

Master's Series on Field Research

A series of interviews with major figures in field research conducted in the early 1980s
by Peter Blanck

Transcript of an interview with Paul Lawrence



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Peter Blanck: OK. This is with Paul Lawrence on 1/15/82, and we'll start with the first question, just your definition of field research.

Paul Lawrence: Well, as you know my field of study is organizational behavior and to me within that context field research is simply studying behavior of people directly in organizations. It's anything that where you're, where you're in that organizational context setting gathering data. So it's very simple and operational. I think the times that doing research that way is most appropriate is, for my money, what you're doing what I call exploratory research. It's a, there are a lot of reasons to do it, but I think that's the most general powerful reason. When you're trying to understand some phenomenon that has not been very systematically studied you're trying to get an overview of, you know, how it works, under what conditions it occurs, what are the accompanying phenomena, what are the antecedents and the outcomes of something that's not very well understood. You can go into a field setting and just watch it unfold and understand it in its complexity even before you have even perhaps haven't identified what concepts are going to help you illumine that or what, even before you've formulated anything like a very tightly defined hypothesis about the phenomena. So it's best for exploratory research and you are, in field settings you're always dealing with a, you can have some focal variables that you're most interested in but you're going to be looking at a lot of variables. And so you're sort of forced to take a multivariate sort of systemic way of looking at what you're doing. I guess among other things you are interested in just my chatting about some of these things that come up in field research based on my experience with it. Site selection is terribly important. I think we all pick our sites to some extent by convenience and accessibility. I don't minimize that. You have to get in or you can't do the research but the more you can apply some of the criteria for selection that are based on a broader research design there's no question you're going to have, you're going to come out with findings that will have more power because you can say more about what this is an example of if you have some criteria selection built into your site selection. So I think it's worth giving that a lot of thought. I think it's worth going to some extra time and trouble to get into the sites that you have selected for design reasons, and it is one way of getting - holding some things constant and getting a lot more leverage out of your findings. As far as getting access, I don't think I have anything very unique to say about that. It is a troublesome thing. It does take time, you have to be patient, you have to try, but there's no substitute for going ahead and making the request, even if one is a little bit uneasy about being turned down and so forth. My experience is that the batting average of getting in is good enough so that you ought to just proceed and pop the questions, and if you are trying to get inside an organization, it's always a good rule of thumb to start at the top. It - it's very difficult if you get in a place where the original point of contact is in the junior levels. It's a fact of life that there's a power system in organizations, and the people who control the boundaries are the senior people., and, they have to be - sooner or later you have to get their agreement, and it's better to ask them first, instead of second, third, fourth, or fifth.

One thing that occurs to me in thinking about this interview and what might be useful - when I was a doctoral student, I did a lot of field work, and it was extremely valuable for

my education. And, I thought it might be of interest to spell that out a little bit. It's what I would call intensive field work is what I got exposed to.

There are all kinds of field work. Obviously, you can go into an organization, and have a half hour interview with each of ten people in a structured situation where you make an appointment ahead of time, and you go in and ask some standard questions, and you get their answers and walk out, and you've done your field work. That's one variety, I'm not knocking it, but the kind I'm thinking about, just to be sure we understand how it can work, is what I mean by intensive field work, is when you, you pick a unit, say it's a factory, and you're going to study it intensively, over multiple visits, over multiple visits, over multiple weeks, and your purpose is to get to know in depth that entire system, that entire organization as a ongoing system. And, I had experiences like that as a doctoral student, and I've - it's always been, really, one of the, you might say, just a kind of foundation of understanding organizations; it was built for me in that experience. And, what you have to do is you have to go in and hang around a lot, and sit down and talk to people at the bottom, at the top, at the staff groups, the specialists, up and down the chain of command, so that they really get to know you, they get to understand that they can talk to you candidly without having repercussions, and they test you, and see whether or not they can tell you something if it leaks back to them, or somebody drops a word that makes them think that you've been carrying messages around the system because you have to be very disciplined, to be a dispassionate, neutral observer that is not in itself, in yourself, influencing the organization; otherwise people won't tell you what they really think. But, I assure you that when you get to a point where you get to know enough of the people and really gain their trust, and they find that it is worth their time and trouble to talk to you because they get something out of it - they enjoy having an audience and sounding board - that you can get to a point where you go to one of these factories, and about a half, well that's not - probably a couple hours, you could touch base with 30 people in all parts of the organization and get an update on all the things going on; you know, all the rumors, all the confusions, all the tensions, the communications, the miscommunications, the people who're - who's fighting with whom, and who's getting along with whom, and what's going out the door, and what's not going out the door, and you really - it's a tremendous feeling to be able to understand the organization in that in depth way because you - and you learn about certain patterns that occur over and over again in organizations. You get to understand that what goes on when two groups are fighting each other, what stages they go through, and what all the machinations are, you can get to understand that; you get to understand how the chain of command can work when it's working well and when it's working in various kinds of dysfunctional ways, when it is distorting communications, or when communications are moving well through the system, you get to understand how small groups work in those settings, what the problems are of trying to introduce change. And I think the, you know, stuff like line staff relationships - I think it's an extremely valuable thing and that's where the intensive field work is. It's not - it's just one variety but it's one that I think we sometimes don't talk enough about and understand well enough so that people can use it a basic tool of learning about organizations in an in-depth fashion.

Peter Blanck: Do you want to talk specifically now about keeping on the topic of your doctoral training, specifically what you did at those times and how looking back on that now X number of years later how, what do you think of that research you did, how your ideas have changed.

Paul Lawrence: Well, I entered doctoral training in early 1947 as I remember and I got my degree in, I had my MBA at that time and got finished and got my degree in June of '50. There was a lot of emphasis on field work. The literature of organizational behavior at that time was of course much more limited than it is now. So, we didn't do as much reading books as we do nowadays simply because there weren't that many books to read on the subject, which gave us all that spare time to go out and observe organizations in action rather than reading about them. So, right from the beginning I remember, you know, we'd start out, often it would come up in the form of, in connection with the course we'd go out and get a case and that involved interviewing up to a point but then under the direction of people that I worked with, men like Fritz Roethlisberger, and this was just before Elton Naylor left the school so he was still around but not for very long after that, and more particularly I worked with George Lombard and Ed Lerner. They were putting together for the first time a new required course called "Administrative Practices" which was the first time a required course of this subject matter had been offered here. So, there was a need for a lot of new cases and we decided to set up a really two field sites where we did intensive work of this kind and then once we got this kind of saturation understanding we could pull out a case on this subject or a case on that subject out of these various settings and take a - it was simply picking some incident where you had a managerial choice factor but then you could array around that incident the whole contextual aspects of it that we had become acquainted with just in the course of soaking up daily all of the experiences of what was going on there. So, that was a big part of how we got trained. It was a - we'd come back from those sessions and we'd write up our field notes and we'd share them with our supervisors and then we'd sit around in a small group and discuss what they meant and what we ought to look for next and whether we were missing some important leads and whether or not, what would make a good teaching case and what would be some patterns that we could see that might take the form of a research report. And two, I, of course, eventually got a dissertation out of that one field site and what I had wrote it on was the study of the whole introductory process of bringing a new product into the factory that was actually designed there and all the blow by blow issues they had to work through to get it done. So, that had implications for improving management practices in that regard. And another one of these field sites, I and a couple colleagues got our first little publication out. A little book called "Management Behavior and Foreman Attitude". Or was it the other way around? I've forgotten. But it was an analysis of the foreman's role and the, how the quality of performance there was influenced by the behavior in the chain of command above him and the line staff relations around him and so forth. And it was a focus on the life of the line supervisor and what goes on there. So, those were two products and we actually got a book out before the dissertation. But after the dissertation was completed, I and another colleague eventually wrote that up into the first kind of full-blown research monograph that I was involved in publishing and that was done. So, it had multiple products. It

produced cases. It produced public research. It gave me a lot of understanding about organizational life and it - I know when I started out teaching I really felt fairly confident about what I was doing because you talk about organizations, I really felt I knew the beast. I had been around them enough so that I knew their typical problem areas and how they played themselves, the cycles that went on, vicious cycles, positive cycles and so forth.

Peter Blanck: Where did you move next in your history - in your personal history - in relation to field research? You had the supermarket book come out in '58, you said you must have done - .

Paul Lawrence: Yeah, I guess that was probably the next big field research that I did. [Phone rings.]

Peter Blanck: If you want to talk about how led into the supermarket study and what you were doing for the eleven years from '47 to '58 maybe.

Paul Lawrence: Well, I can't remember all that I think the - I was teaching mostly. I started teaching first year Administrative Practices in 1950 and was teaching - I was teaching throughout that time period. And I think I started that next significant size project around '53 and it didn't get published until around '57, '58, but it was under way about '53. And I had there, it was mostly serendipity. It was no great site selection. I heard that the senior person at this major supermarket chain was going to be introducing a significant amount of organizational reform and reorganization essentially geared to making the, for the first time, having overall store managers in each of their supermarkets and giving that individual a lot more local discretion for issues of managing the people in the store, having some decision about the kind of merchandise they were going to carry, the way they would display it and in other ways get more decentralized action. And this represented significant change because they had had a tradition of being very strongly guided from headquarters with district representatives traveling around and telling the people in the stores when to sneeze and when to blow their nose and all the rest and I am not exaggerating.

So, it was a change for a lot of people and I decided to be the researcher that would track that effort to significantly shift the whole decision process closer to the store level. And I guess what I learned there more than anything else - we were of course doing interviews with all these folks and, but I learned quite a bit about observation and trying to do systematic field observations. It is tricky and it's time consuming but I learned that you really could identify some strong patterns that you could get well documented on behavior patterns by doing some field observation work. Actually, I used a simplified set of observation categories that were borrowed from Freed Bales' framework at that - that he was using at that time for observing small group behavior and I adapted it for my own field observation purposes. I just took a little spiral notebook and kept my - I had a watch that had a nice big sweep second hand and I would hold this in such a way that I could keep making, for every line I dropped down in the page was as I remember thirty seconds

or so, maybe fifteen - I forgot how it worked - but, I'd draw a line down and put little symbols next to it as to who was talking about what and for how long and where the interruptions came from and coded the interaction between the district supervisor and the store manager, the newly appointed all purpose store manager. I was trying to find out if there really was a delegation of decision-making going on or not at a basic moment by moment behavioral level and the patterns began to emerge. And they were quite clear and it depended an awfully lot about who was the district manager and some

Paul Lawrence page

12

district managers understood what was wanted, they did shift their behavior, they did interact with the store managers in such a way that they helped him think through his decisions and supported him and proceeded to take over more responsibility for the store, and other, more traditional managers had - there were all kinds of instructions as to how they were supposed to do this, they were coached, they were trained, they were cajoled, they were evaluated, so forth and so on, to try and get them to supervise differently, and some didn't. They would pay quite sincere lip service to the - they would say "That's right, that's what we ought to do; it'll make for a better store, I believe in it, I'm a hundred percent behind, I'll do it at a time loss," and you go out and watch them interact with their subordinates, and it's simply - they did ninety percent of the talking, and they would, any question came up they'd provide the answers, and they'd come back the next time and make sure it was done the way they wanted it done. And, it was so that the - and I was trying to figure what makes and doesn't make for a significant change of that kind. And, I looked at all the surrounding activities they were trying to use to reinforce this, such as evaluation schemes, reward schemes, and training, coaching, modeling, you name it, they had a little bit of everything in there, and sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. But it was - in terms of field work - I think what I learned is that you can invent your own observation tools, you can't invent them before you get in the field because a lot of things - every field situation is bound to have its own characteristics, and you have to sort of go there and watch it a while and say, "What do I want to see here? What is the behavior that I'm trying to record? What would be the means, the tools that could help me capture the regularities here?" Because, you go into factories, and I've seen situations where the typical - the absolute average interaction between a foreman and whomever he's talking to may be no more than 4 seconds. That's the average. If you design an observation scheme that's designed to record an hour's worth of conversation, it isn't going to help you - you've got to get something that's geared to a 4 second interaction rate, and there's no way to know that until you get there. [Phone rings.]

Peter Blanck: A question that I was thinking of while you were talking about that - typically the response would be - but typically today most research is really not done that way in business schools. Why do you think we're moving in that direction? Obviously, there's the onset of the computer....

Paul Lawrence: You mean that intensive field work thing?

Peter Blanck: Most people are just willing to hand out these massive questionnaires or surveys and observation is only paid token lip service three or four days in a typical dissertation I think.

Paul Lawrence: Well I think it's - I think it's true that we don't do as much intensive field work as I experienced earlier in my career. We are essentially trying to find shortcuts, trying to see what we can get strictly through standardized questionnaires that we can scale and manipulate the numbers in all kinds of ways with the computer analysis. I think the computer has had a tremendous impact on our choice of method - a tool becomes available and we use more and other things less. I think the - and I think, I'm not knocking that but I think we have to recognize that you get a different kind of understanding of organizations using those more popular methods now than you do in more intensive field work. I think with field work you could get, you can get a more systemic understanding. You can get a more complex, rich understanding of the multiple levels of behavior. [Phone rings]

Peter Blanck: If you want to talk about moving into the next phase of your field research career and especially, I don't know whether it's premature to talk about the book that you did with Jay, but that was certainly a well received book. At least from what I hear, it was a major methodological change for you, it looked like.

Paul Lawrence: Well, I had done a piece of research with Arthur Turner that resulted in a monograph called "Industrial Jobs and the Worker" in which we had used a combination of questionnaires plus field observation of about fifty different kinds of blue collar jobs in a variety of industries where we were trying to find ways to scale the attributes of the work itself that would be most important to the way people would respond to that work situation. So, we had to spend a lot of time observing those jobs and seeing exactly what people did in those jobs and finding ways to scale that and then give questionnaires to people to find out how they reacted to all this as well as look at evidence like turnover and absenteeism and other indicators of worker response. To make a long story short, that research led to a set of ideas that eventually led to the work I did with Jay Lorsch- it came out as "Organization and Environment". Because in that earlier research in the field I had observed that based on different kinds of markets and different kinds of technologies we were seeing quite different kinds of management systems and I began to think about whether there was some pattern to this that wasn't the original point of why we were in there but I just began to see this, and again, field work kind of put me out of that. So I got thinking about it and reading about it and designed the research study and Jay was a doctoral student then. I got him involved and he helped me with it. That's a good example of site selection because I'd been in the field, I had some hypotheses about what we were looking for. We set it up so that we got a sample of companies or units within companies to look at that were distributed across some performance criteria - high or low performer type things in terms of economic outcomes and in terms of the kinds of rates of change, the amounts of uncertainty that were generated by that kind of business in terms of fast technical change, market shifts, things of that kind. So we went in with that kind of grid of circumstances that we were looking for, and we picked industries that varied on uncertainty, and we picked, within that industry, units that varied on performance. So, the whole design was built right into the

selection of the site, and once we did that, we could kind of put that issue aside, and go in and see what's there, and take a good look inside, and we used a variety of methods. We used questionnaires, we used extensive interviews, we used observations of group meetings of managers. The study focused mostly on managerial behavior, and we simply used the full gamut of methods, including archival evidence about economic outcomes. I think the - but I do think the thing that is interesting, maybe from this standpoint, is that I got the lead for the hypothesis from the earlier field research which was just an unexpected dividend from that research which led to the framework that gave us the basis of making those site selections which allowed us to highlight interesting contrasts between different kinds of organizations that led to our ideas about differentiation and integration and different orientations, and different functional groups, all that sort of thing. So, I guess it's an example of the fact that I've always argued that we do need to understand a mix of methods. There is no - we have to be careful not to be trapped by our methods into using a tool, regardless of what we're trying to do with it. And, that the - that almost any tool you use though for doing field work, anything you want to emphasize like questionnaires, or other things, I think it's very important to take the time to supplement your major methods with the backup method of some good old-fashioned interviews because it makes it much easier to communicate your findings, it helps you deal - it is the chief way you can communicate to practitioners, the managers who want to have some feel for what you're talking about and, if you give them quotes and people describing it, I think it helps you interpret your numbers. It's one of the ways that I found - one of the little tricks I've learned about interviewing, that I think it's helpful, as a researcher, when you're conducting research interviews, to think of your - the person on the other side of the table - you're trying to get them to be your research assistant, you're trying to get them to help you understand what's going on. And, if you think of it that way, sometimes you can actually get them intrigued, and say, "I'm just trying to understand this, and I'm a researcher, can you help me understand it?" You know, it's just a straightforward request for some enlightenment about a subject that that person probably knows a great deal more about it than you do. And, if you can get them responding to that kind of a lead, I think they then - that, you know, they assume some sense of concern about getting the story straight, and making sure you're not mixed up about it, and find out how it really works, and all those things that will help you get good data. And, I think we too often think of the person on the other side of the table as - the psychologists always use the terminology "subject", S one, S two, and so forth, and I think that might condition thinking a little bit, instead of saying, "Here's the person that's my research assistant trying to educate me about something he knows more about than I do," the merely occasional way to structure the interview. And, I think it's an important supplement to questionnaires, any other form and can often help you to avoid making, as a researcher, some pretty silly mistakes.

Peter Blanck: Are there any other topics on there that you'd like to talk about at some length - maybe training of doctoral students, or, in more detail, some of the fieldwork you were doing, or currently are doing. Feel free to go into any of that.

Paul Lawrence: How much more time do we have?

Peter Blanck: As much as you want. We can go as long as you want.

Paul Lawrence: Well, the only - the only thing about my current work that might possibly be of interest is that I've combined quite traditional historical research on organizations with fieldwork on their current issues and current problems. So, it's sort of trying to do - most of it's looking back through time through the records, in terms of history, but kind of bringing it up to some contemporary events by adding field work in those same organizations on it as a way to bring you as close as possible to the present circumstances. So, I think field work can add on to and hook on to other methods like history, like, certainly, laboratory work. I think a - another thing I've been involved in is action research in the field, and I've done quite a bit of that one time or another. That has some various special problems, and I think that it's a.... By "action research", I better say that what I mean is that one is in there as a participant in the affairs where you're in there to be a - in a role as a consultant or in some other way as an active advisor trying to be of help to the organization you're working with, even as you record and document, and keep a careful research record of the events. So, you're there both as a participant and as a researcher. It is hard to keep those roles sorted out. Anybody that thinks it's easy is kidding themselves. The roles do complicate life. It is a rather humbling process usually because what you're usually documenting is the fact that it's very hard to change organizations, that, when you stay with it and look at the consequences, it keeps us humble. But, I think it is argued that that is one way to learn about organizations is to try to change them, and that's an old adage that comes down from Kurt Lewin's days, and there's truth to that. I don't think - there are other problems about action research. It's hard to get clearance on the data. It is - because it's usually pretty sensitive for the company involved. It does lead people to look at that kind of research and say, "Does that meet the usual standards of objectivity?" and there are good reasons to ask those questions.

My experience is that if you want to get the findings out of action research, you better let them age for a little while, and then come back to them later on. Both, it'll help you get the clearance, and it will make you more objective when you don't have as much of your own ego involved in the outcomes as you do at the time, and you can stand back and look at it in a little more dispassionate way. So, I think it's the type of research that takes a lot of time. Action - it's online, so you got to let some things evolve. That takes time. Then, I think you almost always have to age the findings before they're - before you're going to get them published. I think the - I think very good, speaking of doctoral training, I think - I feel somewhat remiss myself in working with our doctoral students here that I haven't done a more systematic job of giving people as rich an experience of field work 'cause I think we should be able to. We give them a lot of field work, but I don't know that we always do it as systematically and as extensively as we should. And, I aspire to do more of that. I think the - but it is excellent training, I think. It not only teaches you a lot about organizations, but it teaches you some good habits of maintaining your research documentation. You have to do your field notes everyday, religiously, or you lose them. You can retain them in your mind for a couple of hours, but that's about it. If you wait till the next morning, they're gone, and the tape recorders help, but one trouble with a tape recorder, it collects so much information that you always have trouble sorting it out and figuring out what to do with it after you got it. So, I still believe that,

for many purposes, note taking is still the best way, and the reconstruction of the conversations as soon as possible afterwards is the best way to do your field documentation, and it's a good thing to learn too.

Peter Blanck: What are some of the other typical field problems that a new field researcher would face, the typical doctoral student going out today in his or her field?

Paul Lawrence: Well, one thing is that you feel awkward when you go into a place and you're there to be an observer and not a part of the action. People don't understand that role. They feel awkward around you because they don't know what you're there for. You know, they can't understand that - just soaking stuff up. That makes you feel awkward, and you feel useless, and you wish to hide somewhere. And, you just have to confront that feeling, and recognize that that's one of the prices of doing it, and forget it, keep going. So, it is an awkward thing, but people do get used to that. And, you'll find that, you know, you can build good relationships where you can learn a lot. I think it's hard when you're in the field not to become identified with some subset of the organization. The people who are friendliest to you first, you know. Boy, that feels so good to have some friendly faces when you go in there to a bunch of strangers that it's very easy to become identified with their causes, with their outlook, and you begin to look at those people they call enemies as, you know, that are partly your enemies. And, you have to force yourself to go over and spend a lot of time hanging around the enemies until they get to be friends too. So, you can open up communication with them as well as with the other folks, so that - and it's really a great achievement when you can, you know that the two groups are in an absolute cold war, or sometimes more than that with each other. And, you can walk in there, and make the rounds, and everybody'll tell you what's going on, what's the latest scoop on those SOBs down the hall, and you walk out of there and start walking down the hall, and they can see you down there carrying those same conversations with the enemy. And, you know, when you come back over there, and they don't say, "What the hell were you doing down there?" instead of saying "fine, now we'll tell you the next round of events," you know you've got something accomplished. You can cross the trenches, cross the no man's land, and get the information on both sides. And, it's - so, you have to manage your own identification process very carefully.

Peter Blanck: What about ethical problems? Confidentiality?

Paul Lawrence: Oh, it gets complicated. I think you have to think about that very hard before you start. Then you have to make your commitments to people about what ground rules you're going to play by, and then you're locked in, you have to stick with them. And, sometimes you wish you could get out of them because it's costing you some good information, or, in other ways limiting what you can do to serve your own purposes. But, there are different ground rules for different kinds of research. With some ground rules that I've worked under, you say to each and every individual, what I learned from you will be shown to absolutely no one else until you have gone over each and every line of it and tell me it's okay. Right down to the individual. So, you get clearance one by one. That's a pretty demanding way of getting data, and yet, I've done that, and it can be done. There are other circumstances where I think it is reasonable and not - as

long as people understand what the ground rules are - to say, "I'm trying to understand this overall situation, and when finish, we're going to clear it with so and so, and that person is going to act as the agent of the whole organization to clear this," and we will disguise it so that he will assure that it's disguised in such a way that it can't come back to any individual because any individual's comment is going to be thrown into a bunch of others and scrambled up so that there's no - you don't have to worry about any adverse consequences." So, you got to design your ground rules for confidentiality, based on the particular circumstances, what kind of data are you going to get, what kind of findings you want to report, what kind of specificity you want to put into it. But, if you want to describe an organization in such a way that your really describe the organization and its players, there is no way, just that statement by itself says that anybody who's in that system can look at your report and say, regardless what the name is on there, "This is so and so, and this is so and so." And, you know, they're all doing their individual roles as, it's obvious and conspicuous who is who. When you want to have reports of that kind, you have to face the fact that you have to go on a one by one clearance process, with all the time consuming. You write it all up, and you cut it into little slivers, that - just those quotes that you want to use of this individual and you just patch all those together. And, then the question comes, "Does that tell them anything?", because you can't tell what's going on, what's surrounding, what's the context is. How much context can you show of that person without saying something about the person down the hall as part of the context, you know. So, it gets complicated, but I think that doesn't mean that it can't be done, and it is done.

Peter Blanck: Basically it's very hard for the die-hards, some of the die-hards on the other side of the river to see a difference between the journalist who goes in and does an expose on an organization as opposed to some of the softer field research that goes on this side of the river. And obviously, they have their heads in certain directions and heads are in different directions over here but I do think that's a common idea. Maybe you can address what in your mind differentiates good from bad field research or whether this other type of sort of journalistic sensational....

Paul Lawrence: Well, I think it is in the - it comes down essentially to the professional standards that the individual brings to the work and the purposes they're trying to serve with this work. If you're trying to simply attract a lot of attention in a media sense, you know, you have to, according to the current ground rules, you know, sort of add something that has some sensational aspect to it. I don't - I think that the - don't, you know, whether the thing is sensational or not is kind of beside the point. What is behind that question is really whether people being rigorous in the care and accuracy in with which they're reporting going on and if the accurate and rigorous reporting leads to something that attracts a lot of attention, so be it. If it does, fine, if it doesn't, that's got nothing to do with the question of rigor and accuracy. I think that any time you rely on a human observer as the instrument of inquiry, there will inevitably be questions, perfectly reasonable questions, raised about the precision of that observer. I think it's why I think part of field research training has to put a lot of emphasis on keeping the record straight, getting your documentation done, keeping your, when you're quoting people, quote them as it came out. And, if you - and I think that the one thing that I try to emphasize with doctoral students that good researchers don't fight their data. Why fight it? What you're after it is the way it is! If you start fighting your data and get in your mind that somewhere or other the world isn't supposed to be that way, I'm supposed to make it

look a little different. The only person you're kidding is yourself. Research is a question of understanding phenomena, and quality researchers, researchers that develop a sound basis for a good reputation are ones who don't fight their data, they go with it, and go with the grain and see what it is, and have the openness of mind to observe it for what's there and to capture it in a form that, then, becomes useful to other people.

Peter Blanck: What is it that - so that's one of the things you find most satisfying about doing field research actually capturing what's going on. And you also mentioned understanding, really understanding social systems and social hierarchies in organizations. What other sorts of things are most satisfying for you in field research?

Paul Lawrence: Well, I think that field research is not unique in this respect, but it is possible in field research to pick topics for study that have the attributes of being able to, as you learn more about them, you can both make a contribution to theory, to the general knowledge and also a contribution to a problem. And it is possible to combine research inquiries that combine those two purposes in field research. It isn't the only way you can do it - you can do it in laboratory research and so forth. I don't know, I guess I'm a little prejudiced but I think field research is more apt - that you're more apt to find ways to combine those two in a single project. So, that's one plus. I think it also makes it somewhat easier to bridge between your purposes as a researcher and your role as a teacher. Field research is - you're trying in the first instance to get research findings out to make a research product that adds to knowledge, but in the course of doing that you can learn things that enrich your capacity as a teacher and you often as a byproduct can come out with teaching materials that are useful in class. So, I think it makes it somewhat easier doing that kind of research to bridge between those two aspects of an academic life.

Peter Blanck: The future of field research - you had mentioned how this new video explosion is going to influence the way that people do research now that more and more companies are aware about employee satisfaction and keeping in touch with employee needs and manager needs and growth awareness stuff, how is that going to influence organizations' perceptions of researchers coming in and doing field research?

Paul Lawrence: Well, one thing that I think is beginning to happen - you commented earlier on the observation that nowadays questionnaires are a very popular form of doing research and it lends itself - the data come out of it in a manner that is more easily quantitatively manipulated. But I think that there is a countertrend developing now toward more use of - in contemporary research topics, anthropological field methods - after all, they were the people that had been most consistently dedicated to field research over the years and certainly learned a lot about how to do good field research. We have drawn on that as one of our basic disciplines to learn from. But I think that the - that there is a lot more talk about it. If you look at the topics that come up in professional meetings now, you see more evidence of that. The interests - things like understanding organizational cultures. Well, how do you do that? You probably in most instances have to do some direct observation and interviewing. The whole trend to try to understand the myths, the norms, the rituals, the latent belief patterns of an organization requires a lot of that kind of work. If you are trying to get any kind of a more latent phenomenon, asking

to check one of five boxes on a questionnaire is unlikely to capture it for you. So, the topics that are being studied more are pushing it back to those methods. So, I think that these things come and go and I think that it's swinging back in that direction and I think that the emphasis on applied work, trying to find ways in which the behavioral sciences can be of more use in contemporary affairs - that is also leaving us more into the field because that is where the problems are and that is where you have to study and learn about them to get into applied work. So, I think that there are a number of trends that are leading to that and I think that there was a while that some schools felt as a matter of pride in the product of their doctoral students that if a dissertation wasn't a dissertation if it wasn't full of a lot of numbers and computer calculations and that as a qualitative study, no matter how carefully done and how rich of a field experience - that may be fine, but it is not a dissertation. It is not doctoral work. Well, I think that is a parochial view and I think that more first-class schools are recognizing that it is much too limited a definition of research. We learn about affairs around us in many different ways and we can't - it is stupid to preclude the foray of research apparatus that is being developed to lead to good research.

Peter Blanck: This whole push that we're both experiencing - this interdisciplinary push from both sides of the river - do you think that it will become more apparent as people from both sides of the river look to all of the disciplines for ways of doing research?

Paul Lawrence: Yeah. I think so. I think that field work tends to lead you into multidisciplinary kinds of issues. You need concepts from a variety of disciplines to take account of something that is there for analysis, from the level of the individual, to the group, to the larger system, you have to move back and forth between levels of analysis to understand it. You need concepts and methods drawn from many disciplines. I think that that is characteristic of applied work. The real world doesn't come up in nice little compartments saying, "This is an issue of psychology and this is an issue of sociology." Obviously, those are just complex problems.

Peter Blanck: One final question and then feel free to talk about anything else that you want to. What do you think is the real hot field research going on today? Who is doing some interesting work, people that you know, things that will really have an impact on the way that people view field research techniques or interesting projects in the future?

Paul Lawrence: I am not sure that I can give a very good answer. One thing that we haven't talked about that was used for many years - I am beginning to see a couple of signs of this picking up - is what is called participant observation, which is not so much action research *a la* the consulting role but just going in as a member of the workforce and keeping a documented track of what you can see from that kind of a working role in an ongoing organization. But I see a couple of things in the literature lately where some people are going back and doing more of that. It is a pretty time-consuming method, again. I saw one item that said that somebody got a book out and had gone back to a

factory where they did - there was a fellow named Roy that did participant observation or something over thirty years ago, and somebody is going to come back as a worker in the same department where Roy did his original work and he's got a book out it now. I haven't read it, but I guess the point is that not much had changed. But the - I see those sorts of straws in the wind. I don't know of any one project which is going to have the kind of milestone impact let's say, looking back, we can look at the obvious things like the Hawthorne studies or other comparable things - the early work of Lewin with boys' clubs and so forth. I don't see anything of that kind, but that doesn't mean that such new things aren't out there. I am just not aware of any.

Peter Blanck: Do you think that this Japanese approach to management is just a fad or a swing in the opposite direction, or do you think that this is a case where people really are getting involved from all levels of the hierarchy?

Paul Lawrence: Well, there is no question of the capacity of the Japanese to be effective competitors, and the second fact that one of their - clearly, one of the secrets to their success is the way that they manage people. It has put a lot of leverage on that topic and it has brought it front and center to American managers currently in a way that I don't think is going away any more than whenever somebody finds a better way to do something, the rest of the world has to pay attention to it, and I think that this is a - it is not anything that is unique to Japan. I mean, those are things that, while there is some cultural conditions there that make their ability to do some of these things - it is a little easier perhaps than it would be in this country. I don't think that there's any reason to think that it is unique and only possible in Japan. So, no, I don't think that it is a temporary thing. As long as they are such powerful competitors, we're going to have to pay attention.

Peter Blanck: Okay. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about, or make a summary statement? Feel free....

Paul Lawrence: No, I think that the - I don't doubt that you're getting a lot of different kinds of things discussed that are triggered by the way with field research, and I would simply emphasize that that is such a variable category that I'm very pleased that you're doing what you're doing, partly because I think you should help us understand that many varieties of it, that it is not a unitary thing, and, that is one of things that, of course, adds to it's value is that it comes in many different forms. I think one mistake that people are apt to make, and I mention this earlier, but I wanted to emphasize it, is to design their research, and do all their thinking about what the questions are, and how they're going to collect the data, and so forth, without getting through the door of the place they want to get the data, to take a look at what's going on there, so that they are - their plan isn't, you know, completely out of phase with what's there. And, the more they hang around there, then they will begin to find, you, know, things like these unobtrusive observations that have been written about. Very valuable suggestions come out of that. You don't discover those things - the unobtrusive measures - until you've been around a place for a while, and I think

that's - unfortunately too many people think they have to have it figured out before they open the door.

Peter Blanck: OK. Thank you. That was very interesting.