

Experiencing Knowledge: Gathering Interpretations While Dwelling With Festival Volunteer Realities

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In pursuit of new knowledge production in (Festival) Events Studies, this article explores the space where Festival and Knowledge Studies converge and argues the case for interpretations of lived experiences to generate trustworthy and quality outputs. Interpretivist (hermeneutic) treatments of (phenomenological) lived experiences offer alternatives to traditional approaches, particularly when exploring “fuzzy concepts” that defy simple explanations and measurements. This article’s purpose is to advance methodological plurality in (Festival) Events Studies and examines a research study and its associated design choices. The project in focus gathered lived experiences of knowledge-sharing activities among festival volunteers as recorded in diaries and through depth interviews, both of which informed the researcher’s interpretations and four final themes. This article demonstrates the need for robust standards in gathering rich and deep phenomenological “data,” and supports interpretivists’ contributions to reveal new perspectives on the practice and possession of knowledge for Events Studies.

Key words: Interpretivism; Depth interviews; Thematic analysis; Music festivals; Organizational knowledge sharing

Introduction

Despite the collective pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, recession(s), global unrest, and the cost of living crisis, it is with relief and joy to witness music festivals rising, albeit a little bruised, from the “ashes” bursting with energy and reclaiming their ubiquitous presence over the British summer-time (Ali-Knight, 2023; Chen et al., 2023; Estanyo, 2022). Indeed, these macrochallenges might

account for pull factors bringing attendees back to muddy fields all around Britain to experience sources of well-being (Stevenson, 2023), hedonism (Flinn & Frew, 2013; Frew & McGillivray, 2008), and a myriad of other social, financial, economic, religious/spiritual, political, and cultural features (Bowdin et al., 2011; Van Winkle & Kullman, 2022). These greenfield events continue to be commercially attractive to stakeholders (Andersson & Getz, 2008), boost tourism (Andersson & Getz,

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2009; Avgousti, 2012), as well as being fiscally beneficial to local, regional, and national economies (Formica & Uysal, 1996), and yet have been forced to review and rejuvenate (Van Winkle & Kullman, 2022) due to the aforementioned challenges. Such events form the place and space in which volunteers share organizational knowledge, which is the focus of the current research study, and this article specifically examines methodological and method choices during the design.

The hardy souls of “serious leisure” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3), volunteer stewards, are ready to dive back into the festival scene, both enjoying the experience and contributing to its success. By delving into the phenomenological lived experiences of festival volunteers and employing hermeneutic interpretation, this project aims to uncover rich, meaningful insights that can inspire deeper scholarly explorations (J. Wilson et al., 2017). While considerable research is conducted into event impacts from economic and consumer perspectives (Maughan & Jordan, 2015; J. Wilson et al., 2017), studies on the organizational workings of festival operations and their (human) resources remain limited, with hermeneutic phenomenological-inspired outputs even rarer.

While Tourism, Events, and Festival Studies are embracing a wider range of research methods, positivist approaches continue to hold a strong position (Clayton, 2016; Frost & Laing, 2015; Staedler & Fullagar, 2016; Staedler et al., 2014). In the same way, knowledge management research draws on multiple disciplines and leverages a diverse toolkit of research methods (Argote et al., 2003). By grasping the foundations of research methods, researchers can better articulate the significance and methodology of their work (Johnson & Duberley, 2000), notably when answering “how” and “why” research questions. This researcher’s work is driven by a unique blend of epistemological curiosity and methodological flexibility, prioritizing the exploration of specific research questions over rigid adherence to disciplinary conventions (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

This article considers suitable methodologies and methods to investigate the “how” and “why” of festival volunteers’ knowledge-sharing experiences. While the author fully respects the “well-trodden routes” (May, 2011) of dominant positivist, quantitative methods concentrating on “harder” knowledge

processes (Dalkir, 2011), this article embraces interdisciplinarity and promotes qualitative approaches. Holding a “postdisciplinary” view facilitates the opportunity and capability to challenge and flex disciplinary boundaries and substitute or complement them with other adaptable and productive modes of knowledge production (Coles et al., 2006; Laing, 2018; E. Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). The purpose of this article is to consider phenomenological studies as a quality source of festival–event experiential evidence. This methodological exploration examines a research study’s processes, practices, and experiences with the aim of crafting interpretations of knowledge (sharing) activities within music festival events. The study being explored employs a phenomenological approach to understand volunteers’ lived experiences, while avoiding assumptions about the external world, to extract meaning and significance. This case in focus states the phenomenon is “how” and “why” volunteers experience sharing (implicit and explicit) knowledge inside/across festivals, which are temporary “workplace” organizations. The participants living, experiencing, and sharing this phenomenon are festival volunteers, who share their rich and personalized accounts. The application of hermeneutic–phenomenological-inspired interpretivist methods allows the researcher to produce quality practitioner and scholarly recommendations with rigor, and this article argues that such trustworthy and authentic qualitative research is a valuable contribution to the body of research into (festival) event management.

Research Context

Festivals are researched through myriad lenses, and this article considers festivals primarily as business organizations that recruit and manage people to satisfy their (strategic?) goals, vision, mission, and values. Therefore, the context of this article is the management of people and organizations, where festival organizations differ greatly from “standard” business life cycles, due to the dynamic and organic nature of expansion and contraction of the entity itself—in other words, festival organizations “pulsate” (Crawford, 1991; Toffler, 1990), typically yearly (Elstad, 2003). Characteristically, a mix of permanent and temporary human capital is engaged using a range of core and peripheral relationships

to create a flexible firm (Atkinson, 1984) forming a new, temporary organization (Hanlon & Jago, 2009). This complexity is rarely witnessed in mainstream sectors (Hanlon & Jago, 2004) and is a peculiarity of event business models. For instance, the demand for, and supply of, human capital resources (i.e., people) fluctuates massively in quantity to meet similarly fluctuating tasks at each phase of a festival's life cycle (Hanlon & Jago, 2012), specifically: before (i.e., set-up or "build"), during (i.e., the festival happening), and after the event, or the "break" (Hanlon, 2002) through to next build phase.

Festival organizations are dependent on high volumes of staff, combining core and peripheral (Atkinson, 1984) or temporary resources (Cuskelly et al., 2021), which mixes paid and unpaid festival job roles, paid contractors and suppliers (Holmes, 2008; Kim et al., 2024; Lockstone et al., 2010; Schlenker et al., 2012), and does not include the (highly) paid "talent" or artists and performers. The point of delivery, when the festival opens to customers, is when festival organizations reach the largest "pulse" (Hanlon & Stewart, 2006; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2020). Within these nonstandard organizational structures, a blend of permanent and temporary resources creates opportunities for knowledge flows into and out of the organization (Clayton, 2016, 2020; Song et al., 2003). Humans store implicit, or tacit, knowledge as personal knowledge stocks (Avdimiotis, 2012; Nonaka & Von Krogh, 2009) that are unknown and unseen by others. New knowledge stocks typically flow into an organization with new people (Nielsen, 2006) due to recruitment, while knowledge flows out of an organization through staff departures (e.g., dismissal, resignation, redundancy, or end of contract or project) (Menon & Pfeffer, 2003; Song et al., 2003).

To combat such losses, the process of implicit-to-explicit knowledge conversion (Nonaka & Von Krogh, 2009) allows organizations to leverage knowledge in-flows (Lettieri et al., 2004) and make explicit that which was implicit, and so retained as human capital legacy (Blackman et al., 2017) or organizational memory (Muskat & Deery, 2017) in the form of processes, procedures, and policies. Yet, organizations typically fail to convert, embed, and exploit new knowledge and are at risk of losing all (tacit) knowledge stocks upon departure (Blackman et al., 2017; Song et al., 2003): that is, knowledge simply "walks out the door" (Dalkir,

2011, p. 2). The commutability of tacit knowledge demands organizations to successfully convert tacit knowledge to explicit, which in turn requires effective institutional knowledge management processes. Moreover, to be less reliant on the conversion of tacit-to-explicit knowledge, organizations are urged to use preemptive knowledge activities, and this might include new knowledge creation, acquisition of new/different knowledge, capture of newly converted explicit knowledge, assembly or compilation of converted explicit knowledge, embed and role model a culture of organizational knowledge sharing, integration, leveraging, and, exploitation (Nielsen, 2006; Teece, 1998). If further evidence of the benefit of knowledge management is needed, studies have proven that optimizing knowledge management and staff retention directly relates to organizational success (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Gorelick & Tantawy-Monsou, 2005), encourages long-term commitment and repeat volunteers (Holmes & Smith, 2009), nurtures "corporate memory" (Beckett, 2000; Muskat & Deery, 2017) yet avoiding the "wasteful cycles of relearning" (Ragsdell et al., 2014, p. 351) that oftentimes occurs when converted explicit knowledge is not captured. A festival's organizational environment is conducive to return commitment to volunteering work (Elstad, 2003; Holmes & Smith, 2009; Love et al., 2012), and these same conditions are likewise conducive to empowering tacit to explicit knowledge conversion and organizational knowledge sharing (Clayton, 2014). This is the compelling base for research into festival volunteer's knowledge stocks, and to explore organizational influences on these dynamics.

Literature Review

Epistemological Perspectives

As with many bodies of evidence, Events, Management, and Organization studies continue to be dominated by positivist, quantitative studies (Laing, 2018; Purcell et al., 2009; Shipway et al., 2012). Specific to festival events, positivism remains the prevalent mode of producing research outputs (J. Wilson et al., 2017), although there is increasing evidence of credible research encompassing interpretivist approaches (Clayton, 2016; Frost & Laing,

2015; Laing, 2018; Staedler & Fullagar, 2016; Staedler et al., 2014; E. Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015), with “further paradigmatic diversity” continuing to be advocated (Wilson et al., 2017, p. 199; see also Kim & Cuskelly, 2017). To innovate and expand different viewpoints researchers are encouraged to apply a variety of methods and techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) while maintaining the prime focus on obtaining methodological fit (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Qualitative studies produce deep and rich data, the sensitive handling of which requires thoughtful identification of methods and techniques for collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). From the outset, any research should be designed with the endpoint in sight; that is, what knowledge output is intended? (Creswell, 2003). To ascertain the latter, a constant and principal phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) is the “golden thread” throughout the project’s core: commencing from the aim and objectives, and flowing through all research decisions regarding philosophy, methods, techniques, analysis, and concluding with the findings. This “golden thread” reflects the natural alignment with each approach—exploratory research and qualitative methods, and explanatory research with quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The disparate nature of knowledge management research empowers researchers to reject single disciplinary examinations and allows the choice of methods of investigation based on the phenomenon and context being observed (Argote et al., 2003). As already established, quantitative studies dominate Festival and Events Studies (Shipway et al., 2012) and add value to the knowledge base, often striving to comprehend critical “demand-side” perspectives concerned with consumers (e.g., attendee motives, attitudes to festival content, post hoc satisfaction, and buying behaviors), together with a plethora of impact studies (Gursoy et al., 2004). Without question, the achievements of positivist, deductive, quantitative researchers have promoted the measurement of (professed) “facts,” or the “what,” in line with time-honored theories and hypotheses (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Acquiring large volumes of Event Studies data is valuable for trend analyses, impact review, and consumer preference identification, among other uses. Moreover, positivism creates frameworks and foundations

for future research, and impact studies continue to dominate the research agenda, although not without criticism (Andersson & Getz, 2008; Getz, 2010; Williams & Bowdin, 2007). Mair and Whitford (2013) drew attention to impact studies being comprehensively researched since the 1970s, and they argued that subsequent and similar research is largely redundant. Perhaps a bold suggestion, while empirical research of “soft ways of understanding ‘the Other’, the self, and the hybrid” (E. Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015, p. 44) is still evolving.

Despite these aforementioned critiques, or perhaps due to them (see Dwyer et al., 2005), the deployment of appropriate qualitative and exploratory methods, or longitudinal studies, or both, are inspired (Mair & Whitford, 2013). It is clear that the adoption of qualitative studies is more commonplace in recent years, thus informing the “human” side of festival events with depth and richness (Mair & Whitford, 2013), similarly for human resource management (HRM) perspective of festivals (Baum et al., 2009; Cuskelly et al., 2006, 2021). In short, phenomenological worldview studies expose unknowns and privilege the voices of participants by capturing personal meanings, expressing lived experiences, and recognizing private attitudes (Holloway et al., 2010).

Knowledge Management in Event Studies

The subfield of (Festival) Event Studies continues to evolve, currently, there is a small yet increasing body of methodological outputs that study knowledge in its various forms (Deery & Muskat, 2014; Muskat & Deery, 2017; Ragsdell & Jepson, 2014; Staedler et al., 2013). Where studies exist, they focus on managing knowledge *through* events (as entities) and volunteers (as individuals) (Clayton, 2016; Ragsdell et al., 2014), or where findings reinforce knowledge management as being central to the event itself (Getz, 1998; Halbwirth & Toohey, 2002; Muskat & Mair, 2020; Singh et al., 2008; Staedler, 2021). One notable omission is exploring conditions and barriers to knowledge-sharing processes (Muskat & Mair, 2020; Ragsdell & Jepson, 2014). Looking at Knowledge Studies in the context of tourism, yet again quantitative methods prevail, for instance: precursors and effects of knowledge sharing (Yang, 2010); knowledge management

inciting competitiveness (Bouncken & Pyo, 2002); consequences of “new economy” knowledge traits (Kahle, 2002); knowledge discovery techniques (Cho & Leung, 2002); systems and processes to manage knowledge (Gronau, 2002); knowledge networks (Pechlaner et al., 2002); knowledge matrix for tourism supply chains (Hattendorf, 2002); and finally, using knowledge for improvements in quality (tourism) hotels (Bouncken, 2002). Yang and Wan (2004) call for further people- and organizations-related research combined with knowledge management within tourism. Specifically, they call for investigations into individuals’ motivations to use (tacit) knowledge, and organizational performance improvement is enhanced through knowledge management (Yang & Wan, 2004). These examples support the use of qualitative methods to advance studies in knowledge management.

In a similar vein, findings that explore how personal knowledge and individual’s worldviews of organizational knowledge are applied in practice, offer readers a “richer picture, allowing researchers to have a more sophisticated understanding of knowledge use” (Thorpe et al., 2005, p. 277). In the field of individual and organizational perspectives, and when seeking to uncover “how and why” qualitative research enables the exploration and development of “richer” outputs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Switching focus to organizations studies, and the people creating these entities, this category of research often accumulates quantitative data with ‘excessive emphasis’ (Purcell et al., 2009, p. 3). This further demonstrates the relative infancy of qualitative research among management researchers. This research embraces theoretical lenses intersecting Knowledge, Organizational, and Festival Studies, which offer fertile interdisciplinary opportunities (Laing, 2018).

In summary, using insights from inter- and multidisciplinary methodological trends can shape research design and the resultant outputs as they relate to festivals’ organizational knowledge practices. Therefore, researching personal lived experiences will deepen the subject knowledge base of Festival and Events Studies; likewise, robust explorations of the nature of phenomena and personal experiences support a broader understanding across Knowledge Management Studies and Organizational Studies.

Methodology: Interpretation in Action

When selecting methods of data collection or analysis, the researcher’s choice must ultimately be in service of carefully crafted aim and objective, and in so doing underpin rigor within research design (Creswell, 2013). Before selecting appropriate methods, research techniques, and logistics, Carter and Little (2007) encouraged researchers to substantiate how the aim relates to theory, thus opening an opportunity to approach the phenomenon from a fresh perspective, before the “doing” of research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Moreover, researchers must demonstrate an awareness of established theories and frameworks (Creswell, 2013) within their field, while acknowledging the “well-trodden routes” (May, 2011) researchers are empowered to challenge these norms to contribute to the advancement and enhancement of their field(s). In addition, developing a deeper understanding of “the art of the possible” within each field of study (Creswell, 2013) is a necessary step to create new scholarly knowledge by informed researchers.

Turning to the justification of hermeneutic–phenomenological approaches, this section reviews the study of knowledge sharing by and through festival volunteers. To achieve this, researchers are encouraged to recognize their grounding paradigms and topics, which in this instance are: the central research focus of this study is (tacit-to-explicit) knowledge sharing by and between volunteers, blended with other activities in the pursuit of “knowledge management,” which occur within an “employing” organizational festival structure. During the developmental phases of research design, keep in mind participants possess tacit knowledge stocks; put another way unstated, uncodified, and unrecorded know-how (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) that will remain as such unless or until it is “converted” to explicit knowledge (Blackman et al., 2017; Nonaka, 1994). This reality supports researchers when exploring the “how and why,” rather than the “what,” and as a result aligns with approaches that aid deep(er) knowledge of the lived world through the eyes of actors.

Turning to the project in question, these accumulated arguments defy simple measurement and advocate qualitative, explorative research that uncovers layers of individual experiences that

suggest realities of how and why festival volunteers share their knowledge. Understanding individuals' perspectives and their contextual relationships is fundamental when researching new knowledge creation, existing knowledge retention, person or organizational knowledge transfer, and indeed the study of knowledge itself (Argote et al., 2003). To conclude, to embark on a particular path every design decision point must align, which in this case means adopting an interpretivist philosophy that gathers (phenomenological) lived experiences (or "data") and applies researcher-generated (hermeneutic) interpretations, to produce a rich and deep analysis of the stated phenomenon.

Gathering Experiences and "Fuzzy Concepts"?

Moving to the research strategy, the focus shifts to aligning methods with the field(s) of study, their particularities and complexities. One such complexity of research into the management and creation of knowledge is both notions are described as "fuzzy concepts" (Bathelt et al., 2004; Chauvel & Despres, 2002). Within academic research "fuzzy concepts" are ample, and are defined as "an entity, phenomenon or process which possess two or more alternative meanings and thus cannot be reliably identified or applied by different readers or scholars" (Markusen, 2003, p. 702) or, put simply "How do I know it when I see it?" The essence of "fuzzy concepts" means they are complex, opaque, and difficult to measure (Markusen, 2003) and further supports selecting qualitative methods, which fit messy, socially constructed worlds. Moreover, fuzzy concepts defy single or simple definitions and thus galvanize deep exploration of the phenomenon, and yet again support qualitative inquiry to reveal complex meanings.

To address persistent concerns of quality that are aimed at experiential inquiry and the associated somewhat nebulous nature, quality is assured by assessing trustworthiness and authenticity (Altheide & Johnson, 2011), in contrast to prevalent tests of reliability ("generalizability") and validity ("external validity") (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to be found in quantitative research studies. This study gathered experiences using written phenomenological diaries and in-depth interviews that facilitated festival volunteers to

reveal their lived experiences and the complexities of their multiple realities, which are appropriate in cases with a "phenomenon that is integrative and complex" (Grant et al., 2001, p. 68). To conclude, it is the very transparency of research design and process decisions that underpins this study's originality and contribution, further strengthening the scholarly value of research outputs.

Dwelling in the Lived Worlds of Others

Shifting the focus to data analysis decision points, typical interpretivist methods include ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative research. Although a critical examination of each approach is not within this article's scope, this section proceeds to defend the choice of phenomenology. The need for deep and considered treatment of the lived world is perfectly illuminated when phenomenological research "invites us to slow down, focus on, and dwell with" (Finlay, 2011, p. 3). Indeed, phenomenology goes beyond reporting (e.g., narrative studies) and facilitates the extraction of "common meaning" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) of lived experiences. While phenomenology and grounded theory are often seen as natural alternatives (Smith et al., 2009), in particular constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2017; Charmaz & Bryant, 2011; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), as they are united by interview data collection methods (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). Both approaches provide the potential to derive unique insights into experiences and phenomena; that said, phenomenologists aim to capture the essence of individuals' lived world, whereas grounded theorists study social structures and processes through observation of behavior and speech practices (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). It is recognized that grounded theorists typically aim for theory construction, among other possible goals (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) employing studying social structures and processes and moving beyond description (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Creswell, 2013), whereas phenomenology "remains centred on eliciting the experience of respondents so that the phenomena can be revealed" (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000, p. 1491). Both approaches are inductive, yet phenomenology is a "detailed and nuanced analysis," and grounded theory is more conceptual and

explanatory to support theory creation (Smith et al., 2009, p. 202).

To exemplify how phenomenology can elicit person-in-context experiences of festival volunteers a range of quotes is collated (see Table 1) to illustrate research in action. This demonstrates volunteers metamorphosing into festival “cocreators” (Flinn & Frew, 2013), whereby a perfect storm of temporary place, space, and personal identity empowers people to break away from their normality, challenge their usual behaviors, and embrace new rites and rituals for a weekend (Flinn & Frew, 2013; Picard & Robinson, 2006).

To affirm the appropriate research inquiry requires regular consultation of the project’s aim during the design phase, and this study in focus aims to explore steward volunteers’ experiences at music festivals, which has a developing body of recognized outputs (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010; Loftus & Higgs, 2010). This article argues that phenomenology allows researchers to deeply engage the researched, to facilitate an understanding of inimitable individual and lived world relationships (Loftus & Higgs, 2010), and hermeneutic phenomenology fulfills this goal. More explorations and understandings of “soft” influences on organizational activities are encouraged (Ragsdell & Jepson, 2014), and while leisure meanings are subject to phenomenological examination (Hislop et al., 2014; Hydle et al., 2014), opportunities to reveal lived experiences of volunteers are available (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010). Phenomenology

calls for a methodological plurality of events’ experience studies well (Getz, 2010, p. 21) and inspires consideration of a range of phenomenological approaches (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014). After Husserl’s foundation (Moran, 2000) of phenomenology a range of variants have evolved (see Table Box 11.1: Finlay, 2011, pp. 88–91), and these include: descriptive, empirical phenomenology (see the “Duchesne School,” and Giorgi, 1997); hermeneutic phenomenology (e.g., Heidegger, or van Manen; see Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; van Manen, 1990); lifeworld or *Lebenswelt* [Husserl, 1970, as well as Heidegger (Dasein), Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Schutz, van den Berg, and two contemporary researchers Dahlberg and Ashworth]; interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009), a form of hermeneutic phenomenology; first-person analysis (examples include: Toombs, Young, Abrams); and reflexive-relational approaches (e.g., dialogal, see Halling and Rowe, or Heuristics; see Moustakas, 1994). This study is influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology.

Analysis: Extracting the Phenomenon, Applying Interpretation

The empirical study in focus here gathered data via depth interviews ($n = 17$) and festival volunteers’ diaries ($n = 11$), which were transcribed and uploaded to ATLAS.ti. To assure quality, pseudonyms and codes represent respondents and their narratives (Markwell & Basche, 1998), and documents and

Table 1
Extracts of Changed and Changing Behaviors at Festivals

Participants’ Quotes	Attribution
You can never understand just how beautiful it is. It truly is indescribable . . . a place where you can forget and nothing matters.	Amy, 113:6
nice, carefree and that’s probably not what would happen in the outside world	Nicholas, 100:14
If someone sat next to you on the bus and started to talk to you, it’d be a bit like “Ooh, why are they talking to me?” [Laughs] but people just sit down at a bench at a festival, someone will come and sit next to you and just start chatting and that’s normal.	Laura, 94:12
six fully-grown men in Brownie uniforms appeared	Rose, 119:41
you’re in the world, but you’re not really in the world. You’re in this little special safe zone where you can kind of do anything you want.	Olivia, 92:33
you don’t have the same attitudes when you’re doing your normal work, as you do when you’re at a festival—I mean the festival is my holiday—even though I’m working, I’m doing shifts, that’s my holiday. So, you know, you absolutely go hell for leather for those few days that you’re there.	Carol, 80:40

Note. Source: Compiled by author from data gathered.

identified quotes assigned unique numbers, enhancing the expected transparency for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). Further, to ground interpretations and to demonstrate transparency of the process the participants' lived experiences and voices are evoked within the researcher's interpretations (Grbich, 2007, p. 92) using verbatim quotes to represent and embody the themes.

Capturing and analyzing data generated requires a researcher to dedicate time and space so they may "dwell" within the unique words, phrases, and language and to have the ability to "wonder" (Ellingson, 2011; Finlay, 2011) within each narrative, repeating this process many times. Subsequently, bottom-up coding is applied through the practice of "NCT" (i.e., "noticing things," "collecting things," and "thinking about things") (Friese, 2012, p. 92). The "coding" process is repeated to generate themes that the data suggest (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) using the nonprescriptive guidance of Thematic Analysis from van Manen (1990, p. 93). Using this method the researcher continually asks themselves "What is this an example of?" to illuminate the phenomenon, while circling through the "wholistic" (sic) (van Manen, 1990, p. 93), the "selective," and the "detailed." Or as Smith (2011) might represent it, "diving for pearls" to extract shining gems, suggestive gems, and secret gems.

A key element of phenomenological research is the use of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, which considers the "whole" and the "part" of the phenomenon to develop interpretations. Thematic analysis advocates a period of repeatedly moving from one to the other, and back again, navigating the data to identify themes iteratively (Moran, 2000; Schmidt, 2006). Researchers create themes by uncovering "gems" (Smith, 2011), and reflecting perceived "structures of the experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 79), not simply by counting the frequency of things. To demonstrate this process in action, the following final themes offer the researcher's "gems" supported by capsule quotes:

1. The first strong emergent theme is the distinctiveness of volunteers (and volunteering); the lived accounts revealed the individualism of those holding (tacit) knowledge stocks and this distinctiveness was also applied in how they expressed their volunteering and festival experiences:

I think for festival-, sort of, repeat goes, it becomes a very much . . . it's like a big family basically. I look forward to seeing the same, sort of, people every year and the more you, sort of, see them in the environment the friendship builds and that family edge and you, kind of, you want to help them because, you know, everybody is nice to you and you want to be nice back. ["Bruce," 98:24]

2. The motivation to volunteer, the second theme, is personal and individual (Clary et al., 1992; Schlenker et al., 2012). This study uncovers diverse motivations including altruistic charity donation, career development, saving money, the attraction of the (music) content, and social. In addition, after much "peering" (Smith, 2011) the concepts of volunteering as vacation, and feelings of "smugness" are extracted and are associated with "suspending" everyday life during a period of leisure or tourism (Iso-Ahola, 1983; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987) or seeking "optimal human experiences" through balancing one's overall work-life balance (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This volunteer embodies her volunteer experience as being "the whole festival" that is beyond and above other festival participant experiences:

As a person who goes to a festival as a punter, you're just, you know, in a little tiny, tiny bubble. Whereas if you're stewarding, you're the whole festival. ["Olivia," 92:42]

3. Organizational knowledge practices that are influenced by (informal) communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) is the third identified theme. Representing volunteering teams as a community of practice embodies "aliveness," or "internal direction, character, and energy" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 51). In this instance, the virtues of community are revealed:

If you can't be welcoming and happy to see people and willing to smile at people for eight and a quarter hours, this might not be the job for you! ["Carl," 88:51]

Further, "Ginny" [74:96] says:

if one of us doesn't behave, the whole sort of pack of cards can come falling down.

4. The fourth and final theme extracted from the data gathered is personal knowledge with a

particular focus on knowledge transitions for the individual. That is moving from a state of unknowing to knowing, or “enacted knowing” (Orlikowski, 2002). Formal and structured (explicit) stewarding knowledge is made implicit through booklets and training, often common sense and/or past experience (tacit) knowledge prevail:

Obviously, you’ve got rules to follow, but so long as you’ve got common sense, you can’t really go too far wrong. And it says that in the actual guidelines, the actual handbook that they give you, you know. As long as you use common sense, you’re fine. [“Val,” 66:242]

The resultant (researcher’s) interpretation of the (volunteers’) lived experiences created these aforementioned four final overarching themes, each of which symbolizes the connectedness of two core concepts; first, experiences of *being* a volunteer; and second, experiences of *learning to be* a volunteer.

Discussion: Methodological Boundaries or Flexibility?

Phenomenological research in the fields of pedagogy, nursing, psychology (Gill, 2014; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010) and (clinical) psychology (Finlay, 2011) remains dominant, with Management and Organization Studies developing (see, e.g., Ehrich, 2005; Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Loftus & Higgs, 2010), and are actively encouraged (Cunliffe, 2022). In the field of tourism, hospitality, and events management, examples include interpreting consumers’/tourists’ understandings, experiences, and meanings (e.g., see Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Willson et al., 2013). Interpretative phenomenology has its critics (Giorgi, 1997) yet occupies its place in the researchers’ toolkit to facilitate the study of lived experiences and the researcher’s quality interpretation. Possible interpretations and analyses are sparse (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1057), which may be due to the method’s fluidity and loose “methodological guidance.” In addition, the very fuzzy and complex nature of a phenomenon requires substantial involvement, attentiveness, and knowledge of philosophical underpinnings (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010), which does not always appeal to researchers. This article acknowledges

these constraints, yet defends phenomenology that makes possible exciting, fresh, and innovative academic outputs that seek to sit with the traditional routes of knowledge investigation, rather than attempting to replace them.

Gathering Lived Experiences

Using hermeneutic phenomenology in the pursuit of lived experiences opens a range of possible methods, the selection of which is strongly influenced by the methodology itself (Carter & Little, 2007), the stated research aim and objectives, and assurance of a methodological fit (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). The project in focus uses in-depth interviews and written diaries as multiple (not mixed) methods, and these allow exploration of “deep, personal and experiential aspects” (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007, p. 545) of a festival volunteer’s temporal lifeworld. These methods are frequently used in phenomenological research (Finlay, 2011) as they provide opportunities for depth and richness to allow researchers to “dive for the gems”—that is, extract and interpret phenomenological meanings, lived experiences, and perceived understandings (Smith et al., 2009). The phenomenological (depth) interview is more than just a conversation about experiences, it has a clear purpose and aims to create a place and space for psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018) to thus share *their* story, in *their* words, where interviewers are only present to listen and prompt (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57, emphasis added). In contrast, providing diaries or journals to each participant, with guidance provided within, captured the “naturalness” of lived festival experiences (Markwell & Basche, 1998, p. 229) at the moment. The opportunity to reflect in their own time and at their speed, using their language, phrases, and terminology, captures immediate and felt experiences, and unconstrained, reflective writing participants impart their perceived meaning to life, or features of their lived world (van Manen, 1990). Gathering data using qualitative diaries (vs. quantitative notations, or journaling, real-time psychological and/or emotional states, for instance) is sporadic within phenomenological studies (Smith et al., 2009) and has limited prevalence across Organization Studies (e.g. Ohly et al., 2010; Tims et al., 2011; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008).

“How Will I Know?” Finding the Quality in Qualitative

To misappropriate Witney Houston’s 1985 song title, researchers need to ask “‘*how will I know*’ (if my interpretations are credible)?” Interpretivism demands consistent and thoughtful decisions at all stages of the process and assesses quality through “trustworthiness” and “authenticity” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Quality in hermeneutic phenomenological research should be assured at every stage, with researchers acting flexibly to seek a balance between perfection and work that is “good enough” (Smith et al., 2009). To assess and maintain high standards of quality research practice, process, and outcomes, Creswell (2013, p. 260) offered five checkpoints:

1. Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology?
2. Does the author have a clear “phenomenon” to study that is articulated in a concise way?
3. Does the author use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology, such as the procedures recommended by Moustakas (1994) or van Manen (1990)?
4. Does the author convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants? Does the essence include a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred?
5. Is the author reflexive throughout the study?

This article accepts that assessing the credibility of the (researcher’s) interpretations may be viewed as somewhat problematic, due to the nature of the symbiotic relationship between researcher and researched, and also because constructing findings through interpretations is interactive and cooperative (Decrop, 2004), indeed may be seen as coconstruction. For some researchers (Colaizzi, 1978; Finlay, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) applying member checks with the original social actor and/or independent researcher audits, both of which aim to verify the researcher’s explanations and meaning making (Smith et al., 2009; Yin, 2009). This article, however, puts forward two potential limitations of member checks: first, post hoc withdrawal

of consent when revisiting their own words, and second, where the participant looks to edit their original voice/experience. To expand on these points, researchers aim to dive deeply to extract gems or pearls (Smith, 2011) using experiences and worldviews (Finlay, 2011) from participants’ moments of personal sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2012). This means participants’ instinctive and authentic utterances hold the very embodiment of their phenomenological experiences, which the researcher then interprets. Yet, offering this interpretation back to the participant might trigger “social response bias”—that is, post hoc edits to reflect what the participant “thinks” a researcher is seeking. Further, hermeneutic phenomenological research deconstructs the participants’ lived and perceived experiences and (re)constructs an interpretation (Gil-Rodriguez & Hefferon, 2013). Diligent hermeneutic phenomenological researchers assure quality by aligning their interpretations tightly back to the original data gathered, and in so doing privileging the original and authentic voice, words, and language (Finlay, 2011). Rather than viewing interpretations as “loose and dubious” (Giorgi, 2011, p. 208) researchers collaborate with the person-in-context and subjective experiences (Todorova, 2011, p. 35) to make sense and meaning especially where a participant may have only some, or no, awareness of these gems (Smith, 2011). In cases where researchers experience similar phenomena as the researched, hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges and embraces these rather than employing “bracketing” (Moustakas, 1994) as with empirical, descriptive phenomenology. While acknowledging potential influences on the interpretation, hermeneutic interpretations require “discrimination” and “pay(ing) attention” (Smith, 2011) to avoid “misrepresentation” (Alvesson, 2011). Finally, rigor in, and transparency of, the process provide an audit trail throughout (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) that should assure confidence in quality at every stage. For these reasons, this study actively chose not to request member checks for the validity of the (researchers’) informed and thorough interpretations and this paper argues a high probability that member checks would produce secondary interpretations of the original (or recorded as original) experience.

Summary and Conclusion

This article explores the critical nature of foundational decisions to underpin hermeneutic phenomenological methodological approaches that commence with and must remain true to the study’s aim and objectives. In exploring suitable qualitative designs this article has promoted research caution, patience, and objective decision-making in and across fields of studies such as Knowledge Management, Festival and Event, and People and Organization. The “golden thread” of aim and objectives must justify the data collection and analysis approach(es) adopted. The author’s own first-hand experiences shine a spotlight on qualitative, and particularly hermeneutic phenomenology, to challenge the dominant “well-trodden routes” of research. This article outlines how hermeneutic phenomenological studies generate new knowledge for the cannon, in a trustworthy and authentic manner. This account of methodological practice establishes that through quality processes and decisions,

data are generated and analyzed using experiential insights, and researchers are free to deviate from previous dominant positivist traditions in the pursuit of methodological plurality. As a final thought, while this article enthusiastically defends and promotes qualitative exploration of phenomena, it also recognizes the limitations. As E. Wilson and Hollinshead (2015) posited: “Every interpretation is always incomplete and unfinished, and always capable of much deeper contextual enlightenment” (p. 44). This offers fertile opportunities for innovation and creation in empirical inquiries, where researchers are (relatively?) free from fixed boundaries, assuming there is an appetite and audience to embrace these outputs.

Contribution to Events-Related Research

Volunteer research incorporating experiences of knowledge activities is minimal, and no directly comparable study exists that concentrates on the tripartite combination of: (festival) organization,

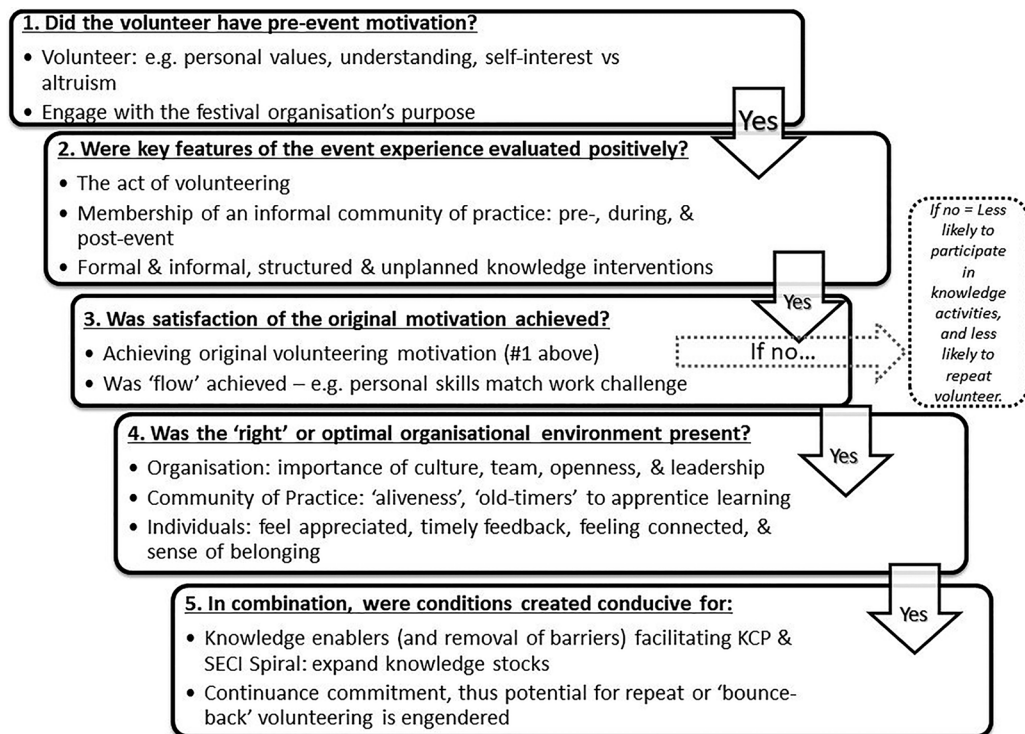


Figure 1. Indicative optimal experience of volunteering and knowledge. Source: Author (2014, revised 2024).

(steward) volunteers, and (organizational) knowledge management. When joined together, this distinctive context provides ideal conditions to apply hermeneutic phenomenological-inspired methodology and methods. Distinctively, the (annual) pulsating nature of festivals creates a nonstandard organizational setting and “working” environment whereby the festival “workplace” exposes volunteers to an open field, (inclement) weather, and omnipresent alcohol and drugs. Festival volunteers are “episodic” and “occasional” (Macduff, 1991, 2005) in nature, mirroring the characteristics of the festivals themselves, and volunteers experience flexible, short working affiliations that lead to intermittent experiences, recalled behaviors, and construction of personal viewpoints. These factors produce a conducive environment to facilitate expressing personal accounts, and from which the researcher can extract informed interpretations, outcomes, and impacts. To exemplify in practice how hermeneutic phenomenological-inspired research aids quality outcomes, Figure 1 depicts an optimal “virtuous circle” to represent an idealized conducive (festival) volunteering experience, illustrating knowing and knowledge activities at its center. The model portrays connections across experiences and conditions that are conducive to: i) volunteering, ii) festival attendance, and iii) knowledge sharing.

Future Research and Limitations

And so, what next? Despite, or perhaps because of, the continuing dominant positivist, quantitative outputs this article advocates the opportunities within in-depth, qualitative research. In particular, (hermeneutic) interpretations of rich person-in-context experiences, using phenomenological studies are rich and powerful means to explore organizational activities within festival events. The field of (festival) events research is alive and kicking, with energetic researchers who are not bound by hard and fast methodological straightjackets, but rather where they can experiment with methodological flexibility, supported by scholarly epistemological and methodological justification and evidence. This article concludes as an advocate for the future of Event Studies, especially those focusing on organizational knowledge activities,

and firmly believes such studies are enhanced by smaller sample sizes that permit researchers to dive for gems to acquire deeper and richer understandings of our socially constructed (festival) world.

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