

Re-inventing management research with learning expeditions



Between 11 and 15 June, a group of French academics participated in a learning expedition in Tokyo called [#visualizinghacking2017](#). The event was organised by the Research Group on Collaborative Spaces ([RGCS](#)), an academic network that focuses both on the study of third places and collaborative spaces (e.g. coworking spaces, [makerspaces](#), [fab labs](#) and [hackerspaces](#)) and their use as possible boundary spanners and levers of change in academic practices.

We visited numerous places, from [Lodge](#) (at Yahoo Japan), a coworking space, to [Creww](#), an accelerator. Based on all the questions and online/offline reactions we received for this event, but also for others organised by RGCS ([#collday2107](#), [#visualizinghacking2016](#), [#RGCS2016](#) and 2015/2016 RGCS live events), we want to draw here a couple of lessons for management research and the collaboration of academics-practitioners.

These ideas will be condensed around an emerging research protocol we offer to label OWEE (for Open Walked Event-Based Experimentations). This method aims to overcome numerous dichotomies around the diffusion of knowledge. It aims at more impact and a deeper connectivity in time and space for management research and the events organised by management researchers.

1. About the use of Twitter for scientific ‘writing’ in the context of a learning expedition

This is something we found particularly striking in the context of our events, in particular our learning expeditions. Live tweets or sequences of tweets can be useful ‘meta-narratives’, combining situations, people, organisations and publications. When published in the flow of an event, tweets create a live narrative that can extend the event in time and space (see [our live tweets](#) in Tokyo), and give it additional sense in relationship with other events (organized or not by RGCS). We did our best to tweet articles and references related to what we saw at the time we saw and experienced them. In many ways, tweets can liberate an object from the four-dimensional continuum—one temporal and three spatial coordinates.

Twitter is nothing like traditional article publishing as it provides an emotional, temporal network that integrates all possible source material—research articles, books, pictures—which can be made more meaningful and be given new life by live tweets. It calls for creative new ways of writing that remind of visual arts techniques like ‘assemblage’ and ‘collage’ whereby found objects can be used to create something new that transcends them.

2. About other practices involved in sharing live scientific knowledge (in particular in the context of a learning expedition)

Other practices—e.g. Facebook, YouTube or Instagram, animating the learning expedition itself, having recurring participants in the expeditions—are likely to contribute to making the event more indelible and unforgettable in so far as they generate emotions. Indeed numerous studies have shown that the longest-lasting memories are linked to emotions. They are recalled with more clarity and detail, which is likely to increase the quality of future publications.

In the context of our learning expeditions, Whatsapp, Facebook, emails and even text messages play a big role in the process: they constitute modern-day rituals that cement all participants together. They make the group more horizontal and involved in sharing whatever knowledge has been acquired. Increased engagement and horizontal communication turn participants into active ‘ambassadors’ keen on spreading the word.

3. Beyond scientific writing: learning expeditions as community-builders

Increasingly all RGCS events tend to be mainly about team and community building. Our learning expeditions have provided plenty of opportunities to demonstrate this. There is no exaggerating the impact the community had on the RGCS network and its production. The numerous emails, messages and posts using the #RGCS2016 #collday2017 #visualizinghacking2017 hashtags are an excellent case in point.

Storytelling and community managing prove more and more necessary to give life to scientific writing and extend its reach and impact. Indeed storytelling is a powerful way to make a point. Topics and research do still matter, of course, but style and delivery tend to become equally important. Incidentally, some of the best storytelling is often quite succinct, which is quite different from what is usually associated with scientific writing.

3. For a necessary pivot in space and time for learning expeditions... a major annual ‘unconference’

‘Unconferences’ are participant-driven events that are quite different from conventional conferences with their fees, sponsored presentations and top-down organisation methods. That is what our first RGCS international symposium in Paris last year was all about. We strived to return the word ‘symposium’ to its original meaning—in ancient Greece, it was a part of a banquet conducive to debate and creativity.

Titled “Work and Workplace Transformations: Between Communities, Doing, and Entrepreneurship”, the [2016 RGCS symposium](#) was a big unconference designed to provide the whole group and its undertakings with a tone, a spirit and a dynamic. It aimed to enhance, order and lever all of our events and various experimentations. Naturally we hope our next symposium will achieve all that, and more.

4. Towards a methodological status for learning expeditions in management: Open Walked Event-Based Experimentations (OWEE)

Over the last three years, over the course of various events and experimentations, we’ve been shocked to see how many academics were bored with their work and disillusioned with academia. Some of them are sick and tired of the whole ‘publish or perish’ game. Others remain dissatisfied even when they are academically successful. Perhaps the relative isolation and the immutable traditions of academia are perceived as increasingly out of touch.

They came to our events simply to ‘have fun’! They longed for the use of new media to write, produce and assemble academic production—in addition to the more traditional academic journals. They embarked on a journey whose destination they didn’t know and thoroughly enjoyed themselves in the process. Many of us started wondering whether scientific writing couldn’t also leave room for the expression of emotions.

Of course traditional modes of writing are still favoured by numerous academics and still have a valuable role to play in the academic world, but more of us now seek to explore new ways of writing that allow for emotional tones and styles. Some journals have started to publish pieces that reflect this trend.

Furthermore, bodies and emotions seem to be critical to our open experimentations. For example, the conversations people have while walking are fundamentally different from those they have sitting indoors. We have walked together so much! We have also spent lots of time in third-places in Berlin, Barcelona, London, Tokyo, etc. continuing on our conversations while doing something with our hands, dropping all formality, feeding on the richness of the context and analysing it together.

Walking and talking is a powerful combination. It effectively mixes people. You can avoid someone in a 'safe' seminar room or event convention center, but in a crowded metro, bus or tramway, you may end up speaking to whoever just happens to be near you. When there is a large diversity of stakeholders—academics, entrepreneurs, representatives of public institutions, journalists—walking works as a powerful engine to break down barriers and create new synergies, which is reflected by the stream of tweets produced by the walkers.

Live tweets are like a big emotional wave... The events, people, existing articles books, organisations, surf on it, enhance it and thrive on it. In many ways, tweeting requires a large amount of emotions and empathy.

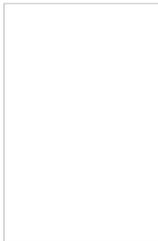
From a research point of view, we believe that [Merleau-Ponty's](#) phenomenological view of space and time (e.g. of reversibility, expression and events) combined with [de Certeau's](#), [Ricoeur's](#) and [Young's](#) perspectives on walk and narratives can be powerful ways to analyse what is in the flow of the kind of learning expedition described here.

All this has resulted in a new research method we are progressively refining. It combines both ethnography and auto-ethnography with more transformative, action-oriented research designs: **Open Walked Event-Based Experimentations (OWEE)**. Deeply grounded into phenomenology, this research protocol gives a central role to our embodied practices. Three learning expeditions with academics and entrepreneurs have been an opportunity to start testing and refining it. Detailed feedbacks should be provided soon in a research article by François-Xavier de Vaujany, Aurore Dandoy and Albane Grandazzi.

To be continued...



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- *The post gives the views of its authors, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
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 **François-Xavier de Vaujany** is a professor of Management & Organization Studies at Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL. He is particularly interested in new work practices (e.g. digital work, remote work, mobile work, coworking, distributed work, slashers, digital nomads, hacking, etc.), how they emerge and how they are legitimated in organizations and society. In late 2014 he has set up an international academic network (RGCS: the [Research Group on Collaborative Spaces](#)) about collaborative communities and collaborative movements involved in new work practices (in particular coworkers, makers, hackers). This network organizes events all over the world, in particular learning expeditions and other experimentations mixing academics, entrepreneurs, managers, activists, journalists and politicians. Those are opportunities for walked, reflexive, collective narratives and events which are connected to each other.



Laetitia Vitaud is a speaker, writer and researcher, specialised in the future of work, organisations and consumption. She works with several organisations, including Switch Collective whose aim is to empower people to redesign their work lives, and the Consumer Goods Forum. She is a lecturer at Sciences-Po Paris and Université Paris Dauphine, and is the author with Nicolas Colin of a book titled "*Faut-il avoir peur du numérique?*" ("*Should you be afraid of digital?*") (Armand Colin, 2016). She lives in London.