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Situational Analysis: Relevant Advances in Grounded Theory for Management Studies

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Abstract

This paper aims at closing a gap in literature referring to academic publications that approach grounded theory, considering that little advance has been noticed in discussions that encompass the application of situational analysis (SA) proposed by Clarke (2003, 2005) and Clarke, Friese and Washburn (2018) in management studies. Thus, this conceptual paper seeks to address situational analysis considering its ontological and epistemological aspects, to investigate its operationalization forms, and, finally, to indicate relevant situational analysis issues for management studies. Our discussion sheds light on relevant situational analysis aspects, which helps prioritizing research methods that may contribute to create fairer and more effective social policies in several fields and meeting daily demands of the management field. As a conclusion, situational analysis seems to bring new guidance to grounded theory after the interpretive turn: cartographic method, consideration of human and non-human actors, and social commitments; in addition, situational analysis gathers discourse and agency studies, action and structure, image, text and context, history, and the present moment to analyze complex investigations.

Keywords: grounded theory; situational analysis; situational grounded theory; qualitative method; management.

Introduction

Created in 1967 by the sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, grounded theory (GT) became the first manifest of the so-called rebirth of qualitative research. Motivated by the inductive approach, the authors suggested a methodology that could create conceptions and theoretical models based on empirical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006).

A historical survey indicates that the evolution of grounded theory may be organized in three generations. The first generation, whose main representatives are the founders themselves – Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, and some other followers –, defends the idea of conducting grounded theory by collecting data from in-depth interviews, ethnographical observations, and field diaries. After collecting data, they must be analyzed in a process comprising two successive coding stages, which add a positivist perspective to the approach. The second generation of the grounded theory methodology relates more to constructive epistemology. Charmaz (2009), one of the main authors of this second generation, understands that grounded theory constructive fundamentals lie in using its tools to understand empirical worlds based on more open approaches, which use more flexible and heuristic strategies. Its constructive basis establishes the priority of the phenomena under investigation; it understands that both data and analysis stem from shared experiences (Charmaz, 2009). The third generation may be represented by a methodology known as situational analysis (SA) or situational grounded theory.

Situational analysis was first proposed by Adele Clarke in 2003 to improve the comprehension of a given situation by analyzing the relationships involved in it and its ecologies. The method was further developed by the author in 2005 and by Clarke, Friese and Washburn in 2018, who wrote a book titled *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the interpretive turn*. Generally, situational analysis has a philosophical foundation inspired by pragmatism, Chicago School of Sociology – which considers agency theory, language, and interpretivist epistemology –, and symbolic interactionism, in addition to emphasizing Strauss' social worlds and arenas; it may be considered an evolution of the second generation of grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The major innovation in situational analysis is operating with a complete investigation form based on new analytical approaches that attempt “to do methodological justice to particular insights of poststructural theory, especially aspects of Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, and science studies” (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 55), which inspired part of the method. Thus, the analytical focus must go beyond knowledge holders to completely focus on the investigation conceived, including the discourse (Clarke, 2003, 2005; Keller, 2017).

Originated from the biomedical area and often used in the nursing area (Martins & Burbank, 2011), the qualitative approach of situation analysis aims at capturing complexities instead of simplifying them; it seeks to clarify uneven processes of change and stabilities, to separate actors from their positions to emphasize contradictions, ambivalences and irrelevances, and to encourage the researcher to elucidate marginalized perspectives and subjugated knowledge, often considered illegitimate.

According to situational analysis, the key focus is relationship. Relationality is analyzed by mapping and memorizing the ecologies of the relationships between the several elements pertaining to the situation (in situational maps), the several social groups (in social worlds/arenas

maps), and discourses on the situation under investigation (in positioning maps) (Clarke et al., 2018). Thus, considering the objects in research situations is important, namely cultural objects, technology, medias, non-human items (animate and inanimate) – such objects also constitute the situations to be studied. Some of them derive from human action, which enables investigating processes; others are perceived as natural, which enables investigating the construction trajectory (Clarke et al., 2018).

A question regarding the method relates to the reason why the work situation is used rather than the context. The use of the word situation stems from the perception that in situational analysis the context involves something without being part of it. Thus, Clarke (2003, 2005) inserts the term “coconstitutiveness.” Clarke understands coconstitutiveness as the relationship that entities or actors have in relation to each other and that are also constitutive of each other. In situational analysis, a situation is not only a special or temporal unit; it generally involves a set of relatively long-lasting relationships among several actors or entities and encompasses different types and categories of elements with their own ecology; it frequently includes several events with different time limits, short or not (Clarke, 2003, 2005).

Considering the existence of consistent publications referring to the first and second generations of grounded theory (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2020; Kalenda, 2016; Pinto & Santos, 2012; Uri, 2015), stating that little advance has been made in discussions regarding situational analysis is possible, which becomes even more clear when considering the management field.

In general, some of the papers that make use of this method in different fields can be observed, for example, in Martínez Pérez, Mubanga, Aznar and Bagnol (2015), which chose constructivist grounded theory as the most suitable methodological approach to explore the associated meanings and health implications of female genital modifications, such as LME, as narrated by the women who practice them; Ralph, Birks and Chapman (2015), which explored the unusual dynamism attached to grounded theory underpinnings, in which generations interact with their context, moments are formed and philosophical perspectives are interpreted in a manner congruent with grounded theory essential methods; Timonen, Foley and Conlon (2018), which put forward a distillation of core principles underpinning existing grounded theory approaches that can aid further engagement with the different variants of GT; Santana-Cordero and Szabó (2019), which focused on the methods employed to date in historical ecology when working with qualitative and graphic materials. In addition, it incorporates an exploration of the links between these methods and those generally used in qualitative research; Noortje (2020) wrote that situational analytics offers a way to address this problematic by making a heterogeneously composed situation – involving social, technical, and media elements – the unit of computational analysis. He showed how situational analytics can be applied in a case study of YouTube videos featuring intelligent vehicles; Turnbull and Carr (2020) investigated collaboration in an integrated outpatient parenteral antimicrobial therapy service. Interviews and focus groups were used to generate data, and grounded theory methods were used to progress the study with constant comparative analysis. The collaboration compass model was developed to illustrate and aid interactive navigation of collaborative situations.

Some of the articles in the field of management based on grounded theory are: Suddaby (2006) discussing common misconceptions of what grounded theory is not: a presentation of raw data, or perfect or routine application of formulaic techniques to data, easy or an excuse for the

absence of methodology, theory testing, content or word counts; Jones and Noble (2007) make three suggestions for increasing the discipline into grounded theory studies; O'Reilly, Paper and Marx (2012) demystify the key tenets of GT, argue the problematic impacts of adopting an a la carte approach to GT, draw attention to GT as a rigorous method for business research, and advocate for the increased use of GT by more researchers where appropriate; Cepellos and Tonelli (2020) presents how methodological issues not foreseen in the research design proposed by the GT were overcome during the data collection and analysis phases.

There are few management studies that use situational analysis. For example, Saraiva, Carrieri, Aguiar and Brito (2011) used Adele Clarke's situational analysis partially. The situational analysis procedure was used to develop the proposal of bringing about a substantial concept of strategy used by the ballet company Grupo Corpo. The practices and relationships constructed between these and the subjects that included them in the organization under study were identified. For this, the authors established a relational scheme involving the observed practices and the individual and collective actors.

Considering all the issues discussed above, some questions emerged that intrigued us: to what extent could situational analysis be suitable for management studies? Could the new approaches incorporated into grounded theory pointed out by situational analysis be considered advances for management researchers? Could not the organizational phenomena of the different fields be evaluated under the lens of situational analysis?

This is precisely the theoretical gap that our research aims to fill; our research aims to present the study of situational analysis developed by Clarke (2003, 2005) and Clarke et al. (2018). In other words, our study sheds light on a research approach that is still scarcely known for management researchers. Some aspects motivated the discussion on this specific matter. First, organizational phenomena have been demanding from researchers new onto-epistemological approaches and methodological tools that enable the analysis of the situation in a broader and multidisciplinary way. Second, the AS proposal, which expands the GT analytical focus beyond the interpretive turn, in a way already well understood by researchers, incorporating other possibilities to more broadly include the key elements that characterize the investigation situation and the various relationships perceived between these elements, is worth of focus. A search in the Web of Science and Scopus databases found 99 articles published about Business, Management, and Accounting (2003-2021) that indicated the use of Adele Clarke's situational analysis in whole or in part, of those, only one in Brazil. The newspapers that published at least three articles using the methodology are: *Security Journal* (17), *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* (3) and *International Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research* (3).

Thus, we judge adequate to develop this paper as follows. As a first step, we present the paradigmatic approach of situational analysis, followed by a brief discussion on the main ontological assumptions. Then, we present a section in which the operationalization of the method is approached. The final considerations are presented as questions and answers; we emphasize how situational analysis can be relevant for management studies.

Paradigmatic approach of situational analysis

The interpretivist approach of social interaction – in opposition to normative paradigms – guides the methodology of situational analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2018). Thus, interpretivist research is based on the perception that every human investigation must be embedded in the comprehension of the human world from a specific situation perspective, which – according to situational analysis – must be concomitantly historical, moral, and political (Clarke & Keller, 2014). The situation usually involves an arrangement of relatively long-lasting relationships and includes non-unique events (Clarke et al., 2018).

Clarke et al. (2018) highlight that situational analysis is part of an emerging line of thought related to interactionism and associated with critical interactionism (Clarke, 2019). The term critical interactionism was first suggested by Sandstrom and Fine (2003) to describe the convergence of both perspectives. Sandstrom and Fine's work stems from the paper elaborated by Hall (1997), "Meta-power, social organization, and the shaping of social action," in which the author discusses the development of a critical interactionist analysis structure of power, policies, and policy creation. Traditionally, symbolic and critical interactionisms have been understood as divergent elements. The symbolic interactionism is usually seen as a perspective that stems from social psychology; the critical perspective conforms firmly to sociology. Their epistemologies and the focus adopted are different (Denzin & Giardina, 2009). The symbolic interactionism relates to a micro and individual analysis, whereas the critical perspective focuses on a macro and social analysis. Such difference reflects on a few concepts and principles, and on objectives and primary concerns (Athens, 2014).

According to Charmaz (2016), the qualitative research from a critical perspective (1) is compatible with pragmatism, (2) sets positivist epistemology aside, (3) encompasses several subjects to strengthen knowledge on social justice, and (4) promotes the development of social consciousness. When gathered, these elements go beyond the importance of theoretical delimitations and bring power and inequality into the discourse.

Thus, symbolical interactionisms and critical perspective present a few similarities and differences, which are necessary to study complex issues considering micro and macro characteristics (Martins & Burbank, 2011). Eisenhart and Jurow (2011) suggest a qualitative model that can be both interpretive and practical; when drawing near pragmatism, the critical interactionism moves away from the question of whether there is a reality "outside" to pursue a knowledge that is useful to solve problems instead (Burbank & Martins, 2009). The pragmatic epistemology of critical interactionism focuses on problem solving; it comprehends and intervenes in different levels by understanding values at the individual and group level, in addition to analyzing repressive structures at the social and organizational level (Clarke, 2019). Hence, we discuss in the next topic the main ontological assumptions of situational analysis.

The main ontological assumptions of situational analysis

Seven key elements may show the main ontological foundations of situation analysis (Clarke et al., 2018).

(a) To recognize the singularity of the producers of knowledge and to assume that knowledge is simultaneous and multiple. The authors affirm that the critical involvement in singular situations

is a conscious insertion of a vulnerable individual in a continuously constructed history. The inspiration here stems from Foucault, who, according to Colapietro (2011), encouraged a personal, physical, and real involvement, whereas approaching issues in the concrete, precise, and defined terms of a determined situation. Such involvement demanded immersion and saturation instead of transcendence or distance.

(b) To abandon the conditional matrix of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and adopt an empirical situational matrix. The conditional matrix of Strauss and Corbin describes some structural conditions – such as context – by adding elements around a central action that expands from local to global. Afterwards, Strauss and Corbin admitted that these elements could expand the analysis by adding fluidity to the diagram; however, the micro and macro reach of the conceptualization must be kept. Clarke (2003) does not believe conditional matrices suffice for analytical works since they present the dualism action versus structure that the author has always been trying to avoid. Therefore, Clarke defended the idea that researchers should concentrate empirically on the situation as a whole and any sort of distinction should be examined empirically and – preferably – based on the perspective from the different actors involved and on the discourses that belong to the situation, not from categories or researcher perspective. The central issue of Clarke's (2005) situational analysis is to question how these conditions emerge, i.e., if they stem from the empirical case under investigation. According to Clarke et al. (2018), the empirical situational matrix represents situational analysis in an abstract way; thus, elements are visualized during the action, becoming part of the situation. The matrix represents, therefore, the whole situation under investigation in an abstract way. Inspiration also stems from Foucault (1975): people and things; human and non-human; practical fields; discourses; regimes or disciplinary backgrounds; symbols; controversies; organizations and institutions – they can all be present and mutually affect one another. The actors in the situation become what they are due to their relationship with other actors. In situational analysis, the conditions of the action are incorporated in the situation, i.e., structure and action simultaneously, which demands the gathering of elements at the micro (interpersonal), meso (social/organizational/institutional), and macro level (broad historical patterns, including technology, industrialization, and globalization).

(c) To deeply/widely investigate the research situation. At this point, Clarke et al. (2018) affirm that the research must not judge any element alone but interpret it considering its connection to the whole. In situational analysis, no isolated element occurs; it is always a part or an aspect of something, considering that things have the same significance regarding the situation in which they are found or occur. The sensibility of the researcher is important to understand the situation as a whole. However, the researcher might get lost during the process, which demands the creation of sensitizing elements. Delving into something means to consider the linguistic behavior, i.e., to understand the social function that coordinates several other actions. To describe action and find out its meaning, introducing the human and material scenario where the action is performed is necessary. In sum, according to situational analysis, partial perspectives tend to be enough (Clarke et al., 2018).

(d) To carry out situational analyses along the research process including the creation of situational maps, social worlds/arenas maps, and positioning maps. Situational analysis seeks to analyze the situation by using the specification, (new) representation, and further verification of the most important elements and the relationships among them; therefore, the nature and the degree

of social organization become empirical questions. To elucidate these analyses, maps are used since they break away from the most common work formats considering that: they promote a new focus to things; they work as discursive devices that reveal assemblages and connections; they materialize questions; they are control, appropriation, and ideological expression tools; they are limiting objects; they share interpretation; they deal well with multiplicity, heterogeneity, and disorganization; they create bases for discussion; they facilitate communication; they work well as an expression of special and temporal narratives; they easily enable mapping and remapping; and their visual concept enables the analyst to move in a much more dynamic way than in narrative texts. The limitations are perceived in what can be seen; it is a portrait of place and moment. However, the authors affirm that no method overcomes the production of knowledge creators and users; this method shall be used only to increase research quality (Clarke et al., 2018).

(e) To include narrative, visual, and historical discourses found in the situation to expand the comprehension of the spheres of social life. The mapping proposed by situational analysis can facilitate the analysis of discursive materials alone, compared, or integrated with different data sources (Clarke, 2005).

(f) To abandon the simplification and homogeneity to encompass and report complexities, differences, and the heterogeneity of the situation. The representational strategies of situational analysis, influenced by Deleuze and Guattari (1983), require that researchers focus on the differences since they represent the limits that create the research core. The search focuses on isolating normativity to reach out to ecology and cartography creating multidimensional and interpretive mappings that represent lived situations, the several positions of actions, and human and non-human discourses in them, inducing production and consumption of discourses as a practice. Thus, emphasizing that this relational method of representation does not relate to frequency but to positions and their distribution throughout situational spaces, not to structure but to create maps of social processes, is important. In situational analysis, the difference becomes a significant element since it serves as a protector and promoter of human rights and social justice. Considering marginalities is part of the method (Clarke et al., 2018).

(g) To affirm the analytical sufficiency of sensitizing concepts and theoretically integrated analyses. According to Clarke et al. (2018), writing a theory about something that is constantly changing is senseless; thus, situational analysis involves a key investigation aspect known as theorizing, which means to theorize based on sensitizing concepts and integrated analysis; in other words, analyses carried out after the construction of such concepts. In situational analysis, sensitizing concepts are constantly compared to data. The result of such action creates more modest and partial analyses, yet also serious, useful, and stimulating. For the success of the analysis process, researchers must have a solid comprehension about existing theories that approach the topics to be studied; only then they will be capable of determining new elements and analyses during the research process.

As research method, the interpretive proprieties of situational analysis include, according to Clarke et al. (2018),

(a) The perspective by which partiality and situation are admitted. The authors used Mead's (1962) concept of perspective, which is – biologically – a conception of multiple and organized nature, such as the use of the word ecology, which is a natural and organized set of multiple

perspectives. Mead, however, appropriates the use of perspective as a social function, created by using a language capable of sharing to make itself understood. Therefore, the individual becomes part of others' perspective as he/she becomes capable of assuming attitudes or occupying a position in their discourses. This way, perspective is always partial as it is occupied by the individual sharing it, dominating the interpretation of reality. The creation of meanings is related to constructivist and relational interpretations and to the multiple perspectives of situations (Clarke, 2003).

(b) Materialist social constructivism. In line with the authors, constructivism is both social and materialist. Social constructivism is often understood as the one preoccupied only with discourse, ideology, and symbolism. However, the material constructed, interpreted, and full of meanings must be considered in the analysis. Physical and social objects share the sociality that unites them (Cefai, 2016), giving sense to human, non-human, and hybrid elements and avoiding epiphenomenal assumptions (Clarke, 2005).

(c) The first level of deconstructive interpretation by using open codes supported by literature or simultaneous interpretations. According to situational analysis, representing is different from analyzing, despite their importance. In grounded theory, the representation of the object stems from the narrative of some individuals; situational analysis critically analyzes data to interpret singular social processes identified in the language. The first interpretation step is guided by open codification, which is a formal processual element that brings constructivist grounded theory and situational analysis closer (Clarke, 2005). The open codification indicates that the data is subject to multiple interpretations and simultaneous codes. There is no correct reading. All readings are temporal, partial, provisory, and prospective – situated historically and geographically (Clarke et al., 2018); they are, however, influenced by literature incipiently constructed as sensitizing theory (Clarke, 2003).

(d) The use of abduction in data theorization. According to the authors, abduction is the research process that comes closer to empirical materials of a study and tries to analyze and conceptualize them in the most abstract way to create a broad set of affirmations on the phenomenon (Clarke et al., 2018). Despite its use, abduction – seen as the third way – is normally compared with the analytic induction proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and with deductive logic. Induction is often used as the unique practice in previous versions of grounded theory and is based on the accumulation of data to achieve and limit generalizations. Abduction, in turn, moves forward and pulls back between the specificities of data and the conceptual formation they allow to elaborate. With the repetition of the process over time, the researcher refines, selects, rejects, and connects robust concepts to substantially theorize. The central issue herein is that some data may alter the conceptualization already made, which restarts the abduction process. Going beyond what is known is necessary in addition to the data itself. However, the authors highlight that caution is necessary when theorizing beyond data, considering that analytical ideas can be seductive and blind the researcher to perceive data contradictions (Clarke et al., 2018). Finally, Figure 1 shows the logic of abduction.

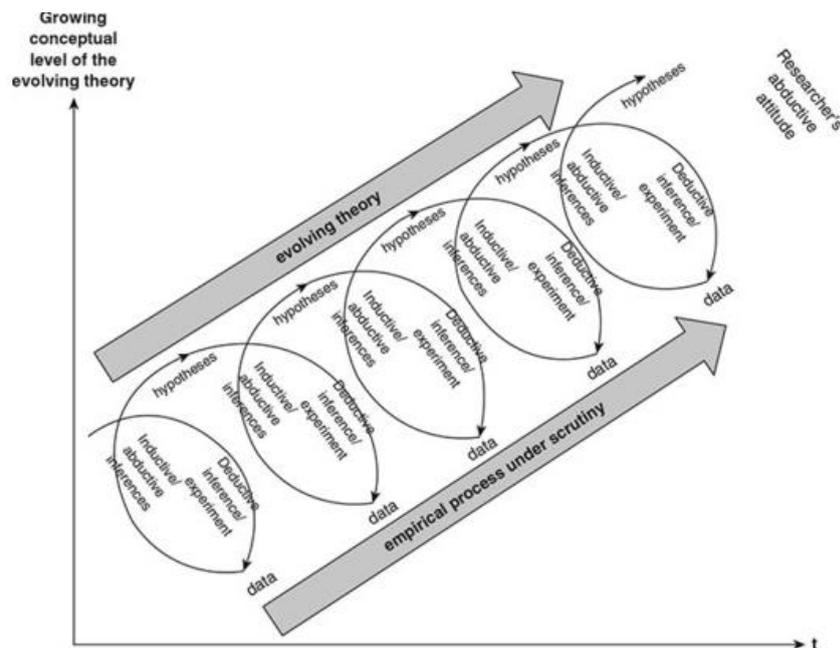


Figure 1. Analytical logic in research based on grounded theory

Source: Strübing, J. (2007). Research as pragmatic problem-solving: the pragmatist roots of empirically-grounded theorizing. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *Handbook of Grounded Theory* (pp. 580-602). London: Sage.

Situational analysis requires from researchers a pre-existing theoretical background before starting their research projects (sensitizing theory) and such framework must be examined according to the abduction approach. According to Clarke et al. (2018), the abduction approach is cognitive and experimental. The researcher must get involved with the data he/she theorizes, and this theorization remains valid if it makes sense; otherwise, it must be discarded to give way to a new reflexivity (Reichertz, 2007).

(e) Orientation towards action, processual analyses, and negotiation among actors to anticipate instabilities. Situational analysis is guided by action, processual analyses, and negotiations, considering that a processual behavior favors the representation of instabilities and contingencies. This fact facilitates the emergence of ruptures, turning points, and trajectories, which indicate fateful moments and epiphanies (Denzin, 1992). The authors mention that some connections can be made based on Foucauldian genealogies that construct present stories by tracking places and changes in discursive moments (Clarke et al., 2018).

(f) Diversity of elements (explicitly significant and underestimated) as the analysis focus and their differences. The diversity in situational analysis has assumed a prominent place to enable the comprehension of human variety in actions. The two most important pillars of this method are to ensure that differences become more visible and to speak our silences (Clarke, 2005).

(g) Use of social worlds/ecologic arenas maps. The ecologic approach according to the Chicago School of Sociology is rooted in territory concepts and metaphors, geographic space, maps, relations among actors in shared spaces, among others. The use of representative relational maps aims at studying the different actors and the activities that positively relate to or confront one

another. Thus, the analysis of worlds/social arenas and other broader frameworks of social ecology and cartography are essential elements for situational analysis (Clarke, 2005).

In short, Clarke (2003, 2005) elaborated a methodological approach that considers differences, power, contingency, and multiplicity. The author aimed for a more explicitly critical approach that did not erase nor dissipate differences, but rather activated them by approaching data silence and silence of resistance, protection, co-optation, and colluding. Finally, considering the presentation of the main issues that sustain the method, the following topic shows a few considerations regarding its operationalization.

Operationalizing situational analysis

Research method

In situational analysis, data can be obtained with different research methods, especially in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, and documentary analysis (Clarke, 2003). In-depth interviews assume that the interviewee can speak about the theme under investigation (Flick, 2004). Initially, asking open-ended questions that are relevant for the research theme is recommended (Charmaz, 2009) with a questionnaire that makes use of sensitizing theory to conduct the topics (Bauer & Gaskell, 2002). In other words, the method is an initial theoretical review of literature before the beginning of the research. Throughout the analysis, new reviews are carried out and incorporated into the data process analysis as the initial review stops providing the necessary assistance to support it (Clarke et al., 2018).

In addition, personal and professional experiences of the researcher are a relevant source of sensitive data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to the evolution of the data collection, other issues intentionally considered appropriate must be inserted in the data collection instrument (the semi-structured interview script) to enrich the analysis (Charmaz, 2009). All interviews should be duly recorded and transcribed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) according to the recommendations made by the most representative scholars of grounded theory.

The inspiration that stems from ethnographic observations is the second research method recommended herein. The fieldwork is the most characteristic element of ethnographic observations, which assumes the interiorization and integration of the researcher in the group under analysis (Pinto, 2009). Participant observation indicates the real participation in the daily social context under analysis; it pushes the researcher to face the lived situations of a participant actor. The non-participant observation enables a contact with actors of the studied group, without integrating the researcher into the group, however; the researcher then plays the role of spectator. In this method, the field diary is the main instrument of data collection, whether registered in a manuscript, in audio or video (Clarke, 2005). As part of ethnographic observation, the researcher takes a participative and observational posture, which enables an analysis that stems from lived experience (Clarke, 2003).

The last research method recommended by Clarke (2005) is the use of any sort of document – also known as discursive materials – that can contribute to research, whether narrative, visual, or historical, such as websites, images, cultural and material objects, technological appliances, scientific and other specialized literature, social media, among others. Documentary research

embodies materials that were not analytically treated or that enable their re-elaboration according to the aim of the research (Beuren, 2006).

Research corpus and sample

Creating the research corpus and the theoretical sample intertwine. First, researchers define a profile of interviewees and/or documents to be analyzed and/or the conduction script of an ethnographically inspired process. However, as the first data are analyzed, the research corpus tends to change due to new discovered paths and demands stemming from the analysis itself. The important issue is to describe – especially using fieldnotes – what motivated the frequent alterations in the research corpus. The justification ensures and gives some credibility to the analysis (Clarke, 2005), especially since in grounded theory the researcher has the option to study determined groups and materials (Bauer & Gaskell, 2002).

The generations of grounded theory, including situational analysis, make use of theoretical samples, which means that the elements initially inserted as part of the research corpus can change as new theoretical preoccupations emerge during the analysis process. Note that grounded theory does not seek representation but new sources of data that enable a better approach to the emergent and specific aspects of the analysis process. Regarding theoretical samples, the sample must be created and re-evaluated in each new data collection to provide a better support to the theorizing process; in other words, the selection of data sources must be gradual and shall occur with the intentional selection and integration of new cases (Charmaz, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2006). Thus, the methodology prioritizes data with different profiles to enrich the collected database.

Data analysis

Situational analyzes makes a clear distinction between data analysis according to the origin of data, which is an analysis very similar to Charmaz's (2017) constructivist model for interviews and fieldnotes and requires a discursive analysis for materials and documents that vest the method with materiality. Thus, the open or initial codification and the discursive analysis participate simultaneously in the theorizing process (Clarke et al., 2018).

After collecting data with interviews and fieldnotes, they must be analyzed in a process known as open codification. This phase consists of making the analyst attribute codes or labels to words or data excerpts in the first interpretative step of the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Coding means to name data segments with a classification that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and represents each part of the data (Charmaz, 2009). This phase is like the first analysis phase of Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory analysis. Researchers must start the analysis as soon as data is available, which shall affect the way in which data sources are chosen. It means that, as the researcher gathers and analyzes data, he/she chooses new sources of data believing that such sources may contribute to better understanding the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2009); this procedure is known as theoretical sample and is adopted in all grounded theory generations, including situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2018).

The analytical organization of data is consolidated by constructing three types of maps, namely situational, world/arena, and positioning maps. The situational map presents the main

human, non-human, discursive, historical, symbolical, cultural, and political elements in the research situation, which leads to an analysis of the relationship among these elements. This map indicates the main elements of the situation under investigation in addition to guiding the researcher during the initial phase of the research, i.e., to decide which data should be collected. Afterwards, the map is constantly updated and used to examine the nature of the relationship among the different elements, which is called relational mapping. From then on, the situational map captures the complexities of the situation by its relations and works against simplification (Clarke et al., 2018). Figure 2 shows the initial sketch.

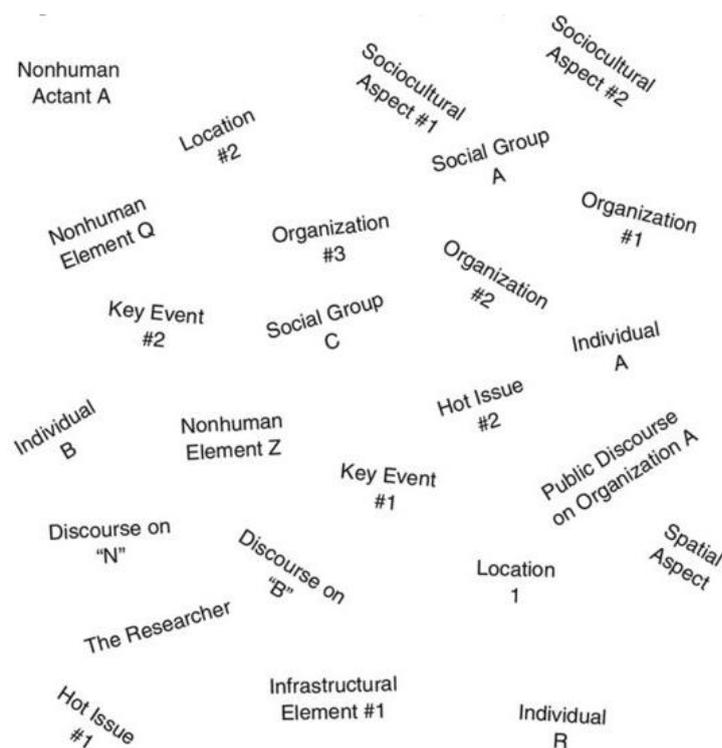


Figure 2. Abstract situational map

Sources: Clarke, A. E., Friese, C., & Washburn, R. S. (2018). *Situational analysis: grounded theory after the interpretative turn* (2nd ed). Los Angeles: Sage.

The situational map can be comprehended by uniting elements that will initially guide the research. Thus, Table 1 shows the first organized version of the situational map. It shows an example that illustrates – in an incipient manner – a determined situation in the food industry. Normally the map has the form of table, which is not required. In situational analysis, the analytical focus is in the relationality, in the mapping, and in the analysis of the relationship among elements – one at a time – in a systematic way, similar to grounded theory codification (Clarke, 2007).

Table 1
Example of an incipiently organized situational map

Individual human actors	Non-human actors
Consumers between 18 and 29 years of age from social classes C and D that consume ultra-processed food.	Nutritional content, food safety, price, products, research and development of new products, communication, distribution, organization of points of sale, promotions, packaging.
Health and business professionals.	
Collective human and non-human actors	Silenced actors/elements
Consumer Protection Code, Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency, Brazilian Association of Food Industries, and Brazilian Association of Supermarkets.	Depression, anxiety, sadness, unemployment, low remuneration, availability, time, Brazilian Code of Self-regulating Advertising.
Discursive construction of individuals and/or collective human actors	Discursive construction of non-human actors
Consuming less processed food is necessary. Having healthier eating habits is necessary. Healthy food is expensive.	Ultra-processed food lasts longer, it can be distributed within long distances and to anywhere, it is easier, quicker, and accessible.
Political and economic elements	Sociocultural and symbolic elements
Economic crises, influence of major brands, generation of jobs and taxes.	Consuming some sorts of food can be related to a better perception of life quality, status, financial situation, shared moments, or especial dates.
Temporal elements	Spatial elements
Historical construction of food industry and food culture.	Local availability of food, local industries, local culture related to food consumption.
Major problems/debates (usually contested)	Related discourses (historical, narrative, and/or visual)
Information asymmetry. Control of a large part of information and influence of major industrial and commercial actors.	Availability of information for decision-making.

Sources: elaborated by the authors.

Social worlds/arenas maps expose all actors and the areas in which they are jointly involved in discourses and negotiations in course. These maps are understood as ecological cartographies of the main collective commitments, relations, and places of action in the situation; they present the main groups, organizations, institution, and other collective actors by describing their relative sizes and key relationships. These maps explicitly analyze social, organizational, and institutional dimensions of the situation based on interpretive assumptions (Clarke et al., 2018), which Figure 3 shows. Based on the previous figure, a social worlds/arenas map was created as an example and is shown in Figure 4.

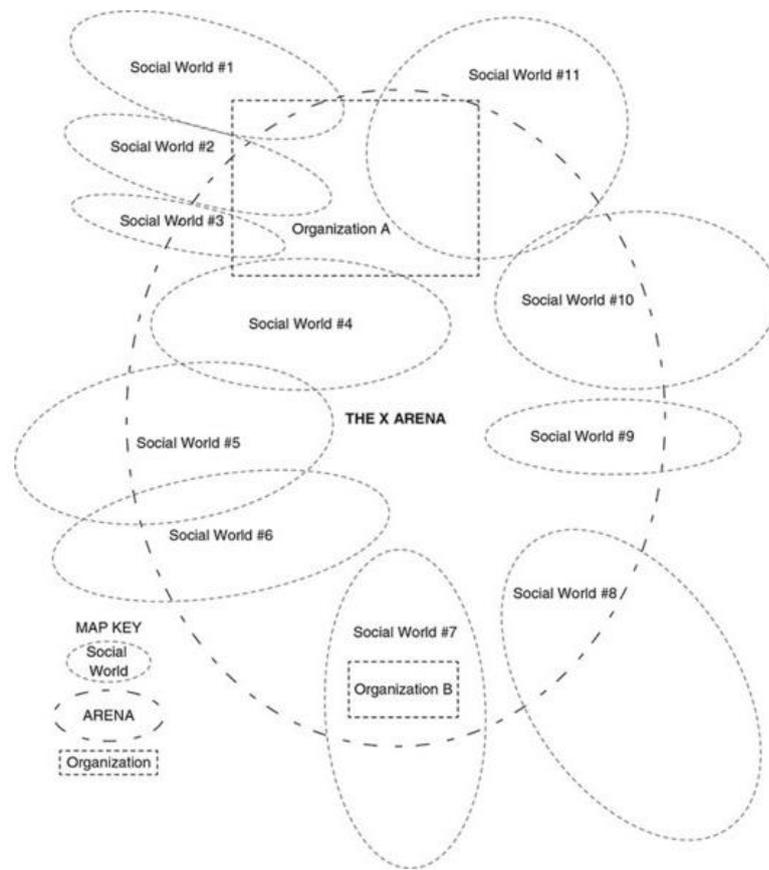


Figure 3. Abstract map of worlds/arenas

Sources: Clarke, A. E., Friese, C., & Washburn R. S. (2018). *Situational analysis: grounded theory after the interpretative turn* (2nd ed). Los Angeles: Sage.

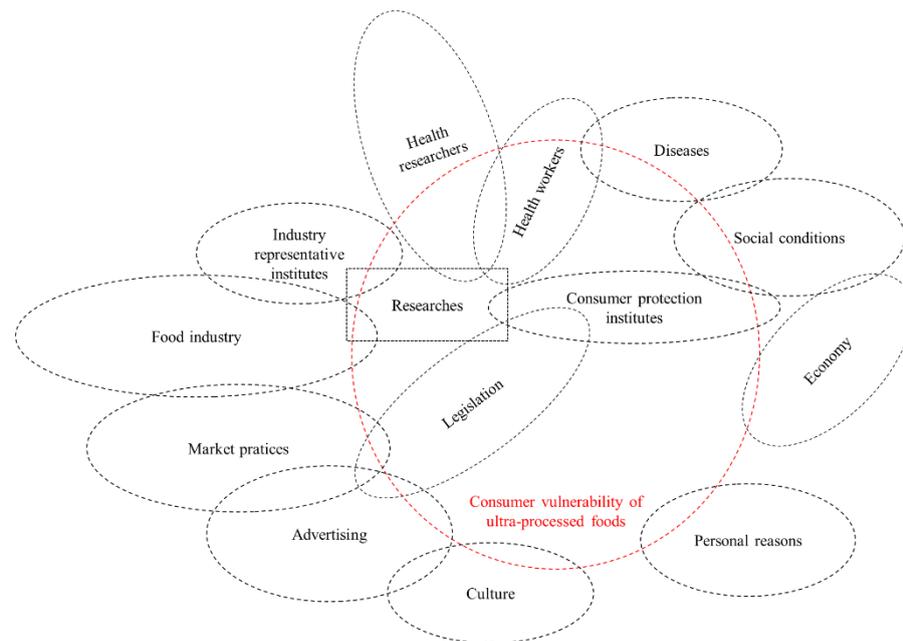


Figure 4. Example of an incipient worlds/arenas map

Sources: elaborated by the authors.

Positioning maps expose the main positions adopted and not in the discursive data found in the situation regarding the specific axes concern and controversy. More importantly, positioning maps do not represent people or groups, but the entire range of discursive positions on issues and demonstrates the articulation of several positions adopted and contradictory positions kept by individuals and communities. Thus, positioning maps detail the main concerns of the situation to reveal the entire range of adopted and not adopted positions in the data. The complexities are heterogeneous, and the positioning maps aim at representing them (Clarke et al., 2018), as Figure 5 shows.

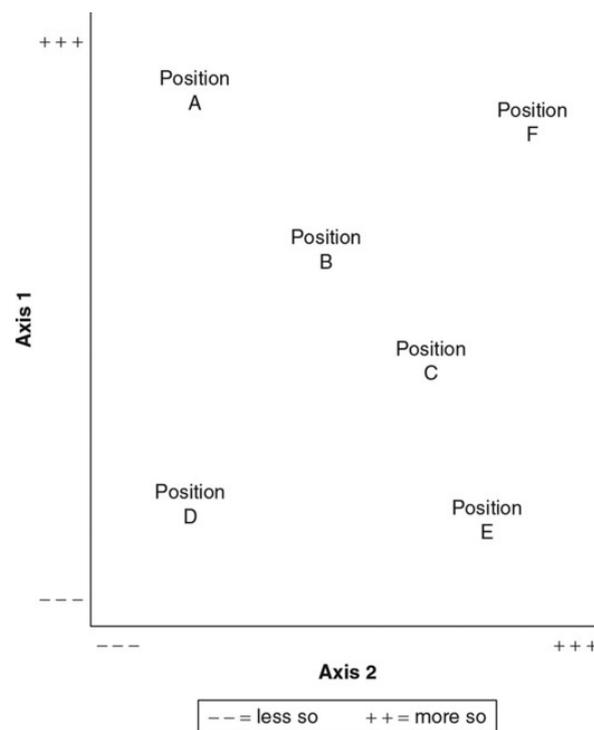


Figure 5. Abstract positioning map

Sources: Clarke, A. E., Friese, C., & Washburn R. S. (2018). *Situational analysis: grounded theory after the interpretative turn* (2nd ed). Los Angeles: Sage.

Only the positions explicitly manifested in the data must be on the positioning map. A position only gets on the map if it is articulated in the data from where examples emerge. At this point, a position that stems explicitly only from the researcher must not appear; what may happen sometimes is the discussion between the researchers' own perspective with positions pragmatically expressed. Sometimes, discussing which positions are missing in the speech might be more than enough, as well as predicting the reason why it happens (Clarke, 2003, 2005). According to previous maps, the example of the food industry will be handled with the positioning map shown in Figure 6.

Together, the three types of maps and narratives about them constitute the general analysis of research in situational analysis and create a relational ecology of the situation. According to the authors, researchers may use the maps to project interventions based on their research (Clarke et al., 2018).

The three maps are essential to represent non-human elements, including discourses, in the situation under investigation as active elements with coconstitutiveness. When creating initial situational maps, the researcher must specify all non-human elements of the situation, making materiality and pertinent discourses visible right from the beginning of the research. One relevant characteristic of the second map is that it works as an arena map of discourses, considering that social worlds are constituted as universes where different discourses take action, which continuously reproduces the elements of concern about the other social worlds inserted in the situation and about the world itself. Accordingly, the discourses are disarticulated from their production sites, which provides situational analysis with more analytical power. Situational maps

create a sort of social inversion when giving visibility to social characteristics that are usually invisible or incipient in a determined situation (Clarke et al., 2018).

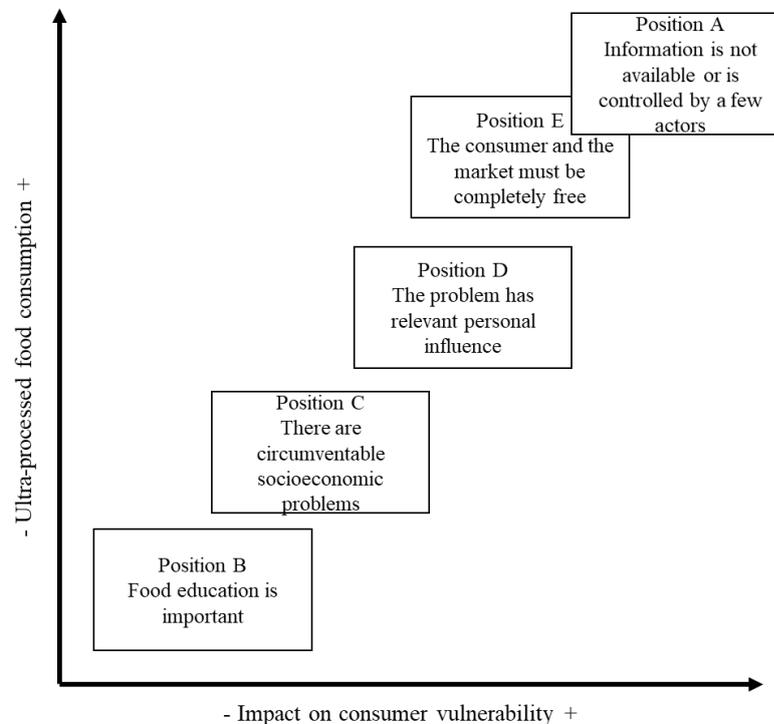


Figure 6. Example of an incipient positioning map

Sources: elaborated by the authors.

According to situation analysis, maps can be used comparatively with different data sources outlining one data source at a time and comparing results (Clarke, 2003). According to Clarke (2003, 2007), framing the situation makes contradictions and disorders more visible and provides them with coherence and order. The focus on actors' real practices elucidates the confusion where the documents and the narratives transmit order.

Every key element of the situation and its inter-relations; the social worlds and social arenas in which the phenomena of interest are inserted; the discursive positions adopted and not by actors (human and non-human) about key issues; and the discourses as a constitutive part of the situation create a post-structuralist work based on pragmatism, interactionism, scientific studies, Foucauldian analysis, rhizomatic analysis, and Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage – all of them are sources of inspiration to the method. Situational analysis is useful by itself and combined with constructivist grounded theory for small or large research based on interviews, ethnographic field projects, and different sorts of discourse analyses (Clarke et al., 2018)

However, none of the works cited along our study clarified one unclear issue in situational analysis. Over the 17 years after the constitution of situational analysis by Clarke et al. (2018), the authors have been affirming the importance of providing research that contributes to

improvements in the life of individuals, collaborative research, research that supports inclusive projects, which would then raise the perception of social justice while bringing research closer to society. The authors, however, do not indicate how it is meant to be done. Now that we have already presented all issues involved in the operationalization, the upcoming topic shows the final remarks.

Final remarks

When finishing up a paper, a few relevant questions tend to emerge. First, what does situational analysis add to qualitative research? To answer this question, considering that – according to Clarke (2005) – situational analysis prioritizes individual and collective differences to generate fairer and more balanced social policies in the areas of education, well-being, health, old-age and disability, among others is important. A research based on situational analysis goes beyond the concern with the emergence of analysis categories from the fieldwork, but it somehow aims at bringing important gains for the public involved. In other words, we assume that research must be based in empiricism to effectively contribute with intricately explicit knowledge.

Second, what does situational analysis add to the two previous generations of grounded theory? We cannot put aside that situational analysis brings new guidance to grounded theory after the interpretive turn. Over the sections of our article, we indicated some advances by presenting the notion of situation, by assuming some cartographic approaches as situational, social arenas, and positioning maps, by considering the role played by non-humans, and by bringing a critical view of social justice for qualitative research and strengthening several sociological discussions. In addition, we emphasize that situational analysis enables researchers to gather discourse and agency studies, action and structure, image, text and context, history and the present moment to analyze complex investigation situations.

Third, which sort of relevant features does situational analysis bring to research in management? We affirm that situational analysis is an approach that seems to encompass several epistemological, theoretical, and methodological elements that – as pointed out previously – and have been gaining more support in researchers' discussions in the field of management. In the area of marketing, for instance, researchers have been discussing that an analysis should encompass micro (related to consumers) and macro elements (stemming from institutional interactions between different actors in society) (Nøjgaard & Bajde, 2021).

And, finally, which are the challenges to be overcome by management researchers that aim at adopting situational analysis in their studies? Researchers that intend to make use of situational analysis face a few challenges. Considering that grounded theory, in the first two generations, already implied a change in the way that a research process is created – i.e., more flexible and focused on empirical investigations –, situational analysis requires from the researcher a greater reflexive capacity and more abstraction to deal with the complexities embedded in social dynamics. Besides, in the management field, the researcher developing the competence to go through new theoretical approaches to search for interdisciplinarity is desirable.

In addition, note that the first analytical aim of situational grounded theory or situational analysis is to generate the so-called sensitizing concepts. A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a determined element; a sensitizing concept provides a general sense of reference and orientation in the approach of empirical aspects. Whereas definitive concepts provide

prescription of what to see, sensitizing concepts provide orientations to look for them (Clarke, 2003; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which makes the method more useful in situations in which changes are continuous, such as in market information systems (pertaining to the marketing field), customer relationship management, crisis and risk management, personnel management, among other possibilities in which situations must be observed and tracked in a broad and exploratory way, considering a large amount of elements. Regarding these issues and the possibility to approach social issues stemming from the society and other actors, situational analysis seems like a promising method to be applied pragmatically by professionals, researchers, public managers, non-profit organizations, social entrepreneurs, and students – especially doctorate students, considering they have more time to elaborate deeper analyses.

In summary, after all this discussion and returning to the questions raised in the introduction section, we can say that situational analysis represents an advance beyond the “traditional” grounded theory by incorporating a series of other elements that bring several possibilities to researchers of management.

Future studies can contribute to the debate by presenting empirical studies that used situational analysis. This paper has the limitation of showing only the fundamentals of the method, commenting on its operationalization and, finally, indicating SA issues that seem to be relevant to management studies. In other words, the objective is to open doors and invite other researchers to join us so that, in the future, we can count on the description of research results obtained with situational analysis. In the same sense, the discussion of how the method can be used to improve the quality and scope of studies in the management area in its various fields will be welcome.

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The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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