Undertaking phenomenological research in Greece: a theoretical discussion based on some empirical observations

Abstract

The paper aims to discuss the implications of undertaking phenomenological research in Greece. The author’s research interest focuses on retail and specifically on the retail location decision-making process. The phenomenological approach being taken to this topic can be regarded as a potential methodological contribution to knowledge, as the author understands a phenomenological study on management decision-making has never been undertaken in Greece before.

Introduction

The term phenomenology has been used in many and controversial ways in social sciences research (Ehrich, 2005). Depending on the epistemological and ontological stance of the researcher it is either conceptualised as philosophy by the Husserlian school of thought or as methodology by the Heideggerian one (Goulding, 2005). Even though phenomenology has strong roots with ancient Greek philosophy (Sanders, 1982) there is no evidence that has ever been used in management research in Greece.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part of the paper the philosophical underpinning of phenomenology is discussed. In the second part the methodological issues behind phenomenology are addressed. In the third part of the paper, the case study research method will be discussed in the phenomenological framework. In order to provide some practical examples, reference to a pilot study undertaken by the author will be made. The aim of this paper is not to discuss the findings of the pilot study, but to contribute to the methodological debate about phenomenology by presenting how case studies can be used in the phenomenological context.
The philosophical foundations of phenomenology

Phenomenology emerged in the late 19th century as a reaction against the then dominant positivist view of philosophy (Ehrich, 2005). Berglund (2005) mentions that phenomenology deals with a fundamental philosophical question: what is real? Husserl (1931, p.43), who is considered to be the founder of modern phenomenology, suggested that knowledge is produced by “…setting aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking”. Phenomenology assumes that even though we cannot be certain about the independent existence of objects in the external world, we can be certain about how they appear to us in consciousness (Carson et al., 2001). Gibson and Hanes (2003) suggest that phenomenology focuses on the meanings that individuals assign to phenomena rather than raw descriptions of observed behaviours and actions.

Husserl’s main aim for philosophical phenomenology was to analyse phenomena for what they are, intuitively and directly, not as what they mean, theoretically and from a certain viewpoint (Berglund, 2005). Husserl wanted to develop a schema for describing and classifying subjective experiences (Goulding, 2005) where the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences will become explicit (Sanders, 1982). Crotty (1998) says that phenomenology is about saying “No”. It is a critical approach to phenomena that will lead to a fresh look at the pure essence of them. Therefore, phenomenology is a critical reflection of conscious experience, rather than subconscious motivation, and is designed to uncover the essential invariant features of that experience (Jopling, 1996).

Phenomenology as a methodology

Four major philosophical concepts of phenomenology are presented that provide the foundation for phenomenology as a research methodology: intentionality, lifeworld, intersubjectivity, and phenomenological reduction (Sanders, 1982; Moustakas 1992).
Intentionality

The term *intentionality* indicates the orientation of the mind to the object; the object or experience exists is one’s mind in an intentional way (Moustakas, 1992). Husserl (1931, p.31) himself describes intentionality as “a concept which at the threshold of phenomenology is quite indispensable as a starting point and basis”. Intentionality is important to phenomenology as a research methodology because the purpose of phenomenological research is to understand how humans experience and perceive certain objects or phenomena in the world (Gibson and Hanes, 2003). As Moustakas points out (1992) the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related. When something – an object or an experience - is presented to us it is presented as something, we see it, interpret it, and understand as something.

Husserl (1931) used the Greek terms *noesis* and *noema* to indicate the intimate relationship between intentionality as a total meaning of what is expected (noema) and the mode of experiencing (noesis). Moustakas (1992) mentions that for every noesis there is a noema; for every noema there is a noesis. Sanders (1982, p.355) maintained that in a noematic experience there is always a “bearer”, one who is interpreting a noema. She has illustrated that through the following figure (Figure 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noesis</th>
<th>Experiencer</th>
<th>Experiencing</th>
<th>Noema</th>
<th>Experienced</th>
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**Figure 1: The noesis – noema experience (Sanders, 1982; p355)**

Lifeworld

Guiding (2005, p.302) defines *lifeworld* as “the world in which we, as human beings among other human beings, experience culture and society, take a stand with regard to their objects, are influenced by them, and act on them”. Husserl (1982, p.51) used the expression “Me and my surrounding world” to describe lifeworld. The lifeworld is the place where humans are in the world and therefore could be the starting point for
research in social sciences. Lifeworld is the context where researchers must go and study the way in which individuals experience phenomena in their natural attitude (Gibson and Hanes, 2003).

**Intersubjectivity**

Phenomenological *intersubjectivity* concerns the lifeworld that the researcher creates by synthesising the different layers of reality that the researched individuals experience (Moustakas, 1992). The essential property of intersubjectivity is the construction of a research context by participating in an empathetic way in the experience of the researched individual. Moran (2000, p. 176) explaining the term says that “I can live in other’s experience in an intuitive manner but I don’t undergo that experience myself in an original fashion”. Intersubjectivity is related with both intentionality and lifeworld. Though the layer that is set by the intersubjectivity the meanings that are assigned in an intentional way to objects and experiences by the researched individuals are positioned in the lifeworld.

Gibson and Hanes (2003) mention that lifeworld is an intersubjective world in which the researched individuals are in a relationship with the world. This relationship is primary for the experiencer but it is acknowledged in an analogy by the researcher (Moustakas, 1992). In phenomenological research, intersubjectivity is the act of researchers being with and developing a trusting relationship with the researched individuals as they describe their experience with the phenomenon being investigated (Gibson and Hanes, 2003).

Related to the latter mentioned three concepts (intentionallity, lifeworld, and intersubjectivity) is the concept of the *embodied consciousness* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The importance of Merleau-Ponty’s contribution is that he removed the metaphysical and transcendental nature of phenomenological research and brings it closer to the needs of the social science research. The concept of embodied consciousness highlights the spatial and temporal relationship between researcher and the researched object (Gibson and Hanes, 2003). Gibson and Hanes (2003) say that the embodied consciousness is the mean through which the researcher experiences the
researched individuals’ lifeworld. They also mention that it is important that the researcher receives the experiences of the researched individual without prejudice and facilitates the free and open expression of these experiences that constitute the lifeworld.

Phenomenological reduction

*Phenomenological reduction* is the basis of phenomenological research (Gibson and Hanes, 2003). This action is divided in two procedures (Sanders, 1982; Giorgi, 1997). The first one is called bracketing or according to the Husserlian (1931) terms “*epoche*”\(^1\). The bracketing only concerns the researcher. It is the process when the researcher sets aside his prejudgements, biases and preconceived ideas (Moustakas, 1992). The bracketed matter does not cease to exist, rather it becomes inactive until the researcher revisits it and integrates it with knowledge that will be produced by his primary research.

The action of reduction that is the second procedure “takes on the character of graded prereflection, reflection, and reduction, with concentrated work aim at explicating the essential nature of the phenomenon” (Husserl, 1931; p. 114). Husserl’s explanation of reduction was interpreted by Moustakas (1992) as a process when the researcher perceives, thinks, remembers, imagines, and judges the contents that build the phenomenon. The world is reduced to the contents of consciousness alone (Carson *et al.*, 2001). In management research practice this is interpreted as the process of collecting, assessing, and synthesising data that come from alternative sources. Through this process the researcher constructs his research context which will be enriched and integrated with the data that he will collect through his field research.

Phenomenological research in management studies

Ehrich (2005) suggests that phenomenological research is suitable for researching fields like general management, leadership, marketing, organisational and corporate strategy, and accounting. Some examples of such research are Moreno’s (1991) study

\(^1\) A Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain (Moustakas, 1992; p.85)
of people’s experience of the transformation of their work life because of IT evolution, and Berglund’s (2005) study of entrepreneurship as a lived experience. Goulding (2005) maintained that phenomenology has its own unique characteristics that are beneficial in terms of theory building around lived experiences in the field of strategic decision making. Carson et al. (2001) suggested that in the marketing context the phenomenological approach could be used to research how managers perceive their marketing decision making roles within their work environment. Gibson and Hanes (2003) said that phenomenological research can be used when the research wants to understand the complexity of human experience and gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of participants’ experience in order to understand the phenomena itself.

Over twenty years ago, Sanders (1982) argued that phenomenology is the new way of viewing management research. Scholars that recently published review papers on phenomenological research in management cited a small number of phenomenological studies. For example Goulding (2005) cited eleven phenomenological studies of consumer behaviour and Ehrich (2005) cited four studies of general management. Some explanations for the limited usage of phenomenological research are provided by Hill and McGowan (1999). They maintained that many management researchers have built on existing normative paradigms that have their routes in economics, psychology or sociology that have a long history of utilising quantitative methods for understanding social phenomena; these researchers have inherited their research approach to their students thus the positivist paradigm was transferred from one generation to the other; and finally they point out that government funding are more in line with quantitative research approaches than qualitative. Ehrich (2005) adds to these explanations that other reasons for the limited use of phenomenological research are the perception that qualitative methods are second rate (Gummerson, 2000) or lack the rigor and objectivity of the quantitative approach (Patton and Appelbaum, 2003).

The phenomenological research process
Easterby-Smith et al. (1994) provide a summary description of the phenomenological paradigm (Table 1). They provide an outline of the characteristics of phenomenological enquiry although neglecting to cite the principles that a phenomenologist should have. Even though their summary is imperfect, it provides a starting point to discuss the research design of this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic beliefs:</th>
<th>Positivist paradigm</th>
<th>Phenomenological paradigm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The world is external and objective</td>
<td>The world is socially constructed and subjective</td>
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<td>Observer is independent</td>
<td>Observer is part of what observed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science is value-free</td>
<td>Science is driven by human interests</td>
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<tr>
<th>Researcher should:</th>
<th>Positivist paradigm</th>
<th>Phenomenological paradigm</th>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on facts</td>
<td>Focus on meanings</td>
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<td>Look for causality and fundamental laws</td>
<td>Try to understand what is happening</td>
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<td>Reduce phenomena to simplest elements</td>
<td>Look at the totality of each situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formulate hypotheses and then test them</td>
<td>Develop ideas through induction of data</td>
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<tr>
<th>Preferred methods include:</th>
<th>Positivist paradigm</th>
<th>Phenomenological paradigm</th>
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<tr>
<td>Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured</td>
<td>Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking large samples</td>
<td>Small samples investigated in depth and over time</td>
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Table 1: Positivist Vs Phenomenological paradigm (Easterby-Smith et al., 1994)

Sanders (1982) argues that phenomenology is a qualitative research method. It is a detailed study of the lived experiences of the individuals who are being researched. Colaizzi (1978) suggests a series of seven steps to describe the phenomenological research process:

1. The first task of the researcher is to read the participants’ narratives, to acquire a feeling for their ideas in order to understand them fully.
2. The next step, “extracting significant statements”, requires the researcher to identify key words and sentences relating to the phenomenon under study.
3. The researcher then attempts to formulate meanings for each of these significant statements.

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2 Husserl (1970, p.385) notes “The appearing of things does not appear itself to us, we live through it”.

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4. This process is repeated across participants’ stories and recurrent meaningful themes are clustered. These may be validated by returning to the informants to check interpretation.

5. After this the researcher should be able to integrate the resulting themes into a rich description of the phenomenon under study.

6. The next step is to reduce these themes to an essential structure that offers an explanation of the behaviour.

7. Finally, the researcher may return to the participants to conduct further interviews or elicit their opinions on the analysis in order to cross check interpretation.

Phenomenology is a qualitative way of researching social phenomena. Ahmad and Ali (2003, p.2) note that “qualitative research is used where there is a concern for understanding how things happen and how they are related, rather than only measuring the relationship between variables”. The objective of qualitative data is to provide depth and details of action, events, and perspectives through the eyes of the actors or those being investigated (Bryman and Cramer, 1988). As a result, a qualitative methodology can provide the investigator with meaningful insights by delving more deeply and examining the intangible aspects of complex issues of process (Lofland, 1971; Mintzberg, 1983; Van Maanen, 1983). Therefore, qualitative methodologies are characterised as ‘deep’ (Sieber, 1973), ‘story telling’, ‘full rich and real’ (Miles and Hubert, 1984) but also ‘soft’ and ‘narrow’ (Hardy, 1985). All these characteristics show the power of qualitative study to answer several research objectives suited to the use of this methodology. However, such methodology is costly and time-consuming, and data can only be gathered from a small sample size (Sekaran, 1992).

The issues of validity and reliability from the phenomenological viewpoint have been addressed by Easterby-Smith (1994). The validity of research is dependant on the access that the researcher gains to the knowledge and meanings of the informants. With respect to that Sanders (1982) suggested that the phenomenologist researcher should probe the research problem in-depth without caring for the quantity. Reliability of the phenomenological research is gained if similar observations will be made by
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different researchers in different locations. The validity and reliability of phenomenological research are discussed in detail in a later stage of the paper.

The case-study research method

In-depth interviews are a common method of executing a phenomenological research project (Sanders, 1982; Moustakas, 1992; Thompson, 1997, 1998), although the interviews are supported by other sources of data like archival data, documents, and observations (direct or/and participant). Yin (2003) suggests that in the case study method there are six major sources of evidence that are used by the researcher. These are:

1. Documents,
2. Archival records,
3. Interviews,
4. Direct observation,
5. Participant observation, and
6. Physical artefacts

The case study method has been used in a variety of research problems that concern decision-making (Eisenhardt, 1989; Perren and Ram, 2004). Yin (2003) provides an extensive guide to the practical implementation of the case study research technique for academic purposes, while Perry (1998) shows how the case study technique should be used for the purposes of doctoral research. Based on the methodological implications imposed by the phenomenological dimension of my research and the widely accepted guidelines given by Yin (2003) and Perry (1998), the practical issues of case-study research are discussed below.

Theory development
The case study method can be used both in inductive and deductive research programmes (Perry, 1998). Eisenhardt (1989) mentioned that a research question is necessary to start because without one it is easy to become overwhelmed by the volume of data.

**Case selection**

The number of the cases that are necessary for a case study research project is not clearly addressed in the research literature. Perry (1998) has done a review of the case study literature and he concluded that a four to six units of analysis and four to ten cases are usually enough to reach the theoretical saturation point (Eisenhart, 1989), which is the point where additional information does not add additional knowledge. The selection of the cases is usually purposive since all the other sampling techniques are characterised as “not preferable” (Eisenhardt, 1989; p. 536). Patton (1990) mentions that maximum variation sampling is the more appropriate because it ensures the maximum richness of information.

**Development of instruments and protocols**

The collection of data through all the alternative ways mentioned before is necessary for bracketing (epoche). Husserl (1931) originally defined epoche as a process where the researcher doubts the facts and his knowledge based on the review of external sources of information. Later, other researchers interpreted Husserl’s definition and concluded that the epoche is the process where the researcher is creating the research context before he starts to reflect on it influenced by the knowledge he will create by the in depth interviews (Sanders, 1982; Moustakas, 1992). The case study method provides a structured framework where the researcher has the opportunity to create a context based on all the sources of information that are available to him and where the interviews will be the catalyst that produce new knowledge out of this process.

Yin (2003) suggests that the case study instruments are just a part of the case study protocol. In there, the use of various data types is described and according to
Eisenhardt (1989, p. 538) the combination of data deriving from various quantitative and qualitative sources can be “highly synergetic”. Yin (2003) proposes that each case study protocol should have four sections:

1. Introduction: The research aim and objectives are reviewed and the theoretical framework of the case study is addressed.

2. Data collection procedures: An analytical database is created where important dates, names and other details of the cases are imported. In addition to them a priori data sources are reviewed and the preparations needed prior to visiting the sites are listed.

3. Case study questions: In this section of the protocol the research questions are linked with the methods that will be used in order to access the necessary data to answer them. This section does not only include the interview schedules, but also includes reminders for the researcher like things that he should observe while on the sites of the retailers or documents that he should find and review.

4. A guide for the case study report: With respect to the phenomenological approach of the enquiry this part of the case study will include the data that will be reviewed by the interviewees where they will reflect and give their feedback. This part of the protocol is related to the phenomenological reduction because through the outlines that will be set here the data will be classified and organised in order to be analysed at the next stage.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis part is related to the theoretical background of the research as well as the methodological stance that the researcher is taking. Perry (2004) suggests that the data analysis should be based on the theory upon which the case study was build. Eisenhardt (1989) maintained that a within-case data analysis approach should be taken. The basic premise of within-case data analysis is the development of “detailed case study write-ups for each site” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 540). This helps the researcher to reflect on his data but also is a tool compatible with the
phenomenological approach, which calls for the validation of the analysis by the interviewees.

The main aim of the within-case analysis is the detection of theoretical replications (Perry, 2004). Eisenhardt (1989) mentions that the process of the detection of theoretical replications gives the investigator a rich familiarity with each case and this accelerates the cross-case comparison. Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that the researchers’ focus should be on finding cross-case patterns. She points out that an efficient way to proceed is to select categories or dimensions and then look for within-group similarities coupled with intergroup differences. Yin’s (2003) suggestion is to base the pattern matching on the theoretical assumptions of the study. Eisenhardt (1989) points out that cross-case searching enhances the probability that the investigator will capture novel findings, which may exist in the data. The data analysis in case study research stops when the incremental improvement to theory is minimal (Eisenhardt, 1989; Perry, 2004).

**Criticism of the case study approach**

Case studies have been criticised as every other research method. Yin (2003) mentions that the greatest concern has been over the lack of rigour of case study research. He also stresses, “too many times, the case investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the directions of the findings and conclusions” (2003, p.10). The development of a complete and efficient case-study protocol assures that systematic procedures will be followed and the biases will be suppressed. Tellis (1997) also suggests that a frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion. Yin’s (2003) reply is that case studies are generalisable to theoretical prepositions and not to populations. The case study does not represent a sample, but in doing a case study the goal is to expand theories and not to enumerate frequencies.
An example of a phenomenological case-study

The latter theoretical discussion is reflected in an exploratory study that the author undertakes as part of his doctoral research. The aim of the research is to create an understanding of how retail managers experience environmental uncertainty and how they are making location related decisions within an uncertain environment.

The research context

Retailing in Greece until early 1990’s seemed in many ways not to have changed since the earliest shops were established there four millennia ago (Bennison and Boutsouki, 1995). The changes that began at the start of 1990’s were sudden and occurred with great speed (Bennison, 2002). The small shops that used to characterise Greek towns have been superceded by modern developments mostly located at out-of-town areas. The major reason for that change was the deregulation of retail as part of the harmonisation programme for the introduction of the Single European Market in 1992. The changes that were introduced were the lift of price controls; the extension of opening hours (excluding Sundays); the removal of the prohibition on the use of overtime and part-time labour; and finally the deregulation of the sale of fresh bread, meat and fish that had only been distributed by specialist shops.

These changes motivated foreign – mainly American and western European – retailers operating in a number of sectors to show their interest in Greece. The newly liberalised market gave them the opportunity to enter, and although the market size was relatively small it was considered worthy by many of exploitation since the indigenous competition was perceived as being weak. The expansion of the foreign retailers had an immediate impact on the sector. New marketing techniques were introduced, modern logistic and warehousing strategies were implemented, retail location analysis became more systematic and new markets were exploited.
Sampling

Statistics are of no concern to phenomenological methods (Berglund, 2005), so sampling was purposive, focusing on the maximum variation of cases. Since in my research aims I suggest that there are differences between the indigenous and international retailers a sample of both is taken. In order to identify extremes in the decision-making process, independent retailers and retail chain companies were researched and location decisions at all levels were in focus. I chose four retail firms two indigenous and two foreign in order to study the differences between them; and I also chose two small-medium size companies and two large ones in order to study if the differences are influenced by the size of the organisation.

Data collection

At that stage of the research in-depth interviews, observations, and physical artefacts were integrated in order to create a holistic view of the managerial experience of decision making under uncertainty. The research strategy I followed was to collect data that could assist me in composing the research context – the phenomenological lifeworld – and use the primary data that I would collect from the interviews in order to understand managers’ experience. Finally, I asked for physical artefacts, in the form of cognitive maps, in order to have a tangible mean of discussion that could be reviewed and developed by both the researcher and the researched individuals.

Research strategy

The research was divided into seven steps. The purpose of each step was to build a holistic view of the managerial experience by combining managers’ views and the researcher’s interpretation.

First step: Construction of the lifeworld - Bracketing
The starting point of the research was the understanding of the macro-environment where managers are making decisions. In order to understand the environment I undertook desk research where I identified a number of issues that potentially can influence the retail companies’ micro-environment. These issues were addressed in the case study protocol and they were included in in-depth interviews schedule. Another reason for doing the desk research is that documents and quantitative data support the research and increase its validity (Yin, 2003).

In order to develop a basic understanding of the micro-environment I visited a number of retail companies where I observed the working environment and I identified elements of the culture of the company that I incorporated in case study protocol. Carson et al. (2001, p.144) highlight that usually observation is a “first touch methodology” that can give a superficial view of the research object but also it gives “rich and insightful understanding of real phenomena”.

**Second step: In-depth interviewing**

Four interviews that lasted about an hour were done that were tape-recorded. A research schedule was developed based on the findings on the research of the first step. The major issues that were addressed included managers’ perception of uncertainty and their understanding of the experience of decision making. Since a phenomenological approach was adopted, where reflection on data is necessary, cognitive maps were used in the interviews. Cognitive maps offer a tangible mean of research, what Yin (2003) describes as a physical artefact that gives validity to the research.

Cognitive maps are a method used to elicit the structure and the content of people's mental processes (Daniels et al. 1995), which provides a mental model. A mental model can be broadly defined as a simplification or a representation of understanding (Ahman and Ali, 2003). It can be seen as providing a framework which directs and controls a decision-making process at an individual level. It affects the way an individual views the world, influencing the way in which he or she thinks about or perceives problems or issues. Ultimately, it affects individual behaviour and action (Spicer, 1998). Spicer (2000) defined cognitive mapping as a suite of techniques and
methodologies which are designed for the elicitation and representation of individual knowledge and understanding. Cognitive mapping techniques are one of the tools to draw cognitive maps. These techniques are used to explore graphical descriptions of the unique ways in which an individual views a particular domain (field of thought or action) (Langfield-Smith, 1992). As a research tool cognitive mapping has its strengths and weaknesses, which can be summarised in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure thought through symbolic representation</td>
<td>Exerts undue influence on mapping process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphical rather than linear layout</td>
<td>Needs skill and highly trained researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quick insight into the structure of information</td>
<td>”Reading” maps is difficult</td>
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<td>Information clearly communicable</td>
<td>Large maps become complex to administer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing large amount of qualitative information</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capture individual knowledge and experience</td>
<td>Mapping unavoidably changes the understanding being mapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve interviewing capability</td>
<td>Stress and uncomfortable feeling of respondent</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Strengths and weaknesses of cognitive mapping technique, Ahmad and Ali (2003, p.5)

The rationale behind using the cognitive mapping technique is that the author wanted to understand the cognitive negotiations that take place in an interviewee’s mind while describing the decision making process. Ackermann et al. (2004) suggested that cognitive mapping helps the researcher and interviewee to structure, organise, and analyse data. They also mention that the implementation of the technique may “increase the user’s understanding of the issue through the necessity of questioning how the chains of argument fit together and determining when isolated chunks of data fits in” (Ackermann et al., 2004; p.2). See Figure 2 for an example of a cognitive map.
Third step: Exploration of intentionality

In this part of the study the research interviews and the cognitive maps were analysed and meaning units were identified. The technique that was employed in order to identify the meaning units was thematic analysis. A total of eighteen meaning units – themes – related to uncertainty emerged from the analysis that needed to be reviewed by the interviewees.

At that stage the researcher should go back to theory and find the correspondence of the knowledge that emerges with it from the phenomenological interviews (Sanders, 1982) that through that process features of the micro and macro environment were identified are meaningful to the managers. Better understanding of the uncertainty concept was achieved and distinct differences of the perception of uncertainty between the managers of the indigenous and foreign retail companies were traced.

Fourth step: Validation of data by the interviewees
Moustakas (1992) suggests that the validation of data by the interviewees increases the validity and credibility of the research because interviewer’s interpretation is assessed by the same persons that were interviewed. The interviewed persons received the author’s interpretation of their interview and a report of the synthesis of the interviews of all the interviewed persons. This step is also consistent with Yin’s (2003) discussion about construct validity of the case studies.

The interviewees reviewed the reports and gave feedback on them. The step of validation is also related with the achievement of the phenomenological intersubjectivity because the researcher receives feedback on his interpretations by the researched individuals. The researcher’s interpretation of the interviews reflect his empathic understanding of the interviewed persons’ experience because he has already constructed their lifeworld and positioned himself in there during the interviews.

**Fifth step: Phenomenological reduction**

Since the researcher receives the interviewees’ feedback he starts the process of phenomenological reduction. Berglund (2005) describe this process as a quest for factors and superfactors, a classification of units into wider units. In this step the researcher integrates the knowledge he created through the bracketing with the existing theory and the phenomenological interviews. This is the part of the research where the researcher actually builds his case study because he is using all the different data sources he has in order to understand the experiences of interviewees, to reflect on them and build his theory.

Through this process the eighteen meaning units mentioned earlier were reduced into five wider units that describe the experience of uncertainty. The reduction aims to highlight the meaningful contents of the researched individuals’ lifeworld. It was expected that the meaning units that would emerge from each interview would be different, since each lifeworld is different and the interviewees experience it in a different way. Through the reduction process of these different lifeworlds the
researcher is looking to find the overlapping layers, that could construct a common lifeworld where a theory that explains interviewees experience can be meaningful.

By analysing the data and synthesising the common lifeworld the eighteen meaning units were reduced to five, that were relevant with the experiences of all the managers that were interviewed.

**Sixth step: Theory building**

In the final step of the research the data that has been collected, assessed, analysed and synthesised drives the development of theory. The researcher has to produce a theory that corresponds with the research methodology and his methods, and it has the credibility, validity and reliability to be accepted. For the purposes of this study a quality protocol based on Carson’s *et al.* (2001) instructions for high-quality qualitative research, Yin’s (2003) quality tests for case studies, and Moustakas’s (1992) validation test for phenomenological research (see Table 3) were used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carson’s <em>et al.</em> (2001) instructions for a high-quality qualitative research</th>
<th>Researching in the natural setting of the phenomena</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using purposive or theoretical sample</td>
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<td>Comparing results across different contexts</td>
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<td>Depth and intimacy of interviews</td>
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<td>Prolonged and persistent observations</td>
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<td>Negative case analysis – look for exemptions</td>
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<td>Debriefing by peers</td>
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<td>Maintain memos</td>
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<td>Triangulation of different data sources</td>
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<td>Independent audits</td>
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<td>Feedback on the findings from respondents</td>
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<td>Yin’s (2003) tests for case-studies</td>
<td>Use multiple sources of evidence</td>
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<td>Establish chain of evidence</td>
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<td>Have key informants review draft case study report</td>
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<td>Do pattern-matching</td>
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Undertaking phenomenological research in Greece: a theoretical discussion based on some empirical observations

The 3rd Hellenic Observatory PhD Symposium

Constantinos Theodoridis

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moustakas’s (1992) validation for phenomenological research</th>
<th>Interviewees give feedback on researcher’s interpretation of lifeworld construction and in-depth interviews</th>
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<td>Do explanation-building</td>
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<td>Address rival explanation</td>
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<td>Use logic models</td>
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<td>Use theory in single-case studies</td>
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<td>Use replication logic in multiple-case studies</td>
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<td>Use case study protocol</td>
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<td>Develop case study database</td>
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Table 3: Quality protocol of phenomenological case-studies

The rigorous implementation of this quality protocol provides the basis of developing a theory that is coherent with existing literature and informed by the primary desk and field research and contributes to original knowledge which is the main purpose of a doctoral research. By following these steps in the research described here a theory was built which now remains to be tested.

Phenomenological research in Greece – Problems and opportunities

The methodological framework discussed above has never been used before in the Greek context. There are actually very few examples of phenomenological studies that were undertaken in Greece (e.g. Chronis, 2005). A major problem of phenomenological research is the time the interviewees have to spend on the interviews and the revision of the researchers’ reports. Particularly when phenomenological research involves managers from small-medium companies the time element is more important because they usually are busy with multiple managerial tasks. A wider issue relevant to the applied academic research in Greece is that both academic and marketing research are not part of the entrepreneurial culture of the Greek managers. The problem that the academic researcher has to tackle is that he has to build a relationship of trustfulness with the interviewees so that they will be
open to share their experiences with honesty and furthermore than that they will give access to the researchers to documents and records of the company. Another problem that is relevant with the construction of the lifeworld is the lack of formal sources of information. Public institutions like the National Statistical Service of Greece and the Bank of Greece provide plethora of data but the process of getting them is problematic because they either do not provide the full datasets or there is no access to this data online.

Even though researching in a phenomenological way is problematic it is still a valuable methodological approach that offers a lot of opportunities to the researcher. Management researchers that are interested in the Greek environment have in many cases to develop and test theories, hence qualitative research methods are particularly useful in contexts that are under-researched (Carson et al. 2001). Experiences research could be the basis for qualitative research because they provide rich and insightful descriptions of human views (Moustakas, 1992). Phenomenology also provides the researcher the opportunity to cover the gaps that remain unaddressed by integrating alternative methods and sources of data. Finally and in addition to the above, phenomenological research is based on the development of human relationships and trust relationships between individuals so there is the opportunity for the researcher to promote the value of academic research to managers.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to discuss the implications of undertaking phenomenological research in Greece. Phenomenological methodology is a valuable methodology in researching managerial experiences (Ehrich, 2005) even though management researchers keep a distance from it. The major argument against phenomenology is that it is descriptive and interpretive and thus it lacks of credibility. A reply to this argument is the employment of case-studies instead of in-depth interviews as a research method. The increased number of data sources that are triangulated and the tests that can be used to assure the quality of the research, as this is defined by the validity, creditability and reliability of the research, could encourage
researchers to include phenomenology in their methodological arsenal. Phenomenology can be the appropriate research methodology when research aims to understand management phenomena and particularly looks at the human dimension of management practice (Ehrich, 2005).
References


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