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ETHNOGRAPHY IN PROBLEM-CENTRED RESEARCH: EVIDENCE FROM A STUDY OF INTEGRATED CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN ENGLAND

Adina I. DUDAU
University of Glasgow, Department of Management
Adina.Dudau@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper considers how new methodological approaches might enhance Mode 2. The paper shows how ethnography research might be integrated into the conceptual realm of the Mode 2 knowledge production in management research. This is alongside other well established problem-solving strategies such as action research, cooperative inquiry, grounded theory and clinical method, all associated with Mode 2 by MacLean and colleagues (MacLean et al. 2002). Specific theoretical points associated with ethnography will be illustrated with a case study of a research into the collaboration between local agencies with responsibilities in the area of children and young people in England. The case study reveals key characteristics of the Mode 2 knowledge production in the use of ethnography-like research methods and concludes with an account of the strengths and weaknesses of using such approaches in a use-inspired, problem-centred research.

Introduction

Social scientists' battle with methodology spans across centuries and went from emulating the research methods used in natural sciences to methods granting a more sophisticated access to the human psychic and to that of the communities. Thus, before the end of the 18th century, the positivist theoretical foundation of social sciences saw the latter apply the same principles and

methods used to research the natural world to the social world, in order to obtain reliable findings that were neutral, objective, and replicable (Eisenhardt 1989, Seale 1999, Halldorsson and Aastrup 2002). This was a safe method to produce knowledge based on a model that was proven to work and lead to progress in natural sciences: the Newtonian idea of an orderly universe where immutable laws made the world predictable and controllable. Indeed, social sciences emerged as disciplines alongside natural sciences, based on the hypothesis that the social world, being part of nature, worked according to rules of behaviour that are as universal and predictable as the laws of nature (Delanty and Strydom 2003). These disciplines, firmly structured to deal with distinct parts of the social, were confirmed in modern universities, promoters of 'disciplinarisation' in social sciences (Delanty 2005, Wallerstein 1996). Two assumptions are of significance in this paradigm: that there is only one truth and that knowledge of it is attainable when pursued through 'scientific' methods. Before long, however, these assumptions were to be challenged.

The blind belief in human rationality, capable to produce knowledge that is certain and universal has been opposed by theorists who questioned this orderly, linear perspective of social sciences. These sceptics go as far back in the history of thought as the times of Plato and Aristotle who distrusted humans' ability to obtain pure knowledge of the exterior reality. However, their views only reached a critical mass in the 20th century with the beginning of the hermeneutical tradition in social sciences, promoted by Sigmund Freud (1865-1939) and Max Weber (1864-1920). The fundamental change in perspective was that social science cannot fully explain causality, due to the bounded rationality of human beings and to the importance of context in shaping the social interactions at a given time and in a given place. This shift in paradigm has imposed the use of more creative research methods, leading to a diversification of qualitative techniques (ethnography, case study, etc.) as complements and supplements of the widely accepted (then) quantitative methods of enquiry (such as surveys).

The ultimate level of relativism in researching the social was reached by post-modernists, who strongly undermined the strong knowledge claims assumed by positivists (modernists). Alongside their disbelief in the progressive thesis of acquiring knowledge, they dismissed the universal truth in favour of views of 'truth regimes' that rise and fall over time (Foucault 1966).

In terms of the methods used in tune with these philosophical trends in social sciences, these ranged from the use of quantitative methods (preferred by positivists) such as questionnaires to that of qualitative methods (favoured by interpretitivists) such as interviews, participant and non-participant observation, focus groups and so on. As for the mix of methods that is deemed appropriate to use in professional research, one that combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques is generally considered a good way to first investigate the subtleties of a social phenomenon and then test the validity of the theories derived from such investigation. In problem-centred research, the method mix is often very imaginative and connected less with a certain research philosophy and more to with the practicalities of what is needed to solve the real-life problem that the research has set out to solve (Tracy 2007). This approach departs from traditional research methodology and methods in that the research design emerges from the study itself, rather than being established a priori, before the empirical research begins.

We took a problem-centred research approach in a qualitative study investigating aspects on integrated working in mandated partnerships in the policy area of children and families in England. Given the wide scope of the study (roughly narrowed down to focus on catalysts and barriers in collaborative work in local partnerships for children), the researchers allowed the field to drive the research design for this investigation. This happened along a few fronts: that of the interesting issues to examine, that of the literature reviewed, and that of the methods employed. This paper is a tale of these fronts where this methodological journey developed, and aims to raise some theoretical points about the use of ethnography-like methods in problem-centred research.

Theoretical background

That research inquiries must start from problems that are worth researching is generally accepted to be true, although what constitutes a ‘valid’ research problem is often less clear (Ellis and Levy 2008). Some look in the extant literature for questions that are pending and hence aim to bring their contribution to knowledge by answering these questions. Others look around, in their everyday lives for persistent issues that have not been solved by subsequent actions. The latter category sets out the realm of problem-centred research.

Thus, if all research starts from a problem, not all research however, is problem-centred. The latter departs from tradition in that it is not grounded in one discipline, but stays open to multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary influences, as dictated by the problem-solving approach that a real-life problem is tackled with (Huff 2000). In the management research, the distinction between the traditional 'problem-based', and the newer 'problem-centred' research, corresponds to that between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al. 1994). The present enquiry is theoretically based on the latter mode.

Mode 2 knowledge production is anchored in contextual issue-centred study and is driven primarily by a desire to engage with 'fundamental dilemmas or crises in society that do not seem to lend themselves to easy solutions by traditional approaches or methods of analysis' (Robinson 2007, p.71). From a close study of the text by Gibbons and colleagues (Gibbons et al 1994), MacLean et al (2002) derived five features of Mode 2 knowledge production: knowledge produced in the context of application, transdisciplinarity, heterogeneity and organisational diversity, social accountability and reflexivity and the need for a diverse range of quality control. Thus, Mode 2 management research is rooted in the real world, transcends academic disciplines, it requires collaborative effort to cover the diverse range of expertise needed from researchers, it needs greater levels of communication with the research users and the academic community to continually negotiate the terms of such new approach (the implication being a higher degree of reflexivity from the researcher) and it must be evaluated using different quality standards than those used from the standpoint of individual disciplines.

Traditionally, research involves a clear *a priori* theoretical framework, rooted in one discipline and followed through rigorously in the course of an empirical investigation conducted with methods that emerge neatly from the theoretical model chosen. Mode 2 management research, however, departs from these canons firstly due to the fact that there is no clear conceptual framework that would provide an a priori basis of analysis (Benson 1982). Rather, researchers who derive their research questions from real-life problems often consider a number of theoretical juxtapositions, often borrowing models and assumptions from other fields and creating new syntheses of these (Tracy 2007), thus innovating. This is where the most compelling claim to interdisciplinarity lies: real world cannot be expressed in terms of disciplinary knowledge, as 'life tends to present itself as a seamless whole' (Robinson 2007,

p.72). Not only traditional discipline-based theoretical frameworks are being challenged in the course of Mode 2 management research, but so are traditional methodological boundaries. What is of utmost importance in problem-centred research is solving the research problem, and this is normally done with every means at the researcher's disposal. The collection and analysis of data occurs cyclically and to a large extent intuitively (Tracy 2007), which often poses challenges to the publication process where the author is asked to explain and justify in detail what methods they used, to what purpose, and in what order.

Challenges to institutionalising 'issue-driven interdisciplinarity' (Robinson 2007) do not limit themselves to the difficulty to explain data collection and analysis, as well as the choice of the disciplines chosen to synthesise into new theoretical dimensions to journal referees. Another important challenge is that universities and scholarship are organised according to disciplines. Thus, researchers are trained within one discipline, then get to work in a disciplined university department whose work is being evaluated by performance indicators which are specific to the discipline that the department is focused on. For example, management researchers are evaluated against issues such as the number of publications they have in journals rated in the area of management. Thus, there is little incentive and many barriers to practicing interdisciplinary research.

In spite of the difficulties in embarking on this kind of research, many have felt compelled to do it. An example of this is the study conducted by Allison (1971) into the Cuban Missile Crisis. He realised that novel answers can only come from novel questions which, at their turn, arise from the interplay of alternative conceptual lenses. Allison (1971) essentially based his research on three models of government actions, any of which might have correctly explained what happened during the crisis. More recently, Checkland (2003) used Allison's lenses in her research on primary care to urge not only for explicit acknowledgement of theoretical bias in research, but also for widening the pool of lenses through which we conceptualise problems. This is because looking at a research problem from alternative frameworks of knowledge improves understanding of multifaceted changes on complex systems (Checkland 2003).

The rise of the complex systems thinking has had a profound impact on the use of interdisciplinary perspectives in research. It provides an overarching theoretical framework

(Klein 2004, Geyer et al 2005) as well as a methodological guide (Robinson 2007) to the use of interdisciplinarity and to that of more opportunistic, problem-solving, use of research methods. It does this primarily through its belief in integration and inter-connectivity between seemingly remote issues and areas, and though its rejection of causality in favour of the 'emergence' theory whereby things are not caused by other things, but emerge out of the collective action of a number of inter-related issues in an unpredictable manner (e.g. Kauffman 1996). The shake that the theory has produced to social science research is considerable in that it is becoming increasingly clear that one issue cannot be tackled in isolation from many related phenomena, that theoretical models conceptualised in one discipline may be transferable to other fields, and that it is important to look more closely at influences on, rather than causes for, research problems.

MacLean and colleagues (MacLean et al 2002) looked at a range of established problem-solving management research traditions and related them to the conceptual territory of Mode 2 management research. The research traditions that they made reference to are: action research, cooperative inquiry, grounded theory and the clinical method. The present inquiry aims to add ethnography to this list by describing how one ethnography-like, problem-centred, study developed and what theoretical issues are worth raising in parallel between the two paradigms.

The study

The aim of the study was to understand the distinctiveness of the newer local safeguarding children partnership arrangements from other types of partnerships (as identified in the extant literature) and to observe the context in which they operate, as well as the inter-organisational and inter-professional dynamics nurtured by these partnerships. This aim emerged from the research problem of continuous failure of local agencies cooperating in the area of children and young people to protect their service users effectively. This was seen in a long history of catastrophic failures investigated to have at their roots one principal cause: the lack of coordination between the different agencies with different responsibilities around children.

As source of empirical data, a research protocol was reached with 'Brempton' (nickname, for confidentiality reasons) Children's Services, a local authority in England, for access to the

organisation and to the partnerships coordinated by it. We used interviews as the primary source of data generation, to uncover partners' own conceptualisation of their experience and interactions in partnerships. Methods resembling ethnographic tools such as participant and non-participant observation (Garfinkel 1960) were also used extensively. Alongside these data collection methods, however, some data about the context and about the 'values' promoted in partnership has been gathered via research of government policies and internal documents including the minutes of partnership regular meetings, but also through a questionnaire.

The involvement with the host-organisation, which sponsored the research by granting access to its people and operations for the purpose of empirical research, can also attributed to ethnography (Alder and Adler 1987, DeWalt and DeWalt 2002, Silverman 2001). The immediate contact with the field, prior to the drawing of a conceptual framework, leaving no space for theoretical pre-dispositions and pre-judgements, left the researcher open to all influences of the field, and then fostered creative use of various conceptual models from various disciplines that would fit different aspects of what was revealed during fieldwork. This lack of theoretical bias when entering the field is also well documented by ethnographers (Agar 1986, Silverman 2001). The iterative process of data collection and analysis, the back and forth movement between field notes and theory in creating conclusions about the findings of the research said by some to be ethnographic in nature (DeWalt and DeWalt). Finally, the centrality of the researcher who conducts the research, their reflexivity throughout the research, is another ethnography-like element (e.g. Seale 2004) in the research undertaken here.

Ethnography-like studies rend themselves well to the use of case study methods. This was also the path taken by this research, which used as sources of evidence (Yin 1994): documents, passive and participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires.

Analysis of findings

Departing from mainstream discipline based academic inquiry, the study undertaken here offers an interesting application of ethnographic methods to problem-solving research. The most

revealing aspects of it are 1) the way in which the literature informed the study, 2) the researcher's centrality and 3) ensuring data quality and integrity.

The use of literature

The research problem that this investigation tackled is an ongoing one in social policy for children in England: the inherent difficulties that exist in harmonising professional expertise in such ways as to safeguard children effectively. This problem has been addressed continuously over the past thirty years by practitioners and scholars alike. Systems changed, but children continue to fall through the net of multi-agency work. The more recent Baby P crisis in Hackney, London (Laming 2009), which occurred soon after a major overhaul of children's services as well as after the introduction of a duty to collaborate for all local government agencies with responsibilities around children, is evidence that the problem persists and that perhaps it is high time to start asking questions differently.

In a similar manner with Allison, who tackled a well-known, yet unsolved, problem using an 'out of the box' interdisciplinary approach, this research aimed to also allow the problem guide the use of literature. Thus, contact with the research field was immediate, before theoretical conceptualisation of the issue. Long sessions of non-participant observations, combined with tentative interviews with key informants, offered early clues about the areas of literature that needed read and to some degree combined in tackling the research problem.

Different juxtapositions of diverse theoretical realms fostered four literature pillars: risk management in policy-making, networks, interactive identities of individuals, professions and organisations in networks, and a system view over communication within and beyond networks.

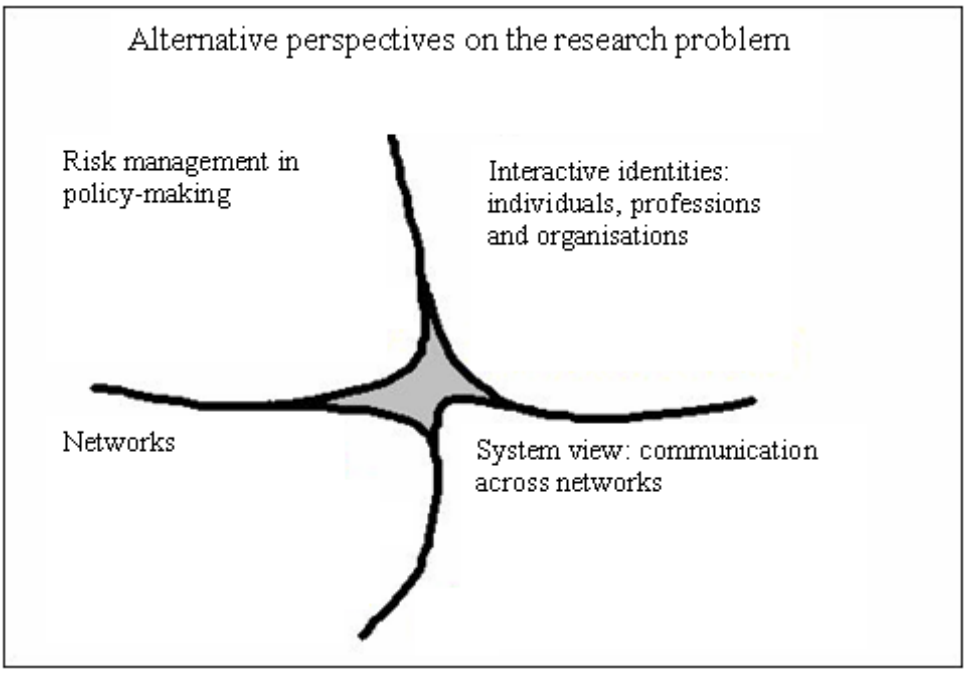

Figure 1: The centrality of the research problem from all four sets of theoretical lenses

The first of the four arose as a result of the observation that the research problem itself emerged from subsequent crises and inadequate risk management in the policy area of children and young people. Indeed, it was the subsequent crises resulting in children being injured or murdered that raised the research problem to the attention of the public. Then, the measure taken by the government to put an end to this long chain of adverse events was to introduce mandatory network partnerships between all local agencies with some areas of responsibilities around children and young people. Hence, 'networks' became an important literature area to consider in this study. Furthermore, though the direct observation of these mandatory partnerships, it became apparent that although the duty to collaborate was placed by the government on agencies, there were more dimensions to these networks than that of inter-organisational relations. The inter-professional and the inter-personal realms of networking were observed to be at least as important in the well-functioning of the overall partnership as the inter-organisational aspects of the work. Hence, the third pillar of literature emerged. Finally, it was observed that there are many factors with impact on the work of the partnerships, some interior (such as cognitive aspects of basic inter-personal communication) and others exterior (such as government legislation or the work of other local partnerships) to the network itself, as well as the

communication processes themselves. This observation gave way to the forth pillar of literature upon which the study was conceptualised.

The four bodies of literature have provided analytical frameworks which offered useful lenses through which to consider the issues faced at Brempton. These have been considered separately, and specific, discipline-based research questions were derived from them. In addition to these separate literatures, the overlaps between them create additional analytical 'spaces' which generate additional insights into the problems. The theoretical framework resulting from this interplay of the different disciplines considered in this study is a synthesis of all and it indirectly resulted from direct fieldwork (which was at the root of the choice of disciplines).

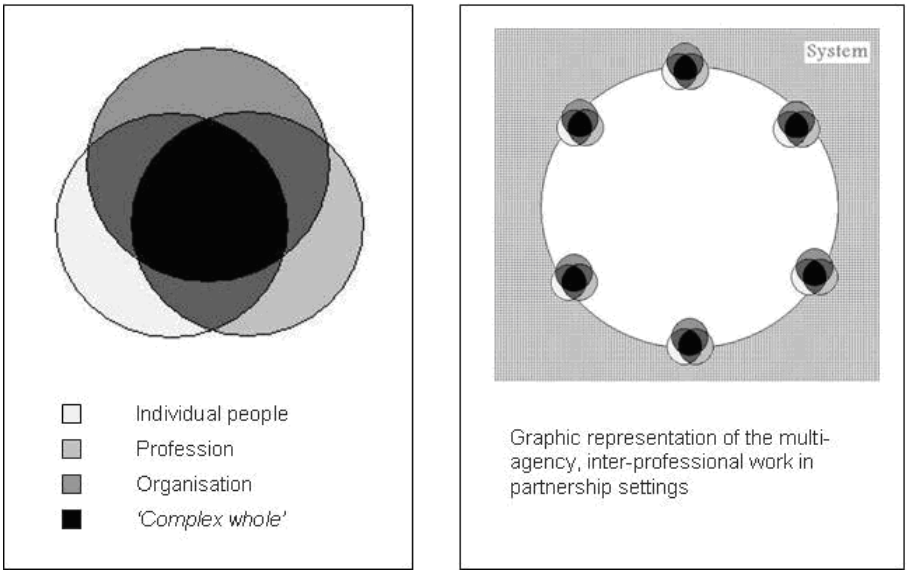

Figure 2: Interactive identities in human services partnerships: individuals, professions and organisations

Researcher's centrality

The methods employed in the research did not occur according to plan drawn ahead of the start of the fieldwork. Rather, they were applied intuitively, according to the opportunities that were arising and to the issues that became interesting to investigate in the course of the research. At the end of the research, however, it became apparent that there was another factor that influenced the use of the research methods: the stages in which the fieldwork was conducted. Thus, the continuum of methods employed was land marked by the various stages of the investigating

researcher's contact with the case study organisation, in which different roles (see Adler and Adler 1987) were assumed, ranging from 'novice' to 'independent consultant'.

Access to Brempton Children's Services was granted on the basis of a research relationship between the latter and the university. Hence, the permission to enter the field was granted by hierarchy, which had the obvious benefit of access, but also posed challenges (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002) of reluctance to cooperate from the part of some people in the organisation. A research protocol was agreed to and then the research formally commenced.

The challenge, from the very beginning, was that, although the Children's Services were moderators of the partnership structure this research aimed to examine, there was little power in the sense of determining the other partners in the LSCB to collaborate with the researcher. Furthermore, since some of the partners regarded this research to be covertly commissioned by the Children's Services, they were sometimes suspicious as to what they thought the 'real' purpose of the study was. In time, this suspicion diluted for those people that were part of the LSCB for the whole duration of the study, but was raised again by those who joined the partnership later on.

In terms of the first contacts in organisations, theorists refer to 'professional stranger-handlers' and 'deviants' (Agar 1986) as to the people that are often either designated or simply willing to 'welcome' or merely 'tackle' strangers to the organisation. Indeed, the first contact at Brempton was someone with an important position in the organisation's hierarchy, but who was later revealed to be filling various places at the top of the hierarchy according to need, which then indicated the fragility of their position and their high level of dependency on the director of Children's Services. From the same category of 'professional handlers' was someone one tier lower in the organisation's hierarchy who later was proven to have questionable legitimacy of role and, again, to be dependent on the organisation's director. As a 'handler' however, the person was very good in confusing the 'strangers' by directing them on various paths at once. Finally, the third 'first contact' was someone also at the top of the hierarchy who was somehow openly against the organisation's policies; this person can be categorised as a 'deviant' rather than a 'professional strangers' handler'. This person voluntarily offered to help with information and access to other people and, while this help was fruitfully utilised, it was thought useful to

also look outside for more 'representativeness' of information. In order to obtain a more balanced account of things, it was sought appropriate to send out a questionnaire to a larger number of professionals than could be contacted for one to one encounters. Although the issue of 'representativeness' of information is more prominent under positivist research designs dependent on statistical analysis, it is no less important to qualitative, ethnography-like enquiries (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002), albeit for a very different rationale. Qualitative research is justified by a need to *understand*, rather than to *explain* a phenomenon. Capturing participants' perspectives of the phenomena of which they are part and to which they contribute is an essential part of acquiring such understanding. Since groups are not homogenous, listening to different such perspectives becomes instrumental to obtaining a rounded view of the issues involved (see Mead 1953, Johnson 1990).

When getting into a research field, the culture shock (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002) was considerable. In this case, not only that the investigating researcher had little familiarity with the specific organisation, they also lacked familiarity with the policy area. Despite the cultural shock, there were clear benefits of such a position. This was in terms of lack of professional bias in conducting this research, given that the focus had to be on the interaction of a variety of professionals. Furthermore, it allowed the investigating researcher –who chose an 'identity' (Adler and Adler 1987, Silverman 2001) of obvious novice in both the field and the culture- to ask questions that were basic enough to enable a deconstruction of the practitioners' 'ways of doing things'.

Participant observation has often been regarded as 'an oxymoron in action' (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002, p.102), as it is indeed a difficult task to strike that balance between observing and participating in the field. One should be as involved as to obtain enough interesting and relevant data from the field, yet not as involved as to 'go native' (Adler and Adler 1987). The degree of participation (Spradley 1980, p.58-62) and the roles researchers assume in the field (Adler and Adler 1987) impact on the collected data. There are diverse typologies of roles that can be adopted in the field. A popular one is that ranging from 'complete observer' through 'observer-as-participant' and 'participant-as-observer' to 'complete participant'. Factors that may determine the role adopted by the researcher in the organisation are: personality, gender, age, class, nationality, ethnicity (Adler and Adler 1987). The fact that the participation of the

researcher in the field depends on such variables indicates that different people may conduct the same research differently.

Data quality and research integrity

The mix between social scientists and practitioners can be as beneficial as it can be dangerous for the social scientist with an interest in public management. An interesting account of the 'dilemmas' faced in ethnographic-type research in management settings is given by Ferdinand et al. (2007). Here, the ethical consequences of research strategies involving the emersion of the researcher in the field are given full consideration. The overarching conclusion of the authors is that the solutions given by researchers to accommodate the ethical aspects arising from their fieldwork depend entirely on the contexts which generated them and cannot comprehensibly be addressed via standard canons of research ethics. Indeed, the problems encountered and the solutions found to each of these problems in the present investigation were entirely 'situated' – that is, emerging from the field and requiring a resolution 'in context'.

A difficult dilemma during this research gravitated around the dissonance between, on the one hand, the need to look at the normative high interconnectivity of the organisations at the policy implementation level, and, on the other hand, the research relationship having been established with only one of these agencies (Brempton CSA). The outcomes of the collaborative project depended on the desire to cooperate in this research from the side of organisations partner with the 'sponsor' agency in the LSCB, and also on the personal ability of the researcher to persuade all professionals in the LSCB but not in the Children's Services Authority to volunteer some of their time for interviews. The researcher was, therefore, at times, representative of the Brempton Metropolitan Borough Council in relating with their partner agencies, alongside their more generic role of a 'student' in placement.

The increasing trend of cooperations between academia and industry -public administrators in this case- is marked by unprecedented complexity that gives way to a number of other dilemmas which are especially difficult to tackle by early-career researchers. Such are issues around the neutrality and objectivity of science versus the reliance on contexts and rather politicised contexts for that matter. They will have to be equipped with different skills (for example political

astuteness, alertness to deep-rooted and invisible organisational assumptions) and manage their projects with more intuition than their predecessors might have. It is therefore fair to conclude that academic rigour has ceased to be enough to warrantee successful completion of research projects. Some of these dilemmas will always remain there, as they are inevitable in research undertaken in close social proximity. Put differently, they arise from the very essence of social science research, which is the fact that the social is investigated by one of its members (Seale 1999, 2004). What can be done, however, to protect the integrity of the research, is to apply formal canons of ethics. This was undertaken here by means of anonymising both the name of the local authority where the case study is based ('Brempton' is a pseudonym) and the names of the people participating in the study. Furthermore, standard ethical procedures applied, such as a research protocol with Brempton CSA, and the fact that interviewees and questionnaire respondents were reassured that the data would be treated confidentially and anonymously and that their participation to the study was voluntary.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the findings of the study were read and analysed by a key informant from Brempton CSA, who verified the validity of the information provided as well as the general understanding of the issues around safeguarding children. It was important to have a respondent confirm the findings due to the lack of background of the researcher in any of the expertise areas involved in the policy area of children and young people. Given that the focus of the thesis is on management studies, not in social policy (the latter only providing the context for application of the management theories), the measure was instrumental in ensuring accuracy of the welfare policy aspects involved. The method is also recommended in case study research as a means of enhancing the construct validity of the study (Yin 1994). Indeed, much has been written about the criteria for judging qualitative research in general (see for example Eisenhard 1989, Halldorsson, A. and J. Aastrup 2002, Patton 2002, Trochim 2006) and case study research in particular (see Yin 1994). Although there are differences of terminology used by each of these authors, they agree nevertheless that the findings of a qualitative research must be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable (e.g. Trochim 2006). Measures have been taken to ensure that this study complies with each and every one of these criteria. One such measure was to ask a key informant from the organisation to check the validity of the findings, which contributes to enhancing the 'credibility' of the findings. Another measure was to lay out clearly

the context and the assumptions of the research, to ensure 'transferability' and the 'dependability' of the results. Finally, a 'data audit' was undertaken whereby the researcher assumed a 'devil's advocate' role with respect to the results, to increase the 'confirmability' of the study.

Discussion and concluding remarks

This account of the ethnographic investigation reveals a number of points that it has in common with Mode 2 management research. To elaborate on that, the five characteristics of Mode 2 management research compiled by MacLean and colleagues (MacLean et al. 2002) will serve as starting point.

Knowledge production in the context of application
Transdisciplinarity
Heterogeneity of research team
Social accountability and reflexivity
Diverse range of quality controls

Figure 3: The five features of Mode 2 knowledge production Source: MacLean et al. 2002

The research on safeguarding children was prompted by a real-life problem: the constant failure of local agencies with responsibilities in this policy area to coordinate their efforts in order to effectively keep children safe. Moreover, the case study on which the research was based in a children's services authority moderating a mandatory partnership of the kind introduced by government to counteract the lack of collaborative capabilities of the local agencies. The ethnographic observation (both participant and non-participant) of the partnership's dynamics aimed to generate knowledge that was specific to the context which helped produce it.

The context of the research application also drove the use of literature, and the way in which four disciplines emerged as theoretical 'pillars' for the study. Not only that the research became therefore embedded in four wide disciplines, but these four were then synthesised into one complex theoretical framework that offered the most accurate portrayal of the real-life phenomenon observed at the outset and throughout the study. Transdisciplinarity was of essence

to the study which could not have developed in the same way, had it been anchored in only one of the four disciplines.

The third of the five feature of Mode 2 knowledge production was less applicable to our study than the other four. The peculiarity of the research (a doctoral research) made it practically impossible to combine the expertise of more than one person (the doctoral student), however, the supervisory team covered very different theoretical angles, both in comparison with each other and with the student herself.

The degree of reflexivity experienced throughout the study was considerable, as illustrated in the previous section of the paper. The researcher was at the centre of the process which was highly emergent in nature, hence needed decision-making and re-conceptualisation of the aims all of the time. As Ferdinand and colleagues (Ferdinand et al. 2007) maintain about ethnographic research, ethnographers find themselves in a continuous decision-making, problem-solving processes, which validates the resemblance with the reflexivity required in Mode 2 knowledge production.

Finally, this research was evaluated according to qualitative research canons, but also against the ways in which various ethical dilemmas arising from the research were resolved. Paramount here is the observations made in the previous section about the importance of going beyond academic excellence in this kind of research. Time and time again during the research, qualities such as political astuteness and alertness to deep-rooted and invisible organisational assumptions were tested in the researcher due to the unforeseen circumstances encountered along the way.

This paper has shown one manifestation of Mode 2 management research in practice using a trans-disciplinary theoretical framework and ethnography-like research methods. Furthermore, it discussed how ethnography can be considered to be a Mode 2 knowledge production method, alongside more established problem-solving management research techniques analysed by MacLean et al (2002). Although the research illustrated here is but a case study of ethnography, more theoretical aspects of ethnography documented elsewhere (e.g. Alder and Alder 1987, DeWalt and DeWalt 2002, Ferdinand et al 2007), too, indicate that ethnographies lend themselves well to the five features of Mode 2 research. They generally use real life to derive contextualised, transdisciplinary knowledge that makes use of the researchers' reflexivity as

much as of the external reality that they observe and is subject to a diverse range of quality controls including the ways in which ethical dilemmas are being tackled throughout the course of the study. Ethnography should therefore be considered as an appropriate methodological means of tackling Mode 2 knowledge production in management research, alongside the more conventional research techniques considered by MacLean and colleagues (2002).

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