

Connecting the Dots

- An Ethnographic Study of Interaction and Community Building in a Transnational Organization

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In this dissertation I explore topics of organizational form and transnational community building in a Norwegian company operating worldwide, given the name Supply Inc. It is a company that emphasizes “globally integrated solutions”, and as a result, has a sales and delivery structure that demands daily cooperation between its branch offices around the world. I have been concerned with the Norwegian company’s effort at creating a transnational organization to support its distributed activity. As part of the study, I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in three of their branch offices; in Buenos Aires, in Texas and at their headquarters in Oslo.

I have approached the company from two angles. First, by focusing on what strategies central management adopts in order to integrate, and to a certain extent homogenize, important company activities. The second, highly interrelated angle deals with the manner in which employees work together transnationally, how they make sense of the transnational organizational network they are part of, and what meaning they attribute to their work context. Theoretically, the dissertation engages in discussions of standardization, globalization of work, and how to understand organizations.

The company’s infrastructure for communication and cooperation becomes particularly important in the discussions. The daily interaction takes place through these systems, and they therefore strongly influence how employees evaluate and give meaning to their own work situation.

Drawing inspiration from an “open system perspective” (Scott and Davis 2007), I have aimed to approach the formal frames provided by the organization, as well as the level of attachment of the branches to the wider organization, as empirical questions. Organizational boundaries

are a result of social situations and are therefore subject to continuous change. The work that goes into establishing these frames are therefore key to understand to the social interaction that takes place within them. I have argued that anthropology should pay more attention to this boundary work, that the discipline is particularly well suited to provide insight into these processes, and that organizational frames are never culturally neutral.