QDA Workshop – Coding Text Data

The only way to develop skills in coding data is to practice. Today that is what we will do. You can code observations, talk and text. So how do we do that?

You can code using 'a priori' codes (in vitro codes) or you can code using in vivo codes grounded in the respondents talk or text. You can code thematically or conceptually.

Note the danger of coding using 'a priori' codes is using other people's words to give meaning to your text. If you do this by using a generally accepted theoretical concept then you must ensure that the way you use the term is exactly the same as the way others interpret it. For example, if you code some text relating to monetary economics as 'quantitative easing' you would need to be sure that you understand the definition of the term as it is generally accepted in use by other economists.

Practicalities
Let's begin by explaining some terms to help you become familiar with coding processes.

Concepts: These are labels we as researchers place on discrete events and instances of phenomena. E.g. we might observe a group in a restaurant and ask ourselves what is going on here? We may decide from our observations of interaction and talk that it is a family gathering. So we first label it as that 'family gathering' as we continue to observe and listen we realise it is a birthday party so we reliable it as that. This is the beginning of a coding process.

Category: A category is a classification of concepts. We identify categories when we group similar phenomena from our constant comparison of concepts. For example 'family gathering' and 'birthday party' could be grouped in a category as we proceed with our coding. Categories are usually grouped under higher order and more abstract concepts. For example, 'group ties' in our previous example might be a category.

Coding: is a process of analyzing data

Code notes: Are a product of analyzing data. These are referred to as memos.

Open coding: A process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data.

Properties: Attributes or characteristics pertaining to a category.

***Dimensions*:** Location of properties along a continuum.

Dimensionalizing: The process of breaking down a property into dimensions.

These ideas have come from sociology and in particular the tradition of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969),which grounded theory methodology (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967) is based on. QDA – Coding has adopted this approach of coding often referred to as the 'constant comparative' method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

If you want to develop thematic or conceptual codes this is as far as you need go. If you proceed to a 'grounded theory' study you will go further using axial and selective coding. Grounded theories build rather than test theory in a rigorous process of 'good science' helping the analyst to avoid bias through assumptions and preconceptions and by grounding explanations (theories) into "a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents," (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

Specialist linguistic or discourse analysis
If you pursue linguistic analytic techniques then you will need to learn those separately. Particular structuralist or semiotic analysis will require you to become familiar with those approaches. Similarly, if you adopt discourse analysis you will need to become familiar with the approach. These are analytic tools not coding as such.

Data can be coded line by line, by paragraph or by a whole document. The level of detail depends on the context and the researcher choice. For example, if an interview transcript has many issues covered as part of the interview it may be necessary to do coding line by line to capture the meanings in the data. If your interview was conducted in discrete sections then you may be able to code by paragraphs representative of the discrete sections in your interview. If the whole text focused on a single issue then you may want to code the whole text as being in that category.

STEPS
1. You begin coding concepts
2. You group concepts into categories using the 'constant comparative method'

Making comparisons and asking questions
Concepts are the basic unit of analysis in GT – you can count raw data but you cannot relate or talk about them easily. Thematic coding is similar to the way I explain open coding. Therefore you need to conceptualise to generate meaning. For example, you may listen to a conversation between two people at work and you may hear some very crude and aggressive language at first you may label this as 'bullying' possibly because you are sensitised to this in your professional role as a Personnel Manager and it is something you have read about and it appears in every professional journal you read as well as in popular press and media coverage. So being sensitised as you listen you become concerned and label the event as 'bullying'. However, as you continue to listen to this conversation it becomes clearer that this talk is equally aggressive, crude and yet jovial on both sides. In fact after some time you begin to reassess your label and decide that what is taking place here is 'banter' with neither individual being bullied but each taking care of themselves in what is still a crude, aggressive tone but more light hearted than you originally thought. Thus you have managed to remove your preconceptions and assumptions and become more open minded to the event itself. Your original interpretation has been reinterpreted through a constant comparison method.

There may be a role for theories in the constant comparisons you make as a researcher but you need to ensure that you avoid bias. Just as a quantitative researcher working with numbers avoids bias through sampling numbers and applying appropriate statistical texts so must the qualitative researcher working with words/text. This is achieved through sampling and through the constant comparison method.

Another example

I am sitting in an airport lounge waiting for a flight. I position myself close to the video screen so I can see flight codes, times and destinations. When I enter the lounge I am anxious to get settled and look at the screen checking my boarding pass and making sure I have not missed the flight or that I am near to the gate and so on. As I relax I begin to observe people around me. I begin to take interest in what they are doing. The man opposite is reading a newspaper open at the sport pages. The lady next to me is staring at her iphone and rolling through text messages. The couple across the aisle are gazing into each others eyes and touching each other affectionately. She, occasionally, whispering in his ear and he stroking her. But what are all these people doing? Well actually they are waiting for a flight like me. So I conceptually label or code all this behaviour as 'waiting'. But you will have noticed from this brief text that there are different types of waiting. There is my anxious waiting making sure I am in the right place, checking times, gates etc. There is Mr Sports relaxed waiting reading the sports pages of the newspaper. There is Ms iphone scrolling through text and there is the adoring couple gazing into each others eyes. All of them 'waiting'. Waiting can be anxious, relaxed, active, affection. These are the properties I have observed in this concept of waiting. I can now dimensionalise the properties.

Category	**Properties**	**Dimensions**
Waiting	anxious	High…….low
	relaxed	More…….less
	active	Always….never
	affectionate	Often……never
	duration	Long…….short

My concept of waiting has become a category in its own right to which I have assigned properties from my observations and I have added dimensions to each property. This is enabling me to build a theory or an explanation of differences and similarities revolving around the concept of waiting. What is waiting? What does waiting mean? How do we wait? Who waits? When do they wait?

References:

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