## What is a Phenomenon

Academic research involves examining phenomena and describing them with validated theory. Each discipline has different approaches to validation. Mathematics requires the research to meet proof in equations. Some macro-economics also veers towards a form of equations that link causes and effects. Mathematicians are horrified at their lack of commitment to proof of these. Some scientific approaches require the research to be reproducible to be valid, and the phenomenon to be repeatable. Social sciences have more qualitative criteria. There is yet another perspective, a subset of philosophy.

## Phenomenology of Practice

The term was coined by Max van Manen,[[1]](#footnote-1) with roots in the *Utrecht School of Phenomenology* in the 1960’s in Holland. The origin of the field being Edmund Husserl (1928 lecture). The roots are in the field of Philosophy. Phenomena are the source for questioning life meaning as we live it and the nature of responsibility for personal actions and decisions

The quest for meaning, the mystery of meaning, how meaning originates and occurs, as well as responsibility for the organic, material and technological world we inhabit. Phenomenology is about wonder, words and world… the study of essences, such as the essence of perception, but essences in the context of existence (Merlou-Ponty 2012 , p. lxx).

It starts with experience, and investigating the existential meaning structures and self-showing of concrete phenomena and events in consciousness.

Phenomenology osf practice is sensitive to the realization that life as we live it is not only rational and logical, and thus transparent to systematic reflection, - it is also subtle, enigmatic, contradictory, ambiguous, sometimes mysterious and saturated with existential and transcendent meaning that can only be accessed through poetic, aesthetic and ethical languages. Phenomenology tells us who we are. So the practice of “doing phenomenology” is thinking and seeing our world phenomenologically… to be swept up in the spell of wonder about the original meaningfulness of this or that phenomenon or event as they appear… directing our gaze toward the regions where understandings, emotions, meanings and feeling originate….

Some of the methods thus include notions of the vocative, the pathic, the image, the anecdote, the vignette, the model, and the example. Such method “does no merely mean procedural, technical, repeatable features of enquiry”. Phenomenology is primarily metho for questioning, not just method for answering or drawing determinate conclusions. Producing insights, cognitive and noncognitive perceptions of existentialities

It is a step removed from the social sciences in practice. It does not require repetition or calculation or technicization, and comparison of outcomes trends and the indexing of data. Cinematology, photography, experiences of travel, the study of a novel, visual and graphic arts, new creative art forms…

The ultimate aim of a phenomenology of practice is modest: to nurture a measure of insightful thoughtfulness and discretionary tact in the practice and understanding of our professions and in everyday life.

The beginning is wonder. Anything can be a phenomenon. But in phenomenology, a phenomenon turns phenomenal, which means the obvious becomes questionable and enigmatic.

Examples: *Driving a Car* (David van Lennep, 1953b); T*he Sickbed* (Jan Hendrik vanden Berg, 1966); *Paediatric Diagnosis* (Nicolaas Beets, 1952); *The Glance* (Edward Casey, 2007).

Phenomenology within some practices: physiology, pedagogy, psychiatry, idolatory, ministry, law, psychoanalysis.

He explores the differentiation of method from the qualitative methods of the social sciences, and evaluations of validity.

**A question of application to Urban Leadership**: If someone were to study urban poor leadership would a phenomenological approach expressed in a novel be wiser than a rigorous case study approach? Or a sociological survey approach as to characteristics?

Was Sajira Awang’s MA research into Filipino leadership styles, which was beautifully balanced, the ideal way? If it were extended into a PhD would a deeper analysis move into further anthropological observation or be better as phenomenological observation of leadership events, actions, relationships? Would researching the methodology of Phenomenological research provide a framework for comparison of these two approaches.

(Rough draft, Viv Grigg, 2024)

1. van Manen, Max (2023). *Phenomenology of Practice; Meaning-Given Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. 2ND Edn. Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)