

**Documenting work:  
A methodological window into coordination in action  
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It is difficult to observe individuals coordinating work. For the purpose of this research, there is a focus on tangible aspects of work, specifically documents. They provide a useful lens into the work practices of organizational members. The notion of documents serves as a lens into the socio-technical or socio-material nature of what organizational members do, day in and day out. Documents are socio-technical in that they are both material, as they embody the technical infrastructure, and social, as they embody both the work practices and shared understanding of those involved.

Current research focuses on the practices associated with communicative tools and documents and where they exist, how long they exist, and what they are composed of. People's activities provide information on how documents are produced and reproduced. This paper regards documents as material manifestation of individual, group, or communal practices. Through repeated document practices individuals in the group learn what works for the group as a whole. Documents offer representation of the world by making part of that reality present and absent in text, while leaving many other things outside the field of attention. Documents are representative of practices, as it calls people's attention to what matters, what should be acted upon, and what can be left untouched.

To gather data, the authors of this paper studied their own documents as well as those of a couple of colleagues. The path documents took was mapped. The mapping involved all participants in a distributed collaboration. The mapping is framed by the overarching question: Where do your documents live? The informant is asked to give a tour of their physical and electronic document spaces. Data was gathered about how the scholars' organize their desktops, home and work offices, and filing system. The interviews revealed multiple locations of documenting work: the office, home office, home desks, and public spaces (e.g. cafe or library). The mapping data leaves a static picture of a rather heterogeneous and dynamic field of documents. To understand coordination in action, document practices must be tracked over time.

This research shows that documents offer a window into collective practices and coordination in action. Documents should be conceptualized as a processes or practices with temporal, spatial, and material manifestations that change over time. The content and location of the documents changed over the course of the research. To study flow requires the collection and intermediate analysis of larger bodies of documents before a picture emerges.

The document-centered methodology developed in this paper offers a new perspective on coordination in action and a call for revised research strategies. The findings should be taken as a pilot

study. The research was mainly carried out to develop and test a document-centric methodology. This paper speaks to one of the core questions associated with coordination in action: What role do artifacts play in coordination work?