

Symbolic Interactionist Ethnography: Implications for Information Systems (IS) Research and Practice

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Abstract

This paper attempts to contribute to the positivist-interpretivist and rigor-relevance debates in IS research. We accomplish this by reflecting on the implications of symbolic interactionist ethnography for enriching interpretive research, and by highlighting how the adaptation of the “constant comparison” technique from grounded theory may help move the ethnography study towards theoretical interpretation of symbolic interactions in varied IS research settings. In particular, we argue that the approach as outlined in this paper may effectively combine the theoretical strengths of the interactionist perspective with the empirical strengths of ethnography and the analytical edge of grounded theory. This approach may thus provide one starting point to help reconcile between the pursuit of academic knowledge vis-à-vis practice-oriented insights in IS research.

Keywords

Symbolic interactionism, ethnography, grounded theory, research methodology

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1. Introduction

1.1 Positivist-Interpretivist debate

In the social sciences, research has been dominated over the past century by positivist approaches to the study of human behavior (Prus, 1996). Similarly, information systems (IS) research has been dominated in terms of publication counts by such positivist approaches (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991).

However, this positivist viewpoint has been challenged in many quarters over time (post-positivism was an attempt to address some of these criticisms), and in fact, the development of interpretivist approaches in social science has emerged somewhat concurrently with the critique of positivism (Prus 1996). Similarly in IS research, there are signs that interpretivism is gaining increasing attention as a legitimate alternative, despite the continuing dominance of positivism (Walsham 1995).

1.2 Rigor-Relevance debate

Against this positivist-interpretivist backdrop, it is important to note that IS research is different from traditional scientific research in that it has to develop a body of academic knowledge while providing practice-oriented insights related to the organizational contexts being studied (Harvey & Myers 1995). Such an intellectual burden has also concurrently led to a famous “rigor versus relevance” debate in IS literature about the balance that researchers often have to achieve between ensuring rigor versus striving for greater relevance. In this regard, Lee (1999) argues the need to go beyond the long-dominant approach of positivism in addressing this issue in IS research.

1.3 Focus of Study

Prompted by these debates, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to interpretive IS research by reflecting on the value of the symbolic interactionist ethnography approach in helping to address the issue of rigor versus relevance in the IS discipline.

In the literature, the empirical strengths of ethnography have been quite well discussed, especially with regards to its ability to provide rich insights by focusing on actual practice in situ through prolonged immersion in the field. On the other hand, we note that a key weakness of many such studies lies in their lack of conceptual depth and in the tendency for the researcher to get overwhelmed by huge amounts of disconnected data (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001, Hammersley 1992).

In this regard, we argue that symbolic interactionism may provide a useful theoretical perspective to guide the IS researcher in conducting the ethnography study while the adaptation of the “constant comparison” technique from grounded theory may offer a much-needed analytical edge in sharpening the theoretical insights from using such an approach.

While other theoretical perspectives such as critical social theory, structuration theory and actor network theory may also be appropriate in informing the ethnography method, we focus on symbolic interactionism due to increasing interest in the role of symbolism within organizations (Turner 1990). Furthermore, we argue that in spite of its obvious theoretical strengths, this perspective has not received the attention it deserves in IS empirical research.

2. Ethnography and implications for IS research

Ethnographic research comes from the discipline of social and cultural anthropology where an ethnographer is required to spend a significant amount of time in the field. The ethnographer immerses himself in the life-worlds of the people being studied and seeks to place the phenomena in their social and cultural context. In the process, ethnographers generally rely on three sources of data to achieve such intimate familiarity: observation, participant-observation and interviews (Prus 1996).

Given that much recent IS research has focused on the social and organizational contexts of information systems, ethnographic research has emerged as one important means of studying these contexts (Harvey & Myers 1995, Prasad 1997). This is due to the inherent advantages of the ethnographic approach, which revolves around facilitating an in-depth understanding of the people, the organization, use of IT and the broader context of such usage (Myers 1999). Furthermore, knowledge of what happens in the field can often provide vital information to challenge existing assumptions.

However, in spite of the empirical strengths of this approach, many ethnographic studies have been criticized as lacking conceptual depth and providing just “common-sense descriptions”, when instead their value “should lie in the explicitness and coherence of the models employed and the rigor of the analysis” (Hammersley 1992).

In the following sections, we describe the process of conducting an ethnography study that is informed by the symbolic interactionism perspective. We argue that such an approach has important implications for enriching interpretive IS research, as it complements the empirical strengths of the ethnographic method with the theoretical strengths of the interactionist perspective. We begin with a discussion of symbolic interactionism and its applicability to IS research.

3. Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is one of several interpretive approaches to social science research – the others include phenomenology and hermeneutics. This approach stems largely from the teachings of Mead (1934) but it was Blumer (1969) who coined its name and who proved influential in developing it into a theoretical perspective that is concerned with the genesis and evolution of meaning and identity. Three basic assumptions underpin Blumer’s formulation of symbolic interactionism: ‘that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them’; ‘that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows’; ‘that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’.

Other researchers including Maines (1977) and Stryker (1981) have extended these ideas, and because symbolic interactionism has thus evolved over the years, it is now an influential school of thought in social science research (Prasad 1993).

It is important to note that symbolic interactionism is not concerned only with the study of symbols. The term “symbolic” refers to a basic premise that humans live in a world of objects (e.g., physical as well as social objects) that do not have intrinsic meanings. Instead, the meanings of objects arise out of the interpretations that people assign to them

during the course of everyday social “interactions” with others. Out of these interactions, shared as well as local (to the actor) meanings emerge but are always subject to the possibility of change. This continuing process of interpretation takes place primarily using the shared symbols of language. People make sense of their world using symbols which convey the meanings of different objects, and these meanings (including the concept of self) in turn influence people’s actions toward the objects (Swan & Bowers 1998).

3.1 Implications for IS research

Over the years, there has been increasing interest in the role of symbolism within organizations (Turner 1990). Indeed, Staw (1985) argues that symbolism may have greater “predictive power over more conventional observations of variables”. More specifically, symbols may be playing a critical role in organizational life as they provide an important means for simplifying and understanding a complex world (Hirschheim & Newman 1991).

Similarly, a theoretical recognition of the symbolic nature of computers and information technology in organizations has gained strength (Prasad 1993). For example, Turkle (1984) critiqued past studies of computerization for not appreciating that the technology may evoke different symbolic meanings for different people. In the same vein, Brissy (1990) uses a “mystery-magic-alchemy” continuum to describe the symbolism of computers in organizations.

In IS literature, prominent researchers have similarly recognized the importance of symbolism when organizational and technological contexts intersect. For example, Hirschheim and Newman (1991) argue that symbolism may hold more promise in facilitating an understanding of the information systems development process, thus challenging a commonly held assumption that is based on conventional economic rationality. Similarly, Kendall and Kendall (1993) use metaphors as cognitive lenses to examine the system development process, while Robey and Markus (1984) describe the functions of rituals in the systems design process.

As noted by Prasad (1993), symbolic aspects of computerized work can in fact be studied from various theoretical perspectives, including cognitive mapping, semiotics, cultural anthropology and rhetorical analysis. In this regard, symbolic interactionism is particularly appropriate for the study of technological symbolism in organizations because it simultaneously emphasizes process issues (interactions) in addition to the roles of meanings (Prasad 1993). However, there have only been a few noteworthy organizational studies of IT development, management and use that explicitly use this theoretical perspective (e.g., Prasad 1993, Gopal & Prasad 2000).

Against this backdrop, we argue that the symbolic interactionist framework may hold considerable promise for IS research, since the prime focus of the discipline has always been on the rich phenomena that emerge from the interactions between information technologies, the users of these technologies, and the organizational and social contexts of such use. For example, Markus and Robey (1988) identify three conceptions of causal agency in IS literature: technological imperative, organizational imperative and emergent perspective. Consistent with the philosophical foundations of symbolic interactionism, the latter perspective holds that “the uses and consequences of information technology emerge unpredictably from complex social interactions” (Markus & Robey 1988).

3.2 Methodological Fit with Ethnography

Symbolic interactionism thus has great potential to aid theory-building in future IS research. In the context of this study, it is important to reiterate that symbolic interactionism is different from traditional positivist inquiry (Prasad 1993). Such a difference is perhaps best captured in terms of its *ontological*, *epistemological* and *methodological* assumptions (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Ontology refers to assumptions regarding the form and nature of reality, and here, the position of symbolic interactionism is that local as well as shared constructed realities exist for the individuals or groups holding the constructions. *Epistemology* refers to the nature of the relationship between the knower (inquirer) or would-be-knower and what can be known, and in the case of symbolic interactionism, the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the “findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds”. In the case of *methodology*, symbolic interactionism’s position is that individual and shared constructions of reality can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among the investigator and respondents in naturalistic settings where behavior can be observed. These constructions are then hermeneutically interpreted, and compared/contrasted through a dialectical interchange.

Considering its ontological, epistemological and methodological positions, any research work grounded in this theoretical perspective clearly requires a strategy of inquiry that is empirically sensitive to the human capacity for symbolic interaction (Prus 1996). In fact, at a high level, this perspective appears to fit best with the broad methodological underpinnings of ethnography: empirical method based on immersion in the setting being studied; remaining open to elements unknown at the start of the study; and grounding the observed phenomenon in the field.

4. Symbolic Interactionist Ethnography

4.1 Implications of Interactionism assumptions for Ethnography

To reflect the key concerns of symbolic interactionism, Prus (1996) presents a set of assumptions that researchers working within an interactionist/interpretive tradition will normally make when conducting field research, which is summarized as follows: Human group life is intersubjective, (multi) perspectival, reflective, activity-based, negotiable, relational and processual. More specifically, four major implications for ethnographic research are discernible from Blumer’s interactionism perspective: respecting the essence of the subject matter (nature of human group life), achieving intimate familiarity (with the phenomenon), developing concepts (sensitive to the phenomenon) that can foster comparisons and contrasts, and understanding the process of interactions (Prus 1996).

Therefore, according to Prus (1996), an ethnographer engaged in a study using a symbolic interactionism lens should be cognizant of: the intersubjective nature of human behavior; the viewpoints of the actors involved in the situation; the interpretations that

the actors attach to themselves, other people and other objects that they interact with; the ways in which the actors do things on both an individual and interactive basis; the attempts that the actors make to influence (as well as accommodate and resist the inputs and behaviors of) others; the bonds that the actors develop with others over time and the ways in which they attend to these relationships; and the processes, natural histories or sequences of interactions that the actors develop and experience over time.

4.2 Research design

In the interactionist ethnography study, research should therefore be conducted in a naturalistic field setting that permits researcher to have access to multiple viewpoints in the situation through prolonged immersion. Research questions need to focus primarily on the symbolic and emergent aspects of the phenomena being studied, with emphasis on local and shared interpretations (Gopal & Prasad 2000).

4.3 Conducting Fieldwork

The whole process of data collection and analysis will also be guided by the interactionism perspective. For example, writing fieldnotes is a critical activity in ethnography research which should be done contemporaneously (so as to preserve vivid details of processes). Using a symbolic interactionist perspective, fieldnotes should also be written in ways that capture and preserve indigenous meanings (i.e., understanding what the participants' experiences mean to them) as well as the details of interaction processes through which members of the setting create and sustain specific, local social realities (Emerson et al. 1995). In addition, it is critical for the ethnographer to exercise reflexivity in documenting his/her own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses in the fieldnotes.

Such reflexivity is important because the interactionist ethnography approach is sensitive to the "double hermeneutic" - the task of interpreting entities that themselves interpret the worlds they experience (Prus 1996). In ethnographic research, the researcher is interpreting the phenomenon based on vast amounts of data gathered during his immersion in the field. There is a high degree of existential engagement and ongoing socialization on the part of the researcher whose intent is to focus the spotlight on the life-worlds of the participants. However, doing this effectively requires a certain amount of constant interactional role playing on the part of the researcher, which may in turn shape what is recorded in the fieldnotes. In the symbolic interactionist view, people will also try to make sense of being studied and can thus "interact" with researchers in widely different ways in an ethnographic study (with the possibility of thus altering the natural patterns and flow of interactions in the field).

Against this backdrop, Klein and Myers (1999) have crystallized a diffuse literature into a set of principles for conducting interpretive field studies, which we note are consistent with interactionist ethnography assumptions. Besides guiding the interaction between researchers and subjects, these principles also relate to the importance of adopting dialogical reasoning, multiple interpretations and suspicion (among others) during the fieldwork. We argue that collectively, such principles will be helpful in aiding the ethnographer to conduct more rigorous research in the symbolic interactionist tradition.

4.4 Ethnography Account

The foregoing discussion also suggests that while reflexivity, relationality, reciprocity and ethics (Lincoln 1995) are important considerations in any piece of interpretive research, they are brought sharply into focus in the interactionist ethnography study. In the written ethnography account, a confessional style (Schultz 2000) may thus help to reveal the various criteria for rigor that have been followed in the course of the study. Such transparency will allow the reader to better judge the quality of the work.

4.5 Implications for IS Research

In short, the practice of the interactionist ethnography approach flows directly from the organizing assumptions of symbolic interactionism itself, and can help contribute to a greater theoretical as well as practice-oriented understanding of complex social relations in a research setting (Rock 2001). For example, acceptance of vis-a-vis resistance to the implementation of evolving types of information technologies are continuing to be studied with somewhat mixed results in IS literature, but the interactionist ethnography approach may be able to dissect these multi-faceted issues with penetrating insight. More generally, such an approach can help to discern symbolic meanings, the sedimentation of these meanings, and how such meanings can lead to enactment of action in various IS contexts (Prasad 1993).

In the following section, we argue that the analytical edge of the above approach may be enhanced by the adaptation of the constant comparison method from grounded theory. This technique may help to move the ethnographic study towards theoretical interpretation of symbolic interactions in varied IS research settings, by greatly assisting the ethnographer in focusing and structuring the data collection and analysis process (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001, Emerson et al. 1995).

5. Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Strauss & Corbin 1998) shares a similarity with ethnography in having common roots in Chicago School sociology with its pragmatist philosophical foundations (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001). It derives much of its theoretical underpinnings from symbolic interactionism.

Grounded theorists give priority to “discovering” original theories in data. At the actual working level, the researcher begins by coding the data in close, systematic ways so that he can generate analytic categories. He further elaborates and integrates these categories by making frequent comparisons across the data and by writing theoretical memos (Emerson et al. 1995).

5.1 Ethnography and the Constant Comparisons technique

In spite of the clear empirical strengths of the ethnography method, a potential problem with many such studies is getting overwhelmed by huge amounts of disconnected data and which often results in low-level description or perhaps lists of un-integrated categories (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001). In fact, there is a traditional concern in ethnography research with the unsystematic nature of observational methods. Werner and Schoepfle (1987) attempt to address this concern by suggesting a typology of

observation processes representing increasingly deep understanding of the setting being studied: *descriptive observation*, *focused observation* and *selective observation*.

In *descriptive observation*, the researcher is open to everything that is going on and takes nothing for granted. It is through such broad and gradual immersion that the researcher will begin to understand what is and is not relevant to the research. Once that understanding is reached, the researcher moves into *focused observation* in which he will conduct more focused interviews, concentrate on types of activities and look for emerging themes. The final stage is *selective observation*, which focuses on the attributes of different types of activities. Here, the researcher will purposefully collect a series of incidents and interactions of the “same type” and look for regularities in them, while being open to variations from or exceptions to emerging patterns (Emerson et al. 1995).

In this regard, we argue that among the grounded theory techniques, the constant comparison method may best provide the analytical edge in facilitating the transitions between the three stages. Indeed, this method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory (as in a grounded theory approach), for the simple reason that the basic premise of such a method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research (Merriam 1998).

In adapting this technique for the interactionist ethnography approach, we draw largely on the work by Charmaz and Mitchell (2001), Emerson et al. (1995) and Locke (2001). In particular, we argue that the techniques of *open coding*, *comparing* and *initial memo-making* related to the constant comparison method may be effective in helping the ethnographer move from *descriptive* to *focused observation*, while the techniques of *focused coding*, *integrating categories* (and their properties) and *integrative memo-making* may be useful in helping to move from *focused* to *selective observation*. In this way, we therefore bring much-needed structure and formality to the use of the constant comparison method in ethnographic research.

5.2 Descriptive Observation

At the outset, it must be pointed out that the core tasks in rich ethnographic immersion are still extremely important. Here, Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) provide some guidelines for gathering rich ethnographic data at the start of the study by posing basic questions about the phenomena under observation. By answering these questions, the ethnographer “learns about context and content, meaning and action, structures and actors”.

5.3 From Descriptive to Focused Observation

To facilitate the transition from descriptive to focused observation, we suggest the use of *open coding* (Emerson et al. 1995) as the first step in developing conceptual categories, as it raises analytic questions about the data. Subsequent data collection and coding provides ongoing validation checks on previous codes. By constantly engaging with and asking questions of their data (in addition to engaging with their subjects), ethnographers begin to create the correspondence between experience and social scientific portrayals of them (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001).

Comparing occurs in tandem with coding and is critical to the act of creating conceptual categories. Researchers compare data incidents with other data incidents, and also compare data fragments with the evolving conceptual categories. Researchers are thus always moving from examination of data incidents to conceptualization and back to data incidents again (Locke 2001).

At the same time, writing initial memos (Emerson et al. 1995) during the initial reading of interview transcripts or fieldnotes can help to capture an idea that has been sparked by a particular incident. When subsequently developing categories, the constant comparative process may also give birth to emergent themes. *Initial memo-making* therefore provides the ethnographer with the analytic space to play with these ideas and to check their usefulness by constantly going back and forth between these memos and the realities out in the field.

5.4 From Focused to Selective Observation

To facilitate the transition from focused to selective observation, we suggest that the researcher conduct fieldwork with the aim of *integrating categories* by fully developing the conceptual categories and providing an organization for them.

At this point, there is a slight shift in the ongoing coding and comparing activities. Firstly, conceptual categories should be further articulated to the point that they can account for both similarity and variation in the exemplifying data incidents (Locke 2001). This can be done through the use of *focused coding* (Emerson et al. 1995). Less time should now be spent comparing data incidents to each other. Instead, efforts should be focused on comparing data incidents to the drafted conceptual category and thinking about its properties or dimensions.

In order to arrange categories so that they begin to add up to a conceptual ‘whole’ (a theoretical framework or a set of coherent, emergent themes), the conceptual elements should be compared in order to clarify the relationships between the categories and their properties. At this stage, *integrative memo-making* (Emerson et al. 1995) can also support the researcher’s efforts to articulate the significance of the categories and to begin working out on paper the relationships between the analytic elements in that framework (Locke 2001).

5.5 From Selective Observation to final Ethnographic Account

As categories and theoretical formulations are composed, the use of the comparative process will help in finalizing the boundaries of theoretical development at two levels. At the level of the framework, the researcher first makes a decision on “conceptual reduction”, thereby shaping a set of choices regarding what to include and what to ignore when composing a particular story from the data. At the level of the theoretical categories composed from the data incidents, this conceptual reduction will help the researcher to focus on the more relevant and robust categories, and to drop those immaterial categories from the framework (Locke 2001).

Finally, memos produced at earlier stages will offer the theoretical substance for the final ethnographic account, in terms of providing both the content for the categories and a way to frame the written presentation (Locke 2001).

5.6 Leveraging the combined strengths of Symbolic Interactionism, Ethnography and Grounded Theory

In summary, a grounded theory emphasis on active coding has advantages for ethnographic research. Ethnographers can then see and connect actions and contexts early in their study. This is because the constant comparison method will lead ethnographers to compare data with data (and with emerging categories) from the early stages, instead of waiting till all the data are in. Subsequently, ongoing active coding and constant comparisons enable ethnographers to show how categories are connected in a larger, overall framework (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001).

However, as per grounded theory, the various steps above must not be forced upon the data. Instead, the timely movement between the three stages (descriptive, focused and selective observation) is dependent on the researcher allowing the categories to gradually emerge from the data, as part of his ongoing immersion in the setting.

Therefore, without losing any of the advantages of rich ethnographic immersion, the constant comparison method of grounded theory may provide the analytical edge in helping the ethnography study move towards theoretical interpretation of symbolic interactions in varied IS research settings.

6. Toward a Set of Principles for conducting Symbolic Interactionist Ethnography in IS research

Based on the foregoing discussion and a review of organizational and IS literature, we distill several related sets of important criteria that have been put forth to guide empirical studies in the symbolic interactionist, ethnographic and grounded theory traditions.

Firstly, in the IS literature, Gopal and Prasad (2000) present a set of criteria for conducting studies (at key stages of the research process) using the symbolic interactionism framework. Earlier, we have also alluded to Klein and Myers' (1999) set of principles for conducting interpretive field studies, and to Charmaz and Mitchell's (2001) guidelines for the initial gathering of rich ethnographic data. In addition, we have also discussed the usefulness of adapting the constant comparison technique from grounded theory.

Last but certainly not least, the written interactionist ethnography account should render "thick description" (Geertz 1973; Gopal & Prasad 2000) with persuasive force. In fact, high quality ethnography writing should also satisfy four criteria: authenticity, plausibility, criticality and confessional (Golden-Biddle & Locke 1993, Schultz 2000).

Consolidated in Table 1, these various criteria may together provide an important basis for future research on the development of a set of key principles to guide the conduct of symbolic interactionist ethnography studies in the IS field. By explicitly linking the written (ethnography) account and the (ethnographic) strategy/process of inquiry to its informing (symbolic interactionism) theoretical perspective, Table 1 thus hints at the importance of having a common methodological thread for due consideration of rigor, relationality and reflexivity (Lincoln 1995) throughout the research process. Interested researchers may therefore wish to use Table 1 as a starting point to more fully examine the methodological insights arising from this study.

7. Contributions

In this paper, we have attempted to contribute to the ongoing positivist-interpretivist and rigor-relevance debates in IS literature through an exposition of how the individual complementary strengths of various qualitative instruments can be jointly leveraged for furthering interpretive IS research.

In particular, we argue that when the ethnography study is designed and guided using a symbolic interactionism theoretical lens while leveraging the use of the constant comparison technique, it may effectively combine the empirical strengths of ethnography with the theoretical strengths of the interactionist perspective and the analytical edge of grounded theory. While more research is needed, the approach outlined in this paper may thus provide one starting point to help reconcile between the pursuit of academic knowledge vis-à-vis practice-oriented insights in IS research (Harvey & Myers 1995).

Research Stage	Guiding Principle	Description of Principle
Research Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Compatibility of research questions with symbolic interactionist assumptions * Selection of appropriate field setting (Gopal & Prasad 2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Focus primarily on the symbolic and emergent aspects of phenomena being studied with multiplicity of meaning and the role of self and identity in mediating local and shared interpretations. * Conducted in a naturalistic field setting that permits researcher access to multiple local and shared viewpoints.
Data Collection & Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Immersion (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001; Gopal & Prasad 2000; Werner & Schoepfle 1987). * Interpretive field research (Klein & Myers 1999) * Constant comparisons (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001; Emerson et al. 1995; Locke 2001) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Researcher involvement through lengthy observational periods and through intense contact with subjects and situation * Focus on the details of interaction processes through which members of the setting create and sustain specific, local social realities. * Descriptive, Focused and Selective observation * Hermeneutic circle, Contextualization, Interaction between the researchers and the subjects, Abstraction and Generalization, Dialogical Reasoning, Multiple Interpretations, Suspicion * Coding, comparing and initial memo-making (<i>moving from descriptive to focused observation</i>) * Integrating categories and their properties, and integrative memo-making (<i>moving to focused to selective observation</i>)
Ethnography Account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Thick description (Geertz 1973; Gopal & Prasad 2000) * Authenticity * Plausibility * Criticality (Golden-Biddle & Locke 1993) * Confessional (Schultze 2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Present the connotational significance of the findings, while telling an insightful story relevant to the different actors in the field rather than the researcher's own story * Demonstrate that researcher was indeed immersed in the field * Present the findings as relevant to the common concerns of the audience * Move readers to re-examine their own taken-for-granted assumptions * Self-revealing writing with interlacing of "actual" and confessional content to transparently demonstrate how rigor, relationality and reflexivity were incorporated in the study

Table 1. Toward a set of principles for conducting symbolic interactionist ethnography in IS research

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