Description

Process Coding has also been labeled “action coding” in selected methods literature. In this manual, Process Coding will be used since it implies broader concepts.

Process Coding uses gerunds (“-ing” words) exclusively to connote action in the data (Charmaz, 2002). Simple observable activity (e.g., reading, playing, watching TV, drinking coffee) and more general conceptual action (e.g., struggling, negotiating, surviving, adapting) can be coded as such through a Process Code. The processes of human action can be “strategic, routine, random, novel, automatic, and/or thoughtful” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 283).

Processes also imply actions intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as those things that emerge, change, occur in particular sequences, or become strategically implemented through time (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020; Saldaña, 2003). One classic example of process is Tuckman and Jensen’s (1977) re-envisioned model of small-group dynamics, in which members generally progress through five stages:

1. *Forming* (an orientation of group members to each other’s ways of working)
2. *Storming* (intragroup conflicts arising from individual differences)
3. *Norming* (a negotiating and “settling in” cohesive stage)
4. *Performing* (the small group functioning productively to achieve its goals)
5. *Adjourning* (group closure).

Applications

Process Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that search for the routines and rituals of human life, plus the “rhythm as well as changing and repetitive forms of action-interaction plus the pauses and interruptions that occur when persons act or interact for the purpose of reaching a goal or solving a problem” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 173). Processes are also embedded within “psychological concepts such as prejudice, identity, memory [and] trust” because these are things “people do rather than something people *have*” (Willig, 2015, p. 146). For grounded theory, Process Coding happens simultaneously with In Vivo Coding, Initial Coding, Focused Coding, and Axial Coding, and a search for *consequences* of action/interaction is also part of the process. Processes can also be broken down into subprocesses for finer detail (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 174).

Like In Vivo Coding, Process Coding is not necessarily a specific method that should be used as the sole coding approach to data, though it can be with small-scale projects.

Example

An adult female interviewer talks to a teenage girl about rumors. Note how the codes are all gerund-based (and note that the interviewer's questions and responses are not coded—just the participant's responses). Virtually each line of data gets its own code. This is coding as a "splitter":

Code example 6.4

TIFFANY: Well, [1] that's one problem, that [my school is] pretty small, so [2] if you say one thing to one person, [3] and then they decide to tell two people, [4] then those two people tell two people, and [5] in one period everybody else knows.[6] Everybody in the entire school knows that you said whatever it was. So …	[1] problemizing school size [2] saying one thing [3] telling others [4] telling others [5] everybody knowing [6] knowing what you said
I: Have you ever had rumors spread about you? TIFFANY: Yeah, [7] it's just stupid stuff, completely outlandish things, too. [8] I, I don't really want to repeat them.	[7] rejecting rumors [8] not repeating

I: That's OK, you don't have to.	what was said
TIFFANY: [9] They were really, they were ridiculous. [10] And the worst thing about rumors, [11] I don't really care if people think that, because obviously they're pretty stupid to think that in the first place. But [12] the thing I care about is, like, last year, especially freshman year, was a really horrible year school-wise. And, [13] I guess it was good in a way that you find out who your real friends are, because [14] some of them turned on me and [15] then started to say that those things were true and, like, [16] then people thought, "Well that person's her friend, so they must know." And so, [17] it just made the entire thing worse. And [18] you really learn a lot about people and, uh, and [19] who your real friends are. LuAnn's [20] probably the only person who's really stuck by me this entire time, and [21] just laughed at whatever they said.	[9] rejecting ridiculousness [10] criticizing rumors [11] not caring what people think [12] remembering a horrible year [13] finding out who your real friends are [14] turning on you [15] saying things are true [16] assuming by others [17] making things worse [18] learning a lot about

	people 19 learning who your friends are 20 sticking by friends 21 laughing at what others say

Analysis

Charmaz (2015) wisely observes, “When you have studied a process, your categories will reflect its phases” or stages (p. 80). The conventions of storyline are used in analytic memo writing when reviewing data for process—for example, the first step, the second step, the turning point, the third step, subsequently, thus, and so on. Participant language with transitional indicators such as “if,” “when,” “because,” “then,” “and so,” etc., clue the researcher to a sequence or process in action. These sequences or processes can be ordered as a numeric series of actions, listed as a bullet-pointed set of outcomes, or graphically represented with first-draft illustrations as a flow diagram. Simple examples based on the interview above include:

Narrative—Spreading Rumors:

1. [I]f you say one thing to one person,
2. and then they decide to tell two people,
3. then those two people tell two people,
4. and in one period everybody else knows.

Coded Process—Spreading Rumors:

1. SAYING ONE THING
2. TELLING OTHERS
3. TELLING OTHERS
4. EVERYBODY KNOWING

See Figure 6.1 for an illustrated process of spreading rumors. Bernard et al. (2017, pp. 185–6) also recommend charting participant process in a horizontal matrix, so that the first cell describes the *historical context*, followed by the *triggers* that initiate the *main event*. Next, the

immediate reaction is outlined, concluding with the *long-term consequences*.

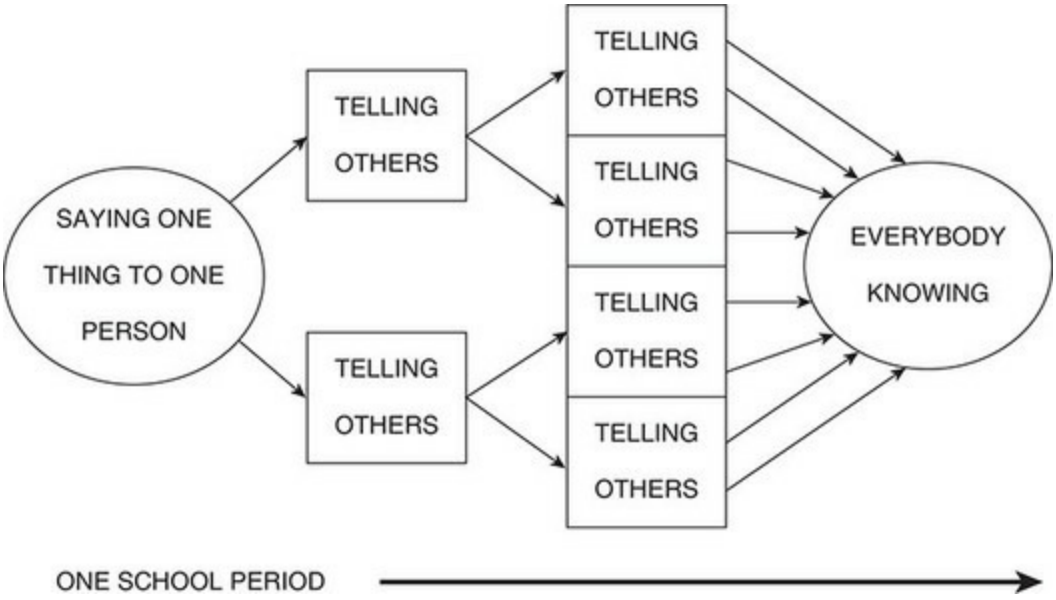

Figure 6.1 An illustrated process for spreading rumors

Consequences of Rumors (the Process Codes that led to the outcome categories are listed for reference)**:**

- **False accusations** (SAYING THINGS ARE TRUE, ASSUMING BY OTHERS)
- **Confrontation** (TURNING ON YOU)
- **Hurt feelings** (MAKING THINGS WORSE, CRITICIZING RUMORS)
- **Bad memories** (NOT REPEATING WHAT WAS SAID, REMEMBERING A HORRIBLE YEAR)
- **Reinforcement of loyalties** (FINDING OUT WHO YOUR REAL FRIENDS ARE, LEARNING WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE,

STICKING BY FRIENDS)

- **Social awareness** (LEARNING A LOT ABOUT PEOPLE)
- "**High road" personal growth** (REJECTING RUMORS, REJECTING RIDICULOUSNESS, CRITICIZING RUMORS, NOT CARING WHAT PEOPLE THINK, LAUGHING AT WHAT OTHERS SAY)

Researcher reflection through analytic memo writing, coupled with second cycle coding, will condense the number of Process Codes and provide a reanalysis and synthesis of your initial work. Dey (1993) encourages consideration of the complex interplay of factors that compose a process and how we can "obtain a sense of how events originate and evolve, and their shifting significance for those involved. Process refers to movement and change over time. In place of a static description, we can develop a more dynamic account of events" (p. 38). Charmaz (2014, pp. 169–70) advises that analytic memos about process can reflect on what slows, impedes, or accelerates the process, and under which conditions the process changes. CAQDAS program linking functions enable you to mark the trail of participant process throughout the data corpus. See Analytic Storylining in Chapter 15 for process-oriented vocabulary to employ in analytic memos and write-ups.

Since Process Codes suggest action, I encourage you to *embody* each code you develop as a form of kinesthetic experience and analysis. Gesturally or with your whole body, enact movements that interpret the codes. For example, rejecting rumors might be interpreted by looking away with an indifferent facial expression as you hold a palm up to suggest "talk to the hand." learning who your friends are might initiate pantomiming a hug with a friend. You may find this a bit awkward at first, but explore it as an arts-based heuristic to gain deeper understanding of the participants and the codes' symbolic and subtextual meanings. I resonate with Ellingson (2017) who places the body at the center of her analytic work, looking for things in the data that "made my mouth and throat hum, my eyes

widen, my spine straighten, my head nod, and my shoulders shiver with excitement when I read about them. I chose exemplars that made my heart speed up and my breath gasp" (p. 192). Indeed, I myself as a former actor am in constant subtle upper body motion as I sit in front of a desktop monitor, read interview transcripts, and physically enact and react to participant narratives.

Some recommended ways to further analyze Process Codes are (see Appendix B):

- Causation Coding
- second cycle coding methods
- action and practitioner research (Altrichter et al., 1993; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Fox et al., 2007; Stringer, 2014)
- case studies (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995)
- cognitive mapping (Miles et al., 2020; Northcutt & McCoy, 2004)
- decision modeling (Bernard, 2018)
- discourse analysis (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016; Gee, 2011; Rapley, 2018; Willig, 2015)
- grounded theory (Bryant, 2017; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Stern & Porr, 2011)
- illustrative charts, matrices, diagrams (Evergreen, 2020; Miles et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2008; Northcutt & McCoy, 2004; Paulston, 2000; Wheeldon & Åhlberg, 2012)
- logic models (Knowlton & Phillips, 2013)
- memo writing about the codes/themes (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987)

- splitting, splicing, and linking data (Dey, 1993)
- thematic analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Smith & Osborn, 2015)
- vignette writing (Erickson, 1986; Graue & Walsh, 1998).

Notes

To appreciate the breadth and depth of Corbin and Strauss's (2015) discussion of Process Coding, readers are referred to their book, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, for a full explanation and thorough examples of memo writing that capture process, and how micro and macro levels of analysis can be projected onto the data. Charmaz's (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory* is also essential reading on this coding method.

See Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams' (2004) thesaurus of action verbs for process reference. Also refer to Dramaturgical Coding for a comparable approach to analyzing a participant's tactics and strategies, and Causation and Longitudinal Coding for links between phases, stages, and cycles of process and action.