Advancing Ethnography in Corporate Environments

Challenges and Emerging Opportunities

Brigitte Jordan, Editor

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Contents

V.

VI.

Introduction

Advancing Ethnography in Corporate Settings: Challenges and Emerging Opportunities

Brigitte Jordan

Corporate Ethnography: What Is That?

The idea of a "corporate ethnography" is new to many people. And even people who have heard of the concept remain unclear as to exactly what it means. Corporate ethnography is not easily defined by established disciplinary boundaries. It has strong roots in anthropological methods, theories and conceptual approaches, but is decidedly much more than a graft of academic ethnography onto business contexts.

I am not going to recount here the story of the rise of corporate anthropology and ethnography. That work has been done by others in the introductory chapters of recent books in the field (see the introduction in Cefkin [2009], the papers by Jordan and Suchman in Szymanski and Whalen [2011]) and is repeated at every ritual occasion where the community reflects on where it came from and where it is going (most recently Mack and Squires at the 2011 Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference [EPIC]). In addition, several of us provide historical details in this book, most notably Patricia Ensworth.

Judging from attendance at professional conferences and publications in the field, most practitioners of corporate ethnography are not anthropologists, despite the strong association of ethnography with that discipline. Nor, in fact, are corporate ethnographers predominantly academics. Even those who are academics are more likely to be teaching in schools of design or business schools than in traditional anthropology departments. But no matter their background, the common thread among most practitioners seems to be a dual reliance on in-person fieldwork and quantitative data. In general, I would say that a typical practitioner would be a member of anthrodesign (a community listserv)[1] and could be found most reliably at EPIC.[2]

Once skeptical of ethnographic methods, industry—the "corporate" in corporate ethnography—has by now largely accepted them as an important component of corporate research programs. In practice, ethnography in industry typically consists of an eclectic mix of face-to-face and digital, technology-supported methods that

might range from conventional participant observation to video-supported shadowing to data analysis in the "cloud." Having grown up in the white spaces between conventional disciplines, corporate ethnography finds its tools and methods in many different arenas of activity, including applied anthropology, product and system design, global marketing, user interface design, and the business sector, and often takes advantage of automatic recording and curating of data.

The contributors to this book see corporate ethnography as an exciting new field that is vitally shaped by and draws heavily on anthropology and its sister disciplines in the social sciences, including sociology, communication studies, and (behavioral) economics, as well as fields solidly based in computer technology, such as Information Technology (IT), Computer Human Interaction (CHI), and Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW). There is an increasingly close liaison between ethnography and design, apparent in the chapters of this book in the prevalence of design recommendations. The chapters by Ellen Isaacs and Ken Riopelle, for example, illustrate how ethnographers are actually involved in the hands-on production of physical products and system specifications.[3]

However, despite these key relationships with a number of academic disciplines, what sets corporate ethnography apart from them is that it "lives" in business. In other words, it derives its ways of knowing and objects of inquiry from industry, and has two fundamental concerns: one, to do research that provides insights into corporate structure and process; and two, to provide real-world solutions to problems that arise in business and industry.

Another major difference is that the output ("results") of corporate ethnography typically consists of "deliverables" for the use of a corporate client or employer, rather than scientific reports and published papers produced for the benefit of academic colleagues. A deliverable may be a design, a workshop, or a PowerPoint presentation to corporate decision-makers, and typically includes concrete recommendations about such things as product design, as Marijke Rijsberman explains, or process enhancement, as discussed by Vidar Hepsø in this volume.

This book wrestles with the key experiences and concerns of practitioners and aspiring players in an exciting emerging market where there are opportunities to address significant problems. It meets a demand in our field for experience-based material that explains methods and approaches, successes and failures, and the breadth as well as limitations in both the theory and the practice of this new field.

How Did This Book Come To Be?

Over many years I have felt a growing dissatisfaction with the antiquated format of professional meetings that requires hundreds of intelligent people to sit silently for hours, listening to a string of presenters reading in monotone a series of only loosely connected papers. What interaction does exist at these meetings tends to come when a discussant or audience member starts the kind of inherently competitive academic debate that pits one theory, methodology, or data set against another.

What if we could instead develop a panel that would induce an atmosphere of playful cothinking, an offering of multiple perspectives and different ideas nourished by the expertise and experience we would each bring from our different intellectual homes? I wanted something much more informal, less stodgy, something exciting that would generate energy, something closer to conversation than debate. I wanted an opportunity for smart, experienced, dedicated, committed professionals to actually have fun laying out their thinking about topics they thought worth discussing with like-minded colleagues.

I asked Vidar Hepsø, a corporate anthropologist and valued colleague from Norway, to help me organize such a panel for the 2011 meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA). I sent a message to a network of professional friends and colleagues, inviting them to join a nontraditional session that would revolve around issues and dilemmas that we considered to be at the forefront of ethnographic work in industry. A small working group developed a set of crucial topics under the panel title "Challenges and Opportunities in Corporate Ethnography."

Hoping to maintain only a modicum of structure and predictability, our next step was to liberate our panel from the stiff academic presentation format. Thus each theme would be explored in a "dyad": two contributors would take on a common topic, each from a different point of view, but with the goal of sparking creative, generative dialog rather than combative academic debate. There would be no reading of prepared manuscripts and no PowerPoints. After the dyad, the presenters would be open to contributions, questions, and challenges from the audience. We wanted spirited exchanges that would show that it is possible to have different opinions and different perspectives to a problem without deteriorating into competition and one-upmanship.[4]

Although the presenters for this venture had been seduced into joining the panel by the promise that it would be a one-time happening, without papers and with no further obligations, at the postmortem the next morning there was spontaneous agreement among contributors that such a fun and stimulating gathering of curious, smart colleagues should not end with the panel. We discussed a number of formats for developing the dyads further and finally decided on a book. I committed to be the editor of this volume.[5]

I do think it is ironic that an event—designed (and promised) as an ephemeral, elusive, one-time happening that would leave no physical traces—evolved into something as structured as a book, and that the dyad framework I had dreamed up to nudge presentations into dialog rather than debate developed into chapters with structures that actually tamed some of the thoughts and ideas gleefully running wild during the SfAA session.

Who Are We, the Authors?

Good question! We think of ourselves as part of an emerging new discipline, or maybe just a promising experiment. Most of us are anthropologists but not all.

Most of us have Ph.D.s, but not all. Most of us have taught in academia. Some of us are at the height of our career, acknowledged experts in our domains. And all of us have worked in corporate organizations as employees or outside consultants for years and are passionate about continuing the conversation to which we hope to contribute with this book.

Dyads and the Dyad Spirit

The dyad format—twin presentations that take on a central topic but from different points of view—allows two lines of thinking to run in parallel, raising questions about different kinds of truths and how to simultaneously follow different approaches to a topic or an issue. It explores potential without premature commitment. Multiple truths, multiple methodologies, multiple theories, multiple outcomes—all are eminently important paths for being successful in this line of work. Later, during writing, the dyads provide structure and a source of support and companionship for the authors.

Even though there is plenty of competition in business, very often the path to a successful outcome is paved with multiple adjustments that pull in the knowledge and experience of multiple contributors. A "with" approach is particularly valuable for engaging in the complex multidisciplinary teams with whom corporate ethnographers typically work. Having to integrate and work jointly with corporate counterparts and negotiating within hierarchical structures where the multiple interests of multiple stakeholders have to be taken into account requires a skillful dance, implicit in many of the chapters but maybe most evident in the chapters by Julia Gluesing and Riopelle as well as Patricia Sunderland and Rita Denny (Dyads 1 and 4) in this volume.

Our Goals for This Volume

We designed this book to appeal to readers with theoretical interests as well as to those with an applied modus operandi. We want to engage ethnographers who work as corporate employees as well as those in independent consultancies, corporate research labs, and academia. We particularly want to reach teachers and students who will be shaping this space in the future. Especially to them, we thought we could offer not only methodological and conceptual advances but also practical advice. Corporate ethnography is increasingly a source of innovation in theory and method, as well as an important option for the vast majority of anthropology students who do not become academic anthropologists.

This volume, thus, is well-suited not just for corporate ethnographers but also corporate insiders, business leaders, strategists, and managers who want to know more about corporate ethnography and how ethnography can help shape strategy and tactics in their projects. In particular, we have targeted the new breed of corpo-

rate insiders who push the cutting edge, the transformative front of business in the twenty-first century, the types that carry titles like media analyst, customer experience designer, data modeler, or social listening expert.

We have tried to provide insights into what it is like to work as an ethnographer in and for large organizations, be they for profit or not, and hands-on lived examples of different kinds of corporate work useful not only for students but also for members of the general public who want to understand the power and conditions of this work. Well aware of the value of theory in our business, and eager to build the new types of theory necessary for the digital era, we nevertheless wrote our chapters hoping to be practical enough to also provide advice for aspiring practitioners and anyone who wants to enter the consulting business. As a consequence, the book offers guidance and background information for people who are engaged in making career decisions.

Dyads and Chapters

What should you expect from reading this book? I turn now to a brief overview of the themes and contents of the dyads and then of the crosscutting themes that run through the entire volume. Remember that dyads link chapters written by two expert practitioners and their take on a particular hot topic in a "with" rather than "versus" dialog.

DYAD 1: Conventional Ethnographic Methods
with Technology-based Methods

Dyad 1 jumps right into one of today's most hotly debated issues, namely the relationship between conventional ethnographic methods grounded in participant observation and technology-supported methods. This ongoing controversy asks whether new digital methods will make traditional ethnography outdated. In Chapter 1, Julia Gluesing, an anthropologist with global experience in high-tech companies, argues that conventional ethnographic methods are more relevant than ever to understand contemporary work contexts. Ken Riopelle, an engineer and information scientist who frequently partners with Gluesing on projects, argues in Chapter 2 that in the digital age, our five human senses are no longer adequate to make meaning of the digital data deluge and suggests that complementary technology-supported methods need to be used to provide a full (or fuller) picture.

DYAD 2: Ethnography for Systems Development: Renovating the Legacy
with Ethnography and Product Design: Fixing the Future

Dyad 2 extends ethnographic history and methodology into two complex arenas that are particularly important in contemporary corporate organizations, namely

the design of systems and products. In Chapter 3, Patricia Ensworth, a business anthropologist with vast experience as a project manager in financial institutions, uses her work in system development to make a comparison between what kinds of ethnographic methods are expected in the ideal case with what the reality is like. Marijke Rijsberman, a design ethnographer with broad project experience, provides the view from a product design perspective by discussing her research on the private and business uses of videoconferencing. Although system development may be more like remodeling a house while product design could be seen as building a new one, the core ethnographic methodologies, based on participant observation and the identification of patterns of behavior and meaning, create many commonalities between the work of the system ethnographer and the product ethnographer.

DYAD 3: The Value of Rapid Ethnography
with The Limits to Speed in Ethnography

Dyad 3 addresses the role of speed in business from both practical and theoretical points of view. In business, time is a hard taskmaster. For ethnographers the central question is what ethnographic techniques can be adapted for speed without losing the depth and fine granularity of conventional ethnography. In Chapter 5, Ellen Isaacs, a system designer with a keen grip on the value of ethnography for technology and service design, discusses three of her recent projects, ranging from improving urban parking systems to realignment of nursing tasks. She provides detailed insights into rapid ethnography through detailed descriptions of methods and design. Her dyad partner Melissa Cefkin, a corporate anthropologist who has been prominent in keeping "the theory question" alive in our field, raises crucial questions: What are the limits to speed in ethnography? How far can we accommodate the pressure from industry to do our work faster and faster? She suggests a switch from time to temporality that considers such things as the time required to satisfy the logic of a project and the time required for achieving ethnographic understanding.

DYAD 4: The Cry for More Theory
with The Cry for Practicality

Dyad 4 may be the chapters academic anthropologists will turn to first because it addresses a fundamental issue, one acknowledged openly in academia though more clandestinely in corporate practice: What is the ubiquitous cry for more theory about, even when we are embedded in practical work that needs to get done? Basing their remarks on many years of joint consulting work in marketing and consumer research, Patricia Sunderland, in Chapter 7, introduces the longstanding dualism of theory and practice and its persistence while Rita Denny, in Chapter 8, focuses on the role of theorizing in practitioners' work. Analyzing successes

and failures in their consulting projects, they suggest that the corporate funders of their work also have theories, albeit tacit, nonformalized ones, that need to be brought into dialog with the explicit anthropological and academic theories that we bring to the table.

DYAD 5: Doing Corporate Ethnography as an Insider (Employee)
with Doing Corporate Ethnography as an Outsider (Employer)

Dyad 5 is concerned with a fundamental structural characteristic of corporate ethnography: the dual nature of engagement (and employment possibilities). Ethnographic work is, roughly speaking, carried out from the outside in by temporary consultants or from the inside out by ethnographers who have been hired by the company for more or less permanent positions as employees. In Chapter 9, Vidar Hepsø, an experienced anthropologist employed for more than 20 years in the Norwegian oil industry, paints a fascinating picture of the issues that arise in the communities of practice charged with provisioning offshore platform installations in the North Sea. He is followed by business anthropologist Francoise Brun-Cottan, who speaks from a career characterized by multiple shifts between insider and outsider status, which is fairly typical in our field. Though their work experiences have been quite different, it is interesting to see that the issues they raise run largely (though not completely) in parallel.

DYAD 6: The Era of Big Data
with Pattern Recognition in Human Development

In a large sweep from prehistory to the future of society, Dyad 6 takes on an ambitious set of issues that will shape the future of ethnography. Arguably, the most controversial, implicative, and important topic in the business world today is the question of the impact of Big Data, analytics, and privacy. Chad Maxwell, an applied anthropologist with extensive experience in advertising, marketing, and design research has based Chapter 11 on his work helping companies adjust to (and profit from) the transformations of the digital age. He lays out the impact of digital technology and the massive amount of data it creates. He proposes to chart a new course for ethnographic practitioners in the new era through what he calls "ethnographic analytics." In Chapter 12, as a corporate anthropologist with deep roots in medical anthropology, I attempt to open up "new thinking spaces." I ground my assessment of the issues we face at this time in the evolution of the human species and the changes in humans' ability to make sense of rapid changes in the environment by developing new sensory mechanisms. Taking up an idea advanced earlier in this book by Riopelle and then by Maxwell (that the digital data deluge has outstripped our human sensory capabilities), I conclude the dyad (and the book) by proposing a set of "what's next" issues that complement those proposed by Maxwell.

Crosscutting Themes

Let me also alert you to some continuing themes threading through the book that, in spite of the variety of topics, provide coherence and mutual relevance. Sometimes these topics are explicitly called out and identified in a chapter; other times they are implicit. For example, methodology issues (and advice) are present in every one of the chapters (though you may have to seek them out). Here I'll highlight a few of the common threads. We'll leave it to you to go looking for more.

Methods

Explicitly and implicitly, all of us are deeply concerned with methodological issues in our work. Our varied experiences over the last four decades open up a practice-based view on the hybrid arsenal of methods in use by ethnographers doing work in business and industry. Methodology is the very topic of the first dyad, where Gluesing argues forcefully that even (and especially) in global high-tech organizations, research has to be grounded in the intimate copresence and coexperience of participant observation. Riopelle asks if the benefits generated by being there face to face are in danger of being replaced by the affordances of new types of sensors and technologies. Can the new digitally based technologies make conventional methods of data collection and analysis replaceable? He and Gluesing both conclude that ethnography's opportunity lies in a combined use of both types of methodologies. Riopelle even provides very specific examples and step-by-step exercises for readers to try their hand at using algorithms.

Ensworth (in Chapter 3) also makes methods an explicit topic when she reports on her research in system development. She suggests that there are always two aspects to consider: the official "field practices" recommended in books and lectures and the unofficial, rarely talked about methods that emerge with a "reality check" of what happens when a project hits the snags that are guaranteed to appear. Drawing on a wealth of examples from her work, she shows us the clandestine accommodations to reality, the unspoken shortcuts, the tacit agreements that get made to get the work done. This chapter should be particularly valuable to aspiring researchers in the field.

Explicit methodological recommendations are also given in Dyad 6, where Maxwell speculates about what kinds of methods might be appropriate in a world dominated by algorithms and data mining. He argues that the use of analytics, even with its inherent flaws, can be a powerful tool in the ethnographer's methodology toolkit. Jordan agrees, maybe with a bit less enthusiasm, and lays out a detailed set of research recommendations that might lead to a deeper understanding of the transformations we are witnessing and the very significant issues they are generating in society.

Quite apart from these explicit treatments there is a wealth of insights and suggestions in the specific projects reported in the chapters, most of which include more or less explicit methods discussions with valuable ideas and examples.

Chapters such as Isaacs in Dyad 3, or Sunderland and Denny in Dyad 4 are almost instruction manuals for Rapid Ethnography and consumer research, respectively.

Technology

It will not escape your notice that the first as well as the last dyad of this book focus on the new digital technologies that are generating fundamental changes in how business sees and goes about its work and, even more important, what the implications of these changes are to all of us on a societal level. Ethnography has always been carried out with technology support, from Margaret Mead's notebook and film camera and the 40 pounds of video equipment I used to drag into the field in the 1970s and 1980s, to the ubiquitous tape recorders that still allow us to catch interaction but now with increasing granularity. Combined with a trend to involve former "subjects" as "participants," we have most recently and very productively used portable videorecorders for unobtrusive shadowing, carried out by the ethnographer or study participants themselves. Video diaries, webcam location data, GPS tracking: there are now many kinds of technologies that make possible massive data collection to the point where the actual collection process is no longer an issue. A bit more of an issue is the curating and analysis of such data for which still no easy solutions exist (nor are any offered in this book).[6]

Instrumented data collection is ubiquitous in ethnography now, in corporate work and elsewhere. However, we have entered a new epoch, the era of Big Data, sociodigitization, and analytics, which has generated technologies of a fundamentally different kind that are now available to do Internet-based, multisited, mega data, algorithm-based research. The new gorilla at the corporate ethnography table is "analytics," which consists of attempts to make sense both of data generated on the web (including mobile and social behavior), and of offline data that might come from credit cards, point-of-sale transactions, and call centers, typically captured from customer databases and organizational records.

At this writing, the reaction among academics as well as corporate practitioners is, expectably, divided and still quite volatile. On the one hand there is complete denial ("how long have we had computers?" or "there is nothing new here"); on the other, major segments of the ethnographic community have become very involved, fascinated, energized, engaged, and even committed to big data analytics, both as advocates and as detractors. This situation is reflected in the book. Riopelle and Maxwell, while voicing appropriate cautions, are clearly enthused and emphasize the amazing possibilities opening up both for commercial interests and individuals. They also discuss opportunities in new sensor and archiving technologies that open up opportunities for anthropological data collection and analysis. Jordan, in contrast, is much more concerned about the effects the mining of these unbelievably massive amounts of data, collected and archived automatically, have on our ideas of data collection and analysis. There is a great deal of delight and enthusiastic experimentation with new technologies at this point, and that should be generative of new

approaches.[7] The security blanket in these discussions is the continued practical usability and availability of the standard basic ethnographic methods to which everybody is ready to return (or at least pay lip service).

So there is tremendous ambivalence: enthusiastic endorsement of the promise but then also awareness of serious warnings, including the question: what does it mean? (Ladner 2008). We see flights of fancy that try to overcome deeply felt uncertainty with a bravado generated by the suspicion that the positive aspects of the new connectivity will be overwhelmed by exploitation: the reaping of the benefits by the large corporations. This is the period of manifestos, of declarations of a great new world just around the corner on one side and warnings of Armageddon on the other.

However important these issues are, the real essence of this book will be found in the chapters where dyads deal with the mundane successes and failures of ethnographic practice in the real world, a reassuring number of which are not at all or only minimally affected by the promises and threats of analytics.

Time, Speed, and Temporality in Ethnographic Work

Time is a fundamental symbolic category for understanding the orderliness of corporate life. For us as ethnographers, understanding the organization of time in a new business setting is one of the first requirements for being productive. In business, time is organized according to recurring units such as business quarters or production cycles within which activities occur in an expectedly orderly way. It is up to the ethnographer to figure out what exceptions are allowed and what disturbances create trouble that requires action.

In time-driven organizations, practically all activities are time-sensitive (like the task chains of nurses described by Isaacs in Chapter 5); with the addition of deadlines generated by such things as end-of-quarter or shareholder meetings, they become time-critical. Time-critical activities and projects usually (but not always) involve the bottom line. If such deadlines are missed, heads may roll.

Work is almost always framed in terms of time. ("When is this due?") Given that time is central in business, it is present in some way or other in all the chapters. With compressed timescales, research scope and methods have to be adjusted. In Dyad 3, speed takes center stage with Rapid Ethnography. Isaacs describes three examples of projects carried out under time constrictions and discusses in detail the methodological adjustments she and her team made to provide crucial input to urban parking enforcement, work overload in hospital nursing, and design suggestions for supporting multichannel communication for mobile individuals. Cefkin uses a more theoretical approach and suggests that beyond the preoccupation with time and speed, there is temporality, a higher-level concept that allows us to better understand time from the point of view of what she calls the temporalities of ethnographic understanding, of everyday life, and of project organization.

One of the problems that corporate ethnographers typically encounter is "requirements creep," when, under the twin pressures of speed and organizational complexity, project goals are constantly redefined as various stakeholders provide input even after it is under way. This requires a great deal of flexibility, the ability to step back and reconsider, and adaptability while still holding on to some vision of the desired accomplishment. How to deal with the dangers of requirements creep in ethnographic engagements is visible in many of the larger projects described by Ensworth, Denny, and others.

Even if not explicitly acknowledged, a pervasive orientation to the ways in which time organizes activities in business settings (see Jordan 1990), it is interesting to note that the new communication possibilities provided by the Internet and the global distribution of team members disturb and disrupt many of those established patterns. In the long run, the most critical aspects of time and speed may be the acceleration of production processes that Maxwell and Jordan talk about in Dyad 6.

Many aspects of the organization of time are not explicitly addressed, even though they underlie all corporate work. They affect not only when people do what during a given day or quarter, but also where they can be found and what they are likely to be talking about. With effective distance communication and the ongoing transition to remote work in the global economy, where coordination over different time zones is essential, many of these tacitly organized activities are now disturbed. While there are interesting issues here for future research, our focus for the moment and in this book is on the necessity to do our work within compressed time constraints.

Theory and Practice

What role does theory play in the ethnography of corporations and other large organizations? This question is most explicitly addressed by Sunderland and Denny in Dyad 4, where they make a powerful argument that the theory we bring from our respective disciplines (in their case anthropology and sociology of marketing) is the most important contribution we bring to the corporate table. They show through a succession of examples and projects ranging from rethinking delicatessen stores to family interaction at breakfast the incessant interplay between the cry for more theory and the cry of practicality, coming to the conclusion that the resolution of the gap lies in understanding and respecting the (usually implicit) theories the client brings to the table. With a delicate, sensitive scalpel they dissect—courageously using their own failures—the sources of miscommunication. They argue that resolving the gap lies in designing and negotiating (early and then again) ongoing conversations that acknowledge both types of theories for a successful solution design.

There is a general view that applied anthropology and ethnography in particular are devoid of theory. But the chapters of this book occupy a space where theory

meets practice. Obviously, every time we walk into a problem setting, we bring with us a set of theories of how the world works: explicit ones from our training, implicit ones from our experience. Examples of using both these kinds of theory can be found throughout the book. The more damning accusation, however, is (and always has been) the accusation that applied anthropology (speak ethnography) does not generate theory. It is purportedly purely descriptive and that (pat on the back) is nice, but it does not promote science.

Conversely, one might want to consider that we use exactly the same methods (well, maybe a bit more sophisticated and technology informed) as academic anthropologists, but that in the corporate environment in which we operate, theories, especially named theories, have a bad reputation. So we mostly don't worry about theory at all even though most of our long-term investigations regarding what makes the world of business work are material for theory. The sad fact remains that in the corporate world there is little reward for theory; the reward is for getting things done.

Might we consider the possibility that ethnographic work is potentially as generative of theory as any other kind of empirical work? It requires tracking particular phenomena and their distribution through time and space to arrive at generalizations that eventually could develop into full-fledged named theories. In corporate ethnography, this endeavor is undermined by the conditions of our work, which in most cases precludes a long-term focus. The mental shift that would be required is a move from seeing ethnography as a validating science to seeing it as a discovery science (Whalen and Whalen 2004). With that in mind, one can see, distributed throughout the chapters, a plethora of experiences and insights that could be seen as embryo theories, or theories in waiting. Consider, for example, Isaacs' observations about task allocation in hospital nursing and its relationship to top-down planning of tasks, or Cefkin's theory of temporality that is already anticipating the naming that is necessary for theories to acquire distribution and "a social life" in an appropriate community.

Identity Conflict and Ethics

To the extent that the capitalist economy is seen as exploitative, working in industry raises ethical questions for many of us, insiders as well as outsiders.[8] The very nature of our work produces issues that range from identity conflicts involving loyalty to company and team to serious ethical worries and concerns, especially about long-term effects. A major issue for all of us is the potential for divided loyalties. To be effective in an organization, you have to be able to speak the language and think the thinking of the company, but that may generate creeping identity conflicts. Such conflicts are evident at various places in the book as part of project descriptions. Both Denny and Sunderland explicitly point to the role of learning to speak the language of the corporation and thereby thinking inside its rules and accepting its unspoken assumptions. That the ethnographer is likely to be in the minority

position in crossdisciplinary corporate teams makes it more isolating and more difficult to disagree with company policy and worldview.

Ironically, it is often the very nature of our work that allows us to understand that when we contribute, say, to our funders' operational efficiency (a fairly positive goal), we may also be contributing to people losing their jobs; that when we help them design more effective advertising, we may contribute to the deterioration of people's lives with new products and advertised services. Down the line, we might be part of an effort that contributes to undesirable changes in families, communities and society.

Many of us have struggled with these kinds of questions throughout our working lives. Part of the dynamics of the conflict is a strong identification with ethical principles acquired during our training as humanistic social scientists, while another part is deeply grounded in the ability to see the ways in which changes—no matter how well intentioned—also may have negative consequences. We hope that companies anticipate and deal with those consequences, but to what extent are *we* responsible for them? And what can we do to mitigate negative effects? How can we, for example, help deal with a necessary RIF (Reduction in Force)? What can we do to minimize (or turn positive) the changes to which our work contributes?[9] This is particularly an issue for consulting relationships that are inherently short and narrowly focused and by their very nature do not necessarily raise questions about long-term outcomes. The typical and endemic requirements creep I mentioned earlier, through which project goals are changed on the fly, is a major contributor to situations where at some time during a project you may find yourself producing outcomes you had not envisioned.

In the following chapters, issues of loyalty to the company that employs and funds you are explicitly discussed in Dyad 5 by Hepsø and Brun-Cottan, where Hepsø discusses identity conflicts and Brun-Cottan deals with some pragmatic solutions that her team devised in a case where ethnographic work could have contributed to very negative consequences for a substantial part of society.

Rijsberman, in Chapter 4, gives us a very thoughtful examination of an ethical question. The goals of her research on videoconferencing had not included identifying any misalignments between company goals and consumers' preferences, some of which emerged in her research. Nevertheless, this has led her to ask the broader question: is videoconferencing inherently inimical to the work environment? I think it is these ethical questions, kicked up one level, that stimulate the ethnographic community to investigate higher-level ethical issues.

In academic anthropology, we teach explicitly about the process and the dangers of "going native" when the dual roles of "involved participant" and "objective observer" are no longer in balance. When ethnographic work turns lonely in corporate situations, the conversations that are necessary to keep this balance are often not available. This is one of those situations where having a network of like-minded practitioners in whom to confide can prove invaluable.

Conclusions

This book occupies the white space between theory and practice. It is an offer to engage in conversation and action to advance corporate ethnography as a new playground and a new market niche for applied social science, anthropology, and ethnography. We are extending this offer to our colleagues in the field, the corporate ethnographers who are already exploring the "corporate jungles" within which we work, as well as to newcomers, including those who are contemplating a career in business ethnography.

We see a rising interest in corporate ethnography in academia with demands from students and professors who are asking for insights, for ways into the world of practicing corporate ethnography, and we hope that our book provides just that. As a matter of fact, we believe that aspiring practitioners will find answers to many of their practical and conceptual questions in the following pages, questions about such things as access, entry, negotiating power structures, pitfalls, and ethics. These can be found here in chapters where experienced practitioners provide insights, project descriptions, models, and even exercises.

But we also want to extend this conversation to practitioners in business who have engaged, or are planning to engage, anthropologists and ethnography. We seek connections to interdisciplinary teams, project stakeholders, managers, and decision-makers: in short, the new breed of practitioners arising within corporations and other large organizations who are ready to explore the white spaces between the social sciences and business.

Throughout this book we have been mindful of the fact that corporate ethnography will be advanced to the extent that we manage to speak to both of these audiences: our conversational partners in business *and* in academia. So we are looking to engage not only with anthropology departments, but also with schools of design and business schools. We want to provide material both for corporate interests and for aspiring practitioners' career choices. This book is equally for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. And it is to this rich and fertile mix of foundations, experiences, and aspirations that we dedicate our endeavor.

Acknowledgments

Not all of us who were part of the original SfAA panel were able to carry through with us to the end. However, every one of them made major contributions to our thinking and had an effect on the shape of this volume. Overwhelmed by the realities of their other obligations (remember, this was to be a one-time, ephemeral, fun kind of thing), they have nevertheless remained involved in the fate of "our baby." Not visible in a chapter that bears their name, they are the fairy godmothers who continue to remain connected to us and the volume's career.

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Notes

1 Anthrodesign was started by anthropologist Natalie Hanson in 2002 while she was struggling to reconcile her doctoral studies with full-time employment at the software company SAP, a market leader for supply chain management.

2 EPIC was organized by anthropologists ken anderson from Intel and Tracey Lovejoy from Microsoft in 2005. EPIC publishes peer-reviewed papers presented at the meetings as well as workshops, posters, and artifacts. The *Proceedings*, in their seventh edition at the time of this writing, provide a powerful overview of the development of the field in less than 10 years.

3 Please be aware that I am a deeply entrenched, dyed-in-the-wool anthropologist. You may notice my tendency to let the terms "anthropology" and "anthropological" stand for what in fact by now has a much broader disciplinary basis and influence.

4 Many of us who have come through graduate training and especially the Ph.D. experience (or ordeal) had to fight for years to get the value of our contributions acknowledged and rewarded. Clearly, business values competition and fosters it through performance appraisals and production numbers, not to speak of the dreaded ROI (Return on Investment). It may sound counterintuitive, but in these complex environments a highly competitive spirit may actually be counterproductive to getting something done.

5 As editor, I thought of my work as "herding cats" (though I was always worried that the "cats" might find that offensive). I saw my job as pulling together the variety of viewpoints into a coherent whole, an interesting terrain that has some landmarks and connecting paths. At the same time I tried not to kill the spirit of the original conversation. I wanted us to let live the variety of writing styles from what I call "academese" to "manifesto" style, and thereby preserve the thinking spaces the panel had opened up. I sought to preserve as much as possible the spirit of the original conversation and so you will find very different writing styles, ranging from enthusiastic advocacy to cool assessment to more academic prose.

6 Interestingly, this is not only a problem for the largely qualitative data we rely on in ethnographic research, but also (and maybe to an even greater degree) for the hard sciences. See Gray (2007) for an insightful discussion of the magnitude of this problem.

7 This shift is paralleled only by what the arrival of probability statistics and game theory produced in earlier times. A bit puzzling in this conjecture is the fact that a quick search of the 2010 and 2011 *Proceedings of EPIC* shows a first major paper in 2010 (Slobin and Cherkasky 2010) but comes up with no evidence of major breakthroughs. Yet?

8 There are parallels here with the embedding of anthropologists in military operations in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an issue that has become a point of deep dissension within academic anthropology.

9 Actually, there exists in the community quite a list of possible ways to influence those negative outcomes, most of which include making provisions for including those affected in designing the transition.