

Rapid ethnographies and organizational research in healthcare: Challenges and ways forward

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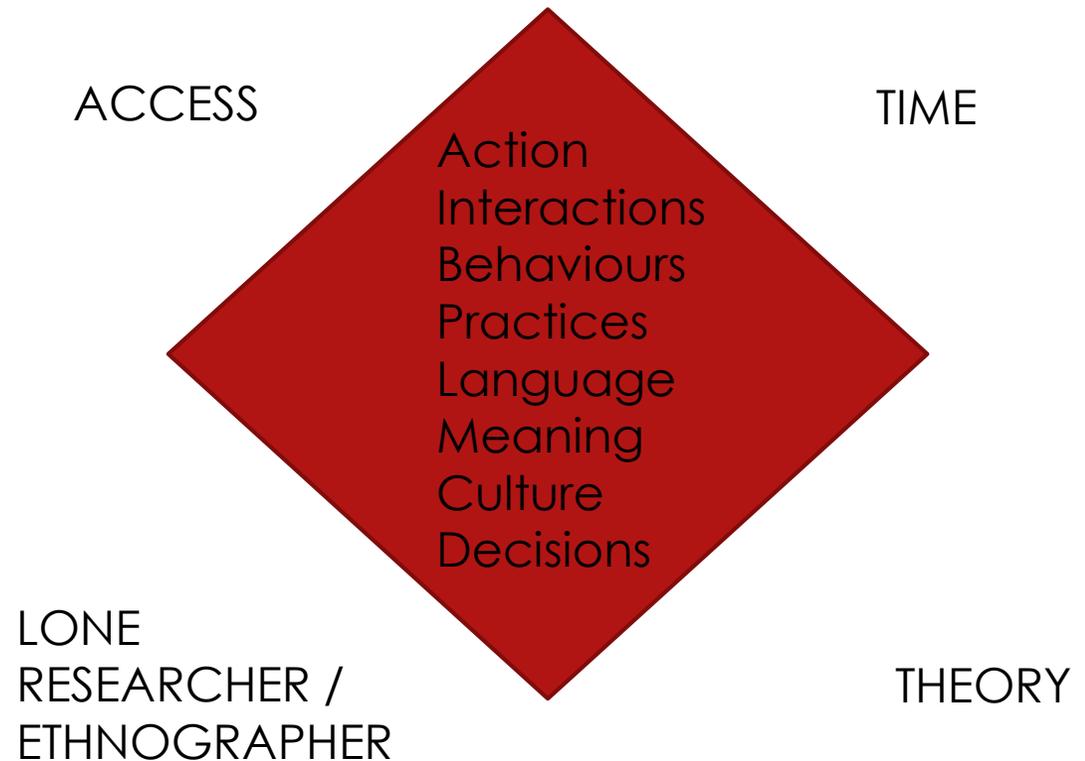
nuffieldtrust

Rapid Service Evaluation Team (RSET)

- ▶ NIHR HS&DR programme (5 years)
- ▶ Collaboration between multi-disciplinary researchers from UCL Department of Applied Health Research and the Nuffield Trust
- ▶ Conduct rapid evaluations of health and care *service innovations* identified through horizon scanning and stakeholder engagement processes
 - ▶ Theory-driven approach
 - ▶ Innovative evaluation methods (inter-disciplinary, mixed methods)
 - ▶ Sharing lessons for rapid impact
 - ▶ Working in partnership/co-production
- ▶ **First evaluation: Interventions delivered within the Special Measures for Quality regime**
- ▶ More information see: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/project/rset-the-rapid-service-evaluation-team>

Classic qualitative social scientific research

- ▶ Ethnography
- ▶ Policy evaluations
- ▶ Organisational case studies
- ▶ Technology and workplace studies



Timely research for policy and practice

“The timeliness of information is no less critical than its accuracy.”

(McNall and Foster 2007)

- ▶ Timeliness = utility of research and evaluation findings
- ▶ Timeliness = ability to influence decision-making at key points
- ▶ In some cases, timeliness = findings can be shared at time intervals

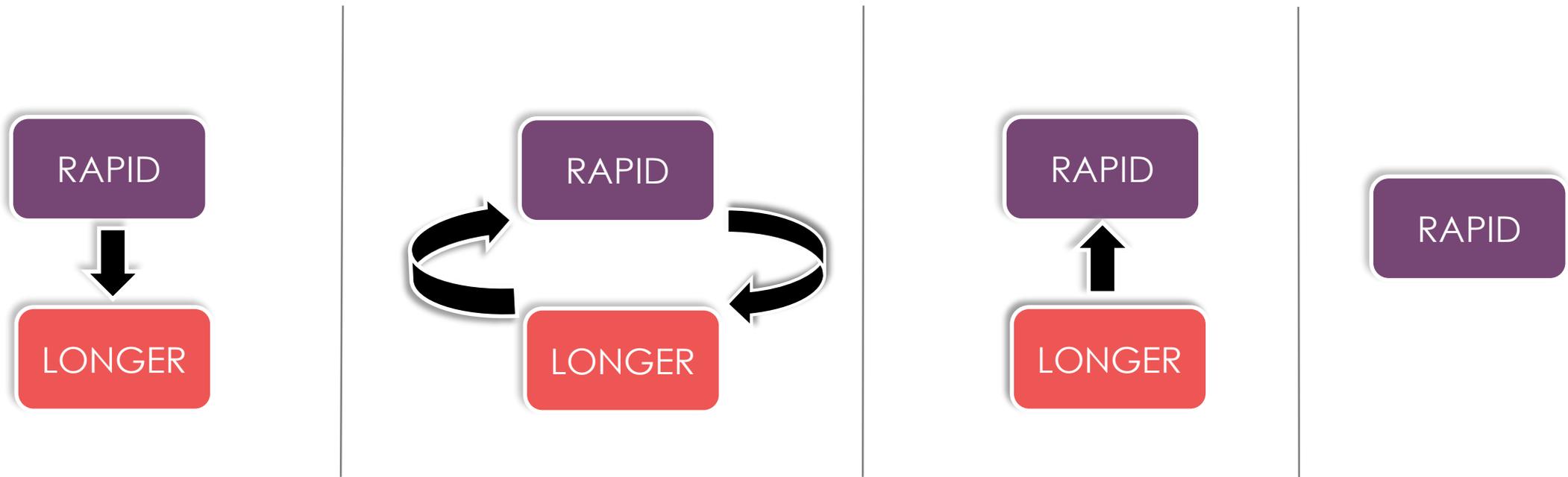


“Must one spend a year in the field collecting ethnographic data in order to make useful recommendations for a health program?”

(Scrimshaw and Hurtado 1988)

How are rapid ethnographies used?

- ▶ Inform longer research project (preliminary study)
- ▶ Run in parallel with a longer study (strand of mixed-methods study)
- ▶ Explore the findings of a longer study more in-depth
- ▶ Study on its own



Rapid ethnographies in healthcare

Table 2 Typology of rapid ethnographies		
Term used	Articles using the term	Definitions used in the articles
Rapid ethnography (RE)	9 11 26 28 29 32 37 40 41 43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop a reasonable understanding, in a compressed period of time, of the people and contexts being studied.²⁶ ▶ Uses three main sources of data: participant observation, semistructured interviews and document analysis³⁷ ▶ Includes brief observations at multiple field sites, in-depth interviews with key informants, engagement with social theory and analysis of archival materials and quantitative data⁹ ▶ Same definition as RAP (see below)¹¹ ▶ Ethnographic methods for quickly gathering social, cultural and behavioural information on health-related problems⁴¹
Quick ethnography (QE)	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Means for collecting and analysing high-quality ethnographic data in a short time frame (90 days or less)⁸ ▶ Gather rich data without extended period of time in the field.⁸ ▶ Short-duration fieldwork balanced by data collection and analysis⁶⁰
Focused ethnography (FE)*	60	
Rapid ethnographic assessment (REA)	30 31 33 35 39 50 61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A phenomenological method for rapid acquisition of data that are rich in life experiences of the subject population³⁹
Rapid assessment, response and evaluation (RARE)*	36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Systematic ethnographic data collection and analysis techniques complemented by survey information and direct observation studies³⁶ ▶ Produces data that can be summarised in a way that can be understood by all of the parties³⁶ ▶ Allows clear triangulation of findings that provide reliability and validity checks on complementary data for each domain³⁶ ▶ Research is normally carried out by field teams.³⁶
Rapid assessment process (RAP)	24 25 27 38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Derived from anthropological methods and theories and is closely related to other expedited methods for capturing critical, social and cultural data surrounding a focused programme topic²⁴ ▶ A way of gathering, analysing and interpreting high-quality ethnographic data expeditiously so that action can be taken as quickly as possible^{25 27 38} ▶ Uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods^{25 27 38} ▶ Substitutes intensive, team interaction in both the collection and analysis of data, for the prolonged fieldwork formally associated with ethnography^{25 27 38}
Focused rapid ethnographic evaluation (FREE)*	62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Similar to other rapid ethnography approaches, it differs in the sense that in FREE there is extensive use of field notes instead of digital recordings.⁶²
Short-term focused video ethnographic case study*	44	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Short-term video ethnography to create an intensive, complex and rich data set⁴⁴ ▶ Permits immersion into experience without being intrusive⁴⁴

*These terms were not used in the search strategy, but emerged from the reviewed articles.

24 rapid ethnographies in healthcare

Challenges and trade-offs of using rapid ethnographies

Potential challenges/issues that require more research	Description of the challenges
'Breadth' versus 'depth' in data collection	Inability to capture changes over time, understand all relevant social and cultural factors at stake, or conflict and contradictions
Representativeness and sample size and selection	Dependency on most accessible informants and loss of multiplicity of voices
Use and training of local research assistants (research assistants from the observed field)	Local research assistants are not always available, have the required skills or willingness to take part. Training takes time. Research undertaken by researchers without an anthropological background might limit the quality of the study.
Lone researcher versus multimembered team	Multimembered teams can maximise resources and cover a wider range of expertise. Recruitment might be an issue and clear roles in the field need to be outlined.
'In and out' researcher versus long-term engagement	New researchers might get more attention, but lack familiarity with the study area. Prolonged engagement often increases credibility and internal validity. Prolonged engagement might also lead to stronger relationships between research participants and the field researchers.
Time for reflexivity	The rapid study time frames might not allow researchers to critically analyse the position they play in the field site and their role in the collection and analysis of data.
Research governance, and ethical principles	Time pressures should not deter researchers from undergoing the required governance and informed consent processes.

Challenges of using rapid ethnographies

Definition of ethnography and use of the 'ethnography' label

1. 'Quick and dirty' exercise
2. Too instrumental, lack of critical analysis
3. Loss of serendipity
4. Ethnography 'lite'



Process and context-sensitive research in organisations

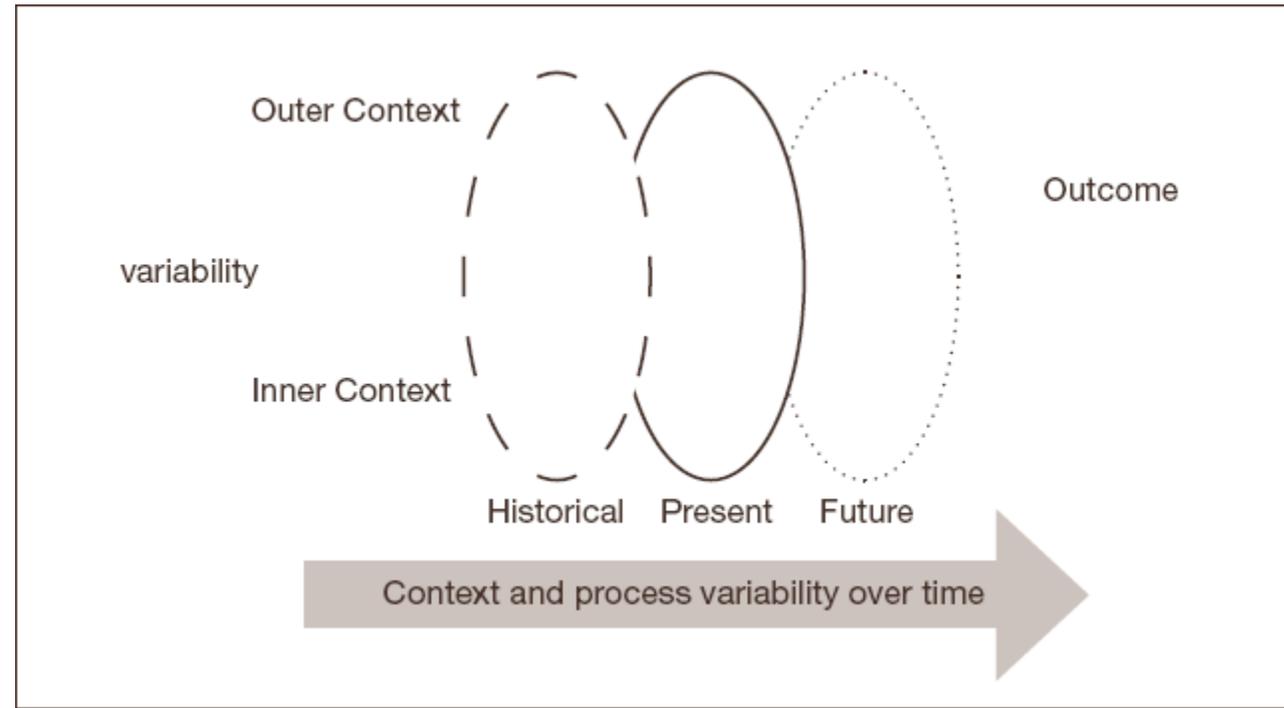
- Longitudinal process case studies are typically a minimum of 2 years (some 10 years)
- Focus on: organisational transformation, development and strategic change
- Strategic *decision making* and *processes* studied in tandem
- Useful for exploring organizational conditions for innovation and creativity

“The becoming of things...Catching reality in flight”



Professor Andrew Pettigrew

Context and process over time



Components of Analysis: Context and Process (adapted from Pettigrew 1985: 37) by Nelson, L. *Managing the Human Resources in Organisational Change: A Case Study, Research and Practice. Human Resource Management*, 2005; 13(1), 55-70.

The challenge of context-sensitive, process research in organisations

The only way to reveal the relationship between multiple levels of context in the interaction field is to have a time series sufficiently long to show how firm, sector, and economic levels of context interact to energize change processes...

At the most general level, process questioning involves the interrogation of phenomena over time using the language of what, who, where, why, when, and how.

(Studying Organizational Change and Development: Challenges for Future Research, Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron, 2001. *The Academy of Management Journal*.)



The Dynamics of Collective Leadership and Strategic Change in Pluralistic Organizations
Author(s): Jean-Louis Denis, Lise Lamothe and Ann Langley
Source: *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Aug., 2001), pp. 809-837
Published by: [Academy of Management](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3069417>
Accessed: 19/12/2013 10:52

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Lean in healthcare: The unfilled promise?

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Challenges and questions for organizational researchers

- ▶ Shortening research timeframes in organisations for rapid reevaluation
 - ▶ For case studies: What organizational levels to include (e.g. elite bias if only interviewing at the apex)?
 - ▶ Are secondary documents alone enough? Or do we need empirical data?
 - ▶ What could be missed if conducting research in shorter timeframes? (e.g. history of the organisation)
 - ▶ Are multiple 'rapid' case studies practical? What resources are required?
 - ▶ What aspects of process and change to 'zone in' on?
 - ▶ What to leave out?
 - ▶ Risk: not capturing the role of context, power and history



Ways forward

Move away from seeing short timeframes as limitations (Pink and Morgan 2013).

“One could do a participant-observer study from now to doomsday and never come up with a sliver of ethnography...We are fast losing sight of the fact that the essential ethnographic contribution is ***interpretive*** rather than methodological” (Wolcott 1980; 56).

Ways forward

- ▶ Learn from developments and discussion in rapid research
- ▶ Critical analysis of the use of the 'rapid ethnography' label
- ▶ In-depth exploration of how rapid ethnographies and case studies (and their findings) are used in healthcare
- ▶ Improvement in reporting (timeliness *for whom?*)

Avoid missed opportunities



Room discussion: key questions

- ▶ What topics are more / less appropriate for rapid ethnography or organizational research in healthcare?
- ▶ For case studies: Is it always necessary to go out to the field for long periods of time (e.g. might we also apply virtual methods, more tele-depths, online tools, social media, documents?)
- ▶ When shortening research timeframes: What are the biggest risks? What are the potential gains?
- ▶ To retain quality and independence, what must social scientists, such as ethnographers, ensure they do in rapid evaluations?
- ▶ Does study of "big themes" rapidly necessarily mean "big research teams"?

Thank-you for your time and
participation!

Comments and questions
welcome

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