

Ethnographies

The term "Ethnography" comes from two Greek words - "ethnos" (people) and "graphos" (writing). "Ethnography" is, literally, "writing about a People". As a research methodology, Ethnography goes back to the 6th century bce in the West and the 8th century bce in China. Ethnography, in the form of participant observation research, has been the main form of research product in Anthropology for over 100 years, and has been used in business research since the 1930's.

Strictly speaking, an "Ethnography" is a product - a book, a report, and article; it is not a methodology. This has led, in recent years, to some very strange methodologies being referred to as "Ethnographies". At Insignia, we do not subscribe to the cut rate methodologies that are used by some companies: our ethnographies are grounded in solid, participant observation methods that are used by modern Anthropologists. Why conduct an Ethnography?

In many situations, clients want to know what happens in the minds and actions of individual customers when they operate in small groups such as putting on events. While focus groups allow us to get some idea of what happens, they do not provide us with what really happens during such an event, only with what people believe happens. Ethnographies, done properly, allow us to see what really happens at an event which, in turn, let's us construct better questions during focus groups and for surveys. What does an Ethnography give you?

Ethnographies give "context" - an "interpretive schema" that allow both the researchers and the clients to understand what is actually going on during events. At Insignia, we believe that for knowledge to become "actionable" it is important for the client to be involved in the actual participant observation research. This means that we will not only conduct ethnographies for our clients, but we will take you "into the field" and show you how to understand and to act upon what you see. The Insignia Advantage

At Insignia, our team members have been conducting ethnographic research for over 20 years in both business and academic settings.