

Phenomenology: A New Way of Viewing Organizational Research

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Phenomenological studies, as a research method, are noticeably infrequent in the research literature. Organizational researchers are urged to consider phenomenological analysis to study traditional research problems. This paper introduces the reader to phenomenology and demonstrates the relevance of phenomenological analysis to organizational research. It presents an overview of the major features of phenomenology and discusses those components appropriate to designing a phenomenological research model. Phenomenological designs are contrasted with scientific/normative paradigms.

There is a new star on the research horizon. It is phenomenology. In its applied form, phenomenology can be described as a qualitative research technique that seeks to make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experience (Atkinson, 1972). A strong case has been made for qualitative analysis in the social sciences (Barton & Lazarfeld, 1961; Berelson, 1952; Filstead, 1967; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lazarfeld, 1972) and, more recently, in organizational research (Downey & Ireland, 1979; Miles, 1979; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979). Yet phenomenological studies are infrequent in organizational research. Part of this absence stems from the very nature of phenomenology and its relative "newness" as a research methodology.

The phenomenological movement emerged initially as a descriptive philosophical method to challenge analytic/deductive philosophies (Chamberlain, 1974). Analytical methods assume that one first works out or adopts a philosophical position and then proceeds to discern its implications in practice. Conversely, phenomenology begins with "invariant" first principles derived from the primary sources of intuition and insight, which, may or may not, result in generalizations (Lauer, 1965). The task of the phenomenological researcher is the descriptive investigation of the contents of conscious phenomena, both objective and subjective,

or consciousness itself (Atkinson, 1972). In its purest form, "consciousness" is hardly the matter of organizational research. When, however, one understands consciousness as awareness of what accounts for managerial excellence or a description of organizational myths, cultures, and symbols, then the possibilities of phenomenology as an organizational research methodology begin to emerge.

A second difficulty in adopting phenomenological approaches is related to the "tribal" language of phenomenology. The phenomenologist's vocabulary is a torturous list of technical and sometimes Latin or Greek terms: intentionality, epoche, eidos, eidetic reduction, noesis, noema, apodictic. Every field of scholarship has its share of technical or indigenous terms, and phenomenology is no exception. If its method is to be mastered, its language must be learned.

A final difficulty inherent in using phenomenological approaches is related to methodological issues. Quantitative research is well formulated, and there are concise conventions to guide the researcher in analysis. A precise methodology, however, does not exist for phenomenological researchers (Chamberlain, 1974; Miles, 1979). For example, Chamberlain states, "There is no orthodox procedure which can be held up as the authoritative phenomenological method" (1974, p. 126). The method ultimately varies according to the particular

phenomena being researched and the thematic attention given them. Although an "orthodox procedure" does not exist for phenomenological researchers, certain commonalities are present that guide the researcher. All methods begin by examining individual conscious experiences (phenomena), move through an analysis of "how meanings develop in the continuing restructuring process of the consciousness" and end in the individual's critical "reviewing" of experience (Chamberlain, 1974; pp. 124, 136).

This writing offers an overview of the major features of phenomenology. It discusses those components appropriate to designing a phenomenological research model. It contrasts phenomenological research design with scientific/normative paradigms and, lastly, it discusses the value of phenomenological analysis for organizational research. Its purpose is to stimulate researchers to consider phenomenological analysis as a research method and to serve as a primer for those who wish to master the field's language and method.

Major Features of Phenomenology

Phenomenology, most simply stated, is the study of conscious phenomena: that is, an analysis of the way in which things or experiences show themselves. The term "phenomena" is derived from the Greek verb, which means to show oneself or to appear. The founding fathers of the phenomenological movement were the German philosophers, Franz Brentano (1838-1917) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and the movement was promulgated by Husserl's successor at the University of Freiburg, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Other important early contributors include the German philosophers Karl Jaspers and Max Scheler and the French phenomenological thinkers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Paul Sartre, and Gabriel Marcel (Spiegelberg, 1971). Prominent American spokespersons for phenomenology include James Edie of Northwestern University, Don Ihde of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Quentin Lauer of Fordham University, Maurice Natanson of the University of California at Santa Cruz, and Richard Zaner of the University of Texas. Herbert Spiegelberg, a European philosopher who currently is professor emeritus at Washington University, was a pioneer in drawing American at-

tention to the phenomenological movement.

Phenomenology is a broad stream with many currents. This paper does not attempt to discuss the distinctions among the various currents in phenomenological thought. Rather, it discusses commonalities present in phenomenology that may serve as a basis for formulating a model for analysis.

What Is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology seeks to make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences. It is the search for "essences" that cannot be revealed by ordinary observation. Phenomenology is the science of essential structures of consciousness or experience. It concentrates neither on the subject of experience nor on the object of experience but on the point of contact at which "being and consciousness meet" (Edie, 1962, p. 19). The point of phenomenology is to get straight to the pure and unencumbered vision of what an experience *essentially is*.

Intentional Analysis

Essences are derived from an "intentional" analysis of the correlation between the object as perceived (noema) and the subjective apprehension (noesis) of that object or experience. Husserl used the term "intentionality" to refer to the correlation between the object and the appearance of the object to consciousness. Husserl characterized "intentionality" as "consciousness," which justifies one in "describing the whole stream of consciousness and unity of one's consciousness" (1931, p. 242).

A general statement of the steps in the method of intentional analysis is provided by Husserl when he wrote:

It [phenomenology] has to place before its own eyes as instances certain pure conscious events, to bring these to complete clearness, and within this zone of clearness to subject them to analysis and the apprehension of their essence, to follow up the essential connections that can be clearly understood, to grasp what is momentarily perceived in faithful conceptual expressions, of which the meaning is prescribed purely by the objective perceived or in some way transparently understood (1931, p. 190).

Thus, intentionality refers to the total meaning of the object, which is always more than what is given in the perception of a single profile or perspective. Intentionality is the direction and internal shape of experience or consciousness.

Husserl used the Greek terms "noesis" and "noema" to indicate the intimate relationship between intentionality as total meaning of what is expected (noema) and the mode of experiencing (noesis). Ihde explains this correlativity feature of phenomenology:

every experiencing has its reference or direction towards what is experienced, and, contrarily, every experienced phenomenon refers to or reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present. This is the intentional or correlation a priori of experience taken phenomenologically (1977, pp. 42-43).

In addition, in an interpretation of experience there is always a "bearer" of experience or one who does the experiencing. Ihde uses the following diagram to illustrate the relationship between these concepts (1977, p. 44):

(I) noesis ————— noema
(experiencer) experiencing-experienced

Epoché

The basis of phenomenology as a procedure is the belief that when people ask certain metaphysical questions (i.e., what is the nature of change, of excellence, of truth, etc.) they do so burdened with the mental baggage of assumptions—unquestioned definitions, categories, or opinions that separate the scholar from the truth about things. The essential phenomenological attitude is the temporary suspension of all existing personal biases, beliefs, preconceptions, or assumptions in order to get straight to the pure and unencumbered vision of what a thing "essentially is."

Husserl used the mathematical term "bracketing" to describe this suspension process (1931, p. 108). If one wants to bring another part of an equation (or observation) into focus, other parts are bracketed, leaving them constant but out of consideration. The bracketed matter does not cease to exist; rather, it is temporarily put out of action. Husserl referred to this phenomenological feature as "epoché." Bracketing or epoché is the essential attitude of the phenomenologist.

Eidetic Reduction

The final feature of phenomenology to be discussed here is eidetic reduction. It is the process of abstracting essences from consciousness or experience. "Eidos" means idea or form (essence) and was utilized by Husserl to designate universal features (Kockelmans, 1967). Eidetic reduction is

the act that leads from the concrete expression of a particular phenomenon to universal "pure" essences. It is the "methodological path" back to the meaning of essences implicit in the experience (Atkinson, 1972). It is the process of going beyond, behind, or underneath the conventional patterns or structures of thought and action in order to locate their common grounds.

Eidetic reduction is accomplished through the use of intuition and reflection. Because of its reliance on introspection, phenomenology has been accused of "subjectivism." To counter this accusation, one must distinguish between introspection and subjectivism. The traditional psychological definition of "subjective" is "that which is known only to the individual and not directly observable by others." This is contrasted with something that is "objective" or socially observable (Munn, Fernald, & Fernald, 1972). In the Husserlian sense, however, subjectivity becomes transcendental. That is, subjectivity attempts to go beyond ordinary appearances in order to discover the essential, "objective or absolute," structures in "what otherwise would be merely subjective phenomena" (Spiegelberg, 1971, p. 666). Husserl would resolve this dialectic by saying that "an act of consciousness and its object are inseparable" or "they are but the subjective and objective aspects of the same thing" (Lauer, 1965, p. 17). In fact, Husserl referred to subjectivity as "empirical" subjectivity (1931, p. 173).

Ihde explains that there is a serious "misunderstanding" of what is meant by "introspection," particularly as it is transformed into phenomenological analysis. He notes that introspection is:

the straightforward taking of subjective data, usually interpreted as "directly present to the mind." This notation of direct presence belongs to both the rationalist and empiricist traditions in philosophy and finds its theoretical context in what phenomenologists call Cartesianism. These traditions locate subjective phenomena "within" a subject and contrast these phenomena with objective phenomena located "outside" the subject (1977, p. 23).

If intuition and reflection are the primary tools of the phenomenologist, then one begins to understand the importance of bracketing in the process of eidetic reduction.

In summary, eidetic reduction has been likened to extracting the attar of the rose:

As each petal of the blossom is removed, another is fully revealed. The layers of the petals, blended one with the other into a potpourri, yield the attar—the

essence of the rose. Each layer revealed by the eidetic reduction successively yields experience, then reflection of experience, until the invariants of experience yield the essence of meaning, that which is constant (Brooks, 1980, pp. 62-63).

Designing a Phenomenological Research Model

There are three fundamental components in a phenomenological research design:

1. Determining the limits of what and who is to be investigated,
2. Collection of data.
3. Phenomenological analysis of the data.

The first two components are common to scientific/normative research paradigms as well as to other qualitative research models.

Determination of Limits

The first concern in designing phenomenological research is "what" is to be investigated. If Husserl's motto, "To the thing itself," is interpreted theoretically, anything that has appearance or consciousness could be investigated. Practically speaking, however, those subjects that do not lend themselves to easy quantification are the most appropriate topics to be probed. For example, in a study of characteristics of distinguished teachers (Ahern, 1969), Professor Benjamin DeMott, an E. Harris Harbison award recipient for teaching excellence sponsored by the Danforth Foundation, returned the investigator's questionnaire with the following apology:

I realize it must seem to you unaccountably rude of me to return your questionnaire unanswered but I haven't any real choice. I don't think you can find out about good teaching by concentration on external circumstances. I have to go further and say that the idea of trying seems, if you will forgive me, "wrong-headed." What's necessary is an attempt to probe the innerness of the man who can teach.... What are his inner decisions about human needs his subjects can meet, what is his emotional landscape? (Ahern, 1969, pp. 341-42)

A subsequent investigation of teaching effectiveness (Sanders, 1980) used phenomenological analysis in an attempt to "probe the innerness" of the person "who can teach," as so poignantly alluded to by Professor DeMott.

After determining what will be investigated, the next concern is "who" will comprise the subjects. The persons to be investigated are those who

possess the characteristics under observation or those who can give reliable information on the phenomena being researched. For example, in a paper on competency tests (Goleman, 1981), it was reported that David McClelland, in an attempt to identify competencies necessary for successful U.S. Information Agency cultural attaches abroad, compared characteristics of "water walkers"—people who were so outstanding they could do no wrong—with those of mediocre performers. McClelland interviewed these representatives using an "intensive interview technique" in order to determine the competencies associated with successful performance. As will be pointed out subsequently, intensive interviewing is one of the basic data gathering techniques of the phenomenologist.

The first critical rule for the phenomenological researcher is: more subjects do not yield more information. Quantity should not be confused with quality. The phenomenologist must learn how to engage in in-depth probing of a limited number of individuals. Although the ideal number will vary according to the topic under investigation, too many subjects can become overwhelming. It is realistic to believe that sufficient information may be collected from approximately three to six individuals. Rule number two is: generalizations beyond the group under investigation should not be made. This rule will be expanded in the next section.

Data Collection

Once the researcher has determined what and who will be investigated, the next step is data collection. Stone (1978) identifies three types of data collection.

1. In-depth, semistructured oral history interviews with the subjects that are taperecorded and transcribed.

2. A documentary study in which the writings of the subjects are reviewed to derive "meanings" from them. This technique often is used in conjunction with the first.

3. Participant observation techniques; that is, observing the subjects in an actual situation in which they engage in behaviors related to the phenomena under investigation. This, also, leads back to some interviewing to explore particular behaviors in greater depth.

It is essential to phenomenological analysis that the interviews be tape recorded and that the tapes be

transcribed. The transcribed narratives provide the data to be analyzed. In addition, tape recording of the interviews permits the interviewer to probe systematically and in-depth without the distraction of note taking. Furthermore, note taking involves some reinterpretation of data. The tapes and transcriptions record the interviewees *exact* words which, in turn, are studied and analyzed. Again, the rule of quality versus quantity applies to the interviewing process. It is better to ask fewer questions and to probe them intensively than it is to ask many questions assuming that more questions will yield more data. This, simply, is not the case.

Phenomenological Analysis of the Data

The third component in phenomenological design is analyzing the contents of the transcriptions. There are four levels of phenomenological analysis. The first level is *description* of the phenomena as revealed in the taped interviews. The transcribed narratives identify and describe the qualities of human experience and consciousness that give the person being studied his or her unique identity and outlook.

Level two in phenomenological analysis is the identification of themes or *invariants* that emerge from the descriptions. Themes refer to commonalities present within and between narratives. Themes are identified based on the importance and centrality accorded to them rather than on the frequency with which they occur.

Level three is the development of *noetic/noematic correlates*. These correlates are the subjective reflections of the emergent themes. Consider the following example: "My boss prefers that we work on a first name basis. This makes me feel important and valued." Reference to the first name basis relationship between superior and subordinate is an objective statement of behavior and constitutes a "noema." Stating that it makes the subordinate "feel important and valued" is a subjective reflection of the objective statement above and, thus, constitutes a "noesis." Noetic/noematic correlates represent the individual's perception of the reality of the phenomena under investigation. Interpretation of these correlations is fundamental to the identification of essences or of what an experience "essentially is."

The final step in the process is the abstraction of *essences* or universals from the noetic/noematic correlates. This is accomplished through intuition

and reflection or eidetic reduction. If noema is described as the *what* of experience and noesis as the *how* of experience, then essence may be described as the *why* of experience. In summary, the phenomenological researcher asks four questions:

1. How may the phenomenon or experience under investigation be described?
2. What are the invariants or themes emergent in those descriptions?
3. What are the subjective reflections of those themes?
4. What are the essences present in those themes and subjective reflections?

Phenomenological Design vs. Scientific/Normative Paradigms

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method. That is, it attempts to probe the *lived experiences* of the individuals who are being investigated. It is the study of one's immediate apprehensions of an experience as they present themselves to one's consciousness. It is not the intent of this section to denigrate scientific/normative methodologies but merely to demonstrate the differences between the two approaches in terms of methodology and inference making. It must be noted, however, before contrasting the two approaches that they share a common ground: both are rooted in phenomenal experiences and, in this sense, both are empirical (Travers, 1978). Both methods involve observation and inference. The differences occur in how they go about observing and making inferences. Differences are described in Table 1 in summary form.

Implications

The preceding section contrasted phenomenological/qualitative approaches with scientific/normative research paradigms. The author believes that phenomenology does not present a new view of observable data. Rather, it presents a "new way" of viewing what is genuinely discoverable and potentially there but often is not seen. This probably is the most significant implication of phenomenology for organizational research.

The scientific/normative research paradigm dominates a large portion of contemporary research, including management research. Quantitative research is professionally respectable, and this respectability is reinforced by the computer. The

Table 1
Contrasting Phenomenological With Normative Paradigms

<i>Phenomenological Paradigms</i>	<i>Normative Paradigms</i>
<i>1. Apprehension of the World</i> Researcher sees the world largely as indeterminate and problematic. Phenomena under investigation are viewed more directly as functions of perceptions, intuition, and personal meanings (Willis, 1978).	Researcher sees the world as more or less determinate and non-problematic. Personal choice still is necessary to decide what characteristics are to be studied and how to value them (Willis, 1978).
<i>2. Phenomena Investigated</i> Considers "lived experiences" of subjects. Considers both observed characteristics and specific qualities perceived as personal forms of meaning.	Considers characteristics that are easily enumerated and empirically verifiable.
<i>3. Problem Formulation</i> Begins with an attitude of epoché. All personal biases, beliefs, or assumptions about causal relationships or suppositions are suspended or bracketed. Questions are formulated and responses are analyzed.	Begins with a hypothesis of a causal relationship. The hypothesis is checked by the manipulation of one or more independent variables in order to study the effect on a specific behavior (dependent variable).
<i>4. Research Methodology</i> Emphasis is placed on describing the world from the point of view of the persons who live in and experience it. All concepts or theories emerge from the data of consciousness, requiring an inductive approach that cannot be replicated exactly.	Broad abstract generalizations or theories are applied in a logical deductive fashion by means of hypothesis and operational definitions to form a design that can be replicated (Stone, 1978).
<i>5. Research Aim and Inferences</i> To arrive at universal pure essences. The logic of inference is one of direct comparison resulting in new insight or reclassification (Willis, 1978).	Statistical interpretation of data to formulate categories or norms. The logic of inference is one of classification and seriation resulting in numerical comparisons (Willis, 1978).
<i>6. Generalization of Results</i> Generalizations concern only the specific subject(s) under investigation. No generalizations are made beyond this group. Findings serve as a data base for further investigation.	Generalizations are formulated based on an analysis of the data regarding similar classes or universal tendencies that are expressed in a normative fashion.

predominance of the scientific/normative paradigm must be challenged. This is not to advocate that phenomenological analysis be substituted for quantitative approaches, nor is it assumed that phenomenological analysis is a final solution to the manifest void in current research approaches. Rather, it is hoped that this presentation will serve as a catalyst in stimulating organizational researchers to consider phenomenological analysis to reveal the deeper structures of what is believed to be commonplace.

A second implication for organizational research is that certain types of behavioral phenomena elude quantification and statistical inference. For instance, in a recent paper on organizational symbolism, Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce lament:

A survey of major texts within the field of organizational behavior establishes clearly that there are virtually no references to the phenomenon that is the subject of this paper (1980, p. 77).

The authors go on to note an exception in a single text which used an "anthropological" approach in describing organizational symbolism and behaviors.

Dandridge et al. concluded that current management research does not study the "deep structure" of organizations. The inability of researchers to probe the "deep structures" of organizations cannot be attributed to their unwillingness to engage in intensive research or to a lack of scholarliness but, rather, to the absence of an appropriate research method. Because phenomenology seeks to study phenomena as they are known directly as they are presented to consciousness, the present author believes that phenomenological analysis is an answer to this methodological void.

Finally, the value of phenomenological approaches to organization research is that the emergent themes and underlying essences may serve to validate (or repudiate) and complement quantitative research findings. The traditional stance has been to view qualitative research as preliminary or exploratory "ground breaking" work for initiating quantitative research hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 15). This may have been true in the early stages

of qualitative research, but the research climate today is changing. There is a growing acceptance of qualitative research methods as they stand on their own (Daft & Bradshaw, 1980; Mintzberg, 1973) and of integrating methods (Jick, 1979; Lyles & Mitroff, 1980; Sieber, 1973; Van Maanen, 1975). In addition, phenomenological approaches may be designed specifically to complement quantitative research designs. That is, it may be entirely possible to collect concurrently both phenomenological information and quantitative data from the same organizational setting to produce stronger analyses than would have been possible by collecting either type alone.

Concluding Remarks

The major purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate the relevance of phenomenology for organizational research. Phenomenology does not present a new view but a new way of viewing

organizational problems. Its method is aimed at describing the fundamental elements in phenomenal existence in order to expose universal "pure" essences underlying human consciousness.

Exploring the phenomenon of human consciousness is not a simple task. There is neither a mystery nor a metaphysical enigma at issue here. Clearly, it is a method that does not have universal appeal, but it is not a talisman of some occult order. One begins by learning phenomenology in a step-by-step disciplined fashion through reading, observation, discussion, and reflection. Then one *does* phenomenology. It is only after doing phenomenology that one begins to understand the meaning of intentionality, intersubjectivity, eidetic reduction, and how to practice epoché. Learning and doing phenomenology is reminiscent of the Augustinian circle: In order to find out, I must already know, but in order to know, I must first find out.

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