

Organizational Ethnography. By Daniel Neyland
London: Sage Publications, 2008.

Review by Claire Grauer

Anyone ever wanting to peek over the shoulder of an organizational ethnographer will find Daniel Neyland's *Organizational Ethnography* an interesting read because the author manages to sketch the most important steps of a research process, illustrated with plenty of references to ethnographic research. And while this "guide to becoming an organizational ethnographer" is primarily aimed at students and those interested in but not familiar with organizational ethnography, the experienced organizational researcher might also enjoy relating her own experience and approach to another practitioner's reflections.

The book is clearly structured and written in simple language, making it recommendable both for teaching as well as for self-study for anyone interested in the subject matter be it with or without an anthropological background. Neyland's approach to organizational ethnography is presented along "ten sensibilities" an organizational ethnographer has to engage in, each discussed in one separate chapter. Among these we find issues such as ethnographic strategy, field relations, writing, ethics or exit, among others, capturing all steps to be considered during the process of (organizational) ethnographic field research. Each chapter begins with a brief reference to a particular sensibility's roots in anthropological theory and ends with recommendations for further

Page 1 of 3

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332

reading.

Neyland does a great job in relating his theoretical considerations to ethnographic practice through an excellent choice of “ethnographic exemplars”, i.e. 14 case studies of ethnographic research. These exemplars range from classics including Malinowski and Geertz to more recent studies in virtual ethnography or within the IMF. It is the author’s balanced combination of these exemplars together with his theoretical explorations and frequent insights into the author’s own ethnographic research practice that make *Organizational Ethnography* such an interesting and worthwhile read.

The text spans the whole research process from pre-entry to after-exit of a given project and thus offers the reader valuable insights into the whole process of the ethnographic research process in organization settings. It needs to be said, though, that it is not a guide to research methods, even though most chapters include a paragraph or two on research methodology. Readers primarily interested in tools for their research may thus prefer consulting other books (some of which referred to in the bibliography). As important as appropriate methods are - an ethnographic research process depends to a large extent on the ethnographers’ attitude and mind-set. Therefore, organizational ethnography requires a great deal of reflection and sensitivity on the part of the ethnographer, as Neyland demonstrates throughout the text using case studies taken from different contexts and research settings.

There is one issue the author could have granted more space or even a chapter of its own: the question of “utility” of organizational ethnographic research. This is highly relevant for practitioners but only briefly dealt with in the conclusion although organizational ethnographers may more often be confronted with it than ethnographers studying other phenomena. Not only may “users” of research ask how they can best make use of results, but there is also an additional dimension to it as researchers often have to think about how “users” may actually use research.

At times, Neyland seems a little over-concerned that readers might not be getting his point, as most chapters contain repetitions of main arguments, tempting to repeatedly skip one or two pages. What’s more, academic anthropologists in particular might criticize his fairly condensed introductory presentation of anthropological theory, which is only partly made up by placing each ethnographic sensibility into its context within the anthropological tradition. However, since the text mainly aims at students (who may have learned about this in previous classes) and practitioners (who may appreciate the space given to detailed case studies), this should not be held against the author.

Summing up, Neyland’s volume is an excellent resource for teaching, learning and reflecting because of its clear structure and fine

choice of ethnographic research examples. Even though it is not a very recent publication (first published 2008), Neyland's volume is recommended to everyone interested in gaining insight into an organizational ethnographer's approach to research. While experienced organizational researchers will probably not discover a lot of previously unheard of, *Organizational Ethnography* may be a valuable source for adding some ethnographic evidence to one's collection of case studies. What's more, the author's insights into his own research practice may resonate with experience made during own organizational research, thus supporting reflexion of one's own practice.

As an anthropologist who has only recently begun to engage more deeply with organizational ethnography, I found this volume a worthwhile read, one that I will definitely consult again when working on future ethnographic projects.

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