ACCESS TO THE LOCAL LIVED EXPERIENCES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO DECOLONIZE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a phenomenological approach as a meaningful way to decolonize management studies. We first review the decolonization literature and point out the lack of methodological discussion about it. Next, we show the basic perspective and a specific procedure of a phenomenological approach. We then discuss the limitations of the dominant positivism-based approach and the possibilities of the phenomenological approach by illustrating the phenomenon of the workplace in Japan, which was one of the first countries in the world to experience the colonization of MOS, while at the same time retaining its traditional culture and institutions.

Keywords: Decolonization; epistemology; first-person perspective; lived experiences; management and organization studies; phenomenology

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present a phenomenological approach as one way to decolonize management and organization studies (MOS).

Decolonizing MOS means critically examining the dominant Western model or Eurocentrism in management studies (Banerjee, 2022; Girei, 2017; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Tourish, 2019) and presenting its ontological, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological alternatives (Banerjee, 2022; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021). Such debates have been particularly active since the 2000s (Jammulamadaka et al., 2021), and studies are accumulating that seek to understand a pluralistic world based on indigenous epistemologies rather than universal knowledge (Banerjee, 2022; Yousfi, 2021). For example, we can identify research practices that focus on indigenous perceptions and practices (Girei, 2017), social conflicts between colonization-based urban planning and local populations (Toivonen & Seremani, 2021), using interpretive approaches (Weber, 2004) and ethnographic methods. However, discussions of MOS decolonization tend to be biased toward theoretical considerations (Girei, 2017; Tourish, 2019), and in particular, there is a lack of discussion of methodological tools that are elaborately tuned to better understand indigenous management phenomena (Yousfi, 2021).

Therefore, this paper discusses the possibility of a phenomenological approach as one way to decolonize MOS. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand the comprehensive experience of a phenomenon from the perspective of a party rather than an observer, i.e., from a first-person perspective (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Goulding, 2005; Neubauer et al., 2019; Sanders, 1982). We present an example of the perspective and basic procedure of a phenomenological approach that differs from a natural scientific approach. We then illustrate how such an approach can help to better decipher lived experiences of local management phenomena. Specifically, we will focus on the phenomenon of "*sasshi*" found in Japanese workplaces and social relations. *Sasshi* is the act with the intentions of the other party (Aida, 1972; Enomoto, 2017). Specific examples include inferring the other person's intentions, expectations, and desires from ambiguous or polysemous words, carefully observing a situation, and fulfilling the other person's needs before he or she asks for something in words.

We then draw future prospects of this theme. Although the phenomenological approach can be said to be useful as a method for decolonizing MOS, it is also fraught with problems that cannot be overlooked. In particular, as phenomenology branches out in detail, there is a need for methodological development by clarifying the connection between the philosophical foundations on which a study relies and the appropriate methodological procedures (Gill, 2014; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019). Moreover, rather than criticizing and avoiding positivist approaches out of hand, it is also theoretically and practically relevant to ask how phenomenological approaches can contribute to the healthy development of the dominant Western model (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Taguchi, 2014).

EXPLORING THE ALTERNATIVES: DECOLONIZATION OF MOS

Decolonization of MOS means critically examining the Anglo-American-centered intellectual domination and creating more locally rooted and meaningful knowledge (Girei, 2017; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Mbembe, 2016; Scobie et al., 2021; Yousfi, 2021). Such debates have occurred since the late 1980s, began to gain prominence in the mid-2000s, and have been actively developed since the 2010s (Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Scobie et al., 2021; Tourish, 2019). These studies rely on post-colonial geography, critical development studies, and critical management studies (Girei, 2017), but not necessarily in a unified direction (Jammulamadaka et al., 2021).

However, a common thread in the debate on the decolonization of MOS is to literally move away from the colonization of MOS. The reason why such an effort is considered important is that the colonization of MOS has resulted in the under-recognition (or invisibilization) or tacit disdain of Indigenous knowledge in local non-Western regions (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021), and it has not contributed to the meaningful development of MOS. Colonization, although various definitions exist, implies that management knowledge conforms to Western (especially Anglo-American-centric) theoretical assumptions (Girei, 2017). Behind this lies a historical structure in which the West is the cradle of modernity, and they have normalized knowledge as a theoretical subject. This means that the Western hegemony system has been established and strengthened in the production and utilization of management knowledge (Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Scobie et al., 2021).

Here, we briefly summarize the characteristics of knowledge that underpin the colonization of MOS from ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives. First, ontologically, it is based on objectivism or foundationalism (Banerjee, 2022; Marsh et al., 2018; Nomura, 2017). As a result, an object is seen to exist in the same way (i.e., objectively) as anyone sees it if observed correctly, and our knowledge is seen to be founded on such unshakable truths. Second, epistemologically, it is based on positivism (Banerjee, 2022; Grey, 2010). Therefore, we take the position that, for management phenomena as for natural phenomena, it is possible to propose some rules or laws after testing theoretical hypotheses and clarifying causal relationships. Finally, in terms of methodology or research methods, quantitative methods are emphasized, and there is a strong need to carry out rigorous data collection and analysis (Tsui, 2018).

It is emphasized that in order to decolonize MOS, it is first necessary to acknowledge the current state of colonization and to start by questioning the assumptions of MOS, namely the ontological and epistemological assumptions (Banerjee, 2022). In fact, criticism has long been levied against dualism (Higaki, 2022; Omori, [1976] 2015), the foundation of ontology and epistemology based on Western philosophy, such as man and nature, consciousness and body, as well as hypothesis testing and causal inference based on the objectivism and positivism (Banerjee & Arjaliès; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021). This is because knowledge cannot be separated from the circumstances and historical context, including the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher in which it is produced (Banerjee, 2022; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Yousfi, 2021).

Therefore, we need to pay attention to the social, political, economic, cultural, and historical context and strive to generate knowledge rooted in the epistemology of each local population rather than the universal knowledge pursued by the dominant paradigm (Girei, 2017; Scobie et al., 2021; Yousfi, 2021). It is argued that doing so will shed light on local knowledge, encourage the deciphering of a pluralistic world, and pave the way for theoretical development through a healthy cross-evaluation with colonization (Banerjee, 2022; Yousfi, 2021).

Based on the above beliefs, a gradual accumulation of studies that implement the decolonization of MOS is underway. For example, Girei (2017) reveals the process by which the author herself, a white Western woman, faced dilemmas with the perceptions and practices of people on the ground while working in organizational development for an NGO in Uganda and recursively generated management knowledge while reflecting on her own identity and position. Toivonen and Seremani (2021) show how management elites in public organizations in Cameroon, while facing resistance from the local population, skillfully legitimized urban planning based on Western management knowledge while also taking into account local circumstances. Moreover, Scobie et al. (2021) describe a case in which a doctoral student of Maori heritage and her supervisor collaborated on a project involving the tensions between decolonial research practice and the completion of a doctoral degree at the center of colonialism, a research university in the United Kingdom.

These and other studies aiming at decolonization practices have explained the need to draw on qualitative and interpretive methods rather than quantitative methods. Among them, the ethnographic approach is actively adopted because it is a "research practice" that could grasp a comprehensive understanding of the management phenomenon and its context, although we can find differences in the detailed procedures (Girei, 2017; Toivonen & Seremani, 2021; Yousfi, 2021).

However, it has been pointed out that existing studies on the decolonization of MOS are inclined to theoretical considerations, and studies based on qualitative methods as well as ethnographic approaches remain scarce (Girei, 2017; Tourish, 2019). Moreover, methodological considerations on how to decolonize MOS have not been sufficiently examined (Yousfi, 2021). For example, seeking ways to generate meaningful knowledge by capturing local management and organizational phenomena that are difficult to decipher adequately in the dominant Western-centered paradigm would contribute to the decolonization of MOS.

Therefore, this paper addresses a phenomenological approach as the alternative.

APPRAISING A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Focus of Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a new philosophical approach proposed by Husserl in the early 20th century (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Gill, 2014; Moran, 2000; Neubauer et al., 2019). Specifically, phenomenology aims to understand the experience of a party about phenomena, that is, the lived experiences (how we experience the

lived world we see, hear, and discuss in our daily lives) (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Goulding, 2005; Neubauer et al., 2019; Sanders, 1982; Yoshikawa, 2017).

Here, phenomena are not the material properties of objects or the causal properties of objects that objective or empirical studies pursue, which are assumed to appear in the same way to everyone, but phenomena that appear and are experienced by the parties concerned. Moreover, a given object may appear in various modalities to the parties concerned. For example, one's supervisor's intention, as she perceives it at work, may appear to her as something that should be fulfilled with the highest priority, or it may appear to her as an opportunity to enhance her work reputation (Ohta, 2022), or it may appear to her as something that she should respond to discreetly and naturally so as not to give a bad impression to other colleagues. Thus, the appearance of the object for her depends on a variety of contexts, including the relationships with her superior and colleagues, the skills and experiences rooted in her own body, the evaluation system of the organization, and the norms of the workplace and the society surrounding it (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Moran, 2000).

Therefore, the phenomenological approach seeks to faithfully describe the experiences as they appear, which are appearances of objects for parties involved embedded in various contexts: historical, social, cultural, institutional, spatial, material, and physical (Moran, 2000; Smith, 2016; Sokolowski, 2000).

Since Husserl, phenomenology has been developed by outstanding philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer (Beck, 2021; Skea, 2016). However, it has been noted that there are various schools of phenomenology with different theoretical foundations (Gill, 2014; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to recognize that the phenomenological approach is not a single method but is diverse depending on the philosophical foundations relied upon (de Vaujany et al., 2023; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Moran, 2000).

We can identify several discussions that attempt to categorize the phenomenological approach, although they are still scarce (Gill, 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019). According to them, most phenomenologies can be broadly classified into descriptive phenomenology, relying on Husserl, and hermeneutic phenomenology, relying on Heidegger (Beck, 2021; Gill, 2014; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019).

Specifically, descriptive phenomenology focuses on the epistemological nature of an experience. That is, its approach seeks to explain the essence of what an experience is like (Gill, 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019). Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses on the ontological nature of a party who experiences a given phenomenon. That is, its approach seeks to understand how a party exists in relation to its own lived world (Gill, 2014; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019). Each school of thought presents more detailed methodological procedures, which are applied in subsequent studies (Beck, 2021; Gill, 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019).

However, it has been pointed out that there is no agreement on the appropriate methodology for using the finely branched phenomenologies in descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology, and no standard procedures have been established (Gill, 2014; Sanders, 1982; Skea, 2016). The purpose of this paper is not to discuss in detail the differences between the various phenomenological methods but to

show the potential of the phenomenological approach as one way to decolonize MOS. Therefore, although the approach to be relied upon can be strictly different depending on what and how it is to be revealed (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Sanders, 1982), an example of the basic characteristics and procedures of the phenomenological approach is mentioned below.

First-Person Perspective: Viewpoint of Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology approaches lived experiences from a first-person perspective (Goulding, 2005; Moran, 2000; Neubauer et al., 2019; Sanders, 1982; Yoshikawa, 2017; Zahavi, 2005). The first-person perspective is the perspective of the person involved. Specifically, an experience appears only as such to the party concerned, and it constitutes a certain whole as seen and perceived by him/her. (Yoshikawa, 2017). Thus, an experience and the knowledge based on it are rooted in the contextual appearances of things and events at "that time, place, and space" of the party involved.

On the other hand, studies that rely on the natural science approach, which is widely shared in contemporary MOS, are based on a third-person perspective (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Rosa, 2023). That is, they adopt the theoretical assumption that the researcher can objectively observe a phenomenon from the perspective of an outsider rather than from that of the party involved. Phenomenologists have cast criticisms on such perspective (Gill, 2014; Moran, 2000), as Merleau-Ponty, for example, pointed out the naiveness and dishonesty (Merleau-Ponty, [1945] 1962). This is because the researcher's own first-person perspective is inevitably inherent in scientific practices. In other words, the researcher's own perception and orientation are not completely scientifically controlled. For example, when observing a phenomenon and interpreting its results, the researcher's own experience based on the first-person perspective influences them directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. Thus, even if we attempt to observe a phenomenon objectively, we would not be able to perform so without the intervention of our own (ever-changing) point of view and experiences based on that viewpoint. Namely, we cannot continue to objectively observe a phenomenon at all times (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Neubauer et al., 2019; Taguchi, 2014).

Here, based on phenomenology's criticism of the natural scientific approach, one might raise the opinion that a researcher who is not a party to the event may not be able to approach the experience of others. However, what the phenomenologist is emphasizing is not the inaccessibility of the experience of others due to the adoption of the first-person perspective but that every experience is based on the unique first-person perspective of the parties involved (including the researcher). Thus, they do not deny the possibility of an experience of a phenomenon from a first-person perspective other than that of the parties involved. Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, also recognized that there could be multiple first-person experiences of a phenomenon and regarded this as a problem to be considered (Yoshikawa, 2017). In phenomenology, the perspectives that "we," including the researcher, can draw upon for understanding the lived world are more precisely considered intersubjective ones that are grounded in multiple first-person perspectives (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008).

A Basic Procedure of Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology is anti-naturalistic but not anti-scientific, and its approach is not haphazard (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Taguchi, 2014). Although phenomenological approaches are diverse, we present the following four basic steps as an example when we specifically describe the lived experiences from a first-person perspective: suspension of natural attitude (epoché), phenomenological reduction, eidetic variation, and intersubjective corroboration (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Other researchers have proposed similar procedures (e.g., Valera, 1996).

First, the natural attitude is the attitude we have when we are living naturally, and it is that we view the object or the living world as an objective entity (Sokolowski, 2000; Taguchi, 2014; Tani, 2002). Phenomenology initially calls for the suspension of this attitude to which we are prone, namely, withholding (as much as possible) from the application of our own beliefs about experience and of authoritative and justified theories (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008).

Phenomenological reduction is a shift from a natural attitude to a phenomenological attitude and gives our attention to the mutual relationship between the appearance of the object and its experience for the parties concerned, which cannot be captured by the natural attitude (Sokolowski, 2000; Tani, 2002). In particular, the experiences that are significant to focus on here are those that are self-evident (Taguchi, 2014). This is because self-evident experiences are not focused on because they are self-evident, even though they are the basis or premise of experience.

We are engaged in goal-seeking activities on a daily basis. For example, when creating a document on a PC, our attention is focused on the letters, symbols, and charts on the display, the progress of the document, and the deadline for its creation. On the other hand, our experience of the physical actions we take when we type into our PCs and the artifacts and spaces that support those actions are non-thematic, i.e., they recede into the background. The reflective attitude and specific method of turning one's attention to structures of (basic) experience that are not captured in one's usual way of perception is not sufficiently emphasized in the ethnographic approach that is found, for example, in the decolonization-oriented research in management studies. Such an approach, which at first glance appears unnatural and circuitous, is one of the characteristics of phenomenology, unlike descriptions in psychology, anthropology, and other fields (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Taguchi, 2014).

Eidetic variation is the exploration of the central nature of an object (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). That is, it is the process of identifying what makes an object what it is by eliminating non-essential features of the object. It should be noted that essence here does not mean the one and only invariant property but rather a common fundamental property that appears across phenomena, even if we change the aspect of an object in various ways (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Taguchi, 2014).

Intersubjective corroboration is the intersubjective enhancement of the certainty of a phenomenological description by comparing it with the first-person perspective of others rather than by conducting the analysis alone (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Husserl strongly insisted that phenomenology progresses through collaboration and that its results are fallible (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Taguchi, 2014).

ILLUSTRATING "*SASSHI*" IN THE WORKPLACE

What Is Sasshi?

In light of the above discussion, this section illustrates two points. First, the knowledge about local management phenomena cannot be adequately understood as long as it is based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions assumed by the colonization. Second, the phenomenological approach presented in the previous section can be one way to capture such phenomena. Specifically, this paper will focus on the phenomenon of "*sasshi* (察し)" or "*sassuru* (察する)" (the verbal form of *sasshi*) in the workplace in Japan, where the author was born and raised.

The reasons to illuminate the phenomenon of management and organization in Japan are as follows. First, Japan was one of the first countries in the non-Western world to modernize under the influence of Western powers, and at the same time, it retains a culture, norms, and institutions that have taken an extremely long time to form, permeate, and transform under conditions of high ethnic homogeneity (Abegglen, 1958; Inagaki, 2007; Maruyama, 1961; Nakane, 1967; Sugayama, 2011; Suzuki, 2017). From the specific perspective of the emergence and development of management studies in Japan, Japan has also been an early and active adopter of management knowledge, especially from Germany and the United States (US), among Western countries. In fact, the world's first scholarly business management organization was established in Germany in 1924, but it may be surprising to learn that the Japan Academy of Business Administration was founded in 1926, ahead of the Academy of Management (founded in 1936) (Japan Academy of Business Administration, n.d.). Therefore, Japan was one of the earliest countries to experience the colonization of management studies. However, there have long been doubts and criticisms of management knowledge based on the colonization by researchers exploring management studies rooted in the Japanese context (Kagono, 1988; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka & Yamaguchi, 2019). Nevertheless, Japanese management scholars are now structurally more called upon to conform to the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin an intellectual hegemonic regime by the West that is growing stronger by the day (Asakawa, 2020; Numagami, 2000; Sato, 2022).

However, it should be noted here that Japan has not only been unilaterally influenced by Western society but has also developed into a major economic power and exported practical knowledge of science, technology, and management, such as production systems and quality control, that were developed independently in the historical context of Japan (Abegglen, 1973; Banerjee, 2022; Fujimoto, 1999; Schaede, 2020; Vogel, 1979). That is, it can be said that Japan, although in the non-Western world, is not only indirectly or partially involved in Western-led colonization but is also independently promoting the generalization of management knowledge. Thus, from the perspective of history, politics, economics, and culture, contemporary Japanese society is an extremely complex mixture of aspects that have been colonized by the West, aspects that have retained their local character, and hybridized aspects (Kato, 1974; Maraldo, 2020). Moreover, even now, there is ongoing tension, conflict, dialogue, and coordination between

them. Based on these points, the organizational phenomenon in Japan is one of the significant subjects in discussing the decolonization of MOS.

The *sasshi* discussed in this paper is a deeply rooted phenomenon not only in contemporary organizations under such circumstances but also in society as a whole. While *sasshi* is sometimes taken to mean compassion in a broad sense, it is more specifically to act with the other person's intention in mind (Aida, 1972; Enomoto, 2017). For example, all of the following actions fall under the *sasshi*: taking in the other person's intentions even if they are not clearly communicated in words, adjusting one's own position, words, and actions while carefully observing the other person's behavior, taking the initiative to move before the other person's expectations and requests are communicated in words, and deciphering the meaning and intentions behind the other person's words.

In order to perform *sasshi*, or to *sassuru* something, we need to always perceive the situation and things from the other person's point of view, not our own. That is, we need to refrain from self-assertion (Aida, 1972). Certainly, for others, especially those from other countries or regions who have not internalized these values, it may be easier to express their own positions and opinions, and they may view such behavior as mutually beneficial because they can clearly share the issues. However, in light of traditional Japanese norms and virtues, such behavior is considered selfish and unseemly. In fact, according to an international comparative study, parents and preschool teachers in the US say that self-confidence is the most important thing that children learn at an early age. In Japan, on the other hand, confidence was only marginally mentioned; on the contrary, consideration, empathy, and sympathy for others were regarded as the most important (Enomoto, 2017; Tobin et al., 1989). Even if there is a gap between the other party's intentions and one's own intentions, one tries to guess the other party's response, emphasize commonalities, blur conflicts, and find a mutually acceptable point to reach a compromise (Enomoto, 2017). In fact, a person who can naturally or smoothly carry out attentiveness is evaluated as "*ki ga kiku* (気が利く) (witty) or *sasshi ga yoi* (察しが良い) (taking into account the intentions of the others well)" in social reference groups such as the family, kinship, school, and workplace, while a person who is unreserved and lacks humility is evaluated negatively (Enomoto, 2017; Katada, 2017).

It is said to be one of the characteristics of Japanese communication to refrain as much as possible from using words and statements that give priority to one's own intentions, such as asserting oneself or persuading others. (Aida, 1972).

Polysemy and Contextuality of Sasshi

Based on the basic explanation of *sasshi*, we will focus on this phenomenon in organizations and workplaces.

First, imagine a certain situation. One day, you, a subordinate, are told by your boss, "*Asu wa yoroshiku* (明日はよろしく)". It is difficult to convey the meaning accurately when translating this message. Its nuance is similar to the statement, "I am counting on you to do a great job tomorrow," but it is more

casual and not as explicit as the translated expression. How would you behave in this situation? Would you ask your boss what he meant by the ambiguous words? Unfortunately, this kind of behavior is not regarded as *sasshi ga yoi* (taking into account their intentions well). In the Japanese workplace, *sasshi* is one of the most important skills for organizational personnel, so much so that the ability to perform one's job is sometimes replaced by the ability to *sassuru* something to be done (Enomoto, 2017; Katada, 2017). As *sasshi* is to act with the other party's intentions in mind, you are implicitly expected to decipher as soon as possible the unspoken meaning of your supervisor's voice and carry it out even in the absence of explicit instructions from them (Ohta, 2021). For example, if you have an important meeting scheduled for tomorrow that your boss will also attend, you should decipher exactly what he/she wants you to do and make sure you do it. Those might be, for example, preparing materials, reporting key points in advance, reminding other prospective participants, arranging a debriefing or a reception after the meeting, and so on. You also need to guess whether the boss's implicit requests are one or several, whether they should be addressed now or not, whether you should share them with your colleagues or not, and so on, and to deal with them appropriately.

Let me give you another example. Let's assume that you are a newcomer who has just joined the company. One day, your supervisor told you to go home early today because you would not be able to go home on time sooner or later. However, all of your *senpai* (先輩) (senior or co-worker who has joined the company earlier than you) are working overtime. How would you behave? It would not be so recommended that you leave the office with impunity, thinking that since your work is done, it is only natural that you should go home without being told to do so by your supervisor. In order to be favorably evaluated by your boss (and others around you) as great *sasshi*, you need to more or less take into account his/her intentions in this situation as well. Specifically, the supervisor's intention may be an implicit instruction that "you should also stay behind and help with some tasks" since the rest of your colleagues are working overtime. Or it may be a pep talk, "Improve your task performance quickly so that you can be given more work to do". Or it may be a disappointment in you, saying that they are fed up with your work and want you to go home early because your presence in the office is demoralizing them. Of course, there are many other possibilities and examples of coping behaviors in response to the supervisor's intentions you decipher.

Difficulty in Objectively Grasping Sasshi

Even from just two examples, one can imagine that individuals working in Japanese organizations are confronted with numerous situations that require them to *sassuru* (take into account the intentions of the other party) on a daily basis.

Sasshi in the workplace is deeply connected not only to the intentions of others but also to countless contexts, including their personality, mood, relationships with others, one's own background and position, responsibilities, motivation, abilities, the goals and size of the group to which one belongs, and recent group

and organizational performance. That is, they do not exist as solid organizational or social entities but appear contextually and fluidly. Therefore, even if we identify a certain behavior of *sasshi* in isolation from its context, it is just a naive attitude or behavior and does not lead to meaningful knowledge about *sasshi* phenomena. Moreover, the success or failure of *sasshi* is basically a relational phenomenon determined not by oneself but by the other party, especially the superior who has authority in an organization (and in some cases, the surrounding people who read the behavior). For example, if a person attempts the same action multiple times as *sasshi* toward a supervisor, the supervisor may or may not recognize it as *sasshi*, depending on how well it is with his/her intentions. Furthermore, even if multiple subordinates practice the same action as *sasshi* toward a supervisor, the supervisor may or may not recognize it as *sasshi*, depending on how well it is with his/her intentions. That is, the exact same behavior may be evaluated favorably and appear as *sasshi*, or it may be evaluated negatively as insufficient consideration or misguided.

Since *sasshi* is a behavior that requires a certain degree of skill (Aida, 1972), it is not uncommon for the performer to misunderstand the intentions of the other party. In addition, the way the other party indicates his/her intention is not always the same. For example, it is easy to imagine that a supervisor may adjust his/her own behavior according to the intentions of his/her subordinates. When both parties carry out their own *sasshi*, the situation becomes increasingly complex, which is known as "*sasshiai* (acting with the intentions in mind each other)" (Enomoto, 2017). Moreover, *sasshi* can be elaborately concealed. For example, a supervisor may dare to hide the process in order to take credit for his/her subordinate's considerate behavior based on *sasshi* and its results. Furthermore, a subordinate, in order not to stand out too much from others (we have a well-known proverb, "deru kui wa utareru (出る杭は打たれる) (The stake that sticks out gets hammered in.)," may carry out his/her own *sasshi* as secretly as possible so as not to be identified.

From the above, it is not easy to observe and identify when and by whom, why and how the *sasshi* (or *sasshiai*) is done, and how it unfolds and ends. It is obviously not a consistent approach for an observer to try to objectively understand an extremely contextual, fluid, and relational phenomenon as the same phenomenon for everyone to see (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Inoue, 2007; Marsh et al., 2018; Nomura, 2017; Sato, 2001). Moreover, suppose that we rigorously measure certain attitudes and behaviors that are only labeled as *sasshi* divorced from context using a scale consisting of a limited number of items and infer causal relationships between them. It is difficult to say that the findings from such attempts will contribute much to the sound theoretical development of management studies as a whole, including studies based on the dominant paradigm (Banerjee, 2022; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Tourish, 2019; Yousfi, 2021).

A Phenomenological Approach to Sasshi as the Lived Experiences

On the other hand, if we follow the example of the phenomenological procedure, we can approach it as follows.

First, we are urged to refrain as much as possible from a natural attitude. That is, we should not see *sasshi* as an objective entity that is the same for everyone, based on a first-person perspective rather than the third-person perspective on which the natural scientific approach relies. We seek to explore the experience of *sasshi* in a workplace from the perspective of the parties involved rather than to draw on positivist-based theories and measures (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Goulding, 2005; Neubauer et al., 2019).

The next step is to focus on the mutual relationship between the appearance of the object and its experience for the parties involved (phenomenological reduction). In particular, focusing on self-evident experiences will lead to an understanding of the basis of the experience of *sasshi* (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Sanders, 1982; Taguchi, 2014). Specifically, in a series of process of *sasshi*, a person's own consciousness is directed toward understanding and fulfilling the intentions of the other party when carrying out *sasshi* in the workplace. However, the physical behavior and the material, spatial, and social experiences of the person or the other party in carrying out the *sasshi* are kept from his/her awareness. However, it is these experiences that can shape the foundation of *sasshi* (in contemporary organizations/workplaces), of which the parties involved may not even be aware. For example, we pay attention not only to the party's coping behavior in response to his/her supervisor's ambiguous "*Asu wa yoroshiku*," but also to the gestures of those involved in the process of that behavior, the relationships between the party and his/her organizations, supervisors, and colleagues, and the tools, techniques, values, and beliefs that support the party's behavior. As a result, we will be able to better understand the foundation and the entirety of the party's experience of *sasshi*. Moreover, interviews as well as observational research on the experience of *sasshi*, even for researchers unfamiliar with the Japanese workplace, will contribute to a more reliable understanding of the phenomenon as an experience based on his/her first-person perspective (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Yoshikawa, 2017).

We will then explore the nature of the experience of *sasshi* (eidetic variation). Specifically, we will examine what and to what extent a *sasshi* must be trimmed before it ceases to be *sasshi* or identify common properties of *sasshi* that appear across diverse phenomena as a result of changing the aspect of *sasshi* in various ways. Because *sasshi* is interpersonal, it is essential to understand not only the experience of the subordinate who carries out the *sasshi*, but also at least the experience of the supervisor who is the object of the *sasshi*.

Finally, it is necessary to deepen our understanding of the experience of *sasshi* based on multiple first-person perspectives (intersubjective corroboration). For example, by comparing phenomenological analyses of *sasshi* among researchers with different attributes, we can expect to arrive at a more valid and reliable understanding of the phenomenon and a more sound presentation of knowledge (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Taguchi, 2014; Tani, 2002). Table 1 contrastingly summarizes the characteristics of the natural scientific and phenomenological approaches referred to in this paper.

Table 1. Comparison of Approaches.

	Natural Scientific Approach	Phenomenological Approach
Viewpoint	Third-person perspective	First-person perspective
Theoretical assumptions	Viewing the object or the living world as an objective entity (natural attitude)	Withholding from the application of our own beliefs about experience and of authoritative and justified theories (epoché)
Research focus	Object that can be not self-evident and newly explored and discovered	Basis of (self-evident) experience of how an object appears for the party involved (based on phenomenological reduction)
Object of understanding and explanation	Material and causal characteristics of an object that exist independently of our perceptions and beliefs	Essence of things, that is, common property that appears across phenomena (as a result of eidetic variation)
Verification of results	Results are verified to see if they can be replicated anytime, anywhere, using common measures and variables (replication)	Results are compared with phenomenological description based on the first-person perspective of others and intersubjectively discussed the certainty of them (intersubjective corroboration)

CONCLUSION: TOWARD THE PRODUCTION OF WHOLESOME MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE

This paper presents the phenomenological approach as one meaningful way to decolonize MOS. As a conclusion, the paper draws a future perspective by referring to the theoretical and methodological challenges to decolonize the management studies.

The following issues regarding the decolonization of MOS can be mentioned. First, it is necessary to avoid essentializing, privileging, and recolonizing the practice of decolonization and the knowledge generated. To do so, we need to be careful not to fall into naive rehashing of the findings of our great predecessors, being all about the dominant paradigm criticism, colonization of the project of decolonization, and essentialization of local knowledge (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Tourish, 2019). The next step is to build on research based on local ontologies and epistemologies. This is because, while oriented toward and practicing decolonization, there are scattered studies that are based on Western theoretical and ontological assumptions (Banerjee, 2022; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is a need to decolonize methodologies as well as theories of management knowledge (Ingold, 2023; Scobie et al., 2021; Yousfi, 2021). Note that these are also deeply connected to the issues discussed below.

The phenomenological approach discussed in this paper has not only attracted attention in areas such as cognitive science, neuroscience, robotics, nursing, and caregiving but has also found significance as a useful method in management studies (de Vaujany et al., 2023; Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Gill, 2014; Holt & Sandberg, 2011; Kingma et al., 2018; Mingers, 2001; Taguchi, 2014; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013; Uda, 2021; vom Lehn, 2019). Underlying this is the insight and expectation that theoretical descriptions and explanations of comprehensive and contextual experiences of the lived world, which are different assumptions, perspectives, and

attitudes from objectivist-based research, can provide a unique foundation for soundly complementing and developing the dominant knowledge (Sokolowski, 2000; Tsoukas, 2023). Research practices based on the dominant paradigm are not carried out in a vacuum (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Moran, 2000; Tourish, 2019). A phenomenological approach would provide a perspective to better understand the process from the appearance of the object to "the constitution of objectivity for the parties involved." On the other hand, the fundamental question remains as to how and to what extent phenomenology and naturalistic research (in management studies) should be specifically integrated (Banerjee, 2022; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Even the application of phenomenology to MOS is still insufficient, and its methodological procedures are finely branched. Therefore, sound comparisons and discussions among these studies are not easy (Gill, 2014; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Neubauer et al., 2019; Skea, 2016). Moreover, phenomenological descriptions based on local ontology and epistemology are also scarce (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Tourish, 2019; Uda, 2023; Uemura, 2023). Phenomenology is fallible, and therefore, it would be essential to examine the ways to make our ontology pluralize, refine the methodological procedures, and bridge with naturalistic research in order to produce meaningful contextualized knowledge.

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