ALTERNED STATES OF
CONSCIOUSNESS: MNCs AND
ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES

Fiona Moore

ABSTRACT

This article explores the contribution of ethnographic studies to our understanding of multinational corporations, through a literature review and through a case study of BMW Plant Oxford. The study considers that ethnographic studies can provide a more complex view of power relations between managers and workers, and can develop embedded perspectives taking into account the influences from outside the firm on its employees' actions, developing the image of the firm not as a solitary entity, but as embedded in complex global networks and social discourses.

Keywords: Anthropology; ethnography; networks; power relations; MNCs; culture

INTRODUCTION

This article is an exploration of what ethnographic studies can contribute to our understanding of MNCs, by combining and incorporating perspectives from inside and outside the firm, challenging and amending received
ideas of power relations in the workplace, and thereby providing us with an image of MNCs as embedded global networks. I will review relevant literature from the 1970s to the present, and develop a case study based on my own ethnographic research on BMW Plant Oxford in Cowley, UK. I will conclude by exploring the implications for future research, and ways in which ethnography can be more usefully developed in IB. This study contributes to theory in that it, first, calls into question the conventional view of power and control in MNCs, and, second, challenges the concept of the MNC as a cultural unit, consisting of insiders and outsiders, and shows it to be a complex network embedded in external discourses, thereby altering our consciousness of what a multinational corporation can be.

LITERATURE REVIEW: ANTHROPOLOGY IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

In this section, I will outline and discuss the literature on ethnographic studies of MNCs. I will consider what ethnography has contributed to our understanding of MNCs, and also what it could contribute, exploring lesser-used aspects of ethnography which do not tend to get employed in the study of MNCs. I will take into account that ethnographic studies, in IB, usually seem to come from a ‘critical’ or ‘alternative’ perspective, and likewise that ethnographic studies of MNCs are considered unusual in mainstream anthropology.

Ethnography is universally characterised, according to Sanday (1979) by a long period of participant-observation, in which ‘the ethnographer becomes part of the situation being studied in order to feel what it is like for the people’ (p. 579), and the ethnographer’s own feelings, experiences and perspectives become part of the data and of the analytical process. As Sanday notes, this is usually stereotyped as a researcher living in an isolated village or community for a period of a year or more; in practice this is often more complicated. In particular, ethnographies of organisations usually involve the researcher working for, or with, the organisation in some capacity (see, for instance, Rohlen, 1979), or, in cases where this is not possible, closely observing its activities with permission (see Schwartzman, 1993; van Maanen & Laurent, 1993). Multi-sited ethnographies, such as the case study which will be used here, may involve the researcher playing multiple roles (in this case, a period spent as a line worker was followed by one acting as a consultant to managers). However, the defining characteristic remains that of long-term participation and observation.
The first ethnographies of MNCs which are normally identified as such are Nash (1979) and Rohlen (1979), although Nash herself notes a few pioneering studies in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s (1979, p. 422). *Administrative Science Quarterly’s* two special issues on the anthropology of business, in 1979 and 1983, also mark the emergence of the genre around this time. That the genre should emerge in the late 1970s is perhaps not surprising, since the discipline of international business, and sub-discipline of cross-cultural management, really begins to emerge around this time. What is more surprising is that the genre remains relatively rare in IB; although such journals as MIR and JWB do publish ethnographies, Piekkari, Welch, and Paavilainen’s (2009) study found these methods to be far from mainstream, with interview-based studies dominating qualitative approaches.

The relative scarcity of ethnographies of business has been periodically discussed. Chapman, for instance, argues that the core of the discipline of IB is rooted in economics, and the more behavioural schools of psychology and sociology, meaning that the emphasis is on quantitative measurement rather than on more complex descriptions: on ‘function’ rather than ‘meaning’ (1997, p. 10, 19). Chapman also notes that the fact that IB emerged first in the United States, with its more quantitative sociology and psychology, as opposed to Europe, with its more narrative treatment of business and its relationship to the wider culture, also affected the status of ethnography (1997, p. 10). One might also raise the point that IB tends to focus heavily on generalisability as a measure of validity, whereas anthropology tends to question the concept of generalisibility, focusing instead on comparison (see Holy, 1987). Baba (2006) notes that anthropology in business has been pushed more into design and marketing, as opposed to focusing on organisational, and other, cultures, presumably because the former sub-disciplines have less of a conflict with the quantitative ethos of international business studies as it stands.

On the anthropological side, the discipline, while popularly described as the ‘science of humanity’, traditionally focuses on the non-elite, for good or for ill (Ardener, 1987). While there are occasional movements toward studies of the elite, for instance Hannerz (1996), these still generally remain on the fringes, with anthropological ethnographies of businesses tending to focus on labourers, migrants and working-class culture rather than on MNCs as a whole (e.g. Shaw, 1988; Westwood, 1984). A major exception exists in the form of the anthropology of Japan, which has included a number of prominent studies of MNCs (see Moore, 2012a). However, the
The anthropology of Japan started out when Japan was a developing country, and, as the country industrialised and its businesses grew in size and scope, ethnography followed more or less as a matter of coincidence, making it an exception which proves the rule (Moore, 2012a). Equally, the fact that there is a long tradition of anthropology of wider Japanese society, going back to the nineteenth century, means that concepts such as *amae* (an untranslatable term relating to love and affection) and *sempai-kōhai*, or hierarchical superior-inferior, relationships (as explored, for instance, in Rohlen, 1979) are situated in a wider academic context, rather than being artificially isolated within the business context itself.

In both areas, however, the anthropology of international business appears to be finally coming into its own. As the discipline of IB matures and adopts a more multifaceted approach, and takes more nuanced perspectives on culture, ethnographic research is increasingly appearing in such journals as the *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Academy of Management Review*, *International Business Review* and others. In some cases, it is serving as an explicit critique of the quantitative bias of the discipline, as, for instance, in two papers by a Leeds University-based ethnographic research team arguing against the focus on metrics and quantifiable 'cultural distance' measures, and in favour of discourses which include more ambiguity and ambivalence (Buckley, Chapman, Clegg, & Gajewska-DeMatteos, 2011; Chapman, Gajewska-DeMatteos, Clegg, & Buckley, 2008). Brannen’s (2004) paper on Tokyo Disney versus Disneyland Paris also questions conventional metrics, noting that by the usual measures of cultural distance, Tokyo Disney should have failed while Disneyland Paris should have succeeded. Finally, research which adopts the trend in organisation studies for considering organisations as embedded, networked, political entities, subject to negotiation between internal and external discourses, has begun to expose the need for the sort of complex perspectives that ethnography can provide (see Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Ethnography in IB is thus developing a role as critic of conventional approaches to culture in IB.

**Ethnography and Micropolitics**

More than this, however, ethnography can provide nuanced explorations of complex subjects. From the start, many ethnographic studies of MNCs focused on power relations, drawing on a long tradition in industrial anthropology dating back to Mayo’s Hawthorne studies of the 1920s.
This study, in particular the ‘bank wiring observation room’ project, was where it was first realised that managers and workers have quite different perspectives on the plant (Baba, 2006, p. 88), which forms the genesis of the stereotype of power relations characterised by managerial control (through regulations and disciplinary action) and worker resistance (through disobedience, legitimate or otherwise, and industrial action) which continued to pervade the industrial ethnography of both the British (e.g. Gluckman, 1958) and North American (e.g. Dunk, 2003) academic traditions. However, the complex perspectives and rich description of ethnography provide a means of challenging these simple divisions. Although Nash’s pioneering ethnography focuses on power relations, coming as it does from a Marxist tradition, rather than following the stereotypical path described above, she focuses on the ways in which the managers of the corporation deploy the language of cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural competence to describe their operations and to mask the fact that they are frequently quite ethnocentric, describing host-country workers as irrational and anti-business (1979, p. 426). However, she also considers that the same managers are skilled adaptors to local contexts, and diffusers of knowledge (p. 428), and notes that they suffer from a form of alienation which differs from that of the proletariat, in that it is due to the constant competition between businesses leading to cycles of obsolescence and a sense of life as a contingent, shifting, unstable condition (p. 440). Nash also considers more generally that MNCs are the products of changing local, national and regional discourses, fitting in with these, influencing and being influenced by them.

Rohlen’s For Harmony and Strength (1979), similarly, explores the ways in which the rites and rituals of a Japanese corporation are used in the development and acculturation of its managers, thus, arguably, falling into discourses of power and dominance as the managers form a distinct age-based hierarchy. However, in this case, the fact that these structures are connected to wider discourses of hierarchy and social relations in Japanese society provides a mitigating sense of context and enables the reader to understand the role of such rituals in providing structure and order within corporate life. Power and control, and the exploration of what these mean in different contexts, are thus key themes of early ethnographies of MNCs.

This has also continued into more recent ethnographic studies, as ethnography is particularly well suited to examining the nuances of day-to-day interactions in organisations, making the connection with the organisations’ embeddedness in wider social processes, and of exploring the meanings given to particular actions, events and symbols by their members. Van Maanen and Laurent examine the subtle discourses and negotiations which
went into the expansion of Disneyland to Tokyo, exploring the way in which the attraction creolises American and Japanese culture (1993). Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, and Wagner (2004) conducted a longitudinal study of knowledge sharing in teams which was able to look at the social dynamics behind knowledge management in a transnational business context, looking not just at the team as a social entity (albeit a geographically distributed one), but also looking at the company’s relationship with clients and consultants, building up a picture of the company not as an enclosed entity, but as a distributed network. Sharpe (2006) presented a picture of a multinational company by examining the different rivalries between ethnic and occupational groups in a manufacturing MNC, exposing the unspoken political tensions within the organisation. By exploring the tacit lines of conflict and allegiance within organisations, ethnographic research can cast light on the political forces behind seemingly objective business decisions.

**Ethnography and Complex Social Processes**

Arguably, therefore, the most crucial contribution of ethnography in MNCs is providing an element of contextualisation, and social complexity, in the sense of analysing the complexity of structures and processes in organisations. Martin, in her seminal non-ethnographic work on complexity in organisations, argues that to study organisations requires a methodology which yields large amounts of rich, experiential data and complex perspectives on the organisation (1992, p. 24). She notes that different staff members in organisations can define even a shared concept such as ‘family feeling’ in quite different ways (p. 6), and that the same individuals can hold different, even contradictory, perspectives on the same organisation, meaning that to truly understand the social activities which inform organisations, a method which can first, acknowledge, and then, explore, these contradictions must be employed. Moeran, similarly, argues that ethnography can provide an understanding of the context in which business takes place, and the complexity of networks, histories and social practices which underlie every transaction (2005).

Nash argues that anthropologists can provide a holistic perspective, showing the MNC in the context of the interplay between local, national and transnational interests (1979, p. 422). Baba cites Warner and Low’s (1946) study of an industrial strike in Newbury, Massachusetts, as providing a similarly holistic perspective, ‘explaining connections between the social system within the factory and larger economic, technological and social
forces that contributed to the strike’ (2006, p. 9). Likewise, van Maanen and Laurent (1993) are able to take a perspective ‘above’ the American and Japanese versions of Disneyland to analyse the discourses between the two. My own research on BMW Plant Oxford has been used to show how both managerial and worker perspectives contribute to the operation of an organisation, even influencing policy and practice at top level (Moore, 2011).

Anthropologists, furthermore, often use sources of data which are not normally considered in IB studies. As well as ethnography being a relatively rare method in IB (Moore, 2011), anthropologists will also look at popular culture (Armbrust, 1996), memoirs (Benedict, 1946), historical accounts (Blok, 1975) and others (van Maanen & Laurent, 1993) in order to flesh out the wider context in which the study takes place. This approach can provide contextualising material which IB studies often lack, meaning that they miss out on identifying cultural factors which have an impact on cross-cultural management (Moore, 2015). IB could thus benefit from a more holistic approach to data collection, as in anthropology.

Finally, an ethnographic approach can provide insight into what Buckley and Chapman termed ‘native categories’ (1997). This can be defined in the context of management studies as ‘cognitive systems’ (Gregory, 1983, p. 367), or ‘social categories … which are continuously formulated and re-formulated by managers and workers through both conscious and unconscious processes of collective definition, with reference both to external and internal discourses and concepts, and which are used as a means of organising and understanding their social world’ (Moore, 2012b, p. 627). By assuming that categories such as ‘nation’ or ‘organisation’ are not so much objective, real items as they are subjective concepts, subject to continuously-changing discourses, we can develop insights into organisations: for instance, Gregory’s study of ‘native view paradigms’ explored the ways in which technical professionals inside Silicon Valley computer technology firms understand their social worlds (1983). This can also be expanded to explore ‘multiple native views’, that is to say, different perspectives on the organisation and the world around it.

Ethnographic studies of MNCs can, therefore, contribute to IB in four crucial ways. First of all, they can provide embedded, holistic perspectives that connect individual experiences with the wider social context rather than artificially confining them within a single organisational context. Secondly, they provide ways of embracing multiple, even contradictory, perspectives on organisations. Thirdly, they provide insights into tacit micropolitical activities which underlie organisations, and into the power structures and discourses in MNCs. Fourthly, they provide a way of
analysing, and redeveloping, ideas about nation, power, hierarchy and control which may be taken for granted in more positivistic approaches, following participants’ definitions and structures of power, control and resistance rather than adhering to familiar stereotypes. Finally, ethnographic accounts contribute to critiques of IB research through a portrayal of MNCs as contested terrains (e.g. Edwards & Belanger, 2009).

Despite ethnography’s reputation for focusing on the small-scale and localised, furthermore, it has proved more than adequate to the task of exploring groups embedded in globalisation. Burawoy (2000) notes that ethnography can explore the sociopolitical complexities and seeming contradictions of the postcolonial world; ethnographic approaches have also successfully been applied to elite labour migrants, for instance (Ho, 2005). Ethnographic approaches can also contribute to the study of MNCs by addressing how formal management policy and strategies within the MNC are actually translated into practice in day-to-day activity (see Moore, 2011), or how the complexities of culture and the cultural framing of meanings affect MNCs’ operations (Ybema & Byun, 2011). The use of ethnography can thus also explore the cultural complexities of cross-border interaction in MNCs.

I shall now illustrate this argument with a case study drawn from longitudinal research on BMW Plant Oxford. Rather than following conventional lines of powerful managers and resistant workers, in Plant Oxford the situation was more complex, with formal and informal power networks developing among workers, and managers also engaging in resistant practices as much as controlling ones. Although the company’s reach was global, furthermore, it was also embedded in local discourses, blending the boundaries between BMW as a global entity, and the social environments in which it actually operates. Furthermore, the workers of the plant actually had an unacknowledged influence on policy and practice within the wider MNC. Ethnographic research was thus able to uncover complex, contextualised political processes within the manufacturing MNC.

COMPLEX CONNECTIONS: THE CASE OF BMW PLANT OXFORD

While conventional studies of manufacturing corporations consider managers as the locus of ‘control’, and the workers as a locus of ‘resistance’ (e.g. Delbridge, 1998; Kamata, 1983; Meier & Rudwick, 1979; Sweeney, 1993, chapters 7–9), the situation in Plant Oxford was more complex. While the Oxford study does not dismiss the conventional, hierarchical view of the
factory — the managers were certainly privileged, particularly in terms of their ability to dictate official policy and practice, and the workers certainly were resistant in certain ways and contexts — the situation was more like Martin’s observation that firms which are unified at one level can be fragmented or divided at others (1992). Finally, the way in which the plant operated, and its staff related to it, showed the factory not as an isolated organisation, but as part of a transnational network of connections. Plant Oxford thus provides a useful example of what anthropology can contribute to IB.

**Methodology**

This article is based on participant-observation, interviews and archival research (cf. Leonard-Barton, 1990). The resulting data were analysed using close reading techniques, by an anthropologist trained in the structuralist, Marxist and postmodern schools of thought, who has worked in critical management studies, leading to a combination of internal and external perspectives on the organisation (cf. Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

The first part of the study took place over a nine-month period in 2003, three months of which I spent working on the line in the Final Assembly Area (‘Assembly’), as a temporary employee of the firm, with the permission of the management. The workers on the team were informed once I had sufficient grasp of its micropolitics to do so without causing misunderstandings (see Briggs, 1986). The aim of the study was to identify reasons why the firm was, at the time, having difficulty recruiting and retaining female employees. As statistical instruments and interviews were generating inconclusive results, it was determined that an ethnographic approach using a female ethnographer would assist the identification of the tacit, unconscious, aspects of working as a woman in the factory which were causing problems (van Maanen, 1979; see also Hodson, 1998). I also gained permission to gather data on national and ethnic identity to further my own research on ethnicity in MNCs, and which provides the data analysed here in the context of national identity in acquired organisations.

I was restricted in my ability to select a team; however, the team I worked in was unusually ethnically diverse (compare Tables 1 and 2), which allowed me good access to discourses regarding ethnicity and national culture. To provide context for subsequent analyses, I will briefly indicate the ethnic makeup of the workforce (adapted from an in-house survey using contract workers, about one-third of the workforce, as an indicative sample) and of the team which I studied.
Following accepted ethnographic practice (see Sanday, 1979), detailed fieldnotes, with a focus on gender and ethnic identity, were made as soon after each working session as possible, with notes being made whenever opportunities arose. Formal interviews were conducted with 13 staff members (see Ferner & Quintanilla, 1998, p. 712). Ten were office managers with the Human Resources (HR) division or the temporary labour agencies’ on-site HR teams, selected because they were involved with recruitment and retention. Three were shopfloor managers or trainers, who provided information on shopfloor practices. Most interviewees were from Assembly, with three from the Paint Shop and one from Body in White.

Table 1. Ethnic and Gender Composition of the Plant Labour Force (2003; Permanent Contracts Only).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information available</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White African</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White UK</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1,026</td>
<td>1,096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Human Resource Department survey.

Table 2. Demographics of Sample Team (Permanent and Temporary Contracts, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Eastern European</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White UK</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(the area where the unpainted car is assembled), to provide an element of comparison with different areas of the organisation. In cases in which the allocated time had not allowed all relevant issues to be covered or in which the interview had thrown up new lines of inquiry, follow-up interviews were conducted. Until the end of 2003 I lived in Oxford, meaning that I was able to observe how the plant interacted with its community, following Sharpe’s approach (2006).

Ethnographic interviews (informal, unrecorded discussions; see Briggs, 1986) were held with workers on the line and in the canteen. The workers with whom I regularly spoke consisted of my team members and about 10 individuals from other teams who I approached in the canteen, selected to include as wide as possible a range of age, gender and ethnic groups. This approach was taken because my earlier research had confirmed Briggs’s (1986) findings that people in the lower strata of an organisation prefer informal discussions to interviews. As these took place repeatedly, they provided longitudinal data regarding individuals’ opinions.

The second phase involved 18 months intermittently working with managers from the Human Resources department on two related projects, one involving the development of a management education programme based on ethnographic techniques, and one aimed at assessing and improving the plant’s extant management culture, meaning that I had a specific mandate to gather data on culture and identity among the managers. I attended five meetings more or less evenly spaced out over this period, attended by between three and ten managers and myself, and conducted two group interviews with two sets of three managers, selected from the different divisions of the plant in order to obtain a diverse range of opinions on management style, as well as keeping in touch with the project members via phone and e-mail. During this phase I was able to follow-up my research in Assembly through visiting one of the company’s German plants and interviewing five former expatriates, mainly in HR, chosen because they had been involved in the initial restructuring of the plant, and thus could provide perspectives on HR practices in the wider organisation. The firm did not ask for confidentiality, and, given its unique position in the market, it would be impossible to conceal its identity; however, for partial confidentiality, I have disguised the identities of participants.

As indicated above, the data was initially gathered for purposes other than the analysis given below. However, the material was sufficiently diverse and rich to allow for use outside the relatively narrow confines of the company’s own interests, and to suggest a number of other directions...
for analysis regarding the complex political relationships among managers and workers. The analysis below must therefore be read with the above in mind.

*The Organisation: BMW Plant Oxford*

The plant at which the study was conducted, BMW Plant Oxford or ‘Cowley Works’, was established by a domestic British car manufacturer, Morris Motors, in the early 1910s (Newbigging, Shatford, & Williams, 1998, p. 12). It was a focus of social activity for its workers, developing its own sports teams, volunteer organisations and clubs (Bardsley & Laing, 1999, pp. 86, 95–104; Newbigging et al., 1998). While the company prospered initially (Whisler, 1999, pp. 49–52, 342–346), it was hit by the decline which affected industrial Britain from the early 1960s. Nationalized in 1968, it continued to decline, and was reprivatized in the 1980s as part of the Rover Group (Whisler, 1999, chapters 3, 10), owned by BAe (with Honda later acquiring a 20% stake), finally being acquired by BMW in 1994 (*Financial Times*, 1998; Greenhalgh & Kilminster, 1993; a useful timeline compiled by Rover enthusiasts can be found at http://www.aronline.co.uk/index.htm?histindexf.htm), giving the plant a history of acquisitions of varying degrees of friendliness.

Although BMW initially took a hands-off approach to Rover, its poor financial performance meant that the decision was taken to sell parts of the company around the turn of the millennium, though it kept Cowley Works and the MINI, a car based on Morris’ original Mini. As Cowley Works produces this make of car exclusively, the plant is known in the MNC as BMW MINI. The HR-related goals of the integration at the point in time at which the study was taking place, as articulated to me by British and German managers, were, first, to improve the branch’s performance in terms of communication, staff morale and the development of a positive Anglo-German managerial culture. The second goal was to integrate the branch into the wider international organisation while retaining its connections with the local community.

BMW Plant Oxford is thus an acquired organisation with a complex history and several lines of potential cultural fragmentation. I will now use the ethnographic data outlined above to consider several issues within the organisation, specifically: Power networks among workers, acts of resistance among the managers, and the impact of worker discourses on policy and practice.
On the face of it, the power structures at the plant appeared to fall into a vision of the factory in line with the labour-relations literature, where workers’ options for wielding power and influence are limited. Officially, there were only two grades of workers on the line — those with permanent contracts, and those employed through a temporary labour agency — although in practice it was impossible to tell the difference between them, as they wore identical uniforms and worked the same shift patterns; the only real functional difference was that the former had greater job security. Workers could also become ‘team coordinators’, in charge of a working group on the line, or possibly take on a specialist job such as becoming a trainer (I was unable to ascertain whether these jobs were restricted to workers with permanent contracts or not), but, again, such formal positions were limited compared to the hierarchies and pay differentials among the managers.

Managers’ and workers’ relationships did also, sometimes, demonstrably fall into the traditional adversarial paradigm of the labour-relations literature (Delbridge, 1998; Dunk, 2003; Kamata, 1993; Meier & Rudwick, 1979; Schwartzman, 1993; Sweeney, 1993). Taylorist micro-conflicts occurred frequently between managers and workers regarding how fast the line was allowed to go, which were usually resolved through negotiation between the union representatives and the managers. An unofficial underground newsletter circulated in the plant, which reported anonymously on poor or adversarial management practice. In some ways, the workers’ role in the plant was thus as the recipients or victims of managerial policy, rather than its instigators.

On other levels, however, the workers had a number of options to exercise informal power. One key practice was the use of knowledge and skills to gain power in various ways. Although the factory was officially operating on the kaizen system, whereby all the workers in the team are required to learn multiple tasks (Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990), in practice, job rotation was limited, especially for newer or seasonal workers. Consequently, the learning of new tasks became a way to gain status: workers would boast of how many tasks they could do on the line, and multi-skilled workers were respected for their abilities by other workers, sometimes above and beyond their official superiors, whose promotions were not dependent on skills and
thus not necessarily worthy of respect. Workers who were skilled at many
tasks were also usually assigned to train new staff members, meaning they
could build up networks of influence through mentoring relationships.
Furthermore, since the temporary workers had often worked at the plant for
as long as, or longer than, some permanent workers, there was no connec-
tion between the ability to learn new tasks and permanent contract status.
Union activity was less emphasised as a source of power than expected: the
union representative, when giving his recruitment talk to new workers,
emphasised the role of the union as a means of providing a social safety net
in cases of injury, rather than its political aspects. The union representatives
were volunteers, and the workers generally seemed to feel that they repre-
sented them; however, their main role seemed to be to raise grievances or
issues, for instance regarding the speed of the assembly line, with managers
in regular consultancy meetings.

Multi-skilled workers could also become what was known as the ‘buyoff
man’ (all the examples of which I am aware are male, though there was no
reason in theory why a woman should not hold the post). Although com-
manding no extra money or status, or even guaranteeing a contract, buyoff
men were considered skilled and useful individuals and were generally
respected by their teammates for their skills. Officially, the buyoff man’s
job was to inspect the car at the end of the line, identify any problems with
the vehicle, and either fix the problem, or else alert others to the problem
so that it could be fixed further down the line. At BMW Plant Regensburg,
a multi-skilled worker might become a ‘spotter’, a person who acted as a
formal substitute, to fill in for workers who are on leave or who have called
in sick, a practice which some workers at Plant Oxford argued ought to be
incorporated into their factory as well. Knowing how to do many jobs on
the line thus allowed the way to network-building and increased prestige
among workers, and a popular buyoff man or trainer could acquire a
power base greater than that of a less-popular team coordinator.

Furthermore, the area which the managers assumed would be the main
source of power and control among the workers — possession of a formal
contract — was less of an issue in practice. The managers generally assumed
that the contract was a source of prestige:

Out of forty associates I currently have three who are [temporary labour] agency [staff]
and the remainder are contract staff ... the people who aren’t contracted all want to be
contracted. It can give me a slight advantage, because the people who haven’t got a
contract I can motivate towards getting a contract. The issue it gives me is that con-
tracts are in short supply, BMW has a strict percentage as to how many are contract
and how many are agency associates. (White male Paint Shop manager)
However, as contract staff wore the same uniforms and worked the same hours as the temporary labour associates, there was little informal power or influence to be gained. Furthermore, although some workers wanted contracts, mainly for reasons of financial security, a lot of workers were also seasonal, temporary, or were artists or students working in the factory as it was a job which allowed them the time and money to pursue other activities, for whom a contract was undesirable. Finally, some of the temporary workers who had been with the factory for a long time had greater informal status than hired contractors, due to the above-mentioned focus on skills, and, as noted above, this could give them influence above and beyond individuals with more formal roles or higher salaries.

It is also worth noting that not all areas of the factory were the same. Reportedly, for instance, contracts were more linked with skills and knowledge in the Paint Shop, where most processes required a relatively long period of training, and the managers were consequently anxious to retain workers in whom the relevant time and money had been invested. In the Final Assembly Area, where training systems were more informal, there was less of a link between contracts and training, and thus between contracts and power. While conventional portrayals of businesses tend often to treat them as if they had a unitary culture, taking a more complex perspective highlights the fact that organisations can also be complex, fragmented cultures (see Martin, 1992), with, consequently, no one-size-fits-all solution available to handle issues which may arise.

The case of Plant Oxford also calls into question the assumption, which appears to underlie many IB studies of MNCs, that workers have no impact on corporate policy and practice, and therefore are not relevant to studies of cross-cultural management and organisation. On the face of it, the workers did have no formal say (except collectively, via participation in the company's European Works Council) in the company's agendas and policy as a whole. Workers were not consulted by managers about wider issues, and, as noted above, the managers did not necessarily have an accurate image of the workers' priorities and interests.

However, in other ways, the workers influenced policy and practice at the plant and, sometimes, at the top management level. Expressions of worker discontent were taken very seriously by managers: an incident in which workers displayed their dissatisfaction with an unsatisfactory Christmas bonus by throwing the Christmas cakes which the management had given them around the carpark (see Moore, 2011, p. 664), and one in which workers also reacted angrily when a shortfall in skilled labour was resolved by temporarily importing workers from a Portuguese BMW plant, and
communicated this anger to their line managers (see Moore, 2011, p. 659) were both discussed by managers in the group sessions, with a view to understanding where the problems had occurred, and the former incident led, in part, to changes in the company’s reward policy. The initial study which provided the data for this report was undertaken because the company’s management were concerned that they were not successfully recruiting enough women (indicating that they were concerned about worker demographics and diversity), and I saw evidence that both the company’s management and the top management of the temporary labour agencies acted on my report’s recommendations. The plant’s management were also keen to retain and develop connections with the local community, which influenced the development of locally focused initiatives. The workers’ influence on policy and practice may have been tacit, in that they were not given an official voice, but it existed, and complicated the traditional view of factory relations.

The case of BMW thus shows us a complex, divided workforce, in which the power wielded informally by workers through their social networks and knowledge bases can rival the more formal power of managers and supervisors grounded in rank and contract status, and can even have an influence on the running of the factory itself. We shall now consider the case of the managers.

Resistance by Managers

Furthermore, in some circumstances managers could come across as a powerless group engaging in informal resistance activities as a means of professional survival. To consider one such case, for instance, during the study interviews were often used as a forum for airing ambivalence about the senior management, as in the case of one British manager, who had joined the company 18 months previously:

When I joined the company, my view was that they were very successful, very German or very Bavarian, great products .... Myself, my view changed; this site has a history, good and bad, and all the qualities seem to have been stripped away. I find it very hard to sell as my perception is as a company with little direction; we don’t agree on things, rules are imposed without discussion and people on the track up to the management are very unhappy. (White male HR manager)

These perspectives were not universal; other British managers emphasised that they did not have a problem with the German managers, and/or
that they felt the association was beneficial. However, even among the managers with more positive views, there was a sense among the British that the Germans had most of the power within the plant. While the British managers dominated numerically, the Germans were either specialists brought in to assist with engineering processes, or else were general managers in overall charge of activities, so this is not an irrational belief. However, among the Germans, there was also a sense that the British were unwilling to let go of local practices which the Germans felt were not beneficial to the organisation, implying that in some areas the British technically were the most powerful. To present managers as universally powerful is to overlook complex areas of power and resistance within management (see Dörrenbächer & Geppert, 2011).

Furthermore, there was a social division among the British between ‘shopfloor managers’ (process area managers, or PAMs) and ‘office managers’: the British tended to either exclude the German managers, or expatriates, from either category, or else to lump them in with the ‘office managers’. Due to the process area managers spending most of their time on the shopfloor, the PAMs wound up occupying an uneasy intermediate position where their workers regarded them as managers, and the office managers treated them as workers. This led to patterns of dominance and resistance more normally associated in the literature with managers and workers, as in the following excerpt from a group discussion (both are white male British process area managers in their fifties):

Process Area Manager A: I’ll treat people how I’m treated. If someone is rude to me I won’t help him, but if you’re good to them they’ll work better. But there are still dinosaurs in the business …. They expect when they talk to PAMs, that they’ll do whatever they say. But times have changed, and we all stick together now. Management style is getting worse; why? Because the pressures are greater. And they’re taking it out on PAMs. Again, if [an office] manager tells me in the right way I’ll do it, but showing too little respect for his people won’t get it done. Things boil over sometimes.

Process Area Manager B: [Senior managers] give us shit, and we can’t and we don’t know why, and the guys under us say “why”? You get decisions you can’t understand, incomprehensible.

Management is therefore not a unified category, with different groups within it engaging in patterns of dominance, resistance and control. Even among equals, interpersonal relations could also prove quite complex, as in this excerpt from later in the group discussion:

Process Area Manager C: We need to work with each other. We need to have a better relationship with the technology manager in Paint.
Process Area Manager A: The technology manager is out of touch, because we can’t really communicate with him.

Process Area Manager C: It’s different in Paint, we can talk to our technology manager. I’ve never seen a PAM take what you’ve been taking.

(General agreement followed that different areas of the factory are different).

Process Area Manager B: Yes, you see people being victimised in some areas, and everyone asks about different things at meetings.

Process Area Manager C: [Do you] do a deal with the hard-liners, or does it just go to the next level?

This excerpt indicates, firstly, that patterns of power and resistance go on even at the same level among managers. Secondly, that managerial relationships differ strongly in different areas of the company, rather than being uniformly generalisable. Finally, one can see strategies being formed among the managers as they build alliances to resist what they see as bad behaviour and negotiate strategies for resistance and power-building. The managers thus also faced a complex situation in which they were not necessarily the ones holding the power all the time.

It might be noted that there is nothing, in and of itself, new in observing that managers during an acquisition or other restructuring process feel anxious and destabilised, and that the changes affect their status within the organisation (e.g. Abrams, 2007; Vaara, 2003). However, this is usually framed as an issue of integration and culture, and the power aspects are not often considered; it appears generally assumed that managers as a group have agency and power, and the nuances and unevennesses of power within the managerial world are not often explored. While space does not permit an extensive examination of it here, seeing managers in terms of power and agency provides a more realistic picture of the management experience to that often seen in IB.

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Connections the Plant Had with the Wider Group

Finally, we will briefly consider how Plant Oxford appears when considered, not as an isolated fieldsite, but, following Nash (1979), as part of a wider transnational network of organisations. At the time the study was conducted, the employment of just-in-time systems throughout a multinational company meant that the parts of the car were produced by subsidiaries and external contractors, and shipped to the plants. One of the more unexpected aspects of this is reflected in a fieldnote from 2 July 2003:
Fridge and microwave [in the staff lunchroom] cordoned off due to an infestation of mysterious ‘black bugs’. No one’s saying what, but the rumour is that they came in off an engine …. Frank says they often get some odd orange beetles in Engines [i.e. the engine fitting section], because the engines are assembled in Brazil and so get weird Brazilian beetles.

This embeddedness also informs the incident discussed above, in which the workers were angry over the temporary importation of Portuguese workers to fix a shortfall in the United Kingdom, and communicated this to their team coordinators: the office managers involved saw the importation of skilled labour from elsewhere in the EU simply as a matter of transferring resources from one part of the group to the other. The workers were very much aware of the way the just-in-time system worked, whereby subcontractors would produce the parts which were eventually assembled into the car; I was also casually told by a coworker on the line that most of the purchasers of the car would then take the vehicle to specialist garages to replace factory-standard parts with customised ones, for instance oak steering wheels, extending the supply chain. Finally, the workers were aware of the plant as part of a wider group; the Portuguese incident aside, many workers had met workers from Plant Regensburg (of which more below), and, although I was initially surprised that, when I was on the shopfloor, nobody seemed particularly surprised by my North American accent, I later discovered that it was generally assumed that I was an exchange worker from one of BMW’s American plants. The workers, as well as the managers, tacitly treated the plant less as an entity in itself, than as a node in a complex transnational network extending outside of the plant.

The fact that many of the workers were supplied through temporary labour agencies was also a continuous reminder of the complex embeddedness of Plant Oxford in wider business networks. Although they worked at a BMW facility, and although they were generally indistinguishable from BMW’s own employees, they were in fact, technically, the employees of other companies. The agencies all had their own offices on the site, dressed similarly to other office managers, performed the same functions as BMW’s own HR department, and worked closely with the local HR managers. They also supplied staff for other local and international businesses, such as supermarkets and offices, part of a wider transnational network of commodified labour. The plant may be connected with a specific location, but at the same time has a strong sense of itself as a transnational entity.

This can also be seen in its connections with another unit in the group, BMW Plant Regensburg. As Plant Oxford was integrated into the group, it was ‘twinned’ with Regensburg, with both managers and workers from the
Bavarian plant being sent to Oxford in order to help with the technical and cultural transition. The similarities were remarked upon by Regensburg managers: Regensburg is also a middle-sized medieval town with a strong academic and artistic community, with an analogously sized automobile plant as the main form of heavy industry. However, the plants were not identical; where Oxford produced a single model of cars, Regensburg produced several, and most of Regensburg’s heavy industry postdated the Second World War. Ethnic diversity was also differently expressed on the line (see Moore, 2012b). While this is to be expected, the interest for researchers came in the way in which managers expressed the different identities of the branches, drawing parallels between the two and encouraging close relationships. Through such associations, and through emphasising the similarities rather than the differences, Plant Oxford’s employees develop a sense of the plant not only as one branch in a wider group, but as the group itself being embedded in a network of suppliers, dealers, labour agencies and diverse towns and cities.

An ethnographic study of a plant in the BMW group gives us an image of both plant and organisation as complex, networked, uneven entities where relationships may behave as one might expect from the literature in some ways, and deviate strongly from expected behaviour in others. We will now consider the study in relation to the wider discipline of international business studies.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research Implications

While I have stated at the outset that this study ‘contributes to theory’ in providing a complex, challenging view of the MNC as embedded in global and local discourses, I would like, in the closing section, to problematise my own assertion. Anthropologists tend to be reluctant theory-builders, due in part to the nature of the field of study, simultaneously focusing on specific local contexts while also seeking, through comparison, to understand human nature more generally. As such, the ‘contributions to theory’ in this study are those which emerge from the experiences of its participants, and the unique perspectives they provide; by showing individuals’ experiences within the MNC, this study problematises the concept of developing universal theories about MNCs and challenges us to rethink our objectives in studying them.
This study indicates, first, that the image of managers as dominant, workers as resistant, and workers as the recipients rather than the shapers of policy and practice is more complicated than much of the literature suggests. In no cases was this paradigm contradicted, but this image doesn’t take into account the complexities, micropolitics and multi-layered social relations within the branch. As with Nash (1979) and others, an ethnographic approach in method and analysis allows the researcher to explore the complex social relations which underlie the company’s decision-making processes.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to our understanding of MNCs. Although it is acknowledged in IB that MNCs constitute less a single entity and more a network of interdependent organisations of varying sizes (to take a few examples, Coe, Dicken, & Hess, 2008; Edwards & Belanger, 2009; Kristensen & Zeitlin, 2005), in practice, most studies tend to treat them as unified organisations, and/or to narrow their focus on to the MNCs core businesses. However, given the spread of globalisation and the increasing importance of transnational supply chains to business, IB needs to find new perspectives on MNCs, or else risk failing to understand their operations. It is therefore important to find ways of seeing the MNC as embedded in transnational processes, without losing sight of the roles of individuals and small groups within the organisation.

Ethnography has been traditionally used in IB for small-group studies, and has been criticised in the past for decontextualising its subjects (see Tyler, 1986); indeed, traditional ethnographies such as The Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1940) deliberately attempted to filter out as much of the wider social and political context as possible when studying a tribe or other social group. However, later ethnographies actively embrace the social and political context in which they take place (see Armbrust, 1996), and, in MNCs, the cases discussed above indicate that business anthropology can provide a sense of context, and of how the multivalent, networked nature of organisations affects the process of doing business in globalisation. Although this dates back to Nash’s (1979) paper, which discussed MNCs as embedded in national contexts, acting as a transfer vector between them, and Baba et al.’s (2004) ethnography of team operation, seeing the MNC as a network of suppliers and clients (and documenting what happens when the company in question undergoes a merger during the data-gathering period).

Although the BMW study focused on a single plant in a specific local context, the influence from outside was impossible to keep out: orange beetles, Portuguese workers, temporary labour agencies and social connections to Regensburg and the United States interwove themselves with the study of the shopfloor, blending the global and local. One contribution
which the BMW study and other ethnographies make is to present an
image of the MNC not only as an assemblage of different offices, subsidi-
aries and plants, but an integrated network extending out to suppliers and
contractors, and beyond that to multiple national contexts. The reason
why the firm was failing to recruit more women — the subject of the origi-
al study — turned out not to be down to policy or practice in the plant, so
much as to indigenous concepts of gender and work, in which British con-
cepts of acceptable work for women generally excluded labouring in an
automobile factory, meaning that women experienced tacit social pressure
not to apply for jobs on the BMW shopfloor (Moore, 2014). Ethnography
thus provides a way to grasp the complexities of the global from a
local context.

Ethnographic approaches also provide a way of taking into account the
complex, even contradictory, aspects of micropolitics at work. In organisa-
tions, although sometimes the more traditional theories of power relations
in organisations do fit the situation, sometimes they do not, and this can
even occur at the same time: Nash (1979) observed that the managers of
her MNC perceived themselves as cosmopolitan, and yet also adhered to
an ethnocentric narrative involving ignorant locals being set right by
educated people from Head Office. At BMW Plant Oxford, the idea of
managers as powerful and workers as resistant overlooks the fact that the
workers can have power, and the managers employ strategies for resistance,
at other levels and in different ways. This is similar to Brannen’s (2004)
observation about how the French can be the largest consumers of Disney
products outside the United States, and yet still a Disney theme park estab-
lished near Paris can be an expensive failure. At BMW, although the tradи-
tional, received views of who controls and who resists were present, not all
manager and worker behaviour could be included in this frame, and an
ethnographic approach exposes these complexities.

Finally, the study also emphasised the need to take multiple perspectives
into account (see Martin, 1992). The British managers accepted the
German takeover, but not unambiguously (see Moore, 2012b). Inaccurate,
or stereotype-based, perspectives could also inform behaviour: the British
‘knew’ that the Germans were organised and punctual, and so acted as if
they were, regardless of whether this was actually true or not. Likewise, the
managers’ ideas of what motivated workers were not necessarily true for
all, or even most, of the workers on the shopfloor. The fact that the work-
ers could dominate, and managers resist, does not mean that we should
overturn our ideas of power and control in the workplace, but that we need
to understand their complexities more thoroughly. By acknowledging
contradictions and looking at the organisation from multiple perspectives, we can understand the complexities of the organisation.

Ethnographic research can, therefore, lead to developing studies of MNCs as embedded networks, rather than as domestic companies writ large, which consider not just their impact on employees and outsiders, but also how even actors who are marginalised in the literature and/or in practice, such as contractors, line workers and parts suppliers, can have an unacknowledged influence on their functioning. From this one can argue that IB, as a discipline, needs to consider itself less as the study of international business, and more as the study of international business in context, taking into account the social environment in which the company is situated, considering contractors, suppliers, workers and subsidiaries as part of the whole, to challenge the concept of the MNC.

Methodological Implications

An ethnographic approach to MNCs also suggests methodological development for IB. It has often been observed that IB focuses on the idea that an objective approach can be taken to culture, with variables to be isolated and theories to prove (Chapman et al., 2008, p. 218). Increasingly, however, the limitations of this approach have been acknowledged, and the question raised as to what sort of science can be done in situations where variables cannot be isolated or experiments repeated: the most obvious answer is to look to disciplines such as anthropology, in which these questions have already been dealt with. The ethnographic approach suggests that, rather than isolating variables, studies of MNCs should in fact give greater attention to the context of the study.

The ethnographic approach also suggests that researchers could make greater use of other sources of data. To understand BMW Plant Oxford, the study was not just limited to interviews and participant-observation, but also involved the analysis of museum displays, popular ephemera, advertisements and so forth, all of which inform the researcher’s understanding of present-day activity within the plant. All of this also was filtered through the fact that the researcher was on the line with a specific remit to consider gender issues and the recruitment of women. Holden’s study of a German aviation company using its historical records takes an unconventional approach for IB, which nonetheless yields insights into its present situation (2014). A case could also be made for using first-person popular accounts of business such as Liar’s Poker (Lewis, 1999) or Heels of
Steel (Vallely, 2013) as an ethnographic resource, being a form of first-person account which provides personal insights into the genre and culture of business. A case could also be made for examining popular-cultural fictitious accounts of business, such as Mad Men or The Office (particularly given the latter’s continual recontextualisation into different national contexts), which provide an insight into the norms and controversies about business and management at the time in which they are made (for instance, many critics of present-day sexism in the workplace invoke Mad Men, with its 1960s setting, as a sort of cultural shorthand for outdated behaviour: see Parsons, 2014). Ethnographic studies, and an open-minded attitude to other sources of data, can yield insight into the organisation which both takes the individuals in the organisation, and its wider social context, into account.

Implications for Practice

In terms of the implications for managers, there is a need to understand worker culture, not in terms of how it appears from the outside, but as a complex culture with its own power dynamics. As the managers of BMW learned more about what motivated the workers in the plant, they were better able to work with them. Managers might also benefit from working to perceive the company less as a unit, and more as a network of linked organisations. A recent project involving educating managers from the retail multinational Tesco in ethnographic techniques, and assisting them to use this to explore and develop their own organisation across borders, has proved tentatively successful as a means of allowing a domestic multinational which was having trouble expanding its culture across borders to do so (Brannen, Mughan, & Moore, 2013). The Tesco case study, like the BMW one, serves as an indication that anthropological approaches and ethnographic research can be of benefit to firms in wider areas than simply design and marketing. Ethnographic research can therefore shed light on how management practices are received, and why they are resisted or adapted, in day-to-day practices.

Areas for Further Development

The main issue going forward from this study is, therefore, how to encourage wider use of ethnography and anthropology in MNCs; despite having
been a subgenre of anthropology since at least the 1970s, and persisting into the present day, it still is not a mainstream genre of research. It is also worth inquiring why it is that other disciplines, such as organisation studies, marketing and design research, have been more welcoming of anthropological studies. It is possible that IB itself is in the throes of a change encouraging greater use of ethnographic methods, as it is a relatively young discipline and appears to be currently entering a more self-critical phase; one crucial line of current inquiry in organisational ethnography is that of redeveloping positivistic concepts of ‘culture’ in order to develop a more effective discipline of cross-cultural management studies (van Maanen & Laurent, 1993, pp. 282–284). However, as part of this self-criticism, such questions need to be considered.

Furthermore, the practice of ‘triangulation’ of ethnography with quantitative methods (Jick, 1979) might be called into question. While employing multiple research methods is indeed a logical means of testing the propositions thrown up by one particular method, the focus on quantitative measures again suggests that ethnography has no validity unless it is backed up by numerical measures. More studies are needed which triangulate through, for instance, using other qualitative methods, studies coming from other disciplines, focused on other areas or groups in the same nation, or by multiple ethnographers. One of the ways in which BMW proved a useful fieldsite was that there had been extensive studies of the same site in a variety of disciplines over the years (for instance Sweeney, 1993; Whisler, 1999), as well as other studies of the wider cultural context (for instance Shaw, 1988). The fact that the ethnographer was not merely studying the plant, but also living and studying in the wider community, also proved useful in terms of obtaining data about the wider community. More creative approaches to reliability and validity might thus prove helpful in employing ethnographic methods in IB.

Finally, it might be worth considering how to reassess earlier studies using research in other disciplines to provide context. For instance, Moore (2015) indicates how incorporating data and analysis from anthropological and economic studies of Taiwan can be used to flesh out and provide context for more teleological IB studies. Similarly, the BMW study in this case can be taken with other studies of the same organisation to provide more context and understand the influences on its actions. The use of studies outside of IB itself can be used to expand and develop conclusions within the discipline.
CONCLUSIONS

IB studies thus finds itself at a significant moment regarding ethnographic methods of data-gathering and analysis. Although ethnographies of MNCs have become increasingly limited in use and approach since their introduction in the 1970s, they are now returning to mainstream use, and researchers have the opportunity to make greater use of their potential for altering our consciousness as researchers: not only as tools for challenging received views of power and micropolitics in the organisation, and taking in multiple perspectives on the practices of MNCs, but as a means of incorporating the influence of the wider context into studies of organisations, and of providing the view of the organisation as network which is increasingly essential to understanding their operation in the present period of globalisation. In order to benefit from such approaches, IB scholars must be willing to achieve these altered states of consciousness, in becoming more flexible in terms of the data sources consulted, the definition and establishment of reliability and validity, and in terms of how we look at MNCs as social organisations; indeed, we must question our purpose in studying MNCs in the way that we do.

REFERENCES


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