

ProDoc Project - Research Module

Mobile and Contingent Work Interactions in the Hospital Care Unit

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SUMMARY

Members of hospital care units continually move around among different workspaces, the nurses' station, patients' rooms and the consultation, examination, operating and supply rooms, often transporting persons, documents and objects along with them. This "mobility work" (Bardram, Bossen, 2003) requires a great deal of energy from the staff and represents approximately 30% of nurses' working time (Hendrich et al., 2008). Far from being limited to transportation, it involves the nurses in a range of activities with colleagues, patients or other individuals, and is essential to the unit's operations. As they move from one space to another, the staff members engage in face-to-face or technology-mediated interactions through which they exchange information on patients, coordinate with each other to provide care and assemble documents and tools. A central feature of these exchanges is that they are largely contingent: they are not planned ahead of time but rather arise with the circumstances. These contingent and mobile interactions are the pivotal element of the work organization of spatially distributed teams that must rapidly accommodate inherently changing circumstances.

The literature has acknowledged the importance of these contingent interactions in mobile situations and outlined their features and functions: gathering material and human resources, sharing information, coordinating activities, displaying the state of the team's operations and strengthening its cohesion (Bardram, Bossen, 2003; Long et al., 2007). Yet there is still no study which: a) analyzes the sequential and multimodal organization of these interactions and b) examines their relationship to the organization of the care unit's activities. The proposed research project aims to achieve these goals by focusing on the mobile, contingent, co-present and verbal work interactions of the nursing staff of a hospital care unit in French-speaking Switzerland. The project adopts the framework of Workplace Studies (Heath, Luff, 2000; Luff et al., 2000), which analyzes the embodied and embedded features of work interactions and their moment-by-moment and real-time accomplishment through the articulation of talk, gaze, gestures, body movements and the use of tools and technologies. The consequent video-based field study - including informal interviews, document research and in-depth observations in addition to the recordings - will provide for detailed analysis of work interactions in their context.

The project addresses a current challenge in sequential and multimodal interaction research, which is too often focused on static and planned interactions in circumscribed spaces (Mondada, 2009). The project will offer detailed understanding of the organization of mobile and contingent work interactions and their role in the unit's work organization. These scientific contributions have practical relevance for the visibility and management of an activity recognized as essential but which, because of its inherent fluidity, is difficult to address. The project is designed as a research module of the *Adaptivity in Communication and Health* ProDoc program (SNSF grant no. 132615) exploring communication within health-care teams and the adjustments of hospital practices to the contingencies of daily work. It includes collaboration with the *Work, Interaction and Technology Research Center (King's College London)*. Creating

the framework for a doctoral thesis, the project will also lead to presentations and publications in the scientific and professional fields concerned.

