

## **'Ethnography: Future intimations'**

### **Two-day workshop for PhD students and Early Career Researchers**

Tuesday 18 June – Wednesday 19 June 2024

Newcastle University Business School

Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK

### **Confirmed keynote speakers**

[Professor Daniel Beunza](#)

[Associate Professor Kimberly Chong](#)

[Professor Jana Costas](#)

[Professor Tammar Zilber](#)

### **Opportunity to publish in special issue on Ethnography of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations***

There is no registration fee for this event but there are limited places available, so expressions of interest are required before **12pm UK time, Friday 29 March 2024** to secure your place.

Please complete this form to register your interest in attending this workshop

<https://forms.office.com/e/53y4pU78BC>

Ethnography offers one of the most powerful methods of inquiry in management and organization studies and is becoming increasingly popular amongst researchers working within the various specialisms of business and management practice, whether that be human resource management, strategy, marketing, employee relations, accounting and finance, or technology and innovation. And yet the provision of good ethnographic training for PhD students and early career researchers is only in its infancy in UK Business Schools, struggling to hold its own in efficiency-driven environments, especially relative to mass production methods popular at the moment. At its best, however, ethnography gives access to the rich subjective and interior life of actual people and their experiences revealing parts of organizational life too subtle and too nuanced to register in methods that seek to collect data to populate simplified and reductive models of business and management. As one famous ethnographer wrote, only ethnography can help you understand the difference between a 'twitch' and a 'wink', and to explore the significance of the wink when it appears in a field study (Geertz, 1973:6). To explain this in a way that does justice to the complexity of organizational culture requires what Geertz called 'thick description' (after Ryle). But how does one prepare and write 'thick description'?

Originating in anthropology and sociology, the rise of ethnography in business and management studies has opened up new topics and research specialisms that follow in the wake of ground-breaking and pioneering studies. Indeed, ethnography was there at the formation of modern management theory where its methods helped the team employed in the Hawthorne studies discover 'human relations' and to identify the complex group

relations and dynamics between formal and informal groups. With elements of ethnographic enquiry Hawthorne also helped show how family and wider community relations helped structure and inform group identity and in-group and out-group conflicts (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). In more recent times ethnography has helped open the lid on otherwise secret and clandestine activities in organizations and workplaces. Donald Roy (1954) famously discovered the importance of 'banana time' in his ethnographic work, for example, and showed how this rather surreal fruit-based practical joke became an almost sacred element amongst workers in organization and to which management had to learn to respect. In a different organisational setting, Arlie Hochschild (1983) revealed how flight attendants skilfully deploy 'emotional labour' to develop a 'managed heart' in order to provide customer service. Spradley and Mann (1975) provided insights into the culture of cocktail waitresses; their use of space, humour and language to address the problem of doing 'woman's work in a man's world'. Fine's ethnography of chefs and waiters (1996) in the restaurant trade revealed the day-to-day negotiations between those employed to create, serve and consume food served with 'good taste' in mind as an aesthetic and social regulator. Latour and Woolgar (1979) in their pioneering laboratory study showed how scientific 'facts' are constructed through various techniques of rhetoric and persuasion that artfully downplayed the 'mess' and disorganisation of everyday laboratory life. Their work continues to unsettle our normal assumption about the objective nature of reality as revealed (but not created by) science.

Many of these examples go back several decades, to the rather different work conditions and social norms of the past, but if you want to understand how the contemporary bond market operates, or how a social media marketing campaign is realised, how conspiracies and subcultures get built in the workplace, or how aeroplane manufacturing retains just enough critical safety procedures to prevent compromising the structural integrity of aircraft wings, critical scholars still turn to ethnography. Crude mass production data sets and reductive models of business and management cannot get access to these features of organization. More recent business and management studies have turned to a variety of topics to which ethnographic enquiry is required: the importance of emotional intelligence in good management practice, for example, or the pattern of power plays, struggle and resistance in organizations that form around the diversity and inclusion agenda.

Alongside subjects that are considered 'mainstream', ethnography also tackles difficult subjects, extreme work, and matters of political controversy. One recent doctoral student, for example, has employed ethnography to develop a highly original intersectional approach to exploring barriers to career among Lesbian and heterosexual Muslim women professionals (Calin, 2023). Ethnography can help us understand the experience of racism, and how one might best tackle it in organizations steeped in controversies around decolonisation agendas and 'black lives matter' (state institutions, the police, parliament, universities, private corporations). Many scholars are increasingly now turning to study the significance of rational and non-rational features of management and organization which can only be grasped together through the kind of sensitivity that ethnography

cultivates. From affects and organizational moods to the influence of the secret sex and kinship lives of corporate executives on hiring and promotion decisions, the shaping of queer identities in marketing and advertising to the influx of animals and more-than-human life forms in the making of modern management and organization; all demands ethnographic enquiry. We have organizations today that combine human and artificial intelligence, big data with instantaneous real-time analytics, formal models of strategy and future scenario planning with earth sensor data that supplements human decision-making with an understanding of 'how forests think' (Kohn, 2013). How do these things work in practice? Do the fads and fashions of management practice actually work out in the ways their supporters and proponents in the consulting industry tell us they do? Only ethnography can operate across these different domains of science, technology and management and provide access to the hidden abode of production where we can discover the intricacies and hidden mechanisms through which these things are negotiated and where organization and disorganization are brought into being.

This two-day workshop is designed to explore these issues with you and support you to develop your ethnographic research project, whether a PhD thesis or early career research project. We will work with you on these and allied ideas to think ethnographically and to develop your ethnographic practice. How does one 'do' ethnography? How do I 'record' my data? How do I write field notes? Should I use audio or visual recordings? How much time does an ethnography take? Can I conduct ethnography in a virtual working environment? What makes a good ethnographic paper? How do I satisfy the requirement for methodological rigour in ethnographic research and writing? How do I get my papers published? From experienced ethnographers with over 30- years' experience, to journal editors and practitioners who have hosted ethnographers in their organizations, this workshop will answer all your questions whilst helping you to ask smarter questions in your fieldwork and writing.

In addition to keynotes, interactive sessions, and opportunities to meet journal editors, the first day of the workshop will have a session devoted to the study of a classic ethnographic text, in which distinguished Professors converse with you to share their responses and to help learn what makes the classics so valuable and insightful. This format will be repeated in a different session in which the writing of ethnography will be discussed. We will also host an ethnographic film night and drinks reception with introductions and commentary from leading film and visual ethnography experts.

On the second day, we will host seminars with round-table discussions focused on the practicalities of doing ethnography and how to think about ethnographic research within the context of an academic career beyond the PhD. In addition to this, we have a limited number of bursaries for participants who have already completed fieldwork and are ready to develop their ethnographic writing for publication. Recipients who are awarded a bursary will work in small groups together with an experienced ethnographer or journal editor to develop their manuscript. The best papers will be considered for publication as part of a special issue of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* on Ethnography. The

workshop is therefore an opportunity for:

- **All PhD students and early career researchers who are interested in ethnography but may not have experience or do have some experience and are looking for a safe environment to learn more about and discuss ethnography.** The event is free to attend so long as you register, you commit to attend both days, and you can pay for your own travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs. You will be given priority registration for day one of the events and we will share details of all reading and presentations for the seminars in advance of the event. We have limited capacity and will accept expressions of interest for this on a first-come-first-serve basis if we reach capacity.
- **PhD students and early career researchers who are already doing ethnography and will have completed enough fieldwork before the workshop to have a manuscript that is ready to develop.** If this is you, we strongly encourage you to apply for one of our bursaries that will allow you to bring a working paper or chapter to the workshop and have it closely read by experienced ethnographers working in small groups of less than four people on the second day of the workshop. If you are accepted, your manuscript will have 60 minutes of discussion time. The best papers will be considered for publication as part of a special issue of *Research in the Sociology of Organisations*. Please note that the bursary will only cover UK travel and accommodation for two nights so you must be prepared to cover your own subsistence costs.

We are aiming for the workshop to include members of the editorial boards of the following journals: *Journal of Management Studies*; *Academy of Management Learning and Education*; *Organization Studies*; *Organization Theory*; *Human Relations*; *Journal of Business Ethics*; *Gender, Work & Organization*; *Work, Employment & Society*; *Ethnography*; *Journal of Professions and Organization*; *Competition & Change*; *Culture & Organization*; *Management & Organizational History*; *Work in the Global Economy*

#### **Convenors**

Alanoud Alenizi (Newcastle University, PhD student)  
[Professor Lindsay Hamilton](#) (University of York)  
Charlotte Makepeace (University of York, PhD student)  
[Professor Leo McCann](#) (University of York)  
[Professor Damian O'Doherty](#) (University of Liverpool)  
[Dr Dean Pierides](#) (Newcastle University)  
Anand Roy (Newcastle University, PhD student)  
Steve van Riper (University of York, PhD student)

#### **Newcastle local organising committee**

[Professor Matthew Brannan](#)  
Elie Chahda (Newcastle University, PhD student)  
Dilan Ciftcioglu (Newcastle University, PhD student)  
[Dr Andreas Giazitzoglu](#)  
[Dr Deborah Harrison](#)

Jingyao Hou (Newcastle University, PhD student)

[Dr Kristina Humonen](#)

[Dr Yin Liang](#)

[Professor Abigail Marks](#)

[Dr Angela Mazzetti](#)

[Professor Alan McKinlay](#)

Karlie Toame (Newcastle University, PhD student)

[Professor Andrea Whittle](#)