What is phenomenography?

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Content of today's session

- What is phenomenography?
- How do we do phenomenographic studies?
- What do the results – set of categories that are hierarchically ordered – tell us?
General description

“Phenomenography is the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualized, understood, perceived, and apprehended.”

(Marton, 1994)

Specification of the research question

- What is a way of experiencing something?
  - A person’s way of experiencing something is built on the aspects that the person is able to discern simultaneously, that is, on the aspects that are focal in her or his awareness at a particular point in time

- What are the actual differences between various ways of experiencing the same thing?
  - Identification of the critical differences between various ways of experiencing something
  - Identification of the hierarchical structure of the set of categories.

  e.g. Marton & Booth, 1997; Tan, 2009; Åkerlind et al., 2005
Data collection

- Normally through interviews or texts written by participants in response to specific questions
- Aim of the interviews:
  - open-ended questions that allow flexibility for interviewees to reveal their current understandings of and experiences with the phenomenon as fully and openly as possible
  - the use of follow-up questions
- The interviews are recorded and then transcribed verbatim to prepare them for analysis.

Data collection & sample size

- Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to ensure information-rich cases.
- Maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) to ensure heterogeneous sample.
- To maximise variation, between 10 and 20 interviews is normally sufficient to capture the variation (Åkerlind, 2008; Trigwell, 2000).
Case illustration: Career practitioners’ conceptions of competency for social media?

Aim of the study

- The aim is to discover and describe the different ways in which career practitioners understand competency for social media in career services.

- The research questions are as follows:
  1. What are career practitioners’ conceptions of competency for social media in career service?
  2. What are the critical aspects that differentiate qualitatively varying ways of experiencing the phenomenon?
Analysis, how to

- Repeated reading of the transcripts

  1.) identifying and describing participants’ experiences or understandings in terms of their meaning

  2.) identifying the similarities and the differences that appear to be most important for both grouping together and distinguishing the various ways of experiencing

What kind of conceptions of competency for social media are described in “extracts” below

“You can find so much information from the Internet, but if you don’t know which of them to pick from, then you’ll just be lost.”

“I mean that you must be able to write with such a language in there [social media] that you will be taken seriously. Literary language may not quite be the thing.”

“You need to be able to break the content into smaller segments and it is about making it a process, and then individuals can create content and contribute… to my mind, skills for online discourse and know-how for the interpretation of the online discussions are also strongly needed.”

“We have to rethink the whole idea of career services. I think that in social media you have to put in significantly more effort to be present…it has to do with understanding how to behave there in such a way that you are treated as an equal and reliable.”
Four different ways to describe the needed skills

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Analysis, how to – is there a structure?

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## Career practitioners’ conceptions of competency for social media in career services

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<td>means for delivering information</td>
<td>information literacy</td>
<td>accuracy, validity</td>
<td>motivated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content focused</td>
<td>Medium for one-to-one communication</td>
<td>Online writing</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogically focused</td>
<td>Interactive working space</td>
<td>Online discourse</td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>Confident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systemically focused</td>
<td>Impetus for paradigm change and reform</td>
<td>Online presence</td>
<td>Trust, professional proficiency</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
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Analysis how to – final phase

- Ensure that each category
  - distinctly describes a different aspect of the experience of the phenomenon
  - are logically and hierarchically related (vs content analysis)
  - parsimonious

When to choose phenomenography

If a qualitative study
- aims at
  - Identifying and describing qualitatively different ways of experiencing
  - Identifying educationally critical aspects that could be used as a means towards new and more complex way of understanding (a pedagogical purpose)
- Is interested in revealing critical differences, NOT in describing everything that could be captured from the data
- to study the development of the conceptions over time
Challenged faced and lessons learn

- No "magic", but hard work.
- Key focus is on qualitative differences, not on all details
- Varying ways to approach the phenomenography – researchers must decide well-reasoned decisions regarding methodological options
- Phenomenography and content analysis are not the same

Some relevant literature

Thank you, kiitos!

For further information, please contact:

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