The importance of understanding work-as-done: Implications for research and practice in organizational psychology

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Abstract

This paper aims to describe how the concept of 'work-as' proxies can offer important insights for work and organizational psychologists. We explore how routine work activities can reflect those that are actually carried out when following a work-as-done perspective, rather than through the commonly used perspective of work-as-imagined. In highlighting these different perspectives, we suggest that they allow for a more in-depth understanding of what workers do and the processes they use. The value of this approach is illustrated through three case studies of applied research that have examined work in practice across the different contexts of job interviews, clinical handovers and decision making in teams. The paper challenges some of our existing assumptions of how we view work and highlights the benefits of adopting a work-as-done approach for practitioners and researchers.

Keywords: observation, qualitative, work-as proxies, reality-based, work-as-done, work-as-imagined

Introduction

Work and organizational psychologists will typically consider work and how it is viewed through approaches such as job analysis, training and/or coaching that involves an understanding of how work is undertaken. The development of systems to select individuals or assess their performance is also reliant upon some appreciation as to what good job performance represents. These perspectives consider how work is carried out through an assumption that there is a singularly and uniformly agreed perspective across the organization of what work activity or performance looks like. This approach fails to consider that stakeholders may adopt their perspective from different positions or that, in different contexts, their representation of how work is carried out might also be different. Consequently, there is a growing recognition that there are different perspectives or lenses as to how work is conceived in practice. Nielsen and Randall (2013) argue for a greater focus on process evaluation and understanding the mechanisms that influence intervention outcomes, which is reliant upon a deeper scrutiny of practice. Such positions follow a 'reality based' approach (Rae et al., 2020) whereby an emphasis is placed on the use of rigorous observations of existing practice to understand how work is carried out.

Our knowledge of the workplace remains bounded by the methods we use to understand it. Direct observations, which might offer practice insights, are not widely used by researchers, compared to the frequent use of research surveys and interviews (Wilhelmy & Kohler, 2022). This position reflects a wider critique on the state of work and organizational psychology as a discipline. For instance, Hollway (1991) challenged the dominant work and organizational psychology positions that produce "sanitised versions of work psychology" (p.11), and subsequently Islam and Sanderson (2022) have urged the field to move beyond these dominant perspectives. Therefore, it is relevant and timely for work and organizational psychology (WOP) to consider the fundamental notions of how work historically has been understood and the implications that this might have.

Work-as-done provides a way to understand routine work activities by considering the varied aspects involved in completing particular tasks. Through examining routine work activities, work-as-done acknowledges that there are unpredictable facets that organizations may lack awareness of and that could lead to unintended consequences. For example, a worker who adapts their way of working to accommodate a lack of

resources ensures that they remain efficient. However, this local change places greater demands and pressures for others in the system as they must accommodate this change further along in the work process. Understanding what was involved in accomplishing an activity has made work-as-done a paramount concept that organizations need to explore (Hollnagel, 2016).

Our paper proposes that work and organizational psychology would benefit from utilising the conceptual distinctions of work-as-done proxies (Hollnagel, 2016), as a means of emphasising the adoption of a reality-based approach. We set out a number of aims. Firstly, we aim to apply the work-as-done concept to the work and organizational psychology context. Secondly, we demonstrate three broad examples of research application, where work-as-done is incorporated within the design, to illustrate the potential benefits of the approach. Thirdly, we conclude with some implications and recommendations for practitioners and researchers.

Differing perspectives of how work is carried out: Conceptualising 'work-as' proxies

We can conceptualize how work is understood through two different lenses. Through the lens of 'work-as-imagined' tasks are often envisaged before they take place. In comparison, through the lens of 'work-as-done' how tasks are envisaged represent how work is actually carried out or what that would look like when it was carried out (Hollnagel, 2017; Hollnagel & Woods, 1983). The work-as-done vs work-as-imagined perspectives (i.e., 'work-as-proxies') have been widely applied in the field of safety science across industries such as healthcare (Ashour et al., 2021), nuclear and aviation (Teperi et al., 2015; 2017) and emergency response (Carvalho et al., 2018). Historically, the concept drew from distinctions made between task and activity (Leplat & Hoc, 1983) or task and system design (Hollnagel & Woods, 1983) and recognises the need to understand work carried out with granularity and specificity. Work-as proxies approach is evolving conceptually. Shorrock (2020; 2022) provides an excellent overview of ongoing development of nine different 'work-as' proxies, such as 'work-as-disclosed', 'work-as-measured' or 'work-as-judged'.

Where an organization or practitioner takes a work-as-imagined focus, they base their understanding of the activity on previously carried out work or their own embedded

assumptions. This position might reflect how a manager used to do the work when they were previously in that role or how they originally envisaged the role when it was designed. The work-as-imagined perspective neglects to recognise how the role may have changed or adapted over time and simply bases the view of the activity on the assumptions about the work in general (Clay-Williams et al., 2015). Changes or key decisions taken based on this perspective may generate risks to the organization if the work activity itself no longer exists or has evolved over time. In contrast, work-as-done has been characterized by the activity that people do when completing tasks and work routines (Catchpole & Jeffcott, 2016). Therefore, work-as-done reflects what people do when completing tasks and work routines, and for that reason it represents an understanding of what is involved in accomplishing the actual action (Catchpole & Jeffcott, 2016). The work-as-done approach relies on accessing data and information on how work is carried out from those who are closest to that actual activity. This can lead to a greater scope of understanding the details or granularity of how work is carried out. Because of the close relationship between work-as-done and how an activity is actually carried out, it is essential that organizations and practitioners explore work through this lens. Doing so will ensure that any proposed changes or developments are designed to improve things that actually occur rather than fail due to targeting work activity that is imagined to be happening but is not.

Adopting work-as proxies in organizational psychology

An important task for work and organizational psychology is to better align to the realities of work, through bridging the academia-practice gap (Gelade, 2006; Symon, 2006; Vosburgh, 2022). This alignment would provide a better evidence base for practice (Briner & Rousseau, 2011) and ensure the relevance of research for society (Byington & Felps, 2017). Some past critique of WOP research has focused on how data is sanitized to advance research aimed at understanding the relationship between a limited set of variables at the expense of understanding complexity, context and relevance (Teo, 2018). Islam and Sanderson (2022) describe the practice of 'hegemony' whereby concepts and insights gained from research drawn from a group or population are extended more widely. In doing so, a pretence of universality is offered that often obscures gender, ethic, cultural or geographic idiosyncrasies of the original group. Consequently, the details and context of how work takes place is reduced and the division between research and practice persists. This division further manifests when considering evidence-based practice. Briner and Rousseau (2011) illustrate this division through an example of the

adoption of a new organizational system, whereby the implementation, based on what was originally planned and understood, differed from the actual practices in place. To bridge the academic–practitioner gap, the adoption of models and approaches in related disciplines, such as safety science or health services research (e.g., Bos et al., 2022) may offer useful approaches to achieving this.

Work-as-done perspective relies on research that provides rich insights from subject matter experts, often using qualitative methods, such as observations, simulations or reflections from those with first-hand experience in a particular work activity (Carvalho et al., 2018). In-depth analysis has provided useful insights into work activities such as sales calls and entrepreneurial presentations (Clarke et al., 2019; Huma et al., 2019). However, qualitative methods remain on the periphery of WOP or are used as a first step to inform larger quantitative designs (Wilhelmy & Kohler, 2021). Consequently, within work and organizational psychology there is a risk that much of the research undertaken relies on a work-as-imagined viewpoint.

We propose in this paper that the adoption of 'work-as' conceptualisations can substantially increase WOP practitioners' and researchers' positive impact in the workplace, which is the fundamental manifesto for the future of the discipline (Bal et al., 2019). There are some WOP activities that particularly offer the potential for work-as-done understanding. For example, one opportunity could be to view job analysis as a process, where the current incumbents are involved and present a work-as-done perspective. An appreciation of work-as-done can enhance job analysis decision making as data collected from incumbent observations, supplemented with work diaries and critical incident interviews (Lohman, 2021) would provide a clearer indication of what is actually happening than interviews with supervisors or clients. A work-as-done approach also accounts for the environmental pressures and employees' responses to them, as the data collected captures variations and adaption in practice. An employee might report on their day's work as an aggregated list of tasks that are completed. However, direct observations offer the opportunity for a more nuanced understanding, including how those tasks were carried out, how the incumbents dealt with other competing demands and tasks and how this might vary from one day to the next.

Work-as-imagined perspective may not be able to consider the variability of work situations and, as such, limits our understanding of how work is conducted (Hollnagel, 2016). For example, job crafting behaviours are indicative of the complexity of modern

day working and reflect situations where employees proactively adapt their own job demands and resources to make their jobs more meaningful and satisfying (Demerouti, 2014). Similarly, employees are also known to utilise 'workarounds' whereby tasks get done while circumventing barriers inherent in the work systems and processes (Ash et al., 2003; Morrison, 2015). Job crafting and workarounds both represent a significant departure from how tasks and processes are believed to be carried. Hence, managerial assumptions about work may differ from actual process of work due to the adaptations that employees may introduce. Unless a work-as-done perspective is applied, research and practitioner interventions could risk being undermined by designs based on assumptions of how work occurs during imagined 'on paper' days, rather than how work is actually carried out.

To adopt a work-as-done perspective, data is collected via first-hand accounts and direct observations (Carvalho et al., 2018). Wilhelmy and Kohler (2022) argue that whereas interviews provide insights into individuals' thoughts, experiences and beliefs, observations provide insights into what individuals actually do and how they interact with their context. Therefore, it is imperative to use naturalistic data (e.g., observations and organizational documents) that directly capture what occurred in practice. For example, in the field of workplace bullying despite evidence regarding the merits of using direct secondary data, such as organizational records (e.g., Catley et al., 2017), most research relies on self-report and retrospective methods (Neall & Tuckey, 2014; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Consequently, adopting methodological practices that offer a direct examination of institutional settings, e.g., disciplinary hearings, coaching sessions and investigation interviews could provide valuable insights that are directly representative of practice (Thompson & Catley, 2021) and reflect a work-as-done perspective.

Typically, an understanding of work-as-done would rely on observational approaches such as participant observation, shadowing or ethnographic approaches that might be limited to participants' direct observations, supported through extensive note taking and possibly follow up interviews. However, technology is increasing our capacity to examine and understand work-as-done more effectively. Rather than relying on second-hand retrospective accounts or having to directly shadow practitioners, the growing sophistication of video capture and organizational metrics has increased the opportunities for applied researchers to directly observe and understand practice. In the following sections, we describe three examples from our ongoing projects. The examples illustrate different levels of proximity in 'researcher presence' to the organizational practices being

undertaken. Specifically, these range from situations where a researcher is physically present, to situations where the researcher is in a different room observing activity as it occurs, to situations where the researcher observes recorded practices after the event. The projects also draw upon different degrees of naturalistic data collection, such as work simulations, pre-existing video recording collections, and in-vivo recordings of practice that enable the identification of work-as-done.

Observing work-as-done through analysing simulated activity: Job interviews

Job interviews are traditionally used in some form by most organizations to recruit new employees. They are typically viewed as central to the selection process and provide critical information for hiring managers (Dipboye, 1992). Interview processes have been extensively examined, with notable reviews available that illustrate the scale of this research (e.g., Macan, 2009; Melchers et al., 2020). However, the scope of our knowledge in this area relies on study designs that often do not closely align with how practices are actually carried out and, instead, often represent work-as-imagined. For instance, job interview research often requires candidates to retrospectively describe their views or experiences of job interviews (Bozionelos, 2005; Ho et al., 2021). Consequently, they rely on applicants' ability to recall and report on past events, rather than collect data in the moment during the activity. Other studies focus on understanding assessment decisions. For example, a comprehensive multi-study project (Tews et al., 2018) examined the influence of interview etiquette on hiring decisions. The design relied on assessments of hypothetical candidates, followed by candidate self-report assessments of their own interview behaviour compared to actual interview outcomes. However, generating detailed insights of actual interview processes and behaviour was not possible given that assessments were based on scenarios that depicted the interview interaction. Similarly, other studies rely on data from single interviewer assessments (e.g., Chen et al., 2010), whereas, in practice, it is typical to use multiple interviewers as part of a selection panel. Field experiments, such as the one carried out by Silver and Anderson (2003), reflect a closer alignment to practice by drawing upon data from actual interviews and scores based on the consensus of multiple interviewers. However, these studies are often reduced to understanding an extremely narrow set of outcomes, either because they compare interview formats or because they employ very restricted coding. This limits our understanding of how job interviews take place.

Where research draws directly from organisational practice, typically the methods used only examine segments of actual practice. In past research, it is commonplace to only examine short segments of time or limited numbers of interview questions. Further reductions may involve only using a selected small set of data from a larger dataset (e.g., Bangerter et al., 2014; Wilhelmy & Kohler, 2016) or the data being reduced in scope, with rich qualitative data discarded in favour of sanitised structured behavioural checklists (e.g., Roulin et al., 2014; Van Iddekinge et al., 2007). However, in practice, during a high stakes interview, a candidate can be typically interviewed for an hour or longer, by multiple interviewers, involving multiple phases of question-and-answer interactions between interviewer and candidate. Observational methods might provide rich insights in situations that involve high stakes interviews with candidates who are invested in performing to their fullest and interviewers who are accountable for their decisions.

Few studies of job interviewing practice have employed qualitative video methods that allow for a rich analysis of the dynamic interview interaction that represents work-as-done. To address this, a study was designed by the first author to follow the general principles of work-as-done. To examine job interview practice, simulated interviews were set up where two experienced recruiters were asked to recruit for a graduate role. The overall intention of the research project was to explore the broad practices that take place during interviews and shine a light on them by using video technology which offers opportunities for detailed scrutiny. Since this was an exploratory study, we did not have any a priori hypotheses. Our objective was to develop a corpus of data over time using the work-as-done lens and the video methodology. We could then use the data generated to examine new research questions or re-examine past study assumptions that may have relied on a work-as-imagined lens.

In this study, the recruiters were provided with a job advert, job description and brief competency framework that had been developed as a composite of recruitment materials in the public domain. The interviewers then developed questions based on those materials. Participating interviewers were asked to draw on their own experience of how they would typically approach an interview situation. The 'candidates' were undergraduate and postgraduate students who took part in the interviews to gain interview feedback and experience. They had to apply for the job by using an application form. All job applications were provided to the recruiters in advance of the interviews. The interviews were recorded using three fixed position cameras, so that interviewer and candidate behaviour could be isolated and analysed, and a holistic examination of the

interview behaviours could also be collected (See Figure 1). Alongside the data collection, interview feedback was offered to the candidates for improving employability.

To align with typical interview practice, all participants were asked to approach the interview as they would in real life. Each interview, lasted up to an hour and included partially structured competency–based interview questions that were based on the job description and competency framework. Despite different interviewers being involved in this, in some instances the same or very similar questions were used by recruiters. For example, "What experience have you had in analysing data?" was often used across the different interviewer panels.

Figure 1

Images of the video camera positioning

Camera focused on candidates   **Camera focused on full room**

Camera focused on candidates

Note. Images are blurred to preserve participant anonymity.

Several indicators were evident in the recordings to represent work-as-done rather than work-as-imagined. The pairs of interviewers would often switch turns in asking questions, clarify and use prompts to generate further data. Recordings also captured the interviewers' discussion of candidates during scoring conversations and general debrief. Despite clear well-written questions being developed by the participating interviewers, there was variation in how these questions were actually asked during the interviews. For example, the same question was adapted by different interviewers, resulting in at least one instance where the flow of the interaction stalled as the candidate needed to seek further clarification before being able to answer.

Candidates demonstrated examples of the use of several impression management strategies. These strategies could vary throughout the interview and were often responding to the question posed or how an answer might potentially reflect negatively on the candidates. For instance, when candidates were asked to recount a failure or unsuccessful outcome (whereby their answer would reflect badly on them), often defensive impression management was used to justify their accounts. Image repair was used as one approach, where candidates offered excuses and justifications to defend their position in an attempt to repair the potential damage to their image brought about by having to describe something they did not do well. Another approach, impact protection, involved the candidate resisting or omitting to mention negative details about events, or distancing their involvement. In these instances, it was only through using supplementary probing questions that fuller accounts of how candidates managed failure or success were recorded.

This reality-based data collection provided an understanding of the antecedents and consequences of applicant behaviour in context. The recordings also allowed a more nuanced analysis of applicant behaviour, e.g., asking for clarification, justifying limitations in their potential performance, displaying nervousness, building rapport with the interviewers and using humour. What was apparent through the detailed analysis was that interview design that is reliant on a work-as-imagined assumption can reflect neat uniformly applied question and answer pairings. However, work-as-done reflects much more of the 'mess' that can occur in practice, which is typically omitted within conventional research designs but are important considerations for interview research and practice.

A potential limitation of this study is the use of simulation as a proxy measure of when work is actually carried out (Stokoe, 2013). However, when real-world access is not available, this research has demonstrated the potential in the context of job interviews to generate rich qualitative insights that are closely aligned to work-as-done. Furthermore, within a single interview context, practice variations could also be examined. Collectively, these findings offer the potential for developing feedback and guidance for recruiters that could lead to future practice improvement and development.

Observing work-as-done through analysing secondary data: Handovers in clinical settings

Clinical handovers involve the transfer of patient information and responsibility from one group of health care workers to another, therefore can be viewed as an important and high-risk area of patient care (Bost et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2015; Sujan et al., 2015; Wood et al.,2015). Clinical handovers are part of the routine operational activity in a hospital, which happens throughout the course of any given day. To examine clinical handovers as a practice, the second author completed his PhD research using secondary data analysis of pre-recorded video media that detailed handovers in action.

Examination of clinical handovers allows organizations to better understand employee duties in high-pressured situations. Handovers represent a complex set of work tasks that require an alignment of both organizational and individual priorities. A typical handover consists of key components: background information of the patient's situation, reason for why the patient was assisted by ambulance services, treatment that had been provided and any recommendations for next steps in the patient's treatment (Sujan et al., 2014). Clinical handovers between ambulance services and emergency care staff can be extremely complex, posing greater risks to patient safety through information not being communicated (Shapiro, 2020). Inadequately conducted handovers may result in long delays for patient care. These risks are heightened further as they involve the sharing of patient information in a multidisciplinary and multi-organizational setting (Iedema et al., 2012).

Previous research on clinical handovers has often relied on the use of different qualitative methods, such as interviews or surveys (Wood et al.,2015) and required participants to reflect on the overall process of the handover they conducted. Much of the research

on clinical handovers from ambulance services has not considered a work-as-done approach. Hence, what is known about clinical handovers has not derived from direct observational data. Where opportunities have arisen for direct observations, differences between work-as-done and work-as-imagined have been recognised. For example, Sujan et al., (2017) identified that second handovers were often commonplace in practice while not recognised in guidance.

To better understand how the interaction between the practitioners and the activities they undertake are carried out within this routine practice, an examination of clinical handovers between ambulance services and emergency care staff was carried out using a collection of 120 recordings that were taken from real handovers available in the media. The data used for this study was obtained through an online source called Learning on Screen developed through the British Universities and Colleges Film and Video Council also referred to as Box of Broadcasts (BoB) (BUFVC, 2018). BoB is an online resource that staff and students are able to access so long as their institution has a subscription. The use of videos allows for improved understanding of routine work activities as the verbal and nonverbal interactional elements can be observed (Heath et al., 2010). The handover examples were analysed to look at the structure of the activity and to assess the various aspects of the interactions such as the way in which information is shared between healthcare staff.

Through this examination, key facets of the work activity were drawn out that illustrated a work-as-done perspective and demonstrated the complexity of the handover in practice. A pre-handover alert would be initiated by the ambulance team member to obtain attention of the receiving emergency care staff. This also highlighted how there was a need to orient and prepare themselves for the handover prior to the exchange of any patient information. The pre-handover did not fall within the existing literature on the structure of a handover from ambulance services (Sujan et al., 2014) and illustrated the work-as-done vs work-as-imagined distinction. According to the latter, the handover was meant to commence when background information of the patient was exchanged but this additional feature showed that other aspects of the activity were necessary.

The use of the word 'okay' was found to have a multifunctional purpose during handovers. Previous research has demonstrated the significance of the word 'okay' as a discourse marker and the relevance of where it was positioned within a conversation can hold different meanings (Bangerter & Clark, 2003). These previous findings were

applied to this clinical handover context. 'Okay' was commonly used among staff during the pre-handover to indicate their readiness to formally begin the handover process and to capture attention or orient other staff members to the specific task. The positioning of 'okay' during the handover interaction signalled to receiving staff members of receipt of information. This was a key aspect of the handover to indicate if patient information had been understood by the emergency care staff or if clarification was needed. Another way that handover staff would indicate acknowledgement of information was the use of repetitions. During the handover, it was observed that receiving staff would repeat words used by the ambulance team member. Repetition serves two purposes. Firstly, it signals key points of miscommunication and information that needs to be corrected. Secondly, through repetition, receiving staff seek assurances that their understanding of the situation is correct (Pomerantz, 1984).

In taking a work-as-done orientation, this research demonstrates how clinical handovers are conducted and how often they are structured in a way that does not reflect the prevailing, work-as-imagined, conceptualisation of it as a standardized event. This prevailing conceptualisation of clinical handovers reflect the work-as-imagined understanding. A work-as-done perspective as described above helps to identify instances of effective practice that enable the process and problem areas that risk derailing the handovers which can then be shared more widely. Hence, in such high-risk areas of work, work-as-done perspective may help improve performance and reduce unforeseen risks in the process.

Observing work-as-done through analysing in vivo data: Decision making in team meetings

The third example of work-as-done research was developed during the PhD research of the third author where she generated a data corpus of video recordings that document ongoing work team meetings across a number of case studies.

Work teams are the foundations of the modern workplace organizational structure (Kozlowski & Bell, 2013; Mathieu et al., 2008) and have been the focus of interest in research and practice. Classic studies of team working (e.g., Moreland & Levine, 1982) or practice models (e.g., Belbin, 2012; Tuckman & Jenson, 1977) can be critiqued due to their divergence from practice. The strengths of these traditional approaches are that they attempt to explain in general how teams work and allow for comparisons across
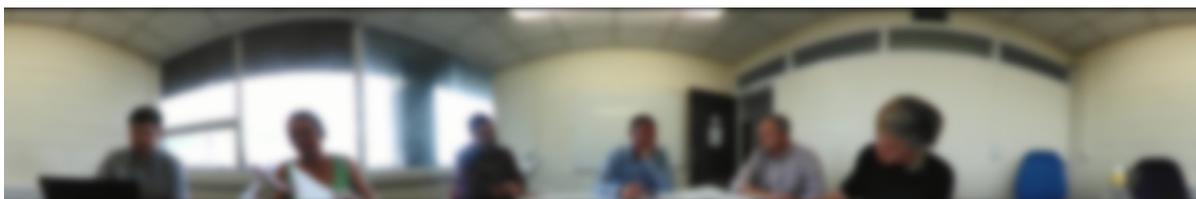
teams. They also reflect sanitised illustrations of how things should happen rather than what actually happens in a given team. A comprehensive review of teamworking has suggested that future research needs to model dynamic team relationships in context of the complex systems they inhabit (Mathieu et al., 2017). This critique of these past approaches aligns with the view that existing models typically draw on a work-as-imagined perspective rather than seeing teams through a work-as-done lens.

An example of a dynamic work team inhabiting a complex system is those that take place during the design process for construction projects, which is widely recognised as being challenging to manage (Ponton et al., 2019). The complex process of design and construction are managed through regular joint design and construction team meetings. The focus on how designers and constructors interact during these team meetings and how social cohesion affects team performance reflects an in-depth examination of work-as-done using contemporary methods to understand what constitutes typical behaviour and work practices (e.g., Ponton et al., 2020).

The research used an ethnographic observation method, a research approach that has historically been employed in WOP (e.g., Roy, 1959). By comparison, contemporary ethnographic approaches use shorter timeframes, less active participant observation and the use of technology to aid and enhance data collection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This project focused on gathering qualitative data from seventeen consecutive design team face-to-face meetings across three case study projects. The group membership represented several different organizations who were commissioned and contracted into large scale construction projects. The make-up of these cases reflects the complex dynamics of contemporary work teams rather than sanitised experimental groups. Work-as-done in this instance was captured using the researcher as an observer and recordings of meetings using a 360° panoramic audio and visual video-camera footage (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Typical image from the panoramic camera footage

Note. Images are blurred to preserve participant anonymity.

The nature of the data collection allowed for observation and qualitative analysis of all the meeting participants' simultaneous verbal and non-verbal actions and reactions. The use of recording technology also allowed for a greater depth of analysis. Previous research has been reliant on observer notes or participants' recall of the events, whereas here observations could be examined and re-examined to a high level of granularity. Using digital recordings also allows incorporating a critical analysis by more than one analyst. Over time larger data corpuses can be developed to allow comparisons across settings of particular meeting behaviours and offer greater transferability of the findings.

The results of the analysis of team decision making illustrated how social cohesion performed distinct functions that impact the decision making process of the meeting. The presence of social cohesion allowed potentially dysfunctional task- and process-related conflict to be mitigated successfully. The use of this approach allowed an examination of specific behaviours and how they contributed to conflict and cohesion. For example, a behaviour such as humour was shown to be part of the core business of the meeting rather than a disruptive factor. It was only possible to examine these interactional dynamics as they were available through the rich data collection and would have been lost if other data collection methods that require participants to describe their aggregated experiences of the meetings, such as questionnaires or semi-structured interviews were used.

Considerations for the future adoption of work-as-done approaches for practice and research

There are several considerations for adopting a work-as-done approach for researchers and practitioners. Primarily, there is a need to adopt methodologies that permit the understanding of work-as-done. This paper has described three different approaches to examining this through observational research that make use of video analysis. Use of organizational documentation and critical incidents analysis of incumbents may also offer similar insights and further value through integrating and triangulating with direct observations. Other approaches such as talk through walk through analysis (Lee et al., 2021) or verbal process analysis (Kuusela & Paul, 2000) may be necessary where the scope for data collection might be restricted or not possible in instances of non-routine cognitive work. However, approaches that rely upon recalling may introduce other potential limitations as participants can drift away describing work-as-done into work-as-imagined, prescribed or disclosed (Shorrock, 2022).

For researchers to turn to work-as-done approaches, methods do need to have a focus on direct observations of practice, so that they can seek ways of understanding the richness of contextualised workplace activities, rather than the sanitised presentations of how work is supposed to occur. Consequently, competence in ethnographic or observational data collection methods and the use of qualitative analytic approaches, such as thematic analysis, conversational analysis or video analysis can be required. For some work and organizational psychologists this might require further development or might be achieved through establishing collaborated partnerships with others with that expertise.

The use of work-as-done designs in research may have implications for theory building. The merits of parsimonious theory building to account for complex phenomenon is itself a contested area (See for instance Edwards & Potter, 1999; Schmidt & Fielder, 1999) and the inclusion of contextualised data, rather than sanitised or reduced approaches may lead to further divergence from this position. Recognising that theory and practice are generally bound together and mutually sustaining, theory building needs to be informed by practitioner learning (Kuhn, 1996; Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019). Therefore, work-as-done approaches have the potential to inform, challenge and develop theory through a practice informed lens, and may offer new future insights into theoretical explanation of the workplace.

For future research direction, the adoption of a work-as-done perspective presents opportunities to revisit established fields that may have a work-as-imagined lens. Studies might take a practice focus, utilising some of the methodology already described. How are specific employee selection practices such as personality assessments facilitated in practice? Do our understanding of practices such as teamworking, meetings, leadership development etc, reflect work-as-done or a more historically established work-as-imagined perspective? Adopting this research lens also encourages co-constructed research designs with practitioners as key partners and moves to address the long-cited research-practice divide.

For practitioners, there are several considerations of using work-as-done approaches that could be useful when planning and designing intervention work:

■ Recognising variations in work-as-done perspectives will likely require qualitative methodologies that offer greater depths of insight, which can then be applied to the design of change initiatives and interventions. Such approaches reflect the complexity

of work. Methods that aggregate experience might remove vital contextual and process information but may still serve as useful for data triangulation or be combined within a broader analytic framework (e.g., Bos et al., 2022).

■ Organizations may seek to improve their capability for systematically collecting complex organizational data that reflects work-as-done activity or recognising where current data collection is limited in only providing work-as-imagined perspectives. This may also result in seeking out opportunities for research-practice partnerships to enable organizational data collection in areas currently not available.

■ Use of video-based data collection as evidence offers opportunity for establishing research rigour and objectivity as claims about the data can be examined by multiple analysts, triangulated with other data or examined by critical friends and partners.

■ Specific approaches that apply observational methods are increasingly being adapted for the benefit of organizations and may become more mainstream or integrated into existing interventions. Such approaches may be focused on improving broad organizational, e.g., through approaches conversational analytic role-play method (CARM; Sikveland & Stokoe, 2017; Stokoe, 2014), or individual performance, e.g., through video enhanced reflexive practice (VERP; Kennedy et al, 2015; Murray & Leadbetter, 2018). Critically, such approaches need to be grounded on an orientation to identifying good practices and enhancing performance rather than identifying and penalising individual poor performance.

■ Following ethical practice is a critical principal underpinning the studies and practices described. All studies received institutional ethical approval which incorporated standards of informed consent, storage and management of data. Anonymisation is often a key concern raised, however this can be addressed through visual recordings being anonymised through blurring or other manipulations, as we have done with the images used in this article. The use of deception is not employed as it is contrary to the work-as-done approaches that engage with practitioner engagement. Often with the use of video recordings concerns are raised as to socially desirable behaviour distorting the observations. These studies reported instances of humour, mundane conversation, swearing and very few instances where participants seemed to orientate to the camera. This suggests that camera presence is less of an issue for accurate data collection than has historically been viewed.

Conclusion

Work and organizational psychology as a field has received criticism for over-reliance on methodologically narrow approaches that have drifted away from the complexities of practice. This article has illustrated a collection of naturalistic approaches across primary and secondary data that represent different ways work-as-done data collection and analysis can be approached. We have highlighted projects with variation in the researchers' proximity to data collection and demonstrated the growing advantages of technology in this area. We have also highlighted some of the potential limitations in not considering work-as-done vs work-as-imagined distinctions and some benefits from adopting the former.

Conversely, there are limitations with this approach in the way this research is conducted. There are no specific guidelines for conducting research looking into work-as-done but a research protocol typically involves triangulation of data (e.g., observation, analysis of conversations, etc.). This type of research is accessible to WOP practitioners, but an understanding of different methodological approaches is needed to be able to carry out a study exploring these concepts.

Overall, in this article we have aimed to illustrate how by adopting the conceptualisation of work-as-done and distinguishing it from work-as-imagined, WOP practitioners and researchers can take an important step in reclaiming that 'reality' focus on what actually occurs at work. This will enhance subsequent designs of interventions and practice that WOP practitioners can offer therefore shaping both academic and practice development in future years.

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