Handbook of Anthropology in Business

written by Gareth Hamilton
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When a colleague saw this book in my hand, she exclaimed, 'Wow, it's like a Bible!' – referring, of course, to the book's size. However, metaphorically, I do wonder if it might also indeed represent some variety of text to which to refer to when in need of encouragement, advice or simply information.

To summarise the book – let alone pass judgement on it – is no simple task due to its diversity, with over 800 pages and 44 substantive chapters (not including

I wish to highlight very briefly why I wanted to read it (being from my literary studies days fond of a reader-response point of view). I live in a country (Latvia) where anthropologists are much in demand. Some of this relates to critique of the social issues it faces, but much has to do with engagement in business, whether directly or via the media. Personally, I have, for example, given [talks](#) to businesspersons and the press, and been [interviewed](#) by the latter on related issues. Despite a PhD focused on business persons – albeit on an intimate level with mostly self-employed persons – I have often wondered how to engage effectively with large commercial interests with foci different from academic departments. Further, our students work with business in practical research courses (on [financial literacy](#), funded by the [Association of Latvian Commercial Banks](#)), and one wonders how best to train them for this and for life after graduation.

This book offers ample examples to satisfy the need 'in' and 'for' business much more. The title itself reflects this – 'anthropology in business' rather than 'business anthropology' – where people might study business etc. academically but equally remain firmly ensconced within companies doing research, or indeed on the fluid boundaries of the two.

The book deals with theoretical questions (especially in the first section), provides examples of good (and not so successful) practice throughout, offers examples of methodological innovation and is heavily based on people's experiences even when straddling these two worlds.

The volume represents a 'one-stop shop' perhaps, seemingly in mind given its title as a 'handbook'. The authors themselves use the metaphor of the city (originally from Wittgenstein) with 'anthropology and business as labyrinths of the old and new' (p. 16). Certainly, when moving from chapter to chapter and section to section one gets the sense of going down useful alleyways, where there are often

surprises and some delights. The thematic range of its contents (design, medicine, marketing, family business), its geographic scope from Japan to Norway, Finland to Australia (despite the editors' suggestion there may be a slight North American bias) and its accessible style can only be gleaned from some detailing of each of its chapters. While hard to sum up in often one sentence, I have done this because it would be a shame if some were ignored, and I further strongly believe such an approach, in not using a survival-of-the-fittest selection method, reflects the deep and often sensitive insights that anthropology (or ethnography) can bring to their world of business.

The book is divided into five sections with a relatively equal spread of the 44 chapters throughout. The first, 'dynamics of tension, forces of change' is certainly engaging and vital reading no doubt for the business anthropology novice. What links these chapters generally is not only their well-referenced historical and theoretical detail but also that the authors mostly (and helpfully) offer experience-based approaches from their own work so that the reader is not left wondering how the ideas suggested might work in practice.

> *The section begins with the sensible advice from Baba (pp. 43-68) who suggests that we need to 'deanthropologise' ethnography lest businesspersons link it to older, stereotypical ideas of the discipline and do not want ethnographic analysis.*

Photo by Jon Anderson

Then, arguing that business anthropologists should fully engage in the tasks carried out by their informants, as part of a wider discussion of what they are doing in and for business and which theoretical perspectives they should take, Moeran (pp. 69-81) also suggests that anthropology in business needs to reinvigorate academic anthropology, preparing students for the world outside academia, and engaging with academic colleagues, for example, while focusing on

its methodological advantages. Roberts (pp. 83-99) and Desjeux (pp. 100-15) provide an overview of the situations of anthropology in business in the UK and France respectively, with the former tracing the sometimes fraught developments while showing that this is clearly not a US-only branch of anthropology. Arnould and Thompson (pp. 116-34) demonstrate how culture has become much more important in business school approaches to consumer studies, its theoretical evolution while they question what will occur in the future. After taking us through a philosophical history of their separation, Patel (pp. 135-56) then calls for new, horizon-expanding syntheses between qualitative and quantitative research using 'hybrid "statistico-ethnographic" methods' (p. 148), principally based on Internet technology.

The second section, 'boundaries breached and blurred', gives examples of events at the demarcating lines between business and anthropology. Nafus (pp. 167-85), from Intel, describes her experiences of having to comment on quantitative data and whether this shows if a market is an 'emerging' one or not. She shows that economic data alone does not always reveal why markets adopt technologies such as mobile phones and how ethnographic approaches matter. Kimbel (pp. 186-201), using her own experiences with designing a service for befriending the elderly, shows practically how services can be developed better for the needs of the end users (for instance by imagining them as active users) by combining design with ethnographic methods.

In a lively-written case study of a large investment bank's IT supply issues, Ensworth (pp. 202-22) suggests her 'four-field body of knowledge' (p. 202) helps her regularly in the business world and shows how an ethnographic approach involving staff from various (previously hostile) partners solved problems that might not otherwise have been identified.

Pant (pp. 223-45), again offering experience from his own work with an Italian family business, suggests that anthropology can strongly enhance the practice of management consultancy.

Alami (pp. 234-46) shows how anthropology has moved, despite formerly being poorly represented, into business research within the healthcare sector, offering a much more in-depth view of patient practices, for example, even than interviewing where people's practice may differ from what they describe.

Based on a conversational format, Dicarlo, McGowan and Rottenberg (pp. 247-65) describe the experience of the introduction of teaching of ethnographic skills into a university design, engineering and commerce curriculum, which increased students' knowledge of the situations they were designing for and increasing their collaborative skills, useful for the world of work. McCreery and Yamaki (pp. 266-83) offer a view into a body of work on Japan, in Japanese published in the country, on ethnographic approaches to business in Japan, including the role of religion in Japanese business, and globalisation's effects on Japanese business practices. Cefkin (pp. 284-98), in a very practically useful chapter, rounds off this section, focusing on 'work practice studies', the practices involved in work itself and related social factors, including bringing up the issues met in Alami's chapter above on the difference between practice and informant's descriptions of what they do.

(Alenka Chocolate) Photo by Michael Fludkov

The third section, 'plying the trade', is a more heavily case-study based section. The editors' note that most chapters could have fit into this section, where the idea is not necessarily 'how to', but to provide the reader with examples. In any case, it offers interesting ways of doing things nonetheless. Kitner (pp. 310-20) uses examples from fisheries to computing to show the piquant issues of ethics when working with (and more precisely, inside) business and suggests how to cope with such. Cotton (pp. 321-35) takes a *longue durée* view, questioning what might happen, and what does happen, once anthropologists depart from their involvement with business, illustrated with an example from computer accessories designing and manufacturing.

Ailová, Cír and Sv. Gillárová (pp. 336-45) bring attention to the Czech Republic (on the 'periphery' as it is suggested), showing their involvement in business projects but question why there have not been more. Squires, Wasson and Jordan (pp. 346-61) show how students at the University of North Texas are better prepared through teaching for working with business, through 'merging theory and practice' (p. 359). McCabe (pp. 363-78), in an engaging example of how pet food manufacturers brand their products, shows how their key anthropological questions, themes and topics crop up in the formulating of how pets fit inside families as 'social connectors'. Agafonoff, Cayla and Heath (pp. 379-95) document the building of a Diageo marketing strategy for rum in Australia and how ethnographic sensibility can confound normal marketing strategies.

Cova (pp. 396-411) describes how HP's 12c calculator developed a cult following, people's multifaceted attachment to it, and how the company used ethnographic findings to relaunch it in a high-quality anniversary version. Erickson (pp. 412-28) describes the process of attempting to improve (if not completely successfully) the aeroplane travel experience for reduced mobility passengers for Boeing. Hepsø (pp. 429-46) describes his experiences as an anthropologist in a Norwegian oil company. Hunt and Barton (pp. 447-62), focusing on 'Britain' [sic], describe the development of the usage of cultural semiotics in marketing via, for example, the example of the skin care industry. The section closes with Hasbrouck and Scull (pp. 463-85) offering an example from the fishing industry on how collaborative, interdisciplinary working helped to develop sustainable fishing models in light of a global sustainability crisis.

The fourth section, 'the energy of memes', takes up Dawkins' notion and configures it as signs: 'discursive vehicles of accrued meaning with overlapping orbits of circulation' (p. 489). In the first chapter, Wilner (pp. 497-520) shows how anthropology is presented in US business media and the strange exoticisation of anthropologists involved in this. This is a chapter that all anthropologists might identify with and one that might leave the blood boiling. Neese (pp. 521-39) charts the term 'user' in design and how the concept affects the process of design. Hanson (pp. 540-55) describes her experiences of software firms using the

so-called 'Agile' design process. Tian (pp. 556-70) elaborates upon the development of business anthropology in the PRC, including education and teaching. Morais (pp. 571-87), based on experience in an advertising agency, describes how anthropologists can be involved in creating strategy in advertising.

Tamminen, Utti and Suikkanen (pp. 588-601) argue that 'national' as a category is still valid in consumer culture, using Finland as an example, (with its export 'Angry Birds', among others), while Shatokhina (pp. 603-18) suggests that *chez les voisins* 'Russianess' is important in the post-Soviet consumer environment, using, for example, the Alenka chocolate brand and focusing on the idea of 'ours'. Diamond et al. (pp. 619-37) details their study of the 'American Girl' brand of dolls, while Wang (pp. 638-57) describes the concept of 'live fieldnoting' and her use of Internet technologies to document things she notices to allow informants to participate more easily in research. Keeping the online focus into the final chapter, Caliandro (pp. 658-79) provides details of various aspects of Internet-based ethnography, including that of virtual worlds.

(American Dolls) Photo by In Sappho We Trust

The fifth section, 'muses for engagement', is designed to provide encouragement for people to keep on working between business and academic anthropology. Sometimes eclectic in style, it shows once again great diversity in many ways. Cochoy (pp. 689-703) uses the example of his experiences with the video game *Assassin's Creed II* to shed light on strategy. Malefyt (pp. 704-21) describes his experience of research on shaving for a grooming products company and the role of the senses in how men approach shaving. Darrah and Dornadic (pp. 722-36), via a serious of vignettes showing their own experience, give insight into the interactions between anthropologists and designers, and insurance companies among others.

Teitler (pp. 737-52) explains the usefulness of blogs in creating connections

between anthropologists working in ways connected to business and design.

Høyem (pp. 753-62) describes the vicissitudes of trying to understand fast food restaurants as an anthropologist. Moynié (pp. 763-74), an ethnographic filmmaker, talks about his 'ethnographic mojo' (pp. 765), his 'desire to be desired' and how he feels connected to his subjects. Kozinets (p. 775-86) again takes up Internet-based ethnography to detail his experiences working on Campbell's soup. O'Dell and Willim (pp. 787-99), with a starting point of the film *Kitchen Stories*, describes how Swedish cultural analysts have worked, and how the work itself has developed, in the post war period, focusing on the idea that ethnography should be 'composed'.

The editors have done a marvellous job at bringing this all together in a coherent way, and that main introduction, as well as those of the sections, links not only the texts in this 'city' but also to the broader discipline of socio-cultural anthropology in general (let alone business anthropology). In this sense, I would recommend it also to any university library as its contents, taken singly, or more probably as a whole, are bound to find interested readers.

Denny, Rita M. & Sunderland, Patricia L. (eds.). 2014. *Handbook of Anthropology in Business*. Left Coast Press Inc. 837 pp. Hb: $139.00. ISBN: 9781611321715.