Idiographic Explanatory Phenomenology: A Contextualist Approach to Elucidating Experiences

Abstract

This paper introduces Idiographic Explanatory Phenomenology (IEP) as viable research approach to collect and analyse rich qualitative data on experiences. Drawing on the example of a study elucidating experiences of personal creativity of 18 world-class chefs, the key contribution of this paper is to make explicit the data collection and analysis procedure in order to demonstrate researchers how IEP can be applied in any research aiming to elucidate lived experiences. IEP is a contextualist approach and found particularly suitable for researching highly context-dependent cognitive and nebulous phenomena such as personal creativity. The latter is a precondition to innovation and perhaps the most vital aspect for the sustainable competitive advantage of firms but yet also the most under-explored area of innovation management research. Attaining better understanding of the phenomenon requires both personal creativity and the socio-cultural system that evaluates the innovative qualities of personal creativity to be addressed.

Keywords: in-depth interviews, phenomenology, creativity, experiences, sensemaking;

Word Count: 6,693 words

Introduction

Chef Raymond Blanc (emphasis added): It is essentially for *it*! You work for the sake of beauty, to touch excellence – even if it is for seconds, between seconds. You want to go to the heart. When you do a dish, or a new environment, or a new breakfast, or whatever it is, it is for *it* and for the sake of our guests. And the by-product of that is, of course, that it will make you so much happier!

Chef Ferran Adrià: The way I understand cooking and my particular culture is that I am not going to cook a rat! But this is only for particular cultural reasons. There aren't strange dishes! There are strange people!

To understand the meaning of the above interview quotes, more understanding of the context of these chefs is required (see Clarke et al., 2011). Context, in phenomenological terms, may be explained by the concept of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*). In his early work, Husserl, the founder of the philosophical school of phenomenology, proclaimed that people could completely remove themselves from the outside world by just focusing on their inside where the pure ego and consciousness resides (Spiegelberg, 1982). Later he realised that he had fallen into the Cartesian trap and that without the life-world consciousness would be meaningless (Moran, 2000). Since then Husserl spoke of the life-world as the context of experiences, a horizon that correlates the consciousness of the world with the objects of experiences (Husserl, 1936/1970).

For a long time we struggled to explain to our research students the concept of life-world until we applied Husserl's example of a house that is always perceived within its context and only comes to have meaning through its context (Husserl, 1936/1970, Ihde, 1986). So, we literally took a picture of a house, removed its context and showed it to our students (Figure 1, left-hand sight), who commonly perceived it as deserted and run down.

Figure 1. Deserted House with and without Context, Barossa Valley, Australia

Then we showed the original picture (Figure 1, right-hand side) with the house in its context and most students stated that the house changes its character and aesthetics entirely. They started to understand that without context it is easy to jump to conclusions that can be

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dangerously blurred or mistaken. The example of the house and its context is further helpful to understand the individual and the communal level of experience. The inside of the house might be experienced purely individually if the inhabitant would never allow anybody else in the house. The context, though, is the field of communal experience and thus is inter-subjective. Here, individual perception and experience are altered by others, who also bring a wider range of perspectives through their opinions and experiences (Husserl, 1936/1970). In other words, the life-world is a person's foundation for life and is altered by communal re-interpretation (Kockelmans, 1994). It is a world "that appears meaningfully to consciousness in its qualitative, flowing given-ness; not an objective world 'out there', but a humanly relational world" (Todres et al., 2007: 55) that is past, present and future at the same time (Husserl, 1936/1970, Moran, 2000).

Phenomenologists suggest that the life-world has definite essential and interlinked fractions that are lenses through which data can be viewed (Ashworth, 2003). According to Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nystrom (2008: 37), the aim of phenomenological research is thus "to describe and elucidate the lived world in a way that expands our understanding of human beings and human experience." In doing so, the researcher faces two challenges: "how to help participants express their world as directly as possible; and how to explicate these dimensions such that the lived world – the life world – is revealed" (Finlay, 2008b: 2). In order to answer these questions, we outline in this paper idiographic explanatory phenomenology (IEP) as a contextualist approach for elucidating lived experiences. IEP builds on Giorgi's (1985, 1994) descriptive phenomenology that is particularly suitable for research questions that aim to identify the essential structures underlying the experiences of a phenomenon. In addition, IEP applies a second, more interpretive-explanatory, level of analysis building on researcher A's past experience in the work domain of the interviewees and in-depth discussions with researcher B, who does not share this past experience but also has expertise in creativity research. Hence, the paper provides a detailed outline of the data collection process and the two-level analysis process of IEP, and illustrates the sense-making process between the descriptive and interpretive-explanatory levels of analysis by means of exemplary interview episodes and research note samples. We do this in three stages. First, we discuss the contextualist view of creativity and offer an epistemological model of IEP. Then, we introduce the methodological stages of IEP. And finally, we explain the sense-making process between description and idiographic explanation.

From a contextualist model of creativity to IEP's epistemological model

From a research perspective, experiences are problematic because of their subjective components (i.e. qualia), which cannot be put precisely into words and therefore are difficult to study. However, when two people have experienced the 'same' phenomenon, it is possible that they can discuss these experiences inter-subjectively (see e.g. Jackson, 1982, Lewis, 1929). The reason for this is that qualia can be accessed through self-observation (i.e. introspection) (Sadler-Smith, 2008, Varela and Shear, 1999a, Varela and Shear, 1999b). Thus, we decided to investigate haute cuisine chefs, because researcher A shares the same "inherited background" (Wittgenstein, 1979: §94), which can be described as the social practice against which practitioners implicitly make sense of their actions (Hardy et al., 2005, Philips et al., 2004, Kogut and Zander, 1996) and thus it is easier to access the subjective dimension of the lived experiences of personal creativity of other chefs. In addition, the familiarity with the inherited background produced, in Bergson's (1946) sense, some very complex insights into the intuition of world-class chefs, because of the advantage of being able to draw on the intuition derived from working as a chef.

The aforementioned question of how researchers can encourage participants to express their life-world as directly as possible and explicate its dimensions is particularly relevant to contextualist approaches to researching creativity that are based on a sociocultural model of creativity. The social psychologist Teresa Amabile introduced this model in 1983 after an examination of personality tests, which, at the time, were used to measure an individual's originality (Sawyer, 2006). Amabile (1983) came to the assessment that originality was not measured objectively and that these tests relied on the implicit subjective assessment of a group of raters, who use their own criteria to simply score a person's originality. She therefore proposed a consensus based definition of creativity that says that "a product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative" defining appropriate observers as those that are "familiar with the domain in which the product was created or the response articulated" (Amabile, 1983: 359, Amabile, 1982: 1001). Hence, Amabile concluded that creativity research could never avoid the criterion of social appropriateness, a radical thought that led practically to a complete break with personality trait approaches of creativity (Sawyer, 2006).

The idea of a sociocultural model of creativity was then further developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990, 1999), who introduced the systems perspective, resulting in a contextualist model of creativity consisting of three inter-related parts: the domain, the field, and the individual (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997, Csíkszentmihályi, 2006). The domain is the area in which the individual has chosen to work. Each domain has its specific rules, knowledge, tools, practices and values. The field, on the other hand, consists of the persons and institutions that judge the individual creator's quality of work. In other words, the field consists of those people that Amabile calls appropriate observers. The individual creator, in contrast, is guided by personal creativity, which consists of the individual genetic makeup, talent and experience. However, despite consistent calls for a systems view of creativity and good progress in social psychology (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010), creativity research in management has shown a tendency to study exclusively the 'creativity of new products' (Im et al., 2013: 171) and to ignore the creative ability of the individual, which is the single most important factor contributing to the creative output of firms (Althuizen, 2012, Kabanoff and Rossiter, 1994). In response to these shortcomings in creativity research in management, the consistent calls from social psychology to adopt a systems view of creativity, and recent calls from management research to move towards contextualist studies (Özbilgin, 2011), we have built on Csikszentmihalyi's systems view of creativity and developed an epistemological model (Figure 1) that provides us with a scaffolding for elucidating experiences in general.
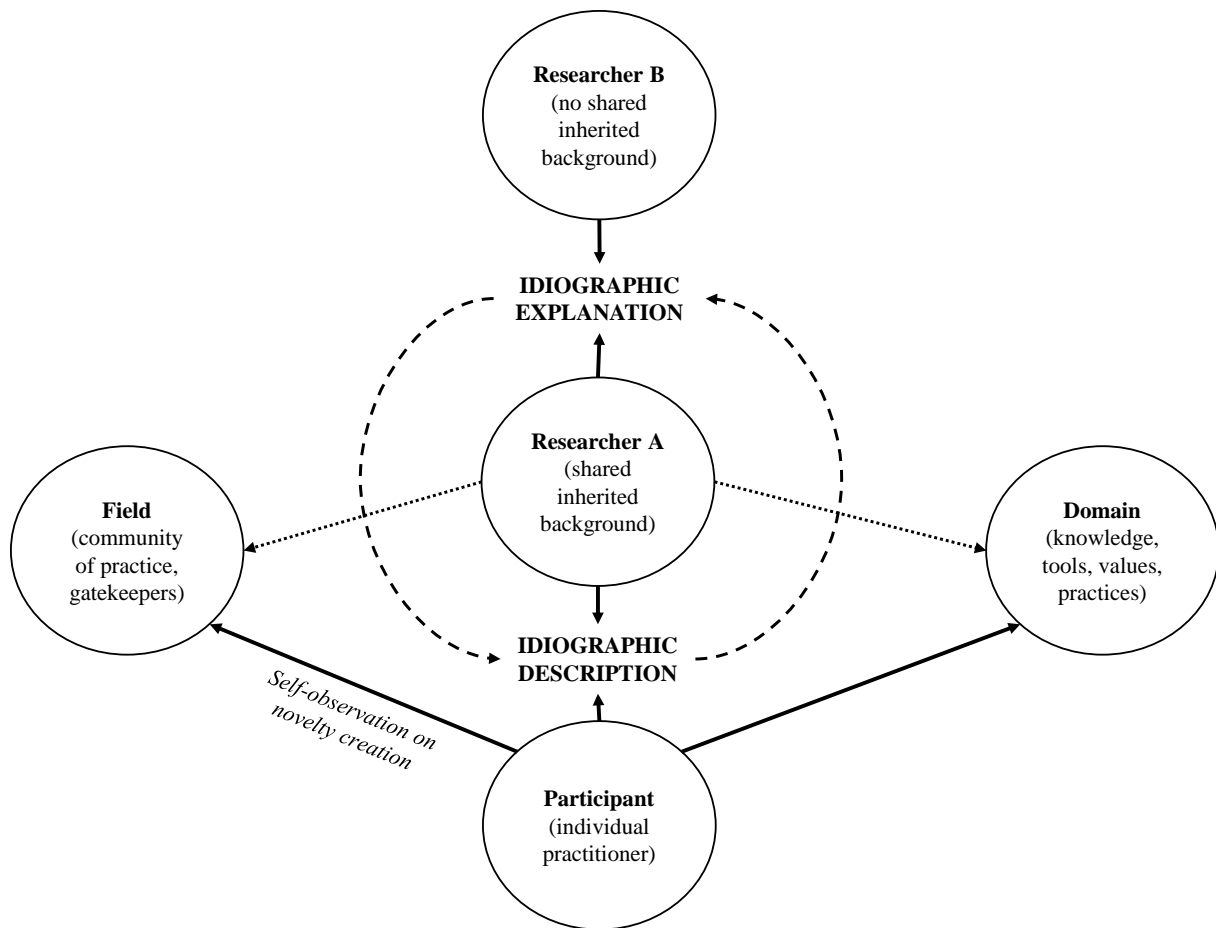
Figure 2. IEP's Epistemological Model

The methodological stages of IEP

Research setting and sample

The research setting of the underlying study is the haute cuisine sector. In the Western world the term haute cuisine is closely associated with gastronomy, which, in its contemporary consideration, can be defined as being a self-directed and at times artistic act of preparing, presenting and consuming food (Richards, 2002). The haute cuisine sector is acknowledged as economically and culturally significant, which was formally recognized in 2010 when the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization) added the gastronomic meal of the French to its 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' (UNESCO, 2010). The economic and cultural importance of haute cuisine is manifested by its value-creation through aesthetic and symbolic work (Svejenova et al., 2007) that makes haute cuisine restaurants greatly reliant on the reputation, craftsmanship and personal creativity of their chefs (Balazs, 2001, Balazs, 2002). Due to these characteristics haute cuisine is a good representative of the creative industries (Petruzzelli and Savino, 2012, Svejenova et al., 2012, Ferguson, 1998), which are those industries that have "their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001: 5).

The protection of the chefs' creations of the mind (e.g. recipes) is mostly norms-based (Fauchart and von Hippel, 2006) and socially evaluated by the field's professional bodies

(Rao et al., 2003) that guard its conventions and traditions (Svejenova et al., 2007). Two of the most influential professional bodies that have these gatekeeper functions are the Michelin and Gault Millau restaurant guides. These gatekeepers determine the chef's quality of craftsmanship and creativity and thus make personal creativity a criterion that is externally expected from haute cuisine chefs (Peterson and Birg, 1988, Fine, 1992, Fine, 1996, Balazs, 2001, Balazs, 2002, Rao et al., 2003, Svejenova et al., 2007, Svejenova et al., 2010). Hence, the interviewees were identified based on this assumed expectation and thus any chef who holds at least one out of three Michelin stars or at least 16 out of 20 Gault Millau points is assumed to be engaged in recognizable personal creativity. Thus, we used purpose-based snowball sampling, because interviewees were required that could "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007: 125).

The actual selection of interviewees was based on a variety of data sources: researcher A's experience as a chef in haute cuisine restaurants, trade press articles, cookery books, websites of chefs, and an initial interview with the German chef Harald Wohlfahrt (www.traube-tonbach.de). The interview with Harald Wohlfahrt was, besides being rich in insight, also of great strategic value because he signed a letter of support in which he encouraged the selected chefs to participate in this study. This letter was originally written in German, then translated into English and French and sent via email to the selected chefs and chefs he had recommended, such as Jean-George Klein. Wohlfahrt's reputation in the field, having held three Michelin stars for two decades, the highest accolade in the gastronomic world, resulted in predominantly positive responses. Upon receipt of the first few positive answers more emails were sent out to other chefs now also including the names of those who agreed to participate. This again encouraged more chefs to participate. In total 35 chefs from France, Spain, Austria, Germany, and the UK were contacted of which nine did not reply, seven refused, and 18 agreed to participate. This group comprised two chefs from the UK, four from France, three from Spain, two from Austria and seven from Germany. This ratio is purely the result of an avalanche sampling strategy and does not suggest any personal or professional preferences. Table 1 lists all interviewees by country, accolades, and restaurant names.

Table 1. List of Interviewees

Chef	Michelin | Gault Millau ranking (at time of research)	Restaurant
UK		
Fergus Henderson	1*|n/a	St John's, London
Raymond Blanc	2*|n/a	Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Great Milton
France		
Jean-Georges Klein	3*|18	L'Arnsbourg, Baerenthal
Michel Troisgros	3*|19	Maison Troisgros, Roanne
Michel Bras	3*|19	Bras, Laguiole
Sébastien Bras	3*|19	Bras, Laguiole
Spain		
Andoni Luis Aduriz	2*|n/a	Mugaritz, Errenteria
Joan Roca	2*|n/a	El Celler de Can Roca, Girona
Ferran Adrià	3*|n/a	El Bulli, Roses
Austria		
Heinz Reitbauer	2*|19	Steirereck, Vienna
Roland Trettl	1*|18	Ikarus im Hangar-7, Salzburg
Germany		
Harald Wohlfahrt	3*|19	Schwarzwaldstube, Baiersbronn
Dieter Müller	3*|19	Dieter Müller, Bergish Gladbach
Nils Henkel	3*|19	Gourmetrestaurant Lerbach, Bergish Gladbach
Heinz Winkler	3*|19	Venezianisches Restaurant, Aschau.
Hans Haas	2*|18	Tantris, Munich
Joachim Wissler	3*|19	Vendôme, Bergisch Gladbach
Juan Amador	3*|17	Amador, Langen

Data collection

The data collection has been based on in-depth interviews and a research diary, following the template by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), in which the observational, theoretical and methodological notes were recorded after each interview. The observational and conceptual notes, in particular, were helpful in re-collecting the interviews and provided little pieces of evidence supporting the process of analysis. In addition, a number of additional data sources were used in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the underlying structure of the experience of personal creativity. The full details on the data collection are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Details on the Data Collection

| Data source	What / Who	When	Why
Media coverage	Restaurant guides, websites, press articles and videos featuring the chefs: *e.g. Gault Millau, Michelin Guide, Relais & Châteaux, www.sternefresser.de, www.lesgrandestablesdumonde.com, http://www.jre.net/en/page/1, http://www.savoirvivre.de/,* Der Feinschmecker.	During the entire period	Triangulate facts and observations; enhance validity of insights; contextualize observations in terms of sector.
Books	Books authored by the interviewed chefs and books on cooking and gastronomy: e.g. *"Geheimnisse aus meiner Drei-Sterne-Küche"* by Dieter Müller und Thomas Ruhl; *"Ein Tag im elBulli: Einblicke in die Ideennwelt, Methoden und Kreativität"* by Ferran Adrià, Albert Adrià und Juli Soler; *"Molecular gastronomy: exploring the science of flavor"* by Hervé This.		
Research diary	Following the template by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), the interviewer recorded all observational, theoretical and methodological.	Before and after the interviews and again after the restaurant visits	Re-experience the interviews; provide pieces of evidence supporting the process of analysis.
In-depth interviews	18 in-depth interviews with world-class chefs lasting between 1 hour and several hours including in some cases informal chats over lunch (see other sources); all interviews were recorded and transcribed for a total of 135,617 words (approx. 306 pages).	Summer 2008	Provide descriptive foundation making the idiographic explanation more transparent.
Other sources	*Dieter Müller/Nils Henkel:* Invitation to amuse bouche menu with corresponding wines and a tour through the kitchen and herbal garden; *Roland Trettl:* Invitation to a 5-course menu with corresponding wines at the chef's table in the kitchen with a long informal chat; *Jean-Georges Klein:* Invitation to a 12-course menu with corresponding wines followed by a long informal chat; *Andoni Luis Aduriz:* Invitation to a whole menu that the interviewer had to refuse because of time/travel constraints, but Aduriz offered instead a quicker cold lunch with 'special' products he wanted to show; *Joan Roca:* Tour through the kitchen and wine cellar and invitation to a 18-course menu with corresponding wines; *Raymond Blanc:* Invitation to choose freely from the menu including corresponding wines; *Hans Haas:* Invitation to dine that the interviewer had to refuse because of time/travel constraints, but Haas offered instead a char of homemade apricot jam and a long informal chat; *Heinz Winkler:* Invitation to a glass of champagne after the interview and a long informal chat; *Heinz Reitbauer:* Offered at the end some of his 'food cards' that he invented and a long informal chat;	After the interviews	Triangulate facts and observations; enhance validity of insights; contextualize observations in terms of chefs' actual creations.

The interviews relied on a relatively small number of pre-planned topics, aiming at an emergent dialogue that could help elucidate and better understand the interviewees' experiences (see Boje, 1991, Cunliffe, 2011, Ibarra, 1999, Cunliffe, 2002). This fluid style of interviewing was possible because of researcher A's prior experience as a chef that facilitated building trust and deep conversations between professionals that, with hindsight, would not

have been possible without this prior experience. During the research process it became clear that no story or account is complete (Boje, 1995, Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012) and that researchers cannot fully detach themselves from the process of creating order from the 'unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience' (Ricoeur, 1992: 162) that is in the very nature of the type of research approach at hand. Thus it has significant implications that researcher A was a chef. On the other hand, the prior experience demanded rigorous self-reflection which was supported by critical discussions with researcher B after each interview in order to stay alert to any influences that might have blurred the understanding of the interviewees' accounts.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed in two stages keeping in mind suggestions of what constitutes a good, practical and interesting theory (Davis, 1971, Alvesson and Karreman, 2007, Whetten, 1989, Whetten, 2002, Van de Ven, 1989). This meant to ask questions of what, who, when, where, why, and how to contextualize the data and extant theory as far as this was possible and to look for explanations that would critically question common-sense assumptions. For the first level of analysis Giorgi's (e.g., 1985, 1994) method of descriptive phenomenological analysis was followed, because it is particularly suitable for research questions that aim to identify the essential structures underlying the experience of a phenomenon and thus is preferred over other phenomenological approaches that, for instance, aim to capture individual variations between co-researchers (Finlay, 2008a). Thus, this first level of analysis (Figure 3) is an idiographic but descriptive account of the experience of personal creativity from the interviewees' perspectives and includes the identification of elements that blur the invariant but essential nature of the interviewees' experience (Stierand, 2013). This identification was achieved by actively practising the attitude of phenomenological reduction through the process of bracketing whereby "one looks at the data with the attitude of relative openness" (Giorgi, 1994: 212). This process can be seen as a "dialectic movement between bracketing preunderstandings and exploiting them reflexively as a source of insight" (Finlay, 2009: 13). This meant that we had to let several iterations between the data and the reviewed literature take place in order to allow themes to emerge naturally from the interviewees' descriptions. Hence, the descriptive level of analysis provided the necessary transparency for conducting the subsequent interpretive-explanatory level of analysis.
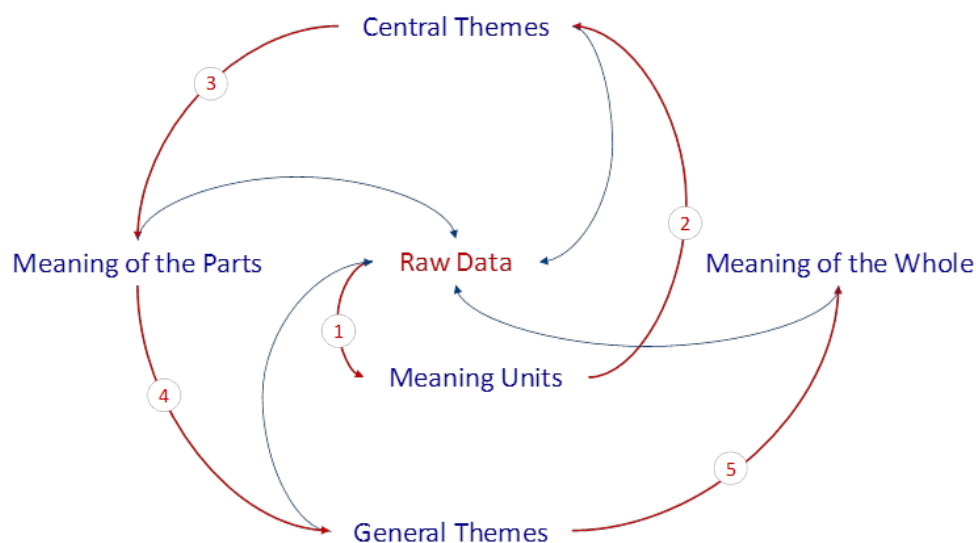
Figure 3. Descriptive Analysis (1ˢᵗ Level of Analysis)

Several further iterations followed between the descriptive themes, self-observation of researcher A, the data, and the extant literature. The reason for this level of analysis was not to find some 'hard evidence' to prove a hypothesis but to explain what has been learned about the lived experiences of personal creativity from the interviewees' accounts and their self-observations. Thus, this second analysis level (Figure 4) is a 'meta-level' of the findings that may be seen as a pattern existing beyond the descriptive findings, or as particular implications of the descriptive findings, their essence, their structure, or loosely coupled associations. The second level of analysis was dominantly intuitive, which was possible because of researcher A's shared inherited background and chef expert knowledge. This intuitive analysis can be pictured as a kind of imaginary play (see Runco, 1996, Runco, 2004) between a moment of sudden illumination and a purposeful process of constructing ideas (Gruber, 1981). The essence of the idiographic explanation phase is that instead of rejecting the subjective expertise in the domain researcher A had to get immersed in it so completely that it was possible to grasp the essential nature of the phenomenon, i.e. the personal creativity of chefs, which could then be brought to the surface and conveyed to someone without the life-world experience of the chefs but within the life-world of creativity.
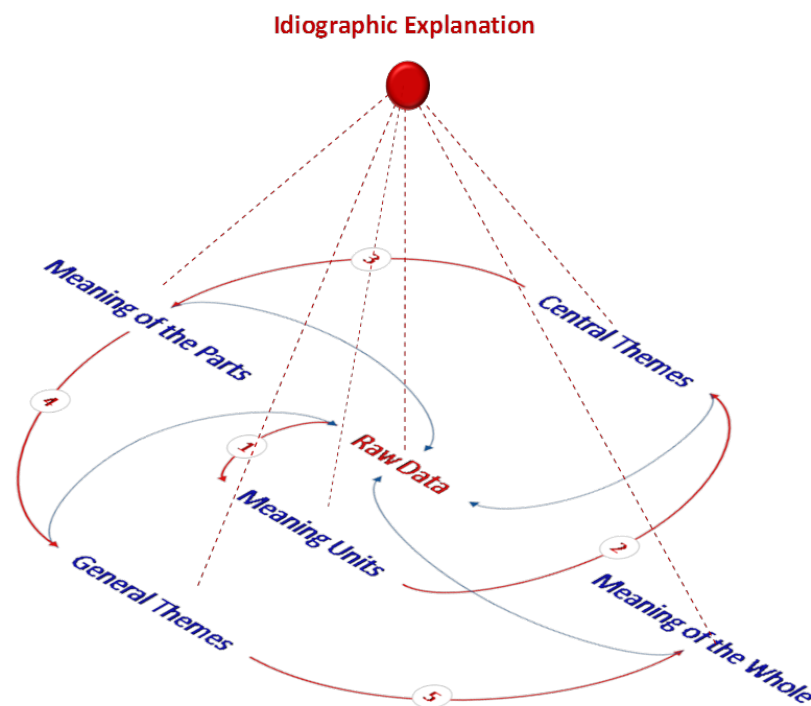

Figure 4. Idiographic Explanatory Analysis (2ⁿᵈ Level of Analysis)

From description to interpretive explanation

The process of elucidating experiences, as described in this paper, is essentially a process of sensemaking that leads from interviewee descriptions (1ˢᵗ level of analysis) to an idiographic explanation (2ⁿᵈ level of analysis). This sensemaking process entails a large degree of embodiment through bodily sensations and sensory knowing (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012), which meant to allow for intuitive understanding, our human capacity of 'direct knowing' (Behling and Eckel, 1991, Osbeck, 2001, Sinclair, 2011), a 'knowing without knowing how' (Vaughan, 1979). This embodiment was used, for example, when deriving meaning at the descriptive level about the creative process (Figure 5) for which words do not exist or when

simply sampling the culinary creations of a chef in order to gain 'access' to his creative mind. Thus, this type of sensemaking goes beyond its traditional understanding of being a purely linear and retrospective activity of translating data into knowledge (Weick, 2001).
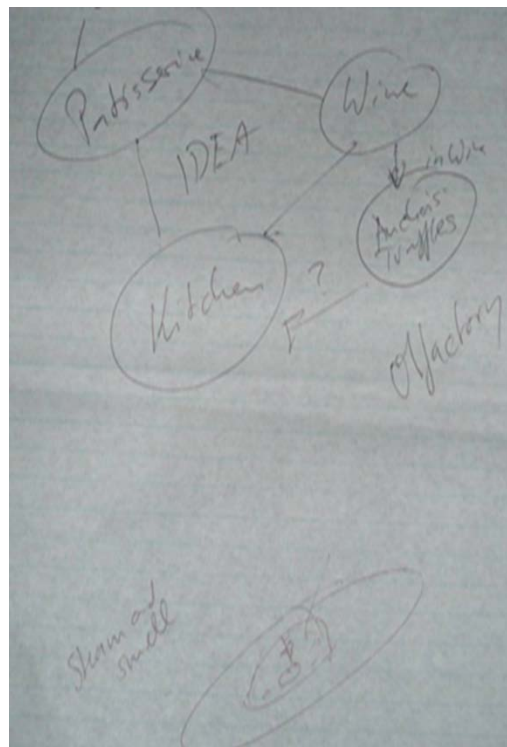

Figure 5. Deriving Meaning during Interview

Embodied sensemaking is temporal, because it has to be felt based on experiences in the past, current interactions and anticipations of the future (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012). The problem with allowing embodied sensemaking into research inquiry is that, as with any intuitively obtained knowledge, there is no evidence that knowledge derived from such sensemaking is 'true' (Dörfler and Eden, forthcoming). Therefore, phenomenologists typically speak of the 'Aha Moment!'; a moment "when we have the sense that, at last, the description fits. We feel gripped by the phenomenon understood in the way we are describing it" (Crotty, 1996: 169). Buytendijk (in Hayllar and Griffin, 2005) refers to the 'phenomenological nod', which Van Manen (1990: 27) describes as follows:

> *"[It is] as a way of indicating that a good phenomenological description is something that we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we have had or could have had. ... In other words, a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience — is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience."*

The problem of truth implies, however, that phenomenological findings depend on what Agor (1986) explained as 'knowing for sure without knowing for certain'. This means that, because of the nature of phenomena we investigate as phenomenologists, and the nature of reality providing the context for these phenomena, we can at best aim for findings we are sure can be true, but we cannot know for certain. This does not suggest that phenomenology cannot produce findings that a true 'for certain' in a factual scientific sense – only this cannot be proven. The essence of this problem is that, after all, phenomenologists interpret experiences of others, which does not per se create an original and useful contribution to knowledge,

because of the interpreter's sense of originality and usefulness. Consequently, the phenomenological sensemaking process of interpreting these experiences requires a "controlled oddness of thought or feeling" (see Barron, 1993: 183) in order to produce an original and useful contribution to knowledge. Thus, sharing the same inherited background with the interviewees is an advantage, because it allows using intuition effectively in both judging the interviewees' accounts and creating convincing idiographic explanations, since themes emerge more naturally from the data. Thus this shared background makes it possible to distinguish relations between the different lived experiences and identify occupational habits and socio-cultural influences. In other words, interpreting is all about making a choice, which requires exercising judgment based on knowledge derived from theory, the interpretation of context, or both (Bell, 1999, Tsoukas, 2009, Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). This, in turn, requires from the interpreter the ability to make new distinctions where previously nobody else saw any need for such distinctions (Tsoukas, 2009, Benner, 1994, Herbst, 1993, Kittay, 1997, Reyes and Zarama, 1998) by applying them against the context's mutually controlled wisdom (see Polányi, 1966/1983: 72), which in our case is the mutually controlled occupational wisdom of haute cuisine and the occupational wisdom of creativity research.

Hence , IEP, like most qualitative research approaches, can be criticised for its overreliance on participant and researcher subjectivity and its inability to establish objectivity and reliability in its methods of investigation (see Madill et al., 2000). But, of course, all types of qualitative research must "be open to scrutiny" and "the credibility of findings [must] rest on more than the authority of the researcher" (Madill et al., 2000: 2). Surely, qualitative research varies in its epistemological stances, which brings with it differing implications for evaluation. Phenomenology occupies the middle ground on Madill et al.'s continuum (King, 2006), embracing a contextual constructivist epistemology that assumes the inter-subjectivity of meaning (Madill et al., 2000) and a situation dependent, local and provisional character of knowledge (Jaeger and Rosnow, 1988). The reason for this contextual character in this type of research is that the production of knowledge depends on "(1) participants' own understandings, (2) researchers' interpretations, (3) cultural meaning systems which inform both participants' and researchers' interpretations, and (4) acts of judging particular interpretations as valid by scientific communities" (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997: 250). This means that participant and researcher subjectivity are no reason for invalidating research findings, because alternative perspectives, which may be conflicting, are epistemologically accepted. However, contextualist approaches tend to aspire for a kind of grounding for results, often by closely tying them to the actual descriptions of the participants (Tindall, 1994). This means that contextualist epistemology assumes that "results can be justified to the extent that they are grounded in the data" (Madill et al., 2000: 15). Another way of revealing further usefulness of ideas emerging from a contextualist phenomenological research is looking into other sets of data from different contexts about the same phenomenon and/or juxtaposing findings from two researches of the same phenomenon from two different contexts – if similar patterns seem to emerge, that strengthens the findings and extends the domain of validity beyond the primary contexts of research. This also happened in our case, the findings from the research on top chefs were compared to findings from interviewing Nobel Laureates in another research project and the two studies helped refining our findings about personal creativity.

Conclusion

At the beginning of our research we have been repeatedly told that we would never get access to these famous chefs, that it is elitist to look only at 'positive outliers' and that having a chef background would not give us sufficient distance from the research. The problem at the time was that we were unable to exactly explain what we were after, but in hindsight we intuitively tried to better understand the phenomenon of personal creativity and we used haute cuisine chefs as a vehicle to come closer to this phenomenon because we intuitively understood that these chefs are more representative of the creativity in their domain than they are representative of the population of chefs (see Dörfler and Stierand, 2009, Stierand and Dörfler, 2011, Stierand and Dörfler, 2012). Thus, again, our chef background eased the access to these chefs, but more importantly, these chefs did not only agree, but actually participated in and were excited about the study and in most cases even took more time than initially planned, inviting researcher A to sample their creations and visit their restaurants, kitchens and wine cellars. This was very helpful in getting a better understanding of the context, or just a reconfirmation of past experiences of the context, that, in turn was crucial in order to apply the above-mentioned embodied sensemaking process from interviewee descriptions to idiographic explanation. So, one could say that, from a methodological perspective, the applied two-layer analysis is a sensemaking process starting with describing the epistemology and ending with explaining the ontology of the interviewed chefs. This insight makes both the idiographic description and the explanation equally important because the latter explains some potential 'categories of being' creative and the former describes how chefs acquire the knowledge and how they use it to constantly re-create these categories of being within themselves and within their creations, as well as between themselves and their creations within the context.

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