

# Abductive Research Strategy (ARS) and the Construction of typologies: An Example of the Use of Twelve Methods of ARS

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## ABSTRACT

The Abductive Research Strategy is a type of qualitative method of theory construction in interpretative social science. Norman Blaikie has largely drawn from the work of Schütz, Weber, Winch, Douglas, Rex, and Giddens to develop the methodology of Abductive Research Strategy. The Abductive Research Strategy (ARS) has been employed to identify the process used, firstly, to generate social scientific accounts from social actors' accounts, secondly, to derive technical concepts and theories from lay concepts and interpretations of social life, and, thirdly, to construct theory that is grounded in everyday activities in the language and interpretation of social actors. This use of abduction involves twelve methods and four major dialogues. The first dialogue is between the researcher and participants. Second, between the everyday constructs that emerge from the dialogues with participants. Third, between the accumulating information such as recorded field notes, the knowledge in the mind of researcher and the observation of the researcher at any time and emerging typology. Fourth, between the researcher and 'outsiders' such as supervisor or advisors. While there is a great deal of written work on the idea of the Abductive Research Strategy in the form of books and published articles, the application of this research strategy has still to appear in the literature. Therefore, this article would like to contribute to the latter by employing a study of the experience of work of life insurance sales workers in Penang as an example of the use of Abductive Research Strategy and, through the example, the article has presented the use of the twelve methods of Abductive Research Strategy of generating typologies.

**Keywords:** Abductive logic, Abductive Research Strategy, grounded concepts, typologies, qualitative research

## Article Info

Received 15 August 2020

Accepted 22 November 2020

Published 30 November 2020

## INTRODUCTION

Abductive logic was originally proposed by Charles Sander Peirce (1931a, 1931b) and later by David Willer (1967) as a method for constructing hypotheses in the natural sciences. Because of the work of Blaikie (1993, 2000, 2007, 2010, 2018) and Blaikie & Priest (2019, pp. 99–101), the use of abductive logic as a research strategy is now advocated as the suitable method of theory construction in interpretative social science. Abductive Research Strategy (ARS) is one distinctive type of qualitative research developed by Blaikie, which refers to the process of constructing theories or typologies that are grounded in everyday activities and in the language and meanings of social actors.<sup>1</sup>

This research strategy is associated with Interpretivism and is used to generate social scientific accounts from social actors' accounts. Blaikie developed this research strategy by drawing largely from the work of hermeneutics, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, existential sociology, and even ethnomethodology

(Schütz, 1963a, 1963b, 1972, 1976; Weber, 1964; Winch, 1958; Douglas, 1971; Rex, 1974; and Giddens, 1976, 1979).<sup>2</sup> The aim of this paper is to show how grounded concepts, in the form of typologies, are generated by abductive logic. This will be displayed through using an empirical example from Malaysia. However, it is necessary to, first, review the ARS and to illustrate its methods of generating grounded concepts or typologies.

### **Abductive Research Strategy**

ARS holds idealist ontology and the epistemology of constructionism. This means that ARS entails social reality as socially constructed by social actors, where there is no single reality but multiple and changing social realities and it regards social scientific knowledge as being derived from socially constructed mutual knowledge – from everyday concepts and meanings. Therefore, the view of the nature of social reality, the source of answers to ‘why’ questions, and the manner in which those answers are obtained have made the ARS distinctively different from other types of qualitative research (Blaikie, 2000, p. 116).

The ARS focuses largely on the meanings and interpretations, the motives, and intentions that people use in their daily lives and which direct their behaviour. This is because the social world is interpreted and experienced by social actors from the inside. People use the largely tacit, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, motives, and rules as guide to do what they do in daily life. Mutual knowledge is background knowledge that is largely unarticulated. Therefore, people must interpret their activities together for them to negotiate their way around their world and make sense of it. It is these meanings, embedded in language, that produce people’s social reality. These subjective meanings are not private but are intersubjective which people maintain through their ongoing interaction together (Blaikie, 2000, p. 115). Hence, social explanations need to go beyond the specific meanings that people give to their actions. This means that people need to deal with typical meanings produced by typical social actors, which involves the use of abstractions and approximations.

Because social world is already defined and interpreted by social actors before the social scientist enters into their social life, according to Giddens (1976), social researchers cannot begin to describe any social activity without knowing the accounts of social actors. Hence, the accounts people can give of their own actions and the actions of others are the only access to any social world. Social scientists should need to discover and describe this ‘insider’ view and should not impose an ‘outsider’ view on it. It is this stock of knowledge and how it is produced and reproduced by social actors that abductive researchers need to grasp and articulate to provide an understanding of these actions. This also means that social scientists need to deal with typical meanings produced by typical social actors.

Social actors’ accounts of their actions are provided to the social researchers in the language of the participants. Therefore, social scientists must learn the language social actors use to describe and negotiate their way around their world. Language here has to be seen not only as a system of signs or symbols “but as a medium of practical activity” (Giddens, 1976, p. 155) which must be grasped as skilled accomplishment of active human beings and must be studied from the ‘inside’. Therefore, “generating descriptions of social conduct depends upon the hermeneutic task of penetrating the frames of meaning which lay actors themselves draw upon in constituting and reconstituting the social world” (Giddens, 1976, p. 155). Therefore, social researchers have to use the same skills as social actors use to manage their everyday social lives (Giddens, 1976). This means that abductive researchers must get into this world and learn the skills social actors use to construct and reconstruct their life. This process of construction involves people constantly reinterpreting their world.

Much of the activity of social life is routine and is conducted in a taken-for-granted and unreflective manner and only when social life is disrupted or ceases to be predictable that social actors are forced to consciously search for or construct meanings and interpretations (involving reflection). In view of this abductive researchers may have to resort to procedures that encourage this reflection in order to discover the meanings and theories. However, it is necessary for abductive researchers to piece together the fragments of meaning that are available from their externalized products to generate social scientific accounts.

The logic abductive researchers uses to construct the ideal types (second-level construct) is in accordance with the logic social actors use to create the typification in daily life (first-level constructs). However, the distinction is only that the former are particular constructions, constructed with a certain purpose and aim in mind that have to adhere to the rule of science (Schütz, 1976). It is from the process of moving from the first level of constructs to second level of constructs that the idea of abduction gains its meaning (Blaikie, 1993, p. 176).<sup>3</sup> Whether or not second level constructs can be regarded as being superior to everyday accounts is a matter of dispute.

### Abductive Logic of Constructing Typologies

The ARS has suggested four stages to generate concepts, typologies or theories that are grounded in everyday activities, in the language and meanings of social actors (see Blaikie, 2000, pp.116–117).

1. Observe the activities of social actors that are related to the research problem and, then, try to elicit their accounts of these activities. This stage is satisfied through researchers immersing into the everyday social world of the people to grasp their socially constructed meanings;
2. Describe their activities and meanings (conceptualization and interpretations) closely to their everyday language (first-order concepts);
3. Find suitable second-order concepts (social scientific concepts or technical concepts) to capture the differences and similarities in these accounts; and
4. Derive social scientific accounts (descriptions and understanding) of the problem at hand.

While it is possible for different forms and levels of abstraction of theory to be generated from social actors' accounts, following the tradition established by Weber (1964), Schütz (1963a, 1963b, 1972, 1976) and Becker (1940, 1950), the ARS promotes the construction of ideal types or typologies (Blaikie, 2000, p. 181).

To practically accomplish these four stages, the ARS further lists twelve steps in generating typologies (Ong, 2005, 2012).

1. Start with a general formulation of the problem to be studied.
2. Relevant literature is reviewed even though its relevance is very hard to ascertain at that stage. Therefore, this task proceeded in parallel with the fieldwork.
3. Enter the social world with some sensitizing concepts as a guide but being as non-directive as possible.
4. Identify the concepts and categories that are used in the discussion of the 'topic', especially those that keep recurring in the conversations.
5. Explore the meaning of these concepts and categories. This continues throughout the study.
6. Refine and narrow the problem.
7. Become part of the social actors' world by regular involvement with them.
8. Record all comments and behaviour that have associations with the central concepts.
9. Test the concepts and categories that are identified in social actors with other social actors.
10. Search relevant literature for ideas about how the social actors' concepts and categories are used in social sciences. Check their relevance and usefulness.
11. This continues until typologies of social actors are established.
12. Present the typologies to the social actors to establish their validity.

These twelve steps involve a series of four dialogues (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, pp. 233–237) which will be further discussed below

### An Example of the use of Abductive Logic

The logic of abduction was used in a study of the experience of work encountered by life insurance sales workers in a life insurance company, in Penang (for details, see Ong, 2005). This approach to research was adopted because of the limited literature on sales workers and previous methodological problems encountered in undertaking such research<sup>4</sup> (for a review, see Ong, 2005). The research focused on the extent to which these sales workers in Penang, experience work alienation, and job satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Fifty life insurance sales workers were selected and interviewed (Ong, 2005). This sample was selected through a combination of non-probability sampling methods, purposive sampling, snowball sampling and theoretical sampling. Data was collected by participant observation and, particularly, in-depth interviewing, over a period of twelve months. The interviews and field notes were analysed with the help of NVivo to establish categories, to locate patterns and to generate typologies of sales workers' experience of work. Based on the twelve practical steps of ARS, three typologies of life insurance sales workers have been constructed.

After seven to eight years of the initial study, more data was collected from the sample of life insurance sales workers in other states in Malaysia. Therefore, the research focused on the experience of work of life insurance workers in Penang, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor using abductive research strategy and survey methodology (Ong, 2013). This follow up research has corroborated and, therefore, confirmed the findings of the research that were revealed in 2005. Hence, for the purpose of this paper, I have only focused on sales workers

in the life insurance company whilst the previous study focused on both life insurance company workers and electronics company workers (Ong, 2005, 2013).

The data from the study of experience of work of life insurance sales workers in other parts of Malaysia – such as Penang (11 respondents), Kedah (6 respondents), Negeri Sembilan (10 respondents), Melaka (22 respondents) and Johor (17 respondents) – have strongly supported the typologies that were constructed in Penang (see Ong, 2013). While this section discusses the practical procedures by which the typologies of life insurance sales workers were generated, the next subsection illustrates the typologies.

1. *General formulation of the problem.*

This research began with a general statement of the problem to be investigated: the experience of work of life insurance sales workers.

2. *Relevant literature.*

Some relevant literature was reviewed in early stages, on work alienation, orientation to work, job satisfaction, and job stress. Included in this review were some theoretical perspectives, Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and the Social Construction of Reality Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1972).<sup>5</sup> The literature was explored further, in parallel with fieldwork.

3. *Entering the social situation.*

At the stage of entering the social situation, the researcher tried to be as non-directive as possible while interviewing and observing the sales workers. This was important to avoid preconceptions and the imposition of existing concepts and theories. That is why even though some ideas were derived from the formulation of the problem and the literature review, the researcher endeavoured to set aside these ideas when he entered the social situations to interview the sales workers. This did not mean that the interviews were conducted without any guide. Some themes and concepts – such as ‘experience of work’, sales work, job satisfaction, stress, work alienation, work and job, work attitude or orientation, and work motivation – were used to initiate conversations with the sales workers to provide direction to the research.

At the same time, the researcher also sought to discover other concepts used by sales workers that were roughly equivalent or different. The aim was to explore the meaning given by the sales workers to these concepts and themes if they used them. Other than these themes and concepts, no theories or hypotheses were proposed at the beginning of the research. Models, in the form of ideal types, were to be developed to understand the experience of work of sales workers.

4. *Identified the concepts and categories.*

By establishing a non-directive approach as illustrated above, the researcher tried to explore sales workers’ stories of their experience of work. In the process, many concepts were identified that were used by the respondents when the topic was discussed. The researcher was particularly interested in those that kept recurring in the conversations. Concepts such as trust, relationship, friendship, professional, good character, luck and many others emerged as interview proceeded.

5. *Explored the meaning of these concepts and categories.*

This stage of the research required an exploration of the meaning of the concepts that were derived from sales workers’ conversations. This task continued throughout the study. The process involved learning to speak their language, learning their interests and their understanding of their worldviews and perspectives. It involved leaning their form of life (Winch, 1958, pp. 55–57) which engaged an empathic listening to the story of sales workers. This means the researcher sought to seek to understand without critically trying to respond to respondents.

6. *Refined and narrowed the problem.*

The scope of the study was narrowed through identifying the main categories and their properties. For example, the researcher had identified the concept of trust as a main category and relationship, good character, luck, and professional as its properties. This continued throughout the study.

7. *Became part of the sales workers’ world.*

The researcher became involved regularly in the work of sales workers in order to be part of their working world. For instance, the researcher followed the sales workers to work and helped them in their daily selling work. The researcher also mingled with sales workers and participated in sales workers’ social activities. This participant observation in the sales workers’ work and social activities helped the researcher to immerse himself in the form of life of the sales workers in order to learn the sales workers’ worldview and experience of work. Through this kind of involvement, the researcher was able to observe and reflect on the differences between what the sales workers have shared and what they actually do in

their work. These regular involvements in the sales workers' work and social life were complemented by attendance at seminars and informal discussions held weekly by sales workers. The seminars and informal discussions are 'the weekly sharing meetings', 'the career talks', and 'the winner nights. At the weekly sharing meetings, sales workers discuss their daily problems. The career talks are seminars conducted for new workers to provide them with a better understanding of the prospects of sales work in life insurance. The winner nights are gatherings where sales workers' good performance is rewarded. Besides this, the researcher also read the annual meeting reports and training program manual.

8. *Recorded all comments and behaviour that had associations with the central concepts.*  
Under this step, the researcher was required to record ideas, comments, and behaviour related to the focal or main concepts that emerged from the interviews. This included anything that seemed to have a bearing on the sales workers' experience of work. This was done with the help of the memo writing facility in the NVivo software program.
9. *Tested the concepts and categories.*  
During the process of the interview, the researcher continued to check and confirm the categories and concepts that had been identified with particular sales worker, with other sales workers. This expanded the information about the concepts and the categories. Glaser and Strauss (1974) have called this way of checking and confirming the categories as the 'constant comparative method'.
10. *Searched relevant literature for ideas to order concepts and categories.*  
After the fieldwork proceeded for seven months, a search of relevant literature was conducted to see whether the concepts and categories had been used by social scientists, and, if so, in what ways. It was possible to compare the use of the concepts in the intellectual domain with the meaning defined by sales workers. This not only stimulated more questions to ask the sales workers, but it also helped the researcher to identify the relevant literature for ideas that might help to order the data. Thus, an ongoing dialogue between the first level constructs and sociological concepts was conducted. For instances, the work of Misztal (1996) and Gray (1998) provided some relevant ideas to help organize the sales workers' concepts and categories.
11. *Typologies of sales workers were established.*  
The above processes continued until all the categories and concepts identified from the sales workers had reached theoretical saturation. Saturation means "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). Therefore, theoretical saturation occurs when no new categories emerge, and new or relevant data can be dealt with within the existing categories. The researcher then started to build typologies from the sales workers' accounts.
12. *Presented the typologies to sales workers to establish their validity.*  
The typologies had to satisfy the postulate of adequacy. The construction of the typologies adhered to Schütz's argument that they should be derived from and remain consistent with lay concepts. The typologies were either presented verbally to the sales workers or they were allowed to read the types relevant to them. Their reactions were recorded. It is understood that member checks in this research are not only about checking the validity of the researcher's types (the second level constructs), thus ensuring that they fit with the respondents' understanding; but it was also done to check the first level constructs, in terms of the extent to which the researcher had fully grasped them in the first place. During the period of 'member checking' further data were collected. This is similar with the use of the constant comparative method.<sup>6</sup>

### **Typologies of Life Insurance Sales Workers**

The study of the experience of work of life insurance sales workers has provided a detail insight into the nature of work from workers' perspectives. Sales workers' descriptions of their work have been described in typologies. Three typologies – types of orientations to work, types of gaining trust or types of selling the life insurance, and types of sales workers' motivation, have been constructed. These typologies were used to understand how life insurance sales workers experience work alienation, job satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

#### **Types of orientation to work**

Four types of insurance sales workers' orientations to work have identified and constructed. They are labelled as the 'instrumental' (41 sales workers), 'contributive' (40 sales workers), 'achievement/ego' (six sales workers) and 'practical' (20 sales workers). In the instrumental type, work is viewed as being a means to earn a better living. Workers are very satisfied with their work if they earn a great deal of income from their sales work. In this case,

work only gives extrinsic satisfaction to sales workers. Besides instrumental meaning, work has no value. These sales workers seek their fulfilment outside work, such as, achieving a high standard living.

In the contributive type, sales workers regard work as an activity in which they can contribute to other people's wellbeing. These sales workers feel happy and satisfied with their work if they can help other people by having life insurance. Therefore, work provides intrinsic satisfaction to contributive-type sales workers because they see work as being an enriching experience.<sup>1</sup>

Under the achievement or ego type, work is regarded as an activity in which sales workers can develop themselves. Achievement or ego-type sales workers share with the contributive-type sales workers the same ideas of the meaning of work because they view work as being an enriching experience and as providing challenges that can develop them to fulfil themselves. However, in contrast to contributive-type sales workers, this meaning of work is restricted to what they can achieve for themselves, not for other people.

Like the instrumental-type sales workers, the practical-type sales workers regard work as a means to an end, a way of earning a living. However, in contrast to the instrumental-type sales workers, they regard work as earning enough money for their basic needs to survive in this world, to make a daily living. They are more interested in enjoying their lives through spending more time on their private life.

### **Types of Gaining Trust**

The concept of trust was identified to be an important category in understanding sales work. Trust is regarded as being the prospects' or customers' belief in the reliability or trustworthiness of sales workers. It is based on their good character, relationship quality and professional ability. It is a subjective feeling that depends on the perceptions and experiences prospects or customers have of a sales worker. For sales workers, selling life insurance is a process in which they relate to and interact with their prospects by creating a good impression to gain prospects' trust in them. It is like people acting in everyday social life to gain social trust to satisfy their social goals. However, the difference is that life insurance sales workers do it in a more self-conscious and reflexive way to gain their prospects' trust. As fieldwork advanced, four types of gaining trust as selling strategies were identified and constructed. The types are relationship type (38 sales workers), luck type (15 sales workers), good characteristics type (15 sales workers), and professional type (28 sales workers).

#### **(a) Relationship Type of Gaining Trust**

In relationship type, sales workers endeavour to first establish a friendship relationship with the aim of gaining their prospects' sincere trust. Hence, prospects buy to support a close friendship. The process that leads to close friendship occurs in stages. It begins with cold calling and then leads up to follow-up, acceptance and closing stages. These four stages are also called attraction, uncertainty, exclusive and intimacy stages.

The cold-calling or attraction stage begins with sales workers trying to relate to and interact with their prospects. This stage involves telephoning and knocking on strangers' doors to sell life insurance policies. A good first impression is, therefore, very crucial if an interview is going to occur. Because sales workers desire to understand their prospects and develop friendship with them that the sales workers have usually spent a great deal of their time listening to their prospects.

At the follow-up stage, sales workers visit their prospect more regularly to develop their friendship relationship. The sales workers must bear with many rejections from their prospects. Nevertheless, they usually look for opportunities to help prospects with personal things through which they have the chance to be with their prospects and they can increase their knowledge of each other by learning to do things together. As a result, friendship trust slowly develops between sales workers and prospects.

At the acceptance stage, sales workers are regarded as friends by prospects. For the first time, sales workers can freely visit prospects and they are usually comfortable being together. Sales workers' visits and help are expected by prospects as desirable. When opportunities arise, sales workers are not hesitant to ask their prospects to buy from them, which they do because of the friendship connection.

The closing or intimacy is the stage in which sales workers and their prospects enjoy a very close friendship relationship. Prospects are usually motivated to buy from sales workers they have already accepted as a

member of their family. Having such close relationship with customers ensures continuous business. It is, therefore, no surprise that such customers introduce more prospects to sales workers. This is the stage in which sales workers make a great deal of sales.

#### **(b) Luck Type of Gaining Trust**

In the luck type, sales workers look for prospects who can trust them as what they are. According to the luck type, people can trust and get along well with each because they have similar personalities and a way of life. In this case, sales workers believe they can sell to people who trust them naturally. In contrast to the sales workers in the relationship type, these sales workers can behave naturally in doing their work. Meeting more people is the only practical way to identify prospects with whom they share a common way of life. When they have found suitable prospects, they will pursue and persuade them to buy life insurance. It is, therefore, a matter of luck for sales workers to meet people who can trust them naturally. To increase this luck, sales workers usually commit themselves to 'the logic of the numbers game'. They aim to meet ten prospects a day and expect to interview three of them. However, a sales worker's minimum hope is that one of the three can trust them sufficiently to buy. This method motivates sales workers to work hard and achieves good results.

#### **(c) Good Character Type of Gaining Trust**

Under the good character type, sales workers gain prospects' or customers' trust through presenting themselves as having a good character, as being sincere, honest, helpful, courteous, responsible, trustworthy, and reliable. Having a good character is, in fact, essential when people desire to gain meaningful and lasting support from other people to achieve their social goals in life. The extent to which sales workers can gain prospects' trust is largely dependent on whether they can manage to convince their prospects that they are reliable and trustworthy. Impression management is clearly involved. Sales workers whose character is naturally good have little trouble gaining this type of trust. However, those sales workers whose character is naturally unreliable, have to work very hard over time, and in various ways, to convince their prospects that they are trustworthy persons; or that they have already changed to be a more reliable and responsible person.

#### **(d) Professional Type of Gaining Trust**

Under the professional type, sales workers believe selling life insurance is a professional job that needs special training and skill. Prospects are expected to trust them because of their profound life insurance knowledge, skills, and ability to serve prospects well. Sales workers, therefore, focus on their professionalism to gain people's trust. To achieve this, sales workers try to create prospects' need for life insurance through getting the prospects to understand the concept of life insurance and then to relate this specifically to their lives. This is usually done in a very rational way that using facts, figures, and logical arguments. For example, this selling strategy starts with professional sales workers approaching their prospects through cold calling (strangers) or natural markets (relatives and friends or business associations). Sales workers then introduce themselves in a friendly manner and request time to present the concept of life insurance. In the beginning, the presentation is usually very general. However, it then becomes more specific to the life of their prospects to demonstrate the importance of life insurance directly to them. The process entails sales workers asking certain standard and appropriate questions, which then direct their prospects' answers. Usually, the standard questions are based on the prospects' income, job, education, and age. In this way, sales workers can control the conversation. Knowing many facts about their prospects is very important for them to be able to influence their prospects in viewing and understanding the importance of life insurance. While it is the skills and knowledgeability of professional sales workers that convince people to trust them and to buy life insurance, the expensive clothing and car usually confirm and legitimate this trust.

#### **Types of Work Motivation**

Sales workers refer to the term motivation as needs, desires and expectations that drive them to work hard in their work. They also refer it to as the process of how these energies (the need, desires, and expectations) drive sales workers to work diligently to achieve something they expect. It is also involved in how their behaviour is maintained or sustained. In the context of motivation, sales workers use the concepts of responsibility, achievement, goal setting, job accomplishment, positive thinking, self-development, group spirit and environment. Seven types of work motivation have been identified and constructed: responsibility or money type (37 sales workers); achievement type (50 sales workers); goal-setting type (50 sales workers), job accomplishment type (45 sales workers); positive thinking type (46 sales workers); self-development type (44 sales workers); and environment type (35 sales workers).

Under responsibility or money type, sales workers are able to remain motivated to do their work because of a sense of responsibility to provide a good and comfortable living for themselves and their family members, such as house, car, and children's education. This motivates them to work hard to earn money as obtaining this quality of life is very costly. Because of this, these sales workers always refer to money as being their motivation.

The achievement type highlights the desire or need to achieve something in work as the basis for a sales worker to continue to work daily. The desire to achieve something is concerned with wanting to become somebody in or through the world of work. This type of motivation is very prevalent among educated sales workers.

The goal-setting type has a connection with the achievement type. For people to make use of their desire to achieve something, which is the key idea of the achievement type, requires them to identify and specify their goals clearly. Having certain clear goals in life or work can motivate people. Once people have achieved their goals, their lives will be more meaningful. Sales workers' goals in life are usually having a car, a nice house, and a wife and children in their lives. This motivates them to work hard. In the world of work, sales workers' goals are to achieve sales targets, be higher achievers in sales, and be in the best sales group. However, goals have to be achievable. While the nature of sales workers' goals in social life can change from time to time in line with sales workers' needs, their goals in work are more consistent. Therefore, having these goals motivates these sales workers to perform well in their work.

In the job accomplishment type, sales workers are motivated by being able to complete their work. However, sales workers differ in how they view complete work. Sales workers who regard a piece of completed work as being making a sale, tend to feel motivated to do their work whenever they make a sale. However, sales workers who associate it with finishing any piece of their daily work, tend to feel motivated daily even they do not make a sale. Most of the time, the process of selling takes a period of time, in which sales workers try to identify, approach and persuade their prospects or customers to buy from them. Therefore, the latter type of motivation tends to be more effective than the completed sales type.

Under the positive thinking type, sales workers adopt a positive thinking approach on whatever happens to them on a daily basis, particularly rejection by prospects or customers. Positive thinking generates a good feeling towards their daily work, which, in turn, can motivate them not only to continue working but also to work hard. One of the positive ways of looking at work is to focus on the results perspective rather than the failure perspective.

The self-development type is based on the logic that people will feel motivated to work when they know their work is enhancing and developing themselves. They view their work as learning and learning for them is a fun activity as it develops their knowledge and awareness. Because daily sales work is naturally not routine, when compared with office work, sales workers have many opportunities to learn and develop themselves every day. This challenges sales workers' ability to handle their work. They feel excited and motivated to work hard and to stay focused on their work.

According to the environment type, sales workers are motivated to work hard as a result of their positive and conducive work environment. The important aspects of the work environment are motivational songs and books, and group culture. In life insurance, motivational songs are routinely played during group discussions, meeting, and seminars, particularly at the time before the gatherings start and after they end, to produce good feelings among sales workers. Furthermore, when sales workers sing in groups they have a sense of togetherness in doing their work, and this encourages them to work hard. Sales workers' regular read motivational books, which keeps them positive about their work and supports this healthy environment. In addition, these life insurance sales workers have a high group spirit that provides support and makes sure that they are successful in their work. This form of healthy group culture attracts and motivates workers to work hard. These sales workers are externally motivated to view their work positively.

### **Member checks on the Types**

The types of orientations to work, gaining trust, and work motivation were presented to fifty sales workers to see if the type related well to their working reality. This process is referred to as the postulate of adequacy (Schütz, 1963a, p. 247; 1963b, p. 343) or 'member checks' in ethnomethodology. Life insurance sales workers confirmed the types, with some practical variations. About the types of gaining prospects' or customers' trust, for example,



sales workers have provided their responses in three ways: they

- use different strategies at different sales levels (25 sales workers);
- use different strategies in different situations (17 sales workers); and
- consistently adopt a specific strategy (13 sales workers) (for a detail of this, see Ong, 2005).

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Based on the illustrations of the example, it is important to make two important remarks of the elements of ARS. First, as far as the generation of grounded concepts or typologies is concerned, the ARS clearly stresses the importance of getting as close as possible the meanings and interpretations constructed by social actors. For instance, it is clearly noticed that the researcher has seriously immersed himself in the form of life of their respondents in order to “know how to find one’s way about in it, to be able to participate in it as an ensemble of practices” (Giddens, 1976, p.161). In addition, the example has indicated that the process by which respondents’ accounts are carefully constructed, certain steps, such as ‘member checking’ (Garfinkel, 1967) or using the ‘postulate of adequacy’ (Schutz, 1963a), were employed to ensure the researchers’ accounts were not too far away from the respondents’ accounts.

Second, the ARS is insistent that the scientific accounts, at least initially, be derived from, and remain consistent with, lay language. That is why the researcher in the example remained sympathetic to the scientific accounts that derive from, and remain consistent with, lay language. These two key features of the ARS have distinguished this research strategy from other types of qualitative research, such as Grounded Theory (see Ong, 2009, 2012).

Using the Abductive Research Strategy in this study, three typologies were constructed – types of orientations to work, types of gaining trust or types of selling, and types of sales workers’ motivation. These typologies enabled the development of a deeper understanding of how life insurance sales workers experience work alienation and job satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The typologies have led to the researcher to discover a type of self-alienation that is different from Marx’s view of alienation, and, therefore, contributes to the empirical elaboration of the theory of self-alienation (see Ong, 2011).

### Notes

1. The method of abductive logic was originally used to generate hypotheses in the natural sciences (Peirce, 1931a, 1931b, 1934a, 1934b; Willer, 1967; Blaikie, 1993; 2007). However, it is now being used as a method of theory construction in interpretive social science (Blaikie, 2007, pp. 88–89).

2. See Blaikie (1993, pp. 176–193), for a review of their ideas.

3. See Ong (2005, pp. 140–160) for a review of how social actors construct typification and social scientists construct ideal types.

4. For example, one of the methodological problems in the previous research is that researchers have adopted a positivist approach and subjective measurement of the concept of work alienation. Because of this, the researchers have failed to establish a sound empirical relationship between the experience of work of workers and the structural settings (see Ong 2005).

5. See Ong (2005, pp. 90–107), for a review of these theoretical perspectives.

6. The difference between the constant comparative method and member checks in this case is that the former happened in the initial stage of interviewing the sales people to develop the first level constructs, while the latter occurred at the stage after the second level constructs have been established (Silverman, 2001). Therefore, they are different merely because they were conducted with different purposes in mind and in different contexts.

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