

provided rich information about the culture and its communication.

The organization did ask me to sign a form required of all employees: if I develop any computer software or documentation as a result of my being there, it is theirs. And although I was not specifically restricted, I am especially careful to obtain permission to copy any documents. Because most of the corporate development information is proprietary, I avoid using technical information in my field notes, assuring my informants that I am interested in their communication processes, not the technical details.

I am using a pseudonym not because the team-based corporation requires it but because of the original corporation of which the new company was once a part. I have spoken informally with some employees of the original corporation, but I have been told that it would probably be impossible to conduct research on its sites. Using pseudonyms seems less complicated and avoids any potential problems for this new company, which sells products to its former parent. My university required that the software company sign a Human Subjects Research Form which provides liability protection

for the university. (The form—intended for human research which controls variables and aims at predictive results—is long and inappropriate for ethnographic research.)

The most important limitations on my research are self-imposed. In particular, I am guided by the *Statement of Professional Responsibilities* (Bernard, 1988, p. 458) of the Society for Applied Anthropology. The bottom line in this code of ethics, which reflects the efforts of thousands of anthropologists over the last forty years, guarantees that the researcher will cause no harm to the informants or to the culture studied. Of course few researchers would intentionally cause harm, but the field researcher does encounter difficult issues and complex dilemmas when studying communication. Do I respond to an employee's request for help shaping a strategic planning document for the corporation? Do I eliminate gender problems caused by icons used in the corporate newsletter? Do I answer a request to temper the ethnocentric approach of a salesperson's international communications? These and other related issues must be resolved from informed ethical and theoretical perspectives.

## Conclusion

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As Vincent Brown noted, a researcher is always "on the lookout" for a good story. The experiences of four field researchers reported here suggest that good stories are frequently found in the course of daily life, be it working, socializing, or simply keeping up on the TV news. In some cases the researcher pursues a story (like a reporter looking for a headline) and offers services or "free expertise" in exchange for access.

The experiences narrated here demonstrate that gaining access requires the patience to nurture organizational relationships and the commitment to provide organizations with analyses that may dramatically help them yet never appear in print. The field

researcher may contribute to more effective communication in an organization with little assurance of providing the academic community with significant information about "what's going on out there." A researcher may learn more than he or she is ever allowed to share.

However, the possibility of providing another piece of the puzzle for an academic community hungry for "real-world" examples remains enticing. The experience of these researchers suggests that the potential of field research is well worth the care required to build the kind of organizational relationships necessary to open doors and ultimately to gain access.

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