

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 Jeff Sonnenfeld



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Peter Blanck: This is Jeff Sonnenfeld on January 26th. I don't know if you're getting me at all. And we'll start with the first question - and, I guess it's Jeff's definition of field research.

Jeff Sonnenfeld: Well, I'd say a hard topic to define, particularly for academics, since they don't spend a lot of time in the field. It seems that often work in the field - the value of work in the field is most appreciated by farmers more so than academics that - of course they have a different field experience, but they certainly, I think, see something in a natural environment that a lot of academicians miss out. There's, in fact, many researchers were clinging desperately to that old Lewin, Kurt Lewin aphorism, that there's nothing so practical as good theory saying, "Well, that was sufficient view of the world of practice and of the natural setting." But, in fact, the full context of that quote actually shows that there's a - Lewin there was talking about a very complex set of interdependent tasks between the practitioner and the theorist. And, that's something that is often missed, and it's unfortunate, but that theorist has to contribute to the practitioner as well as the practitioner to the theorist; I think a good intermediary there is the field researcher, someone who sees the practitioner and the theorist, and can contribute in both directions by trying to speak both languages, can integrate there well. Examples are, to turn to medicine and to think of the advances Louis Pasteur brought out by looking at very field, very real, applied kinds of problems, whether or not they were dog bites, or spoilage of milk, or things that led back to some very basic learning, and understanding bacteria - advances that hadn't come out of the laboratories. And, those sorts of things still take place today; there's still a lot of innovation that takes place in the shop floor, outside of the research and development labs. There's a lot of "end user" modification of equipment, and those kinds of things remind us that there is, I think, a lot of contributions out in the field, which can feed back to theorists, so that you could say that the efforts that take place inside the laboratories and the libraries are mutually enriching with the efforts that take place in the field. But, now, if I mention libraries and laboratories and field, well then that implies that I recognize the value of those other two places to gather research data. When is - when are they appropriate, or, more so, when is the field appropriate?

That gets to your next question which is when do - when can you take best advantage of field work. And, I think there are really two criteria involved there. One of them has to do with the specificity of the research question. And, the second one has to do with the skills of the researcher. If you look at both of those areas, you have some feel for whether or not field research makes sense at a given point in a project. Certain people through their disposition, or their background, just may not currently have the kinds of mix of personal or intellectual, or whatever skills it takes to have a successful experience in the field, and the specificity of the question then, as the first point there, has to do with whether or not you may want to look at very carefully controlled variables, as opposed to having this whole murky set of inter-relationships where it's hard to understand exactly what's going on. When you take a look at how those two criteria come together, you see three basic uses, I think, of field research.

Now, those three uses are - first, there is a traditional use which was very descriptive, and much of that descriptive work was to either sell the importance of a certain topic, or as some sort of anecdotal support where the field work served as an illustration of the theoretical or laboratory derived bit of learning, but it didn't often stand on it's own. And, that, perhaps, is sort of the most commonly accepted version where people of virtually any methodological persuasion will allow for a descriptive study to fit in support of some other kind of research.

The second type, which is much more controversial type, is theory-generating field research. And there, as with the first type, the actual question to be explored in the field work was very broad because you're not exploring a question, you're just presenting a photograph of something. In theory-generating research, or what has been called "grounded theory", people are very interested in trying to be as inductive as possible, and they don't take a lot of carefully prescribed questions to the field, and they have some general notions, and some will even argue for very much of a "tabula rasa" to just go out there and experience. But, I think, if someone's really honest, they have a set of theories, and they might as well be explicit about them in advance, that they are carrying some values to the field. But, nonetheless, they're trying to limit how tightly defined those questions are. Theory generating-research is, I think, terribly valuable if you consider other places the theory comes from, theory often comes from people often sitting around on nicely stuffed and padded arm-chairs, hypothesizing about the way things might be. And, that could be derived from their own personal slice of life that they've experienced with Piaget's three children. Or, it could be from logic; it could be computer simulations. Well, I don't understand why those are more valid sources of theoretical hypotheses than empirical work in the field. And, some good examples of that would be the Hawthorne studies, say a couple words about them in a few minutes there, but there the effort was, originally, to study physiological factors in the workplace, and as the studies evolved, began to take a look at all sorts of issues in the social setting that hadn't been anticipated, and that they wound up being hypothesis-generating about an entirely different set of variables that were even conceived of it in advance.

The third type, if we first have descriptive, the second theory-generating, the third type of field work which I've seen is something which is less controversial, but not as widely accepted as the first, and that's the implementation field work. It's when there is theory or laboratory research that has become fairly well established and documented a lot of different artificial settings, and now a responsible academic, or an enterprising academic, might see that well the next important step would be to, before selling this stuff, commercializing it and saying to the world of educators or management, or whoever would be the consumers of this great advance in social science - would be to try to pilot it in the field, see how these things work. And, you could think of examples in job satisfaction, or in motivation, or in leadership, things in this particular subject matter where it's been very helpful, and where people have tried to implement things. In trying to implement things, they've seen these trials kick up some new variables, some new wrinkles that, fundamentally alter some of the variables that were well-identified. When they looked at leadership, independent of the group, they understood something about leadership traits of this particular individual. When they thought of what this group

faces, and put this individual back into the group, they realized that some groups require one sort of individual, some groups require another, and sometimes those groups change, and sometimes, if you look at what settings those groups are in, then, which would be the next stages is how the context of the groups feeds all back into leadership, and those are the kinds of things that are, not only not likely to come up in the laboratory, they're impossible to completely simulate in a laboratory.

So, there is something about the criteria and something about the types of field research which have come out. The contributions of field work, then, most simply are, it's helpful in the kind of research which is on a frontier of knowledge that would mean that the questions probable were more general set of research questions - being on a frontier, it, of course, is helpful that this - an applied social problem is investigated because the field is taking you that much closer to application, and, if you are interested in some more immediate implementation, of course, field work is critical. If it's more abstract, you'd think, "Okay, we don't need to worry about how to implement this so soon." And, for interdisciplinary work, field research makes an awful lot of sense because it requires such a mix of perspectives, takes sometimes anthropological methodology, or somewhat psychoanalytic methodology all at the same time, as well as pulling different kinds of theory that may help enlighten rather try to prove or disprove a certain hypothesis. The idea is to try to pull as many different things as possible into the situation to understand that complexity rather than to learn more about the theories, to learn more about the phenomena. And, the conditions themselves have meaning. If you think of how an ethologist would study a caged, incarcerated animal in a zoo versus what they see in a natural field setting, well you'd see a lot more about how an animal deals with crowding, chickens in a coop, or whatever, and it doesn't tell you all that much about how these animals interact naturally, what their own dynamics would be were they in the habitat that they're structured for. In field research, that in the same way, I think, when it's with people rather than zoological animals or things, brings out a certain complexity that you may want to capture; sometimes you don't want to capture that complexity and that's when you don't want field research. One is the complexity itself; you don't want to minimize, you don't want to reduce, you don't to control variables so much as you want to - the field is the phenomenon, the complex interplay of variables is the exact substance you want to capture, instead of avoid. And, interaction effects and murkiness is critical because what field research is bringing out is the richness of the mosaic rather than the color of a particular tile in the mosaic.

The Hawthorne studies took place and - in the mid 1920's, early 1924 to 1933, at Western Electric's Hawthorne works, which is a huge, at the time, plant employing 40,000 people. It was a city within a city. And, there was a real life there, and that was also the central, the original manufacturing facility for telephones in the country. Researchers from the National Research Council and from MIT went out there to help people from Western Electric, trying to figure out how to make workers more productive. And, the prevalent notions of the time were very much dictated by Taylorism, the scientific management principles that workers are an appendage to the machine, and the outsiders who had impact in the work place were not behavioral scientists. In fact, behavioral scientists

didn't have an awful lot of exposure to the workplace unless they had some working parents that support them through school.

But, beyond that, the work place was the domain of managers, the domain of sometimes, some enterprising labor economist - there was an awful lot of that at the time, but, certainly, the industrial engineers. And, this work began with very much an industrial engineer orientation; what can we learn about the physiological factors - about stress, and about illumination - the lighting. And, as they progressed, they found that there were a whole bunch of other factors - the common lore about the studies focuses on the illumination studies in particular. Many people in a social psych. class or wherever hear about how the intensity of the lighting was increased, and workers worked harder, and the intensity of lighting was decreased, and workers continued to work harder, and they realized that there was something going on there which was more important than how many foot panels were present. And, in fact, when they reduced it down to something about the intensity of the moonlight, people were still working very hard, and work started to fall off there just because people couldn't see what they were doing anymore.

But, in interviewing, people - some of the researchers suggested that this may have had something to do with a sense of flattery or the fact that they even cared or - a lot of these hypotheses have been offered since. The original researchers suggested that there was something going on in the social system here which is unexplained by our physical conditions, and we capture that. And, that was a bit of serendipity that you would get from field research that you don't get when you have a very precise set of questions, and you're looking at it in a lab. So, that that then generated a - several very important chunks of subsequent research, four stages, five stages after that. The most famous was to isolate a group of five assemblers and to study, again, still more physiological factors; they studied the length of the work day, and a bunch of things like that - uh - rest breaks and various physical conditions. The one thing that was special about that group, because no matter what conditions they varied, people were essentially working harder, except at one point where in all the perks were taken away, and people were put in very difficult work conditions, that productivity did drop off a little, but even at its worst point, it was still thirty percent above what it was when these people were back out on the main shop floor. And, that what was learned was that there was a certain social group that had formed that these five assemblers, operators; they were called operators, they assembled little switches, little relays; that's why it was called the relay-assembly test room. It was a test room that was removed from the main floor. But they were good workers and I've interviewed them to find out why they got involved with the study. Essentially, nobody really wanted to get involved in it; they were a little bit afraid. There's tremendous fear of supervision; it's a paternalistic company, people liked senior management in the company overall, but the conditions at the time were very hostile. They had some of the scientific management notions that workers - the variation of human behavior was to be controlled and cut back and that a good way to do this was to make an example out of a woman every morning, at least one, and they'd have these task masters going around and driving people into tears, and therefore, people would work harder because they'd - on account of this lean and hungry principle, they'd be working out of fear. And, when supervisors came around to wrestle up volunteers for study, they're a little bit worried

about that, too - you know, what's being done to us; there wasn't a lot of trust between supervisors and workers. Well, they were put in a very democratic system where any changes which were done to them in the test room was discussed with them, and they had suggestions. They were very much involved in the research process, and they also were treated kindly, and those issues about supervision about their social group - there was an awful lot of study - running through, they had observers sitting there watching these women all day long, taking notes, logs when everything they talked about, where they went, what they did, their heartbeat rates were measured, what they ate for dinner, what boyfriends they were seeing, where they were dancing - collecting all this information, and then - which we have all here in the archives. If you go through it, you find that the folks who wrote up the report did a stellar job of really distilling out issues such as leadership, and the emerging social group of - in here, in this test room. This led to some subsequent studies in counseling, and the bank-wiring observation room that George Homans started to do some of his pioneering work on informal groups and social structure and roles and things like that - interactions, feelings - but beyond all that was that there was an awful lot of learning which has contributed to the fundamental principles now of work redesign, quality of work-life issues, job satisfaction studies, research on leadership, research on methodology itself, having to do with this artifact between the researcher and the subject of the research. Studies of power and influence that - and, I guess, most importantly seeing the organization in the work place as a social system, and not just a production system.

Peter Blanck: So, this first study - it was really - the Hawthorne was the first of that kind that led to all these others

Jeff Sonnenfeld: The first of that kind, and it happened because it was field work. The major contributors to many of those fields I just mentioned willingly point back to the Hawthorne studies as the inspirational point in their studies, or in their fields, and that this was learning which came, not because it was - people were looking for it, but, well some folks have argues that Elton Mayo was looking for it, one of the consultants to the study; he had read a lot of the Durkheim before it was translated, and many of these principles were carried in the Durkheim. Yet, this field work presented a very interesting illustration, if not more, of many of those principles that Durkheim laid out, the fact that some folks were aware of social groups beforehand is not evil, but it was through the serendipity of this research that they found there's something more than physiology involved here of workers or physical setting and things.

There is a - while the Hawthorne studies were revolutionary, perhaps paradigmatic, in this applied behavioral science because it, in fact, was the introduction of behavioral science to the work place, many folks have tried to detract from the significance of these studies, and they date all the way back to - the critics date back forty years plus - They can be grouped roughly into the old ideologists and the young methodologists in a crude way, and that there is almost a cult-like worship of methodology with some of the younger folks who are taking a very narrow set of research principles based on hypothesis-testing research, and criticizing the Hawthorne studies because they didn't have a very good set of principles as hypothesis testing studies, without realizing that

their theory-generating studies and hypothesis-generating studies. Running through those two sets of critics briefly, the ideologists attacked the study, saying that - Elton Mayo, the consultant of the study, and Fritz Roethlisberger, his disciple, and others, were trying to weave this Durkheimian sense that the individual can be submerged into the common good, and not allow for the inherent conflict between the individual and the collective forces of society, between the individual and the owners of capital. And conflict wasn't something that the Hawthorne studies avoided; they didn't talk about unions, and they, in fact, didn't take a good view of the greater context of the Hawthorne works, and look at Chicago, and look at the industrial world of that period. If you go back there today, you find there's a very different situation with Western Electric's new license with the divestiture and with the aging workforce today, and Hawthorne works is a decaying facility in a corporation that's growing elsewhere. Those are all criticisms that could be made without the greater context of the study. But, the thing is, at the time, it was a monopoly; at the time, it was very much of a protected industry, and there weren't unions, and it was very paternal, and it was a desired place to work, and people would use any kinds of personal friendships, connections, family, to get into the place, and it had been an employer of generations of families. So, it was highly desirable place to work, and people felt great commitment to it. Nonetheless, there was some conflict, but the conflict was with immediate supervision, and the studies tried desperately to capture that. That turned out to be much of the substance of the later focus of the studies, and of the interpretations thereafter. Why is it that there were some social groups for example, such as the relay-assembly test-room, where the group norms were for greater productivity and working hard and where, essentially, the norms that were, I think, consistent with management objectives, yet there's the bank-wiring observation room that George Homans has studied in much detail which took a look at why group norms emerged which were hostile to management and there really was some antagonism.

Well, those were core issues on Hawthorne's studies, and they weren't ignored by the Hawthorne researchers or the Hawthorne reporters. Now, the newer wave of critics - these methodologists, are folks who are generally, by the way, best known as critics of the Hawthorne studies - rather than contributors to social science and for many other writings, complain about what were the room temperatures, what were the proper increments of illumination in any given particular time, what were - well, they were picking up small points that maybe have some value, but the richness of the contributions of these studies was looking at, not whether, if physical factors are critical or unimportant, but it was looking at social factors as also being important. And when you look back at the studies now, they seem rather modest in the statements made. They were revolutionary at the time because people just weren't saying those things, workers were - this appendage to the machine, human behavior was some irrational thing to be controlled and minimized, and, through the Hawthorne studies, folks became cognizant of the fact that worker attitudes and values were something which are very important to understand, and can also work in concert with the broader purposes of the organization. The methodology was a methodology which evolved over time - it's methodology which led to a lot of serendipitous learning and it's a methodology which is unfairly criticized by people who are looking for hypothesis-testing. It didn't take ancient principles of - well actually there weren't a lot of ancient sociological principles that people were using at the

time to test, but it wasn't taking a lot of industrial psychological principles, and trying this and trying that, nor was it looking as carefully at some of the physical factors as someone would like, but its richness was in identifying this broader view of the organization as a social system, instead of as a production system.

You had mentioned some more precise critical issues in field research, and, at the top of your list, you had suggested site-selection. I think that was a wonderful choice to put up at the top. I think, in field research, it is probably one of the very most critical issues in trying to figure out what makes good and bad field research. If I've said way back when I mentioned that one of the criteria you'd use in deciding whether or not to go into the field in the first place, has to do with the specificity of the question, and I've said there's a very general question to bring to the field. Well, if you're taking such a general question to the field, how do you know, if your question is so general that you're going to do a lousy job because you're not going to know what you're looking for, and that's a common complaint that non-field researchers say is that people are out there on fishing expeditions or worse. They're out there, and leaving the boat and leaving the rod, and just jumping into the water and drowning - that even a fishing expedition has a search quality to it. Well, that is even supported when you take a look at some of the field work that unschooled people do and trying some field work, or people inexperienced at it, or haven't given it a lot of thought in advance is that they wind up on doing field work which didn't have site selection carefully considered. And that's where I think important ethnographic or quality control comes in, when you say if it's not highly specified, and we're going to go to the field as an anthropologist goes to the field, to understand what's going on here. Well, to understand what's going on here, we try to be as inductive as possible, have a general set of questions. What's guiding the research, however, is a question - the specificity of that question is huge, but it is a question. You step back and say, "Why this site? Why does William F. Whyte make a contribution in *Street Corner Society*? Well, he's gone to - there's a lot of thought that's behind that in advance - the fact that we're looking at an immigrant community in an urban setting, and that we're looking, in particular at certain size of group, certain neighborhoods - you could look at a broad sweep at the entire North End, instead of just a block. I mean those are a lot of critical site considerations came out there, and anybody who says that that was sort of an undirected work, I guess few would say that that was an example of a field researcher who jumped in the water and sank - that's a field researcher who jumped in the water, and started swimming, and got somewhere. He wasn't sure exactly where land was, but then got there, had some clues, and that's what I think makes good field research. It's not when it's access driven.

And that, unfortunately, is what many of the critics of field research point to. They can find examples of poor field research, where people are bored to tears insufferably in long cases and endless detail of insignificant situations where the person may not have been a skillful observer, but also it was just an uninteresting site. When you start to consider what would we capture by going to this site, what can we learn, that we don't already know about this kind of community, or this sort of situation, or that kind of workplace. And when you go out to the site, what kinds of things do you need? What's the critical variety of types of behaviors that would be important? And what sort of geography do

you want to cover? These are questions which William F. Whyte looked at a neighborhood. I and - for our studies work, took a look at across the country, the critical community here where the major forest products' producers, and to understand that community, I didn't want to just take a look at people in Maine, or people in Portland, Oregon, or people in Georgia - or Seattle, Washington. It's in industry scattered all around the country, even in the Midwest. And I wanted to understand the way people in that industry work, and since that was my site, my site was that industry, then geography became something that I had to introduce a lot of variety in there to make sure that I was going to understand what's happening in that industry, so I'm not studying a regional issue. William F. Whyte didn't want to study Italian immigrants - wasn't his topic, or else he would have looked at a very different site selection entirely there. And you don't want to just capture the good guys. Going back to this forest products study, I wanted to understand how this industry interacts with its public, its many publics, its stakeholders. Not the marketplace, so much as the public affairs actors in the investment community, in journalists, environmentalists and people in the various towns, the mill towns that are - whose lives are very much affected by the operation of the company facilities and all those kinds of individuals - and, I wanted to have folks who have had - companies that have had good experiences dealing with those outsiders, as well as people that have bad experiences. If I had just looked at companies that have had a good set of relations with those outsiders, then I was going to learn something which may have been very hard to generalize anymore beyond that one setting.

So, it has something to do with the variety and size of the behaviors in that situation that I needed. You tend to get, when you go out to the field, a lot of people who are, sort of, pleased or willing to be flattered, and now, you have a harder time getting the bad guys, or getting the people who are suspicious of you, or the folks who might not look good in your study, and you get the red carpet treatment by folks who often have an ego that they think will be nicely massaged, or people who, just by their very nature, tend to be a little bit more verbal and articulate, or want to brag, and you lose out the folks that have something to hide, or are shy, or are - just don't like attention for one reason or another. Another issue to consider in site selection is, after you'll be thinking of how you'll be getting a full range, is what are you going to do if you lose something, somebody. A company gets nervous, or some tragedy happens to some of your participants, and, if your study is completely dependent on a very tiny sample, you run that risk. And if it's going over several years, you're really in a dangerous position. So, you want to figure out a way, I think, of - I lost one of my companies, I had seven forest products companies, and I had the full range in there of folks who were considered by my outside stakeholders to be good guys, and folks who were considered to be real louts, and abusers, rapists of the forests, and whatever else they were called, and, I kept some of those in, but I lost one. They turned out to be just as nasty as people warned me, and you felt like you were walking on coals the whole time you were walking with them. And it was very hard to keep up the rapport, and, eventually, when they saw my questionnaire that followed up on interviews, they got scared and said "Forget it". Well, they didn't even say that much, I just stopped hearing from them. I had to push to hear the "Forget it". But, I still had a base of 6 companies that preserved that full range, so I figured well, there's a good chance I was going to lose somebody, and I was ready for it. So, I think that, if people have

captured the full range, they want to make sure that they have some back-up; they know that they can still cull something out of this study which will be interesting preparing, I guess, the contingency for loss of sites.

So, if we then say we want site selection to be something which is intentional, rather than for people to back into it because it has convenient access. Well, then, that brings up the questions about how do you get access, if it's not convenient. A lot of undergraduate field work is often fueled strictly by access; "Hey, I got my father's a-blah-blah-blah," and people go in and study anything just because they have the door open to some place, and they wind up learning nothing through all their studying because they didn't have any interesting issues in mind to lead them to the site. Well, then, how do you get access if you have a set of issues, and I think that you got to deal with how to persuade the bad guys to stay with you; you have to figure out how you get to see everybody inside a particular site that you need to figure out, I guess, essentially, establishing contact, you can set-up, in fact, a list of topics from entry in the site, which is trying to gain some confidence and explain yourself to a rationale, once you gain some entry there, who you've gone to see, to explain to them what you want, what you need, and what the mutual interest is, what they can give you, and what you can give back to them. In the case of the forest products studies, these companies have had a very, very volatile rapport with their outside constituents and they have been dumping a ton of money annually into trying to better handle their various outside relationships, and it's critical because those outside relationships determine how the mills work, what times they can operate, what the pollution levels are that are tolerated, what kinds of trees they can chop down, where they can get them, everything from the acquisition of the raw materials to the processing and the disposal and the marketing companies that have had problems with all kinds of antitrust issues and things here.

So, the public interest is very pronounced, and I had a topic that was very much in the minds of management. So, the salience of this was very high, and, if I had a topic which was less salient, I'd have had a harder time in trying to persuade them that there's something in it for them. But, I think, it's a responsibility of the field researcher to recognize that not always are the sites you're interested in imbued with this great sense of altruism and a desire to advance the cause of social science. You'll find some of those that that have, you know, Alfred Morrow and others who open up and find that there are factories, if they own them or something, that are willing to cooperate for no personal exchange reasons at all. Yet, there is an element of mutuality in, I think, most good research because if it's not going to be biased by why these people are letting us in, you need to, somehow, give them something in exchange, in return.

Peter Blanck: I know there's non general rule of thumb, but some people say go to the chairman, some people start in the middle, what's your idea on that?

Jeff Sonnenfeld: I think it depends on what the topic is; if the problem is that someone's interested in looking at the way small groups function within the company, I think that the chairman or the president, or some senior executive is probably a wrong place to turn because it's not an issue that has salience to that executive, and they're not likely to help,

and they're probably going to be annoyed if they even see it. You know, why come to me, why don't you go to Jack or Julie down at Personnel, I mean this is their kind of stuff, and they'll flush you away. What, I think makes sense is to, when considering entry, is to think of who is the most powerful individual that's directly involved with these kinds of issues. You know, I was looking at public affairs issues. Well, that happens to be a primary concern of chief executives, rather than go to a public affairs person in the company, I thought I may as well go to the top, and, if it's an issue that has any general management interest whatsoever, and senior management interest, I think it's best to start at the top because wherever your request bounces down, it will bounce down higher in the organization than you would likely be able to root it coming in, plugging in at a level which preserved a more respectful protocol. So, I think, starting as high as is relevant to the research. Now, some chief executives might be very interested in group behavior, but starting cold on that, I think most of them wouldn't be as interested in the specifics of an organizational problem, unless it's something they were involved with -

Peter Blanck: I think that's good - if you want to move on to something else, that would be fine. I just wanted to get the feeling across of how to think about where you want to gain entry, and I think that's fine.

Jeff Sonnenfeld: Well, I think we have, if we consider entry as determined by how high is relevant, who is the most important decision maker that's involved with these kinds of issues, that's entry - the rationalization for your study is what are you out to look for in some crisp phrasing, which expresses some mutual interest as a second point. A third one is then, how are you going to convey that you're someone worthy of their confidence, how can you establish confidence? That's very hard to do, but it's critical if you're going to get honest impressions back from folks, and, if you're going to be able to see the different people inside the organization that will give you conflicting views. And if you are going to work with competitive firms or between outsiders of a firm and insiders where this - some kinds of information can be abused, they want some guarantee that you respect the confidentiality of the statements they make, that you're willing to extend anonymity should they want it. If you yield a lot of that ground in advance, I think people are very pleased as a third issue, is to try to establish some willingness to respect confidentiality. A fourth issue, and no less important, is to show that you're capable of understanding what they'd say, even if they gave you the time, there are a lot of situations where chief executives or other executives in firms spend a lot of time with academic researchers who are in there asking questions from a narrow frame of mind, and the chief executives answering giving them a lot of richness, which is just falling onto deaf ears because it's not falling into the checklist which was carefully prescribed in someone's mind or on a sheet of paper in advance, and the executive gets annoyed, says "What the heck with this - this person has a narrow mind and is not going to understand what is the richness I'm giving", or, secondly, the chief executive may feel, "Well, he's got an open mind, but it's completely blank, completely open; I have to give him so much background to be able to explain the details of herbicides, or what agent, the Agent Orange debate all is, I can't give all this history." When I went out to the forest products' companies, I spent a lot of time doing homework, doing a lot of background on the industry. I didn't think that it was going to be as biasing, as it was going to be as informative. I think the

"tabula rasa" approach to field work is dangerous there, in that you're going to offend and annoy and insult your respondents by not having shown the interest to try to understand them either as persons or as industry people or, in any way, to try to show some understanding for their role. Then there are also questions about the basic empathy as an observer. So, we get into that, but the advance work would be to try to understand who they might be in more general terms. When I ran through these seven forest products' companies, there were three of them that the chief executive, who was essentially my sponsor in there, we had lunches and dinners together, and I'd get on the chief executive's private Lear jet, and we'd shoot around from mill to mill, or whatever, different sites, and it was quite a red carpet treatment. And in those cases, they generally were interested in bragging; they were nice guys, damn nice guys, and two of them were pretty impressive, one of them wasn't as impressive as they thought they were, it seems. But, their interest in the study was, I think, that they don't mind publicity, and they think they're doing the right thing, and they also were willing to help. There are two others though who knew there were doing a bad job, and I had to convince them that they had something to learn from it, and they cooperated with the study because they saw, well, we're not necessarily going to look all that good here, and if they do protect the name of the company, geez, what do we have to lose, or, if they disguise the background and things, we can gain quite a bit. So, I had two others who were very happy that they were going to gain. Yet, that is five, and I said I had seven. There were two who were just awful; they knew that they didn't want to brag, they knew that what they do offends people, and they didn't want to learn how to do it any differently because they were very pleased with the way that they were doing it, and they thought that executive time was a critical resource, and academics come in here and get in everybody's feet, and they spread rumors and gossip and distort things on the outside, we've had terrible experiences in the past, stay the hell away. Well, it's very hard to figure out what else you can muster other than personal contacts and intense pleading to get in there, that I was determined that I needed those folks as well. And to gain access there was - some interesting stories, I don't know if you want to hear very briefly about -

Peter Blanck: Sure, some anecdotes....

Jeff Sonnenfeld: At one of these companies which we'll call Northwest Forest. They never responded to my letters which was sent straight to the chief executive when, at the same time, all the other letters went straight to the chief executive, and other chief executives responded quickly, and many of them favorably; these are all comparably sized companies in the industry, three and four billion dollars or more, employing thirty thousand people and things. This chief executive never responded, I kept calling, and finally his secretary said, I mentioned I was going to be in town anyway, and they said, "Well, if you're going to be in town, then come on out and see us, and we'll probably know something by then." While I was in town, I was seeing one of their competitors, and I went down the street to visit them, and thought I'd call the chief exec. and see what the final disposition of their cooperation would be. I called from a pay phone at lunch time, and, I didn't realize it, but, in calling, I was expecting to play out my general cassette - Hi, I'm Jeff Sonnenfeld from the Harvard Research - I started in on all that, but the fellow answered the phone, I said "Gee, I wonder who this is...", and, I said, "Hi,

I'd like to speak to Mr. Flark" - "Speaking!" Then he corrected me on the pronunciation of his name, and I started again, about a sentence and a half in, and he says, "Well, Jeff, that sounds like a very interesting study, but, frankly, we're much too busy around here. Thanks for having kept us in mind." Oh, he had me run through the background of the study, because he didn't have the letter; he said he'd never seen anything on it, he didn't know what I was talking about, but what did I want to tell him. So, I'm trying to figure a way of summarizing a two page letter and a couple of publications I'd sent him all into three sentences, and I got a sentence and a half into it, and that's when he cut in and said, "Well, it sounds all very interesting, we're very busy right here, I'm sorry I didn't see your original letter." And there I was, I knew I needed that company because they were rock bottom worst from what everybody was telling me for a huge company," and I went, "Oh, while was talking to him, it was particularly difficult because the pay phone I was talking from was right by a road construction site, the guys were at lunch, they came back after lunch, they came back after lunch, started blasting away at the street, they were putting all these pedestrian malls - and here, I'm trying to convince him to participate in a study. I explained who I am, apologized for not having gotten something his secretary told me he had gotten.

All this over the street noise and the blaring, and I was in a phone booth there, and people were getting off at this bus stop, pounding on the windows, they wanted to use the phone, so it was a difficult situation. I thought, well, I can't let it go though. I'm right here in town, and it's cost a lot of money to get out here. So, I went across the street in there, and there were guards in there because there had been an environmentalist that had recently had a bomb blast inside there, complaining about some of the things these people do. I was looking reasonably respectable, so I started talking with an executive that was going in, and I looked for what, since the building was named after the company, I figured there were at the top floor, and I looked through just the highest going bank of elevators, and went in there, and started talking to people in the elevator, casually, about weather and Mt. St. Helens, or whatever else.

As we got higher and higher, the elevator got emptier and emptier, and by chance, I just hit somebody who was going to the top floor, that I was talking with, and so I was very happy there, and he got out, and I followed him, and I looked ahead, and there was one of these Plexiglas shields that you need to step on trendles and the shield opens, and there was a receptionist on the other side who recognizes people, or has been told to expect certain people that allowed you to come in, and I wasn't to be expected, so I sort of followed in behind this fellow, and snuck in - the doors opened and closed behind, and there I sort of was in the wicked witch's castle, trying to figure out where to go from here. And I looked, and the receptionist said, "Sir, sir, where are you going?" And I just said "I'm just going right over here to an appointment to the secretary who's just in the corner;" I figured the chief executive would have the corner suite. I went over and said, "Hi, is Mr. Smith in right now?" And she said "Oh, no no, no, his office is down..." I said, "Oh, yeah. I get so dizzy up here, you know, in the heights, and I can't remember which corner is which", and, I'm trying to seem natural and relaxed so I don't alarm them, but I - then went over to the right office and I found the secretary, and I introduced myself. And she said, "Oh how did you get in - it's funny, Mr. Smith was just asking me

for your letter, and it's funny...." And, she started looking through the logs of incoming mail, and I said "Well, look, it's fine - I've got a Xerox of the letter with me right now, and I could just walk it right in to him.," and I walked into his office. And she said, "You can't do that." She was behind me, but it had already been done, so I thought that the worse that could call out the gendarmes, but I thought that this was a last gasp effort. If I wasn't going to have a badly biased study by only having favorable people, this was the kind of stuff I had to do. I went in, and this guy looked up with a scowl, and I introduced myself and he looked at the letter and this hysterical person behind me saying that I can't do what I just did, and laughed and said, "Look, you'll want to go see Steve Jones on Public Affairs...." Well, from then on, I had the blessing of the chief executive to go around, and all the doors were open, just saying, "Hi, Mr. Smith sent me down," and, it worked real well. I was real pleased with that. The one time it didn't work as well was with another one of these nastier companies, and they wouldn't respond to my letters, and I wound up being in town out there also, and the secretary suggested to just come by and visit. Only, there, it was the secretary who answered the phone when I got out there, and she said, "Sure, just one second, I'll put him on," and she came back to say that he's not in. And, I got a series of those "he's not ins." She said, "Yes, he's been meaning to respond to your letters." Months had passed. But, I said, "But you told me that you thought he probably would be willing to see me when I got here just for a brief chat, that I could explain the study." And, she said, "Well, yes, that's what I thought, but he's out of town for the week," or something like that, and I said, "Gee, I thought...."

Well, because obviously he was in, and no longer interested in talking on the phone, and I didn't have anywhere to go on that one except he was an alumnus of a well-known eastern school, and I - also, his boss's wife was an important contributor to that school, and his boss, and his boss's wife were very active in a lot of ongoing alumni affairs from that school, and I had a friend who's a fund raiser for that school, and I figured what the hell, she always claims that she knows these people at this company, so there's where I tried the connections to see if that helped. Well, what that got me was it got me entry to, finally, that public affairs executive's boss. Went in and had a nice interview with him, and then, as I was winding things down, I said, "And this is all I wanted to talk to with Mr. Jones about, these kinds of issues because he'd really enjoyed the talk," or this executive said, "Oh, you already talked to Jones?" And, then you realized that he had somehow allowed me to cut around the problem there, and went to talk to Jones. Jones, then, he met for about forty minutes, and then Jones came out there saying, "Jeff, good to see you," slapped me on the back, "Glad you could stop by, and Helen, why don't you get the guy a cup of coffee, already?" He starts to harangue this poor woman who had just been trying to protect him. Then I was in with him; we had three hours, everything was fine. He told me he arranged a lot of other interviews. And, I said that I'd like to come out and meet with these fifteen other people later in the fall. He said, "Fine." I said, "Should I centralize it through you?" "No, no, no, it's fine."

Well, then, I have had contact made with all the other people in the company I needed to talk to, and told them about the study. And, while I was in a competitor's office, I got a phone call from back at school that said Jones had cancelled all my interviews. So, while I was there, he was willing to extraordinarily cooperative. When I left, he cancelled

everything. So, I had lost the field trip. Now some of those people called me on their own, and said we know that Jones has cancelled the interviews, come by and see us anyway, we're going to tell you the truth about this place. Well, I kept those going because I was going to protect the anonymity anyway. And, I called Jones, and he said, "Oh, Jeff. We can't really have you youngsters in here running and turning everything upside-down. This is a real business, and we just don't have the time for something like that." And, I explained that I felt that their competitors were also real businesses and they did too, and they thought it was important and maybe would help to - and no, there's nothing that would help. Eventually, he agreed that, well, he just didn't want me to be running around on my own - he'll centralize it all through his office. Well, when I got out there, by centralizing it all through his office, he meant that he arranged a single interview with the chairman and the president and him, all at the same time in that room. Now, he is somebody who's going to look bad in the study as the public affairs executive, and I was studying public affairs. And, he was anxious to see that he didn't look bad. So, with his presence in the room, the chief executive was a little inhibited. He was a little inhibited with the chief executive there, and, the middle guy, the president, was unsure what to say, and it was hard, but, actually, it turned out to my advantage as it happened in some other studies, and some work that I had done on price-fixing earlier was....

So, the company then cooperated while I was present. I left and I lost the cooperation of the company because there was one particular individual who felt threatened. And, that's very important learning that I got from that is to in advance recognize who might lose from this research and how much influence they have and how to work around that. Eventually, I got the company back, and that was by trying to get to forces inside the company that were very interested in the study. Other vice presidents in line divisions that had comparable influence, as well as chief executive, or the president in this case, had an interest in the study. I got them to prevail upon this guy to cooperate. It turned out that that cooperation, however was short-lived because after the interviews were finally accomplished, my next step with the research was to come back with some questionnaires which were to follow up on the interviews, to try to standardize some topics. They refused to cooperate with the questionnaires, and this is where this guy was able to destroy the study, since I hadn't ever really won him over, and he was worried all the way through, although I had tried to strong-arm my way around him, he had the ultimate card in the end when he could start saying that this question will make the company look bad, and this question will.... Well, the reality of it was that it wouldn't because nobody would know what the company said on that question. Anyhow, there wasn't anything wrong with the question in the eyes of everybody else in the study. But, there is where I lost him, and I never got their got their questionnaires back, but I lost about four months waiting, of delays and delays, the management of time in this field research process was a critical variable, and this guy, essentially, held back an awful lot of the progress, instead of just saying they weren't going to respond, and getting rid of me that way, they felt that just by delaying, I would tire, and that often is an effective weapon against the field researcher.

After you go through the access issues, I felt that there were several types of methodologies that I wanted to use and I want a commitment from the company for those

three different types of data. One of them was the interview data, another one was questionnaire data, the third one was archival data. What I had in mind was that the interview data would help me fuel a better questionnaire because what I found was that the questionnaires which get a high response rate are those that are hitting a critical point that people are interested in are phrased with concise, pointed questions, and are based on some actual contact with them, either personally or there's some empirical derivation of it; it's not all straight out of the libraries - real world phrasing, the language that people used, the vernacular of that industry - things like that help quite a bit. And, that what I thought I'd use the interviews for, alone. It turns out that there were some serendipitous findings of my own here which weren't of the scale of Hawthorne's serendipity, but I found that there was an entire variable that I hadn't planned out in advance. I hadn't even thought to look for a chunk of variables. They had to do with culture, that's what I had called the concept, the company culture. It certainly has become a vulgarity, and maybe if I were staring the research now, I'd have included it as a topic. At the time, I was looking at a very mechanistic model. I was thinking of the company as a sensory system. I was thinking about how human perception works, and you have got these physiological pathways that dictate how outside stimuli hit receptors and neurons transfer that information inward, and I wanted to look at that transmission of the information from the outside to central integration in the mind.

I hadn't realized, though, that, in using this metaphor, I was only using one part of the perceptual process. If you use the full metaphor of human perception, there's the personality or character that affects the perception quite a bit, in that feeds into expectations, and biases, and things, and when I would think of that metaphor, it enriched a lot of the data that I had collected. I went back and looked at my interview data, and realized that there were some very interesting things there in the interviews. The actual texts themselves showed characteristically different metaphors of speech. Sometimes when people talked about outside constituent groups, they talked about them as adversaries, they used military metaphors and things like that. Other times you could tell something not much from the quality of the text, the phrases or the attitudes implicit in the language they used, or their opinions, which is another factor - the belief systems. But, sometimes there were things just like the physical arrangement of offices that the P.R. people were somewhere buried in the middle of the building in some firms. In other places, corporate communications was up there right next to the chief executive's office, in an office larger than anybody else's. Those kinds of symbols told me a lot. There were other kinds of things in - of phenomena in the surroundings. How obtrusive a building was in its environment; if it really blended in beautifully in the forest, or was some gigantic structure which was a vain attempt at insisting on this company here in the midst of a small town, and has destroyed the small office buildings around the rest of the area, and destroyed a community that put it up and things that - you could see something of the character of the actual physical structure of buildings, what that meant, or office arrangement, as I mentioned metaphors of speech. There are a lot of choices to look at that people had made. Choices of office décor, choices of the hours they worked. Those choices are, of course, are - vary quite a bit by the culture. An IBMer who stays after 4:30 is looked upon as someone who didn't get their work done; what did they do in the daytime that they had to stay late to do it. They're not efficient. Versus someone who

had a Goldman-Sachs or Morgan-Stanley or someone leaving at 4:30; what's this guy doing, more interested in golf than doing a good job around here. This involves a lot of ongoing thought and so on. But, it's funny how someone in Aerospace stays well after dinner, - dinner hour, and funny how the culture can be manifest in those kinds of choices, as well as a lot of the givens, and a lot of the unintended or hidden kinds of speech patterns. And, then, finally, I guess the well-known interaction patterns that people have become accustomed to looking for now. Going through the interview process, I came to realize who was consulted for what, and who was likely to stroll in someone else's office and things. That was just a whole set of data that I had filed away in a drawer and didn't even think about until I started into my questionnaires which the pure data I thought that would be the soul, the real significance of the research. It turned out that this second chunk was terribly important for explaining some of the variables too. I was looking at ethics versus alertness, social responsibility, which was ethical commitment to the outside versus their alertness, their responsiveness to the outside, just being aware of certain things. I found that the companies who had a certain culture seemed to be more ethical. And, the companies - looking at their heritage and things like that. And the companies who had a certain physical structure or various kinds of physical structures tended to be more alert. And, if you mixed the two, then they were high on both; and if you didn't have either, they didn't do well on either of the social performance dimensions. But, I didn't have these two clumps in advance of this interview data.

If I talk in specific about some of the interview issues that I found, just some techniques I've learned that is helpful - this is very sensitive material to not bother with tape recorders. Interviews are an hour long, generally, I don't go anything beyond an hour, and I try to have some buffer time afterwards. And you can usually - whatever outline or - you have down captures a lot of the color of their phrasing. And, that color fades with time, so you want to get that as quickly as possible. But, you can usually fill in the blanks right after an interview, and finish out the sentences that you have outlined, or get a couple of great sentences. Sometimes it's a problem if whom you're interviewing is so sensitive that not only will tape recording worry them, but every time you lift up a pen and start to write things down, you're reinforcing certain comments. That becomes very evident every time folks sort of talk about some sorts of violations of pollution, or when they were saying some real nasty things about environmentalists or stuff, and I start to right down, "Gee, what great way of phrasing things," they would get nervous and stop. So, I'd hold off a little bit, and the next topic, we'd start talking about something in the weather, or whatever. And, there, you had what was stored up in your buffer memory comes out. Now you're writing frantically as you're discussing what the stratonimbus of configurations look like from the 24th floor and things. And, I thought that's just a nice way to get material out from people and record it in a safe way. In terms of the questions, it's nice to have an outline of questions in advance to give the person a general feel for the overview of those questions. It's very helpful, and they appreciate that because it helps clarify what your interested in. It's terribly frustrating to them and to you when they're trying hard to give you what you think they want, but it's somehow not working because they suspect that they either don't know the answers or else they don't know the questions. If they know the questions, and they thought about it a little bit in advance, and they're not feeling threatened or surprised, then they're likely to do a better

job. Then the problem sometimes turns out to be time management, right? And, there, you want to be making sure that the questions that you're interested in are in a general way being covered, for your allowing for a departure from any particular pathway that you had in mind; that, well, as long as these bases are covered, it doesn't matter if the actual flow is different than what you'd mapped out in your mind, but it covers the ground, and they appreciate it because it matches up with their cognitive map of the topic, rather than your own because there's nothing necessarily superior about the way you arranged the questions. But, the time is just critical. You don't want to be calling somebody back on the phone later and saying, "Gee, I was wondering if I could just have another 10 minutes." You can do that, and they often say please feel free to call. It's nice to have captured that all in one sitting. And, if you have questions about things, to ask it while you're there. A lot of times, people don't ask for clarification when they need it, figuring they'll understand it later, but all they have is these scrawled notes later and they don't know what dioxin they were talking about, or whatever the topic was. And, the other person coming back two weeks later doesn't remember what he's talking about either. So, there's the time management. And then to show that you're listening to their questions is important and that your next question somehow builds on the last. Or, if it's different you know, you signal that you want to change a little bit. And, respect for confidentiality, and those kinds of topics again, and showing that you understand what they're saying.

Let's talk just a little bit just about the different pieces in the research project then. We've talked about the issues in the initial entry, and how people gain the credibility, how they go about conducting the interview process. Then, how these interviews can feed into questionnaires - I mentioned that it gives them a little more credibility. They are more readable often when they're informed through a serious field effort in advance, a serious observation and interview stage in advance of the questionnaire, survey, preparation. And, if the questionnaires have a length which makes sense, so that people want the whole universe captured, and send out a twenty-eight to thirty page questionnaire, and don't know why it doesn't come back, And, the interviews can also help a questionnaire in that they show the richness of the topic and that you can't put everybody in a yes or no box. you need a bigger range of responses, if not an open-ended question where the answers aren't so prescribed, or, if they are, you recognize the continuum of responses that's less offensive. You wouldn't have thought of that, many times, unless you had gone through the interview stage and talked about some of those topics.

But, those are all ways that the questionnaires can help the interviews or the interviews can help the questionnaires. I've suggested the ways that both a second pass now over the interviews after having gone through that questionnaire stage gives you a second feeling, for cultural dimensions through language, and metaphor, and attitudes, and things which come out of the interviews that are not captured on the questionnaire. The interviews - you start to realize through the interviews that there are very different opinions that you get depending on which office you walk into in an organization. Too often, people from a distance mail out massive questionnaires and think they've surveyed a company by surveying an individual from that company. Well, they may know something about that particular person in that function, or whatever reason that person has a view, it's a view

that is biased for a lot of reasons. And, you want to accumulate those biases and that gives you a feel for what the reality is in that organization; and the interviews give you a feel for the cumulative effect. I think they nicely help you figure how to nicely piece the questionnaires together, and how to aggregate the data. The archival data tells you something about even less obtrusive ways of going about research in that you are going through company annual reports looking at the kinds of statements and president's message, and what pictures are featured, newsletters, what the articles are, the reputation of the company, the community involvement. Those things tell you, may tell you something about the priorities, the real priorities of the company, but people will say, "Ah, just PR" Well, fine, what are the PR priorities? When folks look at, for example, applications to a business school, and they say, "Ah, these people are just putting in a lot of crap, trying to say whatever they think will please an admissions committee." But a second view on that, the meta-level on that, is, well, fine, even if it's not real, what does this person think an admissions committee wants to hear because everybody tries to impress the committee in different ways. In this kind of stuff, archival data, people try to impress shareholders in different ways. What are the ways this place tries to do it, and it's to take a look at the archival data the way - by looking at one of the purposes of it, and how are they going about doing it, rather than saying, "Gee, they're just trying to pull the wool over our eyes," is looking at the method they use. All those things come together nicely because you take often detect fascinating consistencies and inconsistencies between the feel of a place from the culture, where you're getting a three dimensional view. The more uniform comparison across companies that you have from the questionnaires and more of a longitudinal, and less kind of the inadvertent, less intentional portrait which emerges from the archival data.

So, I think that those are like three tripods, three legs of a tripod, you really need those three for any kind of meaningful analysis. You can do an interesting questionnaire analysis, but I think they all should - unless it reflects back on what you learned in the interviews, or what's been manifest over time in archival stuff. I think it's very limited. On top of all that, we didn't mention literature, and I am a believer in being as inductive as you can be in advance, but I think it's good to read up on having done your own homework on what - not so much as what the ways are to ask the questions, but what are some of the interesting issues in this industry, or with folks who live in this world - to learn about that from the literature, then to leave the literature for a long while. If you through the interviews, the questionnaires, the archival data, and you've taken a pass at trying to interpret each type of data relative to its own methods, and then looking across these multi-source methods, to see what emerges and then to try a couple of questions on your own that have developed and take those questions, instead of just seeing what emerges because the data base maybe so immense, you can't just watch things crystallize you want to take some specific questions and add it to the data. Well, then look at the literature and see how would various types of literature explain this, not to do it to find one which is comparatively better and superior to all the others but to see what additional insights they can each yield in a collective way rather than in a competitive way. I think a competitive use of literature can often be problematic but can be helpful. I think at this stage in the data when you've gone through it all you want to look back at literature in a more of a cooperative way to see if this can shed some additional light.

Well, there having gone through all that the skills which were important in addition to literacy and being able to read some of this stuff - skills of persuasion, those can be acquired. Some people are, perhaps develop those in childhood better than others but they can be acquired by folks all the way through adulthood; skills in empathy as a listener, after selling yourself you want to make sure you understand them and that they know you understand them, and the listenership, if you're picking up on these cues, these skills of observation. How I have been trying to acquire some of those things, they've come different ways, some of them were, in my background as a clothing salesman and the time in a family business and having to run it on my own with two parents in the hospital. At one point having an inventory of Nehru suits and trying to sell them when I was them when I was color blind. It was a very difficult challenge. I realized it would take some persuasion and some empathy to try to figure out what to do with that kind of and I was sort of motivated by starvation. I think the academic study I've had of social psych. and behavioral science around the business of organizational behavior was real important. There were, there's a lot of just organizational experience that I never realized had an academic tie in until I became involved with field work, as I've always just enjoyed interacting with groups. I never was the kind that reads on subways - I was just the kind of person who ease drops in restaurants and subways and public places and I think for folks interested in trying to develop some of the observer skills they might try to figure out how to be a little less polite and violate some of our social norms by observing when they haven't been invited. And you know, not trying to invade in anybody's privacy and wire tap and publish intimate secrets - I'm not suggesting that. But I am suggesting that there are a lot of times where people will have the opportunity to appreciate some of the nuances around us and not sort of looking at how we're in a hurry to get to our next place, how to get there or how much longer this line is. But to look at what's happening in the life of that line or why you're stuck in a long train ride or something's happening in the airport - to step back and look at the overview and I think that we just hone down our skills the more we start to practice that way and really practice does it.

In addition, it helps doing it with people who are skilled observers. As an undergraduate I'd go to George Homans with various ideas and ask him what he thought about these theoretical issues about things happening in the work place. He was always screaming, "Get out there to the field!" He screamed, "Get out there to the factory!" I had all these theories about worker alienation and involvement on the job and blah blah blah. I wanted to know if he thought it made sense. And he said that the people who have that information are the people that I'm talking about and he's not one of them. Why don't I get out there and talk to them, and I thought that made a lot of sense and I started doing that and met Lawrence, Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch while I was in the midst of doing that stuff because I wanted their ideas on how to go about doing it, and I found that there really was a whole slew of people who found that approach to be quite valuable. Paul has often said that he's interested in being on the pioneering end, the frontier of behavioral knowledge - when it becomes too - it becomes a topic which is dominated by statistical hair splitting he thinks that refinement in theory is very important but he thinks that his real skill, his contribution comes with some of the rougher investigations. And I thought

that exploratory approaches were I think my personal disposition is better suited and I'd like to be at that end also. And I think working with those folks has helped quite a bit.

So, it all comes down to I think trying to practice skills in groups and working with folks who are well experienced at it and trying to improve listenership and doing background homework on people in advance.

Peter Blanck: Finally, one last question we'll finish with is, what do you find most satisfying and fun about the things you do? Or you can lace into that things you'd like to do in the future or how you'd like to proceed from here with the knowledge that you have now.

Jeff Sonnenfeld: The stuff that I do that I really enjoy is why I am at a teaching and professional school because I think that there's a distinct mandate that these schools have from society which is very different from an arts and sciences school, which is to look at applied knowledge, to be that intermediary, as I mentioned in the beginning, between the theorist and the practitioner. It involves an awful lot of outside exposure. People who research from professional schools, particularly management schools, have to have one foot in the world of action and one foot within the word of observation and analysis. The phenomena here don't reside in the libraries and laboratories. We're not looking at test tubes. We're really looking at the complexity of life and I like being immersed in that. As you can see from this office I love ambiguity and confusion and that's where it is. So there's sort of that issue of just the stimulation I find greatest there because there's so much external stimulation. A person who spends most of their time in a library is able to find intellectual stimulation in different ways and sees different challenges. It's not as physical. Secondly, the sense of contribution is very immediate here. The - for classic high feedback people, need feedback people, well you get it damn fast in field work. When people are bored or disinterested they don't see what all this ephemeral academic kind of double talk has to do - you're forced to prove the value of your research all the time. Does that mean that it's become commercialized? Well, no, not necessarily, because there are a lot of sophisticated consumers out there who realize that there are flim flam artists around and you want to be able to distinguish yourself from them and see what you can do to help lead us in policing that way so that you can help develop a discerning eye from consumers. But it's not commercialized just because it's usable. Now in being usable and practical doesn't mean that you at all detract from the great value of abstract research but that's different than what I find exciting. I find the applied research exciting. And I guess then a third issue is that the stimulation and challenge, the confusion, and that the fact that the work is applied, is that it has real immediate use in society. The people are, you can see that it's hitting critical social problems of the day and perhaps and perhaps of an enduring day as with the Hawthorne studies. There are issues there which are still unresolved in quality of work life and labor management and relations an things like that which are very important today and very current. And I think that that is exciting and fun because of those reasons. And plus the topics keep changing.