Logical Operations in Theory-Building Case Studies

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Abstract

The logical operations involved in theory-building case studies include deduction (logical consistency and interconnection), induction (applying observations to theory), and abduction (creating, refining, and elaborating theory). The product of theory-building research is an account of a phenomenon in the form of words and other signs. Scientific quality control on theory is accomplished by comparing theoretical statements with observations. In case studies, detailed case observations are compared to detailed clinical theories. Stable meanings of terms and logical (deductive) interconnection allow empirical (inductive) observations on one tenet of a theory to affect confidence in other tenets. Researchers creatively modify their theories by (abductively) adding to them or altering them so that they correspond to accumulating observations. In this way, observations on cases permeate the theories, so that the words of the theory convey the accumulated experience of previous researchers.

doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/jcssp.v5i3.973

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This paper describes building theories from case studies. Several aspects of this process are discussed in the literature. For example, Glaser and Strauss (1967) detailed a comparative method for developing grounded theory, Yin (1981, 1984) described the design of case study research, and Miles and Huberman (1984) codified a series of procedures for analyzing qualitative data. However, confusion surrounds the distinctions among qualitative data, inductive logic, and case study research. Also, there is a lack of clarity about the process of actually building theory from cases, especially Case-based knowledge forms an essential element of the evidence base for counselling and psychotherapy practice. This book provides the reader with a unique introduction to the conceptual and practical tools required to conduct high quality case study research that is grounded in their own therapy practice or training. Drawing on real-life cases at the heart of counselling and psychotherapy practice, John McLeod makes complex debates and concepts engaging and accessible for the trainees and practitioners at all levels, and from all theoretical orientations. Key topics covered in