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**Carnavalesque collaborations:
reflections on 'doing' multi-disciplinary research**

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Abstract

Many funding bodies emphasise the advantages of using multi-disciplinary approaches; in response, in this paper we consider our reflections on doing such a project. We contribute to the multi-disciplinary literature by considering the standardizing effect of collaboration on multifarious research approaches. We argue that greater attention should be paid to 'doing' qualitative multi-disciplinary research. We find that elements of 'letting go' and 'coming together' are important when new perspectives and knowledge are engaged. Therefore, we call for clarity on the multi-disciplinary approaches and discuss how we came to understand the collaborative processes of researching, thinking, and writing. The paper begins with *vignettes* about our ontological journeys during the research project. In developing our argument, we consider the retrospective and reflexive qualities expressed in our vignettes and examine how our collaborative theorizing shaped the research project.

Keywords

collaborative, multi-disciplinary research, surveillance, plasticity, carnivalesque

Introduction

It is the end of a project team meeting, and we have been wrestling with outputs from the project, particularly how to theorize our findings. We are six researchers from different backgrounds who have worked together for three years on a research project examining surveillance and organizational systems introduced into the travel and financial services sectors. We decide to think about the collaborative process in which we engaged. What have we done? What are the outcomes of this project? What was involved? How can we capture the workings of the team? To reflect on these, we decide to write down our thoughts:

A¹: Previously I have worked closely with other disciplines within business schools, particularly colleagues in marketing, and have always found broad areas of commonality in our approaches. I have not, however, worked with researchers from other areas of social science. Whilst I have found the experience rewarding, I have [experienced], and continue to experience, feelings of disorientation and slight discomfort – not because anything they do is wrong, it is just different from how I learnt to approach things. This leaves me feeling that I do not know how to join in their world or work – and what they must make [think] of me.

B: I am a business academic and I work in a business school. Apparently. And yet my research strength and my research community lies outside that arena. I regularly work with sociologists, geographers, political scientists, international relations specialists, STS people, public admin academics, technologists ... the list goes on. They think I'm 'one of them' but I'm not. And yet I never work with business academics. I'm not one of them either....

C: I don't think I was ready for just how different this 'new angle' was going to be! We were a multi-disciplinary team; while some of the other disciplines were ones I had some knowledge of, and felt quite comfortable with (information systems, for example), others were completely new to me (surveillance studies in particular). I can remember reading, and re-

¹ Names have been removed for the review process.

reading, papers and book chapters with a mixture of surprise, excitement and bewilderment ... and having to look up words that I had never used before and didn't understand....

D: *Before starting work on [the project] I had been a geographer, my work had centred on consumption and how peoples, cultures and societies buy and sell things. [The project] was a project grounded in Customer Relationship Management [CRM], Surveillance and Organisation Studies; none of which I had, at the time, much knowledge of. Surveillance was something I was aware of and was a subject that deeply fascinated me; indeed, colleagues at my previous institution had been working on many of these issues. CRM and Organisation Studies, looking back, did present to me a certain amount of trepidation; here was something that was well outside of my comfort zone, and discussions and literatures of business models and statistics puzzled me.*

E: *Working together has had its challenges. We haven't always agreed and sometimes we just didn't 'get' each other at all. This isn't that unusual for me. As a marketer, I'm accustomed to sometimes being cast as from the 'dark side'. You probably know what I'm talking about.... One of those murky types, who subscribes to pestering people with promotions for products they neither need, want, nor can afford. Yet for me these challenges were also a key strength of the collaboration. Our differing perspectives allowed us to take different tangents on the issues we were studying.*

F: *When I joined this project, I already had a multidisciplinary background. My doctoral thesis – for a degree in Information Systems – had looked at customer profiling issues (not to mention that my first degree was in Economics and my first job in Accounting!). Moreover, I had participated in a Network of Excellence that brought together sociologists, lawyers and computer scientists, among others. So, I was very aware of the distinctive ways of thinking and working of different research communities. And I liked that.*

‘Knowledge integration’, as Franks et al. (2007) have called collaborations between diverse academic disciplines, challenges established epistemologies and knowledge creation. The benefits to multi-disciplinary work include gaining opportunities to broaden the scope of investigations and teaching, expanding professional relations, and answering questions that are beyond the scope of one discipline (Klein, 1990)—for example, the social impacts of preventive medicine (Hagoel and Kalekin-Fishman, 2002) or the ecology and managing landscapes (Fry, 2001). Indeed, the concept of bringing together differing thoughts and opinions has, since Plato, proved to enrich understandings and debate (Geertz, 1982; Klein, 1990). Moreover, multi-disciplinary research is celebrated and encouraged by many funding bodies and institutions. For example, large UK funders such as the Leverhulme Trust, ESRC, Royal Society, and RCUK regularly call for cross-discipline, cross-faculty and cross-institution collaborations. Nevertheless, as some of our vignettes suggest, challenges and tensions are inherent in how multi-disciplinary work is conducted. When submitting outputs we found that editors and reviewers often expressed reservations about our focus or the absence of particular perspectives of how we constructed our arguments. While this may reflect our choices of dissemination, we contend that the tension runs deeper. Embracing multi-disciplinary work provokes unease in the academy. In this paper, we highlight how our team of six researchers worked together and document what being multi-disciplinary researchers has meant to each of us.

Some previous works have considered aspects of ‘doing’ research and have illuminated expanding theoretical appreciations of collaborative work by, for example, writing about the ‘small’ things that have bearing on research. Conversing by telephone, driving to research meetings, or attending writing workshops all give unique and often personal perspectives on doing research (Adams and Jones, 2011; Cann and DeMeulenaere, 2012; Gale et al., 2012). ‘Warts-and-all’ approaches to research and the collaborative nature of writing present an opportunity to pause and think and then to reflect on what is being done and how (MacCormack, 2001). The theoretical and philosophical

tools that we use when formulating research questions and the extent to which these are made more complex or simplified in team research are also important. Previous work has also highlighted the problems evident when conducting multi-disciplinary work (Cummings and Kiesler, 2008; LeCompte et al., 1999). Technological or theoretical differences can stall or hinder the development of multi-disciplinary projects (see Bracken and Oughton, 2006; Jeffrey, 2003). The blending of outlooks, resources, and approaches, as we have found, requires sustained effort.

In this paper, we contribute to the multi-disciplinary literature by considering the standardizing effect of collaboration on our multifarious research approaches. We argue for greater attention to be paid to 'doing' qualitative multi-disciplinary research. We find that the elements of 'letting go' and 'coming together' are important when new perspectives and knowledge are engaged. The paper proceeds by outlining the project and our research interests. We then draw on multi-disciplinary literature streams and discuss how we achieved a disciplinary blend. We use the concepts of plasticity and carnivalesque to decipher what happened during the project. Finally, we draw conclusions on what the process has been like for us as researchers.

The project

Our project examined UK government surveillance regimes. In an effort to increase national security, new laws had been introduced in the United Kingdom that required organizations to monitor their customers, gather data, and transfer them to governmental organizations. We concentrated on two of these regulations: anti-money laundering/counter-terrorism financing in the financial services and e-Borders in the travel industry. The former regulation requires UK financial services firms to collect identification data on all customers and to monitor their account activity (Canhoto and Backhouse, 2007; Gill and Taylor, 2004; Ryder, 2008). All staff members are required to report on transactions

they view as suspicious. The organization must then pass on any reports it deems suspicious to the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, which will investigate and take appropriate action (Backhouse et al., 2005; Levi and Gilmore, 2002). This scheme, in one form or another, has been in operation since the late 1980s, originating from the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and updated by the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the Money Laundering Regulations 2003.

E-Borders came into operation in 2009 and demands that travel carriers collect and electronically transmit travel document information—also called advanced passenger information or Advanced Passenger Information Systems—for all individuals travelling in and out of the United Kingdom. Data must be transferred to the UK Border Agency within 24 hours and 30 minutes before travel, which then checks the data against watch lists and for particular individuals and unusual patterns. Travel agents, tour operators, and seat brokers are all affected by e-Borders and are mandated to implement systems to collect and transfer the required information to the carriers, which pass it on to the UK Border Agency. The e-Borders initiative has encountered several problems since its inception (Dibb et al., 2014). The UK Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee has emphasised apprehensions about the legality of the programme, as under European Human Rights legislation, European citizens may withhold personal information if they wish to do so (Home Affairs Committee, 2009; Laja, 2012). The committee has also raised concerns about the progress of the programme (see Home Affairs Committee, 2012). In 2010, the UK government dismissed the programme's main IT contractor because of significant delays in delivery (Ford, 2010; Millward, 2009) and replaced it in April 2011 with Specialist Computer Centres. This new contract ran up to the London Olympics Games in 2012. In March 2014, the troubled e-Borders was terminated.

Our project's research questions focused on whether and how the transfer of customer information to government for security purposes affected the organizations concerned. In particular, we were interested in the changes to consumer profiling practices and the work of employees on the customer service front lines. For our project, we interviewed more than 60 key informants, conducted three case studies in each sector, and ran two online surveys. The nature of the problem dictated that a multi-disciplinary team was required, to understand all the potential impacts of the regulations. The context for the project was the surveillance studies, a discipline that has grown in prominence in the past 20 years (see Marx and Muschert, 2007; Surveillance Studies Network, 2006; 2010). Augmenting this surveillance work were significant methodological and theoretical contributions, including how surveillance makes modern living possible (Lyon, 2001), its impact on consumer activities (Andrejevic, 2009; Gandy, 2009, 2010), and the technological or digital bearings on surveillance and society (Vlcek, 2007; Graham, 2005). Surveillance studies have routinely engaged with other disciplines, such as law, science and technology, sociology, politics, criminology, and geography. Yet, despite the discipline's theoretical and methodological inclusiveness, little consideration has been given to 'doing' multi-disciplinary surveillance research. There are, however, both good accounts of the methods used in projects, such as overviewing and justifying the methods used, and high-quality 'field' descriptions of, for example, fishery inspection boats, mental health wards, or nightclubs (Due et al., 2012; Gad and Lauritsen, 2009; Rigakos, 2008). Taken together, this work has delivered detailed insights into surveillance and its consequences. Nevertheless, as in other disciplines, missing from these literature streams is a broader conversation on surveillance studies' methodological ontology.

Who are we?

We are six academics from diverse backgrounds: [A] is a professor of Information Systems, and her work concentrates on the adoption and use of information systems by organizations; [B] is a

professor of Organisation Studies, whose research focuses on surveillance in and around organizations; [C] is a senior lecturer in Strategy with interests in the progress of strategic projects in retail financial services, including market segmentation, relationship marketing, and CRM; [D] is a human geographer and research associate, whose research interests include issues of surveillance and monitoring, with a particular focus on the social and cultural impacts of surveillance; [E] is a professor of Marketing, whose research focuses on market segmentation, marketing strategy, and consumer behaviour; and [F] is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing and Information systems, whose work focuses on the use of transaction data. We avoid listing the extensive theoretical traditions used in the project (these are available in papers published elsewhere); however, the following list highlights our eclectic theoretical outlooks: marketing strategy, segmentation, CRM, consumer behaviour, relationship marketing, information systems, information management, organization theory, the sociology of the body, science and technology studies, regulatory capitalism, new public management, surveillance theory, new media theory, customer profiling, customer management, globalisation, and spaces of consumption. Working within these areas, our intention was to gain a deep and detailed understanding of the workings and implications of new regulations in the United Kingdom.

The team was formed in a relatively straightforward manner; [B] was the principal investigator and, along with [A], [C], and [E], was responsible for writing the original research bid. These researchers were colleagues at the same business school, and some had worked together previously. [D] was recruited to the project, and [F] joined in an advisory and participatory role. While team members joined primarily because of their expertise, a collegial influence was also evident in the team dynamics (Massey et al., 2006). Our approach incorporated the strengths of each team member in highlighting important components of regulatory practice within the financial services and travel industries. Each discipline needed to be heard without lessening the impact of the others. Despite

our broad antecedents, our common focus was on the practices and processes that made the regulations work, as well as the challenges and difficulties faced when enacting regulatory powers. Our approach considered the surveillant, infrastructural, and customer relationship elements that facilitate the process within organizations. The sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonizing theoretical perspectives eventually merged in the pursuit of our common research goal.

Doing multi-disciplinary research

We began the project by conceptualising the phenomena under investigation. Despite this being an area that had not been previously investigated, we needed to conceptualise it in a way that incorporated our multiple perspectives while making the most of our individual contributions. Barnes (2001) argues that theory does not have a hold on an exclusive truth but is messier and that the 'doing' aspect of theory is equally important. The 'doing' aspect is an active practice, one with an openness that extends to the debates and discussions it generates and one with applications and re-definitions in new disciplines and milieu (Lees and Baxter, 2011). Much academic inquiry follows a style of 'theoretical consistency', and approaches often stick to the 'tried and tested' (Newbury, 2011). This is not to dismiss the validity of these approaches; mono-approaches have garnered much interesting and informative work. Midgley (2011) argues that the choices the researcher enacts are situated in and inter-linked by theoretical aims and objectives. The justification in applying particular theories to specific questions is often dependent on the 'wider systems' in which researchers are positioned. The choice of theory, or even the angle of exploration, that researchers choose is relevant to their ontological knowledge and experience.

Several aspects supported the team's approach and how we worked together. These included our theoretical flexibility and the creation of a space that encouraged us to reflect on our theoretical positions. We met together once a month around a table to discuss the project and decide what to

do next. We referred to this time as ‘the research sanctuary’ and frequently breathed a sigh of relief as we closed the door, shutting out the rest of the school and beginning our deliberations. Meeting together ensured that through our collective sense-making, our respective disciplinary knowledge was brought to bear on the problem at hand. In writing about these experiences, we do not view our knowledge as ‘out there’ but as physically embodied and produced as part of a material interaction in a particular space and time. Furthermore, our different positions in relation to the material did not stem solely from our disciplinary backgrounds but were instead produced by the surveillant phenomenon we were investigating. The phenomenon required an articulation and integration of its many facets. Barad (2003: 815) refers to this as ‘intra-action’ and states, ‘It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the “components” of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful’.

The research process needs to maintain certain conventions—for example, producing new knowledge that is publishable, contains valuable insights, and satisfies the funders. Yet, to achieve that new knowledge, it must also overcome the conventionalities and constraints of the researchers’ disciplinary foundations. It is precisely these aspects of academic practice that bind the researchers together but, at certain moments, have the potential to divide them. Star and Griesemer (1989) consider the plasticity in boundary objects, such that objects must maintain certain conventionalities while overcoming other conventionalities. Their example considers the unusual alliance between amateurs and professionals when creating museum displays. The standardisation and categorisation of the object is disrupted—in this case, one set of curators seeks to explain, interpret, label, and display, while the others are entrusted by the act of collecting and preserving local artefacts. While boundary objects are often used to examine the non-human in sociological thought, more recent work has given impetus to objects and ideas, particularly when exploring cross-cultural networks. Examples include virtual global network projects or the socio-financial networks of diasporic

communities. The approaches taken in these and other works follow interpretative and often practical understandings of plasticity. Lainer-Vos (2013) suggests that meanings are not fixed but unfold over time and so can be taken advantage of when generating cooperative harmony or opportunity. Conversely, Iorio and Taylor (2014) argue that the strategic management of conflict produces plasticity in how actions and doings are performed. The observations in these works indicate that zones of indeterminacy or in-betweenness (Levinas, 1989) highlight when and how consensus is achieved by adjacent interests. Achieving a resolution does not necessarily mean that unanimity has been reached or a standpoint imposed. Much like the practices, materialities, and embodied sensibilities that combine during the collaborative process, a 'standard' is needed to theorize. Without such a standard, it is impossible to distinguish one understanding from another, and herein lies the tension to collaborative work (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Metro-Roland, 2010). In instances in which more than one person differs in their approach, somebody has to 'let go'. The standard is the anchor, the collaboration, the plasticity.

The concept of a 'securitised information flow' was the unit of analysis we agreed on and about which theory could be generated. The securitised information flow described the phenomenon of customer data sharing with the government in a way that incorporated all our disciplinary interests. The word 'securitised' was helpful because it distinguishes certain kinds of information. We considered 'information flow' a conduit that linked the organization, its customers, workers, and information systems with the government. Team members were comfortable with how organizational resources, and the concepts they knew about best, became 'aligned' with and invested in the continuation of the flow. We viewed securitised information flow as something that translated customers, as individuals whose activities generated data for strategic commercial purposes (*Interests of team members*: [E], [C], [F]), into potential threats to national security ([B]) and positioned the organization and its members as an important intermediary ([D]). In addition,

employees brought the worlds of business and regulation together ([B]) because they plugged gaps between customers and information infrastructures to ensure that data flowed ([A]) and helped overcome resistances to and the intentional or unintentional blockages of flow ([A], [B],[D]). However, in agreeing to focus on our boundary object of securitised information flow, the process of coming together, working together, and finding a comfortable space in which we could relax theoretical persuasions was also influential in creating, as we call it, a 'carnavalesque' collaboration.

Carnavalesque collaboration

The carnival is an allegory for transformation, in which the world is turned upside down (White, 1993). Bakhtin (1984) sets his argument in the world of Rabelais, a 16th-century French renaissance writer, and challenges the 'sanitized' bourgeois version of the 'self'. As Hall (1993: 7) states, 'for Bakhtin, this upturning of the symbolic order gives access to the realm of the popular – the "below", the "underworld", and the "march of the uncrowned gods"'. There is a suspension that enables *new modes of inter-relationships*, in which those who do not normally mingle or converse do so. *Eccentricity* is prevalent when behaviours viewed as alternative or different are celebrated for their performative zeal. In addition, a *carnivalistic mésalliances* is encouraged, in which formalities and distinctions are ignored for the duration of the carnival and where there is room for *profanation*, as obscenities and ridicule of those of higher social order is tolerated (see Sandner, 2004). Recent work that views the permitted excesses that can disrupt 'civil' behaviours has played a role in adapting these perspectives. This includes studies examining the excesses of contemporary nightlife and the production of sexual cultures and sub-cultures, all of which have been deemed inappropriate or in 'lived opposition' to accepted social behaviour (Bell, 2006; Hemingway, 2006; Hubbard, 2013). Hubbard (2013) highlights the tension between the social and anti-social in the carnivalesque atmosphere of organised student nights out, at which overindulgence of alcohol and vulgarity is encouraged. These acts are, he argues, considered by the media and, on occasion, the judiciary to be

unacceptable. The temporal and carnal visits to the seaside resort or the seclusion of remote night-time car parks embolden equally hedonistic behaviours in which public and private tensions arise. 'Dogging' (Bell 2006) and the 'dirty weekend' (Hemmingway 2006) present pensive moments for 'civilized' and 'un-civilized' behaviours, as performing sexual acts in public or conducting illicit affairs carry their own pressures, pleasures, and excesses. Although we began this paper with anxieties of working on a 'risky' project, the central terrain of doing research in a carnivalesque space is the understandings of otherness and alterity (Folch-Serra, 1990). Indeed, embracing a world of experimentation and one in which there is a temporal relaxation of disciplinary parameters and boundaries is not without its own tensions, but it does present innovative opportunities.

Infused within our collaborative carnivalesque was a strong sense of engaging with worlds and ideas that might not have been encountered in a disciplinary context. While others have drawn on the transgressive nature of the carnival and its relationship to deviant or competitive behaviours (Clisby, 2012; Ravenscroft and Gilchrist, 2009), we emphasise the reflexive potential when daily pressures are suspended. 'Extraterritoriality' or 'place-beyond-place', as Bakhtin (1984) calls it, becomes a space to collaborate. Having collaborative space has been important in how we have worked together throughout the project. Each of us was 'the only expert in the room' in relation to our respective discipline, so we each brought a knowledge with which others were less familiar. As a result, team members at all career stages enjoyed status, and political or competitive elements were deferred. An escape from the usual 'official order and official ideology' (Bakhtin, 1984: 154) was nurtured, as was a distancing between the carnival and 'real-world' elements of academia (Stallybrass and White, 1986). We now turn to our vignettes and begin by reflecting on 'letting go' of our disciplines within the carnivalesque space of the research sanctuary.

The letting go

In thinking through our collaborative ‘letting go’, we consider the manner in which we merged in our research focus and standardised our approach. The phenomenon we were explaining had not been covered elsewhere, so we needed to find our own way of describing it. As mentioned, eventually our discussions identified a concept to which each of us could relate—securitised information flow. Nevertheless, the project presented some uncomfortable and sometimes painful moments for the team. Writing styles, for example, were often incompatible, as three members readily apply critical perspectives to their work, while others tended to consider more positivist appreciations. Moving away from our theoretical histories and perspectives, as well as learning new approaches and enjoying new theoretical outlooks, was eventful, most especially when harmonising our writing styles for journals or during the writing of a book manuscript. Each researcher was required to adopt a degree of plasticity to adapt to the new working arrangements. This process helped distance us from our disciplinary roots and compromised the degree to which we ‘fit’ with one another. We therefore sought new, hybrid, and cohesive ways to root our research. Using the powerful driver of emotive language (Stürmer and Simon, 2009), [B] questions whether her colleagues share her motivations:

I don't know that they feel the same degree of anger as I do at the unfairness of social sorting and the way it concentrates power in untransparent ways. I hope that they caught a few glimpses of that and that I made the critique available in a way that was useful to them.

[B] also comments on the constant sense of plasticity inherent in the movement between disciplinary and multi-disciplinary worlds. She highlights the ambivalence and struggle she feels in how she identifies herself and approaches her work:

[I have experienced] years of teaching-related boredom, intellectual isolation and the rejection of my work from what I thought were journals and communities directly representing my home discipline 'organization studies'. This has also led to a sense that I have been 'moonlighting' in the surveillance studies world – a community of loosely affiliated misfits.... It seems detached from my everyday life. It feels unreal and something that my everyday colleagues cannot relate to. I'm working 'in-between'.

[D] also expresses the discomfort he felt at the start of the project, having moved from a geography department to a business school and then to a multi-disciplinary surveillance project:

Some things are done differently at a business school – for instance, it is necessary to engage with organisations and business and all that this entails (e.g. established links with banks or small business; suited visitors to the department) and academic staff often have consultancy positions with non-academic organisations. These were things that I had not experienced in geography departments ... other things were different, advertisements for invited speakers to the school spoke of mysterious and unusual titles 'international management practice' 'intangible assets', 'managerial innovations' - I had heard these terminologies before but had no idea what they meant.

The juxtaposition was that we were limited by our antecedents but unbounded in our collaborative potential. [C] comments on her sense that we eventually managed to situate ourselves in the new multi-disciplinary context but that she still cannot really be sure:

Given that the literature stresses how difficult it can be to communicate across disciplines or knowledge domains, I think we have (probably, mostly!) managed to do this well?.... It would be interesting to track how some of our ... draft papers ... evolved over time, and also whether our level of consensus has changed (do we agree with each other more, or less, than we did at the beginning of the project about issues such as surveillance practice or CRM

practice, for example? Or doesn't it matter?) And I really like the idea of us using these objects to create knowledge in different domains, as well as at the intersection of those domains.

Furthermore, the plasticity required enabled a reflective distance to emerge. Much academic work is haunted by an un-acknowledged imperative of fit, as evidenced in our reflections. As soon as one becomes aware of one's disciplinary limitations, one questions the limitations of one's own contribution. [A] comments on how she became aware of her disciplinary vernacular and its limitations during the project:

The two aspects that strike me when considering working in the project – both on empirical aspects and theorising – are: both my own and the IS field's (overly?) rational and pragmatic approach compared to other disciplines, the need to recognise and incorporate both detail and larger scale concepts and finally, perhaps most strikingly, both my own and the IS field's lack of critical engagement in our studies of emergent IS phenomena.

As results materialized and we engaged with the world of publishing, too much plasticity resulted in a lack of focus. [F] expands on these tensions, as the conventional—in Star and Griesemer's (1989) terms—begins to reassert itself:

We have now reached the stage to focus on disseminating the research outputs. The project's multidisciplinary approach was welcomed by the sponsor, and the findings well received among the practitioner community. However, it has been a challenge to get our work accepted in prestigious academic outlets. The wide body of literature is deemed a weakness. Instead, we are asked to narrow the scope, while exploring discipline-specific topics in more depth. The terminology becomes another issue. We need to adapt terms that are familiar to the audience of the target journal, even if they fail to capture the full breadth of what we are talking about. And the journey between the macro, meso and micro levels is

difficult to capture in the limited words available for the traditional journal paper. It seems that, as far as publications are concerned, 'multidisciplinary' is, again, seen as lacking focus.

There is a warm appreciation here of difference, underpinned by feelings of fit that 'lacks focus' or 'things being done differently'. Despite our reservations and trepidations, an undercurrent of the desire to collaborate was evident. More effusive was a tentative acceptance of moving into the unknown or working 'in-between'. We all regard collaborative work positively but qualify that view with our anxieties and desires to retain a connection with our disciplinary 'homes'. According to Barnes (2001), theorizing is an activity, and the trepidations associated with attempting something for the first time are part of the theoretical process. Movements away from 'home' disciplines often encourage new modes of theorization, examination, or explanation, but they also expose researchers to critique from their disciplines as they move into uncharted territory (Byrne, 2014). We were conscious of both.

The coming together

Throughout the research project, our academic fit and the academic worlds from which we came were challenged. In reflecting on how we worked together, we recognised the challenges of collaboration but were also aware that we would return to our academic 'homes' when away from the project. As [E] suggests,

It's fair to say that there have been moments during the project when we have had to walk on egg shells, being courteous and sensitive to one another's needs and perspectives. Funnily enough, I found this behaviour to be in itself, hugely constructive. On other projects I work regularly with my husband, who is also an academic. When you know someone so well, it is too easy (although not always desirable) to dispense with polite, co-worker civilities. The

danger in so doing is that we can forget to listen, and may fail to hear or respect the alternative point of view.

Although academic life is hierarchical, political, and competitive and the team members ranged in experience and position, there was a levelling within the dynamic of the team (Curry et al., 2012). Seniority can never be truly left at the door, but there was a temporal realignment here, as the collaborative spirit focused and channelled the ontological awakenings of the project.

Working with others of different theoretical persuasions encouraged us to challenge our own positions, those of other team members, and the perspectives of our audiences. Each of these persuasions was influential in the practicalities and situated practices of engaging with the research project. A balance of sort was struck in how we as researchers rationalised our approaches and inputs. We played to our 'strengths' but were, particularly as academics, aware of our 'weaknesses'. [F] writes,

The other members of the team were very constructive in their approach to the project. No one ever tried to impose their discipline as the best one to study the problem, or their methodology as the right one. Though, equally, no one took the other's explanation or vocabulary as given, and we often spent considerable time discussing the background to a particular concept or framework, and agreeing terminology. It seems to me that, to work in a multidisciplinary team, it is necessary to both have confidence in what you know and willingness to question your long established assumptions.

The social practices of debate, encouragement, and camaraderie ultimately drove the intellectual impetus inherent in our project (Dilthey, 1996; Hirsch, 1967). As [F] points out, we began to see what we had done, how we had diversified, and where we had moved to theoretically. [A] continues,

Whilst I have never thought of myself as embracing a positivist epistemology ... It would appear that an individual considered as an interpretivist in the IS field, may appear as hard-line positivist by organizational studies standards.... This difference in latent epistemologies may have been a source of potential incompatibility but I do not perceive it has been. Rather, I think the team has identified and drawn on the benefits of these different approaches, combining the detail of reality that is often characterises pragmatic and grounded IS studies with the more wide reaching generalities of organisational studies.

The intricacies of converging disciplines have reversed some of [A]’s theoretical ‘positionality’ (see England, 1994). Working from a reflexive imperative grounded in the skills and experiences of a diverse research team brings into question and expands the critical use of ontology. In the following section, we offer closing thoughts on the process of doing multi-disciplinary research.

Final reflections

Doing multi-disciplinary research is, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest, hindered by ‘abstraction’ or the ability to translate the highly complex into the readable and scientific. Theory offers some help. Speaking from a symbolic interactionism perspective, Garfinkel (1974) suggests that issues of reflexivity are associated with how researchers turn a ‘critical eye’ towards their own methods of interpretations. Activities such as working collaboratively can be understood through how the research was made to happen (Lynch, 1999). To learn ‘from’ and not ‘about’ requires a substantive appreciation of what is being observed or experienced, and within this a positional recognition needs to be realised (Laurier, 2001). Reflecting on our vignettes, as we did when reading drafts of this paper, we remain puzzled as to when we ‘let go’ and ‘how we knew we let go’. As [E] comments,

And finally, I have a further and perhaps contradictory thought about cross-disciplinary working. In spite of all that I have said about the positives of such working, and even though this sharing of differing ideas and insights allows us to reflect and grow, I have also found it important to hold fast to my own research identity. It is mine after all, and I, like my fellow team members, have worked hard to develop it and have earned the right to own it.

It is possible that, similar to Garfinkel (1974), we struggle to acknowledge taken-for-granted issues and toil to articulate how, when, and where we collaborated. As researchers, we are structured by and rightly celebrate and protect our disciplines, research methods, research teams, and research audiences. When we do research using an unfamiliar method or write about a new theory, we are not irrevocably changed as researchers; rather, we have merely expanded our research perspectives and experiences. A willingness to work in this manner is essential and may explain the dynamic of this particular research team and why it was productive. We *let go* when we agreed to join the team, and each time we entered a research meeting, we continued to *let go*.

We found characteristics of plasticity and carnivalesque along the way that supported those letting-go and fortifying moments. Consequently, the research took numerous routes. In each and every instance, it was guided by the collaborative process. However, writing about our theoretical journey has been less than straightforward. This paper goes some way in exposing how we felt about our participation in the project. It also shows how the findings were moulded, first by our trepidations and comfort with the familiarity of what we know and, second, by listening to and working with others who have differing histories and perspectives. Last, the project progressed through the reflective space generated by the team dynamic. We all agree that the experience of working on the project was an extremely positive one; yet there is no guarantee that future collaborative work will be equally so. To some degree, we all still hold reservations and will ultimately return to our disciplines of choice and to our 'fit'. Each of us might reflect on the quality of collaborative space, as

well as the importance of embodied knowledge situated within ourselves as we grapple with new and emergent phenomena beyond our home disciplines. Our experience also gave our surveillance collaboration an attractive subversive quality, albeit for the majority of colleagues a temporary subversion that was as empowering as it was daunting: Carnavalesque in a small, north European sort of way. There remains the pressing acknowledgement that collaborative work brings together new knowledge and meanings. As Gadamer (1992) suggests, what ultimately underscores our contemplations is an understanding of what has made this possible. Using extracts from our vignettes has enabled us to understand how we felt and what we understood by working in this way. In developing notions of newfound knowledge, our intention has been to rationalise our experiences and to promote theoretical thinking about doing multi-disciplinary qualitative research. Thinking differently has, we believe, made our contributions to the literature more robust. These are important issues when considering how we can begin to understand how we understand.

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