Chapter 5

The Value of Rapid Ethnography

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"We don't have time for that!"
—Fortune 500 company client

Introduction

In the business world, time is a precious commodity and a tough master. Public companies are scrutinized on a quarterly basis according to their earnings and output. Time is present either explicitly or as an undercurrent in almost every plan and business decision. For ethnographers working in such an environment, fieldwork schedules that once mirrored annual agricultural cycles now must align with the business quarter.

This environment is a far cry from the early days when Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski were concerned with temporal cycles in nonwestern societies, focusing on seasonal cycles and cultural rights of passage that mark the phases of life (Malinowski 1922; Mead 1928; van Gennep [1909] 1960). With the rise of industrial society, the field's interest in the experience of time began to take on economic concerns as sociologists and anthropologists studied temporal issues within hospitals, factories, and other institutions (Bulmer 1984). Other anthropologists looked at cultural differences in how people orient to time and how strictly they observe schedules (Hall 1983). These studies, conducted within their own culture of university-based research, were carried out in a timescale that matched the academic year.

Today, ethnographers working in corporate settings have to accept the need for speed and adjust their approach. While surely requiring tradeoffs, rapid ethnography brings the ethnographic perspective into organizations in a way that is culturally palatable and gives ethnographers a seat at the table. In corporate settings, ethnographers are rarely used as historians; more frequently, they are asked to be the company's scouting party, to understand consumers' needs, to make sense of their evolving practices, and to explain why those practices matter to the company's strategy and to the design of its products and services.

In this chapter and the one by Melissa Cefkin that follows, we propose a dialogue about the nature of time: what it causes us to do, how it shapes our work, and

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the compromises it engenders. I begin by describing how I used rapid ethnography in three projects, each with its own analytic focus, methods, and lessons learned. Cefkin responds with a thoughtful discussion of what we may be losing in our ethnographic practice and our findings when we conduct research quickly. She provocatively asks, "What are the limits to speed?" Together, these two papers deal with the realities of practicing ethnography in today's fast-paced business world.

The Value of Rapid Ethnography

Several times I have worked with clients who were refocusing their product concept to reach the right audience after having missed with an earlier attempt. I suggested spending a month or two directly observing people in their target market so we could understand what they're doing and what they need. Their response: "We don't have time for that!" And yet, as long as three years later, those clients were still searching for the right product concept. I believe if they had invested a handful of weeks in rapid ethnography, they would have saved themselves years of misdirected work.

Still, it's understandable that managers would feel uncomfortable taking time to do open-ended ethnographic observations. You don't know what you'll find, and there's no guarantee you'll have that "a-ha!" insight that will transform your thinking. But in the last two years, I've worked on several ethnography projects that generated specific, long-lasting benefits to the team in a short period of time, so I know it can be done. In fact, I've yet to work on a project that didn't have at least two of the following outcomes:

- Steer the project away from an unproductive direction.
- Refocus the project toward solving a clear, demonstrated problem.
- Open management's eyes to problems or patterns that had been hidden to them, sometimes with simple solutions.
- Inspire technology ideas that could solve an observed problem in a new way.

The following three case studies explain how we generated these benefits. They took from five to ten weeks to complete, with participation from one to four ethnographers (some of them part-time). In the first case, a study of parking enforcement, our client came to us with a specific product concept and wanted to use ethnography to inform its design. In the second case, a hospital had the general idea of supporting nurses and wanted us to identify specific problem areas where technology could assist them. In the third case, a client had the broad agenda of identifying new product opportunities in the area of mobile communication and used ethnography to discover gaps in the current set of offerings to generate ideas. These examples show the use of rapid ethnography for this wide range of uses, from informing the design of a specific product to identifying an opportunity for a new product concept.

EXAMPLE 1: Parking Enforcement

Our client for this project provides services to municipal transportation departments, such as the processing of parking ticket and meter payments. They had the idea of generating a system that would guide parking enforcement officers to potential parking violations to improve their efficiency and increase city revenue. Some cities are already experimenting with this approach by installing systems that have sensors embedded in parking spaces so they can detect when the spaces are occupied. If a meter is not paid, a handheld app guides officers to the parking spot for ticketing (e.g., SFPark in San Francisco, LAExpress Park in Los Angeles, and ParkSmart in New York City). But many cities can't afford such sensor-based systems, so our client wanted to (1) see if we could use historical data on parking violations to predict which blocks are likely to have violations at specific times, and (2) understand parking officers' common practices to help guide the design of the system.

While an engineer on the team ran the analytics on historical parking data, I shadowed three parking enforcement officers (PEOs) in two cities. One city was already using the sensor-based system, and I observed one of its parking officers for half of a shift and interviewed her supervisors the rest of the day. I also accompanied two other PEOs for a full shift each in a different city that didn't have sensors. I video-recorded the PEOs as they drove around looking for parking violations and when they got out of the car to issue tickets or check the meters. As we drove around, I chatted with them to learn more about their work and their perspective on it.

The day after each outing, I wrote up detailed notes based on memory to give the rest of the team quick feedback on the visit. Then I watched the videos and took more careful notes about the PEOs' activities. As I did so, I generated a log or loose transcript of their activity, noting the time and a brief description of what they were doing throughout their shifts. The following is an example of my log:

Time code	Activity
6:45	Gets out to look at receipt in windshield to check if it says 8:51 or 8:31, couldn't tell from reflection
7:26	Gets out to check meter, finds violation, writes a ticket (#5). (Takes 1 min 35 sec)
9:20	I ask about expectations for tickets, he says depends on beat. Marking beats take more time to mark. In meter beats, you're focused on meter violations but if you run across other violations, you'll get them.

TABLE 5.1 Sample Parking Enforcement Log

I create these logs primarily as a mechanism to help me truly understand the activity, and secondarily as a way to quickly find key events when I go back to create a video podcast (discussed later) of my findings.

As I reviewed the videos, I was struck—as I always am—at how much I had missed during the original observation and how much more became visible to me through the videos. After having spent a full day with the PEOs, I was now able to understand more about the reasoning behind their activities, especially in the morning when I was just getting a sense of their job. For example, one officer occasionally got out of his car to check the meters on foot rather than scanning them as he slowly drove by. I later realized he usually walked when he was monitoring diagonal parking spaces where it was harder to see the meters from his car and the cars are parked more densely than they are in parallel parking zones.

Spending the time with those videos also helped me realize several inefficiencies in the way they were enforcing parking; inefficiencies that are currently necessary but could be removed or reduced with the right technology solution. Since I am trained primarily as a user experience designer and secondarily as an ethnographer, I'm always looking for the obstacles people put up with and the ways they work around the system to accomplish their goals, since those practices tend to spark ideas about how technology can help them. These insights almost always happen when I'm reviewing the video rather than during the original observation period, since at that point I'm completely focused on trying to understand what the participant is doing from their point of view while also making sure I'm capturing the right activity with my camera. It's only later that I can step back and evaluate what I saw; without the video, much of the detail necessary to generate novel insights is lost.

After discussing my analysis with my team, I produced a 12-minute video podcast that summarized what I had learned and pointed out opportunities for

FIGURE 5.1. Screenshot of video podcast describing findings from observations of parking enforcement.

generating technology improvements (Figure 5.1). I posted the podcast to a secure website and sent a link to our clients, who were able to watch at their convenience. We have found that producing these short video summaries of our findings greatly increases the impact of our work, since the videos show rather than tell what we learned and people find them more engaging than slide sets or documents (Glasnapp and Isaacs 2011). In addition, people seem inclined to forward the link to others in their organization, which helps build a broader base of support for any decisions based on the data.

One of the key findings was that, in the city that already had sensors installed in the parking spaces, the PEO and supervisors were finding the system extremely frustrating and felt that it was *reducing* rather than improving their productivity. I observed the officer as she chased down one "violation" after another only to find that the car had a handicapped placard, or the person had already paid, or there was no car in the parking spot. Her supervisors called these "ghost violations" and complained bitterly about them. The system was handling cars with handicapped placards by having the officers mark them as such, which was supposed to remove the "violation" from the system, but after a while those cars reappeared, so the PEO had to go back to check and mark them again. She wasn't sure why she saw other ghost violations, but she suspected the driver paid after the violation appeared on her screen but the system didn't update quickly enough. Or the meters were miscalibrated. Whatever the reasons, it was clear the system was a hindrance, and in fact she was delighted that we now had video to prove it.

Our client was surprised to hear about these difficulties. Surely the system could be tuned to address these problems, which may have been technical glitches. But it had been in place for about a year and still wasn't running smoothly. It became clear that if a system *with* sensors in the street was creating such frustration and inefficiency, it was less likely that a system based on probabilities from historical data would be successful. The outcome of the analytics on the historical data were consistent with this conclusion: even with seven years of data, most blocks didn't have enough data at enough times to predict violations with reasonable levels of accuracy. So at least in the near term, the study steered the client away from spending a lot of time developing a system that was likely to be ineffective.

Beyond that, the study also suggested several alternative areas for innovation that would solve problems I had observed. One of these concerned enforcement of "marking beats," areas where cars can park for free for a limited amount of time (typically four-hour, two-hour, or one-hour zones). These areas don't have meters, so to enforce them officers have to drive by once to mark the cars (which they sometimes do with chalk but more often by entering license plates into their handheld device), and then return after the right amount of time to identify the cars that were still there. They also have to arrange their time so they can return to the right blocks at the right times. This two-pass effort could be reduced if there were some way for the cars to "know" when they arrived and communicate it to a

PEO's device as the officer drove by. PEOs could then cruise by any street at any time to detect violations.

Our engineering research team held a brainstorming meeting to come up with ideas to enable parking officers to know when cars had arrived. Some were shorter-term with necessary limitations, and others offered greater benefits but required innovations in materials and systems. Both these directions were useful to our client and to our research team. The important point is that the ingenuity of all the smart people in the room could build on my observations to find ways to address a real problem that, if solved, would have a large impact, rather than imagining a possible problem that may not exist or have much impact if resolved.

Of course, these observations by no means gave us a full picture of all that's involved in parking enforcement, and we could make no claims about whether the practices in these two cities were representative of other cities. But they certainly made the client aware of problems with the original project plan, and they identified at least some opportunities for future technology development. Also, the client's company worked with parking offices in many cities, so by sharing the video with others in the company, we were able to verify that our characterization of basic enforcement practices was accurate (in particular about marking beats), while also noting ways that it varied across cities.

This whole project took five weeks from the time I observed the first parking officer to the time I released the video summarizing my findings, including air travel to one of the cities. I was the only one doing the ethnographic work, and I was even splitting my time between this and a secondary project. To be fair, additional time was spent setting up the visits and initially understanding the clients' goals. But since they had good access to the city parking offices, the visits were set up quickly and were constrained only by my schedule.

EXAMPLE 2: Hospital Nursing

The goal of this project was to develop technology to support nurses in a hospital setting. We partnered with a hospital network and started with the goal of helping nurses *plan and schedule* the many patient care activities that need to be interleaved among many patients. The hospital gave us access to several of its nurses and supervisors so we could get a deeper understanding of how they currently plan their tasks. After conducting a few workshops to understand their jobs, we arranged for three of us to observe three nurses during their shifts on the same day, each of them from a different department. (Two of us were ethnographers and one was a conscientious engineer with ethnographic training.) We video-shadowed the nurses during their whole shifts, occasionally asking clarifying questions when it wasn't disruptive to their work. Since we had already met with them a few times and built up a good rapport, they were relatively comfortable narrating their activities and thought processes for us. Although the two ethnographers recorded continuously, the engineer only captured snippets of video on his phone whenever something of

interest was happening. We hated to lose the opportunity to capture that nurse's entire day on video, but we considered it a bonus that the engineer wanted to participate in the shadowing and so settled for the less-than-complete data.

Video recording was tricky because of the hospital's strict privacy requirements, but we managed to get some of the patients' consent; when we could not, we avoided recording the patient and focused only on the nurse. Since we sometimes captured their medical data on computer screens or paper, we postprocessed the video to blur out any such data from patients who hadn't granted permission.

As it turned out, the engineer's abbreviated video recordings had some advantages. Within just a few days of doing the observations, the engineer put together and presented to the team a set of slides that communicated his main observations and showed several short video clips he had recorded. Although his analysis was not deep or thorough, the team appreciated getting a preliminary report shortly after the visit that gave them a sense of what we had learned. After a few weeks, the ethnography team followed up with a more extensive analysis.

During those weeks, the ethnography team went through the continuous footage we had captured of the other two nurses' shifts, again generating detailed transcripts similar to the parking officer logs. A sample is shown here.

Time code	**Activity**
NURSE'S STATION (Pages Dr. O for Mr. M's potassium)	
1:02:19	Decides to page Dr. O since she hasn't heard back from her in over a half hour. Has to look up number on computer.
1:02:28	Calls someone to ask for Dr. O's pager number, writes it on her nurse's brain (a piece of paper summarizing key information for that shift)
1:02:58	Goes to landline phone to page Dr. O
1:03:11	Hangs up phone, says, "Now we just wait till they call."
Memory	**Waiting on Dr. O to return page**
HALLWAY (Transition period)	
1:03:21	Walks over to sink to wash her hands thoroughly
1:04:00	Puts bandaid on her finger
1:04:09	She hears someone saying, "Oh, there's the doctor."
1:05:08	Logs out of computer and gets ready to do med pass
1:05:12	Tells someone (who?) if Dr. O calls to grab her
1:05:19	Puts on medical sash

TABLE 5.2 Sample Hospital Nursing Log

In this log, I grouped the entries into chunks and labeled each one by their location and a short summary of the main activity for that period of time. I added the bold "Memory" note later, after we got interested in how much the nurse was keeping track of in memory. I went back through the logs to note each time a new item got added to her mental list, and when she could remove it (when the task got done).

For this project, we decided to create a series of edited video podcasts, each of which told the story of one patient care "vignette" as it unfolded over time, such as calling a patient issue to a doctor's attention, tracking the progress of medication being prescribed and filled, and then giving it to the patient. We clipped together the bits of video that showed intermittent progress toward completing the task and narrated the story. In addition, we turned our observations about excessive memory load into a "cognitive load timeline" that showed all the tasks handled by one of the nurses on her shift, categorized by type of task, showing how long they took to complete (see Figure 5.2).

What emerged was a clear finding that the nurses were spending a lot of their time simply tracking the status of many ongoing tasks that required coordination among other people, often prodding or unblocking those people so they could carry out the next step in the process. For example, early in her shift, the nurse noted that a patient's potassium level was low. Over the next hour or so, she made several attempts to notify the doctor, first sending a text message, then paging her, and finally corralling her in the hallway. The doctor was about to visit another patient so she said she would soon write a prescription. The nurse kept monitoring the "Pyxis room" (where the pharmacy dropped off medications), but each time she didn't see the potassium-lidocaine mix that should have arrived. Later, when she happened to see a pharmacy tech delivering meds, she asked if it had arrived, but still no luck. At that point, she dug around through multiple screens in the electronic medical record system and discovered that the doctor had prescribed pure potassium, not the mix she had been expecting, and the pharmacy had delivered it a while ago. She had just been looking in the wrong place. The nurse immediately went to give the patient the medicine—three and a half hours after she'd originally noticed the problem.

This was just one episode among many where the nurse had to monitor the task to make sure it got done—all going on in parallel. Keeping track of all these tasks was a heavy cognitive burden, and we saw several times when this nurse didn't complete patient comfort tasks, such as getting an extra blanket or returning a call from a patient's relative. If she couldn't do it immediately, she lost track of the task among the many higher-priority medical activities she was tending to.

We also noticed that the nurses spent a lot of time tracking down phone numbers. At the beginning of each shift, the hospital issued most personnel a mobile phone, to be returned at shift's end so they could be sanitized. Every time the nurses had to reach someone, they had to call the central switchboard, look up

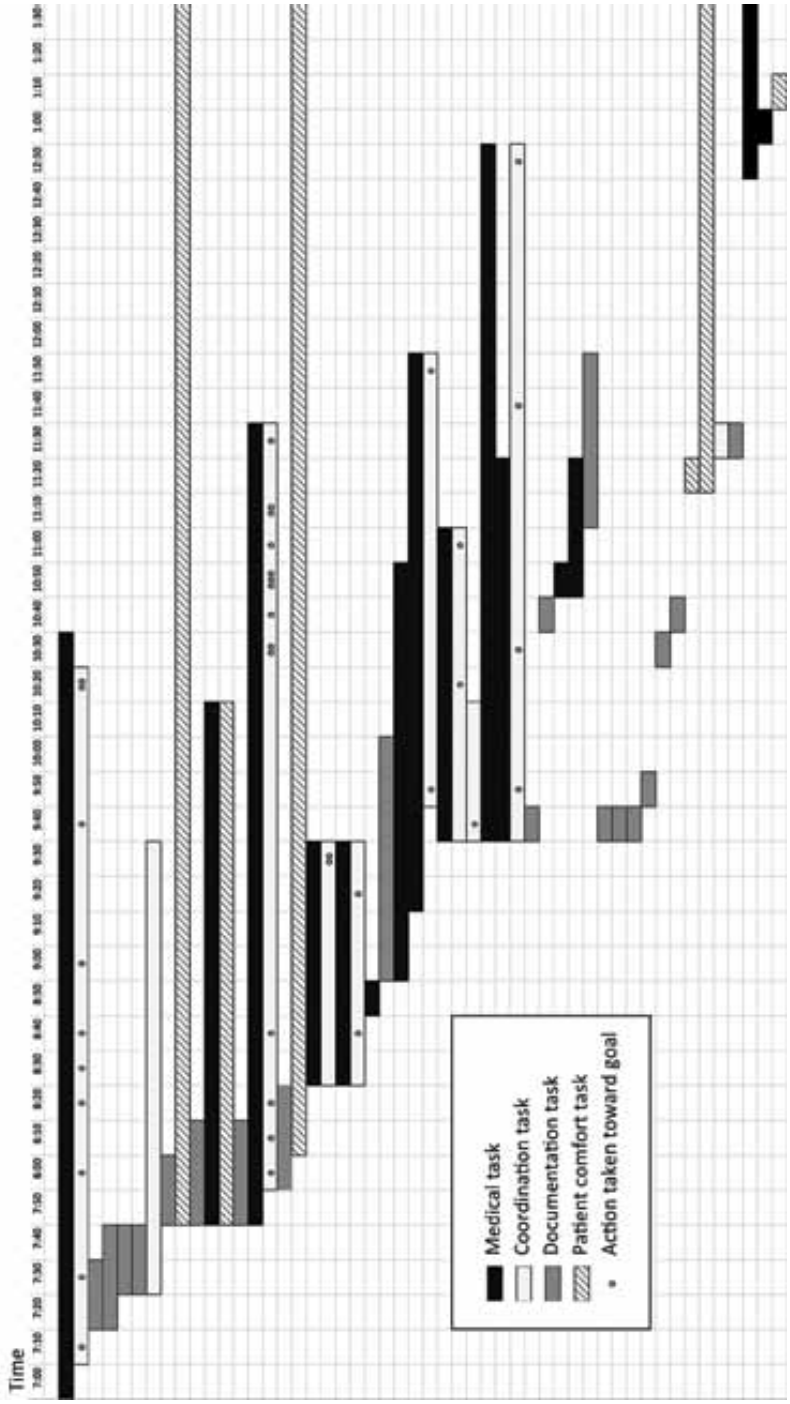

FIGURE 5.2. Timeline showing one nurse's activities over her shift. The diagram shows that the nurse is keeping track of and communicating about many activities across multiple patients all at the same time, leaving little time or mental capacity for patient comfort tasks, such as getting a blanket or returning a call from a patient's relative. As a result, if she couldn't do a patient care task immediately, it often didn't get done.

the number on a piece of paper if it was nearby, or ask someone. Whenever they were asked to get back to someone, the nurses asked for the person's extension and wrote it down on a piece of paper; whenever they made a request of someone else, they provided their number. It was a minor inconvenience, but it caused frequent delays and added up to a meaningful amount of their precious time.

Toward the end of the analysis phase, we met with the nurses and a supervisor and later the management team to show them some of the video vignettes and to discuss our analysis and conclusions. We find it effective to conduct such reviews, since it helps us avoid making unwarranted conclusions based on data that might be unrepresentative of their practices over the long term. The nurse supervisor said that even though she was on the floor with the nurses, she had no idea how much they were keeping track of in their heads. She was also astonished to learn how their phone policy was causing such inefficiencies; she was receptive to the idea of assigning people the same number on every shift. The management team, which wanted nurses to spend more time in the patients' rooms, was deeply impressed by the amount of time the nurses had to spend out of the room to facilitate many of the in-room tasks.

As a result of this analysis, the project shifted its focus toward helping nurses keep track of ongoing *coordination* tasks rather than helping them plan and schedule upcoming tasks, which they were doing with relative ease. This was a profound shift, and yet it was clear to everyone that the data supported it. The team is currently discussing how it can best support coordination among multiple hospital roles and free up nurses to use more of their cognitive capacity for solving patient issues instead of tracking task progress. The ethnographic data is playing an important role in guiding this thinking.

Again, we cannot conclude that our findings generalize to other hospitals or even all types of nursing in that hospital. It's also more than likely that we missed other opportunities for supporting nurse activity. But by showing the videos and our analysis to the nurses and the hospital team, we confirmed that we had accurately captured at least one important part of the story. The most senior nurse on the executive team said to us, "Your knowledge of nursing is light-years ahead of where it was when we started in just a few short months." As a bonus, the nurses were gratified that our analysis made their management aware of how hard they worked to overcome routine obstacles.

This ethnographic work was part of a longer-term project that involves prototype design and development, and our involvement lasted many months. However, the key observation and analysis activities described here were carried out over a two-month period by our three-member team. The initial workshops with the nurses served to establish a relationship with them and gave us a basic understanding of their work, and the one-day shadowing event and the subsequent analysis work revealed the details of the nurses' day and yielded the insights about their cognitive load.

EXAMPLE 3: Mobile Communication

For this project, our client was a consumer electronics company that had the open-ended goal of discovering an opportunity for a product concept involving "mobile telepresence": something that would support people who wished to stay connected to friends and family while moving among many locations throughout the day. There were no guarantees we would uncover new discoveries: indeed, this domain is crowded with technology and has been well researched by both academics and businesses (Grinter and Eldridge 2003; Ito and Okabe 2005; Kirk et al. 2010; Ling and Yttri 2002; Nardi et al. 2000; O'Hara et al. 2006; Okabe 2004). To increase our chances, we attempted a method that as far as we knew had not been tried before. We identified four small groups of people who like to stay in touch and we video-shadowed each group: not just from one person's point of view, but from each member's simultaneously. We arranged for a different researcher to accompany and videorecord each group member over the same period of time so we could see each person's perspective as they connected, engaged, and disconnected over time. There were four of us involved in this project, two full-time and two part-time, and we spent about 10 weeks doing the shadowing and analysis (not including a preliminary phase in which we helped the client choose a domain of study and identified appropriate participants). One member of the client's organization joined us throughout the whole process so he could learn our methodology firsthand.

There were certain logistical issues in video-shadowing in this way, but we were pleasantly surprised at how well it came off. We were able to video record our participants in many public places, including a farmer's market, restaurants and coffee shops, grocery stores, downtown streets, and a department store, as well as in their homes. Only once were we asked to stop recording (in the department store), but we were able to get a manager's approval once we explained our purpose. We got written permission from people who interacted substantially with our participants, and asked for verbal permission from those who spoke with them briefly (such as a waiter or sales clerk).

We wound up with 48 hours of recordings (from 10 people's points of view), so we had to triage. Each researcher scanned through their video to clip episodes of interest for supporting mobile telepresence: cases where participants had problems connecting and sharing, interesting ways they engaged with one another, and so on. We quickly previewed these videos as a team and selected those that seemed most promising for further analysis. For those, we transcribed the conversations, this time in greater detail using a more formal notation. We also clipped the same sequence from the other participants' points of view and synchronized the videos so we could see one video with multiple views in separate windows (see Figure 5.3). The group then met to further analyze those videos and transcripts, discussing patterns across interactions. After we'd shadowed our first group, we held a workshop with the client to give them an early sense of the data, and then we continued with the final three observations.

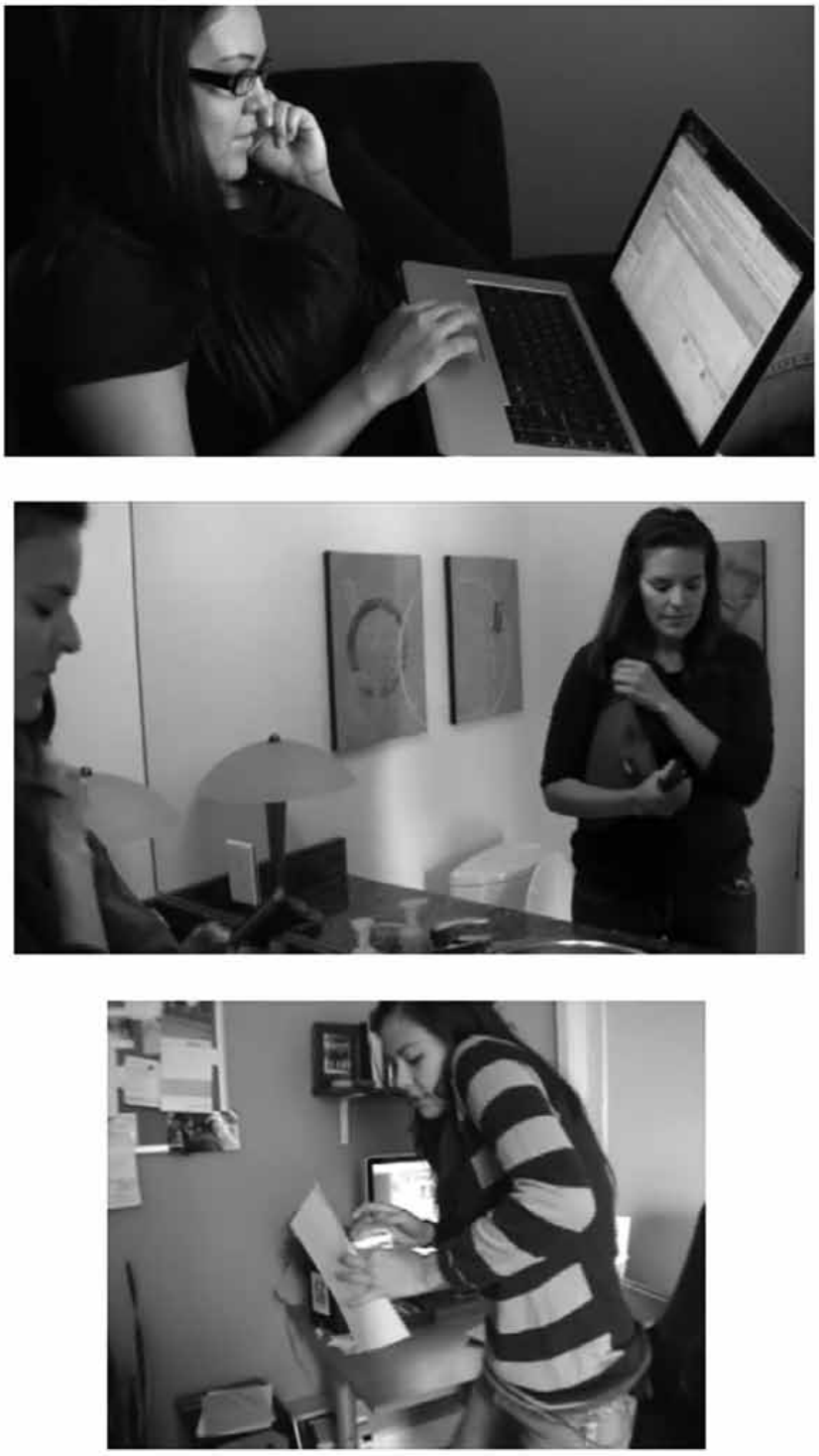

FIGURE 5.3 These videos, showing three sisters on a three-way phone call, were combined to create one video showing all three points of view at once.

After an intensive two months of work, we identified a phenomenon we dubbed "channel blending," which can be thought of as the opposite of multitasking (Isaacs et al. 2012). We saw small groups of participants, often with several of them in one location and several in one or more remote locations, using multiple devices to carry on one integrated conversation that often included video, music, and/or data (such as their game-playing activities or even their sleep cycles). Rather than splitting their attention among many conversations over different channels (multitasking), people were *blending* the channels together to have one coherent conversation that spanned local and remote spaces.

Yet most of the technologies they used were designed to connect only two people (phone calls, texting, video chat) or large groups of people (Facebook, Twitter, discussion forums), and all of those technologies assumed everyone was in a separate space, alone, using a single device. There seemed to be a clear opportunity for a technology to support small, consistent groups of people (maybe three to six), designed with the assumption that some people may be in the same physical location while some are remote, and that they want to blend together content from multiple devices. We saw a number of variations on this theme, and at the end of the project we had a final workshop where we showed the client many videos and discussed their implications. On the basis of this study, our client initiated an entirely new project to support one of the scenarios included in the broader phenomenon of channel blending.

This project was the biggest of the three discussed here, as it involved intensive work from two of us and substantial work from the part-timers for about 10 weeks. In that time we were able to identify a fundamental need that wasn't being met even with the many technology options available. The finding opened up many possibilities for future product concepts, which could have far-reaching implications for a relatively small upfront investment.

Again, we can't be sure how common channel blending is, but our client was now in a position to have its large consumer research department apply its well-established methods to identify the consumer group(s) that have this need, determine its frequency, and test the product concepts they generated to address this need.

Conclusion

Time is always a concern for clients who are under pressure to produce products that will succeed in the market. Yet in all these cases, the impact of the ethnographic work had long-lasting effects that more than justified the few months of effort (which was sometimes done in parallel with the rest of the team's activities). In the parking and nursing studies, the clients avoided spending a lot of time and resources developing a solution that was not likely to have success (parking) or great impact (nursing), and were steered in a more productive direction. In the mobile communication study, the client became aware of a gap in the market that

offered opportunities for multiple product concepts that could be developed over the next several years.

We were able to produce these results in a short amount of time for several reasons:

- TEAMWORK. All the ethnographers who participated in these studies are highly trained and have a lot of experience extracting findings from observational data to inform technology development. Our backgrounds are in sociology, anthropology, and psychology, and we combined our approaches to get the benefit of our diverse training. Beyond that, our clients also contributed to our success. In the parking and nursing studies, the clients were in a position to give us access to key personnel to observe, and those participants were generous in sharing their work experience with us. In the mobile communications study, the client demonstrated its strong commitment to the project by dedicating one of its members to participate full-time in the project and by actively participating in interim workshops that guided our focus of attention. Indeed, all of the clients showed commitment and openness to the process, whatever it might reveal.
- FOCUS. Each study focused on a specific type of activity with the goal of identifying opportunities for technology and design constraints. We did not attempt to gain a complete understanding of the underlying cultural norms or the larger significance of our participants' practices. While no doubt fascinating, that type of study would have been impractical to complete in a short timeframe. The benefit of having a narrow goal is that it helps you triage and exclude so you can focus on the data that is most useful for your purposes.
- RELIANCE ON VIDEO DATA. We used video as our primary data source, analyzed it in a systematic way, and based our findings directly on evidence captured in the video. This is notable because people sometimes assume that you cannot afford the time to analyze video in a short-term project; instead, they rely on their notes and impressions to form conclusions and use video to illustrate them to the client. By going over the video immediately after recording it, we consistently noticed many rich and subtle activities that were lost on us during our initial observations. There is simply too much to notice at one time. It was through the systematic review of the video that we generated our most compelling insights and built up evidence for our findings, allowing us to tell a convincing story to the client.
- STRONG, REGULAR COMMUNICATION. We took conscious steps to communicate frequently—internally with the rest of the team as well as with the client—rather than delivering results at the end. We quickly generated preliminary results soon after doing the observations to give the client confidence that interesting findings were likely, and in some cases to prepare them for findings that challenged the project goals. We then followed those up with more thorough analyses based on video data. In addition to showing our results in

a one-time presentation, in some cases we generated video podcasts that gave the client direct experience with the data and laid out the case for our conclusions. More important, these standalone narrated movies increased the impact of our findings because the client could review them on their own time and share them with others in their organization. Even months later, some of our clients are still showing the videos to their partners and collaborators to get buy-in for the direction suggested by our research.

- LIMITATIONS OF TIME. Still, there's no doubt there are limitations to rapid ethnography. If you spend relatively short periods of time doing intensive observations and analysis, you cannot expect to gain a deep understanding of the many facets of a complex activity, you cannot be sure your findings are representative of a broader market, and you might base conclusions on a distorted picture of the activity you're observing. It's admittedly frustrating to have such rich data and not have the time to delve into it more deeply to gain a richer understanding and uncover a wider range of findings. Still, there are ways to mitigate some of the limitations mentioned. In the nurse study, we validated our findings with the participating nurses as well as their supervisors and upper management. In the parking study, we checked our conclusions with others in the client's organization who had experience with other cities' parking departments. In the mobile communication study, the client planned to use traditional consumer research methods to verify the need for the product concepts they were developing based on the outcome of our study.

By the end of these projects, all the clients felt their "leap of faith" by investing in ethnography had paid off. In fact, the parking study was the client's second engagement with us after they had seen the value from an earlier short-term study. The head of the hospital management team said his team was deeply impressed with the findings, and the consumer company is working to incorporate a version of our ethnographic methods into their own suite of research tools.

Companies that want to be competitive in industries with rapidly evolving products cannot waste time pursuing unproductive strategies. It pays to spend a little time up front to save time later. In fact, it seems to me that such companies don't have time *not* to do these types of observational studies.

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