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Harmonizing Theory and Experimentation: Unveiling the Potential of Multi-Grounded

Mohammad Abbaszadeh[1*], Sajjad Pashaie[2], Hacı Duran[3], Hamed Golmohammadi[4]

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Abstract

Research in the field of sports sciences undergoes substantial turmoil and instability, stemming from both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This turbulence prompts the expansion of theoretical and empirical knowledge in the domain. Qualitative research, which can be approached through positivist or critical lenses, necessitates researchers to articulate their research philosophy and epistemological stance upfront. Notably, the methodological approach, rooted in intuitionism for analyzing social phenomena, undergoes similar shifts in sociology and sports management. This approach not only invites critique but also spawns numerous theoretical underpinnings. To counter reductionist tendencies in theoretical frameworks, the Multi Grounded Theory (MGT) emerges, aiming to harmonize intuitive and reductionist analytical methods within the framework of Hegelian thesis and antithesis. Hence, authors employing MGT move beyond the pure inductive approach in MGT by explicitly incorporating external theories. By bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and empirical data, MGT promises to offer a holistic understanding of sports-related phenomena, empowering researchers to cause innovative theories and drive the advancement of knowledge in the field.

Keywords: Research philosophy, Methodological approach, Intuitionism, Grounded Theory (GT), Innovative theories.

1. Department of Social Sciences, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran. ORCID: 0000-0003-4837-0329
2. Department of Sport Management, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran. ORCID: 0000-0002-3933-146X
3. Department of Sociology, Istanbul Aydin University, Istanbul, Türkiye. ORCID: 0000-0002-2843-7496
4. Department of Physical Education and Sport, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Türkiye. ORCID: 0000-0001-5812-3255
*Emil Coresponding Auther: m.abbaszadeh2014@gmail.com

Introduction

Today, it will not be possible to achieve the goals of science or scientific knowledge in sports management unless you do it with the right methodology. In other words, it is the research in terms of the method that gets credit, not the subject of the. Humanities, like other sciences, have its own research methods, each of which must be done with the utmost care so that the results are valid and useful Sports science has seen many discussions over the past 25 years about increasing diversity, methodologies, and complementary methods, which have led to the integration of quantitative and qualitative research (Pashaie et al., 2023).

Grounded theory (GT) is a qualitative research method whose goal is to generate theory based on data (Cronholm, 2005). GT, like many other qualitative research methodologies, entails procedures such as developing a research topic, selecting data, collecting data, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions (Freeman, 2018). This notion promotes the discovery of new concepts and the formation of new linkages between categories. This is in line with the experience of Orlikowski (1993) in using GT, she claims that one of the advantages of GT is the opportunity to incorporate new ideas during the research. Also, in GT methodology, there is a tendency to search for diversity among concepts and summarize categorizations. Collecting and analyzing data without any bias is one of the essential principles of GT (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). Therefore, the mentioned concept is a recognized method in many fields for empirical development based on theory. The prescriptive approach, influenced by its inventors, Glaser and Strauss (1967), is now a widely used method for assessing (mostly) qualitative data in the humanities. GT was able to suggest the (nearly impossible) stage of examining empirical data abstraction into theoretical categories and systematically proposing theoretical structures. The primary aim of GT is the development of theories and the generation of fresh insights and comprehension concerning a specific phenomenon or social process. This is achieved through the formulation of explanations rooted in empirical data acquired via systematic research methods. The approach underscores the significance of anchoring the theory in the data gathered directly from research participants, facilitating the organic emergence of patterns, themes, and relationships inherent within the data. GT proves especially advantageous in the exploration of intricate or inadequately understood phenomena, as it offers a methodical yet adaptable framework for theory construction.

Currently, the Multi Grounded Theory (MGT), a recently developed concept gaining popularity in Europe, is seldom employed (Freeman, 2018). The goal of multimethod research is to address a particular research problem by combining different research methods (Pashaie et al., 2023). The fact is that over the years, GT has been transformed and used in many different ways. A disagreement arose between the two main authors of this method when Strauss wrote a book on GT with Corbin. Glaser (1992) opposed them for ignoring the basic principles of GT. GT gives a precise inductive approach to creating categories from empirical data in its right form (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). In other words, it demonstrates a rather accurate inductive process for creating theory from experimental evidence. The various coding

procedures used (open coding, axial coding, selective coding) imply abstracting and linking the categories to one another (Pashaie & Perić, 2023). This inductive method of working with data has been considered as both a major strength and a weakness of GT. Failure to apply existing theories causes the loss of existing knowledge; while these theories can serve as a source of inspiration and be used to abstract experimental data. In the sense that the production of theory should help in the synthesis of knowledge (Cronholm, 2004). Considering the mentioned cases, it can be understood that the mentioned method contains criticisms that finally caused the MGT to be proposed. The goal of MGT is to generate theory based on existing data and theories (Cronholm, 2005). MGT means that the theory is empirically, internally and theoretically founded.

Today, the need to exploit and use the results and findings of research in human societies is not hidden from anyone. Therefore, it can be acknowledged that research affects many aspects of our lives in general. Therefore, carrying out research projects can solve many human problems and issues. It is very valuable for any organization to know how to carry out correct research projects and their use. Sports management, as an executive agent and leader of issues related to sports, should benefit from the results and findings of valid and valuable research and studies. The current article is based on the changes and developments created in GT (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010) and the theoretical and experimental content of its creators, they put forward the MGT, which can be considered both a reaction against the GT and a complementary approach and development for the GT. The existing knowledge in the field of sports sciences research is characterized by fundamental turmoil and instability, particularly in the integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods. This has led to a significant gap in the theoretical and empirical knowledge within the field. The lack of a clear articulation of research philosophy and epistemological approach has further exacerbated this gap, hindering the development of a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of sports management. Additionally, the traditional GT approach has been criticized for its tendency toward reductionism and its limited integration of external theories. This has resulted in a need for a methodological approach that can bridge the gap between intuitive and reductionist analytical methods, and explicitly incorporate external theories to advance knowledge and improve research methods in sports management. Therefore, the gap in the existing knowledge lies in the absence of a comprehensive and integrative approach that can effectively address the complexities and breadth of phenomena in the field of sports science, ultimately hindering the advancement of knowledge and the development of the sports management sector. The current research was compiled based on the research needs of PhD and MA degree students in the field of sports management; it is a source for researchers in sports management and those working in this field.

Theoretical Frameworks

MGT, introduced by Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010), is a significant advancement in qualitative data analysis. This approach uses existing theories while inductively analyzing data,

allowing data to speak for itself. This approach differs from classical GT, which relied solely on empirical data and avoided reading relevant literature. MGT allows researchers to gradually lead to conclusions, moving away from a pure inductivist position. Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010) MGT enables researchers to develop research based on prior theories and examine the validity of derived theories from data, despite a significant distance from classical GT, but Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010) intend to use the strengths of the grounded theory such as "systematic method of data analysis" and "theoretical sampling process". As a result, MGT enables researchers to dive deep into data, look up concepts in coding, and extract theories directly from the data. By highlighting the use of additional sources to establish triangulation and enhance the researcher's understanding of the provided data, MGT expands on GT. We think that MGT is a theory that exists in empirical evidence, preceding theories, and the theory's internal coherence (between the theory's pieces) or internal grounding (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

Because the MGT is a method for constructing theories, the procedure is separated into three stages: theory formation, explicit grounding, and research interest reflection and revision (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). Focused theory relates to different sources of knowledge. Different types of knowledge are the source of theory production and guarantee its validity. Grounding means "providing a reason or justification"(Merriam-Webster, 2010). We supply more than just empirical facts to generate theory, other sources of knowledge are also used for justification. One of the criticisms raised is that in the experimental and theoretical phases, the analysis based on GT may be confusing. Research questions may be too vague. According to the principles of MGT, we must constantly return to the research interest. It is also possible to work with relatively open research questions or with specific research goals. As a result, we place a greater emphasis on the importance of ideas and research interests than traditional GT theorists. We underline that during the research process, research interests (operationalized in research questions) should be formed, and that other theories should be utilized constructively. The coding process in MGT research is as follows:

Theorizing

Inductive coding is the first stage in the theory-generation process. The GT is the source of the work process, which involves conceptualization and category identification and should be carried out with an open mind. Therefore, data analysis should be done as far as possible, regardless of any existing presuppositions. The reason for starting with induction is that if you remove data from predetermined categories, it will be difficult to discover new ones. An important question to ask during the analysis is, "What is this about?", "What is happening?" and which example can this be? According to the MGT, the inferred empirical category should be classified based on the ontological category (Goldkuhl, 2000). It is necessary to ask, "What kind of phenomenon is this?" The response to this query ought to be able to promote the recently identified category. Ontological questions should be accompanied by the following

linguistic questions: Is there an adequate fit between the category and the word form? Is this category independent in nature or is it an attribute and characteristic of an item or another process? An important point that should be noted in these questions is the accuracy of labeling them. The words chosen should not be too abstract and vague. In addition, labels should not be too brief and short (Cronholm, 2004). Finally, to begin with, categorizing ambiguous cases cannot prevent the application of valid theories. Also, the ontological and linguistic determinants of the phenomenon should be identified. Each created category should be a reflection of its ontological status (Cronholm, 2004).

Inductive coding

Deductive coding corresponds to the open coding stage in GT both in the way of work and in the type of approach to the role of data. In this type of coding, the main emphasis is on working with an open mind and free from pre-classified categories. We have to let the data "talk"! If one uses pre-defined categories early in the data interpretation process, it will be difficult to use open-mindedness in the later stages. Therefore, as far as possible, the first data analysis should be free from the researcher's presuppositions. If theories and categories are applied in the early stages, the possibility of data innovation is lost. If something is to be discovered, there must be the conditions for such a thing. If pre-defined categories are applied to the data, the possibility of discovering categories is reduced. Here, we emphasize the basic principles of GT, that is, the application of the inductive method to work with data. This work includes conceptual labels and conceptual apparatus (categories, subcategories, properties, dimensions, etc.) (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

Conceptual refinement

It is important for researchers to practice conceptual refinement by not taking empirical statements at face value. Stated differently, he should take a critical look at what was said or observed (Cronholm, 2004). According to Cronholm (2004) explanation, conceptual refinement provides an opportunity for researchers to critically evaluate the collected data and not accept everything reported as absolute. The mentioned case is considered as a reaction against the dependence of GT researchers on data, a worthy issue (Freeman, 2018). Therefore, in conceptual refinement, we are moving away from GT (in terms of working with categories with a critical and constructive method, clarifying concepts, continuously evaluating and refining concepts, and paying increasing attention to critical thinking). Here, paying attention to the shape and form of experimental phrases and sentences is not very important. The data can and ought to be contested; As mentioned earlier, in GT there is the possibility of data dependence. That is, what is said by the interviewees is always the result of their interpretation. Conceptual refinement means working with different types of category questions. In order to clearly understand a conceptualized phenomenon, we ask six questions:

- What is this concept? Conceptual determination
- Where does it come from? Determining the ontological position
- What is its framework? Determining the text and related phenomena
- What is its function? Determining functions and goals
- What is its origin? Determining its importance and appearance
- How to talk about it? Determining linguistic usage

Pattern Coding

Pattern coding is mainly related to the axial coding in GT. In this step, the categories are combined with theoretical expressions. Axial coding (in GT) corresponds to the creation of categorical structures in MGT (Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006). To construct categorical constructs, MGT researchers must organize and categorize their data into a set of categories. Unlike the GT process, in this phase, the researchers themselves do not create the categories (Freeman, 2018). Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that GT is an active/interactive method of theory building in which an action-oriented paradigm model should be used. The 1998 version of the action paradigm model describes preconditions, actions/interactions, and results. In the previous version, Strauss and Corbin (1990) used a more complex paradigm model that included several concepts, causal conditions, phenomena, contexts, intervening conditions, interaction actions/strategies, and their consequences. Urquhart (2001) believes that this model is difficult to understand in practice. An interest in conceptualizing action patterns is indicated by the phrase "pattern coding"; social action is the action that social scientists try to understand and explain. This means that the action performed has social goals and contexts is based on social preconditions, is socially directed, and has specific effects on other people. This definition is proposed in line with Weber's classic definition of social action: "An action is called social if the intention of the actor or actors is to consider the behavior of others and as a result is influenced by it. Model coding includes the structuring of action conditions (external and internal), actions results, and consequences of actions. These types of patterns can be described in the form of diagrams and theoretical patterns (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

Theory Condensation

The theory condensation stage (in MGT) corresponds to selective coding in GT (Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006). The stage of summarizing the theory in MGT is self-explanatory, and in this stage, researchers identify important topics in the data and then collect them in a single unit, which finally forms a theory. When MGT researchers develop an initial theory, they must compare it to existing theories. If the new theory falls outside existing theories, researchers may modify or discard it (as theories cause in MGT are still subject to hammering at this stage). After comparing the new theory with previous theories, MGT researchers must measure the validity of the new theory to ensure that it matches empirical observations in the real world. It is only after confirming internal validity and external validity that the work of MGT is finished.

In discussing the application of existing theories, Cronholm says: "the development of theory should lead to the integration and synthesis of knowledge". According to him, theory production in MGT is its strength, an inductive approach, and the antithesis of GT, a comparative approach based on previous theories, should be used together in theory production (Freeman, 2018). Summarizing the theory is the final step in the MGT. Before this stage, there should be three grounding processes (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

Findings

Theoretical grounding, explicit empirical grounding, and theoretical matching coherence

Grounding means analyzing and controlling the validity of the evolution process of a theory (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010); In other words, the concept of grounding means analyzing and controlling the validity of the emerging theory. The three grounding processes correspond to the three types of theoretical validity, empirical validity, and internal validity. Theoretical validity means that the theory is consistent with other theoretical abstractions. The emerging theory and its categories are coordinated in such a way that it is possible to compare with other theories. For this reason, this step is known as "theoretical grounding". To confirm the theories, external theoretical and abstract sources can also be used. Theoretical adaptation may lead to a revision of the emerging theory. It is possible that the categories of other theories are more suitable and can replace some suggested categories (Cronholm, 2004). The concepts of validity and Grounding are not only related to direct empirical truth but there are various claims of validity in the case of theories. The concept of " validity claims " was proposed by Habermas (1985) in the theory of communicative action. But this concept is used here with a relatively different meaning. According to Habermas' view, there can be different validity claims, and these claims can be challenged in different ways. Three different kinds of credit claims are grounded by the following three processes:

> Theoretical validity means that the theory is consistent with the abstractions of other theories.
> Empirical validity means that the theory matches empirical observations of the world.
> Internal validity means that a theory is a logical way to discuss the outside world.

Controlling different types of credit always involves finding warrants to support the theory. In this way, to check the degree of internal and external conformity, it examines its internal and external coherence. External coherence is related to relationships with the empirical world and other theories. However, grounding processes have other issues than explicating warrants. By comparing and examining theoretical elements and guarantees, it may be determined that the emerging theory is consistent with these warrants. These grounding processes often lead to further refinement and development of theory, and not only have a validity control function, but they also have a generative function regarding the content and structure of theory (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

Explicit empirical validity, theoretical matching, and theoretical coherence assessment

In the theory generation coding process, the goal is to construct categories. Explicit empirical validation means that instead of generating theory, more emphasis is placed on controlling and testing its validity (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). More simply, explicit empirical validity determines whether or not the theory is consistent with empirical observations of the external world. Theory validation means changing the focus from theorizing to controlling and testing validity (Cronholm, 2004).

In the continuation of the mentioned material and its completion, it can be said that it is not enough to find the basis of the emerging theory only in the data. Grounding is more than empirical grounding. This is where attention to theoretical compliance becomes important. Theoretical adaptation means that the emerging theory is compared and checked with other existing theories. Other theories must be somehow related to the studied phenomena. MGT researchers should choose related theories. Sometimes a theory can be used at an abstract level as the basis of adaptation. During such a situation, the question arises whether the emerging theory can be considered as a specific type of more general theory? In this way, theoretical adaptation is considered Grounding, and for this purpose, external theories and abstractions can be referred to in order to provide suitable theoretical warrants. Theoretical adaptation may lead to a re-examination of the emerging theory. It can be proved that the categories of other theories are more suitable and can replace some previously formed categories. Through theory adaptation, foreign theories and categories can be introduced into the theory development process, which is far better than the common GT method. To analyze the data or classifications created, alternative theories can be applied. They can also be used in the process of analyzing different topics. That is, existing theories and concepts may have an organizing function in the process of analysis and theory formation. Theories can also be used in the process of testing the hypotheses of the cause data; With this note, don't neglect the use of theoretical sampling in any of the steps and pre-mapping cases. In adaptation theory, analogicalism is an issue that can be raised; In the sense that in the early stages of data analysis and theory generation, an inductive method is used, but now it is time to use other theories as well. Theoretical adaptation can also influence external theories. The data collected and the theory constructed may contradict what was previously claimed in other theories. Comparisons may lead to criticism of other theories. Therefore, theoretical adaptation can be divided into three modes of adaptation to the emerging theory; It leads to explicit theoretical grounding or criticism of existing theories (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010). After examining the explicit experimental validity and theoretical adaptation, paying attention to the evaluation of theoretical coherence is one of the important issues that should be given serious attention by researchers. Evaluating theoretical coherence means internal Grounding. The conceptual structure of the developing theory is systematically examined and the congruence and the consistency of its conceptual structure is also examined. There may be a need to provide good illustrations of the theory to achieve internal validity (Cronholm, 2004). Evaluation of theoretical coherence is a systematic

examination of the conceptual structure of the emerging theory in which the degree of correlation and coherence is examined. In this type of internal validation, it may be necessary to provide a suitable image of the theory, for example, to provide graphic images (various types of diagrams) next to the provided text. Not only is the use of suitable diagrams essential for internal grounding, but it is also crucial for the production process and for communicating the theory to other people. Evaluating theoretical coherence entails comparing the theory's focused section—which consists of one or more concepts and potential connections between them—to other sections of the theory's evolving framework. The theory itself is also used for grounding. The goal is to achieve a theory that is conceptually clear (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

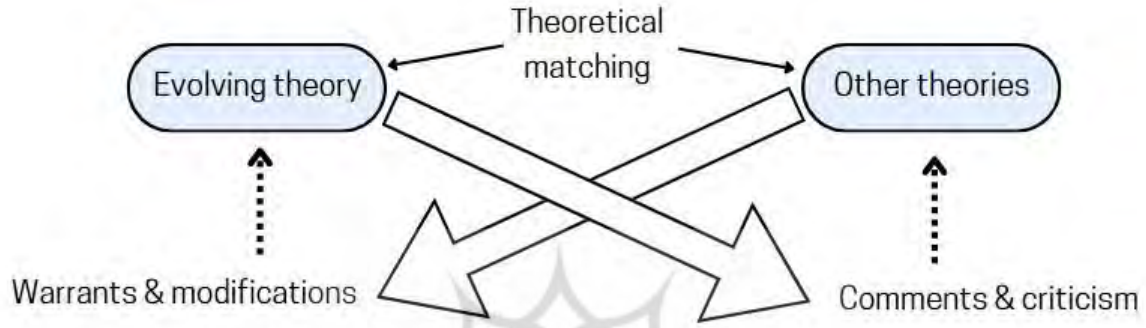

Figure 1: Theoretical coherence (Goldkuhl and Cronholm, 2010).

In order to achieve the best research results, it is very important to remain open-minded and allow empirical observations and theoretical insights to influence the research interests. Research questions should be developed through empirical and theoretical work. The MGT approach places more emphasis on the role of theories and research interests than GT does. Research interest (operationalized in research questions) should evolve over time, and an external theory can be used constructively during the research process (Figure 2).

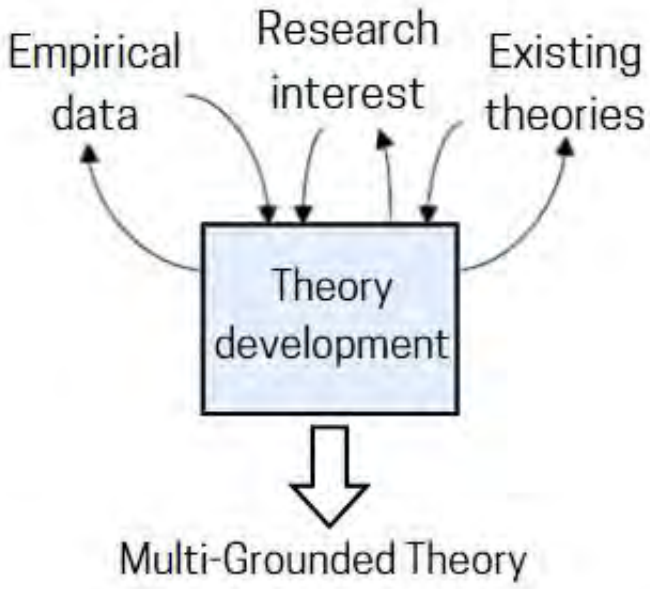

Figure 2: Empirical data, research interests, and existing theories forming an MGT (Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006).

In other words, the MGT suggests to use of graphic images in addition to textual representations. During the theory development process, research interests should also be considered. Data collection and analysis always increase the researcher's knowledge and lead to a revised or refined research question that guides the research empirically and theoretically (Cronholm, 2004). Based on this, summarizing the theory is considered the final step in the MGT. However, as mentioned earlier, before, three processes of grounding should be considered: theoretical adaptation, evaluation of theoretical coherence, and empirical validity. The first two stages of the grounding process (theoretical and internal grounding) cannot be found in GT. MGT means that the theory is rooted in empirical data, other theories, and internal validity (Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006). To clearly show the connection between the content of Figure 1 and Figure 2, the graphical structure of the MGT method is presented in Figure 3.

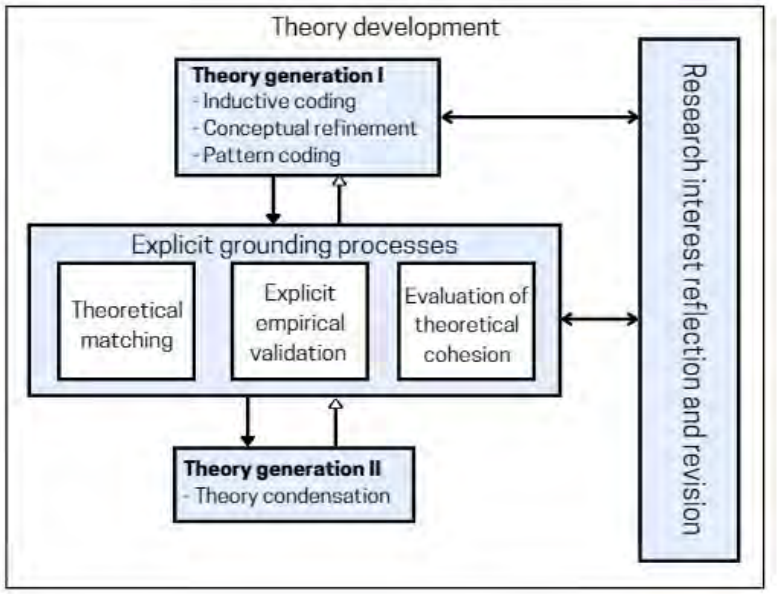

Figure 3: The graphic structure of the MGT method(Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006).

Discussion and Conclusion

GT is obtained from data and then illustrated with specific examples of data. In data analysis, the various coding procedures used entail abstracting and connecting categories to one another. Strauss and Corbin (1998) named coding processes with three titles: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. One of Glaser (1992) main differences with Strauss-Corbin is that the inductive method of data analysis is not taken seriously enough. Glaser stated that conceptualizations should be created through the application of pre-existing categories. However, GT has been criticized for this neo-foundational approach. The inductive method of working with data is known as both the main advantage of GT and its weakness; One of its weaknesses is the lack of attention to the existing theories, which itself causes the waste of a lot of knowledge about the different topics under investigation. Therefore, in certain stages of the theory production process, the use of previous theories can be an inspiration and perhaps, from this point of view, challenge some of the abstractions made. In this method, it is possible to compare and contrast experimental and abstract findings with other theories. On the other hand, the danger of isolation of knowledge is seen in inductive abstraction. We think that the development of theories should result in the synthesis and integration of knowledge. This means that theories can be actively used and aim to synthesize knowledge from existing theories and achieve new abstractions by coding new data.

The discussion of using previous theories during theory building in GT is not a new issue. In Glaser and Strauss (1967) there are also discussions about the effect of existing theories. In this regard, these authors say: We do not mean that the production of new theories should be separate from previous theories. However, it can be said that one of the remarkable features of

GT is the lack of use of existing literature before initial data collection and analysis. Several users of GT (for example, (Bruce, 2007; Kelle, 2007; Seaman, 2008) have discussed the impact of using prior theories in data analysis and theory generation. Bruce argues that "qualitative studies also have theoretical expectations that guide the steps of data collection and analysis". Seaman has combined the use of GT with the practical application of theory. The practical concept is the basic principle in data collection and analysis. He argues that the use of existing theories should increase the potential of analysis instead of limiting the possibility of analysis (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). Disregarding the existing theories means leaving experimental data free and freeing them from challenging restrictions, which can ultimately have a negative impact on the synthesis of new knowledge. Therefore, in order to apply the existing theories in the theory generation process, the concept of MGT was proposed that the purpose of its design in the article of Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2003) as a theoretical framework[1] (Cronholm, 2005), was to challenge some foundations of GT, so that it can break the tradition in the application of GT forms by going beyond the pure inductiveism and simultaneously paying attention to theoretical and empirical grounding. and as an alternative approach, to put positive and rich horizons about data analysis and theory building in front of researchers in this field; Which is clearly shown in Figure 1.

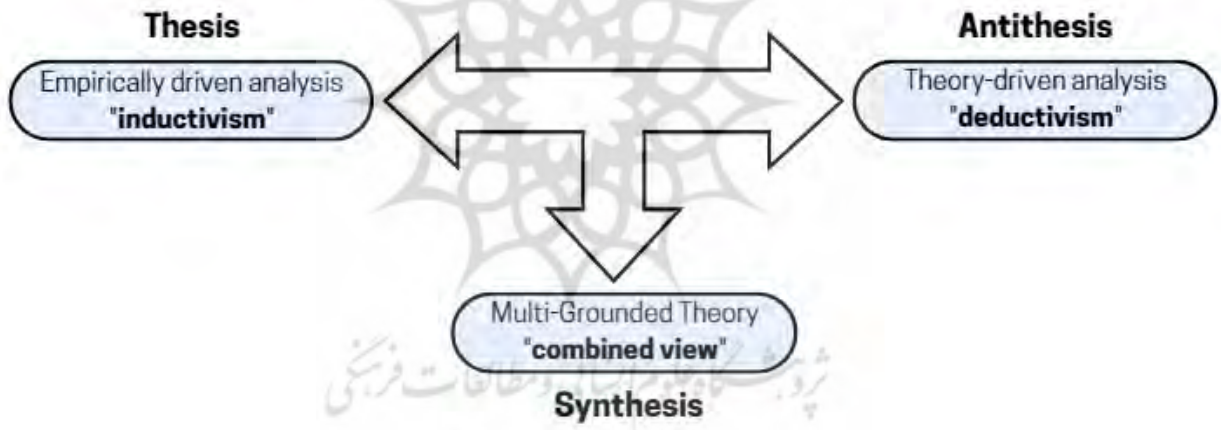

Figure 4: MGT; Dialectical synthesis between inductive and deductive methods (Cronholm, 2004).

The MGT has been constructed following the link of a quantitative-oriented theoretical framework with a qualitative-oriented framework with an interpretative tone, which can be considered an important step in the direction of improving the credibility of published sources.

1. A theoretical framework is a framework that outlines and explains the key components, variables, or arrangements that make up the structure of knowledge (Ngulube, 2018); In other words, the theoretical framework is a "plan" or research guide that somehow reflects research hypotheses by relying on existing theories (Adom, Hussein, & Agyem, 2018), from this point of view, it adds to the special interpretation of the purpose of analysis (Bruhn Jensen & W.Jankowski, 1991). This is why the theoretical framework can be called a road map (Sinclair, 2007).

In quantitative approaches, theory is mainly tested, and in qualitative methods, theorizing is mainly assumed, which is decisive in the first, the theoretical framework, and in the second, the conceptual framework. We conclude that the MGT in sports management represents a significant advancement in qualitative data analysis, aiming to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative research methods. This approach, introduced by Goldkuhl and Cronholm, emphasizes the integration of existing theories while inductively analyzing data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena. Since MGT has been proposed as a critical, reactive and ultimately complementary approach compared to GT, it is argued that an advanced perspective of grounding lies behind MGT (Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006). This is the same concept that can be considered as the missing link in the analysis of qualitative methods, including GT. The main concern of many researchers in analyzing human subjects and issues has been falling into the trap of one-dimensional qualitative methods. Especially, these types of pitfalls have been observed many times during the application of GT.

Unlike classical GT, which relied solely on empirical data, MGT enables researchers to draw from various theoretical backgrounds and incorporate new concepts, ultimately leading to the development of new theories in the field of sports science. The MGT method involves a multi-stage process, including theoretical adaptation, evaluation of theoretical coherence, and empirical validity, which are essential for grounding the emerging theory. Additionally, the MGT approach places more emphasis on the role of theories and research interests, allowing for the evolution of research questions over time and constructive use of external theories during the research process. By incorporating graphic images in addition to textual representations, MGT provides a comprehensive framework for theory development, data collection, and analysis in sports management research. Overall, the MGT approach offers a new and integrative method for analyzing phenomena in the field of sports science, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge and improvement of research methods in sports management. MGT is recommended to strong graduate students and other researchers who are able to navigate the combination of qualitative and quantitative dataencouraged by this approach (Freeman, 2018). Such an approach fosters a profound comprehension of intricate sports science phenomena and fosters rigorous scholarly investigation.

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