# Spotlight Session: Grounded Theory with MAXQDA

Typically, grounded theory projects do not follow a strict step-by-step process, but the researchers apply basic principles and procedures, such as the following:

- The research process is designed iterative, with alternating data collection and analysis.
- Coding takes a significant role in the analysis. For coding, a variety of approaches (for example, open, axial, and selective coding) is used.
- The level of abstraction of codes and categories developed increases as the analysis progresses.
- Researchers write memos to record important thoughts and findings.
- Concept maps are used to visualize current states of theory development.

How can grounded theory studies be implemented with MAXQDA? This document presents helpful functions and provides concrete tips.

## Set-up your MAXQDA project and organize your documents

- Create a new MAXQDA project right from the beginning of your study.
- Import all data into the project.
- Import field notes as documents (not memos) so that they can be coded.
- Use meaningful document names for easy access of different types of documents.
- Structure data in document groups by data type, time of collection, or other meaningful logic.
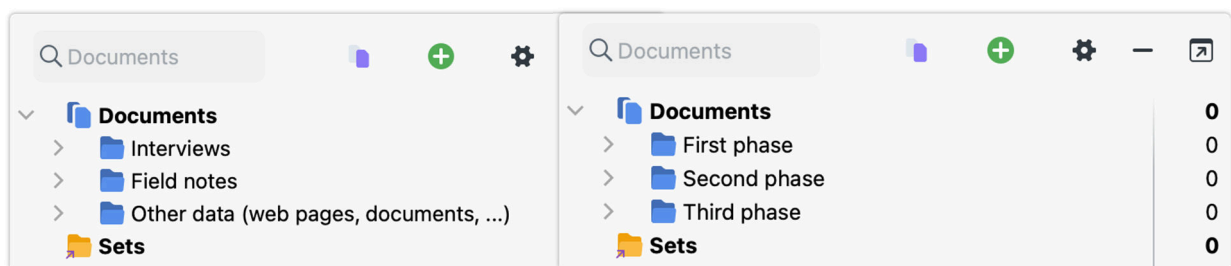
Documents structured in document groups by data type (left) or by phase (right)

"Open coding" mode

For the first coding phase of open or initial coding, you can activate the Open Coding mode by clicking on this icon 🐞 in the "Document Browser" window. Upon selecting a text segment or image section, an input mask will automatically appear for entering a new code name. MAXQDA lists existing codes with the same name so that you can easily code with existing codes instead of a new code to avoid an inflation of codes with the same or similar name. In the mask, you can also write a code memo and a comment on the code assignment.
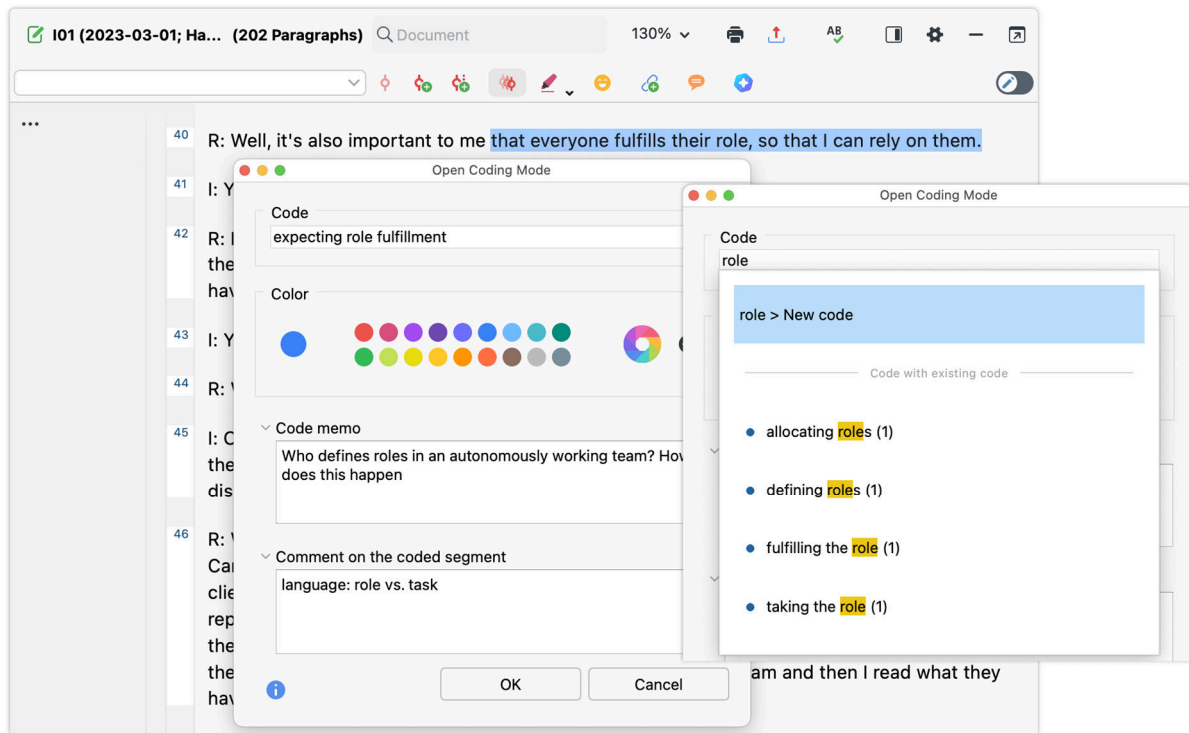
Activate "Open coding" mode in the "Document Browser" (icon highlighted in yellow in the toolbar)

In-vivo coding

In-vivo codes utilize phrases directly extracted from the data as their code names. To create an in-vivo code, select a text section and click on the corresponding icon at the top of the "Document Browser". Alternatively, you can use the keyboard shortcut Alt+I (Windows) or cmd+option+I (Mac).
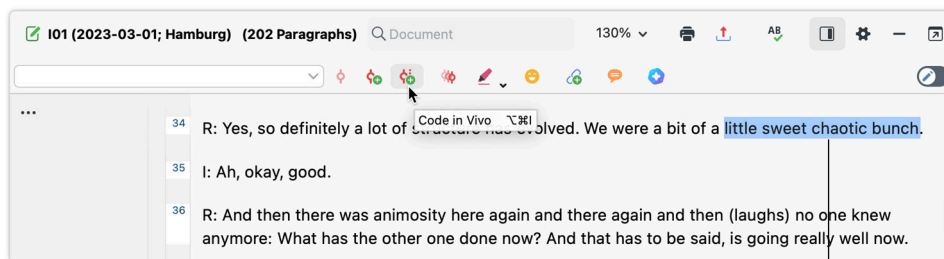
*Create an in-vivo code for a highlighted text section*

New in vivo codes are inserted at the very top of the code system, and can be moved, merged, renamed, and colored just like normal codes.
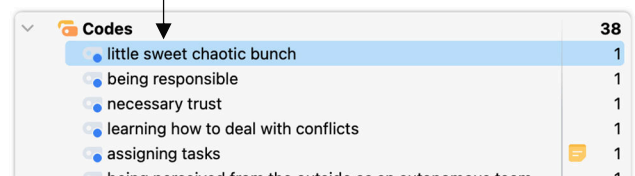
Creative Coding: Organize codes as on a whiteboard

Using the Codes > Creative Coding function, you can systematize, group, and arrange the open codes from the first coding phase. First, you have to select the codes to be sorted, then, you can move around and arrange the codes as you could with sticky notes on a whiteboard.

Create new parent codes/categories and connect related subcodes by adding arrows. Drop one code onto another to merge them.
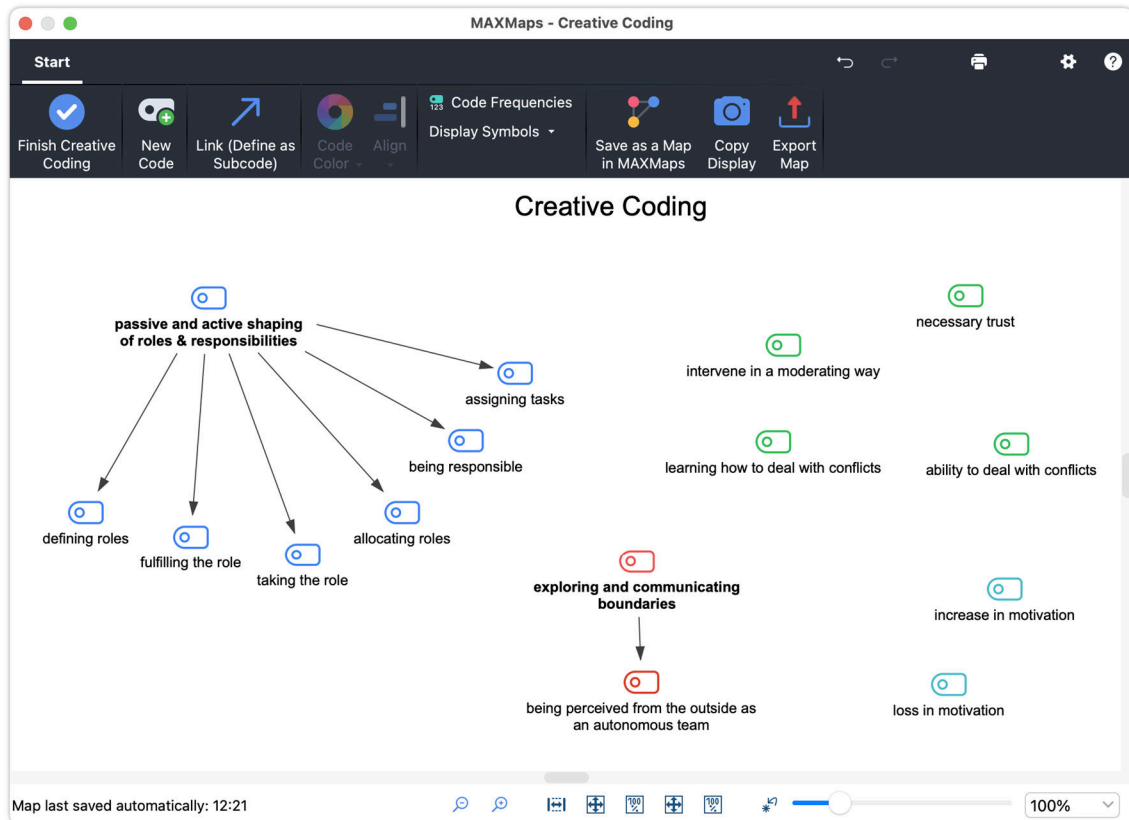
Group codes in a whiteboard-like workspace with Creative Coding feature

To transfer the structuring of codes to the "Code System" window, click Finish Creative Coding in the upper left corner.

Merge codes in "Code System" window

To merge two codes, drag one code onto the other in the "Code System" window and release the mouse button when the pointer is on the blue "Merge" field:

Merge two codes

## Elaborate properties and dimensions of categories

The properties and dimensions of categories (in the sense of Strauss & Corbin, 1990) can be created as subcodes in the "Code System" and/or can be recorded in the code memo.

*Right: Properties of categories and their dimensions as subcodes in the "Code System" window*

Applying the coding paradigm (Strauss & Corbin)

The coding paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) includes the domains of causes, context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences of a phenomenon. The paradigm can help to elaborate relationships between the categories formed. You can implement it either graphically in MAXMaps or using parent codes in the "Code System" window.
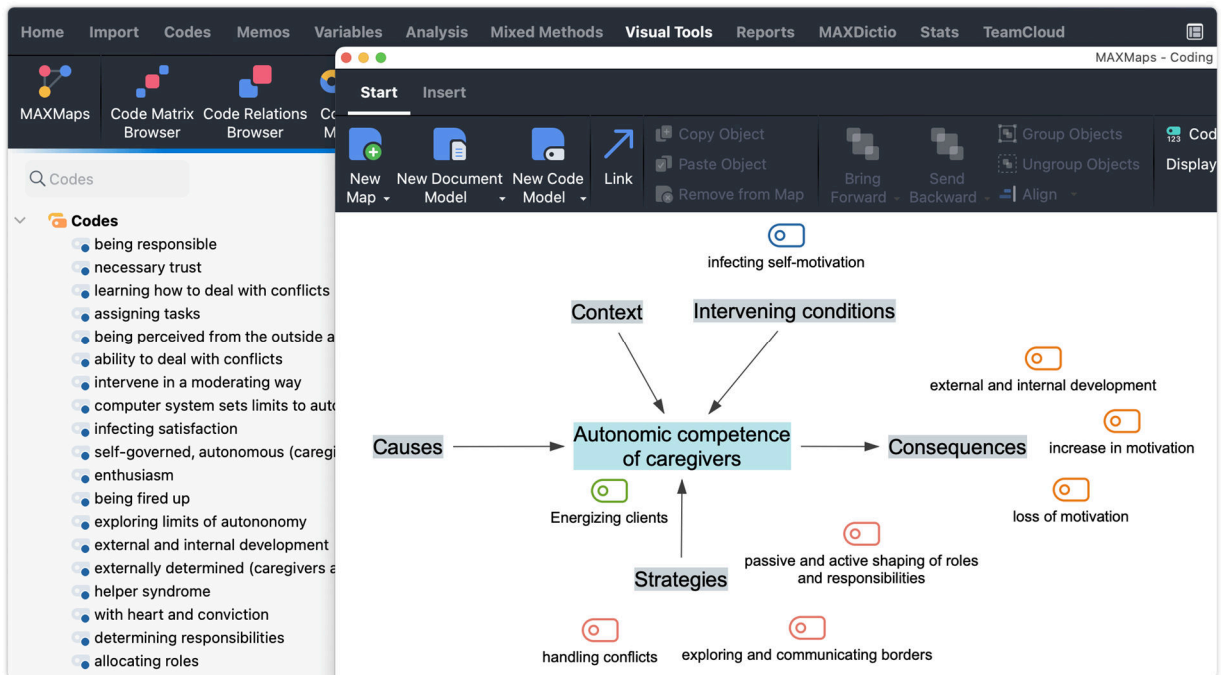

Creating a concept map in MAXMaps using the domains of the coding paradigm
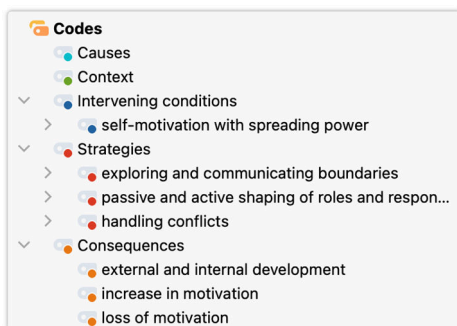
"Code System" with domains of the coding paradigm as parent codes

Applying the coding families (Glaser)

Glaser (1978) has compiled analytically valuable terms into coding families that can support theory building. You can record the coding families in a memo via Memos > New free memo so that they are always at hand.
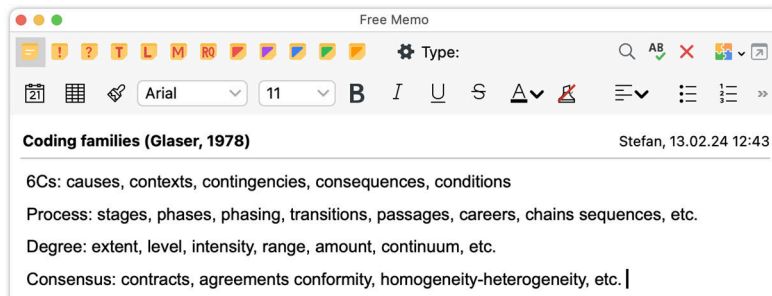
Recording Glaser's coding families in a free memo

Write and differentiate memos

Memos are used to record your thoughts, findings, and notes. Memos are visualized by yellow sticky note symbols and can be placed at various locations in MAXQDA. In grounded theory projects, the different memo locations can be used as follows:

- **Project memo (top entry in the "Document System")**: Research questions and research interest; important decisions in the research process.

- **Document group and document set memos:** Information on data gathering phases and on data types; results of case comparisons.

- **Document memos:** Supplementary information on individual cases and on situations of data collection; case summaries; analytical findings on a case.

- **In-document and in-media memos:** Notes and insights on specific text passages or image excerpts, for example, contradictions in the data.

- **Code memos:** Analytical insights regarding codes, categories, concepts.

- **Free memos (not assigned to any particular location):** Reflection on prior assumptions; thoughts on overarching concepts; integration of other analytic memos.

Regardless of a memo's location, you can assign one of the following icons to each memo:


Tip: In any memo, click on the gear icon right to the symbols to record their meaning in the current MAXQDA project as a label for the symbols.

Link memos

Internal links can be used to link sections in memos to text in other memos: right-click on highlighted section with link start, select Insert Internal Link (Start), right-click on highlighted link target and select Insert Internal Link (Target).

You can link codes to a memo by dragging the code from the "Code System" window to the memo. Similarly, you can drag a coded segment from the "Document Browser" into the memo and link it.

By right-clicking on a code or a coded segment, all memos linked to this code can be listed:
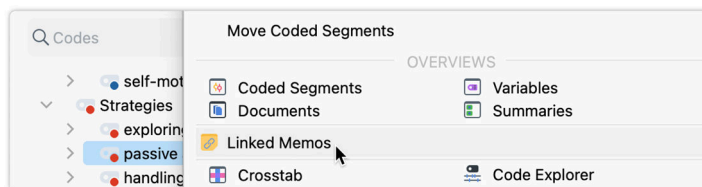
Call up memos linked to a code to list them in the Memo Manager

The "Memo Manager"

The Memos menu tab gives you access to all the memos in your project. For example, click Memos > Code Memos to list all the memos you have written for a code. The memos are presented in the Memo Manager, where you can read, modify, filter, compile into sets, and export memos.
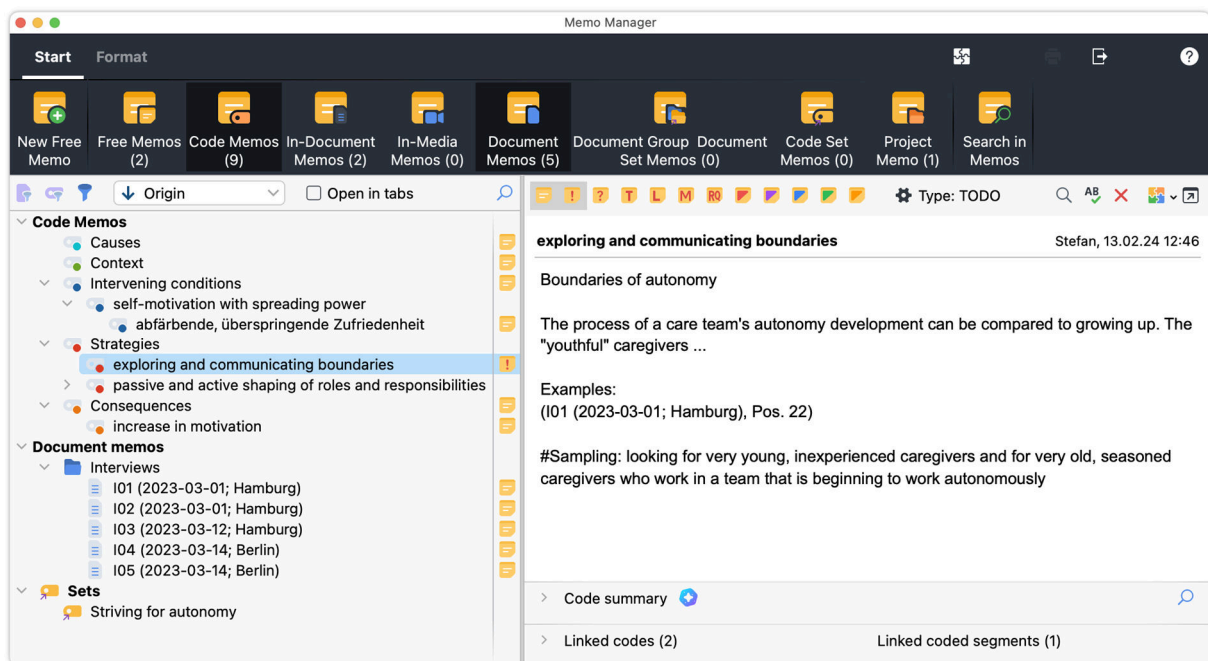

The Memo Manager allows access to selected or all memos of a project

Create concept maps in MAXMaps

Calling up Visual Tools > MAXMaps opens a workspace in which you can create diagrams and concept maps. (Almost) all elements of a MAXQDA project can be inserted into a map (for example by dragging them with the mouse): codes, memos, coded segments, documents. The elements in MAXMaps can be connected with lines and arrows and are interactively linked to the project data. For example, double-clicking on a code symbol opens a list of the associated coded segments.

MAXMaps provides numerous model templates that allow you to automatically create case-based or code-based concept maps and then customize them as desired, such as the Single Case Model or the Code Theory Model.
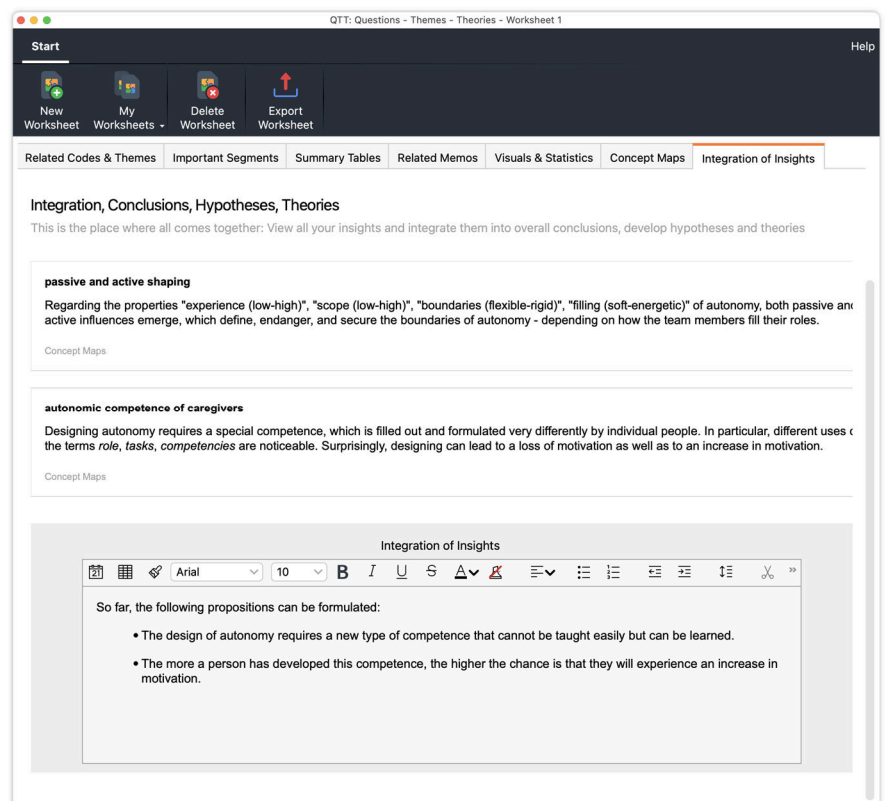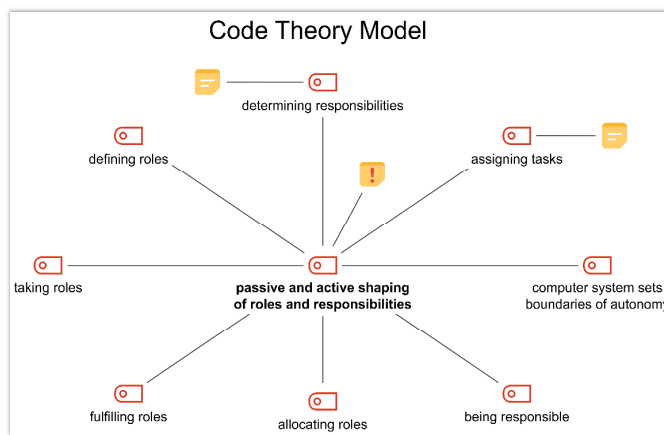

Code Theory Model in MAXMaps including first level subcategories

Bring it all together in Questions - Themes - Theories (QTT)

In the Analysis > QTT: Questions - Themes - Theories workspace, you can gather important elements of your analysis, such as selected memos, visualizations, or text segments. For each element, you can note down and integrate important insights.

"Integration of findings" section on a worksheet in the QTT workspace

More information

Rädiker, S. (2023). Doing grounded theory with MAXQDA: Guidance and tips for your practice. MAXQDA Press. https://doi.org/10.36192/978-3-948768164