Ethnographic Research in Organizations:
Theories, Ethics, Strategies (Part II).

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Position

- No Archimedean point of enlightenment – no all-knowing scientific 'point from nowhere' (Bourdieu) - Haraway's 'God trick'
- Field – site – position. Reality is seen from a definite place – position – which exists relative to other positions.
- Researcher and researched are all positioned actors – all expressions are positioned and are interpreted for their political, ideological overtones
- Reflexivity – map their and your interested position in social space – especially look at the spot you cannot see directly – your own point of view.
- Systematic analysis from a particular site that refocuses attention on what is happening in a field

Position in the field

- Where is your organisation within this university-industrial complex?
  - See the complex not as made up of discrete organisations – boundaries are constantly being made, reinforced, changed
  - See the complex as made up of value chains (Porter) and/or
  - Systems of governance
- Why choose this organisation as a site for researching this field? What perspective does it give you?
- Practical politics - What are the strengths/vulnerabilities of 'your' organisation in this complex – are there likely to be any politically sensitive points?

Location within the Organisation

- A position that gives you experience of daily work-life – could range from having a desk, to being given a task
  - Research insights
  - Practical experience
- Recognition that you are a researcher and the issues you are interested in. Permission (encouragement) to do this research through access to documents, participant observation, interviews – how active a participant do they/you want you to be?
- An element of your research re-packaged as useful for them – a report, presentation…? (Plus a reflective role)

Insider/Outsider Position

- Outsider/insider; stranger/friend; observer/participant (oscillation between objectivism/phenomenology, experience-distant and experience-near concepts)

- Keep your outsider identity as a Marie Curie fellow, employed by your university (protects your research freedom)

- Locate yourself in the day-to-day work life of the organisation with a manager as your supervisor/sponsor/gatekeeper (someone strong enough in the organisation to guide you well and to mediate your relations with the organisation's powerful people)

Reflexive Analysis of your Positionality

- Consider how you are being positioned by your colleagues/ how you are positioning yourself
  - It changes continually, so you have to negotiate and adjust
  - How are people looking at you – are you getting stereotyped or side-lined?
  - How are you behaving/responding
- Are you in the right position/relationships to get the kind of information you need for your research?
- Reflexive employees (lay ethnographers) - objectify and reflect on themselves and role in the organisation to optimise conduct, work relations, corporate values

Organisational Processes

- Their representation – organograms
- What are the central processes – in a system of value production, what values are being produced, who contributes what, what blockages occur, what support do managers give when people are struggling with value problems (Greenwood)
- Serendipity – notice opportunities to pursue what you are interested in; let what is important in the context reshape your interests
- Weirdness - Things are said/happen that you did not expect and cannot explain. Rich points (Agar). Surprises (Willis). Problem (Wright)

Keywords and Narratives

- Chase something through an organisation, e.g. a keyword, associated concepts, semantic cluster, narrative
- 'From idea to invoice' - What does this mean. How did it emerge?
- Other words in semantic cluster? Autonomy, top down leaders, university as driver of the economy, relations with 'surrounding society', performance (industry to harvest outputs), payment by outputs
- How did it become dominant? Contestation over 'autonomy'
- What are the material effects – trace the legislation, university-government relations, management, day to day changes

Analysis

- Particular instances with wider relevance – a perspective from a site on wider processes of governance (not generalisation)

- How ideas work in a particular place – the particular formation – not reliance on general terms (NPM, neoliberlism)

- Writing – aim is not to explain all you know (to gain a grade) but aim to educate the reader

Ethics

- Do your daily colleagues understand that you are a researcher and what you are interested in? Don't just rely on the boss to have got you access
- Do they understand that you are researching all the time? Not just in fixed interviews.
- How do you both fit into office life and mark that you are researching? Always having a notebook? How do your thoughts and practices feed into the reality you are studying?
- Establish methods for them to mark confidential information (write this in Secondment Agreement)
- Always be confidential – never say 'so and so told me that….' Office life is often tense and 'political' . If they attempt to use you as a resource in their politics, turn their comments into questions – try and leave the place better than you found it.
- Anonymity – gain agreement on whether you will use the name of the organisation and on how you will refer to positioned individuals without revealing their identity.
- Feed back – use your secondment supervisor as a sounding board, sense the politically sensitive issues and how to put them over. Always present research orally before giving it to them in writing
- Ownership and right to comment (Secondment Agreement) – you own the research material, but give them sight of drafts,. Request factual corrections and respond to them,. Welcome views on the analysis but don't promise to include them.

References

Haraway, Donna 1988 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' *Feminist Studies* 14(3):575-599.

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Willis, Paul and Trondman, Mats 2002 'Manifesto for Ethnography' *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies* 2 (3): 394-402.
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Wright, Susan 2011 'Section I: Introduction to Studying Policy: Methods, Paradigms, Perspectives' in Cris Shore, Susan Wright, Davide Però (eds) *Policy Worlds: Anthropology and the Analysis of Contemporary Power,* Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 27-31.