Reflections on Using Grounded Theory

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Grounded theory — what it is?

Discovery of Grounded Theory (DGT) 1967:

- Adequacy of a theory cannot be divorced from the process by which it is generated (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p. 5)
- Also judging the usefulness of a theory needs to take account of how the theory was generated
- DGT suggested that theory is generated from the data, and then, it is expected to suit its supposed uses (Glaser & Strauss 1967, p. 1,3)

"Currently, students are trained to master great-man theories and to test them in small ways, but hardly to question the theory as a whole in terms of its position or manner of generation."

Grounded theory — What it is?

- "Theory as process"
- "Ever-developing" instead of fixed conceptualizations
- Emergent concepts over borrowed ones to solve the problems of richness, fit, relevance, and forcing.

Grounded theory — What it is?

- Constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss 1967):
- Joint coding and analysis
  - comparing incidents applicable to each category
  - integrating categories and their properties
  - delimiting the theory
  - writing theory
- Theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation
- Sensitizing and analytic concepts
- Substantive vs. formal theory

Difficult to begin with

- It’s not easy, e.g. (Suddaby 2006) (Adolph et al. 2008)
- Analyst needs to be capable of conceptualization, theoretically sensitive, and patient
- There are two different approaches on GT, which differ quite a lot, and hence create a confusion for beginners

Starting with books

It is almost a necessity to know these books in order to apply Grounded theory!

- Discovery of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967)
- Theoretical Sensitivity (Glaser 1978)
- Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques (Strauss and Corbin 1990)
- Emergence vs. Forcing (Glaser 1992)

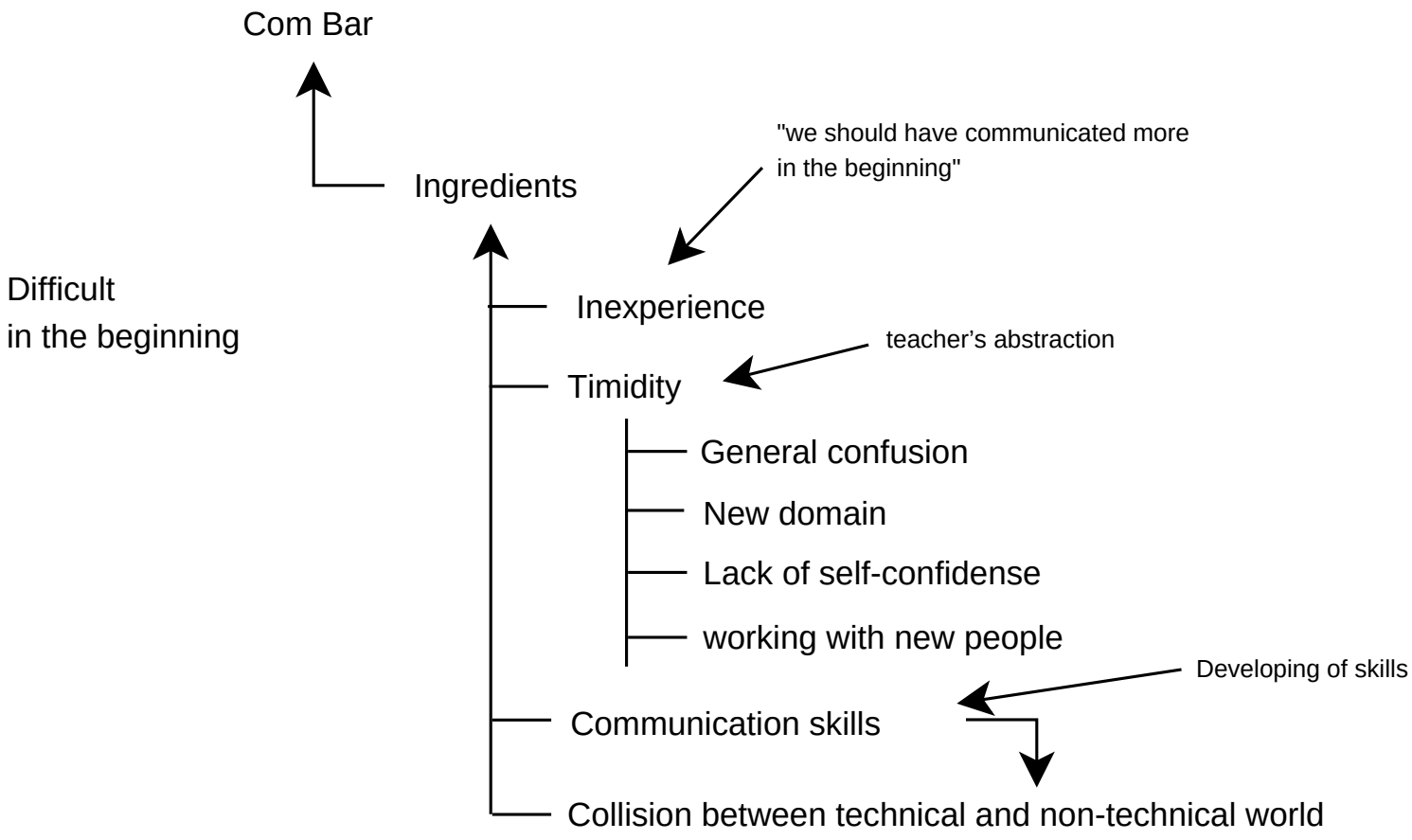
Example: core category

The inexperienced students' entry into a realistic software development context discloses the communication barrier the students potentially have towards the customer. ("Communication barrier disclosed")

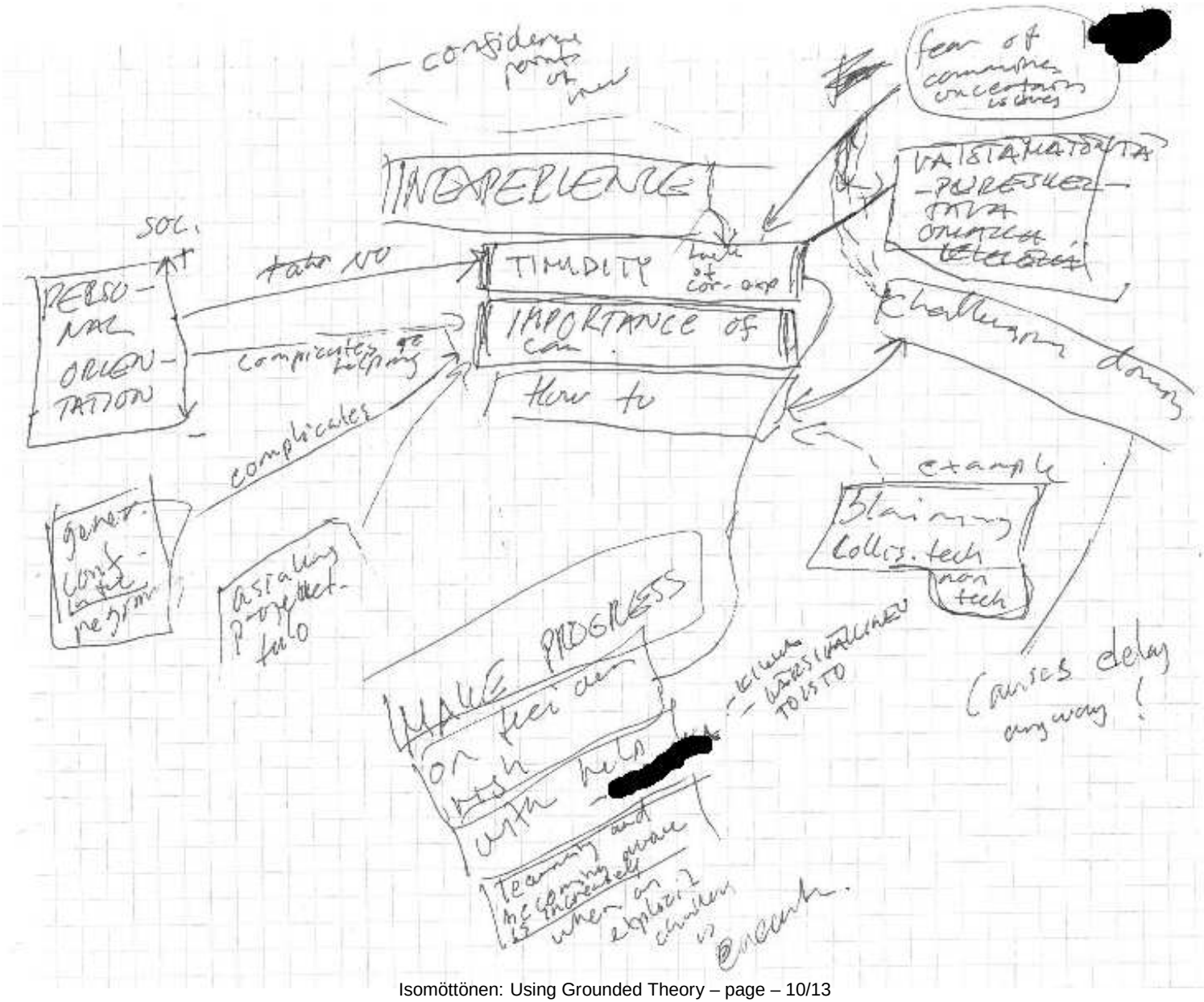
Example: constant comparison

1. One ingredient of the barrier: students do not know the importance of communicating with the customer as they begin the course ("not aware of")
2. Coding another incident where the communication barrier was obvious:
   - the students were told about the importance of communicating
   - they still did not communicate
   $\rightarrow$ another ingredient was discovered: ("timid to communicate")

Example: delimiting theory



Example: delimiting theory



Most difficult issues

- Reduction: overlapping concepts can be reduced to a higher level concept
  - One may notice that the analysis is drowning in number of concepts. It is necessary to make reduction, but then, it is difficult to keep the result relevant and logic of the result right.
- Explication: making yet implicit knowledge sufficiently explicit
  - One might be able to explain bits of his/her theory but laying out the whole theory in explicit form, so that the concepts and logic of relations are given with clarity, is difficult.

What helps?

- Time
- Drawings
- Continous writing
- **Doing it $\rightarrow$ Experience**

THANKS!

If you are doing grounded theory, and like to discuss the subject, please correspond:
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