

Contents

1. Introduction, or: From IT Projects to Organisational Ethnography	11
1.1. "You should be able to resolve this, right?"	11
1.2. Office fieldwork in India	13
1.3. Misunderstandings as a research subject	14
1.4. Organisational ethnography and its limits	15
1.5. Client centricity and ground reality as opposing values	16
1.6. Chapter outline	18
2. Anthropology, Organisational Systems and Misunderstandings	21
2.1. Complex organisations as a field of inquiry	22
2.2. From organisational culture to social systems	31
2.3. The organisation as a social system	37
2.4. Conceptualising misunderstanding	42
2.5. Ethnography as a communication process	48
3. Fieldwork in Corporate Offices	51
3.1. Office ethnography: Access and the role of the researcher	51
3.2. The fieldwork setting: In and around Advice Company	55
3.3. Methods: Classics with a twist	64
3.4. Concluding remarks on fieldwork in corporate offices	73

Part I: The Organisation as a Social System

4. System/Environment Boundaries	81
4.1. Passing gates: Access procedures	82
4.2. Differentiated environment: Clients, freelancers, universities, contractors	96

4.3.	Organisational membership	109
4.4.	Concluding remarks: Operative closure and openness to the environment	119
5.	Internal Differentiation: The Offices	121
5.1.	Increasing differentiation to reduce complexity	122
5.2.	Access procedures: From elaborate to basic	124
5.3.	Inside the offices: Differences in space and equipment	129
5.4.	Atmospheres as “tempered spaces”: Office perceptions	133
5.5.	Concluding remarks: Client centricity as a continuum	150
6.	Formal Boundaries, Informal Bridges: Departments and Teams	155
6.1.	Differentiating function and hierarchy: Job types and teams	155
6.2.	Lunchmates and batchmates: Informal bridges across the office	165
6.3.	Concluding remarks on the organisational system	171

Part II: Working Misunderstandings

7.	Working Misunderstandings	179
7.1.	Working misunderstandings and ethnographic insight	179
7.2.	Working misunderstandings as an analytical category	181
7.3.	The client project as a service commodity	187
8.	Collaboration as a Working Misunderstanding	191
8.1.	Discovering “collaboration”	192
8.2.	From a non-intentional to an intentional working misunderstanding	195
8.3.	Working (with) a misunderstanding	197
8.4.	Concluding remarks on collaboration as a working misunderstanding	198
9.	Modus intentional: Date games	201
9.1.	Double contingency and cross-system interaction	202
9.2.	Date games and working misunderstandings	203
9.3.	Date games reversed: Status reports and escalation	209
9.4.	Date games across system boundaries, and their limits	215
9.5.	Concluding remarks on intentional working misunderstandings	223
10.	Modus Non-Intentional: Project Representations	227
10.1.	Organisational decision-making and “black boxes”	228

10.2. Lead management: Translating uncertainty	232
10.3. From strategy to project actions	237
10.4. The client project as a plan and the “ground reality”	246
10.5. From data to presentations: Project view from “behind the wall”	258
10.6. From presentation files to strategy	270
10.7. Concluding remarks on working misunderstandings	278
11. Conclusion	281
11.1. How “Indian” is Advice Company?	282
11.2. Advice Company as a client-centric social system	285
11.3. Guiding difference as working misunderstandings	287
11.4. Mutually exclusive values	289
11.5. Closing the black box	291
Acknowledgments	293
List of Figures	295
References	297

*Dedicated to Matti –
may you keep your interest in opening boxes to find out what's in them.*

