12
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

This chapter will provide information on:

- What is specific about ethnographic research
- How the ethnographic research process proceeds
- What are the methodological and ethical principles of ethnographic research
- How to do ethnographic fieldwork
- How to analyze and interpret ethnographic research materials
- How to write and evaluate ethnographic research.

WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH?

Ethnographic research takes a cultural lens to the study of people's lives within their communities (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Fetterman, 2010). The roots of ethnography lie in anthropological studies that focused on studying social and cultural aspects of small communities in foreign countries. The researchers lived among the inhabitants with the purpose of understanding the culture that these people shared. Thus, the classic anthropologists were foreigners in their field sites. It often took years for them to get into the culture of the community that they were studying. In order to do so, they had to learn the language necessary for socializing with the inhabitants and understanding their daily habits, rituals, norms and actions.

In the 1930s, the critical sociologists of the Chicago school introduced a new stream of ethnographic studies when they started to explore their own street corners just as if they were unknown places (Deegan, 2007). Currently, the fieldsites of ethnographic research can be anywhere, including familiar settings. Ethnographic research can take place in many types of communities including formal and informal organizations such as workplaces, urban communities, fan clubs, trade fares, shopping centres, and social media. In addition, the research is often performed in the native language of the researcher. The main aim of the ethnographers, however, remains about the same: to observe and analyze how people interact with each other and with their environment in order to understand their culture (see Box 12.1).

The emic and etic perspectives

Ethnographers seek to gain an emic perspective, or the 'native's point of view' of a specific culture (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This means that they try to look at the culture under study from the inside; through the meanings that the members of that culture live with. Therefore, ethnographers avoid imposing conceptual and theoretical frameworks on empirical data at the beginning of the research process.

According to our experience, understanding the emic perspective is difficult for a novice business researcher who is more familiar with what is called the etic perspective. Etic perspective means that the researcher looks at the culture mostly with theoretical conceptions. Although researchers tend to combine emic and etic perspectives at some point of their research, you can still emphasize them in different ways throughout your study. For an example of this, see the Laukkanen and Eriksson (2013) article in which they discuss various ways of combining emic and etic perspectives when studying managerial cognitions.

While ethnographers are interested in the emic perspective, that is, how members of a culture give meaning to the world, they are also interested in language practices. This is also true in business-related ethnographic studies; for good examples, see Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) and Samra-Fredericks (2003). In ethnographic research, language is conceptualized as a social practice: what people say and what they keep silent about produce meaning and value in social life. Language practices are socially constituted because they are shaped by social and historical forces, which are beyond the control of individuals. At the same time, however, language practices constitute people's lives together by specifying, creating, maintaining and changing the frames of their action.

BOX 12.1

Key elements of ethnographic research

Ethnographic research entails:

- an interest in cultures, cultural understanding, and meaning-making;
- looking at the culture from the 'inside', with the emic perspective;

- being attentive to language practices;
- being close to the field and collecting first-hand experience.

Different versions of ethnographic research

Ethnography exists in many forms and ethnographers continuously debate about what counts as ethnography, and 'how to represent the field' (van Maanen, 2011). As a result, there are distinct versions of ethnographic research that have their own epistemological backgrounds and varied research practices (Atkinson et al., 2007). This is why, if you plan to do an ethnographic study, you will need to specify what kind of ethnographic research you wish to perform. Besides the basic approach outlined in this chapter, there are also more specific alternatives.

Critical ethnographies (Castagno, 2012) and feminist ethnographies (Pillow and Mayo, 2011) are examples of theoretically informed approaches relying on the principles of critical theory (see Chapter 18) and feminist theory (see Chapter 19). Autoethnography (Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2014) refers to an approach where the researcher's personal and reflective perspective is part of the analysis.

The expansion of the Internet and social media has boosted researchers to perform virtual ethnography or netnography (see e.g. Hine, 2010). Virtual ethnography rests on the argument that the ethnographer should experience the social life of the research subjects regardless of how those experiences are mediated. Related to this, ethnography can be global, multi-sited and mobile in the sense that researchers follow people around physical and virtual places (Epstein, Fahey and Kenway, 2013).

Business-related ethnographic research

Workplace, industrial and organizational ethnographies (Eberle and Maeder, 2011; Yanow, Ybema and van Hulst, 2012) provide in-depth descriptions on a wide range of topics within the field of management and organizations, such as managerial action, organizational cultures, interaction of professional groups, work behaviour and co-worker relations, emotional labour, and sexual harassment. For exemplary empirical studies, see Watson's (1994) research on company managers; Ram's (1994) study on working lives in small firms; Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio's (2004) research on gender and entrepreneurship; and De Rond's (2012) research of teamwork in Cambridge university's boat rowing team.

In marketing, Arnould and Wallendorf (1994) have encouraged researchers to understand the marketing professionals' point of view of the market (for an example, see Schweingruber and Berns, 2005) and to explore the cultural meanings of marketing outputs such as a brand or service quality from the consumer's perspective (for an example, see Bradford and Sherry, 2013). Mariampolski (2006) provides wider insight into the extensive use of ethnographic approaches in marketing research.

With these developments, business companies have noticed that they can benefit from ethnographic research through which culture-based business problems can be addressed (Abrams, 2000; Sweet, 2001; Elliott and Jankel-Elliot, 2003).

Corporate anthropology (van Marrewijk, 2014) has also been pursued for several decades, and the interest in it is increasing. Issues that have been studied relate to all fields of business research. Thus, examples can be found in accounting (e.g. Kornberger, Justesen and Mouritsen, 2011), international business (e.g. Moore, 2011) and small-business research (e.g. Wapshott and Mallett, 2013).

But is the research done by business researchers really ethnography? Some would say it is not. It is not long-term fieldwork in a community context. It is much more likely to be short term and multi-sited with multi-researchers (for an example, see Eriksson, Henttonen and Meriläinen, 2008). Ethnography that deals with business issues often involves shorter periods of participant observation than the classic ethnographies. Despite this, ethnographic business research can still be informed by a theory of cultural interpretation.

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

There are three methodological features of ethnographic research, which have differing philosophical backgrounds. 'Naturalism' has its roots in the realist research tradition, which seeks to discover a true or authentic description of the world. Understanding and induction, in turn, are related to the social constructionist research tradition, which suggest that there are several descriptions, or versions, of the reality, the trustworthiness of which depends on what we believe is true, and how relevant the description is.

Naturalism

According to naturalism, the aim of research is to capture the objective nature of naturally occurring human action (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Hammersley, 1992: 43–54). The argument is that this can only be achieved through intensive, first-hand contact and not through what people do in experimental and artificial settings, or by what people say in interviews. This is why ethnographers carry out their research in natural settings, which exist independently of the researcher. They also try to explain social events and processes in terms of their relationship to the context in which they occur. According to naturalism, objective description requires you to minimize your influence on the activities of the people that are studied.

Understanding

A counter argument to naturalism entails that you can explain human action only if you have an understanding of the culture in which action takes place (Rosen, 1991). This is rather obvious if you study something that is completely alien to you. However, some ethnographers argue that it is just as important when you are studying more familiar settings. Indeed, when a setting is familiar, the danger of misunderstanding is especially great. You should not assume that you already know other people's perspectives, because specific groups and individuals develop distinctive world views. This is especially true in large complex societies; therefore, it is necessary to learn the culture of the group that you are studying before you can give explanations for the actions of its members. This is why participant observation, conversations and open interviews are central to ethnographic research.

Induction

Ethnographers argue in favour of inductive and discovery-based research processes focusing on 'local interpretations' (Geertz, 1973; Fetterman, 2010). It is argued that if the researcher approaches a community with a set of predefined theoretical models, concepts or propositions, they may fail to discover the distinctive and contextual nature of it. This is why ethnographers typically start their research with just a general interest in a community, group of people, type of social action, or a practical problem. The research problem will then be refined, and sometimes even changed, as the research project proceeds. Similarly, theoretical ideas are developed over the course of the research process. These are regarded as valuable outcomes of the research, not as its starting points.

Ethics

One of the strengths of ethnographic research, but also one of its challenges, is the reflection on the relationships that the researchers build with the participants in their studies. Carrying out ethnographic business research differs from many other qualitative research approaches. Doing ethnographic research means getting to know people (e.g. managers, employees, customers, consumers), gaining their trust, and perhaps committing oneself to long-term friendship relations. Or, as van Maanen (2011) puts it, in your research project you are 'part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member'.

All research is supposed to protect the people who participate in the study. This includes letting them know the risks of the research, protecting their identities and, more generally, paying extra attention to the decisions that you make during the research process (Vanderstaay, 2005). You need to make your research goals and objectives clear to the members of the community under study, and gain the informed consent of these people prior to starting your research project.

Ethics in research also includes ensuring that the study participants are given the opportunity to decide whether you can use their real names or pseudonyms in your research. You also need to discuss whether participants would want to read and comment on the drafts of the research report. Overall, you must be sure that your research does not harm or exploit individuals or groups of people that you are studying. For more details, see Chapter 6 for research ethics.

HOW TO CONDUCT ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The concept of 'field' implies that the research is carried out in the real world. The field site is the place in which your research happens, such as a small enterprise, a department in a larger company, or a shopping centre.

Choosing the field site

Ethnographic research often starts with choosing a field site. Thereafter, you generate a guiding research question appropriate to that specific site. It is also possible, however, to start with a theoretically derived research question about a certain cultural process and to find a site where that question might be appropriate. For example, Girod (2005) tested a pre-given theoretical model in her ethnographic study in retail branding.

Either way, setting up a research project can work as long as the site and the question are relevant to one another. Whatever way you choose to proceed, be careful that your research questions touch upon something important about social and cultural life in the field site.

Once a potential field site has been selected, you need to negotiate access (see Chapter 5). This involves getting permission from the people on the site to visit the site for research purposes during a certain period of time. Getting permission often means that you need to convince a gatekeeper (e.g. the CEO of the company) about the relevance of your study. Also, you need to find some key participants, that is, people who you think are central in terms of the research question that you have in mind.

When doing an ethnographic study in a business company, it is often crucial that the researcher can offer to the company involved in the study, some concrete benefit in exchange (for example, see e.g. Ram, 1994; Fletcher, 2002). This might include working for the company, providing consultation services or business training, or some other exchangeable services.

Ethnographic fieldwork typically begins with participant observation, which is later complemented by other data (e.g. interviews and documents). Keeping field notes is a key activity performed by the ethnographer. Everyday events are recorded along with the participants' viewpoints and interpretations. Initial observations focus on the general, open-ended collection of materials derived from learning the basic cultural rules and language used at the site. This initial orientation process is important for providing a background for a more focused investigation. It also helps the researcher to gain a rapport with the participants and test out whether the original research objectives are appropriate in the local situation.

Ethnographers engage in participant observation in order to gain insight into the culture in which they are interested. These insights develop over time and in relation to the social relationships in the field as well as through repeated analysis of many aspects of our field sites. To facilitate this process, ethnographers must learn how to interact with the people in the field and how to take useful and reliable notes regarding the details of what happens in their research contexts. The field notes constitute a major part of the empirical data on which the conclusions of the research will be based.

The completed written ethnography both speaks and adds to established theoretical debates. Therefore, theory is important in ethnographic research for at least two reasons. First, theory has a key role in helping generate guiding questions for ethnographic investigation, allowing you to address larger questions about how culture works among diverse groups of people. Second, through applying theoretical tools to what you learn in the field you can better understand the social life in a certain research setting. It is through theory that the data gain wider meaning and relevance. Therefore, ethnographers must apply some theoretical concepts to their data at some point of the research.

Doing fieldwork

Fieldwork includes all activities that you need to carry out in order to collect your data (e.g. observations, interviews and site documents). Overall, fieldwork is a personal experience because all researchers are different and have varying interests and skills (Box 12.2).

Sometimes, the group of people that you want to study does not live or work in one geographic location. The idea of multi-sited fieldwork can be useful in business research, particularly when there is a goal to make cross-cultural comparisons between companies, businesses, customers, personnel or management groups, or activities in several countries. For example, the field site could consist of the finance units of multinational corporations, users of web services in different countries, or women-owned biotechnology companies in Europe. Multi-sited ethnography allows ethnographers to do research in more than one locale for the purpose of making comparisons between more local sub-cultures (Epstein et al., 2013).

BOX 12.2

Guidelines for conducting ethnographic fieldwork

- Collect a variety of information from different perspectives and different sources.
- Use observation, open interviews, and site documentation, as well as audio-visual materials such as recordings and photographs.
- Write field notes that are descriptive and rich in detail.
- Represent participants in their own terms by using quotations and short stories. Capture participants' views of their own experiences in their own words.

Participant observation

Participant observation is a central data collection method in ethnographic research (see Chapter 8). In business research, the extent of participation can vary in between research projects. At the one end, the researcher makes shorter visits to the site (see Bruni et al., 2004; Eriksson et al., 2008). At the other end, the researcher shares the everyday life and activities of the people in the chosen setting. In business research, this could mean working in the organization studied, for instance. This would help in developing an 'insider's view', which means that you would experience and feel what it is like to be part of the group studied. Experiencing a site from the inside is what necessitates the participant part of observation. Simultaneously, however, there is always an observer side to this process. The challenge is to combine participation and observation in a way that enables understanding of the site as an insider while describing it to the outsiders (Wolcott, 2005).

The extent to which it is possible for a researcher to become a full participant in the culture they are studying will depend on the nature of the setting being observed. For example, Ram (1999) used his own ethnic background as one basis for choosing field sites (small companies) where he could become a full member of the group studied. Business researchers have also offered to work for the company that they have studied in order to gain an 'insider view' (see Watson, 1994). Being a participating member of the group studied develops a 'working knowledge' that enables a good understanding of the culture studied (Rosen, 1991: 16).

Whereas it would not be possible for a young business student to become the manager of a company and experience the site from this position, it may be possible for the researcher to work there as an assistant for a manager. In this way, they could then develop a partial insider perspective into managerial work. Actually, some ethnographers do not believe that understanding a culture necessarily requires becoming a full and active member of the group being studied. They claim that the ethnographer should try to be both an outsider and an insider, staying on in the margins of the group both socially and intellectually. Therefore, combining the outside and inside views is fruitful.

Ethnographic interviews

Besides observation, an ethnographic study can be centrally based on open-ended narrative, or life history interviews, which can also be called 'ethnographic interviews' (Heyl, 2007). Most often, however, ethnographers supplement what they learn through participant observation by interviewing people who can help them understand the setting or group they are researching. It can be useful to interview a variety of people at various points of an ethnographic research. In their ethnographic research on female entrepreneurship, Bruni et al. (2004) made several formal and informal interviews during their fieldwork with the people working in the companies chosen for the study.

Overall, interviews can be particularly helpful when choosing a site, after participant observation has been finished, or when the participants are going through changes that interest the researcher. While participant observation gives information on action and behaviour, interviews provide a chance to learn how people directly reflect on their own behaviour, circumstances, identities and events. This can be valuable in gaining an insider's perspective.

An important part of the interviews is to establish a rapport with the participant. The best way to do this is by being a good listener, which means to listen and hear much more than to talk and converse. Showing genuine interest towards the participant and doing what you can to make the other person socially comfortable are high priorities. When conducting the interview you should choose a setting where the participant can relax and talk openly. Be sure that the participant knows that the interview forms one part of your data and that they understand the overall implications of being interviewed (see Chapter 5).

Before starting to interview people, you should ask yourself what you want to learn from the interviews. Often, it is a good idea to make a list of all possible questions and then see which ones are most closely related to your research question. In order to let the participant talk from their own point of view, it is good to plan open-ended questions rather than structured ones. If the participant pauses during their talk or seems to be talking about irrelevant issues, wait awhile instead of immediately insisting on moving to the following question. This often leads to useful insights, even those that you would not have planned to ask.

Interviews can be taped with the participants' consent. Even if you are good at keeping notes, it is helpful to have an actual account of what was said and how. Taping allows you to transcribe interview data for closer analysis. If the participant does not want you to tape the interview, take enough time after the interview to write down more complete notes about what was said.

Site documents

A variety of site documents can be relevant to ethnographic research. These include: advertisements, work descriptions, annual reports, memos, correspondence, brochures, newsletters, websites, minutes of meetings, menus, and many other kinds of written items.

You can use site documents to learn about general issues which might affect the field site, or they can tell you how the participants of your study present themselves to other people. Site documents are helpful in placing the participants of your study in a wider context. You can also learn about what kinds of demands are placed upon the people in your site, or what kind of privileges they have. Site documents provide demographic information and documentation of historical events.

When considering whether a site document is relevant to your study, you can ask: What is written in this document and how? Why was this document produced? Who will read or use it, and how? What is not included in it, but could be? Privacy or copyright issues may apply to business-related site documents in particular; therefore, it is important to ask about this before they are included in your study. In business research, you should not use any documents that you do not have permission to use. If you are given permission to include information from the documents in your research report, you will need to cite the documents appropriately.

Field notes

Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) give an extensive overview of all issues to be considered when making field notes. The general advice is that the field notes should be written either during the stay in the field or as soon as possible after leaving the field site. Even though you may not think so when observing, you are most likely to forget relevant details unless writing them down immediately. Writing down your field notes takes time. This is why you should make a plan about how to do this. For example, reserve enough time for writing down your notes every time you will leave the research site.

It is possible to distinguish between four main parts of field notes, which should be kept distinct from one another (Emerson et al., 2011). First, jottings are brief words or phrases written down at the field site. Usually recorded in a small notebook, jottings are intended to help you to remember things that you want to include when you write the more complete notes. While not all research situations are appropriate for writing jottings (e.g. having a conversation over coffee with the CEO), they do help when sitting down to write more complete notes afterwards.

Second, description means writing down everything you can remember about a specific event, for example, a board meeting, a training session, a one-to-one conversation at lunch. While it is useful to focus primarily on things which relate to your research question that you did or observed, some amount of more general description is also helpful. This might help with writing about the site later, but it may also help link related phenomena to one another.

Third, analysis is about what you learned in the setting about your research question and other related points. Are there any themes or patterns that you can identify that would help in answering your research question? How can you focus your observation on the next visit? Can you draw any preliminary connections or potential conclusions based on what you learned?

Fourth, reflection is about what you have thought, felt and learned when making observations. What was it like to conduct your research? Did you feel comfortable being at the site? Did you have any negative emotions during your fieldwork? In what ways did you connect with the participants, and in what ways did you not? Reflection is highly relevant in ethnographic research, but be careful to separate it from description and analysis. Finally, methods of writing the field notes are rather personal. Therefore, you can develop your own system of writing different types of notes. Whatever you do, remember to separate description from interpretation and judgement.

ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

In ethnographic research, analysis takes place throughout the research project and is tightly connected with interpretation. This means that, during your research process, you will continuously analyze, interpret and learn from your empirical data. In this respect, analysis involves both creative insight and careful attention to the purpose of your study. At some stage of your research process you stop collecting data and turn your attention more fully and systematically to the analysis. Then you will ask: What do my field data tell me? What have I learned in the field? What interesting and unique things can I say in order to answer my research question?

While there is no single way to approach the analysis of ethnographic data, the following points are useful to keep in mind. Start with reading through your field notes and other data. Do this several times. The first reading you can do quickly to get an overall picture of the data. However, as you proceed, it is useful to be much more thorough. Becoming familiar with the empirical data helps you to understand them. After some rounds of reading, start to make notes on the texts you are reading and pay attention to traces of patterns, connections, similarities, or contrastive points. Then write analytical memos of these.

Reduction of data is often the second step of the analysis. In ethnographic business research, you may have vast amounts of other data besides your field notes (e.g. hundreds of pages of documents). In this case you can, for instance, decide to use only certain parts of the documents (those that are closely connected to your research question), or to make summaries of them to make easier their use.

You can formalize the analysis further through coding, or by using a computer-assisted data analysis program like NVivo or Ethnograph (see Chapters 9 and 10). Coding is not a requirement, nor is the use of computer programs. Whether you use coding or not, look for specific and local meanings in your data. What terms, words and concepts do the participants use for various things? What can you, as a researcher, identify as patterns or themes, even if the participants do not? Are there alternative understandings for what you have found in your analysis?

When using respondent validation, you will explain your preliminary conclusions to your participants. Business people in particular are in a good position to share with you additional things, which can help to confirm or to problematize what you have found. Once you have findings and conclusions in mind, you may need to elaborate the preliminary research question of your study. Can you answer this particular question with what you have found? Would another research question be more appropriate and interesting? Working back and forth between the findings, conclusions, research questions and theoretical ideas is useful.

WRITING AND EVALUATION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The word ethnography literally means 'a portrait of a people', which reminds us that ethnography is about representing the field (van Maanen, 1995). Wolcott (2005), in turn, suggests that ethnography concerns both the processes of accomplishing the research and the research report itself, which is often written in the form of prose rather than in the form of a more traditional academic research report. He argues further that these two are so closely tied to each other that the research process deserves to be called ethnography only when the end product, the research report, follows the conventions of ethnographic representation, which means an emphasis on cultural interpretation.

Using the narrative form

Business-related ethnographic research often starts with presenting a problem or an issue in the guiding question. The researchers then proceed to explore this question or problem and analyze it in light of the fieldwork. Therefore, it is useful to clarify early on in the research report why the selected issue or problem is important and why it is worthy of investigation. Business-related ethnographic writing also puts a lot of emphasis on the implications of what you learned at the field site, which is useful for adding new insights into existing theory (Rosen, 1991).

Ethnographic writing includes a lot of detailed description presented in narrative form (Fetterman, 2010). Watson (1994), Rosen (2000) and De Rond (2008) are good examples of this. The purpose of description is to let the reader know what happened in the field, what it was like from the participants' point of view to be there, and what particular events or activities were interesting and worth exploring further. A detailed description and quotations are essential qualities of ethnographic accounts.

What is included by way of description will depend on what kind of research questions the researcher is trying to answer. Often, an entire activity or event will be reported in detail because it represents a typical or unique experience, or because it allows a very detailed micro-analysis (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2001). Even a comprehensive research report will have to leave aside much of the empirical data available. This is why you should be careful to keep the focus of your research in mind during the entire writing process.

Extensive description needs to be balanced by analysis and interpretation. An interesting and readable ethnographic research report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the analysis, and sufficient analysis to allow the reader to understand the interpretation and explanation presented. Be sure that the points that you present as evidence are based upon your data. In order to understand your research, the reader needs to see the path from description, analysis and interpretation, to results and conclusions in the research report.

Situating yourself in the text

One of the major decisions that an ethnographer needs to make is how to situate themselves in the ethnographic text that forms the research report. Van Maanen (2011) discusses three modes of positioning in detail.

- In realist writing, the researcher is absent from the analysis and the text, the aim of which is to present realistically and objectively what happened in the field. Here, the researcher writes in passive mode without giving any personal accounts.
- In confessional writing, the ethnographer opts for a personal style, presenting emotional reactions, unexpected occurrences, and one's own expectations and experiences of the fieldwork.
- Impressionist writing involves the researcher offering tales in which they have participated in the field. Here, the overall story of the research report makes visible both the culture being studied and the researcher's way of knowing the culture.
- Since the ethnographic research process and the evidence presented engages the researcher intensively, it is best to use the first person form when writing the research report. Ethnographic writing is best described as evocative, descriptive and lively. It is academic writing, but it also requires creativity in rendering scenes, sights, smells, feelings, experiences and people as lifelike as possible. Help the reader to be in the field just as you were, and to feel and understand what it was like.

What counts as good ethnography is a highly contested question in many ways, with the key questions revolving around how to arrive at and write out interpretations. You will find different views about how to evaluate the quality of ethnographic research, depending on the philosophical and epistemological commitments of the research and the researcher in question (see Chapter 22). Hammersley (1992: 57–77) provides a thorough description of one possible set of criteria that can be used to evaluate ethnographic research, concluding that validity and relevance, as understood in any research, are central.

KEY POINTS OF THE CHAPTER

Ethnographic research has an interest in culture and cultural meanings with an emphasis on the 'emic' or 'the insider' view.

Ethnographies are based on fieldwork among the people whose culture is under study.

Ethnography focuses on interpretation, understanding and representation.

Methodological principles such as naturalism, understanding and induction draw on different philosophical backgrounds and, therefore, produce different types of ethnography.

Collect data from different perspectives and different sources, write field notes that are descriptive and rich in detail, and represent participants in their own terms by using quotations and short stories.

Write rich description followed by analysis and interpretation, and situate yourself in your writing. The narrative form of writing works well.

FURTHER READING

The collection of essays in Atkinson et al.'s (2007) *Handbook of Ethnography* provides a comprehensive and critical guide to ethnographic research.

LeCompte and Schensul's (2010) book on *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research* discusses key issues and processes of ethnographic research through accessible writing and a good number of examples.

EXERCISE 12.1

Mini ethnography

The purpose of this exercise is to learn the basics of ethnographic research from a small-scale ethnographic research project.

- Start by finding and reading an interesting ethnographic study published as a book or an article.
- Then use this study as an example and write a one-page plan of your own ethnographic study that you can conduct in a short time period.
- Carry out your study and write a short report of it.

- Ask a more experienced colleague or friend to read the report and give you feedback on the report.
- With the feedback, reflect on how you succeeded in your study.

EXERCISE 12.2

Evaluating ethnographies

The purpose of this exercise is to learn to evaluate ethnographic research.

1. Find two ethnographic studies published as theses, books, book chapters or articles, and read them.
2. With the help of this chapter and the one on research evaluation (Chapter 22), write an outline on how the two studied could and should be evaluated.
3. Evaluate both ethnographies with your outline and compare the evaluations.

Reflect on the following issues:

- were you able to use the same evaluation criteria for both studies?
- what problems did you have in the evaluation process?
- how did the evaluation process change your pre-assumptions concerning ethnographic research?