Knowing that and knowing how: Towards Embodied Strategy

SIMON ROBERTS
Stripe Partners

TOM HOY
Stripe Partners

This paper explores two different forms of knowledge. We compare embodied understanding with propositional or abstract knowledge. Ethnographic research, with its commitment to understanding through immersion and engagement in social fields produces dexterous, intuitive and practical cultural knowledge, which is highly suited towards culturally attuned activity. We argue that ethnography can often be reduced to propositional knowledge as a result of the lack of team participation in research and how we communicate insight. Ideas of professional expertise sit behind the division of labour that characterises client-researcher relationships. Accompanying that division of labour is a need for the communication of ethnographic research to bridge the gap between client and external worlds – the world we as researchers explore and that our clients needs to act in. By engaging our clients in shared, immersive experiences we can create the conditions for them to develop 'know how' about relevant social fields. The shared nature of this understanding forms the basis for the development of 'embodied strategy' - collective action based on shared, deep, first-hand understanding of a world.

> "I don't want my team to focus on strategy; I want them to focus on becoming strategists. Strategy is stilted. The field has been relegated to a specialist's discipline. In doing so, leaders have come to rely upon experts to inform their direction. However, it is only when strategy is embodied in a living, breathing person that it can be actualized. The separation between strategy and the strategist has created a gap between planning and execution. It fixes strategy as a periodic event rather than an unfolding process. A winning strategy is not declared; it is lived into"
>
> - Flint McGlaughlin

BRIDGES BETWEEN WORLDS

EPIC has always sought to bridge the theoretical and the practical, the academic and commercial, the world of exploration and action. As a community we have always prided ourselves on an ability to bridge these gaps and to continually advance our own, and others' thinking, about how to unify research and practical action.

As a professional community that has positioned itself at the interface of these different worlds we have, arguably, had a stake in keeping them somewhat distinct. This paper suggests that we need to examine the ways in which our current practice is based on these ideas of division. Specifically, we are interested in exploring, and breaking down, distinctions between non-expert and expert, cultural novices and virtuosi, client and researcher[1].

We argue that the current configuration of research praxis – with non-expert researcher (i.e, clients) actively discouraged or excluded from the field – denies our audiences the dexterous, intuitive knowledge that is so important to appropriate cultural action. If the foundation of successful activity in any social field is "practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles" (Bourdieu 1977: 19), and mastery of this arises from engagement in the world, it seems strange to us that we tend to exclude clients from the field and then attempt to communicate to them the sort of embodied understandings that defy accurate elucidation.

In this paper we explore the weakness of approaches to solving client challenges that are structured around a division of labour that means while *we* 'know how', *they*, our clients, only 'know that'. We make the case for, and sketch out, an approach that we call 'embodied strategy': collective action based on shared, deep, first-hand understanding of a world.

EXPERTS AND EXPERTISE

The EPIC community, and the canon that its members have built up over a decade, bears witness to the belief that the longer and more deeply we study something the better the understanding of it we will have. The hallmark of our work is, and should remain, a deep and reflective engagement with social worlds.

Central to our occupational identity is the belief that we study social realities, cultural phenomena, behaviours, beliefs and values that are highly complex and demand deep examination. Our research deploys a set of techniques, theories and heuristics that provide sophisticated but useful analyses and interpretations. Our identity is fashioned from a broad but essentially shared set of ideas, practices, and beliefs that casts us as cultural analysts and interpreters. Our identity is one of expertise earned through training and experience.

We are not seeking to suggest that there is no role for trained or expert researchers; there is. Nor are we seeking to undermine the role and value of this professional community that has been nurtured for over ten years (and whose mission statement is to provide "access to the best practical ethnographic expertise from around the world"). However, we are arguing for a reconsideration of the division of labour that exists between clients and researchers.

At the heart of this idea of expertise and its practical expressions, lie notions about the distribution of skills and knowledge for exploring, analysing and subsequently communicating understandings of the world. According to this logic, our expertise is in framing, observing, analysing and sense making. Our clients – consumers of our work – have different skills and abilities – limited to acting on the results of our work (e.g. Schwarz 2011; Greenman and Smith 2006).

This role separation is integral to our identity and threats to it are risky. Sometimes, as outlined by Greenman and Smith (2006: 230), 'non-experts' are admitted into the field as a means of understanding how we work and the nature of the knowledge we produce, but not as contributors in their own right.

In a similar vein, Schwarz, spoke to this separation in an account of a project that put a team from a media company together with their readers in order to generate product concepts:

> "A workshop like this is always a 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 actually be derived and developed in two days by *non-experts* - a process that in normal consulting projects would…involve *professional* researchers and consultants" (2011: 79, emphasis added)

Schwarz's articulation of 'professionals versus non-expert' emerges from his discussion of the nature and value of bringing clients into the research encounter and this is something we return to at length below. But we believe that this distinction is implied in much of the EPIC cannon and in its conferences (where clients are a rare sighting).

A different but even stronger articulation of expert vs. non-expert emerges in calls for the certification and accreditation of ethnographic researchers. These seek to distinguish ethnographic expertise, within and beyond our community, more formally (see Ensworth 2012).

Whether or not it is credentialised formally, the notion of expertise is at the heart of the community. We want to question this notion of expertise for the simple reason that we believe it sits at the heart of what is broken about traditional models of consulting. This model relies on divisions of labour in the production, communication and application of knowledge and understanding. Our view is that such divisions are not just inefficient but detract from the utility of our work.

First, we want to explore the idea (and reality) of expertise in a little more detail.

FORMS OF EXPERTISE

As a community we claim, explicitly or otherwise, three forms of expertise. The first is an expertise in developing a rich and deep understanding of the world through direct experience of it. This is an expertise that draws on methodological abilities, theoretical knowledge and a reflexive outlook on the nature of our practices and the nature of our knowledge. This expertise helps us make sense of the world for those unable, unwilling or lacking in the training or intellectual sophistication to experience and engage with it themselves.

This expertise in making sense of the world bears with it an assumption that is played out in the rhetoric of EPIC and the construction of many of our papers and case studies. The unspoken but pervasive idea is that the better *our* understanding of a phenomenon, the better placed our clients will be to solve the challenge or seize the opportunity that led to our research in the first place.

According to this logic we make our impact by the creation of powerful new understandings of the world. What we find intriguing with this notion, and it is one that has gained much force through its recent articulation in published form (Madsbjerg and Rasumussen 2014), is its silence on the issue of how it is that *our understanding* becomes *our clients' understanding*. Without a discussion of how it is that the knowledge we develop becomes the client's knowledge our research emerges as a *deus ex machina*.

In this rendering of our practice, the work of developing a perceptive and novel perspective on the world is, in itself, enough to win the day. We typically focus our accounts on the profundity or novelty of our insights, not into the subsequent work that was involved in enabling this perspective to change the way an organisation thinks or acts. A set of insights emerge as something in themselves sufficient to change the company's direction.

The second claim to expertise we make is our ability to impart this understanding to our clients in ways the can drive successful action. Typically we focus on acts and artifacts of communication. Our work as a community contains many examples of different communication tools or styles designed to influence, inform and impact our multiple audiences (see Arnal and Roberto 2007; Churchill and Elliott 2009; Wakeford 2006)

All these different communication forms – the deck, books, films, personas, experience maps and posters – take our experiences, our analyses and abstractions and attempt to make them communicable to our clients and durable within their organisations. Our notions of what best represents and communicates knowledge – despite our best efforts and intentions – betray the logocentrism of our disciplinary backgrounds and educational heritage. The worlds we explore for our client are, most of the time, given form solely through words (or PowerPoint decks with words and images).

Our claims to expertise are founded on our twin abilities to understand the world and communicate that understanding. But this in turn suggests a third area of expertise: the ability to translate between two worlds: the world in which our research took place and an entirely different social field – the organisation of our client. The 'actionable insight' - that key deliverable for many of the consultants amongst us – asserts the skill of being able to identify an insight *and* sufficiently 'get' our client's organisation so we can materialise this new understanding in a way our clients can act on it.

However, we believe that the time has come to question the assumptions embedded in these three claims to expertise.

1. **Reframing expertise:** We think it is time to ask again what abilities our clients have to understand the social worlds in which their work is ultimately located: do they really not have the expertise required to understand the world with us? How might we reframe expertise to allow a more central role for our clients?

2. **Revisiting forms of communication:** We want to suggest the way understanding is communicated to clients needs revisiting. The very need to communicate to bridge a gap between what we have experienced and what our client organisations have *not* experienced suggests we need to think about closing the gap, not find ways of bridging it temporarily through ever more 'sophisticated' communication tools.

3. **Reconsidering client participation:** Finally, while we like to think of ourselves as experts uniquely placed to intermediate between the real world and the world of business – we rarely act in the world. The notion of the actionable insight as the bridge between two worlds – the client's and the external world – betrays a need to get our clients involved in experiencing and understanding the external world.

Recently, the development of our own praxis as a consultancy has focused on exploring how we can transcend the need to bridge the worlds of the social realities we seek to understand and the worlds our clients inhabit. Our conclusion is that while innovating around the communication of ideas is not without merit, it does not get to the heart of the problem.

The problem, as we see it, is that much of the research and consultancy industry has been geared towards the provision of propositional over non-propositional knowledge (Ryle 1940). Propositional knowledge is abstracted and conceptual. And while useful, it is knowledge of an entirely different nature from intuitive, embodied, non-propositional knowledge.

Work for clients often leaves them 'knowing that', but not 'knowing how'. We believe the former, whilst valuable, is not as well suited to the way large organisations seek to solve strategic challenges and innovate. On the other hand, 'knowing how' – a form of knowledge that is intuitive, fluid and embodied - is at the heart of culturally sensitive and therefore successful action. 'Know how' arises from experience – that's why as a community our research practice privileges observing and participating in social fields. But we believe its time to develop our practice so it becomes more participatory for our clients: to create the conditions for them to learn through experience and doing in the same way we do.

This shift towards experience and engagement as the route to developing 'know how' and embodied knowledge puts the body at the heart of our research encounters.

We believe that by making this tacit knowledge central to our approach and by introducing our clients to a shared social field we can help our clients develop embodied strategy. 'Embodied strategy' is strategy that is based on a deep understanding of something that is known because it has been experienced. And our experience is that embodied strategy is successful strategy.

KNOWING HOW AND KNOWING THAT

> "It seems like the best problems to solve are ones that affect you personally. Apple happened because Steve Wozniak wanted a computer, Google because Larry and Sergey couldn't find stuff online, Hotmail because Sabeer Bhatia and Jack Smith couldn't exchange email at work."
> Paul Graham (2006)

It is received wisdom in Silicon Valley that the start-ups that succeed are built on opportunities identified in their founder's personal experiences. The spark may have come from a recurrent issue encountered during daily routines, or in a flash of inspiration when, say, observing a daughter playing after school. The common thread to such stories is that the founder started something based on an intimate, first-hand understanding of a specific world or social field[2].

It is perhaps for this reason, as much as it is about the availability of resources, that many start-ups eschew in-depth research. They don't need somebody else to explore, analyse and explain what they already know. Their understanding of the world in which they operate is, according to this logic, already and consistently close and intimate. Maintaining this intimacy becomes an obsession for some founders – AirBnb's Brian Chesky famously has not owned a home since 2010, choosing to continually use his own service (Fairweather 2013).

There is a striking contrast between the way successful start-ups stay close to their world, and the approach taken by more established, larger organisations. Such organisations usually stay informed by commissioning external research agencies to conduct research on their behalf. The task of commissioning and managing research is a specialised role and research departments or individual managers become the buyers of research and reports or other outputs. They become the internal brokers of specific types and forms of knowledge.

The different approaches to research, here characterised by start-ups and larger established organisations, involve quite different forms of knowledge. Start-ups, with first-hand insight permeating everyday decisions possess 'know how'. Larger organisations, with established structures for commissioning and subsequently circulating research, have knowledge products (and cultures) of an entirely different nature: they 'know that'.

Our contention is that these two kinds of knowledge have different impacts and different levels of effectiveness. And while start ups – and the proximity they have to the world they are developing for - are very different from large organisations, we believe that the 'know how' they possess is within the grasp of larger organisations.

'KNOWING HOW' AND 'KNOWING THAT'

The philosopher Gilbert Ryle first made the distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' in a 1945 essay. He illustrated this distinction by using the metaphor of a person finding their way around their home village.

The villager knows how to reach the local church from the station. But it doesn't necessarily follow that they can accurately map the route for somebody else. The villager intuitively 'knows how' to get to the church, but doesn't necessarily 'know that' is the way to get there. In this sense 'knowing how' is practical, embodied knowledge, while 'knowing that' is propositional, conceptual knowledge.

Imagine a tourist arrived at Ryle's village looking for the church. Written instructions for finding the church from the station would help the tourist 'know that' was the way. They may not reach the church as quickly as the local, but by following the instructions step-by-step the tourist can find it. Now imagine if halfway into their walk the tourist turned their ankle. They now need to go the hospital. But they only have instructions to go to the church. The tourist hobbles back to the station to get another set of instructions.

If the local were in the same situation the outcome would be different. After turning their ankle the local would take a shortcut to the hospital without needing to go back to the station. Their intimate, intuitive understanding of the village means the new route is already obvious to them.

To summarise, the tourist has relevant knowledge for a specific, contingent situation. But once the situation changes the knowledge becomes redundant. The villager, on the other hand, has an embodied 'feel' for the local area based on first hand experience. As the situation changes the villager is able to intuitively change with it.

The following table helps to crystalise the distinction between these two ways of knowing:

	Knowing that	**Knowing how**
Knowledge type	Propositional knowledge	Embodied understanding
Acquired through	Interviews Focus groups Surveys Desk research	'Being there' Active participation Bodily experiences
Conveyed by	Reports, presentations, videos	Shared experiences, reminders of the experience
Benefits	Appropriate knowledge for a *specific situation* within a world	Appropriate understanding of *any given situation* within a world

Figure 1. Knowing that and knowing how

Now let's return to the difference between a start-up and an established organisation. Think of the start-up as the villager. They know their world inside-out, because they are of that world. When an unexpected situation arises they intuitively 'know how' to adapt to it.

Think of the established organisation as the tourist. The knowledge they have about their world is propositional. The segmentations, surveys, tracking studies, market and competitor reports that they commission provide them with lots of context specific knowledge that is framed by the research.

The research they commission helps them 'know that' x is the appropriate response for situation y. But when situation z arises, or other conditions change, a new piece of research needs to be commissioned since the 'knowledge that' they possess no longer provides the basis on which to act efficiently or confidently.

We are often purveyors of these forms that rely on 'knowing that'. We observe, participate in and experience the social fields that we seek to understand for our clients. We transfer these understandings and analyses into documents designed to communicate these experiences and our interpretations of them. Our deliverables – the 'actionable insights' – are a way of translating the 'knowing how' that we came to have in the field, into terms which can be shared with our clients: propositional knowledge.

Our established model of turning the 'know how' we generate in the field into propositional knowledge for our clients denies them access to the embodied knowledge that they could use to more fluidly and confidently get things done.

In order to become purveyors of 'knowledge how' rather than 'knowledge that' we need to revisit and rethink our ideas of expertise.

FROM NOVICE TO CULTURAL VIRTUOSO

Aristotle defined an expert as someone who knows how to do "the appropriate thing, at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way" (Dreyfus: 1998). An expert has the ability to respond to their shifting, dynamic world. The 'right thing to do' will emerge in each given situation within their field of expertise. Experts can identify a course of action that only seems right to non-experts after it has succeeded.

Expert 'know how' is based on a deep, embodied understanding which is not reducible to a set of unitary representations or instructions. Pierre Bourdieu has a useful term for the expert - the 'cultural virtuoso'.

> "Only a virtuoso with a perfect mastery of his 'art of living' can play all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and behaviour and situations so as to produce actions appropriate to each case, to do at the right moment that of which people will say "There was nothing else to be done"…We are a long way, too, from norms and rules… The temporal structure of practice functions here as a screen preventing totalization" (1990: 107)

For Bourdieu expertise is not transferable through the communication of instructions or explanations any more than social life is best described through recourse to norms or rules. Expertise is accrued through direct practice and experience in the world. As those who conduct fieldwork will be only too aware, actions that breach or transgress the grammar of a social context are often the best way of surfacing what social actors may know unconsciously, or otherwise be unable to explicate.

Hubert Dreyfus (1998) applies the insights of Merleau-Ponty to map the phenomenology of skill acquisition. He uses the example of learning to drive a car to contrast the differences between a novice and expert.

For the novice driver:

> "the instruction process begins with the instructor decomposing the task environment into context-free features, which the beginner can recognize without previous experience in the task domain. The beginner is then given rules for determining actions on the basis of these features, and so acts like a computer following a program." (*ibid.*: 2).

The novice driver 'knows that' is the way to drive, but doesn't yet 'know how' to drive. On the other hand the expert driver:

> "not only feels in the seat of his pants when speed is the issue; he knows how to perform the appropriate action without calculating and comparing alternatives. On the off-ramp, his foot simply lifts off the accelerator and applies the appropriate pressure to the brake. What must be done, simply is done." (1998: 7)

The prevailing wisdom in business – the common sense – is that making decisions based on feel or intuition is not a good idea. As Madsjberg and Rasmussen (2014) make clear 'default thinking' displays this antipathy to intuition. Better to apply the cold but impartial process of rational decision making based on hypotheses and data analysis. However, Dreyfus's analysis suggests the expert should trust their instincts because they are the product of deep, embodied understanding. An expert's embodied understanding of how to perform everyday activities such as drive a car, make a good cup of tea, or run a successful meeting is worth much more than a dozen novices armed with instructions, recipes or guidelines for how to do these things.

The question then becomes this: how can we help our clients develop the 'know how' of cultural virtuosos, rather than just helping them 'know that'?

BEING THERE TO KNOW HOW

A central premise of the sort of work that EPIC is engaged is that by 'being there', through experiencing, participating and observing the social fields we study, we are able to understand everyday phenomena. Our presence allows us to explore what a good cup of tea is, the occasions when tea is and isn't a good thing, and the nuances in how tea is made, served and drunk. We can traverse and explore multiple dimensions of tea – from an idea, a thing, to an ideal and socio-cultural marker. We are able to understand the stuff and substance of tea making and tea as an idea. By 'being there' we are able to really 'get' tea.

In our subsequent analysis and presentations to clients we share what we experienced, attempt to reveal the meanings of what we found and make recommendations. But the know how that we have developed is not so easily communicated to those who did not share the same or similar experiences.

We tend to communicate knowledge of a propositional nature. The richness of the experiences we have become diluted. We transform these experiences into knowledge products that to all intents and purposes could have been produced through other methods. We attempt to "recreate the original experience in the field…[but] PowerPoints, even with pictures and video clips, never quite reach the same persuasive force (Schwarz 2011: 85). Even when ingenuity and innovation is applied to the production of our deliverables our visceral experiences from the field are rarely, if ever, recreated for our audiences. Framing current shortcomings to our praxis as 'communication challenges' is a category error. The issue lies in the separation of our research audiences from the research experience.

We are not the first to raise this problem. A variety of papers during the last ten years of EPIC have explored how to involve our audiences to address this issue (see Schwarz 2011; Salvador 2007). But the tendency has been for authors to see involving our clients or audience as an essential dilution of what we do. The involvement of non-experts in what apparently should be a domain restricted to those with the appropriate expertise is a distraction to be avoided.

For example, Schwarz, in his exploration of 'Executive Exposure' tellingly distinguishes between 'experience-centred' and 'insight-centred' projects (2011: 78). In his analysis, involving the 'non expert' client leads not to 'real' insight but merely an experience. They are spectacles or 'safaris'. On the other hand, when consultants act alone, without clients looking over their shoulders, the real business of insight generation can take place. Here the outcome is the "production of knowledge" (ibid.: 81) not the "production of experience".

We are arguing against the necessity – and value – of this distinction. Why, we ask, should the two been seen as mutually exclusive? The belief in the value of knowledge about social fields gained through bodily experience is one of the foundations of our practice. So why have we either discounted the value to our clients of such experiences or actively discouraged them from learning through such experience? One possible reason for us to exclude clients from the field (or position such practices as peripheral) is the challenge it poses to our professional identities.

In the next section of this paper we explore in more detail how and why shared experiences have value. We then start to build out the case for a re-orientation of our practice.

KNOWING HOW AS AN ORGANISATON

Our clients act in the world. It is them, not us, that are charged with taking forward 'our' work. The work they commission is typically about revealing the world outside their organisation – the external world in which they must operate. Our insight is designed to drive their action.

These organisations are often large and diverse. They are typically characterised by extensive divisions of labour (see Tett 2015) resulting in entities organised by functional teams or divisions that need to work together to achieve successful outcomes. Entire organisations have assumptions about or ways of looking at the world that might be artifacts of their industry, their position within the industry, or arise from specific cultural or historical factors. Equally, different divisions or departments might have shared and divergent assumptions about their consumers and the markets they operate in.

So if organisations have specific views of the world, and are also internally complex, diverse and divided, research needs to build bridges within the organisation and between the organisation and the external world. Research can do this most effectively when it creates a shared point of view.

Another way of framing this is that organisations or their constituent divisions (marketing, sales, R&D teams) have their own specific sets of 'know how' but they also need 'know how' about the external world against which their own, organisational or functional specific 'internal' know how can be applied. Critically - and this for us is the heart of the notion of embodied strategy - it is not enough that this perspective is owned by a few members of a team. It must be shared by all those who will work on the execution of a strategy arising from it. There is a need for shared reference points – and shared reference points emerge most effectively from shared experiences.

Shared research experiences give a team collective, intuitive understandings of the external world they are operating in. They give people the practical knowledge Bourdieu characterised as being about "tact, dexterity and *savoir faire*" (1977: 10).

KNOW HOW FROM SHARED EXPERIENCE

So how do we develop this kind of know how? Our answer lies in creating shared experiences, which disclose aspects of the organisation's external worlds – the social fields they operate in. Simply put, that means creating the space and time for clients to work closely together with us in the field so they have a chance to experience, understand and embody the social fields they are operating in.

The result is that when people within an organisation are asserting what course of action to take in pursuing a goal or specific outcome, they do so with mutual reference points. Informed discussion can take place. The decision will be understood by everyone, even if it isn't unanimous.

In analysing the phenomenon of assertion, Heidegger wrote "assertion is not a free floating kind of behaviour which, in its own right, might be capable of disclosing entities in general in a primary way: on the contrary it always maintains itself on the basis of being-in-the-world." (2009: 199)

In other words, an assertion by one person only makes sense to another person if they share the same underlying experiences in relation to what is being asserted. Because the underlying experiences are not entirely explainable, they must be assumed. Miscommunication arises when the person making the assertion acts is if their audience shares the relevant underlying experience when they do not.

This is not the fault of the messenger, but the structure of the medium of communication. As Joachim Renn puts it "The problem of representation hardly originates simply from the anthropologists lack of imagination. Even if there may be a way out in the direction of imagination and good scientific poetry, the basic and general difficulties posed by the indeterminacy of translation and hence of meaning…are irreducible" (2015: 123-124).

Renn's and Heidegger's observations serve to remind us that whatever our methodological ingenuity, and however creative and assiduous we are in communicating research findings, they remain firmly in the realm of 'knowing that'. Because the audience has not shared in the underlying experiences that went in to the report, the insights remain at the 'free floating' symbolic level. Or worse, proxy experiences are subconsciously and consciously attached to fill the void.

Heidegger's oft-cited phenomenology of hammering is a prime example of this. His story of the tool receding into the background is powerful precisely because most of us have wielded a hammer. Understanding is already embodied by his audience. Discussion on the subject is therefore informed and meaningful. But it is a deep category error to make the same assumption about a complex social world if it is detached from your audience's personal experiences.

So where does this leave us? The analysis presented here suggests that the traditional way organisations stay informed about their external world is fundamentally flawed in three respects:

- the knowledge absorbed is propositional and therefore conceptual, shallow and transient
- the knowledge is open to a wide range of interpretation due to lack of exposure to the experiences and contexts which gave rise to the interpretations being offered
- the knowledge is inarticulate because it is produced by interlocutors who have limited understanding of the internal world of the organisation that is poised to act

The implication as we see it is as follows; to gain know how, the multidisciplinary teams who work to set and execute a strategy need to become part of the research process itself so they can experience the social fields and develop know how for themselves. In the next section we present a case study of embodied strategy development in action.

DEVELOPING CAMPING KNOW HOW

The decision makers of a consumer electronics brand identified the world of camping as a potential growth area for their leading product. In the past these decision makers would have commissioned a consultancy to research the world of camping, identify relevant insights, and make recommendations for how the brand could grow its market share.

In this scenario, the consultancy would have embarked on the research. If adventurous they might have gone camping themselves, or conducted interviews with campers and those connected with the camping sector. Either way, having got closer to the world of camping they would likely have developed a report and presented their findings to the decision makers. This report would have attempted to transport the client into the world of camping and allow them to understand those that camp. The report would also contain recommendations based on the insights from the research.

The decision makers, utilising their technical knowledge and internal know how, would then set about assessing and translating these recommendations into next steps. If they felt there were opportunities worth pursuing they might decide to take the project to the next stage. An implementation team would be created: project managers, engineers, marketing and external agency partners would move into action. Either original project documentation or edited versions of it would be circulated. The original research team might be invited back in to present their work. A research manager would take on the role of interlocutor – the voice of the research consultancy within the business.

On this occasion, the decision makers were open to exploring a different approach. Something in the specific situation, given the opportunity at hand, suggested they needed to do something different. They observed that none of their team were experienced campers and many lived in or spent much of their time in metropolitan areas. They sensed that in order to understand camping the whole implementation team needed to experience camping.

We met the extended client team at the airport and transported them directly to an outdoor store on the outskirts of San Diego. At the store we met with three groups of campers who immediately set about ensuring that they had the gear and provisions needed. One camper reliably informed us that it was going to be a clear, and cold, night. Warm clothing and winter thickness sleeping bags would be required. The regular, expert campers set about helping the outdoor novices with their clothing and provisioning before we headed to a national park a few miles from the Mexican border.

Know how is disclosed when worlds are practically experienced. Pitching a tent on uneven ground you quickly establish which way round to sleep. Setting up camp you quickly learn the value of digging a shallow hole beneath a water tank to prevent muddy puddles developing. The bright head torch, you quickly understand, is great for practical tasks but not so good for conversation. To avoid the glare of such directional lighting, you see how the 'hack' of using LED wardrobe lights clipped to the tree above provides the perfect ambient lighting solution. It is only by shivering in a tent at 3 a.m as the temperature sits below zero that the value of understanding tog ratings becomes apparent. A visit to the bushes in the middle of the night reminds one of the worth of a good torch under the dark sky of a new moon.

Writing these words now, we are struck by how banal or prosaic these flashes of knowledge or experience might feel. Perhaps this serves to illustrate one message of this paper which is that our ethnographic work rarely is able to transcend the medium we use to communicate it.

However, because it was a collective *'we'* – researchers and clients – that experienced these things for ourselves, as consultants we were not reliant on words or images to communicate these experiences after the fact. These experiences, and the emergent understanding they created, were collective property.

The world was disclosed in situ to all, not experienced by researchers to be subsequently revealed by them to their client audience. In that sense the camping trip established an instance of existential communitas (Turner 1974) in which status between researchers and clients dissolved and a sense of togetherness was created by a shared experience. Important though this communitas might be, the significant impact on research practice arises from the complete immersion of the client in the social field they are seeking to operate in and their acquisition of camping and outdoor.

Both during and following the camping trip, the team shared stories about the experiences they had, the people they had spent time with and learned from, and the equipment they had used and seen deployed on site. Combining these new experiences with the organisational and technical know how of each team member, a clear sense of how the brand could successfully increase its presence in the world of camping emerged.

For reasons discussed above, the texture and richness of this shared insight is impossible to explain here. The experience and the know how it produced transcends its explication through the written word. Instead the shared experience becomes the primary vehicle for understanding – embodying – the meaning and the import of the phenomenon under examination. The progression from this to defining and aligning around a strategy as a small, senior and multi-functional team turned out to be relatively simple. And the results of the trip and the work done by the combined team were vindicated commercially.

The integrated campaign the team launched was a huge success. It was launched under six months after the research trip and within two weeks of launch one of the advertising spots had been viewed 8 million times on YouTube. It had gone viral amongst campers. Arguably, this is because of the way the spot was executed. The tone, message and language were highly attuned to the world of camping. Their strategy and subsequent execution embodied this shared and deep understanding. The result spoke clearly and compellingly to people who are part of that world. The work of the business was culturally attuned to the world of its target audience.

EMBODIED STRATEGY – TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

In concluding this paper we want to recap the argument we have made, and discuss how and where this approach to conducting successful (i.e. impactful) ethnographic research could or should be applied. In so doing it is necessary to reflect on some of the changes that have taken place over the decade since EPIC formed as a community.

First, let us explore some of the more significant changes which 'embodied strategy' as a concept, and practice, addresses:

Rising awareness: Growing awareness and familiarity with ethnographic approaches has led to a better understanding of its strengths and weakness and increasing desire for members of client organisation to be involved in research.

Changing timelines for impact. A shifting balance between research projects tilted towards horizon scanning, intelligence generation and the long term towards projects more focused on immediate impacts.

Rhetoric of agility and speed. A world dominated increasingly by software, the scaling of disruptive start-ups and the widening influence of software development processes, has led to business wanting to discover how to 'move quickly', with a focus on multi-disciplinary working.

Markets have become complex. Markets are increasingly characterised by a) rapidly changing technology advances; b) very short product cycles; c) dense networks of relationships between businesses, between business and consumers, and amongst consumers themselves; and d) ever quicker feedback loops (Anderson et al 2013). Setting strategy in this context cannot be a static event – it needs to be a process that is lived by a fluid, culturally attuned team.

Our contention is that these contextual changes are not sufficiently accounted for in our current praxis. There was a time when our work was alien to organisations and this exotic allure gave us a monopoly over its application. This is no longer true. Equally, there was a time when we could just speak to the long term cultural change that our ideas could have on an organisation. There was a time when our investigations were a long wavelength, a contribution to deliberative, 'slow thinking' strategy work.

In our view the EPIC community tends to see these contextual changes as negative influences that weaken the value of our work. Instead we can see them as an invitation to re-calibrate our practice.

Embodied strategy is our response to some of these contextual shifts. It responds to the desire for people from client organisations to actively engage in research that is framed, structured and guided by people with training and experience. It is sensitive to the desire for teams to move quickly without sacrificing the intimate understanding of the social fields they are operating in. Embodied strategy is born of the need for organisations to bridge the distance between themselves and the world.

The EPIC community has done a great job in bridging these worlds and it is time to reconsider whether the current configuration of our research practice –with a neat distinction between 'us' and 'them' – and the resultant pressure this puts on communication is fit for purpose.

The central argument of this paper is that through immersion in social fields teams can develop dexterous, intuitive understanding; they acquire the 'know how' required to make culturally attuned decisions. They are able to create embodied strategy: collective action based on shared, deep, first-hand understanding of a world.

We have not announced the creation of a silver bullet making machine. The approach we have outlined is not suited to all challenges and organisational contexts or configurations. An embodied strategy approach works well where a core team share a common view of a challenge to be addressed, an opportunity to be seized or a specific development activity to be planned and initiated (be it innovation, product or communication development). In short, we believe it delivers impact where there exists a degree of pre-existing focus. Conversely, it may be less well suited to more open-ended, exploratory research contexts. Finally, given our argument about the importance of giving teams first hand experience of the world there are also questions about how to communicate such shared experiences to those who did not take part in the work.

Our practice in this space is very much in development. We are learning from our clients, and the culture and contexts of their organisations, what works best, when and why. However, we believe that we have started to shift research practice, to paraphrase McGlaughlin, from something that is consumed second hand to something that is *lived into*. And with that shift can come 'embodied strategy': collective action based on shared, deep, first-hand understanding of a world.

NOTES

1. Throughout this paper we have referred to a distinction between clients and researcher. The position that this assumes is of an external agency or consultancy conducting work for another organisation. We are well aware that researchers operate within larger organisations, working within tightly integrated teams or in more standalone research functions. We believe that our argument – while more obviously addressing the external consultancy-client relationship – is also relevant to these other configurations.

2. It is beyond the scope of this paper and a somewhat speculative assertion, but the number of start ups developing ideas that seem to solve a narrow range of problems relevant to the social and cultural milieu of 'The Valley' would appear to support the idea of insight into social fields to which starts up have spatial or socio-cultural proximity.

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