Undertaking phenomenological research in Cyprus: the nature and impact of Aristotle’s emotions in the Higher Education workplace

Marilena Antoniadou
Manchester Metropolitan University Business School
Aytoun Building, Aytoun Street, Manchester, M1 3 GH, UK

Telephone: 0044 (0) 77 8303 9550
Email: m.antoniadou@mmu.ac.uk

Supervisor, Name: Dr Peter Sandiford
Supervisor, Email: p.sandiford@mmu.ac.uk

20th EDAMBA Summer Academy
Soreze, France
July 2011
Abstract

The following paper discusses an exploratory study that the author undertakes as part of her doctoral research. This research refers to a phenomenological investigation of Aristotle’s fourteen emotions as they were first introduced in his Rhetoric (1984) and aims to understand how these emotions are experienced by the Higher Education academics of Cyprus, at work. Inspired by Aristotle’s human emotions, the study examines the nature and impact of anger, calmness, love, hate, fear, confidence, shame, shamelessness, benevolence, selfishness, pity, indignation, envy, and emulation into academics’ workdays, using storytelling. The emphasis is placed on the interpretive phenomenological approach being taken to this topic and discusses how the research of emotions can be conceived from this perspective, and why this conception can facilitate the development of the research.

Key words: emotions, phenomenology, Higher Education, Cyprus, Aristotle, narratives.
Introduction
While the field of organisational emotions matures, current literature suggests that there is limited evidence examining the everyday workplace emotions, with the emphasis being on the phenomenological exploration of people’s subjective accounts (Gooty et al., 2009). This suggests that there is a need for studies to consider an anthology of the organisational emotional events, based exclusively on what people have to say and how they feel about the things they experience at work. Accordingly, this study attempts to investigate the experience of emotions with stories that people tell about how they feel when they are at work, relying greatly on Aristotle’s philosophy of emotions. Perhaps the first who recognised their essential significance, this study recognises Aristotle’s remarkable analysis of emotion and aims to magnify his work.

The study wants to develop an understanding on emotions in the workplace of academics and poses the following objectives:

1. To critically explore the nature of Aristotle’s fourteen emotions as experienced by the academics of Cyprus within their working environment.
2. To analyse what it is like to experience these emotions, the main factors that influence them and their possible impacts.
3. To investigate how the academics react to and cope with these emotions and to the emotional demands of their work, and identify which types of emotional self-management strategies academics use are more successful and those which are less successful, in managing emotions.
4. To evaluate the storytelling procedure and identify the positive and negative implications that storytelling has for the academics through their reflections.

Philosophical Status
This project’s interest is on lived experiences, on the how academics in Cyprus experience certain emotions and handle each emotional situation at work. In order to understand the academics’ emotional world, it is useful to know more about their lived experiences, how these experiences impact upon their well-being, and to identify ways of coping with their experiences. The exploration of emotions requires the use of a research paradigm which is able to obtain data that is rich in contextual information and deep in understanding (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). Consistent with a range of relevant studies (e.g. Hochschild 1983; Ashforth
& Humphrey 1993; Morris & Feldman 1996; Fineman & Sturdy 1999), this paper preferred the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm argues that emotions and emotional management occur in the context of social relations and thus incorporates the notion that emotional expression is subject to contextual pressures (Morris & Feldman 1996). Accordingly, the study’s status supports that reality is constructed by individuals involved in any research situation, having multiple realities, such as those of the researcher, those of the people being investigated and those of the reader interpreting a study (Creswell, 1994). The particular ontology best serves the purpose of the study, and therefore, an interpretive approach is a necessity in order to bring coherence to the data. Thus, it was felt that phenomenology is likely to be an appropriate research approach when investigating the nature of socially shared emotions of academics in their work. More precisely, the adopted type of research was amenable to the interpretive phenomenological approach and the utilization of qualitative research methods. 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) or as Taylor & Bogdan (1984) say about phenomenology, "the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (p:2). From this perspective phenomenology embraces a more relativist ontology, which emphasizes the idea of a multiple reality having a diversity of interpretations to the world (Creswell, 2007). At the same time, phenomenology recognises that the meanings people give to events come from their interactions. This means that people’s interpretations are not entirely individualistic but the result of social interactions and processes that are shared between social actors (Willig, 2008). In this sense, knowledge is to some extent socially constructed, with language having an important role in society. Consequently, the phenomenological ontology which the study adapts relies greatly to the symbolic interactionist premise.

The current study intends to gather data regarding academics’ experienced and displayed emotions, and their emotional management strategies within their working environment from their perspectives. To achieve this, the phenomenological paradigm was identified as the best means for this type of study, as it assumes that the ontology consists of subjective experiences, which are intersubjective and interactional.

The origins of phenomenology
The word phenomenology derives from the Greek words ‘phenomenon’, which means appearance, and ‘logos’, meaning reason or word (Manser & Thomson, 1995).
Phenomenology supports that people can be certain about how things appear in their consciousness, thus realities are treated as pure phenomena, which is the reason why ‘phenomenology’ is called the science of pure ‘phenomena’ (Eagleton, 1983, p:55).

Nevertheless, the term phenomenology has been used in many and controversial ways in social science. Depending on the epistemological and ontological position of the researcher, it is either conceptualised as a philosophy of the Husserlian and Heideggerian school of though or as a methodology, by Schutz (Goulding, 2005). For Luckmann (1978), the operative goal in phenomenological research is to describe as accurately as possible the universal structures of subjective orientation in the world and not to explain the general features of the objective world. According to Omery (1983) phenomenology is an inductive, descriptive, research methodology, aiming to investigate and describe all phenomena, including human experience in the way they appear. In a few words, a phenomenologist is concerned with describing and uncovering the essential meanings of human experiences, including the meanings that these experiences have for the individuals and allowing the essence to emerge.

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology

Husserl (1931) is regarded the founder of phenomenology in the 19th century and the version of phenomenology that he described, has been classified "transcendental phenomenology", which encompasses notions of pure consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). He developed a universal philosophic method, by focusing purely on phenomena and describing them, that came to mean the study of phenomena as they appear through consciousness. Husserl is acknowledged for his concept of the ‘lifeworld’, a schema for describing and classifying lived subjective experiences. These lived experiences comprise those things which are common sense and are taken for granted. However, because they are not readily accessible the aim is to return to these experiences that are taken for granted and to re-examine them (Hitzler & Eberle, 2004).

An important notion in Husserl's phenomenology is 'essences', the ultimate structure of consciousness (Crotty, 1998). This means that the aim is to describe the essences of the consciousness and perception of the human world. Husserl believed that in order to grasp the pure essence, the researcher must get back to the immediate experience and hold on to it by a kind of intuition. For Husserl this can be accomplished through what he called
**phenomenological reduction**, the basis of phenomenological research which grasps the experience of consciousness (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). Phenomenological reduction is divided in two procedures: bracketing and reduction. The notion of ‘bracketing’ or according to Husserl (1931) ‘*epoche*’, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain (Moustakas, 1994, p.85), concerns the researcher and involves a process which assumes that individuals are able to separate their preconceived ideas from their lived experiences. Husserl’s intention was to analyse phenomena for what they are, intuitively and directly and 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” (Husserl, 1931, p:43). It is essential for the phenomenologist to suspend all the held beliefs about the world, but not in the sense of doubting their existence, rather detaching from them or even putting them aside. The second procedure, reduction, is a process when the researcher perceives, thinks, remembers, imagines, and judges the contents that build the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Gibson and Hanes (2003) further suggested that reduction is useful when the researcher is interested in understanding the complexity of human experience and gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the participants’ experiences in order to understand the phenomena itself.

**Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology**

Husserl's successor, Martin Heidegger, was known as the father of "hermeneutic phenomenology" (Packer, 1985). Heidegger focused on the study of everyday human existence and what it means to be a human being. He believed that an individual does not have to be separated from the context in which he or she lives. As a result, Heidegger refused the notions of ‘bracketing’ and ‘transcendental phenomenology’ and defended that the phenomenologist needs to refer to the person's background, so every experience would entail an interpretation on the person's background and history. Also, unlike Husserl, he believed that prejudices are important to valid interpretation and achieving understanding and rejected that understanding requires us to separate ourselves from our world (Dreyfus, 1987). Heidegger argued that understanding is only possible because we have our **being-in-the-world**, which he considered a key notion of the human every day experience (Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger (1962) claims that interpretation enables us to have a world and being born in to the world implies the occurrence of understanding. Through being-in-the-world the Heideggerian phenomenology aims to discover the fundamental meaning of **Being**. For Heidegger, the way we make sense of our world derives from the interpreter's unique way of
being-in-the-world. The person is viewed in relation to his relationship to the world, which is the main concept about existence because it is the place in which one is. In this sense, people are self-interpreting and self-defining beings, because they are what they take themselves to be and how they interpret themselves in their relationships and practices (Taylor, 1987).

Heidegger’s view of the person concentrated on its relationship to the world, and derived from the basic concern of what it means to be a person in the world. In his work ‘Being and Time’, Heidegger (1962) linked phenomenology with the hermeneutical tradition. The word hermeneutics can be traced back to the Greek, messenger-God, Hermes whose role was to translate messages from Gods into a language that humans could understand (Palmer, 1969). The Greeks credited Hermes with the discovery of language and writing. Hermeneutics in the simplest sense mean ‘interpretation’. As a methodology, by its definition is interpretive in nature and emphasis is placed on the understanding of the context of the researcher as well as the other through the use of language (Annells, 1996). A basic principle of hermeneutics is that the researcher is expected to recognise their biases and incorporate them into the research as hermeneutics recognise the inability of the researcher to remain completely unbiased from his or her own prejudices and cultural context. Therefore, the researcher interprets the world reflexively to bring new knowledge. The hermeneutic philosophy as it is understood within the social sciences, does not attempt to render a complete understanding of the world, but instead, it aims to reach a better understanding of the social world.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, Heidegger’s student, understood the impossibility of being prejudgments-free in the interpretation of the world to have a powerful influence. Like Heidegger, Gadamer rejected Husserl’s bracketing and phenomenological reduction and defended that repressing prejudices would only result in a distorted interpretation (Palmer, 1969). The prejudices of the researcher are viewed as a vital part of the hermeneutic process and for gaining new insight. For Heidegger and Gadamer, interpretation is not seen as an isolated activity. Gadamer, stressed the important role of reflective interpretation of the text in order to achieve a full and meaningful understanding. As Moustakas (1994) wrote, the reflective interpretative process includes not just a description of the experience as it appears in consciousness but also an analysis and interpretation of the underlying conditions, historically and aesthetically, that account for the experience.

The study’s standpoint
The study adapts interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology as defended by Heidegger and Gadamer, who highlighted the usefulness of the impossibility to remain unbiased and emphasised that the researcher interprets the world reflexively. Heidegger's prime interest was to find the basis of understanding and supported that understanding is grounded in the person's background history and knowledge, and that interpretation is only possible in accordance with the interpreter's own understanding. The study assumes that reality cannot be represented as an objectified structure and that it does not exist independently of an actor. Knowledge is social in nature, hence, the view taken in this research is that knowledge is a result of our social interactions. Our knowledge depends on the socio-historical context of its creation, including individual frames of reference and experiences (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

When considering the research topic, Aristotle’s fourteen emotions as experienced by academics at work, a functionalist framework seems to prevent the investigation of the phenomenon and its meaning. To gain an insight into the way emotions are experienced, it is necessary to gain first-hand experience of the process itself, which is possible if an interpretive framework is adopted.

Although early phenomenologists had diverse views on epistemological and ontological questions, there is a common core which justifies the use of the label. In summary, phenomenology is an approach that acknowledges and values the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences. Moreover, in the case of this research, this is grounded on Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics (or interpretive phenomenology). However, this does not mean that it follows Heidegger's method, since Heidegger did not have a method as such. Nonetheless, central notions of Heidegger's and Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology, such as reflective interpretation and understanding the participants’ context, are used to guide the procedures of the study.

**Research Methodology**

Phenomenologists believe that human behaviour must be experienced first hand to be understood (Lee, 1992) and embrace qualitative methods, which is why sometimes the terms are used interchangeably. Qualitative researchers, in their effort to ‘get close to the data’, frequently develop strategies such as face-to-face techniques of participant observation, intensive interviewing or total participation in the activity being investigated to uncover the subject's orientations (Filstead, 1970). When the aim is to take people’s verbal expression seriously and provide rich explanation about a phenomenon, qualitative methods seem more
appropriate to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

An interpretive approach aims to understand human action (Schwandt, 2000) and focuses towards the significance of personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs recognising the role of subjective experience in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Subsequently, the fundamental task of an interpretive researcher is to examine the meanings of experiences and phenomena from the perspectives of the research participants (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). More specifically, the research employs a qualitative methodology, strongly associated with the interpretive phenomenological paradigm, as the most relevant for a detailed description and a rich insight into the participants’ emotional experiences and the way they interpret them (Lee, 1992; Saunders et al., 2000).

To get closer to academics’ emotional experiences it was considered appropriate to develop an in-depth understanding of the meanings they attach to these experiences. In fact, when the research is about experienced emotions the researcher should be interested in the social interactions and situations, the events, since they are the main sources of experienced emotion (Briner, 1999) and have the biggest importance in organizations (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Furthermore, Scherer (1984) suggested, that it can be difficult to study emotions experimentally and objectively because emotions are often regulated, thus, difficult to observe some of its specific components. Certainly, each kind of research has its own uses; nevertheless, the types of information obtained from an interactive interview are different from those obtained in a quantitative structured questionnaire (Tauber, 1987). Moreover, other quantitative studies (e.g. Rafaeli & Sutton, 1988; Fisher, 1997) which had emotions as the examined variable, have proven that emotions cannot be treated as independent from the meaning that individuals assign to them, confirming Miles and Huberman (1994) who supported that quantitative data might miss contextual details, since grasping the meaning from the individuals is a basic advantage of the qualitative research and must not be ignored. Also, researchers seem to agree that qualitative research can be used to understand any phenomenon in which little is yet known and is of major use in contexts that are under-researched (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Carson et al., 2001). Even though quantitative research has made an excellent contribution to the literature, in countries like Cyprus where research is extremely narrow in the area of emotions, peoples’ experiences and interactions need to be examined firsthand, which is possible if an interpretive framework is adopted.
**Data collection**

Storytelling and more specifically narrative interviews will be used as the main data collection method. The recognition of narratives is found in the argument that they are the primary means by which people make sense of the world and themselves within this world. Brown (1998), for example, argued that narratives or stories can be described as a sense-making tool, as they have the ability to depict our experience of this world and us within this world. Therefore, the act of narrating is an act of meaning, as people struggle to make sense and show the different choices they made and how they dealt with them (Plummer, 2001). This understanding of narrative relates to the study’s aim to explore how people construct meaning in their perspectives on their everyday emotional experiences at work.

**Sampling**

The study adapted the concept of purposive sampling (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973), as the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants. Appropriately, a purposeful sample, includes academics both men and women who work in Cypriot universities. In purposive sampling the number of participants can be influenced by multiple dimensions, like time or availability (Strauss, 1987; Koerbert & McMichael, 2008) and other times from the nature of the topic, the scope of the study, or the amount of useful information obtained from each participant (Morse, 2000). As in ‘theoretical sampling’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) a guiding principle is the concept of theoretical saturation, the point in which researchers no longer see new categories, concepts or dimensions appearing in the research and the data being collected appear redundant (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the study was mainly exploratory, with a broad scope dealing with a variety of emotions and questions, it was not possible to estimate an exact number of participants from the beginning of the data collection as there was the need to continuously bring new participants into the study until all aspects of the phenomenon had been obtained (Morse, 1991).

**Data analysis**

The collected data will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Eatough, 2007), which aims to capture the richness and complexity of the participants’ emotional experiences (Eatough *et al.*, 2008).
In IPA all stories are recorded and transcribed, allowing the reduction of data and the preparation for a more focused analysis. According to Moustakas (1994) a special dimension in the phenomenal analysis is *horizontalisation*, a process in which the researcher extracts significant for the study statements from the transcribed interviews and with a sensitive stance determines how these statements can be conceptualized. Thus, the researcher studies the transcribed material, horizontalizes the data and regards every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value. The meaning (or meaning units) of these statements are listed and clustered into common themes. These clustered themes are given a descriptive label and are used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience while the meanings of the phenomenon are constructed. Each broad theme can be subjected to a more detailed analysis, which can lead to the formation of more specific categories within each theme (Cassell & Symon, 2006). In order to display these themes and subthemes, tables are produced (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which comprise each concept.

Finally, the interpretative activity of the researcher and the participants’ stories produce a narrative account with rich, insightful conclusions (Eatough & Smith, 2006). Smith and Osborn (2008) outline that IPA is a two-stage interpretation process, allowing both the researcher and the participant to enter into interpretation; while the participants attempt to make sense of their world, the researcher tries to make sense of that attempt. Hence, IPA, which focuses on experiences, is concerned with trying to understand what it is like from the participants’ view, in order to take their side.

**Epilogue**

The originality of this study is emphasised by its ability to conceptualise a range of emotions within one study in a country where research is limited. The participants’ emotionality is explored in detail using an ancient typology of emotions introduced by Aristotle applied in today’s workplace, offering a multidimensional view of the emotional life of academics. These emotions have not been explored together before in the working environment and given that the study of emotion adds a vital dimension to how organisations are understood (Bolton, 2000) the study’s uniqueness becomes even clearer. Sadly, phenomenological research in the field of emotions is extremely limited in Cyprus. Indeed, a problem with 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 academics from the time element
is more important because they usually are busy with multiple tasks. Another issue that a researcher has to tackle is that they need to build a relationship of trustfulness with the interviewees so that they will be open to share their experiences with honesty.

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. Researchers that are interested in the Cypriot environment have in many cases to develop and test theories, hence qualitative research methods are useful in contexts that are under-researched (Carson et al. 2001), as they provide rich and insightful descriptions of human views (Moustakas, 1994). Through this phenomenological investigation, the formulation of a model is suggested to be a contributing feature to the field as it will enable greater clarity and depth of understanding people’s emotions in organisations.

It is also suggested that the research findings can be advantageous for managers by giving them considerable knowledge on the experienced emotions of their employees, while the research can become a good guide for the students to learn how their teachers feel, what irritates them, what pleases them and what captures their attention. Exploring their psychological world could be the key for better relations and a helpful element for their studies.

Finally, the use of storytelling can portray emotions and enable the detailed description of verbal behaviour evaluating at the same time the role of storytelling in investigating emotions at work and emotion-handling strategies. The research aids future research and the development of theories of specific emotions that have not yet been researched in the context of academics and lends support to the argument that emotions at work should be investigated more enthusiastically, especially to countries like Cyprus where research wishes substantial contribution. This study hopes to assist the recognition of the relevance and importance of emotions in any organisation which will provide an additional way of thinking about organisations to the more traditional rational approaches (Fineman, 2000).
References


