

**Better Together: Examining the Role of Collaborative Ethnographic Documentary  
in Organizational Research**

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**Better Together: Examining the Role of Collaborative Ethnographic Documentary  
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**Organization Research Methods**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite growing interest in video-based methods in organizational research, the use of collaborative ethnographic documentaries is rare. Organizational research could benefit from the inclusion of collaborative ethnographic documentaries a) to enable the participation of ‘difficult to research’ groups and better access the material, embodied or sensitive dimensions of work and organizing, and b) to assist in dissemination of findings to wider audiences. To increase understanding of this under-explored method, the authors first review the available literature and consider strengths, limitations and ethical concerns in comparison with traditional ethnography and other video-based methods. Using recent data collected on working class men doing ‘dirty work’, the authors then illustrate the use of collaborative ethnographic documentary as an investigative tool - capturing often concealed, embodied and material dimensions of work; and a reflective tool - elaborating and particularizing participants’ narrative accounts. It is concluded that collaborative ethnographic documentary facilitates greater trust and communication between researchers and participants, triggering richer exploration of participants’ experiences, in turn strengthening theoretical insights and practical impact of the research.

**KEYWORDS:** ethnography, documentary, dirty work, video methods

## **Better Together: Examining the Role of Collaborative Ethnographic Documentary in Organizational Research**

There is a long tradition of making documentary films to depict the lives of working people, labour history and related economic, political and sociological concerns (Zaniello, 2003). Additionally, a wealth of literature addresses the contribution of film to our understanding of labour, labour history and working lives (Brigden, 2005). For example, Zaniello's expanded guide to films offers readers a comprehensive overview of more than 350 documentary films devoted to working people and labour issues in general which have been a part of Hollywood and independent filmmaking since the 1930s. In the social sciences however, and in management studies in particular, there has been less interest in, or use of, documentaries. The communication of scientific findings has remained, by and large, limited to the written and spoken word.

In the management literature, video-based research in the context of work studies has been predominantly used to record common organizational routines and practices. It is less frequently applied as a means of inviting subjects to produce and/or to react to images in relation to relevant social concerns or life experiences, or as a way of offering voice to groups that might lack 'status-generated' confidence (Bourdieu, 1984). There is also very limited literature in the field of organization studies exploring the potential use of documentaries as a way of establishing a more democratic, collaborative and mutually beneficial research relationship, and increasing the social impact of research projects.

The aim of this article is therefore to explore how the use of video-based research methods can facilitate the production of data in the context of researched groups whose members might lack confidence, or be less willing to recount their experiences as a result of anticipated negative evaluations. Specifically, we seek to demonstrate the utility of collaborative ethnographic documentary as an investigative tool (providing a more exhaustive and nuanced understanding of a particular phenomenon and its context, and challenging conventional views or previously accepted categories (Parker, 2009; Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010)), and as a reflective tool (developing trust and creating a reference point for participants' self-reflections (Haw & Hadfield, 2011)).

The first section of this article reviews existing literature to examine the potentialities and challenges of collaborative ethnographic documentaries in relation to other video methods and traditional ethnography. Drawing on a recent research project in London, UK, we then discuss how collaborative ethnographic documentary emerged as a solution to problems we encountered when using a more traditional ethnographic research design. We illustrate how collaborative ethnographic documentary can be employed to: develop trust; enhance data quality - including capturing material and embodied dimensions of workers' experiences; and increase the social impact of research.

### **The Use of Video in Organizational and Management Research**

The development of affordable, portable digital film technology and editing software has led to increasing use of video-based studies of work practice in sociology, humanities, education, health studies, consumer research and, to a lesser extent, organization and management studies (Clarke, 2011; Hindmarsh & Tutt, 2012; Spencer, 2011). Video-based methods commonly form part of a wider ethnographic research design involving extended immersion in a social context, observation, interviews and examination of documents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Such approaches in the field of organization studies entail unpacking 'the artful interactional practices that underpin the accomplishment of work' (Hindmarsh & Tutt, 2012, p. 59). Typically, research designs have focused on the study of situated work practices using naturalistic video recordings of organizational environments (Hindmarsh & Heath, 2007), as in Clarke's (2011) video ethnography of entrepreneurs' strategic impression management, in Whalen, Whalen and Henderson's (2002) study of call centre sales representatives' routines and Llewellyn and Bowen's (2008) research documenting the sales techniques of 'Big Issue' street vendors. Video has also been used as a tool of capturing speech and gestures in the micro-ethnographic study of entrepreneurial sense-making (Cornelissen, Clark & Cienki, 2010). Additionally, scholars have turned to video-based methods to show the relevance of the material and the embodied in daily exchanges (LeBaron & Jones, 2002; Hindmarsh & Pilnick, 2007). Finally, video has been used in research to investigate the production of different spaces, in particular aesthetic spaces and sensory structures (MacDougall, 2006).

Less attention, particularly in organization and management studies, has been paid to the

potential of ethnographic documentaries – i.e., ethnographic video data that is edited to produce a short film – both as a research tool and as a way of disseminating findings. While ethnographic documentary was once the sole preserve of anthropologists (e.g. Mead, 2003), recent advances in technology and new theoretical developments (e.g. interest in sensory, affective and embodied aspects of work) have widened the range of themes and contexts deemed suitable for being documented in films. Below we examine practical issues in the use of ethnographic video methods, highlighting in particular the implications for collaborative ethnographic documentaries in organizational and management research.

### **Video Ethnographic Methods**

Different approaches to video data collection reflect the role of the researcher and the nature of their relationship to participants (Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 2010), as well as the significance of the data to the analysis. Hence, video data can be collected in many different ways, distinguished by the degree to which the material is selected and filmed by researchers, participants, professional film-makers, or some combination of these. In this section, and summarised in Table 1, we outline and compare three key approaches to developing new video images with the involvement of researchers and/or participants and film-makers: researcher-led video ethnography, participatory video ethnography and collaborative ethnographic documentary.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In researcher-led video ethnography, data is generated by researchers observing participants in their social context, guided by initial research questions and objectives. Researchers carefully pre-select organizational settings to generate the data they are seeking to capture (see Clarke, 2011). While this approach potentially offers data that is a rich, authentic representation of the social, cultural and embodied context of work practice and experience (Spencer, 2011), of particular concern is the extent to which the presence of a researcher might affect interactions and behavior (i.e. participant ‘reactivity’), and how researchers’ pre-existing understandings might influence the framing and selection of visual data (Banks, 2012). To circumvent these difficulties participatory video ethnographic designs can be adopted. Here researchers explicitly involve participants in the research

process, inviting them to generate video data by filming events or organizational phenomena they witness that are salient to them (see Kindon, 2003). This ‘participant-led’ approach has great potential to represent participants’ stories in a way that more closely reflects their lived experience (Spencer, 2011). It is an effective way of accessing and articulating the views of traditionally less advantaged or relatively powerless groups (Parr, 2007). It also reduces the power imbalance between the researcher and researched, enabling a way of looking ‘which does not perpetuate hierarchical power relations and create voyeuristic, distanced and disembodied claims to knowledge’ (Kindon, 2003, p. 142). However, shortcomings of this approach include participants perhaps lacking necessary technical skills, and being selective in what they film. It is therefore important that in planning participatory video research, time and budget are allowed to adequately train and resource participants. It is also important to develop trusting relationships with participants in order to understand the motivations behind their choices and framing of video material.

In light of the limitations of the above methods, Banks (2012) asserts that the dominant trend is towards using the camera to create ethnographic films co-produced with participants. Researchers and participants may also collaborate with professional film-makers to record participants in their social context (e.g. Parr, 2007). We label this approach collaborative ethnographic documentary to denote the role of multiple parties in jointly planning, filming and editing a condensed representation of particular social and organizational phenomena. This approach retains the benefits of both researcher-led and participatory methods but also offers distinct strengths of its own (see Table 1). Foremost among them is that the higher degree of collaboration required serves to establish much closer relationships between researchers, film-makers and participants (Kindon, 2003). This enables a more trusting, transparent and ultimately more ethical process that, in turn, enhances confidence in the authenticity of the data (Parr, 2007).

The collaborative ethnographic documentary is made by editing video material (with input from participants and technical assistance from the film-maker) to produce a film with a coherent visual narrative, encapsulating the essence of participants’ lived experiences (Parr, 2007). While the ‘uncut’ video material can be retained for conventional ethnographic analysis alongside other data sources (Spencer, 2011), the documentary film has multiple additional uses, including: as an elicitation tool

for further data based on participants' responses to their film; as a means of assessing 'trustworthiness' or validity (Spencer, 2011) of the findings in the eyes of participants; as a stimulus for change, via dissemination to organizational or institutional leaders (Kindon, 2003; Parr, 2007); and as a means of more easily disseminating the research findings to wider / non-traditional audiences (Kindon, 2003) to increase the social impact of the research.

However, relative to researcher-led and participant-led video methods, there are several potential challenges to realizing the advantages of collaborative ethnographic documentary. In practical terms, the services of professional film-producer (e.g. a free-lance individual) may be prohibitively expensive. A great deal of time and interpersonal skill are needed in order to develop trust and a sense of shared ownership with participants, to negotiate roles, and to co-construct a shared understanding among all parties of the aims of filming (Parr, 2007). Without careful attention to these issues to arrive at a 'transparent and negotiated approach' (Spencer, 2011, p.59), there is a risk of 'losing' meaning or misrepresenting / over-riding participants' realities through insensitive filming or editing. Finally, if the documentary is intended to have practical impact, researchers need to be aware of the need to commit to the 'long haul' – planning to maintain relationships with participants and organizations well beyond the fieldwork / filming stage (Kindon, 2003).

### **Extending 'Traditional' Ethnography**

Collaborative ethnographic documentary extends 'traditional' ethnographic practice in important ways (see Table 2 for a summary). Traditional ethnography is concerned with the 'study and representation of culture' (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 221). In the 'standard model' of ethnographic research a single researcher immerses themselves in the context of study for an extended period of time, observing and taking field notes (Van Maanen, 2011). Studying people in their natural environment facilitates rich description of people's constructions of their everyday activities, norms and values to reveal meaning in the mundane and 'how things work' (Watson, 2011). Immersive fieldwork also conveys the prevalence of particular themes, reducing the likelihood of 'over-interpreting' data. However, as contemporary work and organizations become more flexible, dynamic and geographically dispersed, the extent to which participants' social realities can be observed and recalled by a single-site

researcher is constrained (Smets et al., 2014). In collaborative ethnographic documentary, the focus on capturing and understanding participants' constructions of the everyday remains core but filming offers greater efficiency and flexibility. Participants can identify the most important times, places and things that should be filmed (Parr, 2007). Researchers are then able to capture a faithful visual record of the many seemingly unremarkable, transient details of everyday life (including the social and material) that really matter in the participants' world but might be missed by an overloaded traditional ethnographer (Smets et al., 2014; Spencer, 2011).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

According to Smets et al. (2014), a further concern with traditional ethnography is that it is increasingly required to produce research outputs with tangible benefits, and more accessible communication of findings. Relatedly, traditional ethnography is sometimes criticised for reproducing dominant power relations and privileging 'expert' researcher perspectives over those of informants (Pink, 2007). In contrast, a key strength of collaborative ethnographic documentary is the focus on building greater trust and reciprocity – i.e., mutual benefit – into the research process (Parr, 2007). This approach empowers participants and creates a safe space for self-reflection and expression of views, which in turn may strengthen data quality and permit new insights that better reflect participants' perspectives (Kendon, 2003). Wider organizational or societal impact is also made possible because the documentary film itself offers flexible communication options for reaching key stakeholders (Parr, 2007) via research websites, social media, or screenings for organizations and the public, for example.

It is pertinent to highlight at this point that we view collaborative ethnographic documentary as distinct from action research and related approaches (e.g. insider/outsider research, action learning etc.). These approaches share a concern to combine academic rigor and practical impact. However, the fundamental premise of organizational action research is that researchers and participants jointly solve 'real' organizational problems through an on-going cycle of planned action (to stimulate change) and reflection (Coghlan, 2011). While collaborative documentary is used in some fields (e.g. geography) to support community change initiatives (e.g. Parr, 2007), in the present paper we focus on how it can be used in work and organization studies to enhance traditional ethnographic research aims while



strengthening the practical potential of the research outcomes. Change may be a consequence of the collaborative documentary research process but it is not front-loaded into the research design.

Relative to traditional ethnography, collaborative ethnographic documentary brings challenges that must be anticipated and addressed. Compared with traditional ethnography, collaborative documentary is more resource intensive. It is important to factor in time and costs of all aspects of collaborative film production in the earliest design stage, to ensure adequate resourcing. Collaborative documentary generates large volumes of visual data (compared with researcher memory and field notes in the traditional approach). A clear plan for managing multi-media data sources and systematic data management using CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software) can help to ensure nothing is 'lost' or forgotten. Ethnographic documentary, as with visual research more broadly, risks privileging the visual as more 'real' than other data sources (Bell & Davison, 2013). It is also possible that the process of collaboration, and emphasis on achieving practical outcomes, could somehow compromise 'academic neutrality'. Strong reflexivity, including keeping a research journal of decisions made (e.g. what should be filmed or omitted, and why), and a commitment to an open and transparent researcher-participant relationship (Spencer, 2011), can help to alleviate these concerns. Finally, collaborative ethnographic video poses greater ethical challenges compared to standard ethnography, particularly if the film is to be disseminated as part of the research output. We discuss ethical considerations and how to address them in more detail below.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The core ethical issues associated with video-based research - as with all visual research - concern consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Wiles et al. 2008) driven by the need to protect the dignity, privacy and well-being of research participants (Wiles et al, 2010). In video-based research, these considerations are particularly salient given that video images can more easily jeopardize participants' and organizations' anonymity (Harper, 2005; Warren, 2009) and lead to exposure of sensitive areas of individual lives and business organizations (Ray & Smith, 2011). Indeed, employees in organizations might worry about their views being exposed to management (Ray & Smith, 2011). Participants can also become very distressed by how their voice / image is edited and presented (Parr, 2007). There is

also the possibility that researchers / film-makers might intrude on, and interrupt, the daily activities of participants, and impose on the film (via framing and editing) their preconceived views about those who are the subject of the film (Spencer, 2011).

In light of these issues, obtaining informed consent from participants is of paramount importance. Express agreement is needed on the making and use of images – the latter covering both the use of video material for the research, and how the images will be utilised for publication and dissemination (Ray & Smith, 2011; Wiles et al. 2008). In ethnographic documentary making it is important to ensure that both types of consent are obtained at two points in the process: before filming, and before showing/disseminating the material. The discussion should include which audiences the participants are happy for the material to be shown to. Providing detailed explanations of the research process, the goals of academic publications, and the nature of dissemination outlets can also help to establish credibility and trust with participants (Ray & Smith, 2011). Overall, in collaborative ethnographic film making, ethical problems should be reduced because the relationship between researcher and participants is inherently closer, and the researcher / film maker is not the sole editor of the final film (Parr, 2007). Indeed, collaborative documentary making enables the kind of trusting, collaborative relationships, and empowerment of participants to represent themselves, that is increasingly advocated in all ethical visual research (Pink, 2007; Spencer, 2011; Wiles et al., 2008). As Spencer (2011, p.65) notes: ‘a collaborative and transparent approach should be encouraged in the mutual interest of integrity and honesty and in presenting a valid representation of social reality.’

To summarise, the potential of collaborative ethnographic documentaries has been largely overlooked. Based on our review, we suggest that the collaborative ethnographic documentary offers a way of conducting and disseminating research that is potentially more empowering, ethical and representative of participants’ voice and lived experiences than other video-based methods, and traditional ethnography alone. To further illustrate the potential benefits for researchers and participants, we include in the next section an example of using collaborative ethnographic documentary in our own research.

## **Lessons from a Collaborative Ethnographic Documentary**

In our research, collaborative ethnographic documentary emerged as a solution to difficulties we encountered in engaging participants with our initial, more traditional, ethnographic research design. Incorporating collaborative ethnographic documentary enabled the development of greater trust and reciprocity between researchers and participants. As outlined below, this, in turn, enhanced the quality of data collected and enabled new theoretical insights, as well as providing the foundations for practical impacts of the research.

### *Research context*

The research investigated working class men doing ‘dirty work’ (tasks and roles seen as disgusting, ‘distasteful’, degrading or otherwise tainted in key respects) (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The project took place in London; it was an exploratory qualitative study funded by a UK funding body, the British Academy. The study sought to bring together two aspects of workers’ experience - the material and the discursive. Interest in the material and embodied aspects of workers’ experience was motivated by two considerations: first, materiality in recent studies of dirty work has either been neglected, or discussed too narrowly so that the ways in which everyday practice is bound with materiality are overlooked (Orlikowski, 2007); second, little is known about the potential for the material to interfere with the coherence and soundness of normative narratives and discursive representations (Putman, 2014).

The aims of the study were two-fold. First, we sought to build theory in the area of dirty work by addressing the previously neglected socio-material aspects of workers’ experience, and by refining existing categories and relationships in the literature (Locke, 2001, p. 103). The research was guided by the following broad questions: *How are the physical and material dimensions of dirt experienced by participants in the study? In what ways do the material and the symbolic intertwine in understanding of experiences of dirty work? How do categories of difference such as class or gender intercede with experiences of dirty work?* Second, we sought to develop the potential ‘impact’ of the research – that is, practical benefits of the project beyond a traditional academic audience. In the UK research context, funding bodies increasingly value research that is cognizant of broader societal

concerns. Accordingly, we sought to make a rigorous theoretical contribution with practical relevance for participants and their organisations. We discuss impact later on.

In order to extend theory, we selected a research context that could serve as an extreme case (Eisenhardt, 1989). Extreme cases facilitate theory building because the dynamics being examined tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann., 2006). Applying this criterion, street cleaning, refuse collection and graffiti removal were a suitable context since they intensify differences along two dimensions particularly pertinent to dirty work: 1) physical rather than symbolic proximity to dirt; and 2) direct contact with the public which should intensify participants' sensitivity to stigma and the need to reconstruct valued identities. Choosing an extreme case, however, presented challenges; in particular, how best to research participants who may be unaccustomed to self-disclosure, and whose willingness to participate might be inhibited by expectations of negative evaluation. The expectation of negative judgment, and the vulnerability of a low status position, may lead to an unwillingness to express negative feelings, or to stronger adherence to identity-affirming norms in order to resist potential devaluation.

To try to overcome these challenges, the researchers at first adopted a research design that combined traditional ethnographic participant observation with photographic representation (researcher-only photographs), followed by photo-elicitation interviews (see Figure 1, Phase 1). Ethnographic participant observation was warranted to enable direct experience of daily routines involved in the type of work studied, opening up a fuller articulation of the habitual and mundane practices that might otherwise have gone unexplored. At the preliminary design stage, both researcher-led photographic and (non-documentary) video-based methods were considered as options for visually enriching the dataset. We opted, at this point, to use researcher-produced photographs rather than video. This initial choice was driven by theoretical as well as practical concerns. Both methods offered the potential to enhance theory development (Pink, 2001) by capturing the materiality and the physical aspects of work. However, in practical terms, relative to the time and costs associated with video-based methods, photography was likely to be less resource intensive. A further practical consideration was that filming might be more likely than photography (a less intrusive method) to be read by participants as an additional form of workplace monitoring or

surveillance. Workers in the study were already required by their employers to wear pagers that tracked their progress on the streets as they worked. Therefore, it was possible that despite ethical assurances, participants might view researchers with video equipment with heightened suspicion. In turn, this perception could arguably result in increased non-participation and evasive responses. In sum, based on these considerations, the planned approach was to analyse photographs, transcripts of photo-elicitation interviews, and observational field notes together to identify common themes that could contribute to our understanding of how the material and the symbolic intertwine in experiences of dirty work.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

### *Navigating Trust and Reciprocity*

In practice, the research evolved differently from the original design. After 28 interviews (from 57 in total) it was apparent that fear of negative evaluation, and respondents' suspicion of researchers' motives ('*we have to be careful what we say*' was a refrain of many interviews), restricted verbal exchanges – leaving more contentious issues undiscussed. No doubt, some of these difficulties in data collection were inadvertently produced as a result of the perceived social differences between researchers and participants. There was a presentiment among participants that their voices were not going to be heard even if they shared their views.

In Phase 1 of the research, participants unanimously insisted that they liked their job, in particular, the fact they could work outside and were not stuck in the office. They were also willing to engage with discussions that opened up possibilities for construction of valued identities, for example, conversations which encouraged a display of masculinity through the demonstration of strength and endurance. Overall, however, the information collected at this stage offered very limited insight into the experiences the project sought to explore. The interviews were stopped at this point because the researchers were worried by participants' reluctance to share their insights.

Confrontation with participants' reluctance to engage raised two issues: first, concerns regarding the quality and richness of the data; and second, the question of (lack of) reciprocity – or mutual benefit – from the research. Amis and Silk (2008) stress that, the ways in which we study workplaces, might advantage some members of society and disadvantage others (Amis & Silk, 2008). In

particular, researchers can act as ‘plunderers’ of the stories of ‘others’ – often those with little power – for personal as well as academic advancement and without any accompanying sense of reciprocity (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Similarly, Geertz (1988) criticizes the unhealthy self-absorption of some academic writing and research activities, and the lack of interest in more practical implications of research findings. Reciprocity was especially significant in the present study given the aim of conducting research with practical impact for participants. Therefore, the researchers went ‘back to the drawing board’ to consider how best to de-privilege their own (academic) agenda and establish a more mutually beneficial, and trusting research relationship. Specifically, the researchers sought ways of ‘democratizing’ the research project, using a more ‘proactive forum for dialogue’ (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007) to offer participants a more independent voice. This led to an evolution of the research design using collaborative ethnographic documentary (see Figure 1, Phase 2).

#### *An Evolving Research Design: Collaborative ethnographic documentary*

Denzin (2003), discussing the multimedia ethnographic approach, highlights the importance of establishing a co-learning environment whereby researchers and participants jointly explore emerging research paths that might inform further research (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Based on this, all Phase 1 interviews were first transcribed and coded for emergent themes. Qualitative analysis software (NVivo) was used to assist in coding, storing and managing the data efficiently. Field notes, field observations and photographic images taken by the researchers were carefully catalogued and coded to make sure that they comprehensively covered the range of daily working routines and practices, and could be linked to related themes identified in the interviews. Themes included: encounters with dirt/waste/stains; work routines and practices; social biography; relations with the public, recognition; and change. Next, the researchers presented key findings from the analysis to participants. Participants were consulted over whether they would be interested in making a collaborative documentary, and whether they could assist in choosing the main focus of the film from several broad ‘themes’ identified in preliminary analysis. Participants consented to be involved.

Filming-making can be achieved through various means (see Table 3) ranging from amateur equipment such as cell phones and hand-held video-cameras, to professional film production

equipment operated by trained film-makers. While amateur 'home movie-making' technology is affordable, portable and easy to use, the trade-off is a potentially lower audio and visual quality due to lack of technical knowledge of lighting, sound, composition and editing (Spencer, 2011). This could limit the academic value of the material and its suitability for later communication of the research. In addition, the deceptive ease of basic filming may encourage a lack of reflexivity and selectivity about what is filmed and how it is framed, generating too much – potentially random/tangential - data (Spencer, 2011). Employing film-maker(s) with professional film equipment is more expensive, and may lack flexibility due to the more cumbersome nature of professional equipment and possible limits on filmmaker availability. In addition, working with professionals requires time for careful co-ordination and planning between all parties, as noted in the previous discussion. However, the higher quality audio-visual output may be a more focussed and accurate record of experiences in the field, and may be particularly appropriate when wider dissemination (e.g. uploading to a research website, public screening) is intended.

In light of these practical considerations and the literature review above, the preferred method for the next phase of the research was a collaborative ethnographic documentary, employing the technical assistance of a freelance film-maker. This was considered a more democratic way of establishing a collaborative and equal relationship between researchers and participants (Parr, 2007) whilst, at the same time, producing high quality output that could contribute to the wider practical aims of the research. Increasing participants' engagement in the research through a film production project, and the importance of achieving reciprocity and practical impact, justified the additional costs involved.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Participants were included in the whole process of film making - in planning, programming, in the filming itself and in editing the film. The film's themes were discussed in detail with participants before filming began, and decisions on what to include were made collaboratively. The purpose of the discussion was to co-create both a process and an outcome that delivered shared benefits and enhanced reciprocity in the research relationship (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Priority areas identified by participants were work routines and challenges associated with changes in regulations, at work and in communities; and recognition and encounters with the public. Overall, the collaborative processes

involved in the film project aimed to develop trust by establishing that the researchers were seeking to represent participants' views, and willing to publicise them.

The main uncertainty related to producing the ethnographic documentary was how to make the film as authentic as possible, minimizing participant reactivity and avoiding privileging the researchers' voice. To address this, we decided that the film-maker and researchers would adopt a 'stand by' position, or a way of looking 'alongside' rather than 'at' the participants (Kendon, 2003). Specifically, voice-over narration was omitted in favour of participants' telling their own stories in their own words. Five days of filming took place; participants were filmed and interviewed at work. The film-maker prompted conversation with participants using the questions prioritised in advance by participants. Context was provided by filming participants' working environment, and a wide range of tasks performed during the day.

#### *Analysis: A recursive cyclical process*

Once filming was completed, the researchers started work on analysis: examining the video material to expand the findings of the Phase 1 interviews and develop a protocol for further interviews. There is no single established methodology for analysing video data (Smets et al., 2014). A major concern in this analysis process was how to make two data sets work better together. In particular, researchers must consider how to avoid reducing images to a subordinate role (e.g. using them solely as an illustration of verbal interactions) yet, at the same time, not privilege images as more 'real' than verbal data, or vice versa (Bell & Davison 2013). To this end, following Hindmarsh and Pilnick (2007), the researchers drew iteratively on the two data sets to reflexively view and re-view episodes of lived experiences in fine-grained detail. Comparing observations from the video coding with insights from the Phase 1 data was thus a 'recursive cyclical process' (Engle et al., 2007). Merging the insights from the film and existing data provided an opportunity to 'sharpen the focus' of the research (Spencer, 2011), raising new questions and registering previously unnoticed aspects of work routines and engagement with the public, as well as suggesting a new emphasis or significance for things previously observed but not fully appreciated.

Analysis of each visual instance (i.e. a selected video segment) began with the production of a



transcript of the parallel conversation/audio in the segment, and a detailed description of the visual episode. The instance captured in Figure 2 was described as follows:

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

*It is early in the morning. The roads are busy with traffic getting heavier as more people are rushing to work. The episode in the film shows the dust car (a vehicle of a significant size) stopping in the residential road. 3 men jumping out of the car to bring wheelie bins to the vehicle, the driver of the dust car stays inside continuing his conversation with the film maker. The traffic is building up behind the vehicle. The drivers in the vehicles behind the dust car are getting impatient. A white car passes the dust car by driving on the pavement. The driver of the dust car points to the car on the pavement. He shakes his head in a disapproving mode and waves his arms in frustration and resignation.*

The next stage was assessing and coding the selected video segments (e.g., a vehicle, a driver, a loader, a street walker). Codes were created by watching the film segment multiple times and recording observations at key time-points. As analysis progressed the researchers identified extra dimensions captured in the episode: the assessment of temporal dimensions (darker, lighter, busier, quieter); the assessment of spatial arrangements ‘in a line’, ‘to the left’, ‘behind’. In addition, the researchers documented and coded the development and withdrawal of significant gestures and glances in temporal relation to the conversation. NVivo facilitated comparison of the coded visual data with interview data, field notes and photographs from Phase 1. By creating consistent identifiers, NVivo makes it possible to cross-reference a variety of data sources linking, for example, a particular participant interview with instances in the video and field notes in which that participant also appears (Bazeley, 2007). Thus, NVivo is not a substitute for analysis and interpretation but it was effective for coding and facilitating the search for, and juxtaposition of, conceptually related multi-media data sources. Comparison of Phase 1 data and Phase 2 video material revealed noticeable, yet previously unmentioned, signs of physical exhaustion and injuries, manifestation of suppressed frustration and a startling lack of engagement between the general public and the workers. This stimulated development of a new interview protocol to guide further investigation.

In order to test the researchers’ understanding arising from the analysis, explore new issues and

engage participants further in collaborative practice, a first rough cut of the documentary was shown to participants. The researchers asked participants what should remain in the final edit, what could be removed, and which segment(s) of video they found most representative of their working lives. Further ‘analytic conversations’ (Smets et al., 2014), akin to informal follow-up interviews, with individual participants based on extracts from the video were also conducted at this time. Topics covered were participants’ responses to the film and newly emerged issues and questions from the analysis so far.

### *Enhancing the Quality of Data*

By building greater trust and reciprocity into the research process, collaborative ethnographic documentary enhanced the quality of subsequent interview data. In particular, after showing the rough cut of the film to participants, the researchers were able to broach more sensitive, previously undiscussed topics. As we outline below, the documentary enabled observation and discussion of embodied, material aspects of work and complex interaction dynamics which were absent from earlier verbal responses and static photographic images (see Table 4 for examples).

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

*Materiality of work experiences* - Scenes in the film detailed the physical and material dimensions of the participants’ work experiences the size of the vehicles, the awkwardness of moving the bins (*bumping them down*), the unevenness of road surfaces, and the variety of cleaning equipment. The long shots at the beginning of the film, and the camera tracking the movement of the vehicles and the workers, generated a fuller picture of the working conditions, including revealing spatial and temporal aspects of practices involved. The film offered a different angle on the demands of the job. When the camera focussed on the subject itself it made certain aspects of participants’ physique suddenly more visible - hands with blisters and injuries, faces beaten by the weather conditions, hunched backs and arthritic joints.

The images invited a re-reading of the Phase 1 interview material drawing researchers’ attention to participants’ replies that were previously unnoticed. For example, to the question on what participants would do after work the response was consistently a brief statement such as: ‘*sit down*’.

In the post-viewing follow-up conversations, the researchers were able to elicit more extended discussions related to physical tiredness. The film also provoked discussion on how the physical practices of dirt's removal could place a considerable stress on the labouring body and result in daily physical discomfort. These issues had previously been 'under the radar' of the researchers because they were given little emphasis by participants in Phase 1.

*Capturing interactions* - The film also documented the embodied encounters with things and persons, attending to complex dynamics of interactions between material objects and people – for example details such as the refusal of eye contact in interactions with the public – which were omitted or missed in the original (Phase 1) conversations and photographs. Viewing the film opened up new discussions associated with the frustrations of the big city – dealing with narrow roads, heavy traffic, disrespectful drivers, unlawful parking, and impatient pedestrians. It also started a more detailed conversation regarding public attitudes. Participants' readiness to reflect upon these troubling feelings with the researchers was arguably a result of the greater trust that had developed throughout the collaborative filming process. The scenes from the film also functioned as a form of endorsement of their experiences authorising them to reflect upon their feelings and verbalise their concerns.

#### *Developing Research Impact*

Using collaborative ethnographic documentary allowed the researchers to strengthen the practical implications of the research findings. With participant consent, the film was shown to managers in the organization. The film empowered workers by offering an opportunity to tell their stories in their own words (Ray & Smith, 2011; Spencer, 2011). Previously, in a precarious labour market, fears over job security silenced participants' concerns, especially regarding negative public attitudes. However, the collaborative documentary presented powerful visual evidence that exposed and validated participants' concerns, and authorised them to speak. In turn, the film facilitated a more open and fruitful dialogue with management. Managers agreed that workers' concerns were valid and recognised that more could be done to change public perceptions. Consequently, managers are developing plans to increase their participation in public debates in order to educate the public regarding the demands of the job, to challenge attitudes and to better manage expectations.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to illustrate how collaborative ethnographic documentary can enable the production of rich accounts in the context of groups whose members may lack confidence, and enhance the practical impact of research. Adopting collaborative ethnographic documentary in our own research highlighted its power to extend the reach of traditional ethnography, triggering a fuller, yet more focused exploration of participants' experiences. The combination of collaborative verbal and non-verbal (visual) elements of the process facilitated communication between two groups that do not share taken-for-granted cultural backgrounds (Harper, 2002), helping to foreground participants' accounts, and capture less recognised aspects of their work.

Using collaborative ethnographic documentary enabled us to address an important conceptual gap by elaborating how the material and the symbolic intertwine in experiences of dirty work. A collaborative ethnographic documentary made these theoretical insights possible in two ways. First, the film exerted its own power and agency (Pink, 2003) independent of narrative accounts, thus serving as an important investigative tool. In this study, a collaborative ethnographic documentary approach assisted in enriching participants' narratives, querying the adherence to limited discursive resources available to low status groups to battle the potential of negative evaluations, and revealing the sensitivities that might lie beneath commitment to particular normative standards. Second, collaborative ethnographic documentary functioned as a reflective tool, creating a reference point for the participants' self-reflections (Haw & Hadfield, 2011). The development of trust, and the capacity of the camera to capture the overlooked, functioned as a trigger for participants to engage with negative sentiments and troubling experiences. While our research focused on 'difficult to reach' low status participants, collaborative ethnographic documentary would be useful for any research that requires additional trust and rapport in order to reveal socio-material aspects of work, sensitive topics, or aspects of work that are poorly understood because employees feel normatively bound not to speak out, for example organizational politics, team dynamics or difficult customer interactions.

Collaborative ethnographic documentary can help us to reconsider how we present the findings of management research, not only to academics but to practitioners and policy makers. The role of the visual in disseminating findings is recognised in organizational and management research

though currently little attention has been paid to it (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013). Conventional academic publishing currently limits the scope to include video in communicating research findings. In future, publishers might increasingly host websites to hold visual materials. Meanwhile, authors could include web links in journal articles to a companion research site, or Youtube and vimeo, so that readers can access the visual material. Additionally, there are several ethnographic film festivals which future researchers might consider for wider, non-traditional dissemination purposes. The present documentary is to be screened at the forthcoming ESRC Festival of Social Science. Accompanying the screening, a panel discussion has been organised with academics and non-academics (the film maker, two researchers, council representatives and some of the workers who collaborated in the film production). Additionally, publicly accessible websites e.g. <https://www.shortoftheweek.com> and the community TV channel <http://www.communitychannel.org> offer a means of broadcasting short documentaries to non-traditional audiences.

In terms of practical applications, collaborative documentaries have the potential to enhance the 'real world' relevance of classroom teaching and organizational training. For example, the present film has been used successfully for teaching research methods to undergraduates and postgraduates. In organizations, with appropriate consent from participants, collaborative films could be used to develop training that assists managers and employees in understanding and devising strategies to cope with otherwise 'hidden' or 'unspoken' negative aspects of work.

Because our collaborative ethnographic documentary method was emergent rather than planned, it suffered some limitations which future researchers might take steps to avoid. In particular, the filming process can adversely affect the interview process by inhibiting participants, so it is crucial to involve the film-maker in the research process as early as possible to help establish rapport and build trust with participants. Ultimately, very shy/awkward participants might have to be edited from the final cut on grounds of quality and it is important participants are aware of this possibility. Finally, the format of the resulting film affects how it can be disseminated. Decisions about how the research is to be disseminated should be made at the outset so that appropriate methods and resources can be built into the research design and film production.

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**TABLE 1**

**Comparison of Video Ethnographic Approaches**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Concerns</b>
Researcher-led video ethnography	Researcher observes and films participants in their social context guided by academic research questions (see Clarke, 2011; Llewellyn & Burrows, 2008)	Richness and authenticity of data Revealing the previously hidden / mundane Capturing social and cultural context, in time and space, and the embodied nature of work Efficient method for collecting large volumes of data	Participant reactivity may affect quality / authenticity of data Privileges researcher versus participants' voice Potentially reproduces hierarchical power relations in research
Participatory video ethnography	Following briefing and training with researcher, participants decide what to film and make video(s) themselves. May be individual (e.g. video diaries) or group-based (see Kindon, 2003)	Empowers participants Reduces researcher-researched hierarchical power imbalance Facilitates representation of participants and their lives as they wish to be perceived and understood	Higher training and equipment costs Time consuming training and co-ordination of data collection Research design needs to incorporate means of understanding participant motivations for selectivity
Collaborative ethnographic documentary	Researcher, participants (and professional film-maker) collaborate to record participants in their social context. Hours of ethnographic video material (for use in analysis) collaboratively edited to produce short documentary representing key findings in participants' voice (see Parr, 2007)	Combines above benefits and: Establishes closer collaboration and development of trust - more ethical and transparent process Documentary has multiple uses: *tool for further analysis *assessing 'trustworthiness' / validity of data (Spencer, 2011) via participant feedback *easy dissemination to wider / non-traditional audiences *stimulus for change	Skill and commitment needed to develop shared ownership and co-constructed understanding of film aims among all collaborators Time consuming to negotiate roles in relation to planning, filming, editing Cost of professional film-maker services necessitates significant funding Risk of 'losing' meaning in the edit

**TABLE 2**

**Comparison of Traditional Ethnography and Collaborative Ethnographic Documentary**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Concerns</b>
‘Traditional’ ethnography	<p>Research in natural setting - knowing through ‘being there’ (fieldwork) and ‘doing it’ (participant observation)</p> <p>In-depth focus - extended period of immersion in the field:            *enables insight into participant perspectives            *allows for rich description and understanding of prevalence of themes</p>	<p>‘Single-site, single-scribe’ approach (Van Maanen, 2011) may constrain what can be observed</p> <p>Traditional academic (monograph) output has low ‘impact’ potential beyond academia</p> <p>Output may privilege ‘expert’ researcher interpretation versus participants’ voice</p>
Collaborative ethnographic documentary	<p>Emphasis on producing knowledge that contributes to theory and has practical impact beyond academia</p> <p>Relational focus – building trust and reciprocity in the researcher-participant relationship through collaboration</p> <p>Enhances data quality and theorizing by:            *visually, and permanently, capturing otherwise-missed social and material aspects of work            *triggering participant self-reflection to surface otherwise-hidden dimensions and themes</p> <p>Enables flexible communication of research to enhance practical impact</p>	<p>Resource intensive (time, costs, co-ordination etc.)</p> <p>Ethics – care needed to ensure participants’ consent at every step; and to protect non-participant confidentiality in the ‘final cut’</p> <p>Data management burden – need to cross-reference multiple, multi-media data sources for each participant</p> <p>Risk of compromising academic neutrality during collaboration</p> <p>May privilege video data as more ‘real’</p>

**TABLE 3**

**Comparison of Video-Based Technical Alternatives**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Amateur e.g. researcher cell phone or portable video camera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inexpensive and readily available</li><li>• Convenient and flexible (time and location)</li><li>• Little/no training required</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of reflexivity in selecting what to film</li><li>• May generate ‘too much’ data</li><li>• Poorer audio-visual quality</li><li>• Limited utility for wider dissemination of data</li></ul>
Professional e.g. solo film-maker or film crew with high tech equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High sound and image quality</li><li>• Expertise in selecting, framing and editing</li><li>• Facilitates wider dissemination of data</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher costs</li><li>• Less flexible</li><li>• Requires careful planning and co-ordination</li></ul>

TABLE 4

Comparison of interview data before and after use of collaborative ethnographic documentary

	Phase 1 (Before)	Phase 2 (After)
<b>Response characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited elaboration</li> <li>• Wary of consequences of self-disclosure</li> <li>• Emphasis on positive aspects of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater self-reflection and elaboration</li> <li>• Increased comfort with self-disclosure</li> <li>• Greater openness about ‘realities’ of work</li> </ul>
<b>Example themes:</b>		
1. <i>Materiality</i>	<p>It keeps you fit and uses your whole body as well, your legs running...</p> <p>...we’ve got young lads that work on here and they can burn anybody out...they are really, really good. Really fast...</p>	<p>...after been working... I was a bit shattered so I was coming home from work and I was a bit tired. I was getting like a little hour or two hour snooze and then obviously getting up, having something to eat and ... go to bed really. Not really too much really...</p> <p>God, blimey, my shoulders were killing me, all pains on top of your shoulders, and you think, “oh no”, and you go in the next day, you can’t hardly move your shoulder...</p> <p>Yeah, I mean basically it swings and roundabouts. ...it kills the wrists because basically each bloke is going to move possibly 700 bins in a day ... from probably the front of the drive...you’ve got to get the bin from the drive to the vehicle, usually you know, round some things.</p>
2. <i>Interactions with Public</i>	<p>...some people, they’ll thank you for all what you’re doing... it’s mainly like the oldest people you know, they’re the ones that’ll come and say, “thank you very much”</p>	<p>Some people look down to you a bit, yeah. I mean we’ve got the local MP [Member of Parliament] up there, ... he just looks through me (laughs)...He just sort of like just looks at me and just walks past, you know don’t matter that I’m there, you know.</p>

**FIGURE 1. Evolution of a Collaborative Ethnographic Documentary Research Design.**



