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Abstract

In social science literature, researchers have discussed the implications of using symbolic interactionist ethnography. While the value of such an approach is accepted in social science research, it has not received adequate attention in IS literature. More importantly, there is a need to begin developing consensus on a set of principles to help researchers effectively combine the theoretical strengths of symbolic interactionism with the empirical strengths of ethnography.

In this paper, we take a step forward in that direction by firstly highlighting the importance of the interactionist ethnography approach to IS research. We then describe how the value of such an approach can be realized through achieving congruence and trustworthiness in the research process. Finally, an IS research proposal is used as a practical illustration of how this congruence and trustworthiness can be achieved. By thus combining the strengths of symbolic interactionism and of ethnography, the interactionist ethnography approach can also facilitate the concurrent pursuit of academic knowledge and practice-oriented insights in IS research.

Keywords: Symbolic interactionism, ethnography, research methodology

Introduction

In social science literature, researchers have discussed the implications of using symbolic interactionist ethnography. For example, Rock (2001) usefully describes how the practice of this approach flows directly from the organizing assumptions of symbolic interactionism itself. In an eloquent treatise of the need to establish a greater (epistemological) coherence between the theory, methods and research which typifies the social sciences, and the actual human experience, Prus (1996) provides an insightful treatment of the related importance of symbolic interactionist ethnography.

In this study, we argue that in order to move towards this coherence, there is a need to begin developing consensus on a set of principles to help researchers effectively combine the theoretical strengths of symbolic interactionism with the empirical strengths of ethnography. This is especially important in IS research as the value of the interactionist ethnography approach has not received adequate attention in the literature, despite its acceptance in the social sciences.

As a step forward in that direction, this research seeks to build on Prus' (1996) and Rock's (2001) work by demonstrating how the value of symbolic interactionist ethnography can be realized through achieving congruence and trustworthiness in the research process. This paper will proceed as follows.

We begin by highlighting the strengths of this approach and its potential for enriching IS research. We then show how symbolic interactionism (as a theoretical perspective) and ethnography (as a strategy of inquiry) would guide the study's research design, the subsequent fieldwork experience, the process of data analysis/interpretation and the eventual form of the findings. We also discuss how trustworthiness of the interactionist ethnography study can be increased by paying attention to appropriate criteria for rigor.

Finally, we use an IS research proposal as a practical illustration of how such congruence and trustworthiness can be achieved. We conclude with implications for IS research.

Symbolic Interactionist Ethnography

Theoretical Strengths of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is one of several interpretive approaches to social science research. This approach arises largely from the teachings of Mead (1934) but it was Blumer (1969) who proved influential in developing it into a theoretical perspective with three basic assumptions related to the genesis and evolution of meaning and identity. Perhaps, the most succinct distillation of the essence of symbolic interactionism comes from Blumer (1997) himself: "The symbolic interactionist approach rests upon the premise that human action takes place always in a situation that confronts the actor and that the actor acts on the basis on defining this situation that confronts him". Over the years, these ideas have been gradually extended by other prominent researchers, and as a result, symbolic interactionism has evolved into an influential school of thought in social science research (Prasad 1993).

A survey of the literature reveals that the following enumeration of symbolic interactionism by Reynolds (1990) may best capture its theoretical strengths: reality is understood as a social production; interaction is symbolic; humans have the capacity to engage in self-reflexive behavior; the group is an important factor in the shaping and motivation of behavior; interactionism regards society as ongoing process; and social and physical environments set limits on behavior, but do not determine behavior.

From the above, it is clear that symbolic interactionism is not concerned only with the study of symbols. Instead, it should be emphasized that the significance of this theoretical perspective stems from its twin emphasis on the importance (to understanding human behavior) of both symbols and the interpretative processes that undergird day-to-day interactions (Patton 1990).

Empirical Strengths of Ethnography

Ethnographic research comes from the discipline of social and cultural anthropology where an ethnographer is required to immerse himself in the life-worlds of the people studied. In the process, the ethnographer generally relies on three sources of data to achieve such intimate familiarity: observation, participant-observation and interviews (Prus 1996). By thus spending an extended period of time in the field, he seeks to place the phenomena in their social and cultural context. In this regard, extensive fieldnotes provide the basis for data analysis and the final ethnographic account.

While lengthy, ethnography is intense and "data-rich" (Rock 2001). With such empirical strengths, it is therefore especially suited for research where the phenomenon is unclear, complex and embedded in a social system that is poorly understood or even unknown (LeCompte & Schensul 1999).

Combining the Strengths of Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnography

Considering the philosophical position of symbolic interactionism, any research work grounded in this theoretical perspective would require a strategy of inquiry that is empirically sensitive to the human capacity for symbolic interaction (Prus 1996). Clearly, the empirical strengths of the ethnography method make for a good fit.

On the other hand, many ethnographic studies have been criticized for lack of conceptual depth (Hammersley 1992) and ethnographers may therefore benefit from the use of symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective to guide the research.

To realize this synergy between the theoretical perspective and the strategy of inquiry, Prus (1996) outlines four major interactionist implications for ethnographic research: respecting the essence of the subject matter (nature of human group life), achieving intimate familiarity (with the phenomenon), developing concepts (sensitive to the phenomenon) that can foster comparisons and contrasts, and understanding the process of interactions.

More specifically, an ethnographer engaged in a study using a symbolic interactionism lens should therefore be cognizant of: the intersubjective nature of human behavior; the interpretations that the actors attach to themselves, other people and other objects that they interact with; the ways in which the actors do things on both an individual and interactive basis; the attempts that the actors make to influence (as well as accommodate and resist the inputs and behaviors of) others; the bonds that the actors develop with others over time and the ways in which they attend to these relationships; and the processes, natural histories or sequences of interactions that the actors develop and experience over time (Prus 1996).

By thus combining the theoretical strengths of the interactionism perspective with the empirical strengths of ethnography, the interactionist ethnography approach can facilitate the conduct of research that is in concurrent pursuit of both academic knowledge and practice-oriented insights (Rock 2001). Indeed, such a joint pursuit is fundamental to the IS discipline (Harvey & Myers 1995) and continues to be a challenge to IS researchers (e.g., Lee 1999).

Implications for Information Systems Research

Importance of Symbolic Interactionism to IS Research

Over the years, there has been increasing interest in the role of symbolism within organizations. More importantly, a theoretical recognition of the symbolic nature of computers and information technology in organizations has gained strength in management literature (Prasad 1993). In IS literature, prominent researchers have similarly recognized the importance of symbolism in both organizational and technological contexts (e.g., Gopal & Prasad 2000; Hirschheim & Newman 1991; Kendall & Kendall 1993; Robey & Markus 1984).

In this regard, we argue that the symbolic interactionist framework may hold considerable promise for IS research, since the prime focus of the discipline has always been on the rich phenomena that emerge from the interactions between information technologies, the users of these technologies, and the organizational and social contexts of such use.

For example, Markus and Robey (1988) identify three conceptions of causal agency in IS literature: technological imperative, organizational imperative and emergent perspective. Consistent with the philosophical foundations of symbolic interactionism, the latter perspective holds that "the uses and consequences of information technology emerge unpredictably from complex social interactions". Similarly, other researchers have also argued that technology is socially constituted (e.g., Orlikowski 1992; Orlikowski & Robey 1991). Collectively, these arguments imply that any inquiry of IT may benefit from a keen understanding of the influence of social interactions on the development, management and use of such technologies.

Importance of Ethnography to IS Research

Against this backdrop, it is therefore not surprising that much of recent IS research has focused on the social and organizational contexts of information systems. Here, ethnographic research has emerged as one important means of studying these contexts (Harvey & Myers 1995; Prasad 1997). Topics explored in this manner include system design/development/implementation, organizational change, organizational learning and work automation (Schultze 2001). In such research, the inherent advantages of the ethnographic approach have helped to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the focal IT, the actors involved, the organization, and the broader context of the IT usage (Myers 1999). Furthermore, existing assumptions are often challenged as a result of acquiring new knowledge and vital information of what actually happens in the field.

Importance of Symbolic Interactionist Ethnography to IS Research

While Prasad (1993) and Gopal and Prasad (2000) did not specifically make use of ethnographic inquiry, their interactionist studies point to the great potential of leveraging the ethnography method in such research. For example, Prasad (1993) found that symbolic interactionism is especially appropriate for studying computerized work in organizations because it simultaneously emphasizes *process* issues in addition to the roles of meanings. Similarly, Gopal and Prasad (2000) hinted at the richness of studying GDSS in symbolic context through immersion in the research setting.

Taking the discussion further, we note that for example, acceptance of vis-a-vis resistance to the implementation of new and evolving types of information technologies are continuing to be studied with somewhat mixed results in IS literature. In contrast, we argue that the interactionist ethnography approach may be able to dissect these multi-faceted issues with aplomb and insight. This is because the use of the interactionism perspective will help to focus the researcher on the complex social interactions that result in acceptance vis-à-vis resistance, while the use of the ethnography method will enable the researcher to achieve intimate familiarity with the phenomenon as it gradually evolves in its particular social and cultural context.

More generally, by combining the respective strengths of symbolic interactionism and ethnography, the interactionist ethnography approach can therefore help the researcher to discern symbolic meanings, the gradual sedimentation of these meanings, and how such evolving meanings can lead to enactment of action in various IS contexts (Prasad 1993).

Achieving Congruence and Trustworthiness

To realize the benefits of such an approach, we argue that congruence needs to be achieved between the research question(s), the theoretical perspective used, the chosen strategy of inquiry, the data collection methods and the approach to analysis. In other words, symbolic interactionism (as a theoretical perspective) and ethnography (as a strategy of inquiry) must inform and guide the whole research process from the inception of the study to data collection/data analysis and culminating in the final written account. In the rest of this paper, we describe how this congruence and the twin issue of trustworthiness can be achieved in the research process.

Research Design

In an interactionist ethnography study, the research design must obviously be consistent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of symbolic interactionism, as well as the methodological underpinnings of ethnography. As such, research questions need to be focused primarily on the symbolic and emergent aspects of the phenomena being studied, with emphasis on local and shared interpretations (Gopal & Prasad 2000). The study should therefore be conducted in a naturalistic field setting where behavior can be observed though prolonged immersion and which permits the researcher to have access to multiple viewpoints.

Data Collection

For data collection, the ethnography approach requires that observation, participant-observation and interviews be done through immersion in the research setting. However, there is a traditional concern in ethnographic research with the unsystematic nature of observational methods (Angrosino & May de Perez 2000). Werner and Schoepfle (1987) attempt to address this concern by suggesting a typology of observation processes representing increasingly deep understanding of the setting being studied: *descriptive observation*, *focused observation* and *selective observation*.

Therefore, we suggest that the ethnography study be conducted by first beginning with *descriptive observation*, in which the researcher is open to everything that is going on and take nothing for granted. It is through such broad and gradual immersion that the researcher will begin to understand what is and is not relevant to the research. Once that understanding is reached, the study would move into *focused observation* in which the researcher conduct more focused interviews and concentrate on emerging themes. Finally, the researcher would move into *selective observation*, in which he/she will self-consciously collect a series of incidents and interactions of the "same type" and look for regularities in them, while being open to variations from emerging patterns.

In an ethnography study, this ongoing first-hand participation activity is inter-connected with the concurrent process of writing fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 1995). Writing fieldnotes involves inscriptions of witnessed events, persons and interactions, and often also invokes inevitable processes of selection and presentation. This process is therefore a critical activity, and here, Emerson et al. (1995) provide some guidelines which are informed by a symbolic interactionist perspective. Firstly, the researcher should document his/her own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses in the fieldnotes, as these factors may shape the process of observing and recording others' lives. Secondly, he/she should write fieldnotes in ways that capture and preserve indigenous meanings (i.e., understanding what the participants' experiences mean to them). Thirdly, the researcher should plan to write fieldnotes contemporaneously (during the course or at the end of each day) so as to preserve finely-grained vivid details of processes. Finally, he/she should focus on the details of interaction processes through which members of the setting create and sustain specific, local social realities.

Last but not least, interviews are also an important source of data in the interactionist ethnography study. Interview transcripts should preserve interactional details observed during the session. Documents (such as meeting minutes and company notices) should also be collected, as they may reflect important structural and interactional elements in the setting.

Data Analysis

Since an ethnographer usually ends up with a huge amount of data, strategies should be developed to analytically deal with this right from the start, which include regularly reviewing and developing ideas as the research progresses. In fact, analysis will pervade all phases of the research process – as the researcher undertake data collection, record the data collected in fieldnotes and transcripts, code the contents of these and other collected documents, detect pervasive patterns in the data, generate themes and develop relationships between them (Emerson et al. 1995). Such ongoing analysis may in turn direct further data collection by raising new questions (Spradley 1979). In short, the interactionist ethnographic immersion is a longitudinal process during which the researcher constantly goes back and forth between data collection and analysis in fine-tuning his/her emerging interpretations of ongoing symbolic interactions.

As rich, thick description is a defining characteristic of ethnography, the process of data analysis is primarily to reach across multiple data sources and to condense them. Here, we argue for the operationalization of this data analysis process based on Emerson et al.'s (1995) analytic practices for the ethnographic approach. These practices require the researcher to sift systematically through the volumes of data at regular points during the study, and to look to identify and consolidate patterns about the phenomena being observed. The researcher should periodically read through all the fieldnotes and interview transcripts as a data set, taking in the entire record of the field experience as it has evolved over time. This "close reading" should be combined with the following "open coding" and "focused coding" procedures for analytically coding fieldnotes, transcripts and documents on an ongoing basis.

Early in the data analysis process (during descriptive observation stage), the researcher should constantly ask questions of the data with the help of "open coding" to read fieldnotes and transcripts line-by-line. By staying close to the data in this way, the researcher may be able to identify and formulate any ideas, hunches or issues suggested by the data. Here, the researcher should elaborate on such tentative insights by writing "initial theoretical memos".

Later in the process (during focused and selective observation), the researcher should use "focused coding" to subject the fieldnotes and transcripts to fine-grained, line-by-line analysis on the basis of emergent themes that have been identified as of a particular interest. Here, he/she should write "integrative theoretical memos" to help clarify and link these ideas. The development of a smaller set of promising ideas will provide the basis for the final themes of the ethnography.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, ensuring the trustworthiness of the final account is critical. In this regard, Hammersley (1992) describes several researchers' attempts in trying to define criteria for conducting rigorous qualitative research. We contribute to that discussion by noting that reflexivity, relationality and reciprocity (Lincoln 1995) are very much intertwined with the criteria for rigor as discussed in Hammersley (1992). For example, in an interactionist ethnography study, there is a high degree of existential engagement, ongoing socialization and constant interactional role playing on the researcher's part during his/her ethnographic immersion in the setting (Arnould 1998). This may in turn shape what is recorded in the fieldnotes. In the symbolic interactionist

view, people will also try to make sense of being studied and can thus "interact" with the researcher in widely different ways, with the possibility of thus altering the natural flow of interactions in the field (Prus 1996).

Against this backdrop, a close examination of Hammersley's discussion reveals that Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria may be most appropriate for assessing trustworthiness of the interactionist ethnography study: *credibility, dependability, transferability* and *confirmability*.

The *credibility* criterion refers to the "truth" of the findings, as viewed through the eyes of the subjects and within the context in which the research was done. The credibility of a study will lie in its triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints. To increase trustworthiness in this aspect, there should be appropriate *methodological* documentation containing information about the dates, duration and nature of interviews, observations and participant-observations as well as the roles of participants who were interviewed and/or observed (Rodgers & Cowles 1993).

The *dependability* criterion refers to whether the results are consistent with the data collected. This can be increased by keeping appropriate *methodological* and *analytic* documentation (Rodgers & Cowles 1993). The former should include an explicit description of rationale/decisions related to the research design and data collection process, as well as copies of transcripts, fieldnotes and collected documents, thus providing a chain of evidence. Analytic documentation is a record of the researcher's thought process in sorting, categorizing and comparing data, and in conceptualizing patterns that emerge as the data are examined and coded. Otherwise, the researcher will not be able to retrace the actual paths of data analysis to demonstrate that reasonable analytic procedures were followed.

The *transferability* criterion refers to the applicability of the study's findings to new contexts and it can be increased by providing thick descriptions through contextualization. Here, the researcher should keep *contextual* documentation to aid in eventually writing the final report (Rodgers & Cowles 1993). Examples are fieldnotes which not only describe activities and behaviors of the primary data sources, but also describe observations, events and other factors related to the *context* of the data collection and the actual data collection process, such as non-verbal behaviors during interviews. Such documentation will serve as contextual data while doing analysis and may eventually add significantly to the thick description necessary in the final reporting.

Finally, *confirmability* of a study refers to freedom from bias in the research procedure and results. It can be increased by making explicit the researcher's positions or subjective biases. Here, the researcher can increase trustworthiness by retaining appropriate *methodological* and *personal response* documentation (Rodgers & Cowles 1993). The former includes the basis for informant selection and description, the social context from which the data were collected as well as information about whether the participants were provided with opportunities to check or confirm tentative interpretations or findings. Personal response documentation should explicitly address the issues of reflexivity, relationality and reciprocity. For example, the researcher's conceptualization of the original study area, his background or knowledge base relative to the area, his relationships with the participants, and his psychological and emotional responses to the participants and the data need to be documented as they all eventually contribute to the study's final outcomes.

In summary, trustworthiness of a study rests not only on the procedures by which the data are collected and analyzed, but also on issues of reflexivity, relationality and reciprocity throughout the research process (Lincoln 1995). Locating and documenting oneself transparently in the research endeavor (with the help of appropriate documentation) is essential for establishing a context within which others can judge the degree to which they can trust the final product.

Ethics

In qualitative research in general, ethical considerations have always been important due to the nature of relationships, trust and power between researchers and participants (Angrosino & May de Perez 2000).

In interactionist ethnographic research in particular, there is a heightened concern with ethics. For example, Arnould (1998) offers several reasons why the role of an ethnographer is inevitably highly charged with ongoing ethical dilemmas. While the processual nature of the approach certainly lends itself to such dilemmas, there is also a high degree of existential engagement and socialization on the part of the researcher whose intent is to train the spotlight on the life-worlds of the participants. However, doing this effectively requires a certain amount of constant interactional role playing. Therefore, the researcher needs to be reflexive with regards to ethical issues because fieldwork involves not only initial access but also the ongoing maintenance of

relationships. Beyond obvious moral considerations, such a concern for ethics will eventually translate into greater trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln 1995).

Final Ethnography Account

The combination of the symbolic interactionism perspective and the ethnography strategy of inquiry imply that the findings should appear in the form of "thick description" in which the researcher describe and analyze symbolic forms and interactions – words, images, institutions, behaviors – with respect to one another and to the whole that they comprise. Such thick description is needed because ethnographic research is about developing an understanding of the 'webs of significance' which people weave within their cultural context, and these webs of significance are best communicated by thickly describing the situation and its context (Harvey & Myers 1995). Furthermore, when the ethnography study is guided by the interactionism perspective, the final account should move beyond "static" thick description to also embrace a process or temporal aspect of the phenomena.

Earlier, we have discussed how the researcher's "filters" may come into place during ongoing data collection and analysis. In order to be as reflexive as possible regarding such "filters", a confessional tone may be appropriate in the final ethnography account (Schultze 2000).

A "Research Proposal" Example

In this section, we use an IS research proposal as a practical illustration of how the above congruence and trustworthiness can be achieved in an interactionist ethnography study.

Motivations and Research Questions

In organizational research, socialization of newcomers and other organizational members has been quite well discussed in the literature. In the academic arena, socialization is also an important process, which can significantly impact the outlook of both incoming and established academics in the field. This is especially critical in a relatively new, fast-moving, diverse and interdisciplinary field such as Information Systems (IS). Indeed, there has been much introspective debate within the field in recent years, with renewed talk of an "identity crisis" (e.g., Benbasat & Zmud 2003; Lee 1999; Orlikowski & Iacono 2001).

Therefore, it is important to explore the nature of the socialization process in IS academia (which is likely to be different from other disciplines). Considering the dearth of such studies in the literature, this may help to shed light on the present and future development of the IS discipline.

This research proposal therefore aims to fill such a gap in IS literature, with the following research questions:

1)   What does it mean to be identified as an academic in the field of IS?
2)   What are the features of the socialization process in IS academia?
3)   How does this socialization process impact the development of the IS academic's identity over time?

Research Design

Symbolic interactionism is appropriate as a theoretical perspective for this study because one of its premises is that a person's sense of self is largely grounded in the perceptions of others through ongoing social interaction and the internalization of collective values, meanings and standards (Ashforth 2001). Identity theory enhances this perspective by arguing that the socially constructed sense of self is strongly related to the discrete roles that one plays in society (Ashforth 2001). The identity of an IS academic may therefore be an emergent one that is continuously being reshaped and re-interpreted as he/she engages in new encounters with others.

This study is thus designed to focus on the symbolic and emergent aspects of the (IS) academic's identity by examining the process of his/her ongoing socialization into academic life over time (being socialized by and/or socializing others).

Ethnography is appropriate as a strategy of inquiry because the research questions revolve around the study of the roles, behaviors, language and interactions of a culture-sharing group, the IS academia. In this regard, the focus of ethnography is on a set of incidents as a critical event that offers an opportunity to see "culture at work" (Creswell 1998).

This study is thus designed such that the investigator would spend a significant amount of time in a particular university environment, so that he/she can place the (IS academia) phenomenon being studied in its social/cultural context.

Overall, the research design would ensure that the investigator interact with diverse people such as faculty staff, deanery staff, university administration staff, visiting academics and students (both graduate and undergraduate). He would also participate in diverse activities such as research workshops, lectures, tutorials and meetings as part of the immersion.

Data Collection

In keeping with the interactionist perspective, the fieldwork in this study would be specifically concerned with acquiring the perspectives of an (IS) academic from three vantage points: individual, interactive and structural (Daly 1996). On an individual level, a key question would revolve around how does the IS academic make sense of the world and develop conceptions of his/her role? On an interactive level, to whom and how does he/she talk and work with as an IS academic? On a structural level, how does his/her internal convictions/beliefs relate to the structural norms and features?

In keeping with both the interactionist perspective and ethnography strategy of inquiry, we add a fourth vantage point: processual. On this processual level, the key question would revolve around how does the IS academic's outlook change over time and what factors contribute to such changes?

These four levels of inquiry would therefore guide the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Earlier, we have described how the analytical processes could proceed concurrently with data collection, while the investigator progressively develops first-order and higher-order concepts. In this regard, it is important to remember that writing fieldnotes (as part of data collection) is actually a process of "analysis-in-description" (Emerson et al. 1995). In this research, the investigator would therefore consciously take note of this "filtering" as he perceives interactions in the field and makes decisions on the significant details to be included in the fieldnotes during the data collection process. This point is brought home in Emerson et al.'s (1995, pp. 5-8) example of how a supermarket express checkout line can be ("correctly") described from three different points of view, each of which selects and emphasizes certain features and actions, while ignoring and marginalizing others.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

In this research proposal, the investigator would be doing the study as part of his ongoing immersion in the academic environment of a university in which he is a staff member. As such, it is important to note that he would be doing the fieldwork as a "complete-member researcher", with all the attendant "pluses" and "minuses" (Adler & Adler 1987). Considering that the IS community worldwide is small, some issues may be sensitive. In the symbolic interactionist view, both the investigator and the participants would unavoidably be engaged in a certain amount of interactional role-playing.

Therefore, rigor can be increased in this study by being as transparent as possible about the research methods used and about the investigator's own role in the research process. This reflexivity can be incorporated in the final ethnography account and/or the accompanying documentation.

Similarly, ethical considerations are paramount. To proactively address these concerns, the investigator would, for example, ensure that he has ongoing informed consent from participants, while remaining sensitive to any issues directly or indirectly raised by them during the course of the long study. During the fieldwork, the investigator would strive to create rapport and trust with the participants while recognizing power relationships in the academic setting. As argued earlier, the sum total of these efforts will help to improve the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln 1995).

Final Ethnography Account

The final account would contain a rich description of a set of well-defined themes related to the IS socialization process, while depicting how context and interactions impact the evolving identity of the IS academic.

Contribution

In this paper, we have described how the value of the symbolic interactionist ethnography approach can be realized through achieving congruence and trustworthiness in the research process. In particular, we have demonstrated how the interactionism perspective and the ethnography method can inform and guide the whole research process from the inception of the study to data collection/analysis and culminating in the final account.

This study may thus make a valuable methodological contribution to IS literature by taking a step forward in offering a set of guidelines to conduct interpretive research that combines the strengths of symbolic interactionism and ethnography. By focusing on actual practice in situ while being guided by the interactionism perspective, such an approach may also help to facilitate the concurrent pursuit of academic knowledge and practice-oriented insights in IS research.

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