

An Ethnography of the Workplace

*** *Watching and noticing* ***

What sort of hierarchy, or command structure, exists at the company? [Might be inferred from the existence of private offices vs. cubicles or staff with name tags and uniforms vs. those wearing suits and using business cards.]

How multicultural is the workplace and what language(s) is/are spoken?

How is the physical workspace organized? [A map can be drawn.] What does it tell you about the various responsibilities they have or their status relative to others in the company?

What is the ratio of male to female employees? Do they have similar or different roles from each other? Are there hierarchical differences among them?

How does a typical day proceed?

What role does technology (esp. communication technologies) play in the workplace?

What seems to be the morale of the company? What signs give you clues about it?

*** *Attending to verbal interchanges* ***

How do the employees address each other? What does this tell you--if anything--about power differences?

How do workers, formally or informally, teach each other about their job responsibilities?

What sort of small talk or off-task activities happen? What function do they seem to have in the workplace?

Is there a particular place where "small talk" happens (e.g., at a water cooler)? Is a clear differentiation made between socializing and business activities?

How much communication is carried out among employees F2F, versus through email, text messaging, video conferencing, etc. ?

How much time seems to be spent in meetings? At these meetings, who speaks and how are decisions made?

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Questions to ask

What are the respective roles of the employees? Is there a lot of overlap or are their jobs strictly defined and differentiated?

Is there a lot of mobility up the hierarchy? How easy is it for one to work his/ her way up the ladder?

Are workers trained to work for the company in a wide variety of areas or are they limited to a particular job description that changes little from year to year?

How much job turnover is there at the company? If it's high, what are the reasons for that?

How is time managed? Do the workers work regular 9-5 shifts or is there flextime? Is overtime work expected?

How do the employees gain new skills that they need in order to accomplish their tasks? How much support from the company do they get for