Study on the Facilitation Style

And Process Learning from ARM class

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INTRODUCTION

The current paper reports on an ethnographic work carried for a PhD class. The first part tries to propose a theoretical contribution, which forms the substantive learning of the study. The second part reflects on the process of that ethnographic experience, isolating the self-reflective dimension of the study. The terrain of the ethnography was constrained to "teaching" at the institution where the ethnography class itself was taking place. Separating first order learning from elaborations that are more reflective is therefore even more necessary than during a classic ethnography, however oxymoronic that may sound.

The context was to observe a weeklong executive education program in a top business school. The object of the program was on strategic issues, with the participants being middle to high-level managers coming from blue-chip firms from various industries and countries. The instructors' team was composed of three business school professors and a senior researcher in business. The team was assembled and directed by one of them as Program Director (labeled as "PD" below), who "owned" the program and had taught it for at least a decade. The two other instructors from academia were a female mid-career professor, and late career male professor. The observations were carried in the classroom, an amphitheater on campus. As the observer, I was presented as a researcher studying teaching. I was not a participant in that I missed some of the activities and a few parts of the classes. Besides the tens of hours of observation, I interviewed the three professors.

THE SEDUCTION AND PITFALLS OF FACILITATION TEACHING STYLE

The object of study emerged to be a style of study that I will qualify as *facilitation*. This style implies an exchange among the instructor and the students, a relationship that is at variance with lecturing style, whereby the instructor delivers knowledge to the students with little input from the class. As a base case, I will present this facilitation style as opposed to this *lecturing* style, even though a finer definition could distinguish various dimensions and intermediary styles, which makes the facilitation-lecturing dichotomy rather arbitrary and rhetorical.

The tensions observed in the classroom motivated the core idea of this study: a facilitation style is chosen by instructors because this style is seductive, yet it may be significantly more fragile than a lecturing style. The opposition would therefore be that a given practice, the facilitation style, has visible advantages that make it more fitted; yet, those adopting it are at a higher risk of having poor performance. This theory would not preclude the possibility that adoption would imply higher chances of high performance, nor that the expected average performance could also be higher. If such theory was confirmed and further empirically studied, one may find that facilitation style was selected because of its higher attraction, yet creating difficulties of higher order for those unlucky enough not to have it work.

Various objectives can be carried on the same ethnographic observation, including strong variations around the same construct. I first want to clarify what the current study is not, hoping that it will help the reader benefit from what it intends to be. The study is not attempting to be a definitional work on various nuances of teaching styles. It is not either trying to prove trends in use in such or such style; it is just observing a tropism toward a certain style. It does not attempt to define what could be "better," therefore having normative assumptions or outcomes, neither to study which mix of such characteristics would be more efficient. Rather, the study tries to explore a tension between the attractiveness of a popular teaching style on one hand, and an increased risk of failure for those playing it on the other hand.

Defining a facilitation style

I would define "facilitation" as a style of teaching where knowledge is supposed to emerge out of a discussion between students and the instructor, or between students themselves, moderated directly (in class) or indirectly (in study groups) by the instructor. This style overlaps various methods. For instance, it has a part of the Socratic Method, where the knowledge has to be discovered by the student. It has a part of the case method, where the knowledge is emerging out of discussing cases reproducing real-life situations.

The "facilitation" style will be contrasted below with the ideal "lecturing" style, where the instructor both has the knowledge, and delivers it to the participants with little input from the class. The distinction therefore aggregates various analytic dimensions such as distinguishing the location of the knowledge (instructor vs. participant), the method of discovery (pushed from instructor or pulled from participants), and the nature of the knowledge artifacts (theory based or case based). In practical terms, the program director PD on two occasions clearly defined what he did not see as desirable: first, he was not willing to follow a strong wish by participants to get a "toolkit." This desire had been present in previous instances of the program, PD noticing that it came stronger during that specific instance. Second, when discussing the performance of another instructor, he mentions that he had advised that instructor "not to be an advocate," but rather let the themes "emerge" out of the discussion. This remark hints at the fine line between expressing an opinion or a knowledge, which seems like acceptable, and being seen as an advocate, with a negative aggressiveness being implied in that qualification. This fine line may explain why a facilitation style is attractive, since it is designed to prevent reaching the dangerous zone where students feel invaded by the instructor.

The teaching facilitation style, even as roughly defined, appears as defined by a set of norms that are implicitly carried by the instructors. Those norms arise from the institution at large (how to teach in a top business school) as well as the specificity of the program. Overall, the style in question seems embodied by the program director PD. He has taught the program for many years, is a respected senior academic, and has a reputation of extensive relationships with various blue-chip firms. He excels in seeming like if has had personal experience in most of the discussed cases, which translates in an ability to engage in precise technical discussions with many participants coming from many industries. This seeming intimate knowledge allows him to orient the discussion, putting the questions to the room so participants express some personal experience or knowledge that fits nicely in the current flow.

On the other hand, this style restricts the ability of the instructor to draw simply directly from her own "knowledge." Making a point requires that she dresses it up as an example that is related to the discussion happening in the room and it experientially expressed. For example, during a discussion on how to formalize a partnership contractually, an instructor asks, "John, how do you guys manage your alliance on that point?" The participant follows with a testimonial, which happens to fall nicely in the discussion. One should note the program director PD had prepared before the beginning of the program an analysis and classification of all participants. It was indicated various standardized information, including rank, job, and industry, which would come handy in that dialog. As another example of the difficulty to transfer knowledge, during an interview, one of the instructors stated he was "worried that if he or PD were to step in to give the answer, the participants would feel robbed of finding it themselves." When asked about his role, the same instructor defined clearly his role as "facilitator and traffic director"

An important part of the style enacted in the program was the emphasis on data coming from cases, whose discussions were important part of the process. The program director appeared having roughly a direct or deep exposure to 80% of the cases exposed.

Those cases start taking a life of their own during the program, and a language putting emotional value around those real-life experiences emerges. Hinting at a case that will be dealt the following day, PD announces: "There is a wonderful little case…" and he hints at the learning from the Swissair case. When asked about his personal knowledge of the case, the program director immediately cite his "teaching the program for 14 years", therefore having amassed many artifacts over time. Even tiny messages are brought through mini-cases. When trying to suggest the idea that sometimes only firsthand experience allows executives to perceive cultural context, PD takes two minutes on a quick example. He explains how Nissan first tried to copy BMW cars from models imported in Japan, before finally deciding to send some Japanese engineers in Germany so they could feel like Germans driving German cars on German roads after sleeping in a German home. Such vignettes are practiced regularly by the main instructor that seems to hold a bottomless inventory at his disposal. A variation on knowledge coming from cases is the presence of external witnesses that can testify on real cases. Those are like embodied cases, and the language about them is even more laudatory, for instance one being labeled as "a hero of one of our cases." During the program, three external witnesses from three different firms came to present their experience to the class.

Another important aspect of the style is the interaction with the room. An explicit message delivered at the beginning of the program is that the interaction with participant is "humbling," that even instructors "can learn from you," that participants should not "hesitate to learn from each other." In the opening session, it is even said that a witness, who is used to come and testify often, "still learns from the room." The quality of the exchanges from participants would obviously extend to discussion between participants, with PD praising: "Don't underestimate the quality of discussion between you guys." During the rest of the program, participants are indeed allowed and encouraged constantly to interact with the faculty on the floor, bringing either their own experience or their questions. For instance, during a case discussion, the instructor mentions "I'm talking under Olga control," hinting at a participant's knowledge of the industry in question at that point. Indeed, occasionally, the influence of key participants grows to the point where they are reserved a large part of airtime to present their experience and then answer questions from the room. However, those occurrences seemed controlled by the instructor: some participants get such right, while in other cases the priority is not given at all. With the hindsight of knowing participants had been finely classified, the pattern is not difficult to find out.

Facilitation is attractive

Facilitation has an attractiveness that displaces lecturing style. First, one may hypothesize some popular belief that facilitation is a *modern* style, and that it is *standard* in higher business education. For instances, Harvard Business School has 100% of classes taught using the case method, which can assimilated here to a facilitation style. Popular culture also implicitly favors facilitation style, for instance under the "Socratic" term, and its use is recommended for all including when dealing with children. Therefore, in society in general, facilitation has a mental advantage, an advantage that is implicitly present in the mind of all students in a business school. It seems like everyone assumes the best teachers have a perfect facilitation style.

Following the program suggested this pattern. We can analyze the attractiveness from the point of view of instructors judging the performance of their peers vs. students judging the performance of their instructors.

About instructors, the attractiveness has many sources and expressions. For instance, one of the instructors appeared less experienced on the facilitation style and had had less firsthand experience on the cases taught. Besides, a more natural style would have been for him an academic, therefore lecture-based, approach, as he implicitly recognized. When relating to the facilitation style, he mentions his various other experiences that he could "relate to in response to the discussion that is going on." Then, he notes that he "forgets" about them, noting the main instructor is "much quicker at it." Nevertheless, he never challenged the validity of him trying to enact a facilitation style even when in acknowledged difficulty. He does recognize that such style requires various attributes that were in the hands of the program director, he even claims that he does not try "to mimic him." Let us be clear: the goal here is not to settle whether and how that instructor was maladapted to that style. It is to notice that even when having (potentially punctual) difficulties, the instructor would not consider using another style since it never surfaced during the interview that he could have approached his teaching with an alternate angle. This situation may be signaling there are strong normative pressures to perform in a given style, even when this style is not ideal to an instructor.

Another instructor talks about the style of the main instructor in admirative tones, and compares it to the one of a famous business school professor: "I learned from really great teachers, one in particular was XXX, I just watched him, and now I can observe PD, the two of them are among the best, so incredibly sharp. I often look at them and wonder what kind of little boys they were, they have such a synthetic mind about business, everything about OB, strategy, finance, it is quite unusual!" This quote reflects the impression that is produced by the facilitation style played by the main instructor. It mixes the smartness of thinking one one's feet, with having an incredibly large business experience that allows a capacity to synthesize the flow from the classroom, from other business cases, into some business gist.

An interesting aspect of the attractiveness of the facilitation style is how it may have an automatic competitive advantage compared to other style of teaching toward students. Those may be impressed by the *clear knowledge of cases* evoked above, with students' written feedback containing statements such as: "he knows so many situations," and "she has such a deep experience of Asia." Maybe they are impressed by the *interactions* that are needed for successful facilitation. Since the data collection was focused mainly on instructors, with for instance only one interview with a participant, it is difficult at this stage to untangle the respect that participants express for the style, from other explanations. Nevertheless, the idea here is that once someone start interacting with a class in that style, mentions of academic knowledge appear in comparison to be dull, misplaced. I noted various instances of purely academic, theoretical knowledge being mentioned to students. For instance, one instructor would try to explain culture by referring to Schein (1985). In another case, the word "attribution" is brought in a theoretical angle (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), as well as the expression "task-goal congruence" without added details. In all those cases, the response of the class is simply silence. In the evaluation, the following wording would appear about the instructor having made such comments: "Sometimes a little bit too theoretical" and "probably has a lot of knowledge, but failed to present relevant insights and patterns." My interpretation, which would obviously need to be tested in a further research, is that such knowledge suffers a contrasting disadvantage once compared to facilitation style knowledge (that is case based, in an exchange between instructor and the room experiences). If it were supported, it would complement the facilitation style attractiveness by bringing in some cognitive explanation.

Obviously, in a further research, one would also have to consider the fact that the main instructor carries the title and responsibilities of "program director" and has a hierarchical relationship to other instructors. Therefore, the attraction or normalcy of facilitation style may amount to an obedience pressure onto other instructors, or the result of local norms that may not be generalizable. Whatever the reasons, the pull toward the facilitation style produces a tough choice. If they practice a lecturing style, it may seem at best outdated, if not unacceptable, at least to the program director. If they try facilitation, they are now comparing themselves to someone who has strong experience and advantages in that style (skill comparison). Besides, their teaching requires them to get involved in a relationship between the body of students and the main instructor that may have already taken a personal taste. We will now turn to review the various difficulties met when trying to use the facilitation style.

Facilitation style is fragile

Beyond its attractiveness, the facilitation process may be a fragile, and again we are not trying here to qualify its overall effectiveness. Fragility would mean that engaging in facilitation implies more risk the process is disturbed, and in which case this happens, the interaction being made radically inefficient. Therefore, it may produce magnificent results or it may fail for seemingly obscure reasons that all seem rather negligible. Again, we are not assuming that this final view is the correct one (that facilitation was indeed ineffective), just that the facilitation may create or suggest some expectations that are indeed not robust, and therefore easy to break.

What emerged from the observation was that the facilitation may be seductive for students, but the superficial feeling be in danger to be broken at any point. In those cases, students could escape a "spell" and realize that they do not learn what they expected.

For example, the facilitation seems more sensitive to various environmental conditions, at least compared to a lecture style where progress is scripted and easily under control. This advantage of lecturing holds as long as the body of knowledge the instructor is delivering is not challengeable –a strong assumption that we are not here to debate. For instance, the first clear signals the program was not running smoothly were related to material conditions. One of the slides presented at the beginning of the second day were not the one originally planned. It took nearly 10 minutes for the instructor to realize it, while he was delivering comments that were obviously discordant with the comments on the screen. In a similar fashion, a movie carrying an industrial testimonial was shown that turned out not to be the proper version, since the subtitles and transitions had not yet been included. In the first case, the instructor took much time to notice it, signaling that his attention was absorbed somewhere else. In addition, the atmosphere in the classroom was drastically changed once the problem was recognized, with participants appearing as much less concentrated. In the second case, the class was also disturbed with similar concentration symptoms appearing with students seeming more detached after the incident was recognized and corrected. Besides, in both cases, the incidents caused great stress for the instructors that kept on discussing the issues hours and days later, when interviewed or during discussion as a team. These two examples typify a phenomenon where it seems the relationship between instructors and participants can be viewed as a "spell," that can rather easily be broken. The potential problem is compounded by the fact that the threat of disruption is acutely feared by instructors, and when an event occurs, it starts obsessing them. Symbolically, such instances appeared in the language whereby "Murphy's law" was mentioned many times during the weeklong program. For the outside observer that I was, the events did not seem so dramatic, nor so recurring. I conclude the equilibrium of the system may be sensed as much more fragile by the instructors than by an untrained observer.

This issue can be generalized by the idea that the control of the process in a facilitation style is difficult. Not only the process may require a larger amount of control, but it may also conflict with the norms that seem to dictate that such control be invisible. For instance, during an interview, one of the instructors cites his effort to direct the discussion toward certain participants, with the difficulty of making it invisible. In another instance, during a class, an instructor mentioned that a participant asked to play a particular role in a game. Laughingly to the room, the participants disclosed that indeed he was the one asked to do so, exposing the attempt by the instructor to make it as if coming from the room.

Therefore, directing the class is something that has to be done discreetly, which may make it even more difficult.

Another control issue comes from the multiple voices the facilitation style is supposed to accommodate. Participants are supposed to intervene, which creates the possibility of situations where such input becomes problematic. In a case, a small group of participants engaged in a debate that was not interesting for the others. The instructor was not able to regain control before a few minutes since he could not find a way to cut their "contribution" without seeming impolite or breaking the norms of facilitation. In another striking event, one participant had a serious concern whereby he did not believe the studied firms should have entered the partnership discussed during that afternoon. The instructors had designed that session around the "how" issues of the partnership, not the "whether" question on the relevance of such partnership. The dissenting student was able to air his issues, which then forced the program director to jump in the discussion, and turned into a well-balanced debate that lasted roughly 20 minutes, with the classroom being quite bored in the end. Overall, the possibility for conflict and disagreement to surface appeared as great during the program.

Such disruptions showing difficulties to keep control were numerous. It led to the observation that inherent to the facilitation style is an obsession of instructors with participants, as if all the energy of the instructor was oriented toward anticipating problems coming from the room. Again, the goal here is not to judge this behavior, which could be viewed as healthy concern for the "customer," but to note the dynamics of the social interaction. We have already discussed how the program director prepares by analyzing his participant profile and ability to intervene in the discussion. Other instructors expressed similar obsession. In one telling case, an instructor who had a strong Asian experience expressed little perceived empathy just because there were no Asian present in the room!

The lack of control and the need to attend to participants input may feed another characteristic of the style: the need to improvise. Improvisation appeared repetitively during the weeklong program, with more or less success. For instance, at some point, a participant mentions an industrial example about a car manufacturer, Rover, a remark that had no easily visible relationship with the current discussion, and that the instructor had no direct experience on. At that point, various not-satisfying solutions would be to let the point developed with the risk of seeing it going nowhere; or to cut it and dryly come back to the original discussion. The instructor was able to regain control by answering like "I don't know about Rover but I know that BMW had problems with their acquisitions, I discussed it during seminars with them" in a nice tone. The ability to pull out such answer is what impresses other instructors, most likely because it combines great control of the room while satisfying the norms of letting the participants express themselves and exchanging industrial examples. Each session had various occurrences of interruption where the instructor was challenged to regain control of the discussion in an elegant way, which required not only a large experience to pull from but also a high sense of apropos.

Finally, after discussing various constraints on instructor to preserve control on the room, one needs to discuss the penalty when such control was not realized. The main penalty is embedded in the style itself in that it is participative enough that if control is lost, it is difficult to regain, as if a "spell" could be broken. The most obvious example was a game that was carried to show to participants how emotions could influence their thinking. The setup was that participants would play silently a card game, the trick being that the rules given to participants were secretly not compatible. The learning was supposed to be that uncertainty would create uneasiness and lack of trust. It turned out that for various reasons the participants got into the game in a humorous mood, which carried all the way to the debriefing session. The teaching was supposed to leverage a specific—negative—mood, and the experience—positive—shared by the participants. It happened that both conditions were broken, which made difficult for the instructor to regain control of a crowd that was joyful and unable to emphasize with negative emotions. Unable to switch back to lecturing (i.e. "Let me tell you what one perceives under uncertainty, what effects that creates"), the instructor struggled unsuccessfully to regain control of the room while maintaining the facilitation norms. The situation was regrettable since it was not a mess caused by sheer lack of discipline of participants or lack of competences by the instructor. It was simply a weird situation which strongly reminded the "breaching" experiments of ethno-methodologists (Garfinkel, 1967).

Overall, the style chosen was fragile to various causes such as material environment and timing issues, and needed particular effort to preserve social control in the interaction. Further, once disrupted or breached, the interaction was more difficult to recover and bring back to normal.

Conclusions

The observation and first pass of analysis suggested an interested tension in the interaction between instructors and participants of an executive program of business education. The instructors were aiming to enact a style that I called "facilitation" based on exchanges between instructors and participants and mainly based on cases. This style appeared more attractive, with instructors claiming a preference for it, and trying to enact it even in situation where it appears less valuable. On the other hand, this style appeared fragile since it could be easily disrupted, requiring great cognitive load on the instructor part, and was difficult to recover once the interaction was disturbed. Future research could both strengthen such theoretical framework as well as explore it empirically further.

In particular, we may want to ensure the attraction we isolate is controlled for the power relationship in the system. We would need to untangle perceived attractiveness from obedience to the program director or the rules of the institution. Extra interviews may allow exploring the nature of choice instructors have on the style of instruction. Another exploration would need to test whether the fragility factors identified here would differentially apply to alternative style of teaching, in particular the lecturing style. Currently, it stands as an assumption that material conditions and participants' interactions are more easily controlled in a lecture. Such a confirmation could be gained either by observing lectures in a similar setting, or by further discussion with instructors on their own experience of lecturing.

This research is interesting not so much for its analytic contribution to the study of various teaching styles. It aims rather at exploring the fight between various selective pressures on the style of interactions in a social system. Here, I have proposed two pressures of different types: attractiveness (advantage) of the facilitation style on one hand, balanced with fragility (drawback) on the other hand. This duality is interesting since it would not be resolved by a simple balancing out. Rather, it would predict that the style would tend to emerge, with failures while using that style being more drastic. Such trend may inform the evolutions of teaching in modern business schools environment.

PROCESS LEARNING

This study was the first try at ethnography by the author. This chapter gather various learning from this process.

Richness of ethnographic approach

The class was labeled "advanced research method," it happens to have fulfilled various objectives at the same time. First, it introduced us to an ethnographic approach to research, and proved its beauty. This comes not only from the results–wonderful studies grounded in the richness of the human experience and reporting the thickness the events—but for the possibility to open new theoretical angles. This second facet is one of the great training of the class when it confronted us with the theory-building facet of ethnographic work. It showed us the potential theoretical freedom available in ethnography, a potentiality fully exploited since some of us started with a given angle of research, and ended up reporting on another interesting phenomenon coming from their observations.

I also discovered that such freedom requires management, and could produce specific difficulties, an excellent ground for reflection on our larger role as researcher. Beyond the fact of changing subject of interest during observation, I discovered that even the observations themselves required choice, and that lack of attention or effort would trigger biases in the observation. It was put to my attention that I had observed the program as a sequence of training sessions; therefore, I was missing how the program had evolved. This observational bias was interesting, and echoes another bias where I was focusing on the professors and relatively neglecting to observe students.

This leads to an interesting question about the various angles that can be dealt on a given observation. First, I want to reflect briefly on my original angle. I was to study what are the bases of the *credibility* of the instructors given that they have somewhat less experience that their students. It turned out that this subject was difficult to study for two major reasons. First, the director of the program, a central instructor, had extensive firsthand experience that undermined the underlying assumption of the research question. Second, exploring the subject required to questions the credibility of instructors, something that turned out not to be easy for me. Not only I felt bad or awkward when asking questions about credibility, I also resented some of the resistance that I sensed from actors on that issue.

Various other angles could have emerged out my data, and I was overwhelmed by the suggestions on other angles coming from my own instructors during our class sessions. A limited and only indicative list show the incredible range of phenomena that appeared at some point as possible candidates of study: the power and conflict between the program instructors, instructors obsessed by students, the idea of pain during such interaction, cognitive processing of instructors, the signaling games, etc.

Theory creation as a complex process

The class pushed me in my reflections about the complex process of theory creation. A first facet is the socialized facet of that exercise. Even if ethnography allows greater freedom than other research paradigms, it does not remove the Kuhnian tensions around normal science, whereby a research subject is judged interesting mainly if … others find it so. The class was a rare opportunity to explore that tension since almost no other class in our PhD training put so much emphasis on a process by which the student is supposed to come up with a *new* theory, as opposed to studying existing theories.

Another facet illustrated by the class was the tension between the diverging process of discovering new analytic categories, and narrowing to a tractable theoretical contribution. We were able to navigate both the diverging and converging parts of those processes, and tried to find the right balance, under time-constraints and the disturbances of what the data and colleagues were telling us. The state of the content study presented above shows the flaws and nearly never finished nature of that work. The analysis is at the same time not large and deep enough to support the theoretical hypothesis, hinting that a few other iterations would be necessary before publishable results could be established.

Ethical and psychological issues

I attended the ethnography class at the same time as an experimental psychology class, and was amazed at the number of ethical and psychological issues an ethnography approach created. This was striking since the experimental psychology class did not cause any challenge on those dimensions.

One first dimension was in the relationship of the observer with its "subjects." I was troubled during the whole process by the issue of how to deal with potential psychic pain that my study may inflict on my objects of observation. My concern was that I might expose some truths the "subjects" may not like to hear. I was founded in such an approach by the strict norms of experimental psychology where the idea of inflicting pain is considered not ethical. In particular, famous cases (Milgram, 1963; Zimbardo, 1973) convinced most psychologists that putting subjects in situation which may trouble them is not acceptable. This approach influenced me, and I kept thinking that I might express facts about the instructors that they had not expected could end up in writing and be shared with colleagues. One could endlessly debate whether my intervention can be assimilated to a psychological manipulation, whereby the outcome would be an ethnographic report that may inflict psychic pain.

A related issue is the amount of transfer (psychoanalytic angle intended) that may be involved in ethnographic work. I often wondered how much the feeling of admiration, fears, etc. that I felt by putting myself in the shoes of the instructors or students I was observing, could be disturbing my perception of the situation. A second concern was how much I was supposed to worry about these issues, after my own instructors expressed a concern for my reflective bent, hinting that those were out of the norms. Now, I was worried that I was not "normal" in my observation style, or maybe they meant that I should be able to make silence in my head to become a pure transcribing machine…

For the future, those issues suggest that I follow a practice that is common in many fields where one does some clinical work: the observer has to get its own counseling along with his observation work. This process is most likely already comprised in most ethnographic works, whereby the researcher has an adviser with which he can exchange on the progress of his research. This counseling would most likely allow setting up norms that would deal with the ethical issues that worried me so much. For instance, my advisor may help me on the ex-ante communication with the person with whom the observation is negotiated so expectation is set up in such ways the chances of later feelings of betrayed trust are reduced.

Method learning

This ethnography was developed in the context of a method class. Therefore, there was a permanent tension, over many months, between learning objectives and research objectives. As appeared above, the tension was not always easily settled, but learning found its way through the various choices we had to make, and the possibility to observe various interdependencies between those. I gather here a few remarks, following an ideal sequence from observing to coding to reporting.

I learned that observation is not a monolithically simple process. For my future research, I will approach some details with specific and informed care. For instance, I discovered some of the trade-offs in the types of note taking—typing on the fly is more time efficient, but can be less rich because handwriting is still richer than typed characters. Idem for note and recorded interviews transcriptions—those can be time-consuming. After having done it myself, I can now understand why those that say that delegating the transcription of interviews to an outside paid party might produce useless results since I had difficulties reconstructing the conversation from my own recordings. Another problem is that my observations came out partial in various dimensions: for instance, I observed mainly professors and I underreported nonverbal attitudes, etc. I am not sure how to solve those in a future project since richness seems constrained by some physical, cognitive and time constraints on the observer. At least, I now know to care for those, with the possibility to vary focus and style of observation across sessions as an easy fix.

Coding is a core process that we were exposed to, but I felt was underdeveloped in the class, at least compared to observation process. This remark is based on the idea that coding seems, in the end, crucial to theory development, and the class sessions did not allow for much exchange on that part. I had chosen to initiate myself to the use of a specialized software (QSR N6), with command of software allowing me to analyze notes by assigning text extracts to various codes, and those being organized logically (hierarchically). Even at that bare level, the software produced immediate productivity gains and comfort so the cognitive dimension of coding was also qualitatively improved. Nevertheless, my limited competence in the software or its limits, or my deficiencies with the method, created a sense of incompleteness. Most likely, I was confronting there a core issue for the ethnographer, where a first analysis suggest some directions for categorizations, which would suggest to reanalyze the text, to review the categorizations, etc. I was not able to iterate much that loop, and I did not know when to alternate deep coding, from axial coding, for other variants of coding.

Finally, the reporting opened me to a phase of the ethnography carrying specific subtleties. It allowed me to practice trying to communicate a theoretical angle that I saw in the data, trying to ground it by putting a sense of that data in my text. This created whole classes of difficulties. Mainly, I had difficulty with the epistemological posture of ethnography and its difference with the hypothetico-deductive paradigm of positivistic organizational science we were trained on. I struggled, wondering how I should state how I came up with an idea, and then distinguish that from "proving" that I can find it in the data. For all the artificiality that this process has in positivistic schools, it felt not adapted to my ethnographic reporting. I could not figure out in the end what should be my posture between the inductive and the deductive illusion. One easy solution that I am aware of was not available: to mimic a positivistic posture where a pure theoretical induction suggests a hypothesis, such hypothesis being verified by an ethnographic account, possibly with some quantitative spin to it. This posture, suggested in a class reading from Sutton (1991), was impossible here since we were not supposed to review any theoretical literature. Anyway, this would have been an adulteration of the "true" ethnographic style that we were supposed to practice. I have to admit that only the writing phase forced me to become fully aware of that difficulty. This will bring me, in my future ethnographic readings, to follow with attention how experienced writers manage the epistemological flow of their text.

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