accepting that both data and analysis are social constructions: the researcher does not neutrally observe phenomena but actively participates in their construction through the very act of inquiry. Interview data are not transparent windows onto a pre-existing social reality but are co-produced through the encounter between researcher and participant.

This repositioning has three important methodological consequences. First, researcher reflexivity becomes a methodological requirement rather than an ethical courtesy: the researcher's positionality - cultural background, prior knowledge, theoretical assumptions, and relationship to

the field - must be explicitly acknowledged and systematically analysed through reflexive memos. Second, theoretical fit expands beyond formal categories: analytical constructions must resonate with participants' lived experiences, making member-checking a quality marker, not an optional extra. Third, the output of CGT - theoretical categories and their relationships - is explicitly understood as a construction that offers a plausible interpretation, not an objective discovery.

Table 2 summarises the key differences between the three GT variants relevant to management sciences research.

Table 2. Comparison of Grounded Theory variants relevant to management research

Dimension	Classical GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)	Systematic GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)	Constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2006)
Epistemology	Implicitly positivist: researcher discovers theory	Moderately structured: systematic procedures guide discovery	Explicitly constructivist: researcher co-constructs theory
Role of researcher	Neutral analyst who brackets prior knowledge	Systematic analyst following prescribed procedures	Reflexive co-constructor whose positionality is a methodological resource
Prior literature	Enter the field without prior reading to avoid contamination	Prior literature provides sensitising concepts	Theoretical sensitivity: engage with literature but remain open to emergence
Coding approach	Open, selective, theoretical	Open, axial (paradigm model), selective	Initial, focused, axial, theoretical
Analytical output	Formal theory with broad generalisability	Well-developed substantive theory	Context-born substantive theory; modest claims about transferability
Trustworthiness	Fit, relevance, workability, modifiability (Glaser)	Credibility, originality, resonance, usefulness	Lincoln & Guba (1985) criteria + resonance and usefulness (Charmaz, 2014)
Suitability for Global South	Limited: objectivity assumption suppresses cultural embeddedness	Moderate: structured procedures may not capture cultural complexity	High: reflexivity and context-sensitivity accommodate non-Western specificities

Source: Authors, adapted from Charmaz (2006, 2014), Bryant and Charmaz (2007), and Kelle (2005).

4. Five Contributions of CGT to Management Sciences Research

4.1. Epistemological Coherence

Many qualitative management studies suffer from paradigm inconsistency (Guba and Lincoln, 1994): they adopt interpretive data collection methods - interviews, observations, focus groups - while retaining implicitly positivist analytical logics - coding for frequencies, seeking universalisable patterns, avoiding researcher reflexivity. This inconsistency is not merely philosophical; it produces a specific analytical failure, where the richness of qualitative data is compressed into a quasi-quantitative enumeration of themes that carries neither the statistical authority of quantitative research nor the theoretical depth of genuinely interpretive inquiry. CGT resolves this

inconsistency by providing a complete methodological framework whose data collection, analysis, and quality criteria are all derived from the same constructivist epistemological commitment.

4.2. Theory-Building Rather Than Theory-Testing

A persistent limitation of management sciences research is its tendency toward theory-testing rather than theory-building (Weick, 1989; DiMaggio, 1995). The dominance of hypothesis-testing designs - even in ostensibly qualitative work - means that research systematically confirms what the literature already suspects rather than generating genuinely novel conceptual insights. This is a significant problem in management research on emerging economies and the Global South, where existing frameworks were not developed with these contexts in mind and frequently lack relevance. CGT inverts this logic: the researcher enters the field with theoretical sensitivity but without a predetermined framework, allowing categories and theoretical propositions to emerge inductively. The resulting theory is built from the inside out rather than tested from the outside in, producing conceptual contributions that are genuinely novel rather than confirmatory.

4.3. Iterative Sampling Logic

CGT's theoretical sampling - in which the emerging analysis guides who to interview next - is fundamentally different from the purposive or convenience sampling that characterises much qualitative management research, where the complete sample is determined before data collection begins. In theoretical sampling, every participant is included because they can illuminate a specific gap or tension in the emerging theoretical framework, producing samples that are analytically optimised rather than merely representative. For management research on complex, multi-level phenomena - such as social entrepreneurship ecosystems, governance structures, or empowerment processes - this iterative logic ensures that the analytical framework develops sufficient depth across all relevant dimensions before data collection ceases.

4.4. Multi-Stage Coding as Analytical Rigour

The CGT coding sequence - initial coding (line-by-line examination), focused coding (identifying the most significant codes), axial coding (identification of relationships between categories), and selective coding (integration around a core category) - provides a transparent, documented analytical trail that addresses the most persistent methodological criticism of qualitative research: its apparent non-replicability. When combined with systematic memo-writing, which documents the analytical reasoning at every stage, CGT produces a form of rigour that is genuinely qualitative. The analytical process can be externally evaluated not by asking whether a different researcher would produce the same codes - a positivist criterion that is epistemologically inappropriate - but by asking whether the theoretical construction is coherent, well-grounded in the data, and analytically transparent.

4.5. Trustworthiness Criteria Adapted to Qualitative Inquiry

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework - credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability - replaces positivist validity, reliability, and generalisability with quality criteria that respect the epistemological architecture of constructivist inquiry. Charmaz (2014) extends these criteria with two additional markers specific to CGT: resonance (whether the theoretical framework rings true against participants lived experiences) and usefulness (whether the theory offers practical insight to practitioners and policymakers). These five criteria together constitute a

comprehensive quality framework that makes CGT-based management research accountable without compromising its epistemological integrity.

5. Sampling, Data Collection, and Analytical Procedures

5.1. Purposive and Theoretical Sampling

A CGT study typically begins with purposive sampling - the deliberate selection of information-rich cases - before transitioning to theoretical sampling as initial analysis generates new conceptual questions. For management sciences research, the initial sample should include actors at multiple analytical levels: those directly experiencing the phenomenon (micro), those who organise or manage it (meso), and those who regulate or support it institutionally (macro). This multi-level triangulation is not merely methodological due diligence; it is a theoretical requirement for generating management theory that can account for the full system of conditions, actions, and consequences that constitute the phenomenon under study.

5.2. Data Collection and Language Considerations

Semi-structured interviews remain the most common data collection method in CGT-based management research, and their flexibility aligns naturally with CGT's requirement that collection be responsive to emerging categories. Focus groups provide a valuable complement, particularly for phenomena where collective meaning-making is central, as they reveal group dynamics and negotiated representations invisible in individual interviews. Observation and documentary analysis enrich the corpus by providing access to enacted practices.

A critical and frequently neglected dimension in non-Western management research concerns language and translation. When data are collected in Arabic, Amazigh, Darija, French, or other languages different from the publication language, translation decisions directly affect the quality of the theoretical constructions generated. Translation is not a neutral technical operation; it involves interpretive choices that can suppress culturally specific meanings, flatten emotional register, and eliminate concepts that resist direct equivalence - such as kheir (goodness/grace), baraka (blessing), or nass (community/people) in Moroccan Arabic. Rigorous CGT in multilingual contexts requires explicit translation protocols, bilingual peer review of translated excerpts, and the retention of key indigenous terms in the final analysis with explanatory glosses (Temple and Young, 2004).

5.3. The Coding Process

In CGT, initial coding begins with the first data collected and proceeds in parallel with subsequent collection - this simultaneity is the operational expression of theoretical sampling logic. The researcher reads transcripts line by line, assigning short, action-oriented codes close to the data, often using participants own language (in vivo codes) to preserve the cultural specificity of their experience. Focused coding identifies the most analytically significant codes and begins the process of category formation. Axial coding maps the relationships between categories: their causal conditions, the context in which they operate, the strategies actors use in relation to them, and the consequences they produce. Selective coding integrates categories around a core category that accounts for most of the variation in the data and constitutes the central proposition of the theoretical narrative.

Throughout this process, theoretical memos - analytical notes in which the researcher records emerging insights, works through conceptual tensions, and traces the development of categories - constitute the intellectual building blocks of the grounded theory. Memo-writing is the most important and most neglected practice in CGT-based management research: it makes the analytical reasoning transparent, cumulative, and auditable, transforming the coding process from a mechanical classification exercise into a genuinely theoretical endeavour.

5.4. Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation - the point at which new data no longer generates new theoretical categories or deepens existing ones - defines the analytical endpoint of CGT data collection. Saturation is an analytical judgement, not a mechanical threshold: the researcher must demonstrate, through the documentation of their analytical process, that categories are well-developed and theoretically dense, that the relationships between them are clearly articulated, and that new data consistently confirm rather than challenge the emerging framework.

For management research in the Global South, the redundancy principle formulated by Olivier de Sardan (2008) provides a practically applicable operationalisation of saturation: collection ceases when new interviews consistently generate the same thematic configurations, without producing new conceptual content. This principle is particularly valuable in contexts where saturation cannot be determined by reference to standardised sample size benchmarks, as the informational density of the field varies considerably across territorial, cultural, and institutional contexts.

6. Trustworthiness in CGT-Based Management Research

The quality of a CGT study cannot be evaluated by positivist criteria. Five trustworthiness practices are central to CGT-based management research. Member-checking - the validation of preliminary interpretations with participants - is the most direct form of credibility verification and simultaneously an ethical accountability practice that positions participants as agents rather than objects of the research. Peer debriefing guards against analytical insularity by subjecting emerging categories to external scrutiny. Negative case analysis - the deliberate search for disconfirming evidence - strengthens the theoretical framework by forcing the researcher to account for exceptions. Audit trail documentation - the systematic recording of analytical decisions, category revisions, and theoretical pivots - provides the dependability equivalent of quantitative reliability. Researcher reflexivity - the systematic examination of how the researcher's positionality shapes data collection and analysis - is the defining trustworthiness practice of CGT: not a declaration of bias to be corrected, but a productive epistemological resource that makes the researcher's situated knowledge analytically deployable.

7. CGT in Social Entrepreneurship and Cooperative Management Research: An Original Argument

The specific suitability of CGT to social entrepreneurship and cooperative management research in the Global South rests on three substantive grounds that go beyond generic claims about qualitative appropriateness for complex phenomena.

7.1. The Methodological Challenge of Heterogeneous Phenomena

Social entrepreneurship - defined as the mobilisation of entrepreneurial practices for social value creation (Dees, 1998; Mair and Martí, 2006) - is a profoundly heterogeneous phenomenon. It

encompasses radically different organisational forms (cooperatives, associations, hybrid enterprises, informal community initiatives), motivational logics (necessity-driven, opportunity-driven, values-driven), territorial contexts (urban, peri-urban, rural, remote), and impact models (service delivery, market development, advocacy, empowerment). Survey-based research systematically obscures this heterogeneity by forcing diverse realities into standardised measurement categories. CGT's inductive logic is the appropriate response: it allows diversity to structure the analysis rather than being suppressed by it.

7.2. The Processual Character of Social Value Creation

The mechanisms through which social entrepreneurship generates social value - empowerment, capability expansion, social cohesion, civic activation - are deeply processual: they unfold over time, are shaped by context, and cannot be adequately captured through cross-sectional measurement. CGT's emphasis on process theory - explaining how things happen, not just what happens - aligns precisely with this characteristic. A CGT study of youth empowerment through cooperative participation, for example, can trace the trajectory from first membership through skill acquisition, identity reconstruction, and civic engagement in a way that survey instruments, by design, cannot.

7.3. Cultural and Institutional Embeddedness

Social entrepreneurship in the Global South is embedded in moral, cultural, and relational frameworks that standard management theories were not designed to theorise. In the Moroccan context, cooperative entrepreneurship is shaped by Islamic solidarity ethics (kheir, baraka, nass), Amazigh collective governance traditions, and state-market hybrid institutional logics that have no adequate equivalent in Western social enterprise typologies. CGT's commitment to allowing theory to emerge from within the field- including its cultural specificities- makes it the methodological approach best suited to generate management theory that reflects these realities rather than distorting them.

This argument is supported by emerging scholarship in the MENA region. Research on social enterprise in Tunisia (Lamine et al., 2015) and Egypt (Jamali and Mirshak, 2007) has consistently found that Western SE frameworks - particularly those developed in North American and Northern European contexts - fail to capture the institutional logics, motivational drivers, and impact pathways of social entrepreneurship in Arab and African contexts. CGT-based research is beginning to address this gap by generating context-born theoretical frameworks rather than testing imported ones.

These arguments are illustrated by ongoing research on cooperative-based youth empowerment in the Rhamna region of rural Morocco (El Bousserghini and Lebzar, under review), which applies CGT to examine how young people in marginalised territories construct entrepreneurial identity, negotiate collective governance, and achieve multidimensional empowerment through cooperative participation. This line of research demonstrates that CGT can generate original management theory - including the development of contextualised conceptual models incorporating territorial, cultural, and gender dimensions - that would be methodologically inaccessible to survey-based or purely interpretive approaches.

To provide a more substantive illustration: in an 80-interview CGT study of eight cooperatives in the Rhamna province of Morocco, the iterative theoretical sampling process moved through three analytical phases. In phase one, initial interviews with young cooperative members revealed

economic and psychological empowerment themes, generating a preliminary category structure centred on income access and self-efficacy. In phase two, theoretical sampling directed the researcher toward cooperative founders and ODCO institutional officers, whose interviews revealed governance quality as a conditioning variable mediating all empowerment pathways - a category invisible in member interviews alone. In phase three, deliberate negative case sampling selected three cooperatives that had experienced governance failure or dissolution, generating the conditionality thesis: empowerment through cooperative social entrepreneurship is conditional, contested, and reversible, not automatic. This three-phase trajectory - from initial categories to theoretical saturation through systematic negative case analysis - illustrates precisely how CGT's iterative logic produces theoretical contributions that deductive, survey-based designs could not generate: the conditionality thesis emerged from the data, not from prior theory. This illustration is consistent with comparable published CGT applications in management research, including Lamine et al. (2015) on technology incubation and Charmaz (2014) on organisational identity formation in marginalised contexts.

8. Limitations of CGT in Management Research

Methodological advocacy papers frequently omit the limitations of the framework they promote. This omission is itself a form of methodological unreflexivity and ultimately weakens the credibility of the advocacy. CGT, for all its strengths, carries four specific limitations that management researchers should explicitly consider before adopting it.

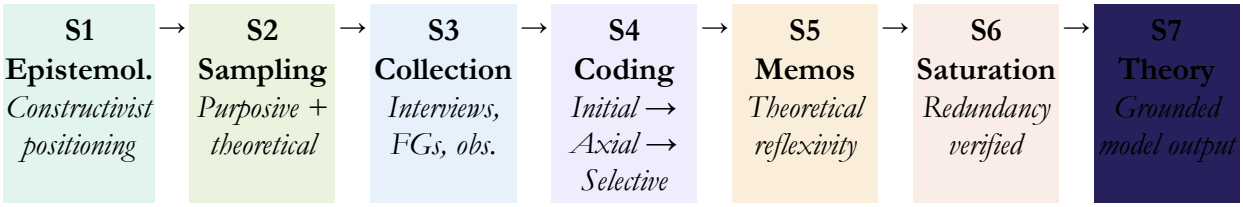
First, CGT is resource-intensive. The simultaneous data collection and analysis, the iterative theoretical sampling logic, and the extensive memo-writing required demand significantly more time and analytical capacity than a conventional qualitative approach. For doctoral researchers working under time constraints or with limited supervisor familiarity with CGT, this can create significant practical difficulties.

Second, the theory generated by CGT is substantive rather than formal: it is grounded in a specific context and cannot be mechanically generalised to others. This is epistemologically appropriate but practically limiting in management sciences contexts where policymakers and practitioners often expect broadly applicable prescriptions. CGT researchers must be explicit about the scope and transferability conditions of their theoretical contributions.

Third, CGT requires a level of researcher reflexivity that is culturally and institutionally unfamiliar in many management research contexts, particularly those shaped by positivist norms. In settings where methodological transparency is uncommon - including some academic environments in the Global South - the reflexive requirements of CGT may encounter institutional resistance from supervisors, journal editors, or dissertation committees who interpret reflexivity as subjectivity rather than rigour.

Fourth, CGT is not appropriate for all management research questions. Questions that require statistical representativeness, causal inference from large samples, or comparison across multiple national contexts are better served by quantitative or mixed methods designs. CGT is specifically suited to questions that ask how and why phenomena occur in specific contexts - not to questions that ask how often or how much they occur across populations. Researchers should select CGT on the basis of this epistemological fit, not as a default response to the unavailability of quantitative data.

Figure 1. The Constructivist Grounded Theory Process in Management Research



Source: Authors. S1–S7 represent stages of the CGT analytical process (Charmaz, 2006). Arrows indicate iterative progression with theoretical sampling feedback loops.

9. A Seven-Step Methodological Guide for Management Researchers

The following guide synthesises the preceding analysis into a practical sequence for management researchers considering CGT as their primary analytical framework. Each step identifies both the methodological action required and the most common failure mode at that stage.

Step 1 - Epistemological positioning. Articulate your ontological and epistemological commitments explicitly, in writing, before collecting data. Ask: do I believe social reality is constructed through meaning-making, and am I prepared to examine how my own presence shapes what I observe? CGT is only coherent when these commitments are genuinely held. Failure mode: adopting CGT for pragmatic reasons while retaining positivist analytical logics, producing the paradigm inconsistency described in Section 4.1.

Applied example: In the Rhamna cooperative study, the phenomenon was defined inductively as "youth experience of cooperative membership" rather than "empowerment" - avoiding premature theoretical closure while providing sufficient focus for sampling.

Step 2 - Research question formulation. Frame questions around processes and mechanisms - how, why, and under what conditions - rather than frequencies or distributions. CGT is epistemologically appropriate for questions such as "How does cooperative governance generate civic empowerment?" not for "What percentage of cooperatives have democratic governance?" Failure mode: selecting CGT for a question that is actually a variance question, producing a study that cannot fulfil the methodology's analytical logic.

Step 3 - Initial purposive sampling. Select an initial sample of information-rich cases with diversity across the key analytical dimensions relevant to the research question. Do not finalise the complete sample before data collection begins. Plan for theoretical sampling to extend and refine the initial sample. Failure mode: treating the initial sample as final, eliminating the theoretical sampling logic that distinguishes CGT from conventional qualitative research.

Step 4 - Simultaneous data collection and analysis. Begin initial coding with the first data collected. Do not complete data collection before beginning analysis. Maintain a memo journal from the first interview. Allow each round of analysis to generate questions that guide subsequent data collection. Failure mode: collecting all data before beginning analysis, which eliminates the iterative logic of CGT and reduces it to thematic analysis.

Step 5 - Multi-stage coding. Progress systematically from initial coding through focused, axial, and selective coding. Use a qualitative data analysis software package to manage the corpus while retaining full human interpretive control. Write theoretical memos at every stage to document the development of categories and the reasoning behind analytical decisions. Failure mode: treating

coding as a mechanical classification exercise rather than a theoretical construction, producing a taxonomy of topics rather than a grounded theory.

Step 6 - Saturation verification and trustworthiness. Document theoretical saturation through the analytical record: demonstrate that later data confirm rather than expand the theoretical framework. Apply the five trustworthiness practices described in Section 6: member-checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, audit trail, and researcher reflexivity. Failure mode: claiming saturation without documentation, or treating trustworthiness as an afterthought rather than a practice integrated throughout the research process.

Step 7 - Theory presentation. Present the grounded theory as a theoretical narrative: articulate the core category, the categories related to it, the conditions and consequences of the central phenomenon, and the scope conditions of the theoretical contribution. Avoid presenting CGT findings as a list of themes, which represents an analytical regression to thematic analysis. Be explicit about the substantive scope of the theory and its transferability conditions. Failure mode: presenting a description of findings rather than a grounded theory, which fails to fulfil the theory-building ambition of the methodology.

10. Managerial and Practical Implications

Consistent with the applied and practical orientation of this journal, this section outlines the concrete implications of the methodological framework developed in this paper for four key audiences: research practitioners, doctoral researchers, academic supervisors, and institutional actors.

For research practitioners. Social entrepreneurs, cooperative leaders, and development practitioners increasingly commission qualitative evaluations of their programmes. This paper provides a framework for understanding what rigorous qualitative research looks like, what it can and cannot claim, and how to distinguish it from impressionistic reports. CGT-based evaluations can generate theoretical models of empowerment, governance, and social impact that are grounded in the specific organisational context rather than imported from external benchmarks.

For doctoral researchers. The seven-step guide in Section 9 provides a directly actionable methodological roadmap. Doctoral researchers in management sciences, particularly those working in non-Western contexts without strong qualitative traditions in their institutions, can use this paper as both a theoretical justification and a practical guide for adopting CGT as their primary analytical framework. The explicit discussion of limitations (Section 8) provides the language needed to defend the methodology to dissertation committees.

For academic supervisors. The comparative paradigm tables (Tables 1 and 2) provide a teaching tool for introducing epistemological and methodological choices to doctoral students. They structure discussions of paradigm fit in a way that is accessible without being reductive. Supervisors working with students on social entrepreneurship, cooperative management, or inclusive development in Global South contexts will find the framework in Section 7 directly applicable to supervision conversations about methodological coherence.

For research institutions and funding bodies. The paper argues that context-born theoretical frameworks - of the kind that CGT produces - are not a methodological concession to data limitations but a scientific requirement for research conducted in culturally specific and institutionally complex environments. Research evaluation frameworks and funding criteria that

privilege large-sample quantitative designs systematically under-invest in the kind of theoretical innovation that the Global South most urgently needs. Recognising CGT-based research as a form of theoretical production, not merely qualitative description, has direct implications for how management research is assessed, funded, and published.

11. Conclusion

This paper has made a sustained argument for Constructivist Grounded Theory as a methodologically rigorous, epistemologically coherent, and contextually responsive framework for qualitative management research. Situating CGT within the broader paradigm landscape - between positivism and interpretivism - the paper has identified its five core contributions to management sciences: epistemological coherence, theory-building orientation, iterative sampling logic, multi-stage analytical rigour, and adapted trustworthiness criteria.

The original contribution of this paper lies in three specific arguments. First, the comparative paradigm framework (Tables 1 and 2) provides a structured basis for management researchers to make explicit and informed methodological choices rather than defaulting to convention. Second, the argument for the specific suitability of CGT to social entrepreneurship and cooperative management research in the Global South - grounded in the heterogeneity of the phenomenon, the processual character of social value creation, and the cultural embeddedness of entrepreneurial behaviour - advances a line of methodological reasoning largely absent from the existing management literature. Third, the explicit discussion of CGT's limitations addresses a gap in methodological advocacy scholarship and strengthens the credibility of the framework by acknowledging the conditions under which it is and is not appropriate.

This paper also challenges the prevailing assumption in management doctoral training that methodology is a technical box to be ticked rather than an epistemological commitment to be made. The choice of CGT is not a pragmatic response to the unavailability of large datasets; it is a principled methodological decision with significant implications for the kind of theory that can be generated, the claims that can be made, and the management knowledge that can be produced. In research contexts - such as rural Morocco, or more broadly the Global South - where imported analytical frameworks systematically distort what is observed, CGT's insistence on allowing the field to generate its own theory is not a methodological preference but a scholarly obligation.

Future research should extend the methodological agenda in three directions: the development of CGT-adapted quality assessment frameworks specifically calibrated to management research in the Global South; comparative multi-site CGT designs that enable limited cross-contextual theorisation while preserving contextual depth; and the integration of digital data sources - social media, platform interactions, digital cooperative governance records - into CGT analytical frameworks adapted for the digitalised management contexts that increasingly characterise even rural and peripheral economies.

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