Watching and Waiting: Conducting Ethnographic Research

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The Plan

• Investigate the antecedents to Yearling sale price at auction
• Keeneland September 2008 Yearling Sale
  – September 8 – 23, 2008
• Combine qualitative and quantitative data
• Take a networks perspective- show that networks data contributes to performance ($)
Preliminary Results

- Pilot study conducted in Spring 2007 with Keeneland September 2007 data.
- Looked at the idea of “signals”- actions of other participants in market are visible-choices and actions that are made in the market are based on perceptions of the goods offered that are shared and public (White 1981, Podolny 1993)
In other words, people look at what other people are doing to get an idea of what they should be doing.

— Various players involved here:

• Buyers, Sellers, Consignors, Agents, Trainers, Vets, etc
So, what do people pay for?

- They want: Quality, Reputation, and Status
  - Quality: Does this animal have the makings of a good race horse?
  - Reputation: Am I going to get screwed over by the person selling this horse?
  - Status: Are my friends going to think I’m special because I own this horse?
But what is the *real* story?

• Interesting, strong results, but needed a way to make some sense of the regression results- once we have a sample size of 5,555 *everything* in the regression model is going to be significant!

• Need some other data to help interpret what is really going on- or else get trapped in a sea of P<.05-ness.

  – Sutton and Rafaeli- use qualitative data to help explain unexpected negative relationship
The Data
And even more data sources...
And to add even more...

• Combine the three sources of quantitative data with qualitative data gathered during the Keeneland sale.

• So I set out to “do” some research
  – Wanted to observe the behaviors that were important to those on the inside: what are these consignors looking for?!
Why bother?

• Well...
  – Need total immersion in the world you are studying- the only way to really “know” the culture.
  – Need to get the native’s point of view- find out how those “inside” view their world
  – Also, great way to build theory- “Grounded Theory” (Glaser and Strauss)
The researchers’ toolkit

- Time
- Patience
- Intimate Knowledge of “Murphys Law”
- Ability to “go hungry” (literally or figuratively!)
- Toughness
- The ability to learn languages (...)
- Oh yeah, and a camera, audio recorder, video camera, pen and paper, etc etc...
- A jungle guide is also helpful... more on that later!
Time

Ahh Sunrise....

Aaaanndddd...  Sunset!
Patience
Intimate Knowledge of Murphys Law

Wherever I was, he was not...
Ability to “go hungry”
Ok, not always...
Toughness
The Ability to Learn Languages

- Vet:

“Synovitis and capsulitis without disturbance of articular cartilage or disruption of major supporting structures.”

“Recurrent Laryngeal Hemiplegia”
The Ability to Learn Languages

- Consignor:

  “He’s got a little bit of knee, but he walks through it...”

  “Well, he doesn’t really belong here, but where else are we going to put him?”
The Ability to Learn Languages

- Buyer

“She’s got ‘the eye’”

“Walks like she’s on a treadmill”
The Ability to Learn Languages

• Cowboy

“Got no hip”
The Ability to Learn Languages

• Spanish would have been really helpful....

Ok, not really... but it sure would have been nice to know what they were saying!
And finally...

A jungle guide!!!!
In your bag...
Finding people

- Stand around and wait
- Ask for referrals
- And then stand around some more....
Asking questions

• Introduction – what you are doing
• Permission to record?
• Start with life history/ background
• 3 types of questions (from Spradley):
  – Descriptive: What do you do here?
  – Structured: What kinds of questions do buyers ask you?
  – Contrast: What’s the difference between a “Book 2” horse and a “Book 4” horse?
Interviewing

• Have a definite plan of what you’re going to ask...

• But be prepared to toss that all away, or go in a new direction! You might not find out what you need to know until you’re in the middle of the process...
Interviewing

• Keep notes throughout the day, but also try to go over your daily records and try to make some sense of it all.

• Try to look for patterns in the information you are getting- get an idea of where you should look going forward
Interviewing

• Last tip: Practice using your equipment before you start interviewing!
  – See previous on “Murphys Law”
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#4690 Bay Colt.
Successful Appeal/Better Be Sure,
Sells Today,Barn 12.
Blandford Stud,Agent.