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An Ethnographic Exploration of Communities of Practice: Participating to Earn a Bonus

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The Research

- Debt recovery agency – Smart Debt Recovery (SDR)
  - Based in West Yorkshire
  - One of the UK’s most successful Debt Recovery Agency’s
  - Large portfolio of consumer debt accounts from high street banks and retailers
- Telephone negotiators
  - Debt collectors
- Ethnographic methodology
  - Participant observation
  - Artifact collection
  - Interviews
What is a Community of Practice?

- Defined by:
  - What it is about
  - How it functions
  - What capability it has produced
- Self-organising system
  - Not directly controllable
  - Unpredictable
  - Flexible
- Members identify a value in participating
- Enable the preservation of tacit aspects of knowledge
Community of Practice at SDR

- Practices:
  - Conversing with debtors
  - Suing debtors
  - Accessing knowledge
  - Contributing to knowledge
  - Providing assistance to others

- Knowledge pool:
  - Negotiation skills
  - Legalese
  - Procedural knowledge
What does participation look like?

- The act of knowing
- Having access to situated knowledge:
  - Being competent on The Debt System
  - Communicating effectively with debtors
  - Following the correct course of action with debtor accounts
  - Having legalese & SDR-specific vocabulary
- Amending existing practices to suit
  - Not following SDR processes & procedures in order to maximise your own collections
- Contributing to existing practices
Why Ethnography?

- Research Style encompassing a range of methodological approaches
  - Participant Observation
  - Interviews
  - Artefact & Document Collection
- Enables the co-construction of knowledge about new cultures
- Explores day to day happenings in minute detail
- Valid only within context, time and place
Any questions?

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