

THE ROLE OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

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Abstract— This short term paper will focus on examining the roles of phenomenological research methodology in management research. Over the years phenomenology has been intellectualized as a philosophy, a method for conducting research and an all-encompassing perspective from which every qualitative research is sourced. The paper endeavors to ensure that the roles of phenomenological research are established to make it more advantageous in management research.

Key Words— phenomenological, methodology, management research, intellectualized.

1 INTRODUCTION

The founding father of phenomenological research was Edmund Husserl. Edmund Husserl explored phenomenology as an approach that can be used for research. He compared and contrasted the two well-known phenomenology applications to show different advantages and assumptions' that can underpin these approaches. The paper asserts that the method of phenomenology in research though has been relatively unapplied in management research, its can play many roles because it has a lot to offer. Phenomenology has been conceptualized as a philosophy, a research method that has overarching perspectives from which every qualitative researched is sourced. Phenomenology tends not to be used but a great deal of researchers on various disciplines for example psychology, education, as well as studies that are related to management. The paper will provide an argument that aims at illustrating the attractiveness and accessibility of phenomenological roles as a potential methodology for management research.

The main aim for Husserl for phenomenology was the establishment of transcendental subjectivity where "absoluteness of conscious existence" could be established. Husserl was interested in coming up with a means by which core or common knowledge would be born. For the purpose of achieving this, Husserl proposed few "reductions" that involved individuals "bracketing" or even suspending the natural attitude so that the phenomenon could be comprehended and experienced in a fresh and unconventional way. One of the reductions proposed was "transcendental reduction" which meant appending everything in the world which included one's own ego (Pickard).

However, criticism developed which forced Husserl to revise his work and explicate the notions of *lebenswelt* or "life world". Through this, the essential and hermeneutic phenomenologist's were built upon the "lifeworld" idea of Husserl. Further contribution was made when four key qualities were identified. These four key qualities have been among the celebrated themes or the characteristics that are common to different phenomenology types.

These key qualities are essences, reduction, intentionality and description. The core aim of phenomenology is to describe the phenomena. Phenomena include everything that appears or presents itself such as objects, feelings and thoughts.

Reduction is a process that involves bracketing or suspending the phenomena so that the "things themselves" can be returned to. Essence is the core meaning of the experience of an individual that make it what it is. Lastly, intentionality refers to the consciousness and individuals as always individuals are conscious of something. Intentionality is the entire object meaning for example idea that is always more than what is given in perception of sole perspective. What can be noted here is that many research methodologies of qualitative research have emerged and have drawn their insights from phenomenological viewpoint of philosophy (Wertz).

2 PROCEDURE FOR PAPER SUBMISSION

2.1 Review Stage

The key objective of phenomenological research is to describe an already lived experience. It refers to the perception of the meaning of an event subject to a person who experiences it. Basically the event is not separated from the person who experienced it. In phenomenological research the event does not exist externally from the person. A researcher in this case, is interested to know an event and how an individual would interpret it.

Phenomenological research seeks to answer the question, 'how is it like to experience a certain event?' People would have different ways of perceiving certain events. One person's perspective could be different from how another person is going to view an event. Therefore, phenomenological research tries to look at and understand the perception of an event.

Since people are inherently different and have diverse cultures and experiences in life, it's likely that the perception of an event

would be different. It is possible to get different perspectives of the same situation. However, after collecting this data, it is possible that the researcher will be able to generalize, what it feels like to experience a certain event subject to the experiences from an insider's perspective (Darren, 2007).

Phenomenological research can be said to be a study of how different people normally construct meaning to an event. After experiencing an event a respondent has a given meaning he or she attaches to an event. It is therefore important that research is done to construct how people attach meaning to a particular event. A researcher will achieve this because it is he or she investigates the description of phenomena as consciously experienced by an individual.

Unlike the other types of research, phenomenological research does not try to establish a causal relationship between variables but how a person experienced an event. An event is not viewed objectively, but on the contrary, how it was in a subjective sense. A researcher is actually not interested in an event in its objective reality as other research methods would attempt to do.

Importantly, it involves qualitative analysis of narrative data. This therefore calls for an analysis of data that is in a way different from the common or quantitative methods of research. Phenomenological research involves four steps. These are bracketing, intuiting, analysis and description.

Admittedly, bracketing refers to the process of identification and holding in abeyance any form of pre convinced beliefs and opinions. A researcher should not have any preformed perspective of a phenomenon being described. This process will involve a thorough identification of presupposition and being able to bracket them out the same as in its mathematical sense so the researcher is able to look at data in its pure form. This is a key element of phenomenological reduction.

Indeed, intuition is an attempt to derive open meaning attributed to those who have experienced an event. This will enable the researcher to reach at a common understanding about the phenomenon being studied. Data is varied until an understanding of the event emerges.

Furthermore, analysis involves coding and categorizing experiences of an event such that it is possible to make the essential meaning of a phenomenon. It is in the process of analyzing that the essence emerges. The researcher should immerse himself or herself in the process as much as it is needed so that the pure and a thorough description of an event can be reached at.

Clearly, the description is a way of communication of the results. The researcher demonstrates how he or she has been able to understand and by extension be able to define a phenomenon. The research is meant to offer a distinct and critical description of the event studied. This can be verbal or in written form.

Data in a phenomenological study is collected employing ways that can allow the respondent to describe already lived phenomena. Normally, it is important to make sure the sample size is not too big to be able to create a very wide scope of data. A researcher can use interviews to know the experiences of the respondent in a particular event. Also a researcher can employ other ways like self reporting and aesthetic expression, for example, poetry and art. It

is also possible to use diaries and also visual observations.

In the collection of data in this kind of research it is advisable that the researcher refrains from using directive instructions. The researcher, however, should be able to allow the respondent to be free as possible to express his or her feelings and describe fully an event of interest. To achieve the best results it is important that the respondent is not anchored to a particular way of answering questions. The respondent should be allowed to give a vivid description of their thoughts, sensations, and images along with description of the event.

In the event of an interview, questions that are asked or even follow up questions should not be directed such that the respondent is made to respond in a particular way (Julian, 1997). In essence, even when trying to get further description from the respondent, it should not suggest what the researcher is looking for. In analyzing this kind of data, the first step is the employment of an emergent strategy such that it is compatible with the nature of the data collected (Louis et al, 2000). For example, an artistic collection of data will be looked at differently from if it were an interview. Notwithstanding, the main focus is a proper understanding of whatever kind of description used. Poetry will be understood differently than if it were a simple interview.

From the onset of the analysis, to get the essential meaning behind an experience, the first step is to abstract out the theme. These are the key and most important aspects without which the experience would not have been the same. This can be thought as, as the essence of the experience. In an interview, for example, the researcher can take into consideration the surroundings, the objects, the characters, the activity, the descriptive element and time reference. A good test of whether information given contributes to its actual meaning is whether its essence remains the same after these elements are removed or included.

A researcher, for example, may want to find out how it feels to use a boat to get to a particular island from the mainland. A study like this can be important if a business person for instance, wants to start a transport enterprise so that a service of transport is offered. A study like this can be able to offer insight on how sustainable that business would be and how any people might be willing to use that service as opposed to the service of a competitor for example air. Also a business would be able to know how to market their service to people with a key intention of being able to change their perspective.

Normally, travelling by boat over long distances can cause sea sickness or vomiting. However, it is important to note that everybody has a different way to reacting to events. If a researcher wants to study this phenomenon of using a boat in travel then, he can do interviews with people who have experienced the event in a bid to find out how it was. It is also possible that a person can give a written account of what the experience was like. Also, art can be used to explain this event. The researcher should use a small and manageable study to avoid an overload of information. First the researcher will be required to remove away other presupposing about the experience so that he can reach at a pure conclusion that is not clouded by prejudice. Even when interviewing, the questions should be open ended enough to allow re-

spondents to express themselves well.

2.2 Final Stage

A researcher might want to know how the respondent feels about a boat ride. How the experience is like when the person is far away from the shore. Also, it is possible to ask what the respondent feels with regard to the smell of the ocean or a possible attack by a huge sea creature. A researcher can also ask about whether a respondent experiences any feeling of nausea or any sickness for that matter.

3 Role to management studies

Management research encompasses on many fields of endeavor which include marketing, leadership, general management, accounting, corporate strategy, and organization. In addition, management research can be used to study the attitude of employees, human resource management, management of production operations, and other management practices within a firm. This shows that the management studies field is wide and broad. Over years, many researchers have made robust cases for qualitative methods that can be applied in research fields such as management and organizational research. These cases have been essential because methodologies used in qualitative research have been marginalized in various disciplines with vast traditional approaches grounded in positivistic or quantitative taking the center stage.

The supremacy of positivistic approaches of research in management research can be explained through the following three approaches. First, various management researchers have largely drawn up to the traditional sciences for example sociology, economics, and psychology that have had a long history of applying methods of quantitative to understand a given phenomenon. Secondly, the same researchers have their student researchers and encouraged them to apply the same approach which has perpetuated this research type from one generation to the other. Finally, vast expectations of state funding agencies are more in line with the approaches of quantitative than qualitative research. For these reasons, phenomenology as an approach for qualitative has experienced very minimal take up by researchers in the field of management (Howitt and Cramer).

The phenomenological research method approaches and emphasizes the importance of description rather than explanation. Not only are participants invited to provide concrete descriptions or examples of their experiences, but also the outcome of the data analysis is a description of the essential structures of the lived experience. Secondly, reduction which involves bracketing or suspending one's beliefs is needed so the phenomenologist can return to the things themselves in order to uncover the essential structures of the phenomenon. Thus, the phenomenologist endeavors to put aside his or her biases and presuppositions so the phenomenon can reveal itself. Thirdly, the use of imaginative variation is common to the approach and it helps to illuminate the themes or essences during data analysis (Denzin and Lincoln).

Imaginative difference is a reflective process which permits researchers to ascertain which aspects or qualities of a phenomenon are vital and which are incidental. Phenomenological research

method is concerned with unraveling the essence of particular human experiences. An important point of commonality is that the focus of any phenomenological investigation with the phenomenon itself not the subjective experience of participants. Each phenomenon consists of an objective and subjective pole and the subjective pole becomes of interest to the phenomenologist only as a way of understanding the phenomenon itself.

The classical view or traditional view of management maintains that management is made up of rational set of activities that see managers perform their functions for example, control, organizing, leading, and planning. Research conducted over the last thirty decades revealed that the picture is more messy and very complex than this. Management, just like leadership is highly multifaceted relational and interpersonal activity which is highly concerned with day to day development of the human side of enterprises. As a result, phenomenological methodology whose core concern is to shed light upon the meaning of experience of human can be applied effectively to explore various experiences of people within the field of management. What is the current nature of managerial competence or practice? What does it mean to be a manager? What is management thoughtfulness and tactfulness? These are the possible research questions that could be addressed through applying phenomenological research methodology in management research (Gregor and Hart).

Phenomenological research methods aid us in understanding how complex is the human experience as well as gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of experience of the participants. Through this, the phenomena themselves are understood, that is transformations', emotions of the team, monitoring, and development of professionalism. For example, phenomenological methodology can help in understanding the experiences being monitored for a faculty of women; how they experience transformation of their chores lives via information technology change; explanation of the emotion of the team; and professional development experience for school principals. Phenomenology research method turns away from the broad science and scientific knowledge and goes back to the things themselves. The effects of studying a given experience of a human outside the brackets of the theories that are pre-existing and strongly-established constructs can result to startling new insights into the uniquely complex processes of management and leadership. The outcome got from phenomenological study can sometimes hold great potential to add to, reinforce, and complement an undergoing research in a particular field of management (Denzin and Lincoln)

4 CONCLUSION

Over thirty years ago, phenomenological research method was a fresh star on the organization research horizon. In various ways, it still remains a fresh and largely unknown not only in management disciplines but also the other academic disciplines. As seen, phenomenological research method is worth and valuable research method that can be applied to explore those experiences of people in studies encompassing on management. The main role of phenomenological research method is to uncover and unravel the

essence of the lived experience. For this reason, it has a great potential to be applied when a researcher wants to comprehend the phenomena of management because management is more than simply a technique of control; it is a process and practice that has a robust human dimension.

From the analysis will be drawn and communicated through writing or by word of mouth. Consequently, a business model can use these findings to develop new marketing strategy for their business (Naresh et al, 2006). Phenomenological research when embraced can provide rich information that is natural and adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge.

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