

Summary and critique about the science of desire assignment

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Summary The article The Science of Desire presents ethnography and its proponents play an important role in modern business world. Author Ante began with an example, the satellite-radio war, to show how ethnography worked in business. In satellite-radio war, Sirius Satellite Radio made a team of social scientists, designers, and ethnographers. Through studying customers' habit of listening to music, watching TV and reading magazines, the team concluded several facts that can defeat competitors. Then, depending on the research, Sirius launched its new product, the Sirius S50. Later, as the company's wish, the S50 became one of the hottest sellers in that season. How does ethnography work in business? Many examples show brainstorming often happened with the guidance of ethnographers because ethnographers can find out what is people's missing in their lives and help designers to improve products and services to satisfy customers. The key of ethnographer's work is a deeper understanding of customers than what does traditional research. Sometimes, people have unarticulated desires, but traditional research or survey cannot find these desires.

Company should closely observe people where they live and work, and find out what they prefer but they do not aware yet. Because of the prominent effects, more and more companies, especially large companies such as IBM and Intel, pay more attention to hire ethnographers to join in their design and produce. Therefore, schools pay more attention to anthropology courses and recruit more anthropology faculties and students. Marietta L. Baba, Michigan State University's dean of social sciences, says, " Ethnography [has] escaped from academia, where it had been held hostage. " The next issue falls to what is right way to use ethnography in business.

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Many people still think using ethnography in business a little flaky. Why?

First, as author Ante (2006) said, “ ethnographers’ findings often do not lead to a product or service, only a generalized sense of what people want” (p. 100). Even if ethnographers find something, it also needs designers and engineers to make products or services to fit it. This process is not easy, even the findings cannot transmit into products and service. Second, ethnographers’ research usually takes a long time, and the result from using the findings needs long time to come out. Therefore, how to use ethnography right is very important.

The author gave five advises to do ethnography right. First, “ Think Big Thoughts”. Companies should use ethnography in big and broad questions, not in small and detailed ones. Second, “ Due Diligence”. Companies should use the right consultants for their projects. Third, “ Start Early”. Companies should use ethnography at the beginning of the development process of projects. Fourth, “ Sell, Sell, Sell”. Managers should constantly tell executives why use ethnography and how it work. Fifth, “ Build a Culture”. Companies should make the thought of using ethnography into everyone of the companies and make it become a culture of companies.

With a right way to use ethnography, some people believe ethnography could become a core competence. At last, three examples showed ethnography made different effects in business. First, ethnography refreshes products. In 2004, Marriott hired IDEO Inc. to rethink the hotel experience in order to attract more young customers. After research, IDEO found hotels generally do not serve small groups of business travelers. Therefore, Marriott

reinvent their lobbies for meetings, creating for each a social zone, with new equipments such as small tables, brighter lights, and wireless Web access.

Furthermore, Marriott will allow solo customers to work or relax in larger, quiet, semiprivate spaces. As guests wish, Marriott is considering a new kiosk to let guests check in by themselves. Second, ethnography cracks markets. GE wanted to get into the plastic-fiber business, which provides material for higher-value, higher-margin products such as fire-retardant jackets and bulletproof vests. However, after research, Jump researchers found customers want to take part in the development of advanced materials. Therefore, GE shares prototypes with customers.

Furthermore, instead of currying favor with executives, it works closely with engineers to solve technical problems. Third, ethnography transforms a culture. From 1990s, Intel, a big corporation that does not market directly to consumers, brought in ethnographers at the highest levels of management in order to focus on consumer products more. In past years, Intel developed its wireless Centrino mobile technology by studying Alaska's fishers; Intel began to develop medical technology for the wave of retiring boomers by studying the elderly; Intel developed \$500 Community India PC by studying rural Indian condition.

In order to do better in ethnography research, Intel created a network of "platform-definition centers" in Bangalore, Cairo, Sao Paulo, and Shanghai. Although some ones in the company still does not believe ethnography, with anthropologists' help, indeed engineers and other had better get used to it.

Critique Generally, I agree with the principles of this article. At first, let's look

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at what is ethnography. According to the definition in the website Wikipedia: Ethnography (Greek ?????? ethnos = people and ???????? graphein = writing) is a genre of writing that uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human societies.

Ethnography presents the results of a holistic research method founded on the idea that a system's properties cannot necessarily be accurately understood independently of each other. The genre has both formal and historical connections to travel writing and colonial office reports. (pp. 1) Therefore, ethnography using in business is a study of customers. Along with customer's life condition and education level improving, customers pay more attention to the value of products or services for them. The value of products or services is different from the quality of them.

Maybe a product has many functions, and its reliability is very good, but if it cannot satisfy customers' requirement, it cannot win in competition. For example, Google and Baidu are competitors in online search in China. Google is the largest search website in the world, but it is not the No. 1 in China. According to the article The plucky local search groups that defy Planet Google, Baidu's share of the Chinese search market is 66.5%, but Google's share in China is just only 11.3%. Jason Yu (2008) said, "Google has many excellent products, but not every product has performed well in China. The reason is some functions in Baidu satisfy Chinese customers. For instance, Baidu provides free music search and Baidu Post, an online forum function of which a little likes Wikipedia. Another key fact is customer's unarticulated desire. In China, cell phone message is very popular, but the Chinese-

character text input method is not easy for everyone, especially the elders. People just felt previous input methods are not good, but they can present which kind of method they need. After observing this phenomenon, Motorola researchers developed a cell phone that lets users input messages by writing directly on the keypad. Overall, the job of ethnographers in business are finding customer's needs and helping designers to realize these needs. Furthermore, almost all the industries can use ethnography. Waterstan said, "By means of ethnography, we have not found impenetrable markets, but sites of tremendous growth and opportunity" (p. 2). Now, we know the ethnography is necessary in business. The next issue is how to use it right. In this article, author mainly pointed out two problems of ethnography ??? nonobjective and long time.

Then he concluded five factors to use ethnography right. I translate them into four issues ??? when, where, why and how to use ethnography in business. Ethnography research is a kind of analysis to help designers, so it should be used at the beginning of the product development process. Of course, the needs of customers is changing and unending, so the development of new products is unending if companies want to continue their businesses. As in grounded theory, there is no preset limiting of what will be observed and no real ending point in an ethnographic study. Trochim, 2005) However, because the resources of a company are limited, a company cannot use ethnography research in every place. Thus, a company should hire right consultants or employees with a mix of skills in ethnography, design, and business. The attitude to ethnography in business is also important. Ethnography cannot make profits by itself. Ethnographers have to

work with designers and engineers to realize the value of their findings in products or services. With a right attitude to ethnography, designers and engineers can more efficiently work with ethnographers.

Moreover, as author stated, ethnography should be used in big problems and by all of people in the company. Kocao? lu (2006) stated, “ Ethnography is an extremely broad area with a great variety of practitioners and methods” (para. 11). Therefore, ethnography is little effective solve small problems. No one can figure out all of problems, so the more people take part in the research, the more problems people find out. Companies should encourage every employee join in researches and provide their ideas. For example, GE created a program named Work-Out in 1988.

According to Kotelnikov (2006), “ The Work-Out program was a way to reduce bureaucracy and give every employee, from managers to factory workers, an opportunity to influence and improve GE’s day-to-day operations” (para. 1). Furthermore, there are some other issues, which I think are important in using ethnography in business. First, it is about the cost of ethnography research. Every company’s target is profit, so the cost issue can be ignored when management makes strategic decisions. Ante’s article did not talk about this issue. Ethnography research is often a long time job.

Moreover, long time results in high cost. On the other hand, Ethnographers cannot insure their findings will bring on high profit. With high cost and uncertain profit, every manager will doubt if the company use ethnography in their business. That is why only big companies pay attention to

ethnography. Second, the speed and validity of ethnography research is still a problem that author did not give a solution. Moeran (2005) stated, “Ethnography requires a long-term involvement with and study of the everyday lives, thoughts and practices of a particular collectivity of people” (p. 3).

However, like Berner (2006) said, “Where anthropologists may take years to do one study, businesses need results in weeks” (para. 1). In high competition environment, speed means money; speed means life. If a company’s strategy falls behind its competitors, it will lose money, even fall down. Thus, in most condition, companies have to make decisions without ethnography’s help. This is one reason many people doubt ethnography. At the same time, if ethnography research cannot increase its success probability, it could not become a core competence. Therefore, ethnographers should improve their research to make it faster and more useful.

The last issue is about the attitude towards ethnography research. In this article, author had a positive attitude and said many advantages of ethnography. However, I think people should calmly face it. After all, ethnography is not a gold goose. Companies still need to focus on their technology, product quality, accounting, and finance. Reference Ante, S. E. (2006, June 5) the Science of Desire. Business Week. Berner, R. (2006, June). The ethnography of marketing. Business week. Retrieved Oct. 14, 2008, from http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/jun2006/id20060612_919537_tm Ethnography.

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