

Ethnography as Executive Exposure – Spectacle or Higher Education?

HEINRICH SCHWARZ

ReD Associates, Copenhagen

This paper reports and reflects on a perhaps new development: A rise of projects where the ethnographic experience of clients moves to the center. With these projects, often for higher level executives, the exposure by clients to real people becomes the main selling point. The paper discusses two recent projects—a workshop for a media company and a study trip for management of a pharmaceutical company—to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of this species of corporate ethnography where experience production outweighs knowledge production. Is the result a spectacle or higher education? A return to capitalizing on the exotic, or a much needed learning experience for high-level decision makers? The paper suggests that the emphasis on ethnographic experience offers an opportunity to engage our clients more deeply but also entails the danger of losing control over the results of ethnographic research without adequate analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will report and reflect on what from my experience may be a new development: Consulting projects where the ethnographic experience moves to the center of the endeavor. In the last year or so I have been involved in a couple of projects where the main selling point was our clients' experience of real people in real contexts, while insight generation, the usual objective of ethnographic research, was only one of the additional goals. Often for higher level executives, the main objective of these workshops or research tours was to expose upper management to their customers and users, so that they could “see for themselves” what these wanted or needed and how they ticked.

Taking clients to the field per se is nothing new. As an innovation and strategy consultancy specializing in social science and ethnographic methods, we have always tried to take our clients with us into the field when doing ethnographic research for a project. Not all clients always come, but we always encourage them to. The idea is, of course, to show them our methods and to let them witness first hand what their customers want, whether these are TV watchers, medicinal cream users, whiskey drinkers, or small business IT managers. This will make it much easier to convince our client of the insights we will be presenting and the solutions we will be suggesting later on in the project. After all, one of the crucial tenets of business anthropology is to unlock the power of the real. Thus in our project practice, and in commercial ethnographic research overall, there has always been an element of clients meeting people in real settings and participating in the ethnographic process itself (see, for

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example, Anderson and McGonigal 2004, Jordan and Dalal 2006, Mariampolski 2005).¹

However, the projects I will discuss here are somewhat different. While in our consulting praxis so far this element of taking clients to the field used to be secondary to the generation of insights, in the cases discussed here the client's experience of their customers' lives moves to the center, and the development of user insights becomes more peripheral or disappears entirely. Thus I see a difference—and perhaps a shift—between our normal projects that could be called 'insight-centered' and these recent ones that could be called 'experience-centered'. Moreover, in the past it used to be mainly low to mid-level employees in marketing, user intelligence, product groups, corporate strategy or engineering who joined us in the field. Yet in these more recent projects the exposure to customers was sought increasingly from senior executives.

When ethnography's key objective becomes exposure to real people and inspiration through the richness and complexity of their lives, the role of the researcher, the nature of research, and the relation to our subjects and clients start to change. This raises a number of important questions for ethnographic as well as for consulting practice that I want to explore in this paper. What does the actual difference between insight-focused and experience-focused projects consist of? What drives the interest in such projects in the first place? Are we dealing with an entirely new species or merely a new mutation in the gene pool of ethnographic formats? Finally, how should we evaluate such projects: In orchestrating real-life access for our clients, are we creating mainly a spectacle or rather a much needed learning experience for high-level decision makers?

I want to investigate this renewed emphasis on exposure in ethnographic consulting practice here because I believe the notion of experience can enrich our understanding of the nature of ethnography and set the basis for suggestions on how to use ethnography in more productive ways in consulting. More specifically I will show that it points to both an opportunity and a danger – an opportunity to engage our clients more deeply and a danger to end up with arbitrary outcomes by leaving out systematic analysis and through that to weaken our expertise and mandate as consultants.

As foundation for the following discussion, I will present as case studies two projects I recently worked on. One is a workshop for managers and editors of a publishing company that aimed at media practitioners developing new media ideas based on a better understanding of their readers. The other project is a research trip for upper management of an R&D division of a pharmaceutical company. Although quite different in terms of industry, scope and research questions, both cases share a strong focus on executives experiencing their customers close up, and nicely illustrate the challenges and

¹ At times we have worked with our clients even more closely through all project phases, from research to analysis to concept development; see Schwarz, Holme et.al (2009) on the challenges of such close encounters.

opportunities posed by that focus.

A MEDIA WORKSHOP AND A HEALTHCARE RESEARCH TRIP

The first example is the media workshop designed for editors to “meet their readers”. Last year our consulting firm was asked by the innovation unit of a publishing company to organize an extended workshop for their managers and editors-in-chief.² The goal of the workshop was to better understand the publisher’s male readership and to generate ideas for specific and innovate media offerings for that target group. The concrete workshop plan looked like this: On day one the workshop participants would interview selected male respondents on the topics of male identity and media use, analyze respondents’ weeklong diaries, and with our help identify key insights on wants and needs of the target group. During the second day, the editors would develop ideas and concepts for novel media offerings based on the results of day one, which they should subsequently present to each other and some of the readers invited back to provide feedback on these concepts. The sequence of planned activities for the workshop followed more or less what we would do for a normal consulting project. Yet instead of us, the consultancy, conducting the work and in the end presenting our results to the client, the media editors and managers would be key actors who conducted a good part of the research, analysis and concept development themselves. Our role would lie in framing and facilitating the workshop activities and guiding the research and analysis. And instead of going on for two or three months as normal projects would do, the workshop would squeeze everything into roughly two days – not counting a few weeks of upfront preparation.

A workshop like this is always a somewhat problematic offering for a consultancy. It tends to send the wrong message to the client. It makes it look as if deep user-insights and novel and relevant product concepts could be actually derived and developed in two days by non-experts—a process that in our normal consulting projects would take about twenty times as long and involve professional researchers and consultants. Thus we usually make a big effort to explain that with a two-day workshop the research could certainly not be as comprehensive, the insights as deep, and the resulting concepts as sophisticated as with a regular project. Yet in this case the client’s emphasis was somewhat different. The motivation behind the workshop was not just about results. Rather the participants wanted to learn the whole process of user-driven innovation and get “exposed to their readers”. The written project proposal stated as intended goal to “open participants’ eyes to the real-world behavior, needs and desires” of their readers. Although editors in the print business would pride themselves of knowing their readers intimately, the innovation unit of the media house who commissioned the workshop had some doubts about how intimately the editors really knew their

² I am unfortunately not authorized to reveal the identity of the clients in these cases, nor any specifics on the questions behind or the results of these projects—a common but frustrating challenge of using project examples in our industry.

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readers, and had pushed for an ethnographic approach for the workshop.

The workshop was largely seen as success both by participants involved and the commissioning innovation unit. The client found the findings on the male readership informative and the editors confirmed to have gained a fresh and deeper perspective on their readers through the close interaction with actual real-life media consumers. This fresh perspective consisted less of well-defined insights but rather on an overall shift in understanding. The editors were surprised, for example, how little traditional media the respondents actually used and purchased, how tech-savvy and price-conscious they were, and overall how hard it was for them to squeeze time for media use from their busy days. Although they had presumably known some of this in some way before the workshop, the ethnographic encounter left a more lasting and vivid impression of the scope and relevance of these observations. This assessment is largely anecdotal and based on informal conversations after the workshop and not on any formal evaluation.

The second case I want to present went further in its focus on experience. The project was essentially a research tour for upper management of an R&D department of a pharmaceutical company. Our consultancy has some history of working with this client on different projects over a number of years. Earlier in the year we received a request to organize a research trip for management of the R&D unit, to let them see “first hand”, as they said, the needs of patients and doctors dealing with a chronic disease. The research was to be modeled after a consulting project we had just completed for engineers of the firm that was designed to help identify user needs and requirements for the next generation of a medical device. The management wanted a very similar research process but this time set up just for them to attend and watch. They were only interested in the ethnographic research itself, while any further analysis, recommendations or solutions would not be part of the delivery.

As in the previous example, initially we were somewhat skeptical about a project without insights and recommendations. What was the purpose of such a tour with only participation in the research itself? The client’s explanation helped calm our concerns in part. As executives, they explained, they had to routinely initiate, oversee, guide, and decide upon development projects that were often based on qualitative customer insights. In order to make useful and informed decisions they felt they needed to better understand patients’ and health care professionals’ struggles and needs with regard to the burdensome disease for which their company wanted to develop solutions. But in difference to the engineers and other employees who reported to them, many managers had not participated in any ethnographic research and never experienced their customers close up before. Now it was time, they felt, to experience their customers close up in person, which they believed would in turn make them better executives. When asked at the beginning of the field research about their expectations, most executives hoped for a rich experience that would be “different” and change their thinking. They wished for “deep, compelling experiences with end users”, getting “exposed to new challenges and

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problems” that would “push their thinking forward”, or simply wanted to “get surprised”.³

When we finally went into the field for about two days, the ethnographers from our consultancy and the group of vice presidents from the client, we conducted interviews and observations with patients and health care professionals much as we normally would. One or more of the managers accompanied us to each session, mostly to observe but at times to ask a few questions. In contrast to normal projects, we took few notes and left at home our otherwise ubiquitous video cameras. And aside from researcher-client conversations over lunch and a wrap-up session at the end, there was not any serious analysis of the material gathered—just as required. Nonetheless, the managers seemed impressed, fascinated and at times overwhelmed by the people they met and the stories they heard, for instance, about the different ways people tried to make sense of and deal with a difficult disease and treatment and about the busy schedules and pragmatic strategies of the doctors.

Feedback on this project was overall positive as well. The executives expressed satisfaction with what they had experienced. In their own words, they had gotten “a feel for the respondents”, had learned “what really matters to people”, had seen how their own products “fit into the larger context of people’s lives”, and as a result, felt more “comfortable” discussing patients needs, now that they had “been there, seen them and talked to them.”⁴ The unstructured and pre-analyzed but still intense sense of their customers’ worlds, that they took away, was apparently precisely what they had hoped for. Having “been there” seemed to help them become more confident about customer issues as background for future discussions and decisions.

PRODUCTION OF EXPERIENCE

The point of these two examples is to present a type of project where the main delivery is to have the client participants experience their customers in a more profound way than they had done before. Ethnography’s toolbox of interview and observation formats was the vehicle to enable this experience; in the media workshop more actively performed by the client themselves, in the health care research trip more passively consumed or watched. To put it simply, ethnography’s key deliverable in these projects was the production of experience rather than the production of knowledge. The juxtaposition of experience and knowledge may seem problematic because an experience can lead to understanding and therefore to some form of knowing (and knowledge can also be an experience). Yet, the main point of this distinction here is to delineate differences between project deliverables.

³ Verbal comments by client participants at the beginning of the field research (March 2011).

⁴ Verbal feedback by client participants during a wrap-up discussion after the days in the field (March 2011).

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What are the main differences between such experience-focused projects and regular insight- or knowledge-focused projects, and what is this ethnographic experience really about? In our regular ethnographic consulting projects, which in this terminology would have a knowledge focus, the ethnographic research process produces data that are then analyzed to derive key insights. Deliverables are insights and recommendations that are meant to shed light on and solve a particular underlying problem. Knowledge production normally goes through a systematic process of analysis and interpretation that integrates different types of data and data from different respondents to produce results that go beyond what individual respondents tell us. The analytical process also prioritizes findings according to the question or problem at hand. Thus this type of knowledge production is designed to generate valid and relevant results in a structured way, in an attempt to follow a “rigorous approach to an empirical understanding of reality.” (Cefkin, 2006:172)

Solely experience-focused projects in comparison have as delivery the experience of participants during the ethnographic process. There isn’t any specific problem to be solved – except perhaps that of a perceived lack of a “feel for customers.” (In other cases it could also be about “witnessing the sensemaking” of ethnographic work itself, as Greenman and Smith describe it in their report on a project with business decision makers (2006:230).) The task of the researcher or consultant is to orchestrate an ethnographic research situation that enables a personal experience rather than specific answers to a particular problem. The goal of this experience is to gain an enriched understanding that may lead to a new perspective on the world and potentially inspires new ideas.

This goal is achieved through an ethnographic experience that is at the same time personal, emotional, and contains an element of surprise. Part of the emotional force and pleasure of the ethnographic situation is that it entails moments of learning, the realization of something new, the promise of grasping a different truth that may offer a wider and more detailed vision of the world. If we think of the old line that ethnography makes the strange familiar and the familiar strange, or the ordinary exotic and the exotic ordinary, we could watch this translation life with our clients in the field. For them the seemingly ordinary lives of patients, users and consumers suddenly became extraordinary, fascinating and shockingly new. And this realization does not just seem eye-opening but also enjoyable and results in a fairly strong new conviction of the so converted.

In short, if we take the projects of our consulting practice as basis, knowledge-focused projects are characterized by a specific problem and a process of analysis that results in explicit insights and recommendations. The knowledge produced thus is articulated, reasoned and evidence-based. Experience-focused projects in contrast are based on a general need for a different understanding and defined by initially implicit and intuitive learnings through an individual and partly emotional

experience of immersion, but without systematic analysis.⁵ (There is no question, however, that this experience may turn into various new ways of knowing later on.)

WHAT DRIVES THIS INTEREST?

What drives this interest in experience production and inspiration for higher level executives? There is some evidence from the two projects under discussion that point to an interesting dynamic within organizations, a dynamic that may represent a shift in the way in which ethnographic thinking has taken root in companies. My hypothesis is that the need to know their customers in a more intimate way is now newly felt by higher level executives and that the first-hand ethnographic experience in the field may serve as a way to retain or gain credibility and authority within the organization. After years of ethnographically supported consulting projects, the marketing departments, engineering divisions and innovation units that have worked with ethnographic consultants are fairly familiar with and convinced of the approach. Yet when they come with their ethnographically supported insights and solutions to their bosses, they encounter decision makers who are much further removed from their customers than they are. They will try to argue why their superiors should listen to their customer insights and solutions, and will use their experiences and stories from the field as arguments. Without a similar experience of having been there and persuasive first-hand stories, management's assessments and decisions may lack the necessary persuasive power and authority. The power of the 'real people' discourse has been nicely described by Nafus and Anderson (2006). Thus, if a while ago the challenge for ethnographic work was to convey methods and results to companies overall, now the challenge may have moved inside the organization and up the corporate ladder.

Although largely anecdotal, there is some support for this hypothesis in the cases described here. As mentioned, the R&D managers of the pharmaceutical company had admitted that they were too far removed from their customers to make meaningful decisions or have a good intuition about projects. They also had stated that after having been part of the ethnographic process they felt more comfortable discussing customer issues in the future. One of their employees, an engineer who I had worked with before, indirectly confirmed the management's concern by privately applauding the ethnographic research tour as something that would presumably help management to become better at evaluating and appreciating the ethnographically based projects she was working on. A similar tension or credibility gap could be sensed with the client organizing the media workshop. They too had pushed for more ethnographically informed customer comprehension of their senior editors. As a

⁵ The distinction between analysis-driven and no-analysis projects is also a bit too simple. There is quite some analytical work that goes into framing the research upfront and that in the end creates the quality of the ethnographic experiences in the field, from selection of respondents to developing interview and observation questions. Yet this is pre-fieldwork not post-fieldwork analysis.

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third example, we found a comparable dynamic in another recent project we conducted for a toy maker, where senior executives were eager to join researchers in the field in an emerging market. The directors of the business unit sought the personal immersive field experience as both a valuable future resource to draw on and a way to gain credibility when leading their company into new markets.

These examples may indicate that the interest in ethnographically facilitated experiences by senior managers and decision makers could be a sign of a growing maturity of our approach. The prior successes may have put new pressure on higher level executives to go beyond the Powerpoints, see for themselves, and come back with their own experiences and more credible stories and arguments. If this is the case, it may mark an interesting development, a step into slightly new territory in the landscape of corporate ethnography—and to stay with the theme of this year's EPIC conference, a far-reaching mutation perhaps in the gene pool of ethnographic formats.

All this may be just speculation. Admittedly it is a bit bold to rest all these thoughts on a few examples. In our consultancy client interest in ethnographic experiences especially from higher levels seems to have risen in recent years, but this may be just our own idiosyncratic project history. There seems to be some indirect evidence, however, in a recent review of publicly funded user driven innovation projects in Denmark. In a commissioned review we conducted we found a high percentage of projects that emphasize research over analysis and satisfaction of participants with their experience over concrete results. Half of the more than sixty projects did not conduct any explicit analysis of research data. And although close to none of the projects had concrete results to show for, in the form of new products on the market, implemented organizational changes, or improved services, the projects were internally assessed as success because of the excitement and buzz that the ethnographic user research had generated for participants. (ReD 2009) This may underline the experience focus I have described.

SPECTACLE OR HIGHER EDUCATION?

How should we evaluate such projects as ethnographic consultants? What do consulting projects turn into when ethnography's primary purpose is exposure to and inspiration by the 'real world'? In offering the experience of the real, do we create a valuable learning experience, a form of higher education to high-level decision makers? Does upper management have a legitimate need for the enriching experience of talking to users and consumers in the field? Or are we creating merely a spectacle, displaying people for the viewing pleasure of paying clients? Does corporate ethnography become a show performed for an audience of alienated managers for whom the real becomes increasingly exotic?

The previous discussion on the character of experience should have suggested that ethnographic inquiry always entails and should entail both: Knowledge generation resulting from post-research

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analysis of data and the production of an immersive experience that changes our views in a more personal, emotional and immediate way. Learning and creating new forms of understanding are achieved through a rational process of reflection but also through the partly emotional experience of being there. Both seem equally valid and important aspects of the inquiry process.

The nature of the experience of being there has been a contested topic in anthropology for some time. It appears problematic to essentialize something that seems far from natural. Yet, accepting the constructed nature of the ethnographic experience should not keep us from recognizing the strong results it can generate both for researchers or participants – its emotional force and its power to create understanding and change. The experience of being there is even an important resource for ethnographers. Using the body as instrument, the personal sensation and emotional response of the ethnographer can provide valuable information that other modes of research cannot deliver (see, for example, Smith 2001).

Thus, I want to begin with a positive view and argue that experience-focused projects point to a real need and offer an important opportunity. From the discussion so far it should be apparent that I do not see the main driver for clients to be primarily an interest in entertainment (although the appeal of that should never be underestimated). Rather clients desire the full ethnographic exposure precisely because this experience is undigested, involves the unexpected, and has the ability to alter view points and inspire new thinking. In the highly condensed and systematized ethnographic projects in industry and consulting contexts, the experience dimension of ethnography can get seriously under-valued and under-used. This is the case despite the emphasis on storytelling we may use in our presentations to recreate the original experience from the field. Powerpoints, even with pictures and video clips, never quite reach the same persuasive force. Thus, we should take seriously the wish for personal and emotional learning moments that are not primarily analysis driven. At times this might be all that is needed and it may serve as the crucial initial step for looking for and accepting more systematic insights at a later point. At other times it can help our clients gain confidence and credibility when arguing for more complex customer views in their own organizations.

On the other hand a reduction of ethnography to nothing but experience carries clear dangers. It can leave clients with a limited or wrong understanding of their customers, can reduce the power of ethnography as knowledge tool, and can prevent ethnographic consultants from bringing to bear their expertise and from guiding the learnings of the client. The discomfort we felt at first in the research situation when not documenting the interviews did not result from clients watching the ethnographic research process. Rather the unease was rooted in the lack of systematic interpretation and analysis and thus in the loss of control over the learnings brought about by our research. What can be immediately seen and experienced in the situation is powerful but it is only a small part of what can be extracted from ethnographic research through a more systematic process of analysis. There is no doubt that clients coming with us into the field learn a lot through that experience—but we cannot be

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quite sure what that is. Without systematic reflection, the findings clients take away are likely to reflect individual biases, depend on the few cases they have been exposed to, and draw on what respondents say rather than what they mean. Clients will always draw conclusions from what they have seen and experienced, but these depend on their individual abilities to go beyond the obvious and below the surface. It is our job as ethnographers and consultants to give them guidance on how to do this in valid and interesting ways. In other words, we need to be careful to not let them mistake the raw for the real.⁶ There seems to be a confusion where the wish to see what is *really* going on is sought through the *raw* experience of people, and not through analysis and interpretation of what they say or do. (The embrace of the raw to get to the real and the confusion between the two seems to be a larger cultural current, driving, for instance, both the interest in reality TV and in lay person journalism.)

When offering ethnography without subsequent analysis ethnographic consultants are in danger of getting reduced to just data collectors or event managers and ethnography to a tool for individual emotional impressions instead of deep knowledge. It has been said many times before but it is worth repeating. Ethnography is not just method but also theory, not just research activity but also analysis. Similarly, ethnographic consultants are not just researchers but also problem solvers, and not so much choreographers but expert advisors to their clients who are responsible for what these learn.

CONCLUSION

Given the unique learning potential of ethnographic immersive experiences, we should not hesitate to give them a firm place among our ethnographic client offerings. This can be done in two different ways. The first opportunity lies in a systematic integration of experience elements into traditional insight-driven projects. Almost every ethnographic project could benefit from this. Yet to be useful these experience elements need to be more than the coincidental add-ons that they currently often are but rather become their own explicit project deliverable, next to the other deliverables such as insights and solutions, presentations and reports. The second opportunity are stand-alone experience-focused projects, similar to the experience workshops or tours discussed in this paper but without some of the drawbacks. Such projects with a sole experience focus are the more far-reaching opportunity but as we have seen also pose the bigger challenge. They might be best targeted to new clients or specific groups within client organizations who have so far been less exposed to ethnographic research, like senior management.

The goal of both strategies, experience element and experience tour, is to use the immersive ethnographic experience as a complement to the more analytically derived customer insights that ethnographic research also generates. The aim is to use the ethnographic experience as a sort of

⁶ I want to thank Melissa Cefkin for directing my attention toward the confusion between real and raw. (Email to author, August 11, 2011)

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change agent that can lead clients to a deeper understanding of their customers and give them more confidence in and credibility about this understanding. In order to achieve this and to avoid some of the risks of an experience focus, however, we need to pay attention and find answers to the following key challenges. How can we ensure that the ethnographic experience serves the clients' needs for understanding? How can we make it a productive immersive learning experience? And how can we make the ethnographic experience more reflective?

First, in order to make the customer experience useful to our clients it is necessary to thoroughly define what we want that experience to achieve and what exactly clients should experience in the immersive situation. It is not enough to have the client just meet their customers together with the researcher. We need to design an ethnographic inquiry that leads to an experience that matches what the client wants or needs to understand. Thus it is important to study the client before studying the customer in order to get a sense of the gaps in the client's current understanding and their expectations for the ethnographic experience. Is it imperative, for example, to challenge the current views of their customers or do they have a good sense already and need to just get deeper into particular issues? We have asked our clients in informal ways before but what is needed are ways of bringing our ethnographic skills to bear when it comes to understanding our clients. Moreover, in our own consulting practice we have developed elaborate protocols, techniques and processes for achieving high quality research and insights (or so we hope), but we lack the same for ensuring an valuable and potentially eye-opening immersive client experience. Thus establishing these protocols and defining the experience deliverable are a key first step.

Second, we should also ensure an ethnographic experience that is a productive and immersive learning experience with all the emotional, personal and discovery components that make it valuable. This we do, of course, in part by following the basic principles of ethnographic research methods, which includes meeting customers in their homes, workplaces, and other relevant contexts, relying on both interview and observation elements, engaging in conversations rather than pursuing structured interviews, and so on. In addition, we need to avoid streamlining the experience for our clients and focusing just on what seems the main messages we want to convey (it can be quite tempting, for example, to ask respondents more direct questions than we would normally do). Otherwise we are in danger of depriving them of what makes ethnographic immersion into other people's lives so powerful—the idiosyncratic, diverse, rich and often confusing quality of the perspectives of the people we study.

Finally, the perhaps most central task is to ensure that the experience gained by our clients in the field does not remain fully undigested and un-reflected, resulting in purely subjective, biased, arbitrary or superficial learnings. Although an emotional and pre-processed experience is essential, as we have seen it is not sufficient. Thus we need to design multiples opportunities for reflection and analysis into and around the immersive client experience. One way of doing this is by making our clients co-

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researchers instead of mere witnesses. Taking on fieldnote or interview responsibilities will encourage them to think about and digest what they see in the field. The second strategy to encourage reflection is to insist on obligatory briefs and debriefs with researchers and clients before and after fieldwork that help prepare, articulate and reflect on client learnings. Individual and collective debriefs enable us to help our clients see beyond the obvious, look at the unarticulated needs, concerns and aspirations, and find the common patterns that reach across individual stories. In short, inserting analytical modes into the ethnographic experience will offer clients more valid knowledge, demonstrate the full scope of ethnographic inquiry, and (re)establish the ethnographic consultant as problem solver and expert-advisor.

In this paper, I explored an increased emphasis on experience in ethnographic consulting practice through the discussion of two case studies. These cases suggested that both the production of knowledge and the production of experience are essential parts of the ethnographic project. I argued that there is a promising opportunity in utilizing the emotional power of ethnographic immersion to help clients develop fresh perspectives on their customers and give them confidence, credibility and rhetorical tools to defend those. At the same time, there is legitimate concern that a sole focus on experience may result in superficial outcomes and a loss of control over the learnings from our research, rendering mute our expertise to generate explicit knowledge for solving particular problems. Ethnographically produced immersive experiences thus may not be high-level education but they have a strong learning potential, and although they may put impressions over depth when left unattended, they are not just a spectacle. The challenge is to find ways to help our clients deepen and improve the understanding of their customers through ethnographic formats that combine rather than contrast a convincing experience with a sufficient level of reflection, and emotional learning moments with sharp insights. This will require some experimentation.

NOTES

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