RENEWING OUR DISCIPLINE

Badges, Branding and Business Growth: The ROI of an ethnographic praxis professional certification

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Renewal is not just about natural cycles of waxing and waning: sometimes it means a leap forward. The progress of ethnographic praxis in industry has been a gradual but steady evolution. Yet recent economic events and academic trends suggest that the moment has arrived for ethnographers to expand our influence by codifying our practices. This paper proposes the establishment of an Ethnographic Praxis Professional (EPP) certification based upon an Ethnographic Body of Knowledge (EBOK). A professional credential and an authoritative repository of shared concepts and methods would benefit clients, employers, professors, students – and most of all ourselves as practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Renewal is not just about natural cycles of waxing and waning, like the phases of the moon or the seasons of the year or the bull and bear episodes of the capital markets. Sometimes it means a leap forward.

The progress of ethnographic praxis in industry has been a gradual but steady evolution. In response to the "scientific management" doctrines espoused by Frederick Taylor and his disciples during the first decades of the twentieth century, emphasizing efficiency based upon time-and-motion task studies (Taylor 1997), the Depression era in the U.S. gave rise to an alternative viewpoint. Beginning in the 1930's, the Human Relations movement sought to demonstrate the effect of social dynamics upon productivity and to focus management attention on the people doing the work (Mayo 2003). Meanwhile the creation of the American Marketing Society encouraged social scientists to employ qualitative and quantitative research methods in the service of product design, advertising and customer relations (Burns 2009).

The Society for Applied Anthropology was founded in 1941, and World War Two elevated the urgency of studying how workplace communities interacted with new machinery. Human Factors Engineering emerged initially as a means of verifying the safety of aircraft for combat. Later these methods proved helpful in evaluating the usability of other innovative technologies and the ergonomics of Human-Computer Interaction (Wickens 1997). Postwar industry adopted Quality Management methods for manufacturing that regarded understanding workers' needs, attitudes and habits as a prerequisite for implementing effective process improvements (Deming 1982).

As computers spread beyond laboratory clean rooms into offices and homes, the demand for anthropological insights into the work environment grew. The National Association for Practicing Anthropology was established in 1983. That same year saw the creation of the Institute for Research and Learning at the Palo Alto Research Center; this initiative became the renowned Work Practice and Technology Group in 1989 (Szymanski and Whalen 2011). The new fields of Requirments Engineering (Robertson 2006) and User Experience Design (Norman 1990) gained influence in the 1990's as developers recognized the importance of researching users' sensory, emotional and cognitive responses. With the inauguration of EPIC in 2005, many of these occupations which historically had been distinct but related soon discovered their common purposes and methods. Ethnographic

research has proved a worthwhile investment for an ever-expanding range of industries, businesses and commercial endeavors (Cefkin 2009, B. Jordan 2012).

During this period of growth, a recurring topic for water cooler discussions and nowadays for chatter in cyberspace has been the creation of a professional certification for ethnographers. Codifying ethnographic praxis would indeed be a big leap, and it's time to give the idea more serious consideration. This paper is intended to stimulate brainstorming and debate, as well as to mobilize any EPIC colleagues who may wish to develop an action plan. Regardless of the ultimate outcome, envisioning alternative future directions for our community should foster a sense of renewal.

BUSINESS CASE

Goal and Deliverables

The goal of professional certification would be to expand the influence of ethnographic praxis in industry: more jobs; greater impact upon business strategy, operations, and workplaces; and higher compensation in recognition of the value of the contribution to the enterprise.

Based upon comparisons with certifications in other domains, the components of a certification would include:

- An Ethnographic Body of Knowledge (EBOK) that would comprise an agreed-upon set of standards and procedures.
- An Ethnographic Praxis Professional (EPP) certification that would be awarded to candidates who passed an exam demonstrating sufficient familiarity with the EBOK, who obtained training in ethnography through either an academic institution or an approved provider of continuing education, and who documented work experience related to ethnography.
- An Ethnographic Praxis Institute (EPI) that would create and maintain the EBOK content and EPP certification process.
- Financing for the EBOK, EPP and EPI would be obtained through revenues from the EPP applications as well as sales of the EBOK and EPI annual membership dues.

Problems to be Solved

Outside academic anthropology departments, the definition of ethnography is not well understood. Concepts and methods that ethnographers routinely employ in social science research studies undergo significant modifications for use in business environments, and the results of customized approaches to data gathering and analysis become less verifiable and reproducible. While there will never be one "right" way to "do" ethnography for industrial purposes, the absence of common principles, methodologies, standards and vocabularies can foster an attitude of "I'm an ethnographer because I say I am." Without peer reviewers or Institutional Review Boards to evaluate proposals and works-in-progress it is difficult to determine the boundaries of competence, ethics and professional conduct.

From the perspective of many clients and employers, it is hard to shop around if you do not know what the price should be, what features are standard vs. optional, and what normally is included in the warranty. Experienced clients who hire ethnographers for consumer research projects have developed

checklists to compare different vendors' services. In response, experienced consultancies that market ethnographic research services to large corporate and government clients have created tiered packages of offerings with clearly defined deliverables. Each customer relies on its own needs assessments, insights and lessons learned for establishing the goals and evaluation criteria, cross-pollinated to some extent by the movement of client sourcing specialists between jobs. Likewise, organizations that employ ethnographers as individuals or as members of a research staff vary widely in the degree to which they label the work as ethnography and in the responsibilities they assign for policy making, product and system design, or customer service. It is possible that if ethnography's menu and ingredients were clearer, more new clients and employers would develop an appetite.

Professional life as a practicing ethnographer can be rather lonely and solipsistic. Nowadays many practitioners attend EPIC, but one gathering per year has a limited effect upon sustaining a community. There are some excellent on-line forums such as the AnthroDesign Yahoo listserv, the NAPA LinkedIn discussion group, and the Open Anthropology Cooperative website. Yet compared with other occupations, opportunities for professional development are limited. When new technologies give rise to new ethnographic methods, knowledge transfer is ad-hoc and informal. When an individual ethnographer is promoted and given funding to build a research staff, trial-and-error rather than systematic study of best practices is the typical approach to learning. If a mid-career businessperson in another field wishes to become an ethnographer or understand how to manage ethnographers, non-academic training courses are scarce. Creating a standard body of knowledge and a professional certification could lay the foundation for a human network infrastructure that nurtured the discipline's ongoing growth and continuous improvement.

In the current economic climate, academic institutions are under pressure to cut costs, increase enrollment and provide graduates with marketable skills. Students want internships that lead to jobs, and after graduation a steady career path that enables them to pay their debts. Some anthropology departments are having difficulty demonstrating the ROI of their curricula both to their own universities and to future job-seekers. Student ethnographers who develop an interest in law, medicine, international development, government and other well-established specialties can more readily find internships and follow in the footsteps of successful mentors in those fields. By contrast student ethnographers who prefer to focus on business, technology, and other forms of industry are less likely to receive support and encouragement from their anthropology professors, and may find themselves at a disadvantage when competing for internships with students from business, engineering or design schools. A professional certification for ethnographers could enhance collaboration between universities and their surrounding communities. It could enable anthropology professors to better explain how ethnography can serve the purpose of designing, making and selling things. It could help recruit more anthropology students who hoped to apply their humanistic perspective throughout a career in industry.

Opportunities Identified

During the decade before the financial crisis of 2008, the growth in computing power inspired a management strategy of relying upon mathematical algorithms and quantitative data to model, analyze and predict human behavior. This trend came to an abrupt halt when the assumptions underlying the numerical constructs proved false and led to a worldwide recession. Subsequently a new idea has taken hold in executive corner offices: to understand people, it is useful to observe them and talk with them

because their decisions are sometimes irrational and often influenced by cultural factors that are hard to quantify. To be sure, data analytics remains a robust field of research – and its growth mirrors the expansion of enormous datasets compiled from internet traffic, mobile telecommunications device logs, credit and debit card transactions, and other sources on an ever-growing list of monitoring capabilities. For point-of-sale consumer behavior tracking, the statistical approach has always yielded worthwhile insights. Yet when an individual is continuously enmeshed in a social group, and the group's identity and norms strongly affect his or her choices, then ethnography can uncover those seemingly irrational and cultural elements that may otherwise be invisible. From the management perspective, the ethnography "brand" is presently in vogue, and a professional certification could strengthen the brand.

The demographics of anthropology graduates suggest that any growth in opportunities for ethnographers working in industry could be well supplied by qualified practitioners for the foreseeable future. A recent AAA survey reported that more than 50% of students who earn anthropology degrees at all levels now work outside academia. Among respondents with Master's degrees, 76% worked in occupations typically represented at EPIC (Fiske et al. 2010). A professional certification could cause that percentage to increase as ethnographers were recruited from other specialties and new graduates joined the ranks.

Among Human Resources professionals, a preference has evolved for job applicants who possess formal certifications. The range of certifiable bodies of knowledge is vast and growing. Once limited to financial, medical, scientific and engineering domains, common credentials now include such badges as Certified Marketing Professional, Certified Purchasing Manager, Certified Risk Professional, and Certified Meeting Manager. Many organizations employ automated screening software to filter out applications submitted on-line that lack specific keywords related to certifications. If an ethnographic professional certification were officially recognized by Human Resources managers, it would be added to the automated software's search criteria and more ethnographers' resumes would be passed along to live recruiters who understood the qualifications.

Within large organizations, cross-cultural communication for projects and operations has become a critical success factor. Beginning with the implementation of secure business-to-business data exchange on the internet in 2006, companies have spread their work across the globe. Whether in regional offices or on the premises of outsourced offshore suppliers, it is now routine for people of disparate cultural backgrounds to collaborate on virtual teams. Meanwhile immigration policies in the U.S., Canada and United Kingdom that favored skilled, well-educated workers expanded the cultural diversity of co-located team members who must learn to get along with each other face-to-face every day. Inevitably, tensions and misunderstandings arise. Under these circumstances, ethnographers play an important role as referees and ombudsmen, particularly during the processes of requirements definition, system design and usability testing. Professional certification could add legitimacy and authority to this function, and provide managers with additional bargaining power when they wish to include ethnographic services in their budget.

CONTEXT: OTHER CERTIFICATIONS

Not all professional certifications are created equal, and not all professional certifications that are created ever issue a sufficient number of badges for the brand to be taken seriously. So far this author has been unable to find any published research analyzing the impact of various types of new

certifications upon their respective professions. Therefore the evidence presented here is subjective and anecdotal.

The information in this paper is derived from the author's ten-year experience as a faculty member at the American Management Association, teaching courses to novice, middle and senior managers from a wide range of industries and occupations across the U.S. In addition, I have worked for more than twenty-five years as a manager and consultant in the software engineering and information technology division of large global financial services organizations, from which vantage point I have observed the birth and maturation (and occasionally the demise) of various types of certifications. Finally, in ethnographic terms, as a participant I have obtained a PMI certification and have experienced its effect upon my own career.

To provide context for the exploration of an ethnographic professional certification, I will describe three other well-established programs in order from newest to oldest.

Certified Business Analysis Professional

The CBAP certification was created in 2006 by the International Institute of Business Analysis (www.theiiba.org). No data is available on the number of IIBA members, but the organization claims more than 1000 CBAPs in 30 countries as of 2012. Criteria for certification include an exam based upon the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK), 21 hours of related education, and 3,600 hours of work experience distributed across the BABOK's six Knowledge Areas (IIBA 2009). The IIBA states that the occupation of business analysis has grown by 20% since the CBAP certification was introduced.

Business Analyst first appeared as a job category around the time of Y2K remediation projects. It combined elements of strategic planning, requirements definition, system design, usability testing, and end user training – all conducted within the organization. While some quantitative methods such as surveys were included, a far heavier emphasis was placed on qualitative methods commonly found in market and consumer research and product design. Data modeling with techniques and schemas familiar to engineers was also incorporated into the official body of knowledge.

After a strong start, the growth in CBAPs awarded seems to have leveled off. Many continuing education schools offer courses on business analysis, and attendance is high enough that demand seems steady. Organizations still employ business analysts, and the content of the BABOK remains relevant even amid the major economic and technological changes following the 2008 financial crisis. The slowdown in certifications may be caused by the fact that budget-conscious employers are willing to pay for some training but not to subsidize the entire cost of certification.

Certified Software Engineering Professional

The CSEP certification was established by the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers in 2004 (www.ieee.org). The IEEE has 85,000 members worldwide, and has awarded 1000 CSEP certifications as of 2012. Criteria for certification include an exam based upon the Software Engineering Body of Knowledge (SWEBOK) and 7,000 hours of relevant work experience during a four-year period (IEEE 2004).

Proponents of the CSEP and other associated but less rigorous software engineering certifications believe that it bridges the gap between the concepts and skills typically conveyed by academic

computer science degrees and the knowledge necessary to succeed as a software engineer on the job. Of the three certifications discussed in this paper, it has been the least successful in terms of attracting applicants and obtaining management support. One possible explanation may be that the technologies upon which the SWEBOK is based change too rapidly for the vocabulary, standards and procedures to stay current.

Project Management Professional

The PMP certification was established in 1984 by the Project Management Institute (www.pmi.org). Today PMI has 600,000 members belonging to 250 chapters in 70 countries. The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) is recognized by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and its framework is embedded in the structure of many project management software tools (PMI 2008). PMI reports that there are presently 460,000 certified PMPs.

To obtain a certification, an applicant must pass a 4-hour exam on the PMBOK. Work experience of 3,500 hours during a 3-year period must be documented and several professional references supplied. The initial certification requires 35 hours of formal project management education, and ongoing professional development activities are necessary for renewals every five years. PMI reports that earning the PMP certification results in an average salary increase of 9.4%.

The creation of the PMBOK and PMP certification coincided with the deployment of personal computers as standard office equipment in developed countries. Software that had been installed only on mainframe computers operated by specialized technicians became available to the general population of white-collar workers. Project management methods previously employed to construct tangible deliverables such as roads, bridges, and factories began to be applied to less tangible deliverables such as training programs, marketing campaigns, event planning, and software development. The demand for certification arose out of a need to ensure that practitioners were speaking a common language, following defined and repeatable processes, and achieving appropriate standards of quality.

In my experience the PMP certification has been a good investment. I obtained the certification in 2003 at the request of several of my clients who felt I needed it to stay competitive, even though project management was not the principal service I was offering. During the past ten years I have observed that organizations have grown increasingly selective about having only PMP-certified project managers as employees and contractors; at the same time corporate procurement managers have increasingly stipulated that outsourced suppliers' project managers must hold PMP certifications, and vendors include this information when submitting proposals. As the PMBOK has gained acceptance, a stronger culture of project management has evolved within organizations that support it. Managers benefit because projects can be more easily compared, measured and monitored. Practitioners benefit because talent can be more easily recognized and rewarded. The number of PMPs awarded continues to grow steadily, and the number of organization adopting the PMBOK also continues to rise.

The appeal of the PMBOK and the PMP certification may be attributed in part to unique characteristics of the project management domain. Yet some features could provide guidance for ethnographers seeking to emulate their success. For example, the content is based upon general knowledge areas, phases, processes, and skillsets rather than specific behaviors or technologies. Within this framework there is much flexibility for interpretation and customization.

EBOK Components

To create an Ethnographic Body of Knowledge, practitioners could begin by borrowing, leveraging and adapting the conceptual frameworks of other professional BOKs. This approach would avoid duplication of effort, focus the design discussions, and make the EBOK more comprehensible to non-ethnographers. Such a conceptual framework might include three components: Knowledge Areas and Domains; Phases and Activities; and Process Cycles.

Knowledge Areas and Domains

The Knowledge Areas and Domains describe the types of professions and occupations for which the EBOK can provide useful ideas, methods and tools. Typically a practitioner would specialize in a particular domain. However, to obtain an Ethnographic Praxis Professional certification an applicant would need to demonstrate an understanding of and familiarity with the praxis of ethnography in the other domains. Certified practitioners in other fields often report that studying multiple knowledge areas leads to more inspiration and cross-fertilization in addressing creative challenges on the job, as well as greater professional mobility.

- *Management* would comprise domains such as work practice and work process research, risk analysis and quality assurance.
- *Engineering* domains would include the development of products, systems and services.
- *Design* would be devoted to the domains of user experience, interaction and innovation.
- *Sales* would encompass the domains of advertising, market and consumer research, and political activism.

The information for a domain would consist of vocabulary, principles, success factors and generally accepted practices for that specific type of work. Experts would provide case studies and references to literature illustrating these concepts in action.

Management	Engineering	Design	Sales
Work practice/process research	Product development	User experience design	Advertising
Risk analysis	Service development	Interaction design	Market/consumer research
Quality assurance	Systems development	Innovation design	Political activism

FIGURE 1. Ethnography Knowledge Areas and Domains

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Phases and Activities

An ethnographic research study follows a pattern of sequential steps. The high-level steps are phases; each phase can be broken down into activities; if appropriate the activities can be further broken down into smaller-scale tasks. To improve the probability of success, a checklist with assignments of roles and responsibilities should be developed for the most detailed level of work.

- *Engagement.* The initial phase involves establishing the sponsorship of the ethnographic study and identifying the target community about which the research is to be conducted. The scope of the effort is agreed upon by the sponsor and the ethnographer. Formal contractual or administrative approvals are obtained and documented.
- *Strategy.* During this planning phase, appropriate methods are selected to achieve the goals of the research. In collaboration with the sponsor, the ethnographer creates a workplan that ensures the scope of the effort can be accomplished within the budget and deadlines. If the study needs multiple researchers, the team members are recruited. The lead ethnographer develops and delivers training to the team so that methods of data gathering will be consistent.
- *Fieldwork.* Activities during this phase would include selecting the location(s) for the study; identifying the informants; building the schedule for the interviews, observations and other research tasks; and establishing auditable procedures to ensure that the implementation goes as smoothly as possible to collect valid, reliable data.
- *Results.* Back from the field, during this phase the ethnographer's activities focus upon organizing large quantities of data, performing the analysis, and reporting conclusions.

While some back-to-the-drawing-board revisions are usually necessary because requirements change and reality in the field differs from expectations, the ideal sequence of steps would be based upon a model where a predecessor phase finishes before a successor phase starts.
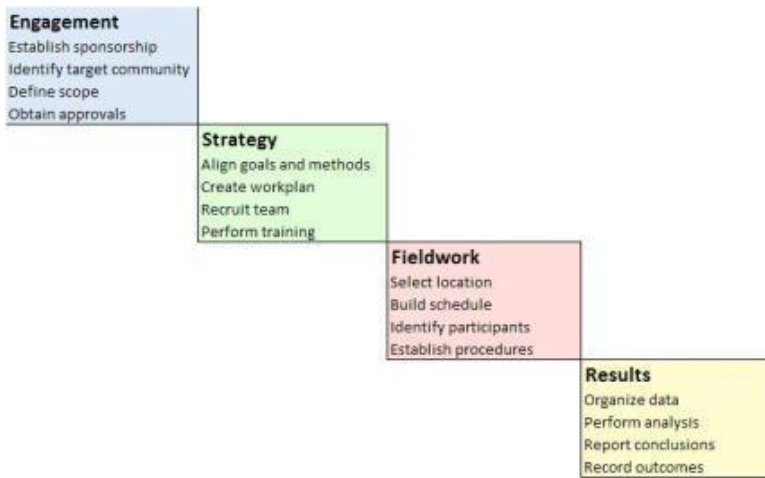
Engagement
Establish sponsorship
Identify target community
Define scope
Obtain approvals

Strategy
Align goals and methods
Create workplan
Recruit team
Perform training

Fieldwork
Select location
Build schedule
Identify participants
Establish procedures

Results
Organize data
Perform analysis
Report conclusions
Record outcomes

FIGURE 2. Ethnography Knowledge Areas and Domains

Process Cycles

In contrast to the sequential phases, an ethnographic research study also features iterative process cycles that repeat multiple times in an ongoing feedback loop of discovery, re-evaluation and adjustment.

- *Advocacy.* The ultimate beneficiaries of the research are not always identified at the beginning of the study, and new stakeholders may emerge while the work is in progress. Likewise the risks to vulnerable populations within the target community may surface during the data collection. In response, the ethnographer may be obliged to set unforeseen limits upon the scope of the effort or articulate the consequences of the study in such a manner that the risks can be mitigated.

- *Theory.* Practitioners are by definition practical people, and discussions of theory are rarer in industry than in academia. Yet every practitioner's conceptual framework and approach to conducting research are fundamentally molded by some sort of theory, however unconscious. Some practitioners learned traditional ethnographic theories as students of cultural anthropology; some acquired theory by studying marketing or Computer-Human Interaction. Explaining the ethnographic theories animating the study to sponsors, stakeholders and team members who are interested enhances the researcher's credibility and provokes worthwhile discussions. Being mindful of the governing theories can enable the ethnographer to select appropriate advisors if the research encounters obstacles. Theory also influences the taxonomy of patterns discerned in the data.

- *Technology.* A quick glance at the discussions on the AnthroDesign listserv reveals the enormous range of technology available to an ethnographer today, and selecting the right

affordable tools for the job is no easy matter. This process involves first analyzing the environment – both the location where the research will be performed and the organizational constraints of the stakeholders who will be paying for the gadgetry and/or hosting the data. Involving the sponsor and team members in evaluating potential technology can facilitate budget approval and appropriate usage.

- *Methodology.* By default, the first set of methodology process decisions usually relate to the qualitative and quantitative techniques to be employed for the study. These preliminary choices inevitably change as issues arise with resources, schedule and budget. Yet other methodologies require attention as well. Most organizations have a project management methodology which a research study must incorporate. A finance methodology determines procedures for bookkeeping, cash flow and payments to team members and participants. A documentation methodology establishes the data repository, the specifications for information to be recorded, and the requirements for privacy and security.
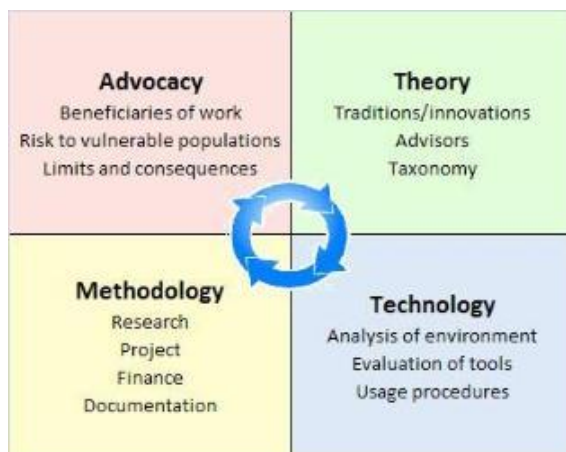

FIGURE 3. Ethnography Process Cycles

EPP Skillsets

To earn an Ethnographic Praxis Professional certification, an applicant should document education, training and relevant professional experience in research skills that are of value to industry: data collection, data analysis, and presentation of results.

- *Data Collection* skills would include both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The core curriculum might be based upon the methodology workshops taught to anthropology graduate students by the National Science Foundation, augmented by recent innovations employing advanced digital technologies. The ethics of data gathering would also be

presented, along with comparisons showing the differences between academic and commercial research.

- *Data Analysis* would likewise encompass both qualitative and quantitative skills, and applicants should show that they understand how different analytic techniques are appropriate for different perspectives, insights and audiences. Evidence of peer review of analytical work by colleagues, stakeholders or team members would demonstrate an ability to perform analysis in a praxis environment.

- *Presentation of Results* varies in format among the knowledge areas, but applicants should be familiar with a range of options beyond their own personal experience. Oral formats would include lectures, demos, meetings and teleconferences. Among the most common written formats are reports, white papers, slide decks and websites. Visual media such as films and videos have long been effective for conveying ethnographic insights. Digital social networks and listservs are becoming increasingly influential.

Reviewing all applicants' documentation of their qualifications in each of these skillsets would of course be impossible. Organizations that award other professional certifications rely upon "spot checks" of a small sample to ensure compliance and maintain standards.

Risks and Issues

A leap forward into new territory entails pitfalls and slippery surfaces. To borrow concepts from the field of risk management, one can expect to face "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns." For the latter category, planning is impossible; preparation consists of setting aside a contingency reserve and relying upon decision-makers' good judgment. For the "known unknowns," analysts sometimes divide the possibilities into categories of Product, Process and People.

Product

The Ethnographic Body of Knowledge, the Ethnographic Praxis Professional certification, and the Ethnographic Praxis Institute can be regarded as three separate but interdependent products.

- *Business model.* The creation and maintenance of these products would require time, money and resources. The business model could prove economically unfeasible or unsustainable over time.

- *Boundary definitions.* Certifications already exist in fields that are related to or share praxis space with the proposed EBOK Knowledge Areas. Professional associations for ethnographers such as NAPA, SfAA, UXPA, and ACM SIG-CHI already represent the interests of specific types of practitioners. Establishing the boundaries of the EBOK and the agenda of the EPI could provoke fragmentation and factionalism within the community of practicing ethnographers.

- *Assessment tool validation.* Selecting appropriate multiple choice questions and establishing the correct answers for the certification exam could become an obstacle if a consensus cannot be obtained.

- *Certification criteria acceptance.* In addition to the exam, other evaluation criteria would be necessary. Obtaining a consensus in this area could likewise present challenges.

- *Publication review board.* The content of the EBOK would be presented as a document of several hundred pages. It might be available for free, or it might be sold to raise funds to support the certification program. In either case, difficulties could arise in recruiting qualified practitioners who have enough time to serve on the editorial board.

Process

The development and operation of a certification program would set in motion a number of ongoing processes.

- *Administrative infrastructure.* The requirements for running a non-profit organization could be burdensome. Applicants who earned a certification would regard it as an investment in their careers. Meeting the expectations of these customers could demand an increasing amount of resources over time.
- *IT infrastructure.* Most certification exams are conducted on-line. Some aspects could be outsourced, yet the need for the EPI to maintain a Web presence and basic record-keeping functionality could become costly.
- *Volunteer vs. paid labor.* The founders of the EPI and the creators of the EBOK would be volunteer subject matter experts. The administrative and IT staff would expect to be paid. The division of labor between these two groups could be ambiguous.
- *Revisions.* Periodically the EBOK and the EPP exam would need to be updated. The effort involved in revisions could be significant. If subject matter experts were unwilling or unable to do the work, the certification could become obsolete.
- *Renewal requirements.* Many professional certifications expire periodically unless evidence is submitted of continuing education, publications, conference presentations, or other forms of service to the professional community. If these requirements were too narrow or time-consuming, the EPP certification could lose its appeal.
- *Marketing plan.* The launch of a new professional certification would be of interest to clients, employers, practitioners, Human Resources managers, training companies and academic anthropology departments. Unless a marketing plan were developed that took into consideration the various perspectives of these stakeholders, the impact of the program could be diminished.
- *Adoption by training companies.* A key factor in the growth of the certification would be the availability of training courses offered to the public and to organizations by companies that have international reputations as providers of continuing education for employers. A lack of enthusiasm on the part of the training companies for the EBOK or an underestimation of its value to a wide range of business customers could prevent the certification from achieving a critical mass of acceptance.

People

Ultimately a new certification is about people. It changes their perceptions and relationships, and influences the dynamics of power both within an organization and between a vendor and a client.

- *Barriers to entry*. Awarding certain people badges of distinction automatically creates an in-group and an out-group. Some practitioners could object to a certification program on principle because they disapprove of perceived elitism or orthodoxy. Others could claim that a standardized certification process excludes the most creative innovators.
- *Theological disputes*. Obtaining a consensus on the exact words of a definition is never easy, and sometimes the debate uncovers profound philosophical disagreements. If the developers of the EBOK and EPP certification requirements are intransigent and cannot negotiate compromises on standards, the group's best efforts could be futile.
- *Institutional ossification*. The success of a professional certification brings its own challenges. Over the years, the Body of Knowledge can become a canon. Certified practitioners may resist new ideas and approaches because they are reluctant to admit that their expertise is obsolete. Unless the EPI accommodates changes in praxis, it could hinder rather than facilitate the growth of the professional community.

Next Steps

The goal of this paper has been to address the complaints and wishes expressed by many practitioners for greater recognition of ethnography as a profession within industry, business and engineering. A certification program is one potential solution to the problem. I have presented a business case for certification and described the characteristics of other types of certifications whose frameworks might offer useful models for ethnography. I have created the equivalent of a whiteboard rough sketch for the components of an Ethnographic Body of Knowledge and the skillsets expected of an Ethnographic Praxis Professional. Based upon my experience as a management consultant and trainer, I have envisioned potential risks and issues that developers of a certification program might face.

If a sufficient number of ethnographers agree that a certification program would be worthwhile, EPIC should consider creating a task force. Following the model of the other disciplines described in this paper, the members of the task force would represent the four knowledge areas and twelve domains in as equal proportions as possible. They would elect a chair and make a commitment to produce several initial deliverables such as draft outlines for an Ethnographic Body of Knowledge and an Ethnographic Praxis Practitioner qualifications. A minimum of ten years' experience with ethnographic praxis would be necessary to serve on the task force. The term of membership should be at least three years. It would also be useful at the outset to form committees for program management, research, technology support and administration.

The research committee would clarify the potential return on investment by evaluating the attitudes of practitioners, clients and employers. In effect, this could be regarded as an ethnography of ethnographers. Additionally, a feasibility study would determine the degree to which subject matter experts were willing and able to volunteer for the detailed development work. A workshop could be scheduled for the EPIC 2013 meeting to discuss progress and plan the future agenda.

The "brand" of ethnography already carries a certain cachet. With all the talent available among EPIC members, just imagine how brilliant our "badges" could be. Perhaps we should begin by designing a renewal-themed logo just for the fun of it.

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