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Using phenomenology in entrepreneurship research

Abstract

What does it mean to be entrepreneurial? This paper examines how this type of question can be addressed using a phenomenological approach. It discusses the basis of phenomenology philosophy and uses an example of research that examines the lived experience of entrepreneurs who receive or give money to start an enterprise from their close family. The philosophy is used as the basis for the development and design of the research project. The impact of the philosophical decisions regarding how data is collected and treated is discussed and illustrated through the example. By doing this, the paper is an important contribution to the call for more diverse methodological approaches to the study of entrepreneurship. It illustrates how a phenomenological research methodology can contribute to research in this field. A deep and rich understanding of the lived world of entrepreneurs is valuable to researchers, practitioners and policy makers because this activity is embedded in a human rather than a natural science.

Introduction

“Who is an entrepreneur is the wrong question”. Gartner’s oft quoted article from 1988 still resonates in the literature. However, there is still a desire to understand entrepreneurship from the individual perspective and “it may be time to reformulate our research questions in terms of our genuine concerns about the phenomenon of entrepreneurship” (Sarasthavy 2004). To this end, maybe one of the better questions is,

“What does it mean to be entrepreneurial?”

If so, and this paper explores this proposition, how do we investigate meaning within the lived world of an entrepreneur? Many would argue that such a question is best answered by qualitative enquiry and a number of researchers have called for such a focus in order to broaden our understanding of entrepreneurship (Hindle 2004). The use of qualitative research methods in the entrepreneurship field has been increasing over the past few years (Neergaard & Hlhoi 2007). However, there has been minimal discussion about the philosophical basis for such requests (Cope 2011; Seymour 2007). Further, widely referenced texts such as Neuman (2000) that are used to support qualitative research are still firmly embedded in the positivist philosophical stance, “Scientists gather data using specialized techniques and use data to support or reject theories.” (Neuman 2000 p7). Entrepreneurship research, as a whole, remains functionalist in nature (Jennings 2005) and few studies examine areas such as identity, phenomenology, ideology, and power relationships.

The call for more qualitative research is not, however, providing the alternative epistemological view of entrepreneurship (Leitch Hill & Harrison 2009). What is required, I would contend, is that entrepreneurship needs to be examined from philosophical views other than objectivist or scientism. Such alternative approaches will surely go some way to addressing what is still missing to a large extent in the literature; a deep insight into what it is like to be an entrepreneur (Bann 2009).

This paper uses a research example to illustrate how we can enhance theory and practice in entrepreneurship by engaging in a philosophical discussion about its research methodologies and methods. The example is an investigation into financing of new ventures by close family members. This is one of the Three F’s, namely Family, Friends and Fools; an understudied area even though the prevalence of the behaviour is clearly widespread. The design, procedure

and processing of data is explained and justified within the phenomenological philosophy. The paper concludes that the use of phenomenology is a valuable, yet underutilised philosophical approach to the study of the lived world of entrepreneurs.

Organisation of the paper

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the motivation behind developing this paper. Second, I present a brief discussion regarding phenomenology and its importance for entrepreneurship research. Third, I introduce the research example and discuss why phenomenology is appropriate and its implication in establishing the research question. Fourth, bracketing is discussed in the context of appropriate data collection, in this case, interviews. Fifth, discussion of data analysis and the procedures engaged for robustness and quality. Finally, phenomenological findings in regards to theorising and conclusions are discussed.

Motivation

“Entrepreneurship is a phenomenon, not a theory,
To always look for some causal explanation makes me weary,
I know scholarship seeks to answer the “why?”
But I am most interested in “what,” “how,” and the nature of “try.” (Gartner 2008)

This paper presents an example of phenomenological research to illustrate one means to answer the “what, how and nature of try”. Entrepreneurship literature, and business literature more widely (Leitch Hill & Harrison 2009), appears to largely ignore the fundamental philosophical paradigm upon which its research is founded (Cope 2005; Seymour 2007; Shaw 2011). This view is reinforced by Davidsson (2004) who declares early in his book, “Researching Entrepreneurship”, his own philosophical viewpoint and clearly identifies that declaring oneself as a Quantitative or Qualitative researcher is singularly unhelpful unless discussing an underpinning philosophical paradigm. This paper answers this issue and engages in the philosophical basis of research using an example.

Background of Phenomenology

The term ‘phenomenology’ was popularised by Edmund Husserl. A philosophical way of thinking that was built on the work of Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) who used the term occasionally, but Husserl also used ideas from earlier work of Rene Descartes (1596-1650),

“The object is said to possess objective reality insofar as it exists by representation in thought” (Descartes as quoted in Moustakis 1994 p27).

Phenomenology was brought to the attention of western social scientists in 1932 with the publication of a translation of Husserl’s work in English in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1932) by Alfred Schutz. Subsequently, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a very influential 20th Century philosopher, embedded phenomenology in his thinking,

“Only as phenomenology is ontology possible” (Being and Time 1962 p 60).

Husserl, and later Heidegger, had significant impact on social research and further developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) who placed much greater emphasis on “All consciousness is perceived consciousness” (Moustakis 1994) and Jean-Paul Satre (1908-1980) who emphasised that our ideas are the product of experience of real-life situations

(Davis 2010). The word phenomenology has its roots in Greek, ‘Phaenesthai’ *To flair up. To show itself. To appear*. Phenomenology is the meaning of things as they appear, “to the things themselves” (Heidegger 1962).

Husserl’s approach to the meaning of knowledge (ontology) is that only through the conscious awareness and engagement (ideation) with an object is knowledge created. An object in nature appears in consciousness and through an intentional engagement will knowledge be created (van Manen 1997). Further, there is no artificial separation between nature and consciousness; a very different philosophical standpoint to scientism as encapsulated in objectivist research philosophy.

Husserl used the term Noema to label the perception of an object and Noesis to label the meaning of the object (Davis, 2010). Intentionality is the conscious engagement of the Noema-Noesis relationship. In phenomenological research, we are attempting to understand the essence of meanings that people attribute to this relationship. Their knowledge is that which is created by their own understanding of their Noema-Noesis relationship in any given phenomenon.

The epistemological stance of Husserl is that to learn about any phenomenon we must suspend all presuppositions. This demands the researcher to look for the essences, the structure, without reference to any preconceived notions; the antithesis of testing hypotheses as per the scientific method. Further, knowledge is developed through the investigation of understandings of experiences; a suspension of the *natural attitude* and adopting a *philosophical attitude* (Moustakis 1994). The result is to be able to look beyond the natural (simply what happens) and identify the meaning of what it is to be in the lived world, “Lebenswelt”; a term previously used by Max Weber in the tradition of Kantian inquiry.

The research project; the example of family finance (one of the ‘Three F’s)

A research project that examined the phenomenon of family finance of new ventures is used to illustrate the phenomenological approach. This is one of the ‘F’s in the often termed phrase the ‘Three F’s’, that is Friends Family and Fools. This is an important study because new venture formation is a key component of economic growth (Kirzner 1973; OECD 2003). In particular, the process by which individuals obtain the resources to turn ideas into an enterprise is key to the study of entrepreneurship (Shane 2003). Many start-up ventures find that debt or grant finance is either unavailable or not suitable. Equity finance may be sought from institutions, Venture Capitalists, or informal sources such as Business Angels (Mason and Harrison 1995). However, many entrepreneurs turn to friends or family (Bygrave 2004).

The impact of family financing is significant. The average number of people who invest globally on an informal basis is 3.4% of the adult population accounting for (US) \$196 billion annually (Bygrave Hay et al 2003). In Australia, 3.3% of the adult population, accounting for 1.26% of GDP, engages in informal investment behaviour with close friends or family (Hancock, Lindsay et al. 2007). Venture capital and business angel investment, by comparison, is insignificant in terms of activity. Yet, this behaviour is not well understood and calls have been made to address this gap (Bygrave Hay et al. 2003; Maula Autio et al. 2005; Wong Ho et al. 2006).

Research design

Undertaking such a research project, given the complexity involved, made the choice of appropriate research methods itself a complex undertaking. Initially, an interesting

phenomenon was identified from my own awareness of the literature, preceding analysis work conducted as a member of the Australian GEM project research team (Hancock, et al. 2007), working with young entrepreneurs, and starting and running my own enterprises. After deciding that there was an interesting phenomenon taking place, and that this was, for me “an abiding concern” (Van Manen 1990p31), the overarching desire was to try and find out “what is going on” (WIGO).

The procedure used in this research in was informed by a number of previous phenomenological studies including, Crotty (1998), Van Manen (1997), Bann (2007) Cope (2005), Berglund & Ulhoi (2007). In particular, John W. Creswell (2007) and Clark Moustakis (1994) provided the structure of the study. This example is not intended to be a formula for phenomenological research; any such claim in phenomenology is clearly inappropriate. It does, however, illustrate how a deep engagement with the philosophical underpinnings of research guides and enables appropriate method selection.

The overall process evolved as much as it was designed (Van Manen 1997). It would be disingenuous for any suggestion that the following steps in the research process occurred strictly sequentially to some overall design. They are, rather, an explanation of what took place in response to the investigation within a phenomenological philosophy.

A phenomenological paradigm to investigate this particular entrepreneurial behaviour was chosen because entrepreneurship is multidimensional and complex in nature (Mitchell, Busenitz et al. 2002; Neergaard and Ulhoi 2007). New venture investment decision-making adds to the complexity because a focus on economic analysis alone provides an incomplete explanation of investment behaviour (Basu and Parker 2001; Cassar 2004). Various financial theories regarding financial investment exist (Kaplan and Stromberg 2004) but this is complicated by the introduction of the complex dynamics of family (Neubauer & Lank 1998). Therefore, some authors predict that any attempt to explain investment behaviour through rational economic theory is doomed to failure because exchanges are made in the context of altruism, personal bonds, loyalty, spite, and duty (Estin 1995). The methodological and epistemological approaches, therefore, need to be able to encompass the complexity and ambiguity of the social environment of the family. This research, therefore, investigates a social rather than a natural phenomenon (van Manen 1997) and, together with the exploratory nature of the complex processes involved, lends itself to a research methodology that allows for an in-depth understanding.

Phenomenology is the examination of a phenomenon from the perspective of a number of participants (Moustakis 1994). It is, at its most basic premise, an examination of “the things themselves” (Crotty 1998, p78). There is an assumption under this methodology that human beings are both aware of the objects about which the research is about as well as an assumption of intentionality. That is, there is a decision making process about which the phenomenon is embedded. In this philosophy, an investigation is not driven by prior research or literature reviews because it is about an “attempt to recover a fresh perception of existence, one unprejudiced by acculturation” (Sadler 1969 in Crotty, 1998 p80). This is a key difference to an objectivist view where the need to know is identified through gaps in the literature, the investigator exists separate from the object, and where objective measurement is the key to underpinning any claim to knowledge. Entrepreneurship is essentially about the human condition and the objective of this research is primarily about understanding rather than measuring by looking for meanings that lie behind the behaviour (Moustakis 1994; Cope 2005). A phenomenological philosophy is, therefore, particularly suited to this research task.

Bracketing and data collection

To commence the research process, phenomenology demands that the researcher set aside any preconceived concepts and ideas regarding the “thing” under investigation. This is what Husserl referred to as Epoch; a suspending of supposition (Crotty 1998; Moustakis 1994). “Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it” (Van Manen 1997 p30) means that an extensive literature review is not only unnecessary but quite possibly a hindrance to the researcher. Further, bracketing implies far more than just putting aside prior knowledge regarding the subject under investigation. Any preconceived notions about reality, assumptions of knowledge, and even means to investigate the phenomenon are also set aside. Attempting to define a tightly bound question early in the investigation is outside of the phenomenological paradigm. To do so implies that a level of conceptualizing is brought to bear on the subject. In accordance with Epoch, the question at the commencement of the inquiry is as broad as “What is going on here?” In this example the research question is,

“How do neophyte entrepreneurs and their funders perceive and describe their involvement in family funding for new ventures?”

Data collection

Having set aside any preconceptions, the next decision was how to obtain data. Following Moustakis (1994), phenomenological reduction requires a textural description of what is evident. All experiences, however described or evident, are as equally important and provide the constituents of the experiences of the participants. This led me to decide that semi-structured interviews with people who intimately know something of this phenomenon were ideal (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The appropriate interview for this type of research is close to a conversation, but within a “specific purpose” with a focus and aim in mind (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Participants should be free to elucidate and expand on things that are of interest or concern to them. We needed to know much more about the common and divergent experiences of people who undertook the behaviour such as Crotty (1998), Patton (2002), and Moustakis (1994). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and noted (Patton, 2002).

A set of guidelines was developed in advance to determine the type of participant who would be suitable for participation in the research. Participants selected for this study were not intended to be a representation of any particular population. A purposive sampling technique (Corbin and Strauss 2008) was employed to recruit participants who had a direct involvement in either receiving funds from their family or those who had provided funds to members of their family to start a new venture. Applying these strategies enabled the collection of information rich data (Patton 2002), obtaining depth and detail rather than breadth and generality (Berglund in Neergaard & Ulhoi 2007).

Invitations were sent to people participating in the South Australian Young Entrepreneurs Scheme (which assists young entrepreneurs through a mentoring and training program), attended “Start and Plan Your Own Business” courses, who had contacted any of the Business Enterprise Centres in South Australia, and through various contacts who operate in the area of new venture assistance advice and services such as accountants, solicitors, and financiers. The following guidelines were used to decide who would be ideal participants;

- The participant had either received funds from a close family member to start their business or, provided funds to a close family member in order for them to start a business.
- The business had to be a new start up, not an existing one looking for expansion funds.
- The funder was not engaging in the finance deal as an experienced or “sophisticated” investor.

- The funder was not intending to play an active role in the venture, so as to avoid partnership or joint management type arrangements

Sixteen individuals were identified and agreed to participate, a suitable sample size because between 5 and 25 individuals who have experience of a particular phenomenon under investigation is a suitable basis for interview data collection (Polkinghorne 1989).

Bracketing (Cresswell 2007) implies that researchers suspend their knowledge of the phenomenon while interviewing and analysing their data. I am an experienced entrepreneur and business operator but adopted a naive position in the discussions (Berglund 2007)) to enable me to suspend any previous assumptions I had.

Phenomenological interviewing in entrepreneurship research is very much in its infancy (Cope 2005). To be true to the epistemological basis of the research, interviewees were fully aware of the intention and interest of the researcher. They were fully aware of how knowledge is created with their participation and engagement with the researcher (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). My past experience and knowledge of the business start-up process was valuable and allowed insightful questions and empathy for interviewees. By fully acknowledging this, and following the concept of bracketing, I avoided, as much as possible, influencing the participants' comments. As a social constructivist, however I acknowledge that this is probably unreasonable if not impossible to avoid completely (Crotty 1994; Van Manen 1997).

Data analysis

The choice of method to analyse the data was informed by the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method (Moustakis 1994). This was deemed to be robust and well accepted by a number of texts that address phenomenological methodology including Patton (2002), Cresswell (2007), Berglund (2007), Seale (1999), and Bazeley (2007). Analysis followed the following procedure:

1. Researcher context
2. Coding
3. Thematic development
4. Textural and Structural Description: For each of the participants, and
5. Essence and Meaning.

Researcher Context

Declaring prior knowledge of the researcher is important. Only through this acknowledgement can true bracketing occur and the reader confident that it has occurred. In my example, an extract from the researcher declaration is as follows;

My exposure to new venture start-ups has been a very long one. I commenced my own business after working in the corporate world over twenty years ago. After that, I started and sold a number of enterprises, all but two of them starting up from scratch. I have also consulted many businesses at the early start-up stage or growth stage. During these experiences, I became aware that funding for early stage business development was very difficult to obtain. In particular, banks would only fund against personal wealth (usually real estate) and rarely, if ever, considered the business proposition as a means of meeting the loan repayments. I had often wondered how people were able to get started given these impediments.

Coding

Data was analysed in a continuous means (Miles and Huberman 1994). After each interview, the recorded audio was listened to and memos made. These memos were used in combination from the notes taken from the interview itself to inform the subject matter and questions for subsequent interviews. The audio was transcribed verbatim (Miles & Huberman 1994). The transcripts and audio files were imported into the Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) program Nvivo v9. I re-listened to the audio while reading the transcript to check the accuracy and make further memos. Transcripts were corrected where errors or omissions were evident.

The audio and both original and corrected versions of the transcriptions became source documents. As the research proceeded, memos were written regarding a variety of issues including observations regarding the data and methodologies and also captured as sources within Nvivo.

Nvivo software was used in this research to assist in five ways (Bazeley 2007).

1. It allowed management of the data which included the audio records, hand written notes, original transcriptions, adjusted transcriptions, memos, literature, and conceptual ideas as the research proceeded.
2. As a means to organise and sort conceptual ideas as the research proceeded. Particularly during the data analysis and importantly being able to quickly and accurately identify the context of the spoken evidence from participants.
3. Provide a way to 'question' the data through queries. Nvivo software allowed me to ask questions of the data and save the results for future reference and reporting.
4. Graphical models help illustrate the relationships in picture or matrix forms assisting in analysis and reporting.
5. Reporting the research can incorporate the original data, sources, findings, relationships, ideas, graphics, and processes supporting the knowledge generated by the research.

The QDAS does not provide analysis of data at the press of a key. For example, using statistical software allows researchers to conduct complex mathematical procedures quickly and accurately. However, analysis of the results still requires knowledge of such tools and the meaning of the statistical measures. Similarly, QDAS, while enabling accurate sorting and coding of data, does not provide the 'answers' to research questions. It is an organizing tool that allows the researcher to engage with the meaning of the data rather than spend time manually sorting. It was found to be a valuable tool in the research process for this project.

The coding process involved listening to the audio as well as examining the written transcript. Listening identified subtleties such as whether the participant was laughing, serious, or sarcastic. In addition, hand written notes made at the time of the interview which were done with a Livescribe™ pen. This device recorded the audio and the written notes electronically and linked notes to the audio for reference. Notes made by the researcher were entered as memos and used as a source for coding in addition to, or as a complement to, data from the interview transcripts. The following coding procedure was informed by criteria developed by Flick (2002) as adapted by Saldana (2009);

First level coding that consisted of elemental (Saldana 2009) and exploratory pattern (Miles and Huberman, 1994) techniques identified major issues of interest. Elements that were included in the initial coding schema included affective, descriptive, structural and simultaneous codes (Saldana 2009). As can be seen, there was no predetermined theory or constructs guiding the analysis. The data was sorted and analysed without reference to extant

literature. Coding resulted in a list of statements, quotes, experiences, notes, observations and other aspects. In all, 345 discrete codes were developed.

Thematic Development – organising codes

Codes are the building blocks that are used to construct themes and understandings to build knowledge about the phenomenon (Moustakis 1994). Themes are not objects, constructs, factors, variables, etc, as would be placed in an objectivist view. Themes are intransitive, illustrative, experiential, simplifications of the ‘lived world’ (Van Manen 1997). Thematic development was developed through iterative organisations and re-organisations of the codes and emerging themes. The process was messy and non-linear; much checking of the written transcript against the audio and memos was made to ensure that the correct meanings and interpretations were being attributed to what was said.

The original list of 345 discrete codes became 6 high order theme groups with 28 second order themes.

Textural and Structural Description

After coding the interviews, invariant horizons, a textural statement that uses verbatim samples of the interview to illustrate the key meaning units, were constructed for each interview. They are not exhaustive representations of the interview, but provide statements that encompass key meanings. Verbatim quotes that were allocated to themes through the coding process were identified through a query function of Nvivo. Thus, each invariant horizon statement is constructed with a high level of confidence of accuracy and thoroughness. Each verbatim quote is presented with an identifying link to the coding scheme developed earlier. This allows the reader to follow the logic used to refine and order the data into themes and meanings. An example of a textual description found in a theme of *family norms* for participant 2 who was a recipient of funds for a start-up enterprise was;

Um I feel very blessed that my parents are willing to do that They're not the wealthiest people, they have gone through a bankruptcy with a small business themselves about 15 years ago . So they have been rebuilding and have just got to the point where they own their own house again ... but they're almost at retirement age and lucky to be in a position to be able to do that so I feel very blessed but at the same time I feel very committed to help them have the life they have been working for.

And for participant 10 who was a provider of funds to close family;

...we've lent them and given them money over the years.. it was of course, to do with business...And I would give them more, except for the tax thing...they work so hard, and these times are tough, but if they get off the ground, then – well we've got the money to help them, so it's a pleasure to us to be able to help them, there's no other reason.... I'm very proud of what our children have been doing, and they don't waste money, they work hard and use it well.

Using imaginative variation, a description of the structure of the experience is constructed for each interview. These statements capture the situations, conditions and relationship aspects of the interview. They are constructed from the invariant horizons as well as taking into account context and using imaginative input to arrive at a deeper understanding of the interviewee's experience. It is at this stage that meaning as co-produced through the interaction of the researcher and participant becomes evident. Imaginative variation takes the “what” of the

textural description and builds the “how” (Crotty 1994). It constructs meaning and essence through the examination of various perspectives and variances. The result is a set of meanings embedded in experience. Examples of Structural Descriptions arising from the aforementioned themes but contextualised in a broader meaning are;

In addition to the cash support, her father, mother, sister and partner have all contributed a significant labour component. There is a common sense of commitment to the enterprise beyond Participant 2, even though it is her passion and drive that has started the business. There is a clear family intent to see the success of the business and Participant 2 sees the cash injection as an indication of their support. Participant 2 talks about the pride that her parents have in the effort she is making.

Participant 10 has provided funds to her grand- daughter but she has also provided funds to other grand-children and her own children over many years. This activity is very much a part of the family culture. Participant 10 and her husband operated their own businesses for many years and the experience has left them with the capacity and understanding to be very happy to financially assist family to do the same

Essence and Meaning

Returning to the whole, a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon is developed. A description of the experiences of the participants as a group is derived from an integration of the textural and structural statements. This composite textural-structural statement identifies the themes, the meanings, and essences of the experience of the phenomenon. This stage in the analysis process reveals the common and divergent meanings and deep understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants and researcher. For example, an extract from the textural-structural synthesis that addresses family norms is as follows;

The family norm was evident in comments that indicated that support within the family unit was normal. In fact one participant only realised that he was providing funds for a start-up for his partner, but had experienced similar support for his own ventures previously from his own family. During the discussion he exclaimed that he had not thought of this as a normal behaviour, but clearly he behaved in this supportive manner because that is how his family had always behaved.

“It’s interesting, I’ve never thought about this until you mentioning it, I mean I’ve always had sort of an ongoing thing with my own family that’s very like that”

Family norms are both developed and are in response to the behaviour. There is a strong sense of what it means to be in a family through this activity. There is a distinct awareness of ‘the other’ family members and it is important as to how they perceive them. Doing the ‘right thing’ by them is clearly impacting on their broader behaviour, both in a business and personal context.

Drawing conclusions

The result of the research is finally enfolded in the literature (Eisenhart 1989). Clusters of meaning units and essences of meanings are compared and contrasted with existing literature, theory, and philosophy. This identifies where existing theory can be developed, where existing disparate theory may converge, or commence the development of new theory.

Conclusions will address meanings from the perspective of the entrepreneur (Bann 2009), the perspective of the researcher (Cope 2005), relevance to literature (Bouchikhi 1993) and may address practice and policy implications. In line with phenomenological philosophy, the findings stand alone, and are examined as knowledge in their own right. The interaction with existing knowledge is done at the end, rather than at the commencement of the research process.

For example, the family norm which is identified as a key development of knowledge in the composite textural-structural description adds to giving theories of the family, in particular, altruism, (Kimball 1987), giving (Kunemund & Rein 1999), and support giving in the family (Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008). It also supports and expands on other phenomenological investigations in entrepreneurship such as Bann's finding of the importance of entrepreneurs' perception of others (Bann 2009 p71). Further, a deeper philosophical discussion is enabled. For example, family norms discussed earlier certainly encapsulated forms of gratitude. This adds to and enhances Andre Comte-Sponville's (2009) philosophy of *gratitude*, one of his "Great Virtues". In this study, there is a sense of gratitude from one family member to another such as "simply for being there" (Comte-Sponville 2009 p139). There is also the reciprocal gratitude for receiving assistance for such an important undertaking, particularly in the cases where it was not even asked for.

Quality of research

It is worth discussing how quality can be judged in such research because measurements commonly used in entrepreneurship research such as internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity simply do not apply to phenomenological investigation specifically and interpretive research generally (Leitch et al 2010). Yet, entrepreneurship research continues to be judged by some (many?) using standards that are borrowed from the physical sciences (Crook, Shook, Morris, & Madden 2010). The question of how to judge quality of research is addressed by applying consistently the philosophical underpinnings of the research rather than general scientific constructs that have no relation to the methodology employed in interpretive endeavours. Moustakis (1994) explicitly espouses that phenomenological knowledge is developed through the interaction between people. In this case, the researcher and participant develop knowledge through discussion, and this is continued through to the analysis process. For example, the value of using multiple researchers to improve internal validity (Seale 1999) is particularly unhelpful when there is a fluid and conversational style of interaction between researcher and participants.

"In the back and forth of social interaction the challenge is to discover what is really true of the phenomenon of interpersonal knowledge and experience" (Moustakis 1994, p57).

Seale (2000) clearly identifies that the positivist notion of inter-rater reliability, such as using independent coders, is not suitable for research that is embedded in constructivist epistemology. Further, the data in this study was analysed as it was gathered and the themes and meanings generated over a prolonged period of time (Corbin and Strauss 2008). In conclusion, while inter-rater reliability is seen as valuable in some forms of qualitative data analysis (Seale 2000; Miles and Huberman 1994), this research was not suited to that method as a quality check.

Quality of the data analysis is, however, assured through addressing the four quality factors proposed by Seale (2000):

- *Credibility*, by presenting a transparent and well documented process, the data analysis section presents the logic and process of thinking. The reader should be able to follow the logic of the investigation clearly.
- *Transferability*, which is developed by presenting deep understandings of the phenomenon under question. The rich descriptions of the participants illuminate what is going on and provide a high confidence that what is understood by us can be relevant to others. This is not a claim that the findings are generalisable; rather, the understanding of the phenomenon is valuable to a wide audience such as entrepreneurs, financiers, policy makers, advisors, and academics.
- *Dependability*, is evident by the clear documentation of meanings generated by insights that can be judged against their relation to current and proposed theoretical constructs. This is where engagement with the literature at the end of the process is evident.
- *Confirmability*, is ensured by enough evidence to provide confidence that what is presented is a true representation of the meanings of the participants. This can be achieved by presenting a clear logic, and in some cases referring findings back to participants for confirmation of their own understanding of the findings.

It is important to note that this research has not proposed that the interviewees were a representation of the population. The aim of this research is not to generalize to any given population; rather it is to discover a deep understanding of the phenomenon. The methodological techniques used ensure sufficient depth of material to allow a meaningful and deep understanding of the phenomenon. It allowed each participant to “be heard” and placed within the larger context (Miles and Huberman 1994). There are two basic rationales for claiming this.

First, the deep understanding provided by thick descriptions allows the readers to be able to judge for themselves as to the relevance of the findings to any particular situation. In this way, knowing about the phenomenon is the critical issue from the reader’s perspective, rather than an abstract claim of external validity as assumed in positivist research (Patton 2002). This is described as naturalism or ecological validity (Seale 2000). The ability for a reader to accept that the findings may be relevant to a broader context outside of the cases presented by the research is predicated on the process and logic of the research (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Second, the findings and conclusions developed by qualitative research rely on a logical rather than a probabilistic analysis (Mitchell 1983). The rationale is that analytic induction provides for confidence in the findings through examination of cases that do not claim to be examples of a pre-determined class, rather the deep meaning and knowledge is established by examining a case or cases that illuminate theory, that is, theoretical generalization (Seale 2000).

Conclusion

This paper used a philosophical approach based on Husserl’s phenomenology. It differs from other entrepreneurship research that use a phenomenological approach by focussing on a Husserlian approach rather than a Heideggerian approach (Shaw 2011), it builds on and was informed by the research of Cope (2005), by developing methodologies that are informed by a wide range of phenomenological studies, and develops the link between philosophy and choice of methods as proposed by Berglund in Neergaard & Ulhøi (2007). The findings support and add deeper meanings to Bann’s (2009) emergent entrepreneurial themes,

particularly in the relationship within a family and the meanings that family ascribe to start up entrepreneurship.

The paper also shows that such an approach can significantly enhance our understanding of the meaning of what it is like to be an entrepreneur. It examines the lived world that enhances recent attempts to engage with the entrepreneur such as effectuation (Sarasvathy 2005).

The findings are important for scholars in that diverse investigation from different philosophical perspectives will tend to provide richer and interesting findings. (Leitch et al 2010). To engage in this diversity scholars must, however, be prepared to develop new research skills. The effort required is, possibly, greater than more traditional methods used in the field and reporting such research is hindered by the amount of text that is typically required to justify the research findings (Moustakis 1994; Seale 2000). Establishing quality in this approach is particularly difficult when word limits are imposed. From a practitioner's perspective, a deeper understanding about what it means to be entrepreneurial will enable advisors and entrepreneurs to be better prepared for entrepreneurial behaviour. Finally, policy makers and advisors would be better placed to develop and implement public policy with a wider concept of *the lived experience* of entrepreneurs.

This paper demonstrated how a more explicit declaration of the philosophical basis in entrepreneurship research papers is useful. This is important for the advancement of the field in terms of theory and practice (Cope 1995). The development of the procedures, techniques, and methods that were needed to conduct the research are laid out in this paper to show that qualitative inquiry, when grounded in a philosophical base can be as robust as the best quantitative, objectivist research. In the words of Van Manen (1997 p11), phenomenological research is, "systematic in that it uses specially practised modes of questioning, reflecting, focussing, intuiting, etc" it is "explicit", "self critical", and "intersubjective", it is a "human science (rather than a natural science)".

Engaging in such research surely assists us to "keep our eyes on improving the practice of entrepreneurship (Bygrave, 2007, p. 25). And answer the,

what, "how," and the nature of "try."

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