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Managing the Private-Sector Research Project

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Few academics are familiar with the practice of managing research projects in the private sector. Fewer still have direct experience in managing such projects. Research in the private sector is very similar to research in the academic setting – it is methodical, tightly focused, intellectually challenging, and sometimes frustrating. Yet there are additional challenges for the private-sector research manager. Private-sector research requires the social scientist to maintain her researcher's viewpoint, while simultaneously employing contemporary corporate practices. An applied social research manager is embedded in a cultural milieu that differs significantly from the academic research manager's: she is part of the contemporary corporate world. This means she must adopt a critical mindset, while, at the same time, becoming a culturally competent actor in that world. The applied social research manager is one part client engagement manager, one part project manager, and still one part researcher.

Private-sector research differs from academic research in some key ways. This chapter will discuss two aspects of private-sector research management that differ from the academic context. I will review how everyday corporate practice differs from the institutional practices most academics would find familiar. I will bring a critical eye to applied social research to reveal how social researchers can practice their craft in applied settings effectively and with fulfilment.

ABOUT APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH

More than ever, there is a need for social scientists to understand applied research practice. There are fewer and fewer full-time academic jobs for new PhDs, with fewer than 30 per cent of academic jobs being tenured or on the tenure track (Pankin and Weiss, 2011). Many PhDs leave the university (whether by choice or necessity) to secure both full-time employment and the satisfaction of applying their skills. At the same time, there is increasing demand in the private sector for the

human insights only social scientists can offer. Innovation hinges upon deep understanding of consumers' behaviours, beliefs, and unmet needs. Accordingly, *Newsweek* calls applied social research 'the new core competence' (Nussbaum, 2006) for today's business. It is within this context that applied research management has emerged.

Social scientists work in a variety of industries, from technology to advertising to management consulting to design. Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists uncover insights about how people use products, navigate services, and think about brands. Their roles require a specific sort of research management that is not related to grant-based funding, academic publishing, or even the institutional context of the university. Instead, these applied social scientists must grapple with managing project timelines and budgets, and dealing with clients and internal stakeholders. This kind of research management is quite distinct from that of the academic context.

ACADEMIA AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR: *LES DEUX SOLITUDES*

I am an academic working in the private sector. In my years working in applied settings, I maintained many social ties with academics, through conferences, academic publishing, and social networks. I found that academic social scientists often had incorrect, and sometimes wildly fantastic, visions of what applied social research entailed. Likewise, those in the private sector conjured up equally fantastic images of the practice of academic research. These absurdly inaccurate images led me to reflect: what was behind these differences? I was reminded that Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau described the gap between French and English Canada as 'the two solitudes.' French and English Canada are two cultures, sharing the same nation state. Academic and applied social research are also two cultures, sharing the same set of methods.

Academia and the private sector are distinct organizational cultures. Organizational sociologists consider organizational culture as including symbols, assumptions, values, and artefacts (Schein, 1996), universal behaviours versus 'specialist' or 'peculiar' behaviours (Linton, 1936), as well as how organization members negotiate the processes of continuity and change (Hatch, 1993). Using this lens, it became clear to me that applied social research is indeed research, just that it is practiced within a completely different culture. It is steeped within that culture, and reflects its differing symbols, assumptions, values, and artefacts.

I came to this conclusion rather by accident. A series of life events led to my entering the private sector. I felt I was indeed entering a foreign culture. I aspired to be a full-time, university-based academic, but like so many of my contemporaries, there was no academic posting for me beyond the precarious, low-paid adjunct professorships. After completing my PhD, I cobbled together a marginal living by teaching sociology at several universities simultaneously. This proved both demoralizing and deskilling – I had no time for empirical research, which was the primary reason I became a sociologist in the first place. Since I had previous private-sector experience, both before and during my PhD studies, I decided to return to the private sector as an applied social researcher.

In the eight years since I re-entered the private sector, I have gathered data through my everyday working experiences. It is clear that the symbols, assumptions, values, artefacts, and behaviours differ significantly between these two milieux. What is the 'correct' behaviour, or 'appropriate' artefact, in a given circumstance? What is an unspoken assumption? These questions reveal what Breton (1999) calls the 'symbolic order' or what and who belongs where in any group. How things are organized, when things are done, what artefacts are used, and who and what should 'come first' demonstrate that the private sector has a distinct set of cultural practices from academia. What 'comes first'

in academia may come second, third or even last in applied settings.

By way of example, let us consider the practice and representation of time. Time is both a representation and an organizing principle: it symbolizes a culture and also organizes empirically observable behaviours (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Postill, 2002). In academia, September is more than simply a month: it marks the beginning of each and every school or university year. September is a perennial activity that is both empirically observable and symbolically emblematic of the university's organizational culture. What 'comes first' in September? September is first and foremost focused upon the streams of fresh undergraduates and graduates beginning their studies. September coheres activity among faculty. Not all faculty prepare for September with the same vigour, but it would be downright peculiar for an academic to ignore, or not mark September in any way. In a sense, September symbolizes the academy's central function of self-perpetuation, by way of producing new scholars. September also demonstrates that academic activity cycles are longer, more universally shared, and obdurate. September happens once a year, and is a centuries-old ritual, which has maintained its general form for generations.

The idea of September has no analogue in the private sector. An applied social research manager could effectively ignore September without any repercussions, either practical or symbolic. Unlike the next generation of scholars, the next generation of workers do not get their own month in the private sector. There is no stream of new-ness into the private sector during September. Indeed, no other month stands in September's stead in the private sector. Young workers enter companies at many different times of year. Senior workers do not universally prepare for any particular month: work happens with relative continuity throughout the year. The lack of a September (or April, or December) ritual in the private sector is but one clue that culture is practiced differently. Time is reckoned on a more consistent cadence and organizational reproduction does not hinge upon the mass matriculation of new workers.

For our purposes, the private sector differs from academia in two key ways. First, applied social scientists have clients, and second, they must manage projects within the corporate context. Both of these dimensions of applied research management involve skills not typically taught or learned in the academic sector. Clients differ from academic peers, and private-sector projects require different techniques and cultural representations of time. In this chapter, I will analyse these dimensions phenomenologically, symbolically, and practically. I will also summarize specific skills and cultural practices that applied research managers must employ to ensure success of their research agendas.

HAVING CLIENTS

What is the symbolic nature of the act of applied social research? In their wonderful book *Doing Anthropology in Consumer Research*, Sunderland and Denny (2007) offer a very simple approach to uncovering the symbolic nature of any social phenomenon. Ask simply: what is 'blank'? They use the example of coffee, which is a hot, brown liquid. But symbolically, coffee is a way to cement bonds, both in business and casual social life (see Stroebaek, 2013). It is a social lubricant with low social stakes attached. Followers of the philosopher Heidegger will recognize this simple approach as a phenomenological inquiry. Asking ever simpler questions about the essence of a thing is how to get to the 'thing in itself,' or the essential nature of a phenomenon. As Heidegger suggests, 'questioning is the piety of thought' (Heidegger and Lovitt, 1977, p. 35).

What, then, is the 'applied social research project'? At first glance it appears to be simply the act of collecting insights from consumers about products and services. But symbolically, applied social research is the concerted pursuit of knowledge, some of

which will be unpleasant and unwelcome. This means, by extension, that applied social research implies an epistemological shift. In essence, applied social research is the act of challenging belief systems. This enterprise is rendered all the more hazardous in the private sector because of 'clients.'

Academic social scientists do not have clients. Certainly, they do have funders, colleagues, research assistants, journal reviewers, and editors. All of these stakeholders shape how they design, conduct, and report their research findings. All of these stakeholders may find the researcher's findings unpleasant. But academics do not have clients. Clients are a different kind of stakeholder, with entirely different effects on research management. Both independent researchers and those who work within large companies have 'clients' in the sense that there are people who use the findings of the research to design, improve, or market products and services. In this sense, all applied research managers have clients, whether they bill them directly for services, or simply work with them inside the same company.

One of the most difficult aspects of having clients is the fact that applied social research often uncovers what anthropologist Elizabeth Coulson called 'uncomfortable knowledge' (as cited in Ramírez and Ravetz, 2011), or the discovery of knowledge that contradicts, threatens, or otherwise challenges established belief systems. Academic researchers can work comfortably among like-minded colleagues, and share uncomfortable knowledge with industry – from the comfortable distance of the university. But applied research managers are embedded within industry, thus making their uncomfortable discoveries more dangerous. They bring with them the potential for troublesome truths. Where once the client stood in happy ignorance of how unpopular her product is, now she must grapple with the uncomfortable knowledge that consumers reject not only her product, but also her company and in a sense, her very identity. In the private sector, researchers often describe this succinctly, using the darkly humorous phrase 'telling them their baby is ugly.'

The applied social research manager, therefore, is engaged with what Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) call 'culture change work.' Culture change work is the process by which organizations change norms, values, beliefs, and behaviours. Many managers believe organizational culture change as a linear 'project,' with a beginning, a middle, and an end. But Alvesson and Sveningsson argue that it is actually the culmination of many micro-changes in everyday life. Culture change work is not 'directed' by senior management, but embodied in the everyday activities of the firm. Applied social research introduces the potential to challenge belief, as it often uncovers insight that openly contradicts an organization's cultural belief system. For example, if their product is terribly unpopular, it may threaten a company's cultural belief that they are 'relentlessly focused on the consumer.' Or such a finding may threaten an even more mundane taken-for-granted belief such as 'our marketing department is the best,' or 'our engineers craft precision products.' Such beliefs are common within organizations. Applied social research, just like academic social research, is aimed at analysing taken-for-granted beliefs (Berger and Luckman, 1966). As a result, applied social research is actually culture change work.

The corporate world is riddled with the corpses of failed culture change projects. Woe betide the applied social research manager who fails to appreciate that their work is essentially a culture change project, in the guise of mere research. Organizations are self-sustaining machines. The university produces new scholars in its effort to sustain itself, while corporations seek to sustain their businesses. Both kinds of organizations have a remarkable capacity to silence, stave off, and outright deny any information that threatens their ability to sustain themselves. Organizations aspire to agree. As Tuckman and Jensen (1977) famously described, company groups form, then 'storm,' before setting norms, after which point they begin to agree with each other, over and over again.

Applied social researchers bring uncomfortable knowledge to this consensus party, essentially taking the firm back to the bad old days of 'storming.' Applied social research managers must know that what they do is not simply 'managing' clients, but guiding them through culture change work.

ACQUIRING CLIENTS

This presents an essential problem: how will applied social research managers get research work, if their sole task it to tell clients 'their baby is ugly'? The answer? Imperfectly (some readers may notice that dark humour goes a long way in private-sector practice). Both qualitative and quantitative research is conducted regularly within private-sector organizations. Academic researchers may be surprised to learn that ethnography and other interpretive methods are routinely practiced in private-sector organizations (Moisander and Valtonent, 2011). Esomar, the international market research association, estimates that in 2013, corporations spent US$6.6 billion on qualitative research, worldwide (Esomar, 2013). The vast majority of money spent on qualitative research is on focus groups, but Esomar estimates almost $1.6 billion is spent on the more interpretive methods of in-depth interviewing and ethnography. This amount is dwarfed by the US$32.4 billion spent on quantitative market research, but, as I have argued elsewhere (Ladner, 2014), much of this is a result of a lack of familiarity with interpretive epistemology, and with qualitative notions of validity. Qualitative and quantitative social research are both common in the private sector.

Applied social research managers may work as 'embedded' researchers within organizations, or as employees or owners of market research companies. I work at Microsoft as a researcher, focusing on technology behaviours. My role is to conduct primary and secondary research about productivity, and uncover potential technological features or enhancements that may help information workers do their jobs more enjoyably and efficiently. My job is also, at times, to tell my engineering colleagues that the product they have already built will not meet these success criteria. As former Microsoft anthropologist Donna Flynn has written, this activity can elicit a bristling response, one in which engineers may reject the researcher's 'special knowledge' of the customer as incorrect. As Flynn writes, 'my customers are different' is a refrain that allows the engineer to claim a closer relationship with the customer than the researcher (Flynn, 2009). Given this challenging environment, researchers must continue to demonstrate the value of their research through several means: offering specific recommendations for improvement; designing both qualitative and quantitative research studies that uncover 'good news' as well as bad (some might recognize this as appreciative inquiry); and adhering to good ethical standards.

Self-employed researchers or those who work in research companies face the same challenges of uncovering uncomfortable knowledge. Yet they must also market their services externally. Some academics may be familiar with government contracts, which are often in the form of request for proposals. Private-sector organizations also issue RFPs, and I and my applied colleagues have responded to these requests as one way to acquire clients. But more effective are methods that follow traditional marketing best practices. Applied social research managers must first establish a reputation as a trusted source of insight, and then must seek out organizations that would both have the budget and appetite for research. Speaking at industry (not academic) conferences helps establish this public persona. The Ethnographic Praxis in Industry (EPIC) conference is one such gathering, though applied researchers should also consider conferences specific to the industry they are studying. Most industries have member associations which host annual meetings. It is an unusual treat for industry members to hear unbiased, thoughtful

research about their industry or customers, and applied social research managers should take full advantage of this fact. Additionally, writing for various online and print publications is another way to build one's reputation as trusted, external researcher. It also establishes the applied social research manager as a bearer of uncomfortable knowledge, and will attract only those potential clients that are amenable to this kind of research. Applied social research managers should be aware of how they appear in search terms, and what kinds of topics become associated with their names. Custom web sites, blogging and social media posts are important ways to establish a reputation on the Internet.

Once having established this reputation, applied social research managers must act as their own sales force, by seeking out potential clients within organizations that have sizeable research budgets. I personally have met with dozens of potential clients who work in various roles – marketing, market research management, innovation, new product development, Website and mobile application development, and even senior roles such as corporate strategy. I did this as an employee of several web design agencies, and also as founder and principal of my own research company. Finding potential clients, establishing relationships with them, and managing ongoing contact is a job in itself (it's usually called 'sales'!). But applied social research managers can begin small by establishing relationships with a few key partners, conducting research for them, and using this as their portfolio to gain more research contracts. The typical error an academic researcher makes is not understanding that the sales cycle for research is often long (sometimes as long as a year) and requires some proof of ability to gather insight. The portfolio of past work is critical to securing future work. It is particularly helpful if applied social research managers include information about how they pushed through culture change.

Design professor Peter Jones detailed (2008) a case study of this type of culture change work in his analysis of an interaction design project. In his tellingly titled monograph *We Tried To Warn You*, Jones notes that the design process itself transformed his clients' thinking about their customers and how they relate to them. He notes that the moment of truth came when his clients viewed their own positions, and how they relate to their customers, critically. Academic social scientists will recognize this moment as the same instant when their students begin to question taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. Jones describes challenges this practice brought for his applied social research project, through dicey moments when the client rejected many of the claims he made.

Managing clients includes two major tasks. First, the applied social research manager educates clients on the epistemological Pandora's Box which social research may uncover. Clients must be prepared for uncomfortable knowledge, and understand their likely negative reactions to it. They must also be prepared for the specific method that the applied social research manager will employ. As I noted above, many clients have only a passing familiarity with social research methods (at best), and applied social research managers should prepare them for the kinds of activities, techniques, and outputs the chosen method will involve.

How should applied research managers educate clients on both culture change, and social research? The first activity is actively educating the client and guiding them toward a critical epistemology. The consumer's 'standpoint' is not typically embraced in the contemporary corporation, though it is frequently a point of departure for academic sociologists (Smith, 2005). As Ramírez and Ravetz (2011) argue, corporate actors often feel threatened when adopting a consumer's standpoint because it is an organizational response, designed to fight off threats and preserve organizational integrity. Educating clients for this transformation means providing case studies and examples of where uncomfortable knowledge was found, and how it was grappled with. This education also involves taking clients along on fieldwork

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wherever possible, in order to encourage empathy, but also to throw clients out of their element, and the world inside the corporation. Without exception, every client I have ever taken into the field with me has experienced a degree of transformation that simply does not happen with other forms of research. Philosophers will find this a confirmation of the assertion that consciousness is essentially embodied (Dreyfus, 1996; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Fieldwork is the first-hand, embodied experience that makes it impossible for clients to ignore, dismiss or otherwise deny how real people feel about their products, services, or company.

Applied social research managers should avoid focus groups because of their poor educational outcomes. Focus groups quite literally separate clients from real people, with the use of the one-way mirror which allows clients to watch the proceedings without ever having been seen directly by participants. Focus groups allow clients to avoid the embodied, visceral experience of adopting participants' point of view. Focus groups do not educate clients, but allow them to abstract the real experiences of real people into mere 'findings.' By way of illustration, I can share the experience of one client who came to me, frustrated with the results of her focus groups she had commissioned. The client was a market research manager at a major pharmaceutical company. Her job was to understand the patient experience of a vaccine, designed to protect young women from a sexually transmitted virus. The client complained to me about the participants she had observed in a recent set of focus groups. The research was about understanding young women's beliefs about sexual health. As she sat behind the glass, she said she found herself increasingly angry at the participants inside. The participants were all about 20-years-old and seemed completely unconcerned about this topic. She found their responses flippant, uninformed, and rather irresponsible. Her anger only grew as the focus group continued. Her genuine concern for the health of these young women morphed in anger and resentment.

Imagine if this client had come into the field with me, instead of sitting behind the glass. She likely would have visited a young woman in her home. She would have spent time talking with her, and seeing the intimate atmosphere of her kitchen table or potentially even her bedroom. In those few moments she spent attending this participant's home and life, she would have learned more about her, perhaps even being transported back to that same time in her own life, when she too was young and naïve. She would have been reminded of the daily struggles of that time: grappling with femininity, sexual mores, and adulthood. Even if that young woman had been equally as flippant, uninformed, and irresponsible, my client would have already been better equipped to empathize with this young woman's life, just by being with her in an intimate setting. This is precisely what philosopher Hubert Dreyfus argued in his defence of face-to-face education: embodied experience renders people uncomfortable – and therefore more affected by that experience (Dreyfus, 2009).

The second major client-management activity is playing the role of culture change agent. The applied social research manager plays an essential role in the micro practices of everyday corporate life. This role is akin to Simmel's (1950) famous 'stranger': the applied social research manager is typically an outsider to a product design, marketing, or engineering organization and can therefore act as a professional outsider. Because she is an outsider, she is a neutral and safe confidante for members to share their closely held fears or beliefs. A brand manager may confide that he believes the product is confusing to consumers. An industrial designer may confess that she has always doubted a particular design decision. Applied social research managers must cultivate both a 'stranger' persona, as well as create safe spaces and times to broach difficult topics. She can provide an empathetic ear to such concerns, and guide clients toward a collective moment of truth, by engineering fieldwork, meetings, brainstorms, and off-site planning sessions

wherein uncomfortable knowledge gets voiced publicly.

To succeed as culture change agents, applied social research managers can employ several strategies. First, they should make alliances with those who share their desire for change, innovation, and authenticity. These are not always senior people – they are often individuals working in isolation, doggedly pursuing change. Second, applied social research managers can construct symbols that convey the spirit of culture change. In their study of architect Frank Gehry's firm, Yoo, Boland and Lyytinen (2006) found that the firm had the opportunity to make a sculpture for the Barcelona Olympics in 1994. They used this opportunity to push the limits of their current design processes, culminating in the 'fish sculpture,' which later became a symbol of the firm's ability to push its innovative limits. Applied social research managers should aspire to create symbols like the fish sculpture that can embody their change agenda. Third, applied social research managers can build social capital within the firm. Economists often measure social capital as a proxy for innovative capacity, because it indicates a high measure of trust. Applied social research managers can facilitate this trust by organizing opportunities for members of the organization to come together in non-competitive, frequent, and regular activities (Small, 2009).

Being an educator and culture change agent are two very challenging activities. Many applied social scientists spend much of their time educating, guiding, and advising clients in ways that academic researchers do not. Having clients can add significant value to the research, as research managers are forced to simplify their approach, language, and insight into only the most important and significant. It inspires a discipline to strip away the unnecessary, which can be extremely liberating for those more familiar with the academic practice of venerating the literature. But make no mistake, having clients requires an additional set of competencies to the applied research manager's existing skills.

MANAGING PROJECTS

The second major way in which applied social research differs from academic research is in how research projects are managed. Contemporary corporate life does not lend itself well to applied social research, in part because of the essential differences in the symbolic representations of time, but also because of the corporation inclination toward control. Qualitative research in particular is often unstructured, messy, and iterative, while corporate norms exalt structure and predictability. Life in today's corporate world beats to the drum of constant activity. Globalization has 'annihilated' time zones and increased global competition (Castells, 1996; Laxer, 1995). Temporality in the corporate context is also very structured. The pervasive use of technologies such as digital calendaring and project management tools leads to what Glenday (2011) calls 'taut time,' or time that is precisely organized and filled by predetermined activities. By contrast, 'loose time' is unstructured, and filled by emergent activities. Taut time is increasingly the norm, affecting everyone from academics (Menzies and Newson, 2007) to children (Atchley, Strayer, and Atchley, 2012; Gray, 2011). Structured, constant activity is far from the ideal environment for basic research, and applied social researchers must adapt their methods to suit this corporate landscape.

Contemporary corporate actors manage taut time through the creation of 'projects.' The 'project' is the natural manifestation of contemporary corporate culture. A project is the temporary organization of people, marshalled around a shared goal (Lundin and Soderholm, 1995). The goal of a project is to create something within a discrete period of time (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). The implicit assumption in contemporary corporations is that nothing can be created unless it is governed, which is in keeping with neoliberal ideals of self-regulation and monitoring (Miller and Rose, 1990). It is, of course, rather absurd to assume that nothing could come into existence without

it becoming a 'project': some of humanity's greatest achievements were created without the benefit of a project plan. Yet in today's corporate environment, there is an assumption that time and budget governance are required for anything to get done.

Unsurprisingly, the neoliberal world has embraced the discipline of 'project management,' which is now arguably the profession most emblematic of this new age (Muzio, Hodgson, Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, and Hall, 2011). Project management is typically interpreted as the control of both people and time, and is usually a deeply positivistic endeavour (Pollack, 2007). While project managers often perform very human activities such as communication and reaching consensus, project management as a discipline typically operates in a quasi-scientific manner, with the diligent measurement of time and effort.

Applied social research managers may find themselves confounded by these practices. Interpretivist, qualitative research, which is a common form of applied research, is, by its very nature, unpredictable and ambiguous. Project management, by *its* very nature, is creating *predictability and precision* – this may explain why quantitative market research takes 83 per cent of the worldwide market research budget (Esomar, 2013). Applied social research managers need not become positivist project managers to conduct research, but they must acknowledge and engage in the established cultural practices of their organizations. To do this, the applied social research manager can create representations of their research that correspond to the contemporary corporation's need for governance.

Such a representation is the 'project plan.' Continuing the phenomenological inquiry into the essence of applied social research, we may ask: What is the nature of a 'project plan'? It is the symbolic communication that time and people are being controlled. It is not necessary to actually control time and people in such a rigid manner. Then what is the purpose of the project plan? To communicate symbolically that the applied social research project is in keeping with the cultural norms of governance. It is possible to craft project plans critically, while guarding against the deleterious effects of taut time, governance, and an over-reliance on control. To do so, applied social research managers can become *interpretivist project managers*. This allows the research manager to both critically assess corporate cultural practices, while at the same time employing them wherever necessary.

I have developed dozens of project plans in my private sector experience. I have done this, not because I believe it is impossible to do research without one, but because I must establish myself as a legitimate manager in the eyes of my corporate colleagues. This is akin to the multi-paged curriculum vitae in academia: an academic researcher without a CV is still a researcher, but one lacking in some representational legitimacy. An applied social research manager is still a researcher, but one who cannot claim to have a 'project' in the symbolic discourse of the corporation. Creating a project plan is a discursive act, which can be simultaneously embraced and critically assessed.

An interpretivist project manager performs this discursive act. She sees and understands the gap between her interpretivist method and the positivist practices of her organization. She sees the act of 'project management' as a product of that organization's culture, one that is socially constructed and infused with meaning. Her job is to empathize with her clients and their need for positivist practices. The interpretivist project manager establishes trust and has a legitimate claim to authority by creating a time budget. But she also has the courage to break that time budget when research demands.

Some of today's leading researchers in social science would never secure a private-sector research job or contract because they are achingly unfamiliar with corporate cultural norms. Worse, they may reject these norms wholesale, by arguing they are necessarily and essential corrupting to the practice of research. But I would argue that it is

possible to engage in contemporary social practices – of all sorts – with a critical mind. Simply because an applied social research manager creates a project, which measures time in discrete units, does not mean that she cannot actively reject that representation of labour and expertise. Indeed, some of my own research has found that designers who labour under rigid time-management paradigms subvert, reject, and resist these representations of time through everyday trickery and concerted, critical awareness (Ladner, 2009).

Applied social research managers also engage with the ritualistic nature of project management. There is a cadence and a rhythm to managing projects in the private sector, punctuated with key events such as 'kick-off meetings' and 'research read out' meetings. Clients will appreciate these moments as indicative of the 'right' flow of the project, even if these rituals change very little about the research-specific activities. Engaging in such practices brings the applied social research manager a cloak of legitimacy. A typical client will express relief that the applied social research manager is familiar with everyday practices, the need to represent activities in ways that connote predictability and control. This does not mean the applied social research manager is engaging in rigid controls unthinkingly: quite the contrary, she is participating in corporate culture with a critical eye.

ESTIMATING THE COST OF AN APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Creating a project plan is the first step in the applied social research project. This is typically in the form of a proposal to clients or stakeholders. This means breaking down each successive task in the typical project, assigning a time budget and people to that task, and totalling up the entire projected cost. This appears to be the process of creating taut time, but in reality it is simply the process of cultural assimilation – project plans symbolically communicate that the social research manager shares the value of controlling for time and money.

Instead of blindly accepting taut time, and underestimating one's own value, applied social research managers should aspire to represent their labour as more than simply time, but as the sum total of all their experience and training. Some applied social research managers make the mistake to simply estimating the time it takes to do a single task, and assign an hourly wage to that task. Instead, using a per diem rate, and never allowing for less than half a day's billing is one solution to this problem. Another solution is adding 25 per cent to the total estimate for 'administration': this can include compensation for the prior investment in experience and training.

Table 22.1 is a typical project plan I use as template for my applied ethnography research projects, which would be quite similar for in-depth interviewing, and focus groups.

Those trained in academic qualitative research will note that there are many, many things missing from this project outline. Namely, the literature review, the transcription of interview audio tapes, the qualitative coding in NVivo or similar programs, and the iterative analysis using theory are all missing from this project plan. For an academic researcher, simply looking at this outline can be threatening, for it appears completely to devalue their expertise, and dramatically underestimate the time it takes to develop it.

But remember: developing a project plan is a discursive act. It is not 'the project,' but a *representation of the project*. The goal of developing this plan is to show your corporate colleagues that you are indeed a culturally competent social actor, who can legitimately make a claim for resources. This representation can be used to guide conversations about the applied social research project, but it should never be confused for the substantive essence of the research project.

Table 22.1 Private-sector ethnography sample project plan

	Approximate duration	*People involved*
1. **Planning**	**2 weeks**	
a. Planning for kick-off meeting	1d	Applied social research manager
b. On-site kick-off meeting	1d	Applied social research manager
c. Research and sampling design	1w	Applied social research manager
d. Interview and observation guide	1w 0.25h	Applied social research manager
e. Recruitment screener	2d	Applied social research manager
2. Insight collection	**3 weeks**	
a. Recruitment	2w	Recruiter; Applied social research manager
b. Ethnographic interviews	1w 1d	Applied social research manager; Client or Stakeholder
3. Analysis	**1–2 weeks**	
a. On-site collaborative analysis	4h	Applied social research manager; Client or Stakeholder
b. Report document preparation	1w 1d	Ethnographer
4. Applying insights	**1–2 days**	
a. Report presentation	4h	Applied social research manager; Client or Stakeholder
b. Insight brainstorming session	4h	Client or Stakeholder; Applied social research manager
Total	**6 to 7 weeks**	

MANAGING THE PROJECT

In his ethnography of an Australian hotel, Bunzel (2002) discovered that senior staff gathered regularly to discuss the hotel's functioning. Directors of each department would take the floor and report 'the numbers' of their department. Bunzel noted a crucial point: few managers had any idea what the other managers' numbers actually meant. The head of housekeeping did not know the significance of how many meals were served. The head of catering did not know the significance of how many rooms were cleaned. As Bunzel points out, 'the numbers' themselves were irrelevant: what the numbers signified was much more important. It was how urgency was communicated, and thereby how the desired work tempo was implied. The ritual of 'gathering around the numbers' every week symbolized a moment where in time, labour, and resources were considered, accounted for. This is the essence of 'projectified' work: contemporary organizations gather to consider finite time, labour and resources (Muzio et al., 2011).

Applied social research managers can also 'gather around the numbers,' while simultaneously interrogating the significance of doing so. Developing and accounting for indicators of research activity is another way in which applied social research managers can make legitimate claims for resources. How much time has been 'spent' in this project? How much time is left in the project? How many activities have been completed? How much data have been collected? How many reports have been written? How many stakeholders have been informed of the results? All of these indicators can offer applied social research managers a weekly ritual, which is in keeping with current corporate practice.

Crucially, however, applied social research managers must never confuse these indicators with the sum total of their work. Social research is not designed for rigid projectification. It was conceived as a deeply immersive creative encounter with social actors. The goal of recording and accounting for these indicators is not to achieve 'the numbers,' but to achieve that creative encounter. In order

to revel in the complexity of social activity, applied social research managers must assure clients and stakeholders that this encounter is a legitimate use of resources.

CONCLUSION

Pierre Trudeau believed that *les deux solitudes* of English and French Canada could come together under the banner of a nation state, bound together through its constitution. I believe the two solitudes of academic and applied social research can also come together under a banner of shared values. But just as Quebec is a 'distinct society,' private-sector research is a distinct – and no less legitimate – cultural context. To work within this context, the applied social research manager must engage in its customs. But she must also interrogate, reflect upon, and critically apply those customs with her own professional discretion. She should not abandon her academic research roots, but at the same time, she can and will bring culture change to her corporate context.

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