The EPIC 2014 Conversation

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From September 7 through 10, EPIC convened in New York City at Fordham University's Manhattan campus. This year's conference was hosted by Fordham's Center For Positive Marketing, a fact that encouraged a conference emphasis on value and values. Our organizing team, led by Tim de Waal Malefyt and Rogério de Paula, brought four keynote talks into the main conference program this year, giving the EPIC community a chance to hear from culture critic Thomas Frank, industry practitioners Christian Madsbjerg (Red Associates) and Kate Crawford (Microsoft Research), and Professor Dawn Lerman (Executive Director, Center for Positive Marketing and Senior Associate Dean of Research and Academic Innovation, Fordham University).

Every year, the EPIC community introduces important new elements and innovations to the conference. Brigitte Jordan created the Authors' Space, which highlighted new publications by EPIC people and gave the community a chance to interact with authors. Students from the University of North Texas and Indiana University organized the Future Practitioners Exchange to facilitate networking among students and between students and practitioners at the conference. Melissa Cefkin worked with the organizers of the Graduate Student Colloquium, Marietta Baba and Melissa Fisher, to integrate student voices and work into the main conference program. We were thrilled to see so much student activity and the great work produced by so many EPIC people.

As an organization, EPIC is dedicated to providing practitioners, businesses, and partner organizations with access to the best practical ethnographic expertise from around the world. We provide the space, both at our annual conference an online all year, for practitioners to explore and debate the issues that drive us forward and make an impact on the world through how we do what we do or how we think about what we do. This year, the push for impact was apparent in several papers. On the methodological side (doing what we do), Sam Ladner reminded us that non-verbal language should be a key part of what we analyze and study. Julie Norvaisas and Jonathan (Yoni) Karpfen presented tangible examples of how a very small group of qualitative researchers is changing how technologists interpret and approach data at LinkedIn. Evan Hanover shared lessons from taking "common" participatory research methods into West Africa, where the tools and techniques of our trade are not "common" to the participants.

Others challenged us to consider how we think about what we do and how we analyze and interpret our data. While ethnographers often see our role as that of provoking our clients and internal stakeholders to see the world differently, we should not forget to

challenge our own assumptions about ourselves. In his keynote address, Christian Madsbjerg called on the community to "grow up" as a practice and take more seriously its role and value in the business world. He provoked the audience to consider the impact our work could and should have on strategy, post–merger integration, cost reduction, technology, and resource allocation. Melissa Cefkin, Obinna Anya, and Robert Moore presented a compelling case for rethinking work and jobs. In a beautifully presented Pecha Kucha, Nora Morales and Santiago Negrete transformed Mexico City traffic into an experience to be absorbed and reflected upon.

Finally, EPIC2014 coincided with an important transition for EPIC as an organization. In June 2014 we introduced epicpeople.org, a new digital presence, and an expanded role for the organization. Having focused for 10 years on conceiving and orchestrating the annual conference, EPIC will enable more, year-around interactions among our practitioner community through online content sharing, discussions, and a range of informational resources. Our community has grown substantially over the years, and we feel strongly that developing EPIC as an organization that does more to make practitioner work visible and provide tools and resources practitioners need to further their expertise and their careers is critical, not only for us, but also for organizations who don't yet invest in ethnography. As we move the conference to Brazil in 2015 and then the University of Minnesota in 2016, we look forward to new opportunities to expand EPIC participation, at and beyond the conference itself.

We encourage everyone to take the papers in this year's proceedings as a starting point for delving further into these conversations, and to join epicpeople.org to push our practice further.