

## “IT’S NOT THE WAY WE DO THINGS HERE”: THE MEANING OF ORGANISATIONAL PLACE WHEN WORK GOES ON THE MOVE

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In this institutional ethnography of paramedic work, I explore how mobile work maintains organisational identity when the physical space in which the work takes place is continually changing. In opening up the often-invisible institutional relations and connections, I examine how the introduction of technologies (not just information or communication technologies but a more broader definition of the term) allows for increased remoteness on one hand and forms of proximate control and direction on the other. I argue that such technologies of belonging (or control) can take the form of plans or protocols (physical or virtual) or material elements such as uniform, that shape, influence and control but also facilitate, enable and authorize mobile work to take place.

Drawing on ethnographic ‘work along’ interviews with ambulance crews and ambulance control centre staff, the data is interrogated to elucidate these highly mobile working practices, specifically drawing out practices and technologies that bond work to places or organisations. Through focussing on the actual activities of paramedics as they are engaged in their work, the analysis describes the spaces in which this work takes place and the ways in which the work remains tethered to organisational bases and centres of control.

Modes of ordering, exposed through the institutional ethnography, are unpacked to reveal how mobile work practices are based upon existing and continuously redefined organisational arrangements that are carried and embodied by mobile workers. I argue that tacit processes of knowing and belonging cement mobile work practices. In order to maintain organisational identity during ever changing locations of mobile work, as typified by ambulance work, workers are required to continually perform, embody and represent material, social and technical connections and ties. These performances of order, through ordering, enable (and shape) the work that is subsequently done.

**Keywords:** Paramedic work; Mobilities; Organisation Studies; Organisational Identity, Ordering, Institutional Ethnography

### CAVEAT

Before I begin it is important to present a brief caveat in that when I submitted this abstract I was two weeks away from starting my fieldwork with paramedic crews. In the space of those two weeks for a variety of reasons, I lost access to the organisation I was working with. I have now established a

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new fieldwork site and I start my fieldwork in September. Therefore, this paper presents some of the background to the project, some of my related previous work, and some questions that maybe you guys will be able to help me answer.

### INTRODUCTION

The UK National Health Service (NHS) commissions paramedic services through 14 Ambulance Trusts (11 in England, 1 in each Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). These cover geographical areas within which smaller bases are used. The Ambulance Trusts are autonomous organizations and, as such, knowledge and skills are ‘local’, since each trust conducts its own training programs and differs in the local geographical knowledge of the area they serve (Wankhade, 2012).

Since 1997 there has been an increasing push to professionalize paramedic services in the UK, however it has been argued that paramedics still have weak levels of formal autonomy, as most tasks are pre-structured by other professionals, including medical professions, government regulators such as the Health Professions Council, trade unions, and the Ambulance Trusts in which they are employed (Snooks et al., 2004, McCann et al., 2013). Due to the pervasive use of targets, the operational side of paramedic work is monitored closely by managers and control systems (McCann et al., 2013). Consequently, whilst the clinical expectations placed on paramedics have expanded significantly in recent years, the profession is still struggling to secure meaningful forms of autonomy in decision-making associated with other emerging professions (Muzio et al., 2008).

Within the ambulance service, there are pluralistic dimensions of culture producing complexities that counter change (Wankhade et al., 2015), these relate to the differing needs and responsibilities of staff members within the organization and the geographical distribution and organization of the UK ambulance service (Wankhade, 2012). These contingent and situated practices, one could argue, disrupt the notion of practices being able to travel in an exact form, giving rise to emergent practices necessary for unpredictable crisis situations.

Organizational protocols and standards, provided to Ambulance Trusts by the Joint Royal Colleges Ambulance Liaison Committee (JRCALC) are implemented. These are seen as necessary for the ‘para-professional’ paramedics to operate under but simultaneously distil any creativity (McCann et al., 2013). Local adaptation of ‘standards’ leads to processes of ‘othering,’ where individuals align themselves against organizations and practices that would not happen ‘here’ and align with, creating a ‘dual dynamic’ where both are used to inform their own position (Michael, 1996). Through these processes of ‘othering’, relations and alignments are reaffirmed. Formal ordering methods, such as written accounts of these actions or standards, are therefore materializations that embed Organisational Identity.

In this paper, I look at the role of institutional ethnography in uncovering a more nuanced analytical perspective on the relationship between command, control and belonging. I attempt to connect IE to actor network theory and also the mobilities paradigm to explore how the protocol can be viewed as an integral part of organizational identity, not as part of a dichotomy between reason and

tradition. I draw on previous work with medical equipment engineers to show how mobile work can be theorised and how this will feed into an institutional ethnography of paramedic practices.

## PROTOCOLS

Before doing this, I would briefly like to think about the status of the protocol. There is a wealth of literature relating to the way in which protocols function in healthcare most notably in Oncology services (Berg, 1997, Timmermans and Berg, 1997). Despite protocols presenting one explicit description of a course of action; multiple possible trajectories lie underneath the course of action that is laid out in the text (Timmermans and Berg, 1997). The standard dictated, for example by the JRCALC is nebulous enough in definition for modification or interpretation to take place to meet intended outcomes, through interpretive flexibility. The protocol is an organizing strategy. The protocol gives practice a purpose and acts as a legitimating force for practice, enabling practitioners to justify their actions within their organizational identity. Disregarding it would be to fail to align with the organization and profession in which the practitioner works.

Referring to the protocol gives the practitioner a way to perform accountability, a standardization of the self, which enables them to perform their role as 'paramedic', under the protection or safety net of the protocol. Ina Wagner has suggested that working collectively allows for a shared reality that removes the burden of accountability from an individual's work. Suchman (2002) draws on Wagner's notion of fake collectivity suggesting this mode of collective action provides self-evidence for anyone within the community of the logic of individual actions.

'Distributed practices' result in practitioners (and patients) losing direct influence on the course of events through the use of tools that break down practices into specific tasks, rather than encouraging practitioners to consider the whole trajectory of the matter at hand (Beaulieu et al., 2007). The standardization of procedures, the way we do things here, provides not only forms of accountability but also a collective identity. Yet, protocols contain performances of personal judgement; that the actions which they direct and determine are not isolated from other actions but are situated and therefore partial. The centralization of emergency response under the Department of Homeland Security in the US after 9/11, for example, played a significant part in the failure of humanitarian response to Katrina (Birkland, 2009, Tierney et al., 2006, Buscher et al., 2013). Consequently, aggregating to the organization may remove the 'personal touch' or the sense of localized autonomy and care in a response situation.

Standardisation and centralisation have come alongside technology creep in crisis response. Use of satellite navigation and tracking technology has made it possible for engineers to effectively use their resources, but has also resulted in the operators being 'tracked' on a continuous basis and the executives being put under greater financial pressures to modernize their fleet and technology (Wankhade, 2012). In observations of paramedic work, McCann et al. (2013) found strong levels of managerial influence manifested in 'remote control', via radio communications and electronic position monitoring of vehicles and managers, team leaders, and liaison officers "*physically and verbally harrying emergency staff in attempts to exercise explicit and direct control over their work*" (McCann et al., 2013). Such '*power geometries*' (Massey, 1993) demonstrate the corporate mobility regime of paramedic work and the role of ICTs in supporting 'articulation work' defining a division of

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labor, yet affording practitioners scope to independently undertake work, not solely providing a means of communication (Bardram and Hansen, 2010, Mair et al., 2012, Nevile, 2009, Suchman, 1997, Schmidt and Bannon, 1992).

### THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

#### ACTOR NETWORK THEORY

Often described as an approach rather than a theory or method, Actor Network Theory (ANT) signals that it should not be taken for granted that either objects or people determine the character of either change or stability (Law, 1992). The actor network approach is a theorization of the relationship between agency, knowledge and technical artifacts. Those working with ANT argue that social effects, whatever their material form, should be explored in order to answer questions about structure, power and organisation (Law, 1992). Approaching the exploration of work from an ANT perspective makes it possible to explore sociomaterialities outside of a constricting framework of pre-established social categories and, therefore, break down assumptions about the rigid social/technical binary (Callon, 1986). Once this binary has been weakened in favour of a research focussing on ‘relations’ in sociomaterial worlds, it is possible to theorise technology or science as an ‘effect’ of the associations between actors within social worlds. In drawing on the work of feminist technoscience scholars it is possible to recognize that these relationships are recursive and transformative and therefore show how actors become ‘of’ technologies (Barad, 2007) making them inseparable from material objects (Haraway, 1985).

Therefore the ANT approach, alongside the work of feminist science studies scholars, makes it possible to explore these heterogeneous relations; relations formed between ‘matters of concern’: workers, organisations, discourses, diseases, public groups and computer systems to name but a few. As ANT methods assemble and link entities in material and social worlds without prioritising one actor or entity over another, it is assumed that everything is a consequence of its relations with other actants in that world. Therefore, mapping the actor world of sociomaterialities helps show how relations are made and how the discursive ordering within those networks can shape technologies within those worlds. As a consequence, who or what is included in this discourse affects how that technology is perceived. Within the actor network approach it is purported that each actant seeks to ‘translate’ another by giving them an identity, interests, a role to play, a course of action and projects to carry out (Callon, 1986). Actor network theory also provides an additional dimension to the study of sociomaterialities by accepting that the meanings of assemblages constantly change through the relations they inhabit. Rhetorical devices, therefore, are vital to the actor-network worlds, where material and social actors are formed in recursive relationships. ANT accepts that the success of one future is often at the expense of others.

#### INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Tummons (2010) argues that ANT lacks the:

*...lens of inquiry ... needed that will provide ways to explore and talk about the ways in which text-based artefacts are able to order people's activities.*

(Tummons, 2010): 348

He argues that this can be provided by Institutional Ethnography (IE). IE focuses on the explication of discursively organised social settings and the social relations that are at work within them, rather than on the participants as a population, and their understanding of the setting within which they find themselves (Campbell and Gregor, 2002). IE foregrounds the situated nature of texts, which should be analysed in the context of the sequences of action that they articulate and coordinate (Smith, 2006).

Dorothy (Smith, 2009) explained IE as follows:

Institutional ethnographies are built from the examination of work processes and study of how they are coordinated, typically through texts and discourses of various sorts. Work activities are taken as the fundamental grounding of social life, and an institutional ethnography generally takes some particular experience (and associated work processes) as a “point of entry.” The investigator attends to all of the work that’s done in the setting, and also notes which activities are recognised and accounted institutionally and which are not. Analysis proceeds by way of tracing the social relations people are drawn into through their work (with the term “social relations” taken in its Marxist sense to mean not relationships but connections among work processes). The point is to show how people in one place are aligning their activities with relevances produced elsewhere, in order to illuminate the forces that shape experience at the point of entry.

As such, using IE to explore how protocols are enacted in multiple locations appears to be a worthwhile enterprise. Institutional ethnography’s focus on texts comes from an empirical observation—that technologies of social control are increasingly and pervasively textual and discursive (Smith, 1999). Texts such as medical charts, enrolment reports, strategic plans, and so on are mechanisms for coordinating activity across many different sites. Institutional ethnography explores the institutional order and the ruling relations from the point of view of people who are in various ways implicated in and participating in it (Smith, 2009). Where as IE affords an analysis of power relations and control that ANT tends to level, there is a concern that IE will foreground the explicit written material and ignore the implicit sociomateriality of ordering and organising.

This is something I would like to discuss and find out more about here at ISA and specifically in this track.

## MOBILITIES PARADIGM

Key to IE is the movement of text and it would therefore be amiss not to consider how this fits with the mobilities paradigm. Theorists and empirical analysts of movement use studies of Mobilities to explore economic, social and political relationships. Drawing on a range of social science traditions and positions, Mobilities research explores “...different forms of travel, transport and communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces” (Urry, 2007: 6). A key concept in considering place and

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space is that lives and actions, and thus work, is not carried out **in** places but “*through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere*” (Ingold, 2011: 148). As such, Mobilities has been important in studying the in-between and, for studies of work, it has provided valuable insights for exploring the threads of ‘wayfaring’: the embodied experience of movement between complex, overlapping and ambiguous spaces of home and work but also flows of information.

What these studies have shown is that it is not always possible to “follow the information” (Buscher et al., 2014). As everyday life is turning digital, the fact that humans have never been “just” human but have always been entangled with technology in a “cyborg” co-existence (Heidegger, 1977, Haraway, 1985) takes on new significance. The convergence of the physical and the digital in human embodiment and “movement-space” (Thrift, 2004) is changing what it means to be human (Buscher et al., 2014), and thus the institutional order or ruling relations.

So the rise of informational systems and digital connectivity has led to increased study of mobile work (Ferguson, 2011, Hislop, 2012, Nóvoa, 2012) yet the methods available to study this work have not kept a pace. Following the pervasive use of mobile technologies in both work and private lives, highly complex technological environments have been established. Whilst these studies have explored the relational juxtapositions of work and mobility: work that is done on the move, work that is enabled by movement, and work that is movement, studying the coordination of mobile work processes and the connections between processes is becoming increasingly difficult.

Whilst immobile systems, such as behavioural regulation, safety systems and information systems shape mobility (Urry, 2007), they also shape belonging: an on-going process where individual and collective strategies are in interplay with external events (Gustafson, 2008). Spaces and technologies create anchorings and moorings – specific materialities that condition social relations within and between different spaces. I’m going to present some key findings from some work with mobile equipment engineers to explore just how texts were used in mobile work and how this feeds into my imminent work with paramedics.

### EMPIRICAL WORK: MOBILE ENGINEERS

The work with paramedics draws upon previous work with mobile equipment engineers. In this work I drew together elements of Organisation Studies, Science and Technology Studies and Mobilities to explore the materialities of organizing in physical spaces that are continually changing. In looking at the mobile work of medical equipment engineers and examining how these workers handle forms of context, ordering and potentiality I discussed the technologies of ordering (or control), which take the form of plans or protocols (physical or virtual), and material elements, such as signage, that shape, influence and control but also facilitate, enable and authorize mobile work to take place. Modes of ordering, or strategies, were unpacked to reveal how mobile work practices draw upon tacit and continuously evolving ways of knowing that are carried and embodied by mobile workers. As such, I argued that these highly embodied processes of knowing, belonging and becoming cemented mobile work practices.

The work of incorporating orderings (manuals and positioning of equipment) into the machine is done in order to make it fit into the rest of the department's work; what I termed 'organising the machine'. As Suchman (2002) states

*...if technologies are to be made useful, practitioners of other forms of work must effectively take up the work of design...that is appropriating the technology so as to incorporate it into an existing material environment and set of practices.*

(Suchman, 2002: 93)

The material environment changes from hospital site to hospital site but the mobility of the engineers, changes their expertise and experience and enables them to act in specific ways, which in turn shapes the ordering of machine.

The engineers are installing the machine, sometimes referring to the installation manual, and sometimes, mainly in the instances of the more experienced engineers, completing tasks without reference to the manual. The system block diagrams supplied with the CBCT system depict the 'true' order of the machine and are produced with the expectation that the knowledge they contain will enable installation in any site. But they are too complicated. Some engineers create what are termed, "Micky Mouses," at home. In the construction of 'Mickey Mouses,' engineers facilitate their own part in installing the system. Such personally produced and situated knowledge is needed to make sense of the system. Frank Blackler states that rather than studying knowledge as something individuals 'have' it is more useful to consider '*knowing as something that they do*' (Blackler, 1995 1039). Knowing, according to Blackler, is mediated, situated, provisional (in that it is constructed and developing) and pragmatic (in that it is purposive). The system block diagrams do not facilitate knowing on a practical level as they do not allow for situated, provisional and pragmatic knowledge – they are fixed, unlike the mickey mouses which can be amended each evening to reflect the ongoing knowledge production during the installation of the CBCT system. Even the manual, designed to aid the installation of the system by an engineer with no previous experience of the CBCT, needs local or accumulated personal knowledge to enable this.

This is similar to what Lucy Suchman described from her observations of people using photocopiers (Suchman, 2007). Suchman described how the expert help system, designed to anticipate users of the photocopier's inquiries, has embedded within it the presumptions of normative imaginaries. It assumes that users, placing their paper on the photocopier screen, will know what is happening in the world of the photocopier. Suchman states that

*Although plans presuppose the embodied practices and changing circumstances of situated action, the efficiency of plans as representations comes precisely from the fact that they do not represent those practices and circumstances in all of their concrete detail.*

(Suchman, 2007: 72)

The manuals represent the order – or at least what is to be done to achieve that particular order. However, the ordering of the CBCT during the installation comes from the way in which those

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working with the system perform that order. This performance of order, ordering, enables (and shapes) the work that is subsequently done.

The ‘prescriptive representations’ of the manuals presuppose actions that will take place within a context, which they cannot predict or specify (Suchman, 2007). The ‘situated action’ of the engineers is a process of translation from the ‘decontextualised’ manual to the embedded, real world installation of the machine. These “docile texts” only become relevant when individuals experience the practical problem of following them *in vivo* (Garfinkel, 2002). Obviously the manuals are produced in the context of ‘no-where’ which in itself gives them a ‘context’.

We see, throughout the ordering events, how ‘design work’ takes place. Locally defining and shaping technologies in order to incorporate them into existing practices enables machines to become obdurate (if this work is successful). However, rather than focussing on unlimited possibilities for technologies, this local design work, or organising, becomes shaped by the expertise and experience of those involved and the very environments, practices and sociomaterialities into which it is to be incorporated. Eventually decisions are made useful and are made to work.

In the work with equipment engineers I showed how knowing was manifested through mobility practices, how mobility enables knowing and also, how these mobile practices shape the sociomaterial orderings of systems. Proximity and physical ‘brushings’ create translation of ideas by contact and enable the transfer of specific courses of action, work arounds, approaches and fixes. How the machine is organised results in different materializations in each context, becoming, therefore, a product continuously being re-generated from the telling, performing, embodiment and interaction between different orderings: the organising of the machine.

### COLLECTIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

The proposed project with paramedics will expand on that previous work to consider organisational identity during mobile work practices. Organizational identity (OI) can be thought of as a specific type of purposeful collective identity (Moufahim et al., 2015) and is often a target for managerial intervention to enhance loyalty and commitment. OI creates ‘a sense of belonging and providing an anchor’ for members to be attached to and to defend (Driver, 2009). It is similar to Organizational Culture: “...*pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problem of external adaptation and internal integration; and that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems*” (Schein, 1985). Studies on OI, or organizational culture, often explore how rhetorical strategies, culture or organizational image are employed to foster identity (Gioia and Thomas, 1996, Hatch and Schultz, 2002, Moufahim et al., 2015).

Corporate Mobilities Regimes govern the mobility practice of its members within and on behalf of a company (Kesselring, 2015). They discipline mobile subjects by means of a framework for action that dictates who is allowed to move, how and under which terms. But there are other elements within these regimes that need to be considered when looking at Work on the Move: specifically the ways in which principles, norms and rules emerge to form work practices on the move. ‘Technologies of

control,' like protocols or standards (physical or virtual) shape, influence and control but also facilitate, enable, authorize and configures the mobile work that takes place. Protocols can be seen to provide a framework for implementing medical oversight of care (Anantharaman, 2012), legitimizing the paramedic work as they travel between organizational bases and their sites of implementation. The way in which EMIS are used and developed alongside these technologies allows for increased remoteness, on one hand, and forms of proximate control and direction on the other.

## WORK ON THE MOVE PROJECT

### METHOD

The proposed research project, entitled Work on the Move, involves ethnographic 'work along' interviews with ambulance crews and ambulance control centre staff. 'Ride alongs' will take place, involving observations of paramedic staff during full shifts. Observations will be with a range of different staff members, vehicles and crew sizes. The work along interviews will involve observations of working practices, specifically looking at any material-discursive practices that bond work to specific places or organizations. Observations will also look for instances when paramedic work is shaped by the location of the call out and any ways in which it is influenced by organizational base and the role of EMIS during these events. I am looking for how material-discourses shape activities, either formally or informally. In order to add meaning and depth to the observations, crewmembers will also be asked questions after each call out to clarify events that happened.

### OBSERVATION / QUESTIONING GUIDANCE

As part of the observations, participants will be questioned about their actions and experiences in mobile work. This may involve replaying aspects of video footage from exercises to discuss actions and procedures based on established methodologies (Mesman, 2011). This mode of questioning is also derived from a form of discussion termed the 'critical decision method', which aims to make processes of perception, reasoning, imagination visible, as well as processes of collaboration (Mendonca, 2007).

### ANALYSIS

The analysis of the collected data will be on-going and iterative focusing on modes of 'configuration' (Suchman, 2012) to reveal associations between non-formal knowledges and assemblages during mundane work practices. Configuration is a device for studying areas of interest with particular attention to the imaginaries and materialities such practices join together. As such, analysis through configuration is not something that happens after the process of data collection, more it is a resource for exploration, inquiry and further investigation throughout the period of the project. As such, I want to see how IE can be used alongside configuration to provide a more practical account of the social relations people are drawn into through their work, to show how people in one place are aligning their activities with relevances produced elsewhere, in order to illuminate the forces that shape experience.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper I have covered the background to a stream of research on Mobile Work. I have presented the background for current work on paramedics and also described how I have explored the use of the protocol in medical equipment engineers. I am interested in exploring how IE accounts for materiality and how it may inform the exploration of material-discursive practices.

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