

**ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING IN LIGHT OF PHENOMENOLOGY:
A Study of Group Experience in Administration Research in Brazil**

Ricardo Pimentel

*Universidade Positivo – Programa de Mestrado e Doutorado em Administração
Rua Prof. Pedro Viriato Parigot de Souza, 5300 - Campo Comprido – Curitiba - Paraná,
Brazil – Zip- Code: 81280-330
E-mail: pimentel.ric@uol.com.br*

Eloy Eros da Silva Nogueira

*Universidade Positivo – Programa de Mestrado e Doutorado em Administração
Rua Prof. Pedro Viriato Parigot de Souza, 5300 - Campo Comprido – Curitiba - Paraná
Brazil – Zip- Code: 81280-330
E-mail: esn.eros@gmail.com*

Adriana Roseli Wunsch Takahashi

*Universidade Federal do Paraná - Programa de Mestrado e Doutorado em Administração
Avenida Lothário Meissner – 632, 2º andar - Jardim Botânico – Curitiba –Paraná
Brazil – Zip Code: 80210-170
E-mail: adrianarwt@terra.com.br*

Mariane Lemos Lourenço

*Universidade Federal do Paraná - Programa de Mestrado e Doutorado em Administração
Avenida Lothário Meissner – 632, 2º andar - Jardim Botânico – Curitiba –Paraná
Brazil – Zip Code: 80210-170
E-mail: psimari@uol.com.br*

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge of the group learning process through the study of this phenomenon within the context of research in universities that focus on the scientific production of knowledge in Administration. Within this context, the study aims at analyzing the group learning process via the experiences of members of a research group in Administration through a phenomenological approach. This work reveals another way of understanding how group learning is processed, in identifying the fact that there is a mutual coordination process, and in the definition of some key elements expressed in key categories.

Keywords: *organizational learning, group learning, phenomenology, group experience, Administration research group.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Substantial intellectual production reveals the fact that Organizational Learning (OL) has become a reference with relevant potential for understanding organizational phenomenon, being a lens that allows one to analyze how organizations change, develop competences and incorporate knowledge (i.e. Argyris, 1977; Senge, 1990; Nonaka; Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport; Prusak, 1998; Argote, 1999; Dierkis *et al.* 2001; Eeaterby-Smith; Lyles, 2003; Greve, 2003; Gherardi, 2006; Starbuck; Holloway, 2008; Crossan *et al.*, 2009; Argote, 2011; Argote, 2012; Sillince; Shipton, 2013.)

Two gaps stand out in the attempt to systematize the scientific study of OL: the need to have a focus that encompasses learning on diverse levels (individual, in groups and organizational), and the deficiency of studies found on the group level. Wilson *et al.* (2007) highlights the fact that the studies on learning have focused on a limited set of features, often based on dichotomies for knowledge - simple x complex, tacit x manifesto, concrete x abstract - and also that these studies do not jointly explore various aspects: cognitive, behavioral and emotional - and different levels: individual, group and above group. This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge of the group learning process through the study of this phenomenon within the context of research in universities that focus on the scientific production of knowledge in Administration. Within this context, the study aims at analyzing the group learning process via the experiences of members of a research group through a phenomenological approach. Hence, the communication amongst the subjects in the group are considered a means for capturing this experience and, therefore, understanding the learning process.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 Group Learning Process

The social character of learning and the group’s role in this process may be seen from different perspectives. The group level was identified in literature as a means to reach another level but without expounding on how this happens. Wilson, Goodman and Cronin (2007) and Edmondson, Dillon and Roloff (2007) highlight that, in spite of growing studies on group learning from the 90s in the last century, this field continues to be characterized with a wide variety of terms and concepts, as well as research methods. If this, on the one hand, shows an advantageous theoretical development, on the other hand it indicates a concern with understanding the phenomenon.

Silva (2013) updated a concepts framework elaborated by Wilson, Goodman and Cronin (2007). This work has expanded this framework with more recent studies, as shown in **Table 1**. In this study, it is worth mentioning Bresman’s argument (2013) where he says the consolidated theories from the field show that studying how routines change is to study how group learning takes place, as the change in routine affects how members of the group “do things, it reflect on what’s being done and they do things differently (or the same things in a different way) from this reflection.” (Bresman, 2013, p. 38)

Despite the existence of a privileged focus on objectives and results, one may also see that there are two elements of consensus in literature, experience and knowledge sharing. Experience is mentioned directly by Argote *et al.* (1999), Ellis *et al.*; and Gibson and Vermeulen (2003); while indirectly cited as actions by Edmondson (2002); as solutions by Sole and Edmondson (2002); as work by London *et al.* (2005); as change by Wilson, Goodman and Cronin (2007), Sessa and London (2008 a and b) as well as Bresman (2013); as promotion by O’Leary *et al.* (2011) and lastly, as integration by Gardner *et al.* (2012).

Table 1 Definitions of group learning

References	Definition
Argote, Gruenfeld, Naquin (1999, p. 354)	"Activities in which each individual acquires, shares and combines knowledge by means of experience with others."
Edmondson (2002, p. 129)	"Process, in which a group chooses actions, obtains and reflects upon feedback and makes changes in order to adapt or improve."
Sole, Edmondson (2002, p. 18)	"The acquisition and application of knowledge which allows a group to handle issues collectively where solutions were not obvious."
Ellis, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, Porter, West (2003, p. 822)	"A relatively permanent change in knowledge and abilities on a collective level, produced by members of the group sharing experiences."
Gibson, Vermeulen (2003, p. 203-204)	"Exploring knowledge by means of experimentation, a combination of insights through reflexive communication and the application and specification of what was learnt via codification."
London, Polzer, Omoregie (2005, p. 114)	"As the members seek opportunities to develop abilities and knowledge, they welcome challenging missions, are willing to assume risks with new ideas and to work on tasks that require a lot of ability and knowledge."
Wilson, Goodman, Cronin (2007, p. 1043)	"Changes in the potential repertoire of group behavior."
Sessa, London (2008a, p. 555); Sessa, London (2008b, p. 7)	"A continual process of profound and ample (re)structuring of group capacities, in order to promote change through the addition and use of new skills, knowledge and behaviors constantly improving their performance through feedback and reflection on their own actions."
O’Leary, Mortensen, Wooley (2011, p. 461)	"...(ability to) promote and transfer knowledge."
Gardner, Gino, Staats (2012, p. 998-999)	"...ability to integrate knowledge in order to dynamically apply the resources of the members of the group, in the direction of greater performance." "The ability to integrate knowledge is a reliable communication standard of the group which generates common contributions for the understanding of complex problems."
Bresman (2013, p. 38)	"... group learning is the agents’ behavioral change and this change can be expressed in a change of routine."

Source: Updated by Wilson, Goodman, Cronin (2007) and by Silva (2013)

Sharing of knowledge is directly cited by Argote *et al.* (1999), and by Ellis *et al.* (2003); and indirectly cited as a reflection on feedback by Edmondson (2002) as well as by Sessa and London (2008, a and b); collective application by Sole and Edmondson (2002); as a combination of insights and reflective communication by Gibson and Vermeulen (2003); and finally, as integration by Gino *et al.* (2012)

The revision of literature confirms the identified *gap*. Hence we go back to the discussion of learning within a social perspective and the group as a locus of interaction.

2.2 The Group Learning Phenomenon: The Level of Interactions

Individuals acting and interacting, and the concrete social world where these actions occur are inseparable. Based on this supposition, the social world, and the practices occurring within, cannot be studied separately. Furthermore, the context and activities that occur within should be considered flexible and mutable, by its dynamic, processual character, and inserted in the flow of daily living (Lave, 2009.) Another result of these assumptions is that, as it is a situated phenomenon, learning cannot be studied solely on an individual level; while considering the organizational context, this embedded, dynamic and mutating nature of learning cannot be grasped without placing the group, as a privileged space of occurrence and the full comprehension of the phenomenon, in the center of the investigation.

As Brandi and Elkjaer (2013) highlight, knowledge in this sense differs from that which perceives a separation between the knower and that which is known where knowledge can be described, stored, managed and shared by means of tools and systems. Otherwise, knowledge is seen as inseparable from actions and its social context and sharing is done through interactions.

Kurt Lewin's classic work (1973), and the writings of Kaës (1997), offer their contributions when analyzing the need for subjects to belong to and associate with social groups, and in the case shown here, the research groups. According to the first author, interdependence would constitute the very essence of a group, rather than the possible similarities or differences among its members. Kaës (1997) also speaks of the need for support, maintenance and protection the subject demands from the primary group, aside from other expectations the subject would have in regards to the group, such as the need for protection and limitation against agonizing or dangerous aspects of one's own desires and those of others. Kaës (1997) and Lewin's (1973) work highlight the role of interactions in any given space or time.

The connection between subjects brings up the questions of inter-subjectivity and its relation to learning. According to Kaës (1991) inter-subjectivity is a network of pre-constituted and anonymous feelings in which the individual is an integral part and benefits, establishing itself as subjective. This inter-subjective psychic entanglement would be a constituent of the psychic apparatus by means of the introjections of brands, traces, signs and emblems depicting the relationship of one with another, which the individual does not only receive, but transforms and transmits (Fernandes, 2003.)

Given the above, it is a methodological question of how to perceive such a phenomenon at the level in question.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The methodological procedures in this study are guided by a phenomenological approach. The study of conscious experience was central to the philosophy and the method proposed by Husserl (1999). They initially prioritize the language in considering that it is strictly related to experience and life experience. The speech and language are essential to the organization of experience and its meaning. Analyzing language from this angle could be a privileged resource in unveiling experience and meaning (Giorgi, 2007; Lanigan, 1997; Lanigan, 2008; Pietersen, 2002; Gomes, 1998; Burch, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Schutz, 1962; Husserl, 1999.)

Experience is the relation between a person and its context (Dewey, 1979) and the relation between the processes and the innate content of the person's physical and mental being. Life experience would be a conscious experience. The phenomenological approach considers the difference between presentation, representation and experience to the significance of an object and the sense-making of life.

Studying the life experience of the members of the group allows one to analyze the experience of the group. It is an attempt to situate the use of methodological reflection for sociological analysis (Gottlich, 2012; Boava, Macedo, 2010; Borim-de-Souza; Nascimento; Nogueira, 2012), as well as to understand the experience of group learning, identify concepts, meanings, themes and associated senses (Pietersen, 2002; Greasley, Ashworth, 2013; Giorgi, 1999.)

First of all, the study of the meaning of life experience in the group begins with discovering ones intentions for becoming a member. It refers to knowing Self which is situated in the group and the world. The world is pre-existent in regards to Self and is the reality lived by Self. The group is part of that world and the reality lived, although it might not be pre-existent. In describing these life experiences it allows one to learn the positioning of Self, that person, in regards to the world and the group, indicating a form of existing and revealing a perspective, a meaning and intentionality.

Next, the task lies in obtaining an *epoché* description, material for a new analysis by which to identify the non-essential and the essence of the object of the experience. Finally, one finds the specifications for a way of being and relating to the group and the world.

These are the steps that directed the research in development, where experience, language and meaning are key works for guiding the observation in collecting data, as well as the analysis of that data.

Data collection was based on three procedures: (1) written reports; (2) interviews with members; and finally, (3) non-participant observation at meetings of the research group studied.

Based on a pre-defined, pre-tested and flexible script, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The script issues were divided into three main topics: (1) experiences and behaviors in relation to the group; (2) opinions and values about the group; and finally, (3) feelings regarding group membership. The group is composed of twelve members of whom eight were interviewed. The Table 2 shows the profile of respondents.

4. RESULTS

Based on the defined steps of methodology considerations, we present the main results of the study. We first describe the research group studied, their characteristics and practices. Next we will present the description, the phenomenological reduction and interpretation and finally the conclusion.

4.1. The Research Group in Focus

The four year old group has gone through different phases in its history, whether it's the number of people participating, the configuration of their profiles, their degree of formality or in their production. It is connected to a Master and Doctorate Program in Management in a private Brazilian university, but receives members and guests from other universities for special debates.

Table 2 – Profile of respondents

Interviewee	Time in Group	Academic Level	Professional Activity
M1	4 months	Doctor	Professor in private university
M2	4 years	Doctor	Professor in private university
M3	2 years	Masters student	Consultant
M4	4 months	PhD student	Professor in public university
M5	2 years	PhD student	IT manager
F1	4 months	Masters student	Construction manager
F2	4 years	PhD student	Professor in private university & retired executive
F3	4 years	Doctor	Professor in public university

Source: Developed by the authors

The group has a strong connection with a consolidated field theory in organizational studies, institutional theory and its relation to the legal environment. It is an exploratory field that gives the group specific challenges. The group meets fortnightly on alternate days to allow for adjustments in everyone's agendas. Therefore, it is rare that all the members are gathered together at the same meeting. The meetings last, on average, two hours and are held in a classroom with seats arranged in a circle with no pre-defined spatial configuration of the members.

The group's main practices are to read, prepare and participate in meetings, with emphasis on the latter. These practices are manifested in prior reading and selecting of texts, writing reviews and summaries by pre-defined members according to criteria of affinity to the topic matter or interest, and discussions on the texts during the meetings. This participation is not homogeneous, but occurs according to a difference in degrees and positions as themes change as well as the presence or absence of the coordinating teacher.

Sometimes the meetings focus on discussion of individual research projects such as a theses or dissertation, or collectively using articles and research projects.

At the beginning of each meeting a member is chosen to take the minutes so they will have records of the discussions. A site is being made that will aim at recording information and be a communication channel as well.

4.2. Phenomenological Description

In the phenomenological analysis each interview was described, reduced and interpreted. Meaning units were proposed and correlated to the whole of each interview. Gathering this material allowed for the comparison of these units to draw up a general framework with agglutinating ratings. Then, new efforts were made to identify similarities and differences and arrive at categories, following the new comparisons in order to arrive at the macro-categories, as shown in **Table 3**. The descriptive narrative is referenced with brief passages taken from the interviews.

Table 3 – Analysis Process

Macro-categories	Categories	Agglutinated units of meaning
1. Experience with others	1.1 Perception and expression of coexistence and heterogeneity: of knowledge, training, experiences and interests	Diversity (renovation and innovation by multiplicity);
		Enrichment (through exchanges);
	1.2 Perception and expression of interaction and placement of: attitudes, behaviors and modes of participation.	Challenge of composing and coordinating;
		Turnover x newcomer ratio and veterans;
2. Experience with a group	2.1 Perception and expression of elements of organicity	Ties (by conviction, for interest, for convenience)
		Values freedom, pro activity, empathy and respect
	2.2 Perception and expression of elements of identification and of belonging to the group	Roles (ambiguities, conflicts, overlaps) and designating tasks
		Idealizes autonomy, self management, spontaneous collaboration and belonging by conviction/affinity
with the group and in the group	3.1 Perception and expression of participation in activities and tasks	Group's motive, purpose and mission
		Group's reference pictures
	3.2 Perception and expression of the group training process	Group function
		Age of group: newcomer or veteran.
	3.3 Perception and expression of acquiring maturity	Type of affinity with the group: personal, theoretical, projects;
		Type of interaction with the group: passive x active, type of contribution given to the group
	Extention of sense of responsibility for the group and for the achievements of its goals and purposes.	
	Quality of one feeling welcome by the other participants;	
	Parameters and recognition rules for contributions and results obtained by each	
	Individual pre-meeting activities: reading, writing reviews and summaries, reflection.	
	Group activities: present reflection, listen, debate and share.	
	Post-meeting activities: reflecting, reworking, confirm / modify understanding.	
	1st phase = preparation	
	2nd phase = production	
	3rd phase participation and interaction in exchanges and production of joint works.	
	Changes occuring within ones self	
	Changes occured in relation to others	

Source: Developed by the authors

4.2.1 Experience with others

Perception and expression of social coexistence and heterogeneity: from knowledge, training, experience and interests.

Those interviewed described their experience of recognizing the vast diversity of others in the research group. These differences were not considered a threat but rather as positive for the group as a whole and for learning. They affirm that the group is “*very heterogeneous*” and that “*the group has this experience*” and “*it has helped a lot.*”

In meetings, this heterogeneity becomes a learning agent because “*sharing different viewpoints on a single topic is enriching.*” But this a challenging characteristic for the group as it could be a factor that might serve contrary to what was intended. This challenge is in regards to the pace of the group, as well as possible intellectual maturity discrepancies and style. As reported in some interviews:

“...the group is formed quite differently today, it’s grown. Hence, we find the need to ask ourselves about it. Do the people from the other university have a different pace or profile than we do? It will be difficult to measure the different levels of knowledge.”

The group’s coexistence and activity programs lead the participants to examine what brought them there and what keeps them there, as well as what it is that strengthens, or not, their link with the group and intensifies their participation. What were your motives then and what are they now? What were your intentions then and what are they now? This assessment is also done by comparison, in imagining what the other person’s answers were and what the group’s were. The same occurs when assessing the expectations and the reflection should go as far as the motives and intentions of each one and the group as a whole, which is illustrated with excerpts from the interviews:

“Because, actually, I’m not there because of my thesis. I could very easily not be in the group... I’m participating because I am interested in learning more, in discussing more, hearing critiques, to exchange knowledge...”

Perception and expression of interaction and placements: attitudes behaviors, modes of participation.

Awareness of the diversity within the group’s repertoire permeates the positioning in regards to being, doing and knowing, and is manifested while building interaction.

The dimension of being is referenced in the awareness of the group’s members and is based on roles formed outside the group experience: being a teacher, a student, being a leader, a researcher or being knowledgeable. These roles confer the degree of authority and legitimacy that each member holds, and is manifested as “*professional knowledge in practice*” such as “*readings and research already done,*” and as a reference based on academics or as having “*recognition in the field... legitimacy... he’s the man for that theory.*”

On the other hand, experience in the group manifests and reinforces these diverse roles, through the possibility of transformation and building new roles within the group. First of all, by being aware of a lack: “*a lack of theory, lack of experience in research, lack of knowledge*” (commented by all those interviewed.) Second, in being an opportunity to fill in the gaps, because “*there you are with your baggage... and that baggage you have is what will enable you to participate in the discussions. Nobody is there to teach you anything. You’re there to grow in knowledge. Therefore, you self-develop.*”

The dimension of doing is manifest in the awareness of delegating tasks. This contribution appears in two forms: the formal delegation of tasks, and in an “*organic*” delegation of tasks.

The formality is found in taking the minutes of the meeting, preparing previously assigned summaries, established readings, in choosing the texts, defining the meeting agendas, in coordinating the entrance of new members, among others. However, these tasks are considered routine, and do not depict the experience of the group. Now, the dividing up of “*organic*” activities is considered to be something that springs forth from the participant’s interest: make a review, create a site for the group, establish external contacts through a network of professional relationships and research new biographical sources. These tasks are assumed spontaneously and perceived as the result of members “*identifying more with the group.*” The interest, in this sense, is intentional, a constitutive element of the group’s day to day interactions that contribute to the learning experience, which in turn, is not limited to the developed content, but to what is done to develop the content as well.

Finally, the dimensions of knowledge appear as an element of reference to itself and to each other. The subject's consciousness in regards to what you know or do not know is manifested in relation to what the other person knows or does not know. Whether or not it is because *"they are already on a higher level of maturity"* which moves the subject to *"go after it"* because it is possible to *"learn even if it's from someone else's mistake."*

4.2.2 Experience with the group

Perception and expression of elements of organicity.

The group's interests, motive and purpose appear in the conscience of its members in the form of a process and learning content: to become a member of the group is to perceive that the group goes beyond one's own concrete existence, ones every day activities and formal organization. One person interviewed explained that in the beginning they *"imagined that the research group was more of a formality... and never imagined that there was actually involvement, a genuine concern with the construction of knowledge, a concern for scientific rigor, that there is a concern for the effective training of the researcher."*

For some interviewees, the group is a means of connecting with the academic world, for others, a place where knowledge is produced, and a field to prepare researchers. The group experience allows one to connect a story of the past with that of a future story, as in the possibility of *"stepping back from the scene (the professional corporate environment) a bit,"* to acquire more Professional legitimacy by way of *"another line on your resume,"* as a *"natural insertion"* as it is an activity one assumes when becoming a professor of the Masters or Doctorate programs, or even as a way of *"becoming a researcher."*

These elements are interwoven with some images that are a reference for the group. Whether as an organization and a field of work, or as a venture or passing experience, these images bring an implicit perception of the project and reveals great effort in its construction. Not as the realization of a finished product, but with emphasis on the process of constructing and reconstructing by means of interaction and a sharing process.

The value of face-to-face interaction is a reciprocity that reveals elements of group functioning. The ability that each one has in administering their experience with the group is a manifestation of freedom but also control, as it reveals expectations the group has in regards to its member's participation, such as giving opinions, debating ideas and exposing one's self.

On the other hand, the awareness of a project under construction points to tension between idealism and reality. A recurrent expression of this tension is the issue of autonomy versus dependence, and the autonomy of each individual versus that individual's adaptation to the group standard. The importance of interaction, the freedom of participation and building together raises the question of autonomy. The need for organization, production and openness to the world reinforces dependence on a coordinator. One cannot favor one of these elements without putting to the test the very constitution of the group because *"the research group should be that place... that space, where this does not occur (dependence), but rather something completely different. It's where each one has flexibility, a more comfortable space to interact, to step out and tries to contribute as much as possible to the group."*

This tension is manifested as a sort of learning content and the making of the group:

"So, I see a very strong learning experience in this type of relationship with people in the sense of guaranteeing some coordination, while also promoting the autonomy of the group and its members. Otherwise the existence of the group would make no sense. Another exercise would be the fact of having a learning content. As a researcher who has my own interests and also as a person who tries to somehow mediate access to the content of the other members."

But the tension is also revealed bringing a concern because *"a group stays alive and energized through the interactions of its members.... now when the group depends on an individual... that is the point that worries me."*

This tension was seen in the meetings, especially in one meeting where the coordinator was not present, and was substituted by another member who is also a teacher. You could notice that the majority of the members participated much more freely and actively in the debates. However, of all the meetings that were observed, this was the one that most clearly showed the dynamics of a classroom with the roles of the student and professor clearly exercised.

Perception and expression of elements of identification and belonging to the group.

The process of joining the group is evident in the expression of one's awareness of the previous existence of the group, and each subject's individual journey that led them to participate in the group. This awareness is observed in the group image as an "umbrella" where convictions, theoretic interests, research problems and similar projects are found. For some participants, coming under this umbrella is a mere consequence when one starts receiving guidance from the coordinating professor of the group, which is repeated with one's own participation in adding "insight on research that was previously done."

Even the pioneers of the group handle this issue with the notion that an *affinity to knowledge and the professional experience* already existed, "a researcher's personal interest" and even a notion of continuity, where the closeness of the group "is based on results that we have found in our works, and in the theoretic framework that we use."

Awareness of the individual-group articulation is evident in the initial awkwardness and "singular differences," expressed through the sensation of being "a fish out of water," feeling "intimidated," feeling "a bit of anxiety" or in a "rather tense, rather weighty" participation. But there is also a feeling of "surprise and satisfaction" keeping in mind that one needs an invitation or approval to be able to participate.

The process of feeling part of the group comes about when the participant and other members notice a behavioral change in the sense of more active participation, where the reference is not only dominating the content, but rather dominating "being in the group" which ends up becoming visible..

"... I think it's interesting when I see people more relaxed in the discussion, when they loosen up. Not just when they say what they are thinking in a fundamental way, supporting what they read, or defending what they read months ago, discussing."

The feeling of belonging is manifested in the feeling of acceptance and in socializing practices, such as "... shaking hands, greetings, asking how their trip went... Then it looks like we've got some interaction, some involvement, people are concerned about each other. That's how I feel being part of the group."

The kind of contribution given to the group and the recognition of this contribution is referenced so subjects will notice themselves and others as members of the group, for example: when I "make some deliberations, and notice that I have provoked reflection and debate in the group. It is in this sense that I feel that I am contributing to the knowledge of the group."

4.2.3 Experience and learning with the group and in the group

Perception and expression of participation in activities and tasks

Valuing the face-to-face interaction of the group constitutes a time-space awareness of the group itself. The group meeting is the time and place for building and creating the group itself, where mutual contribution, diversity and fulfilling dreams and projects take place. It is in this slice of time-space that the activities occur that are "more pleasurable than 90% of the other activities," where there is "undeniable richness... an exchange of glances about a topic," which is necessary "for academic researchers" and where you tackle "a challenge because it is something that I want to conquer."

This space and time that each one exposes and is exposed in is essential so that the group learning can take place, for both the topic of study and learning how to work in a group and reach your goals of success. The meetings are considered to be the center point for the group. It's the main vital pulse in the objective plan, and the reason why the factors that keep it running, such as the calendar scheduling meetings with prevision and regularity, are all valued.

Adjusting the calendar due to individual needs limits face-to-face interaction but does not seem to be considered a handicap, but rather "being flexible", with an element of solidarity and cooperation. The face-to-face interaction and the effort of exposing one's self are elements considered to be important for the collective body, which constitutes the group.

Perception and expression of the group training process.

Group awareness in regards to empowerment is manifested in the development of autonomy found in the reading, studying, and the reflecting and comprehension process. The "participant's interest" determines their choice of what they read or don't read, which text or subject to delve into. The individual dimension binds with the group dimension by interactions, because "the learning process has first been about how I organize myself

to get to the group. Second is when I should make a summary of the text and then use that foundation. The third is exchanging a lot of information and discussing it a lot in the meeting.”

Individual interest is also sharing, and may arise from other’s interests and even be considered a group interest.

“We had several moments in the group when some points weren’t clear to anyone. No one had clear arguments that could convince anyone. These were the points where I thought that our growth was organic, because everyone who had doubts had to resort to other resources, find other texts, discuss other ways of, first of all, convincing themselves, ... and then this new element in the group made it grow a little in knowledge and clarified some points.”

Perception and expression of acquiring maturity.

In addition to the procedural dimension, there is a perception and expression that behavior is directly related to the possibilities of results. Each person interviewed, intentionally or not, spoke about the changes that occurred and were perceived in themselves and/or in others during their time participating in the group activities. They emphasized that learning is the result of a cooperative and joint effort, and that it depends on individual effort, because *“if you don’t have that self-development outside of the group, you won’t be able to grow enough, you have less growth.”* This implies sacrifices for each participant because for a two hour gathering to be enriching, you must have 8 hours of reading and preparation.

Although everyone is invited to participate and contribute, there is a certain tension that proves that efforts are not equal (some seem to work more than others) and the individual gains are not isonomic (some gain more benefits than others and some take more advantage of the opportunity than others), which is expressed by the words of one interviewee as their conclusion:

“although I came to the group like a fish out of water, I am no longer that fish out of water in the group, but I do think that those fish out of water can hinder the performance.” As a self-critique: *“I could have been hindering others by taking so long to settle in to the group and for not having had clear objectives.”* Or even another critique: *“some people carry the group on their backs.”*

4.3 Phenomenological Reduction

The process of becoming a member of the research group seems to be characterized in four phases: (1) not be a member of the group and consider the research group as a graduate program; (2) be invited to participate but feel like a fish out of water, normally accompanied by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty; (3) assimilate the group rules and repertoire and evaluate your integration to them; feel like you are in training but not responsible for the group; (4) feel responsible for the group. The individual moves from the perception of their own world (themselves) to a world shared by others (be with.)

The group starts defining its own parameters of what to learn and how to learn. Therefore, group learning does not follow a protocol or previously prepared or prescribed program. Each one brings their own understanding and way of being to the group, but in the meetings they practice interacting, exchanging and building a “being-with -others” which everyone can assimilate as their own. This shift in perception occurs in the human’s world (being with) for one’s own world (one’s self) and returns to the group as a renewed “being with.”

This does not occur without its tensions between the position that is being built through group interaction, and that which is derived from external pre-existing conditions. The rising and intensity of this tension seems to be made up of references to the occurrence of the learning process.

Common and collective aspirations are part of a cohesive force and require stimuli, confirming that the participants are, individually and collectively, following the path that leads to those aspirations.

Reading, studying and discussing texts are defined as necessary activities and facilitators of the process of becoming a researcher. Group discussion contributes to the empowerment of the member. To be able to read and study, to be able to express your point of view and afterwards reformulate it or confirm it, are all processes that identify the participant’s progress. This progress is expressed in an image where the theoretic and practical scenarios, envisioned by each one, are widening. Perception of another’s expression serves as a reference for self-knowledge and to stimulate the expression itself.

4.4 Phenomenological Interpretation

Learning is perceived as knowledge acquisition, skill development and joint realization of projects. Group learning, for the individual, is to understand. And for the group, it is learning to produce tangible and intangible results and involves a study-do process, which in this case means to interact at meetings. This production is based on texts read and each individual's research project, which is the fundamental raw material of the group. Guided by already established references, we can see the group values the experimental process less.

The axis of the group is collaborative learning among the participants. Conducted in a relatively free manner it is, however, guided by the group's focal theme and by the individual and collective projects that are born from it. The process of formal participations is not to be confused with the effective insertion of a member of the group. Experience creates a model where motivation is maintained by the individual and defines their permanence and participation. The member of the group is the one who becomes an apprentice, and is the one who initiates and concludes their own learning process. For some time the participant associates their personal objectives to that of the group, but this relationship can be reversed.

Read, interpret texts, identify concepts and ideas and relate them to each other in real life conditions, transposing the theoretical discussion, are all important parts of learning in group research. The progress of these activities does not follow a rigid protocol but a systematic heuristic prevails. The empirical serves the theoretical.

The research group believes to be working with knowledge that is beyond the everyday knowledge level, and above the knowledge level addressed in the classroom in curricular subjects. Participation in the group is a passing experience; each participant realizes that their connection with the research group symbolizes their connection to the world of scientific academy.

The process of each individual becoming a member of the group, and the process of the building and rebuilding of the group itself requires effort, but also relaxation. Efforts seek to overcome tension generated by transformation and is translated into sharing and cooperating, but also in explicit differences.

Relaxation comes when one returns to the apparently more comfortable position or roles they previously held or when outside of the group. This return does not mean a denial of the transformation of the individual or the group. On the contrary, it allows one to emphasize this transformation by highlighting the differences between one position and another.

In this sense, group learning is inter-subjective, as there is a meeting with several other people, their voices, thoughts, feelings, their bodies that transmit different information, through gestures, glances, movements which are also involved in this process.

5. DISCUSSION

Despite research being the formal object, group coexistence is an experience of collective study. There is the experience of readings and debates, and there is learning in this experience, in both the content studied, as well as how the modes of cooperative behavior work. The dominating sentiment in the group establishes a leveling: the learning process is a study process of texts and concepts. The group's objective then becomes the study process.

Activities contribute to the experience of continuity and purpose shared among the participants; the meetings are creating closeness, privacy and mutual recognition. Even more than the principles, the interests and production goals, the pace of the activities seem to establish a sense of cohesion.

For the newcomers, the research group is not something that is naturally clear. Approximation and insertion implies dealing with the unknown. The group studied does not have a planned way of integrating the newcomers to the group. However, data shows that each newcomer goes through a phase of feeling awkward and ignorant in regards to the standard and running of the group, and end up re-establishing meaning and deciding on their intention, commitment and permanence in the activities and group interaction. They seem to acquire greater clarity and control of group resources, repertoires; the roles and the identity, both individually and in the group, become clearer.

But this is not an individual and subjective process. For the group in question, each participant is asked to supplement the solitary reading with group reading, and exchanging points of view during the meetings. Concepts and ideas of each author, and their relation with other authors are examined in detail. The

understanding reached by each participant is presented face to face with the others. This diversity of understanding constitutes a problem the group has to deal with. Perception and expression occur reversibly, *noema* and *noesis*: to communicate your understanding, listen, compare and others act from this dramatic moment interacting with people, through which one transacts significance, meanings, values, expectations, rules, typifications and reciprocities. The search for knowledge is symbolized by the act of communicating and interpreting, by honing an understanding, which is considered a result of the encounter of those present. All this requires a method of working together, where practice is essentially a reflection in order to reach a shared understanding.

Diversity is not limited to content, but touches on the way to read, analyze and interpret texts, and even the modes of governance for the group. This diversity also constitutes a problem where the participants in the meetings seek to establish a method that can produce satisfactory results for the group.

Communication and interpretive skills intertwine in intra and interpersonal terms, in the development of cognitive, affection and conation processes. The participants have the experience of a whole process where they acquire knowledge and change their understanding, position, and attitude. Practice is coexisting, which creates drawbacks, that bring one to reflect and both lead the learning process.

The meetings provide opportunity for mutual monitoring and sharing. They are situations where each one will act in a way that the whole group can confirm their existence and achieve its purpose. The texts read are instruments for these practices. Overall, the group is being formed and being identified through a set of routines, rules, values and symbols.

Practice builds a sense of experience from a common, exclusive and unique reality, an experience that draws boundaries between the interior and exterior, constituting a social objective and a collective actor.

The following values stand out with the group studied: loyalty, consistency and dedication, work and collaboration; the search of knowledge. It has rules and a delineation of duties and responsibilities, making up a tacit code. There are also ideas and a repertoire of knowledge, forming their cultural pattern, where its reference is a world in which the group is situated, measuring the awareness of interaction between them and provides the conditions for interpretations and other initiatives and actions.

Collected data allows the inference that the group perceives and expresses the feeling of being a newcomer in regards to the community it intends to be legitimized in, as fully and completely trained. The destiny of this group experience, in its quest for greater knowledge, abilities and skills, is not clear. Only the present has clear and precise contours: for the shared sentiments of the group to be gaining increased dominance and clarity of resources and knowledge is fruit of the routines and study activities, and that is where the most relevant knowledge resides.

There is a narrative that the group is four years old, although it has no memory or history of that time. The participants don't share the past, only the present, and to a lesser extent, the future.

The participants who are students understand that the research group offers them additional training for their Masters or Doctorate program. Working with the group also offers elements of a cultural standard that supports an interpretive practice of self, of being, doing, and positions them in relation to themselves, others and the world.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Phenomenological research cannot be seen as one that seeks accuracy, which does not imply a lack of rigor. On the contrary, the dynamic and recursive process between description and a reduction in the search of categories to analyze and have meaning emphasizes the exhaustive and profound character of the method. The tension between the subjective and objective limits of the analysis, and the ever present possibility of deeper studies, or of a new discovery, is not something that can be judged by evaluative criteria, but is above all, part of the nature of this type of research. (Leite; Gomes, 1998). In this sense, the study aimed to meet the objectives it proposed.

The first one is the focus on the group level analysis, with emphasis on the group experience as well as the learning experience. Here the individual was observed but the study level was the group.

This analysis perspective also favored the categories that arose from the collected data, giving a voice to subjects that might not have had a voice in researches that are run on previously defined categories. Knowledge

is not isolated from the action, whether it is the subject who tries to dominate the group repertoire or the group that tries to dominate the repertoire of the academic world, as well as the researchers who seek to take advantage of part of this repertoire in order to participate in the group learning process.

This work reveals another way of understanding how group learning is processed, in identifying the fact that there is a mutual coordination process, and in the definition of some key elements expressed in key categories. Even without claiming a universal status for these categories, it is believed that they are official elements of this dynamic and that they serve to understand the group learning process.

We hope that the considerations shared in this article stimulate further research to examine the understanding of Organizational Learning, and that, in order to understand, one must understand how the world learns.

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