

Developing coherent understanding

You are nearing the end of a long road. As you draw near to your destination your pace quickens a little, and yet at times the end still seems so far away. Critical insights and critical decisions are needed to sharpen the focus of your work, and to bring it to a coherent conclusion where data, methods, and product all 'dance to the same tune'; with arguments and evidence drawn together to support the critical 'take home message' or thesis you wish to present.

In this chapter you will find:

- guidelines to help you clarify your focus;
- guidelines for making use of rich, interpretive description;
- strategies to integrate your theoretical understanding;
- a range of models that integrate and convey a key understanding;
- tips and tricks for bringing it together.

Even while you are putting it all together, you are still refining your analysis.

Coherent understanding?

Coherence: clear, comprehensible, articulate, lucid, rational, sound, logical, consistent, reasoned; logically or aesthetically consistent and fitting together as a harmonious or credible whole (Encarta Dictionary, 2010). That sounds like an appropriate goal for your writing about your work!

You planned for coherence in design when you began your project (cf. Chapter 2). Now it's time to consider how you might create the kind of coherent conclusions and presentation that will do justice to your research, your topic, your participants – and convince others of the value of your work. This coherence will, in the first instance, be found in the goals you set for your work.

- ▶ This is the time to revisit your vision of what you were hoping to achieve, your original purpose statement, and the questions that flowed from that.
- ▶ If you have moved on, then map out carefully how things have changed, and why. The chances are that your project has taken you into paths never considered at the outset.

- ▶ Work from that to develop a renewed vision of what your project might achieve, and what questions you can answer. (It is likely that your specific questions will have changed more than your overall purpose.)
- ▶ From that, think through to the form your findings might take to answer those questions and meet your purpose, and use that to guide you in bringing everything together.

There are times when you think it will never come together

You're drowning in data, codes, stories, maps, and matrices, with memos everywhere – will you ever have a coherent story to tell?

In many ways, this is like having a large set of building blocks, and experimenting with the different ways their form and structure enable and constrain what you are capable of constructing. (Thorne, 2008: 167)

Persistence and immersion are the keys to the process here:

- ▶ Review your memos for consistent ideas, themes, and concepts flowing through them.
- ▶ Tell someone about your project, perhaps making a recording as you do. Gradually you will be able to tell it in three or five minutes rather than an hour (quite a few theses have 'come together' over my kitchen bench, as dinner was being prepared).
- ▶ Explore existing substantive and general theory for unifying ideas.
- ▶ If you have developed an explanatory theory or core concept, focus other concepts and elements of what you have found around that; if they don't fit, work on resolving the contradictions; if they don't belong, edit them out and save them for another day.

There is more than one type of what 'together' is

This book has had an academic orientation with a consequent bias toward theory building, but not all projects will conclude with a neat theoretical statement that encapsulates the core of everything you have found. This is particularly so for non-thesis projects, for projects that have a more practice oriented or professional focus, or for projects that are simply exploratory, designed to 'suss out' the field in preparation for a further phase of work. Perhaps, from your data-driven research, you have written a novel or created a performance that will convey an important message or provide an insightful interpretation of some aspect of the human condition? A report for a sponsoring body or for public consumption will be constructed differently from an academic paper or dissertation based on the same project. Even where you do end up with a central process or concept to frame your work around, there will likely be 'ifs and buts' – divergences, differences, and variations that you need to explain.

When you emphasise description, you want your reader to see what you saw. When you emphasize analysis, you want your reader to know what you know. When you emphasize interpretation, you want your reader to understand what you yourself have understood. In different ratios, for different purposes, we try to accomplish all three. (Wolcott, 1994: 412)

I would argue, however, that even if your primary goal is largely achieved with description it is useful to go beyond that.¹ Lyn Richards (2009: 135) likened raw description to describing the scene of a crime without trying to solve the crime. For example, if you have been funded to identify how people have responded to a new development in housing styles, think about how those people understand housing, or 'home', and its relationship to family and security. Then you could identify some principles that would guide future innovative housing developments, and so on. Don't just summarise your data, or think that it is sufficient to 'allow your participants to speak'.

There is likely to be more than one 'together' from any project

What is the main message you want to come out of your research? Is it the same for all purposes and all stakeholders? A paper generally should be written around a single 'take-home message'; a dissertation will necessarily be more complex, although it is typically putting forward a central thesis that brings together the work you have done. There have been quite a few occasions when I have sat down with a late-candidacy doctoral student to help sort out which thesis he or she wants to write out of three or four equally plausible possibilities. The questions you face now, therefore, are:

- What is most important for now, and what can be put off for the next report, paper, or project?
- What can you realistically achieve with the time and resources at your disposal?

Setting aside some of what you have found does not mean you have wasted effort (as if learning through experience can ever be wasted effort); you will be able to make opportunities to present each of those other ideas in other forums, or you will develop them through further research, or perhaps you will have students who can take up one or other of the issues you have raised. When Lynn Kemp (cf. Box 10.10;) interviewed her participants with a spinal injury, they didn't just talk about community services (the focus of her project), they also discussed at length issues around personal relationships, employment, further education, and leisure and recreation. These 'chunks' of data became an ideal base for student projects in an environment where she was no longer able to dedicate the necessary time to develop them herself.

¹Going the 'extra mile' has two important consequences: (1) you will be offered further contracts or opportunities to conduct research; (2) if you are in the 'game' of applying for (university-based) research grants, you will need to have produced theoretically oriented papers from your commercial contract projects to convince the assessors of those applications that you are capable of doing so, and that what you want to achieve in the new project cannot be met through contract research (Bazeley, 1998).

What will be sufficient?

Lyn Richards has observed that a satisfactory outcome offers more than your participants could have reported. In *Handling qualitative data* (2009: 146), she suggests five signs of sufficiency for an analysis:

- simplicity – a ‘small polished gem of a theory, not a mere pebble of truism’ that reflects what you have learned from your data;
- elegance and balance – well-crafted, grounded in data, and coherent;
- completeness – it explains all: ‘nothing is left sticking out, unconsidered or unexplained’;
- robustness – it doesn’t fall over with new data; and
- it makes sense to relevant audiences (even if they disagree).

I have a Welsh Springer Spaniel dog. When he was younger, it was fascinating to watch him cross a field. He would course back and forth in what appeared to be a very indirect route until he picked up a scent: his brain made the connection with rabbit, and so then he would move rapidly and directly in line with that scent. Coherence and sufficiency require that, having moved along a tortuous and uncertain path until you have found the scent, you make the connections and you are then able to progress directly to the goal.

Coherence through description

Description has been written about earlier as a tool for analysis. The focus now shifts to ways to generate description, based on analysis, that will be useful in your study and ultimately for your audience. Description continues to have benefits for deeper analysis, in so far as the exercise of recording the detail of events and experiences always prompts further reflective thought and interpretation. It is also, for many, a good place to start because it is ‘doable’.

To a greater or lesser extent, descriptive writing will always have a place in the record of a study and may indeed be the primary component of the final product – if that is what best suits the purpose of the study (Sandelowski, 2000; Stake, 1995). As noted by Wolcott:

Description provides the foundation upon which qualitative inquiry rests. Unless you prove to be gifted at conceptualizing or theorizing, the descriptive account will usually constitute the major contribution you have to make. The more solid the descriptive basis, the more likely it will survive changing fads and fashions in reporting or changing emphases in how we derive meaning from our studies. Give your account a firm footing in description. (2009: 27)

There are wide differences of opinion expressed in the literature, however, regarding the issue of whether descriptive reporting from data constitutes ‘research’. Atkinson is one who

want[s] to insist that data should be analysed, and not just reproduced and celebrated (as sometimes happens with life-histories, and some visual materials) ... Consequently, there

is too much social research that collects, reproduces and celebrates individual 'stories', without grounding them in a sustained analysis of their forms and functions. (2005: 11)

What role then should description play in a research report? When and how can it be useful? There would be few who would argue with Wolcott's directive to 'start with a straightforward description of the setting and events' (2009: 27) – as outlined below. It is the use of a descriptive style of reporting as a major vehicle of communication that is more contentious. Descriptive reporting has been justified as a legitimate outcome of research:

- when it provides straightforward answers to practical questions for practitioners and policy makers (Sandelowski, 2000; Thorne, 2008); or
- when it presents sufficiently detailed information to allow listeners and readers to understand an experience 'as it really is' and to draw their own meanings and significance (Colaizzi, 1978; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995).²

As ethnographers, Emerson et al. seek 'to use and balance this tension between analytic propositions and local meanings' (1995: 170) by producing a narrative that incorporates analytic themes or concepts but presents them through data-centred 'tales' that will interest an outside audience.³ The 'persuasive force' of ethnographic writing derives from an 'interplay of concrete exemplification and discursive commentary' (Atkinson, 1990: 103). Even if your task is a practical evaluation or synthesis, Pawson (2006) argues it should comprise a theoretical component, and Smith et al. (2009) suggest that writing an *interpretive* phenomenological analysis involves interweaving analytic commentary with the raw extracts that are included as evidence.

Situating the study

Description of the context, sample, and cases for the study is an important *preliminary* step to complete for analysis, so that both analyst and reader can make sense of and position the results of the study.

Begin your account by outlining the physical, social, organisational, political, historical, religious, and/or cultural context in which the study occurred, so that the reader can 'locate' the study. Within that broader context, note how unique or representative were the particular people, objects, or places studied. Then focus on the events and actions you will be writing about, any aspects that are relevant to your

²This raises the issue of whether 'drawing meaning and significance' is the job of the researcher or the reader. There is a danger that this approach can degenerate into the presentation of 'undigested' data as a form of final report.

³See Barbara Tedlock (2000) for a very comprehensive listing of ethnographic studies presented in a variety of non-traditional formats. Many of these have become classics in the field. Again, there is a danger that the inexperienced writer will focus on the tale and neglect the deeper analytic and theoretical content.

analyses. For example, these might include physical, socioeconomic, and service provision characteristics of the location where data were gathered in an evaluation of a community intervention; the design of the building, the structure of staff roles, and the characteristics of the target client group in a welfare service; or the philosophy of service and discursive practices surrounding welfare in that service. Much of this information will have been recorded during the processes of data gathering and early analysis (cf. Chapters 3 and 4), but other details will have been omitted; assumed knowledge and tacit understandings need to be made explicit.

You will, of course, also need to situate your study substantively (within the literature on your topic) and theoretically, if your data and analyses are to contribute to a broader understanding of the knowledge and issues covered by them.

Rich description

The expression 'thick description' is frequently quoted in writing about qualitative analysis. The term originated with Gilbert Ryle (1971), who had used it in presenting his theory of mind to demonstrate that mental processes (mind) were evidenced in behaviour, rather than being a separate entity. Ryle's example, taken up and extended by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), was to consider the meaning of briefly closing one eye. This could simply be the result of a tic, or it could be a wink that is communicating a secret understanding, or perhaps it is an observer who is parodying someone else's wink. Because the description of an action needs contextual information and an explanation of the cultural significance (signified intentions and meanings) of the action for it to convey meaning, Geertz argued that thick description was an essential element of ethnographic research.

Denzin added a constructivist perspective to the term, part of the trend to see thick description as having an inherent interpretive purpose:

A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. The description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard ... *It contains the necessary ingredients for thick interpretation.* (1989: 83, emphasis added)

Current popularised use of the term has extended it to broadly cover any kind of description that is reasonably detailed. 'How much description is enough to earn the accolade of "thick description"?' asks Harry Wolcott (2009: 94). 'How much context is enough to make a study "contextual"?' To avoid being shallow, how deeply must we delve to present a case "in depth"?' Some classical anthropological works and ethnographies comprise very detailed and full descriptions. Becker describes Agee and Evans' (1941) publication, *Let us now praise famous men*, about

three tenant families during the depression, for example, as a masterpiece of 'minute, detailed description, the kind of description that lets you see how much summary, how much generalization, is contained in the most exhaustive social science descriptions' (1998: 80). Agee and Evans devoted 54 pages, supported by photographs, to describing a sharecropping family's four-roomed shack. Becker noted that while the incredible detail of that account allowed the reader the opportunity to do their own interpreting, in that instance, of the misery of lives lived in these surroundings, the danger is that 'full' description *can* become very trivial and boring. As an anthropologist friend of mine commented when we were discussing this issue, it is important to differentiate between thick description and flowery description. My choice to use the term 'rich' rather than 'thick' is threefold: to imply that description should incorporate a wealth of data-derived 'goodies' within it; to avoid perpetuating the misappropriation of the term that was used by Geertz to convey much more than common descriptive writing; and to avoid any connotation of its simply involving use of a lot of words.

Your ability to produce rich description will depend on your having recorded 'rich data' through long-term involvement, intensive interviews, and careful observation recorded in detailed field notes (Maxwell, 2013: 126). Box 12.2 shows how Leoni Degenhardt (cf. Box 2.10) drew on her journals, notes, transcripts, and literature to construct a richly detailed account of the process of implementing a new approach to learning within the school of which she was principal. Records made throughout the course of the study were essential to that construction.

Box 12.1**Drawing on field journals and other data to create rich description****Radical new pedagogy**

In 1999 an external education consultant had made a significant impact on teachers (I108), helping them to see that students had different ways of learning. However, as discussed earlier, the 2000 student surveys identified that the school still catered more for dependent learners than for independent or collaborative learners. The 2001 strategy set the goal of developing Student Growth Plans [SGPs] for every student and, by 2002, the term 'radical new pedagogy' was in use. This was a contentious term, as the following comments illustrate:

I think it's really interesting how in the first few weeks of my being here, I noticed ... the word 'radical' came on ... Are we radical? And there was a complete fluff ... 'No, we mustn't use the word radical, we're not radical.' And it actually confronted something about the image of the place, you know we're [educating] the nice girls to marry nice boys, it wasn't that we wanted to be radical (laughter). (I108)

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There was ongoing and often heated discussion of the term 'radical' (J200303; IF08). Some HoDs⁴ disliked the term, believing it contained an implied criticism of current teaching and learning, and so did the Implementation Team, who wanted to replace it with 'exciting' or 'innovative' in order not to scare staff. The Implementation Team considered that SGPs needed to be 'marketed' to staff, some of whom were experiencing anxiety and unrest about their jobs (J200303). Despite this, the leadership team determined that the term 'radical' would remain, and would be included in their advertisements for the inaugural Year 7 2004 team members, as the following quote from a member of the leadership team explains:

It is honest to keep it in, as the change IS radical ... If we remove the word, and yet speak about radical, it is a disconnect. (J200303)

By the following month, the angst about 'radical' seemed to have subsided, as this entry in the researcher journal indicates:

We worked through the Year 7 Team member advertisement and conditions. The Implementation Team is now 'over' the radical issue ... they see it as honest to describe the new ways with this word. It helped when they saw the article about the Australian Science and Mathematics School [an innovative school visited by the principal and some other staff] in Adelaide. (J200304)

'Radical new pedagogy' was more than incremental improvement but a profound change in what was taught, how it was taught and assessed, and in the relationships between teacher, learner, and parent. It implied several things:

- 1 a move away from teacher-directed to student-directed learning ...
- 2 authentic learning ...
- 3 a different approach to curriculum design ...
- 4 incorporation of holistic elements.

[Each of these points was discussed in relation to changes at the school and supported by reference to data, theory, and literature.]

Source: Degenhardt, 2006: 163-4

Interpretive description

In so far as choices are made about what to include in a description, what to leave out, how to value different sources, and how to present material, all description is interpretive. Forms of expression chosen also convey a level of interpretation: for example, 'hurrying home' implies a motive not present in 'walking rapidly'; 'heated discussion' (Box 12.1) suggests a level of emotional involvement not present in 'debate'. Interpretation is particularly evident in reports of what was felt, and in meanings attributed to events or actions.

⁴Heads of departments.

Essentially, according to Wolcott (1994: 287), description becomes interpretive through 'mulling'. Build on intensive reading, interpretive memoing, coding, and summarising, and exploration of variations and cases that don't fit. Then cluster these ideas and understandings, sequence and weave them together into an overall account or story that goes beyond thematic reporting. Interpretive description includes the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, and motivations of those who are the subject of the description (Schwandt, 2007: 296). Even with phenomenology, that most descriptive of methodologies, van Manen suggests that 'themes are only fasteners, foci, or threads around which the phenomenological description is facilitated' (1990: 91).

Interpretive description requires an analytic form that extends beyond taking things apart and putting them back together again. It requires that we learn to see beyond the obvious, rigorously testing out that which we think we see, and taking some ownership over the potential meaning and impact of the visions that we eventually present as our findings. (Thorne, 2008: 142)

Thorne goes on to describe 'a good thematic description' as being distinct from a topical summary in so far as it reflects an overall organising structure, so that the description is a part of a new conceptualisation of the issues being researched. It is '*ordered and organized to reveal aspects that would have been obscured through any other presentation framework*' (2008: 173, emphasis added).

Guidelines when writing descriptively

- ▶ Start with full descriptive narrative even if you're not sure about the course your analysis will take – and then cut it as the direction becomes clearer. Keep backups of pre-cut versions as they can be useful to check on later interpretation.
- ▶ The process of writing a narrative, in itself, will prompt further analytic thinking. In particular, look for cases that don't fit, and actions, experiences, or emotions that are incongruous. These will help to jolt you out of your stalled or routine thinking, conventional categories, and things you take for granted.
- ▶ Don't neglect to observe and report the commonplace. Things that seem like 'givens' to you will not necessarily be so for others. People have a tendency to neglect the expected aspects of an environment, and focus on the unusual.
- ▶ If your purpose is to describe, then resist the temptation to intrude on that with researcher interpretive asides. Highlight your interpretive comments until you can decide whether to leave them there, footnote them, or collect them under a new heading to mark the shift in focus.
- ▶ Draw on literary conventions and techniques for presentation to assist in communicating what you have learned, but balance an enthusiasm for unusual forms of presentation with your need to communicate meaningful results in a form that is useful for your audience.
- ▶ Provide case-oriented connecting and contextual detail, to facilitate interpretation. Case analyses and vignettes are often used to illustrate the outcomes (or some other aspect) of a study.

- ▶ Displays communicate powerfully with most audiences, and can help to clarify description for both author and audience (Box 12.2).
- ▶ Use quotations from verbatim transcripts to support or illustrate points being made, but do not rely on them to make the point. One of the best pieces of advice I ever heard regarding use of quotes was from Lyn Richards: write a complete draft of your results with *no quotes* included, before introducing some for illustrative purposes. This helps to ensure your reliance on the set of data as a whole for evidence to support what you are saying, rather than a single quote. One quote is *not* evidence, and should not be tendered as such, although a carefully selected quote can assist in illustrating the point you are making.
- ▶ Where quotes are included, they should be brief, reduced to convey the essential point only.
- ▶ If multiple quotes are being used throughout a set of results, provide an abbreviated form of identification (e.g., a pseudonym that is used consistently through the report) so that the reader can assess whether all are being drawn from the same participant, or widely across the sample.
- ▶ Whether or not you incorporate academic literature into your descriptive writing is very much a question of purpose and style. Emerson et al. (1995) suggest, for ethnographic writing, including literature that highlights your analysis (as in the example in Box 12.1), but in many situations it can be a distraction.

Box 12.2

Using a diagram to help clarify your description⁵

In the process of drafting an article on what makes a good care worker, a doctoral student described the skills used by care workers to build and maintain good relationships with their clients:

Particular skills that were singled out were communication skills, skills in negotiating and managing difficult situations, being able to take initiative and be flexible, to exercise judgement, to be sensitive to and recognise people's needs and to deal with problems as they arose. In order to build a working relationship with people, the participants stated they needed to be able to listen carefully and respond appropriately to the client. They spoke of needing highly developed 'people skills' that would enable care workers to see things from the client's point of view. They spoke of the importance of being able to empathise and connect with people, to be able to talk and to listen when it was appropriate.

Puzzling about how the categories listed in this passage might be more clearly presented led to seeing that the various skills mentioned could be seen as two kinds of communication, with a focus on the centrality of relationship. This suggested the following approach to presenting the skills listed:

Communication skills of care workers were demonstrated in two primary ways:

- through their ability to negotiate and manage difficult situations; and
- through their capacity to listen and respond to the client.

⁵Example adapted from Bazeley (2009: 11–12).

Together, these skills reflect the practical and emotive dimensions of an ability to *take account of the client* – a critical feature of what makes for good care work (Figure 12.1).

The student's article could then continue by elaborating on how the different skills involved in each of these two types of communication contributed to what could be seen now as a core process of taking account of the client.

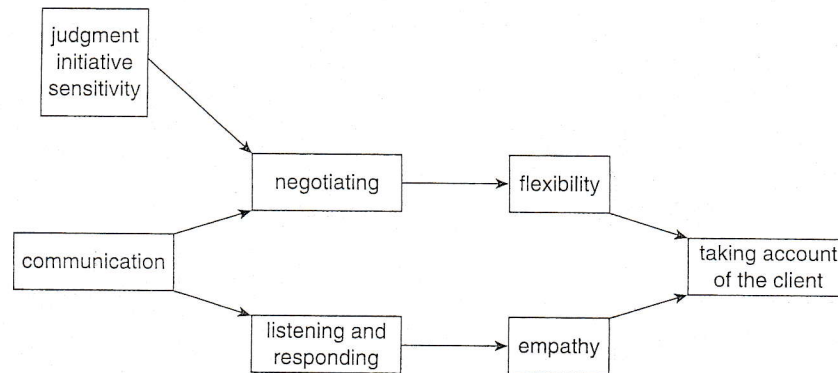


Figure 12.1 The role of communication skills in 'taking account of the client'

Numbers in descriptive reporting

The debates and disputes which arose with the push to carve out a distinct interpretivist and constructivist niche for qualitative research in the 1980s had much to do with stimulating rejection of anything numerical by researchers adopting qualitative methods. Nearly 30 years later, the debates have moved on, yet some still approach incorporating numbers in a qualitative report with great anxiety. Counting things reflects the 'numbered nature of phenomena', however, and is part of the descriptive process (Sandelowski, 2001: 231). Counting recognises that all data inherently combine quantitative and qualitative features. Numbers, as much as words, are the result of an interpretive process that depends, for example, on how questions are framed, how participants respond to those questions, and how the researcher interprets those responses and the patterning of responses.

- Use of counts communicates more effectively and reliably than does use of vague terms such as 'most' or 'some' to indicate more or less frequent occurrence of some feature in the text.
- Counts can be viewed as reflecting the importance of various emergent themes, although it can be argued that frequency and importance are not necessarily synonymous (e.g., Seale's 2001 study, described in Box 6.12, made use of counts for this purpose).
- Counting summarises patterns in data, such as from comparative and relational matrix analyses, and can allow possible interrelationships to be more easily identified for further exploration (cf. Chapters 9 and 10).

- Counting, as a counter to biased impressions, helps to maintain analytical integrity (Boxes 12.3 and 12.4).
- Counts prompt further analysis: why are so few in this group recorded as saying X (Box 12.4)?
- Numbers help to present evidence and can be used in arguing for the strength of a conclusion. They are particularly valuable when you want to persuade policy makers to take action.

Whether one should use counts of the number of participants who mention something or the overall frequency with which something is mentioned depends on the context in which counts are being obtained and used and the possible meanings of a zero (0) count in that context. Using codes that do not have a high degree of specificity, relying on numbers to tell the whole story, and not providing sufficient context to allow the reader to properly interpret the numbers are also cause for concern if you are using counts derived from qualitative coding (Bazeley, 2010a; Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafl, 2009). If you are drawing conclusions based on numbers, beware:

- ❶ Numbers should *not* be reported in a way that suggests a representative sample where this did not exist (i.e., you cannot make *statistical* generalisations to a population from the kinds of samples used in the majority of qualitative studies).
- ❷ If you are drawing conclusions specifically from numerical comparisons, you should have a basic understanding of probability theory (specifically, the central limit theorem) in relation to sample error and hypothesis testing; and
- ❸ Avoid reporting in a form that gives a false sense of precision or rigour.⁶
- ❹ Beware reducing evidence to the amount of evidence. Evidence must be placed in the context of an account that reflects what has been learned from interpreting the text, sound, images, movement – perhaps even statistical reports – that comprised the data for your qualitative study.

Box 12.3

Using counts to challenge researcher impressions

The text search tools provided by software can often be usefully employed to check impressions. A workshop participant studying the growing acceptance of community-owned banks was sure that people trusted these smaller cooperatives more than the 'Big Four' corporate banks. She used text search to locate all the times 'trust' was mentioned, and found it eight times in her 20 interviews – but each time was as part of an interviewer's question. To resolve this, my workshop participant needed to check each interview for the context of her question: was she leading the interviewee, or was she responding to and clarifying something the interviewee had already been saying? As Lyn Richards has observed: 'Every researcher has a war

⁶In quantitative work, for example, the convention in reporting numbers is to not give more decimal places than were used in gathering the data; a difference (e.g., of 0.2°C in body temperature) might make for a statistically significant difference between (moderately large) groups, but not have any meaning or significance for the individuals in those groups.

story of a dominant theme that grabbed their attention, a word that seemed to occur everywhere, but which in the hard light of day was being contributed seldom and then mainly by the members of the research team!' (2009: 164–5).

Box 12.4

Using counts to maintain analytical integrity

Heidi declared that she had identified a number of universal characteristics of people who adopt a pattern of lifelong learning. She was struggling, however, to see where to go in her write-up beyond saying that, and listing the characteristics. As my conversation with her continued, she began to talk about some characteristics being more important than others. How did she know that, I asked? She then revealed a list of the characteristics, ordered by the number of sources coded for each. Ah! Each source represented a single case – and not all characteristics were coded for all 12 cases. How then could she say that *all* these characteristics were universal? Importantly, this observation sent her off into an exploration of why some were coded for only some cases, who wasn't coded for particular characteristics, and so on – thus enriching and potentially changing the whole direction of her analysis.

The ethics of descriptive reporting

Descriptive reporting always carries the likelihood that the identity of your informants or participants will be evident to others, particularly in a report based on a study undertaken within a particular community or organisational setting.

- In some studies, participants explicitly give their permission for their identity to be revealed, and indeed, may request that their real names be used. This is the exception, rather than the rule. In these cases, ethical researchers will assess whether their participants are correctly weighing the risks associated with disclosure. They will point out any possible consequences to them of such revelation, such as reactions from within their community, and will clear the text (or photographs) with them before publication (Guenther, 2009).
- Where confidentiality and anonymity have been promised, unless a participant is simply one among many and not able to be distinguished from 'the mass', identifying details associated with description of individuals or particular groups or quotes from individuals will need to remain undisclosed, or be altered to inhibit recognition by the likely (and any possible) audiences for the report. This can require more than simply providing pseudonyms or adjusting ages; even if identities are 'disguised' or simply not reported, someone within a particular community can be recognisable, for example, from the form of expression contained within an illustrative quote.⁷

⁷In a recent report of a management study within a smallish organisation, I ensured that any quotes contained in the report were representative of multiple comments – and made this clear in the report and to the manager. She, nevertheless, still tried to attribute particular comments to particular people – often wrongly.

The inclusion of photographs or other visual material within a report adds a further complication, primarily with regard to the issue of anonymity – something that is not dealt with just by pixelating faces or covering eyes within a photograph. Claudia Mitchell (2011) provides an example of how something as innocuous as a pair of slippers, photographed by a young girl as part of a ‘feeling safe’ or ‘feeling not so safe’ project, could potentially cause a problem if displayed and seen in that context by her stepfather, who routinely used them to hit her. In their discussion paper based on a series of focus groups and interviews, Rose Wiles and colleagues point to the ‘ongoing tension between, on the one hand, research participants’ rights and researchers’ desire for participants to be seen and heard and, on the other hand, researchers’ real and perceived responsibility to protect participants’ (Wiles, Coffey, Robison, & Heath, 2010: 2). These are situated decisions that call for individual judgements, making it difficult to set guidelines (e.g., for institutional ethics review boards). Wiles et al. ‘make the case that (i) respondents’ status and “vulnerability” in combination with (ii) the nature of the research and (iii) the ways that visual (and other) data are used and presented should be key issues in making informed decisions about anonymity’ (2010: 17), with identifiable images linked to interpretive (‘psychologising’) text or text relating to sensitive issues being the most problematic and most likely to require anonymisation.

- You might consider seeking additional permission *after* an interview regarding which of various ways interviewees are willing to have you use their story. This could be, for example, as one of three options: (a) using it only as part of an aggregated dataset for writing articles, (b) for use also as an anonymised example in a written report or text, or (c) using it as a specific example in a written report or text with the person and/or other data about them identified. In that case (and perhaps also for option b), the text of the example needs to be cleared with the person from whom it was obtained before publication. As well as gaining specific permission for use, this step also ensures the accuracy of the report.

Theoretical coherence

Description was a good place to start. Now you need to move on. If you’ve been following the general pathway proposed in this book, you will have progressed from empirical observation to conceptual ideas, to exploring relationships between those ideas, and perhaps to identifying explanations for how the things you observed happen or work. The task now is to bring those ideas together to build and present an integrated model, a theoretical statement (a thesis), or a coordinated picture of what you have found that will answer your questions and achieve your purpose.

The magic of theory ‘emerging from the data’

In 1994, Janice Morse lamented the inability of researchers to describe *how* they analysed data, and their tendency to summarise the process of theory development as ‘emerging from the data’. Nearly 20 years later, this is still a common

The inclusion of photographs or other visual material within a report adds a further complication, primarily with regard to the issue of anonymity – something that is not dealt with just by pixelating faces or covering eyes within a photograph. Claudia Mitchell (2011) provides an example of how something as innocuous as a pair of slippers, photographed by a young girl as part of a ‘feeling safe’ or ‘feeling not so safe’ project, could potentially cause a problem if displayed and seen in that context by her stepfather, who routinely used them to hit her. In their discussion paper based on a series of focus groups and interviews, Rose Wiles and colleagues point to the ‘ongoing tension between, on the one hand, research participants’ rights and researchers’ desire for participants to be seen and heard and, on the other hand, researchers’ real and perceived responsibility to protect participants’ (Wiles, Coffey, Robison, & Heath, 2010: 2). These are situated decisions that call for individual judgements, making it difficult to set guidelines (e.g., for institutional ethics review boards). Wiles et al. ‘make the case that (i) respondents’ status and “vulnerability” in combination with (ii) the nature of the research and (iii) the ways that visual (and other) data are used and presented should be key issues in making informed decisions about anonymity’ (2010: 17), with identifiable images linked to interpretive (‘psychologising’) text or text relating to sensitive issues being the most problematic and most likely to require anonymisation.

- You might consider seeking additional permission *after* an interview regarding which of various ways interviewees are willing to have you use their story. This could be, for example, as one of three options: (a) using it only as part of an aggregated dataset for writing articles, (b) for use also as an anonymised example in a written report or text, or (c) using it as a specific example in a written report or text with the person and/or other data about them identified. In that case (and perhaps also for option b), the text of the example needs to be cleared with the person from whom it was obtained before publication. As well as gaining specific permission for use, this step also ensures the accuracy of the report.

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lament. Theory 'emerges' for those who have thoroughly worked the data, *who are steeped in it*, and who, at a particular time (often when waking up, in the shower, cooking dinner, out walking, or talking to a colleague), have that flash of insight, an 'Aha!' moment, where they see how things might come together. Not only does this require thorough preparation, it also requires follow-up work where the flashy, insightful idea is pursued back through the data, to check that it really does have some meaning and significance (it often doesn't). The idea or theory, then, emerges through your working to achieve comprehensive knowledge and deep understanding of the data; it does not emerge 'out of the blue'. To a significant extent, increasing sensitivity to the data comes through the use of intensive analytic memos, through which you refine and test ideas. Using those memos to dialogue with yourself will contribute strongly to your capacity to record what you have found, as well. So – no magical emergence, just hard work occasionally brightened by fresh understanding or awareness of a new connection that 'makes sense'.

'Making sense' theoretically

What does it mean to develop theoretical coherence or integration? Is coherent theory necessarily explanatory? Richards (2009: 177) argues that most theory is just about what goes with what. It seems to me, though, that there always has to be something holding those things together; things are associated because one is influencing the other, or because something else is influencing them both – and so process and explanation of some sort come into play.

A theory that transcends description by integrating what has been learned from data to present the 'gestalt' will have:

- abstracted from the particular to the general, with concepts that apply across cases and potentially to related areas beyond those cases and the immediate topic;
- a fabric that links those concepts into a coordinated structure with implications for the phenomenon being studied;
- detail that reflects the complexity of the situation studied, the multiplicity of factors that create, sustain, and change events, processes, outcomes; but also
- a simplicity that allows an observer to see and understand the core of the theory;
- it will 'fit' with data, 'work' as an explanation of those data, without loose ends;
- it will 'ring true' – making sense to the participants and other stakeholders; and
- it will have relevance beyond the specific data that gave rise to it.

Shapes of theoretical coherence: what might yours look like?

There are multiple ways you might pull your fragments of theoretical analysis with their supporting data together into an integrated whole, to say something worthwhile, and so a coherent presentation of what you have found might take any one of a variety of forms. These include (but are not restricted to):

- integrative concepts that have explanatory power;
- classifications and typologies that reveal and clarify;

- identification of patterns and pathways;
- presentation of a thesis – a propositional relationship;
- drawing on existing theory for coherent explanation;
- an extension to or refinement of existing theory;
- a model demonstrating essential relationships and processes for your theory.

You might add to this list from your own reading of the literature in your discipline area.

Integrative concepts that have explanatory power

- ▶ Present a detailed analysis of the dimensions and structure of an important concept, showing how these retain their essential character as they become focused or extended under different circumstances (cf. Chapter 8). Show indicators for those dimensions to guide operationalisation of the concept so it can be used in further research.
- ▶ You have developed a *new* concept to integrate your observations. For example, Morse (1999) reported how she and her colleagues developed 'compathy' to describe the way nurses interacted with and calmed patients in the trauma room. Your concept will need now to be described and defined, and its explanatory value explained.
- ▶ You have been engaged in developing a grounded theory: integrate the main concepts and processes you have identified around a core category and/or process (cf. Chapter 11 and Box 12.5).
- ▶ Show how a narrator 'performs' his story, for example, to preserve his sense (self-concept) of masculinity in the face of debilitating disability (Riessman, 2008).

Box 12.5

Practice justification as an integrating concept for risk factor management in primary health services

Rachel Laws, at the University of New South Wales, studied the implementation of brief lifestyle intervention for risk factor management⁸ in primary care practice for one metropolitan and two rural community nursing and allied health teams (Laws, Kemp, Harris, Powell Davies, Williams, & Eames-Brown, 2009). She used a mixed methods approach, with a major component based on grounded theory methodology. Her overall model (shown in Figure 12.2) 'suggests that clinician perceptions shape their risk factor management practices through the process of *practice justification*' (2009: 5) – a process supported through *commitment* and beliefs about *capacity*. She then addressed the issue of how various patient, provider, and contextual factors impacted on practitioners' likelihood to engage in risk factor management.

⁸Known as SNAP – intervention to improve risk factors related to Smoking, Nutrition, Alcohol and Physical exercise.

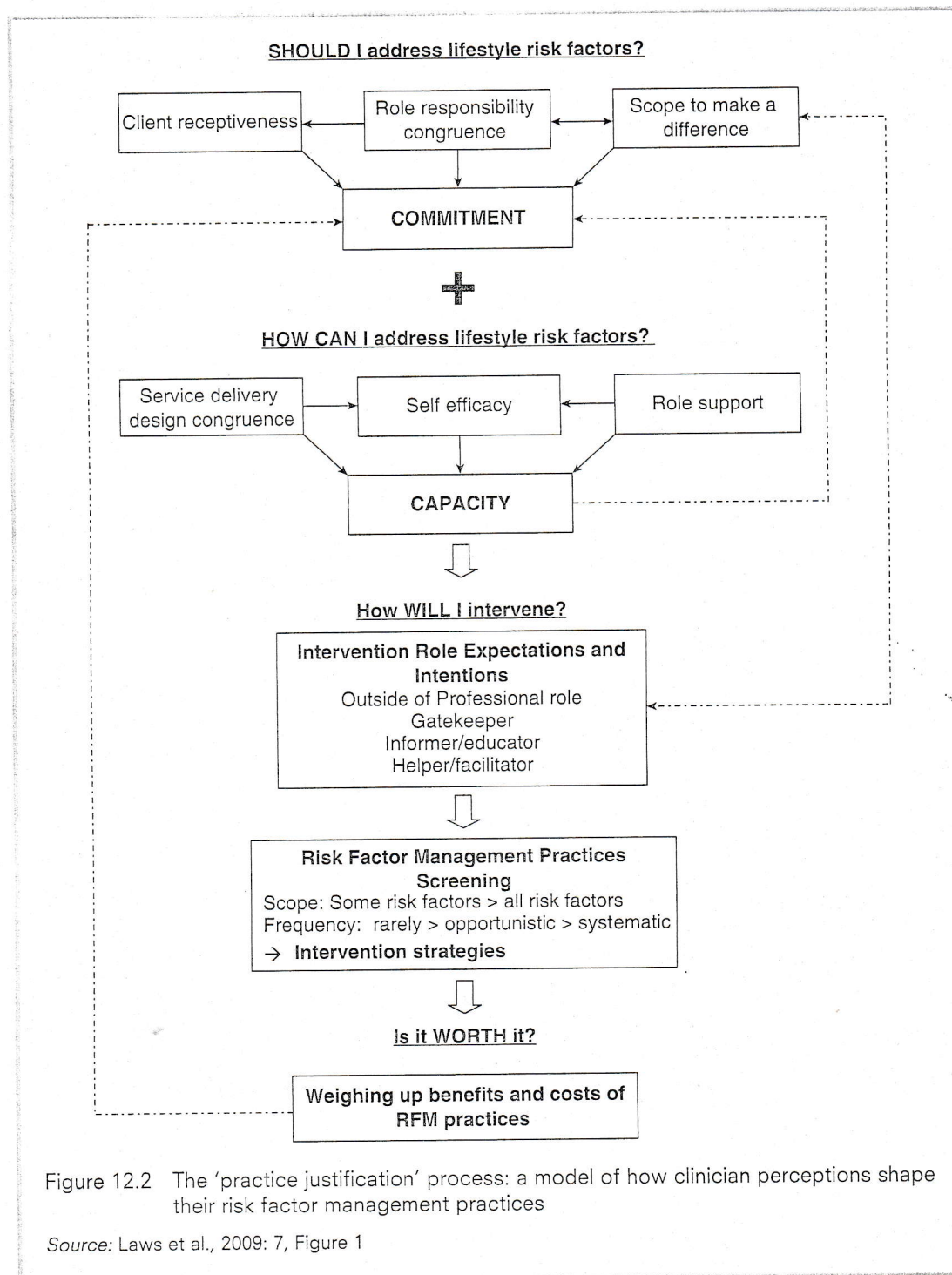


Figure 12.2 The 'practice justification' process: a model of how clinician perceptions shape their risk factor management practices

Source: Laws et al., 2009: 7, Figure 1

Classifications and typologies that reveal and clarify

Classification systems and typologies fall partway between description and theory. While some are very enthusiastic about them, seeing them as a way of clarifying the territory of a subject or phenomenon, others see them as little more than description that doesn't offer anything new. If you are presenting a classification system or typology as the *product* of your study, then each component in it must be based in data rather than speculation, and you will need to take extra care to show how it contributes to knowledge and understanding.

Your classification system or typology might come directly out of the (re)structuring of your coding system; through the cross-classification of two key dimensions; or as a result of clustering concepts derived from your data. Alternative approaches follow:

- ▶ Identify a way of grouping concepts or categories that reflects your participants' ways of describing things (described by Spradley, 1979, as domain analysis) and from which you can theorise about their perspective on the world (or some small part of it at least).
- ▶ Your method of clustering concepts has resulted in a taxonomy that brings order to a mass of concepts such that it will have practical benefits for further work: think of the benefit that has come from Linnaeus' classification of plants, for example. When clustering and ordering of a taxonomy are based on principles that have been derived from the data, this allows the system to deal with new categories, or new information about existing categories.
- ▶ A typology is often built by cross-tabulating two critical dimensions identified in your data. You would then show how doing so, with the resulting 'types' populating each cell, adds to what is known and understood about the processes operating in that setting (Box 12.6). Drawing on the work of Kluge (2000), Sellerberg and Leppänen (2012: 25–30) identified four (potentially overlapping) steps in an analysis, following indexing and annotating data, to develop a typology:
 - compare data fragments to find similarities and differences, leading to identification of dimensions and grouping of cases;
 - locate meaningful relationships among the properties of those narratives grouped together;
 - identify and compare these as types; consider how they differ;
 - theorise the typology by relating it to previously formulated knowledge.
- ▶ Test your typology by asking:
 - Are all cases covered by the typology (without forcing)?
 - Does the pattern hold at all times?

Box 12.6

A typology of bankrupt small-business entrepreneurs

Ann-Mari Sellerberg and Vesa Leppänen (2012) used narrative analysis with positioning theory to develop a typology of bankrupt small-business entrepreneurs in Sweden. Bankrupt entrepreneurs experience a sharp disruption to their economic and social lives, impacting on their ability to make

choices about their business, their reputation, and their professional and personal relationships. In telling their stories, as they reflected on and reconstructed their experience, the 22 entrepreneurs described themselves in relation to their economic activity relative to their economic network, and in their relationships with other economic actors, thus creating the dimensions for construction of a typology (Table 12.1).

Constructing this typology led the authors to then ask (of their data) why the entrepreneurs described themselves so differently, and what the consequences of doing so might be. They found three variables relevant to the 'Why?' question that helped to explain the relative positioning and response of each group of entrepreneurs: the location of the business (large or small community); the integration of the entrepreneur in the community (high or low); and the meaning of doing business (personal or general interest). As the interviews were conducted quite soon after the event, their data regarding consequences were more speculative, but they were able to suggest that the Swedish creditor-friendly model of managing bankruptcy 'may result in a drain of particular types of knowledge and drive from the market' (2012: 75), because it is those who are better integrated into smaller communities who are most likely to withdraw from the market.

Table 12.1 A typology of the economic relationships of bankrupt small-business entrepreneurs

Relationships with economic actors	Position in their economic network	
	Participation	Marginalisation
<i>Equal: able to take initiative and negotiate</i>	The undeterred ($n = 6$)	The analytical ($n = 1$)
<i>Unequal: subordinate, without power to act</i>	The withdrawn ($n = 4$)	The rejected ($n = 11$)

Source: adapted from Sellerberg and Leppänen, 2012: 31, Table 1

Pattern identification

- ▶ Identify and explain a pattern or pathway such that you can build predictions on the basis of it; then you are moving beyond description to theory building. For example, exploration of the career development of early career researchers allowed Laudel and Glaser (2008) to identify critical factors in the process of moving from dependent to independent researcher (cf. Box 9.8).
- ▶ Identify patterns in discursive (or other types of) practices, then 'unpack' them to show how each patterned form of interaction is used, and for what purposes (Antaki et al., 2003).
- ▶ Interpret observed patterns of behaviour for their cultural meaning and relevance. Then bring these together to show their fit within a whole cultural system, and the principles by which that system operates (e.g., Van Maanen, 1979).
- ▶ Place narrative patterns based on elements such as genre and structure within a context that provides the rationale for their development, explains the purpose they serve within that context, and/or provides insights into the life and experience of the narrator (e.g., Frank's 1995 illness narratives; cf. Box 7.5).
- ▶ You have traced the patterned archaeology of events that has allowed your subject to become what it/he/she is. Now it is possible to conceptualise an 'other' – to see a different way of being (Tamboukou, in Andrews et al., 2004).

Argue a thesis – a propositional relationship

This is the classic form in which an integrated theory is presented for a dissertation. In inductively or abductively driven research (cf. Chapter 11) this will typically be presented and argued at or near the end of the work as a conclusion to the research you have conducted. In contrast, if you started from a theoretical proposition, your conclusion will show whether your data supported, modified, or refuted that proposition.

- ▶ Your thesis is introduced, presented, and then explained and supported by use of evidence from the research you have conducted. For example, in my dissertation I argued that: 'Community development is an effective strategy for the promotion of mental health in a disadvantaged community' (Bazeley, 1977). This proposition was elaborated through a series of models (cf. Figures 12.6 and 12.7) and then supported and elaborated from data and literature.
- ▶ Alternatively, put forward a central proposition supported (or refined by) several related propositions for which you have evidence (Box 12.7).
- ▶ Show how the elements you have identified as essential to defining or generating a process or concept (e.g., through a process of analytic induction or theory elaboration) achieve that purpose.

Box 12.7

A thesis with related propositions

John Eastwood's (2011) dissertation was designed to challenge prevailing approaches to epidemiological research by examining the particular issue of maternal depression from an ecological and critical realist perspective (cf. Box 1.2). His thesis was:

In the neighbourhood spatial context, in keeping with critical realist ontology, global-economic, social and cultural level generative powers trigger and condition maternal psychological and biological level stress mechanisms resulting in the phenomenon of maternal depression and alteration of the infants' developmental trajectory. (2011: 409)

He then drew on his empirical findings and an accompanying theoretical framework to put forward 11 (falsifiable) propositions, each elaborated in accompanying models to show context, mechanism, and outcome. These included, for example:

Proposition 4: Maternal psychological stress triggered by 'mismatched' expectation tends to cause (increase) depressive symptoms in the context of loneliness, isolation, lack of emotional support, lack of practical help, limited social network, limited support services, financial stress and poor health. (2011: 419)

Proposition 10: Expectations of mothers (and wives and daughters) is a cultural level mechanism that tends to increase maternal psychological stress in the context of strong bonding social networks, weak bridging networks, language barriers, poor access to services and information, and cultural practices. (2011: 423)

Draw on existing theory for coherent explanation

- Draw on an existing theory to provide a coherent explanation for a pattern you are seeing in your data.

Miles and Huberman (1994: 261) found that in some of their schools, teachers worked extremely hard on implementation of new programmes, and asserted strongly that there had been improvements as a result – improvements for which they found little substantiating evidence. In other sites where there was less personal investment, there were fewer or more accurate claims. To understand the meaning of this pattern beyond those immediate schools, they explored established theories. They dismissed the idea that it was just group conformity to mistaken judgements (Asch's conformity theory), but decided it did fit with Festinger's idea of *effort justification* which states that people justify high levels of effort expended by seeing more results than are really there – a component of his cognitive dissonance theory. This lent plausibility to their finding and gave a theoretical explanation for the patterns they observed in these and other situations (an example of abductive inference drawing).

Similarly Turner (1981), in a grounded theory study, generalised from observing an argument over queuing for cement to conflict over marginal territory to problems of resource allocation, which led him to the relevance of economic demand theory for what he was seeing. He noted that this was very different from starting with economic demand theory and then fitting data to it.

Extend or refine existing theory

- Use your study to elaborate or refine an existing theory. Most refinements will be 'incremental' rather than revolutionary; the latter usually is possible only after a sustained programme of work and reflection, perhaps over a lifetime!

In her study of primary care clinicians' adoption of risk factor management practices (cf. Box 12.5), Rachel Laws found similar associations between patient and contextual factors and lifestyle intervention as had been reported in previous studies, but she then showed how her findings contributed an understanding of *process* to explain those associations. Additionally, she extended theoretical considerations of role adequacy in clinical practice by going beyond commonly used notions of self-efficacy to include the issue of congruence of new practices with current ways of working. Dominant psychological theories of motivation and action, with their primary focus on the role of individual cognitive factors in shaping behaviour, were extended also by her identifying the way in which the service delivery environment also shaped beliefs and practices (Laws et al., 2009).

Demonstrate essential processes and relationships via a model

Models vary in their degree of complexity. They help you to discover, or see anew, what goes with what, as you are 'forced' to find a place for each object and to check each relationship.

- ▶ Rework and refine your original conceptual model or logic model to incorporate what you have learned from your study.
- ▶ Develop a visual model that sums up the key elements of the process you have identified.
- ▶ Show how your theorising about a pattern or pathway works out in practice in one or more settings through a model or series of models.

Examples of models that have been presented in papers, articles, and/or dissertations follow in the next section (see also Figure 12.2).

Coherence through display

Throughout this book I have demonstrated the value of using various forms of display through all stages of a study, from developing a conceptual framework through analysis to developing theory. Let's look now at some ways displays have been used to provide a coherent presentation of the results of an analysis. Treat these as examples, rather than as exact models for you to follow; use them as a point of departure for thinking about your own work.

Even at this stage, the preparation of a visual model, chart, or other form of display will continue to stretch your analytic thinking. It forces you to condense all that you have learned into a restricted space, and consequently to identify what's most important in what you have found for your thesis, report, or article. By using visual strategies well, you can convey a big idea and/or a large amount of information in a small space, but beware the danger of distorting your observations for the sake of simplicity or elegance.

Capturing the essence

I am reminded of the famous quote by Blaise Pascal: 'The present letter is a very long one, simply because I had no leisure to make it shorter.' Lynn Kemp's model (Box 12.8) was built on the basis of much more complex maps of interrelated categories but, in its essential form, it holds within it a wealth of meaning that perfectly summed up both the desires and the experiences of her participants with a spinal cord injury.

Box 12.8

A simple but effective model

In her mixed methods study of people living in the community with varying degrees and levels of spinal cord injury, Lynn Kemp (1999) had evaluated a series of common models for determining need for services and had found that all fell short of achieving their purpose. From her qualitative interviews with 40 participants, supplemented by lengthy additional comments from 30 survey

respondents, she reached an understanding of need for services as being that which would allow the person with a spinal cord injury to fulfil their plan to be 'ordinary' (cf. Box 10.10). Just occasionally, services supported the plan of the person with an injury to engage in ordinary relationships and to make independent choices about daily activities, but more often, in order to receive services, the recipient had to accept difference and fit with predetermined stereotypes: they had to have sufficient (obvious) need to be worthy of services; they had to be dependent but not too dependent; they had no control over how and when those services were provided; and they had to be grateful for receiving them. Her model of this central conclusion came out of careful consideration of categories derived from her participants' narratives and the relationships between those categories, strongly supported by the theoretical and research literature.⁹

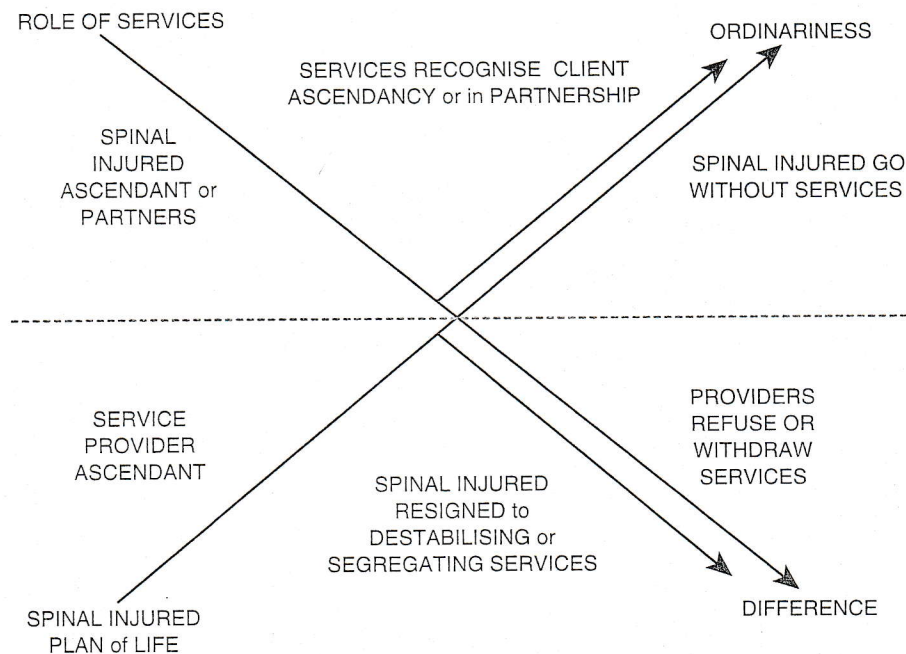


Figure 12.3 Plans of life and the role of services

Source: Kemp, 1999: 177, Figure 27

Tabling a pattern

Not all visual models will be diagrammatic. Carl Auerbach and colleagues (Auerbach, Salick, & Fine, 2006) sought to develop a systematic way of helping clinicians to make decisions about treatment in cases of multicontextual

⁹It was first drawn, however, in a moment of tranquillity in a coffee shop on a serviette with a borrowed pen!

trauma where the sufferer is at risk of post-traumatic stress. Working from a resilience- rather than a damage-based perspective, they used an elaborative grounded theory approach to investigate and theorise the natural process of recovery from trauma, starting from a base in trauma literature. They then explored the relevance of the theoretical constructs suggested by the literature in a series of studies of survivors of five specific, different traumas, modifying the constructs with each successive group (and revisiting earlier data) until no further modifications were needed. From this, they developed a 'stages and issues model of trauma and recovery' (Figure 12.4) that reflected the four stages all of their participants went through (in columns), along with three core issues that arise during recovery (rows). When the model is applied to people experiencing a specific type of trauma, the specific themes populating the cells will vary slightly, but the pattern is the same. This then provides the clinician with a structured procedure for developing an intervention strategy with any particular case.

Modelling a core category and associated processes

Models for core categories with associated conditions and processes typically result from grounded theory studies. Two examples have been seen already: Juliet Corbin's model of 'survival: reconciling multiple realities' in Figure 11.4, and Rachel Laws' model of 'practice justification' in Figure 12.2.

Grounded theory based in symbolic interactionism was used by Landier et al. (2011) to develop and validate a model explaining the process of adherence to

STAGES/ ISSUES	TRAUMATISATION/ SHATTERING	SAFETY	REPROCESSING	INTEGRATION
	DIAGNOSIS AND DESPAIR	CHOOSING TO GO ON	BUILDING A WAY TO LIVE	REENTERING LIFE
STRENGTH	The body fails	Finding an inner strength	Reclaiming the physical body	Moving forward
CONNECTION	Withdrawal from social world	Reaching out	Getting involved	New empathy and giving something back
MEANING	Loss of old life and inability to register	Formulating a plan	Cultivating hope	Finding personal meaning

Figure 12.4 The stages and issues model for PTSD following acquired physical disability

Source: Auerbach et al., 2006: 370, Figure 1

treatment for children and adolescents with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL). Treatment involves essential daily self or caregiver administration of oral chemotherapy, for a period of around two years. The process therefore depended on a parent or caregiver taking responsibility for ensuring treatment was maintained (*doing our part*), with the outcome being mediated by the caregiver and/or patient making the connection between treatment and the disease (older adolescents were most likely to be those who did not maintain strict adherence). From their analysis of interviews with 17 patients and 21 caregivers who had completed treatment, they identified three stages in the process of adherence: *recognizing the threat*; *taking control*; and *managing for the duration*, described through their quite detailed theoretical model (Figure 12.5), with supporting evidence in the text.

Network drawings and flow charts

As suggested by the previous chapter, network drawings and flow charts are a popular and useful way to show the complexity of causal relationships such as are found, for example, in community settings.

I can illustrate the use of a flow chart by reference to my own doctoral work in which I set out to understand the mental health needs of and resources available to people (primarily single or separated women with children) living in a medium-rise section of a public housing estate (Bazeley, 1977). Figure 12.6 provided an overview of the key concepts and overall linkage established between community development and mental health. It was followed by three component charts, each showing in detail the mechanisms (theorised and observed) that played a part in linking specific aspects of community development to components of mental health. The second of these is shown in Figure 12.7.

What was important here, for construction of these diagrams, was that on the journey through my research I progressively clarified key concepts for my research: a three-step definition of mental health relevant to a community context; the implications of disadvantage with respect to mental health based on the literature and then supported by a multi-pronged community study; and a conceptual understanding of community development (which had been an unanticipated component of the project) based on experience in the community that was then supported by literature. These clarifications greatly facilitated my being able to visualise, theorise, and substantiate the links between community development and mental health as I came to the conclusion of my project; indeed, building the final model was possible only because I had undertaken these clarifications (especially as I faced the typical tight deadline by that stage!). The way I often talk about this now with students is to ask them to write, at the end of each section

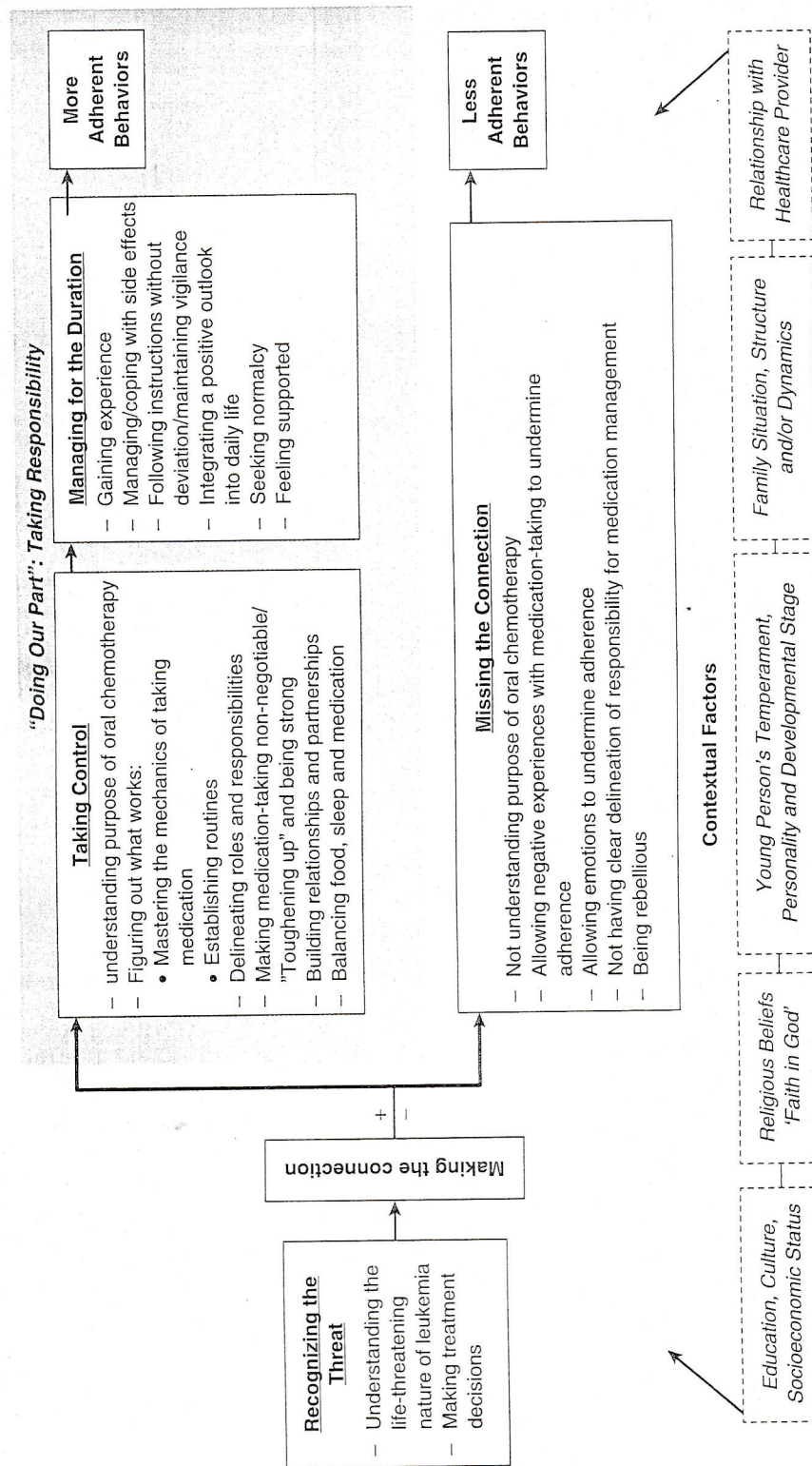


Figure 12.5 'Doing our part': a theoretical model of the process of adherence to oral chemotherapy for children with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia

Source: Landier et al., 2011: 208, Figure 1

of their work, what they are taking forward from that section. This ensures each component of their writing becomes focused and each can then contribute to building a conclusion – as well as providing a valuable 'road map' for the reader on their way through.

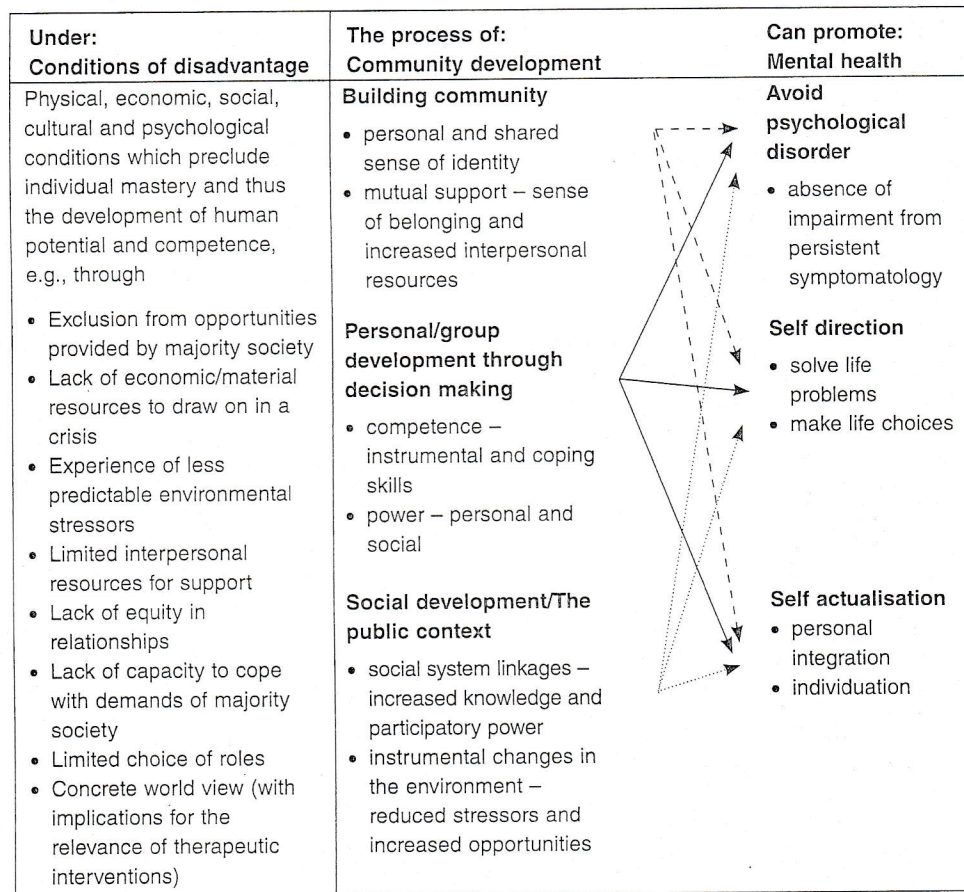


Figure 12.6 Community development as a strategy to promote mental health in a disadvantaged population

Source: Bazeley, 1977: 424, Figure 11.1¹

¹Adapted from the original for clarity in the absence of the accompanying text: column 1 has been added, detail in columns 2 and 3 has been reduced.

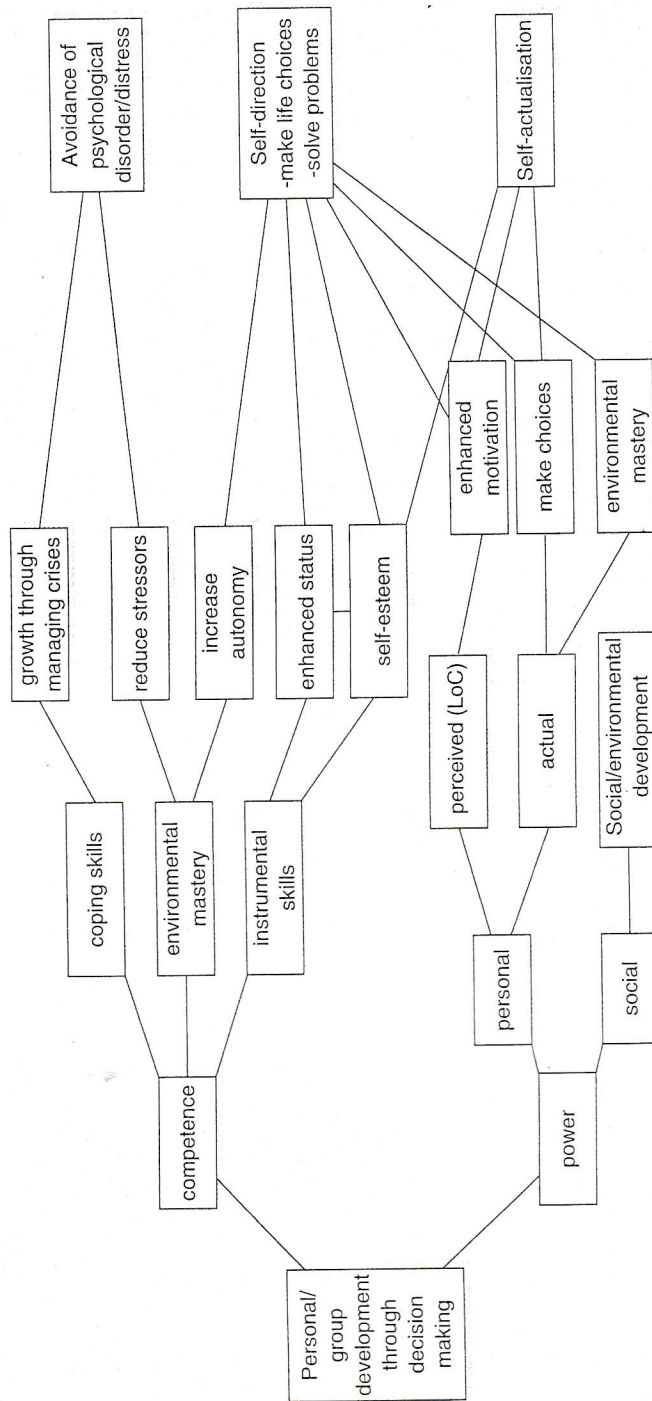


Figure 12.7 Details of specific linkages between development through group decision making and mental health outcomes
Source: Bazeley, 1977: 425, Figure 11.1

A collection of tips and tricks for bringing it together

Enter your skiff of musement [allowing the mind to wander; a mental game without rules], push off into the lake of thought, and leave the breath of heaven to swell your sail. With your eyes open, awake to what is about or within you, and open conversation with yourself: for such is all meditation! ... It is, however, not a conversation in words alone, but is illustrated, like a lecture, with diagrams and with experiments. (Peirce, 1931–35, Vol. 6: 315, quoted in Reichertz, 2010: 20).

- ▶ Develop a 'hunch' and see if it works.
- ▶ Talk it. As you tell your peers and colleagues about your work, their questions will help you to clarify where it is all going. When Justin was telling me he was going to write a paper comparing workers in two similar organisations, I asked: why do the comparison? What will it tell you, other than that this group differs from that in these ways? He then realised the point of his article would be about *how* the comparative structures and funding arrangements for the two types of organisations might impact differently on the working life and satisfaction of employees. This provided a framework for writing, leading to a conclusion.
- ▶ Tell it. Practise presenting your research in three minutes: check out the three-minute thesis competition at 3mt.grad.ubc.ca/about/2012-finalists/ or www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/news/3mt/.
- ▶ Draw it. Create a conference poster without regular text that captures the essence of your work.
- ▶ Write it. Try writing the abstract for your article or thesis. If that is a problem, go back and write an abstract for each chapter or section.
- ▶ Read for stimulation and ideas (not just academic literature; cf. Gersick, 1988, in Box 10.3).
- ▶ Stop reading and just start writing. Then keep writing, constantly referring back to your data for information and ideas. (You might end up 'ditching' a lot of it; make a 'cuts' file for those bits you might use later or that you can't bear to throw away.) As you keep working at it, and become immersed in it, order will come.
- ▶ Check out some likely theories (maybe review those that you included as part of your conceptual framework).
- ▶ Join a writing circle where you can share and discuss work (yours and others') as it proceeds.
- ▶ Think about how you used to write the undergraduate essay. You did your library research, made notes, sorted them, and figured out what you would say from that. Then you wrote an introduction explaining how you were going to approach the topic; you developed your points or arguments through a series of paragraphs that drew on what you'd learned from the reading you did (one point per paragraph, with a topic sentence to start each paragraph); and you wrapped it up in a conclusion. Pulling a thesis or report together in your concluding chapter is similar: figure what you want to say out of all the work you've done, introduce it, clarify definitions and assumptions, support it with evidence from your research (which has been well described in previous chapters), and write the conclusion. The difference is that in a concluding chapter for a dissertation, you're most likely going to put the concluding statement (the thesis) up front in the chapter; it's not designed to lead your readers on a treasure hunt!

- ▶ For each issue covered as you progress through writing up your results, create a keypoint summary about what you are doing and finding.
- ▶ Sit on it. This section of this chapter came about after I thought I'd finished writing it.

Writing about developing coherence

In the methods chapter

- ▶ Briefly outline any strategies used to assist in bringing your work to a coherent conclusion.

In the results chapter

- ▶ Think about what the organising principle will be for writing your findings. In general, it is best that this *not* be according to what method you used, or whose voice (which participant group) the findings were derived from. Rather, use a thematic, topic, or issue basis for arranging your results, and draw together all the data and theory you have developed for each component of your topic. As part of that, you might show what you learned from different methods or different participant groups – from how they were similar or what you learned from their differences.
- ▶ Have a full draft ready well before it is due to be submitted or sent. I find I rework almost every sentence and paragraph that I write, often multiple times over, before I am satisfied with how each reads. It is helpful, too (if not essential), to have other people review it before it is finalised.

Further reading

Mills (1959: Appendix) lays out necessary preparation and then a series of steps to aid the release of 'the sociological imagination', to bring your study together for presentation in written form.

Miles and Huberman (1994: Chapter 10) list and briefly elaborate 13 'tactics for generating meaning' (many of these have been covered in this and earlier chapters). In Chapter 11, they review ethical issues related to analysing and reporting qualitative research.

Richards (2009: Part III, Chapters 7–9) provides ideas and strategies for making sense of your data.

Corbin and Strauss (2008: Chapter 5) is on achieving theoretical integration for those using grounded theory methods.

Seale (1999: Chapter 9) expands on the issue of using numbers in qualitative research.

Wolcott (2009) provides helpful guidelines on writing up your qualitative study.