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Ethnomethodology and Routine Dynamics

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Accepted for publication in D'Adderio, L., Dittrich, K., Feldman, D., Pentland, B. T., Rerup, C., and Seidl, D. (Eds.). (In press). *Cambridge Handbook of Routine Dynamics*

Abstract

Ethnomethodology (EM) has been fundamental to Routine Dynamics theorizing since its inception. However, whereas EM is well known for its detailed studies of face-to-face interactions, its relevance to understanding phenomena such as routines that span multiple sites and times is less widely recognized. EM studies of routine dynamics take a primary interest in the taken-for-granted yet systematic ways in which members produce actions that are accountably “the same” across sites and occasions. Through sequenced embodied displays of orientation to material elements of the setting and the unfolding interaction, members construct *in situ* an interaction that is meaningful to them. To the extent that some such elements are available and oriented-to by actors across multiple sites and occasions, a pattern of repetitive action becomes observable. EM thus provides the theoretical underpinning for an understanding of routines as situated actions, and paves the way for a program of routine dynamics research grounded in the empirically observable material and embodied processes of interaction that constitute repetitive action patterns.

1 Introduction

Ethnomethodology (EM) is a distinctive approach to studying social phenomena, set forth by Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011) over a long and productive career spanning six decades¹. His crucial insight is that social order is constructed from, and available in, the witnessable (visible, audible, etc.) details of each interaction. EM emphasizes elements such as agency, materiality, situatedness, relationality, and processuality that have been central features in Routine Dynamics (RD) theorizing (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011; Feldman, 2016). Indeed, scholars working within the EM tradition, such as Cicourel, Garfinkel, Heritage, Hutchins, Suchman, Schegloff and Zimmerman, have remained rich sources of conceptual inspiration for RD scholars (see e.g. Pentland and Rueter, 1994; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; D'Adderio, 2011; Feldman et al., 2016).

Over the past two decades, RD research has firmly established the elements listed above as constitutive of routines: performances of a routine are actions carried out by people in specific sociomaterial settings (Feldman, 2016). Far from being a mindless or automatic reproduction of structure, each performance is an “effortful accomplishment” involving knowledgeable and reflective actors alongside a multitude of artifacts (Feldman et al., 2016).

In this chapter, I will argue that Ethnomethodology presents a unique basis for furthering RD research and theory, through its conceptualization of action as *situated*.

¹ From early on, EM scholars have worked in close and very fruitful collaboration with Conversation-Analysis colleagues, giving rise to a largely hybrid field of EM-CA (Lynch, 2019; Mondada, 2019). In this chapter, I use the term Ethnomethodology to refer to research that acknowledges Garfinkel’s work as a direct antecedent, irrespective of which group authors attach themselves to.

Garfinkel (1967) argued that each instance of meaningful concerted action does not – indeed cannot – rely on a shared stock of abstract knowledge that preexists the interaction itself (Rawls, 2002). Instead, members of a social scene construct both meaning and action, at the same time and through the same means, in situ, through mutually recognizable sequential displays of orientation, attention and understanding.

Building on recent ethnomethodological studies in Routines Dynamics (LeBaron et al., 2016; Yamauchi and Hiramoto, 2016, in press), my aim is to outline the implications of an ethnomethodological understanding of collective action for Routine Dynamics. I will argue that adopting such conceptualization of action offers the possibility of developing a more fully performative (Latour, 1986) understanding of organizational routines.

2 Theorizing Routine Dynamics

A distinctive feature of the Routine Dynamics literature is its focus on action and materiality as constitutive of routines (Feldman, 2016). Arguably, such focus has been achieved through three successive shifts. First, early RD scholars (Pentland and Rueter, 1994; Feldman, 2000; Feldman and Pentland, 2003) rescued action, actors and agency in routines, which researchers had often black-boxed and assumed automatic and mindless (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011). Second, this refocusing on action set the ground for a fuller exploration of materiality in routine performances (D'Adderio, 2008; Pentland and Feldman, 2008; D'Adderio, 2011). Finally, the latest shift affirms the processual nature of routines, and in particular rejects understandings of the ostensive as a structural cognitive entity that acts or exists at a higher level to action (Feldman, 2016; Feldman et al., 2016). I discuss these shifts in more detail in what follows.

First shift: bringing action into focus

The first shift pursued by Routine Dynamics scholars emphasized agency in routine performances. Researchers in the earlier capabilities perspective tended to consider action in routines as automatic and mindless by definition, driven by individuals' acquired habits and dispositions, or arising from their need to conserve limited cognitive capacity by repeating programs of action adopted in the past (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011). As a result, routines appeared as inherently stable patterns of action that needed an external force to change. Analytically, routines could be black-boxed and treated as entities.

By contrast, RD scholars pointed out that action in routines often requires actors to exercise judgment, deal with exceptions, deliberate, improvise solutions to unforeseen circumstances, and innovate improved ways of operating (Pentland and Rueter, 1994; Feldman, 2000). Once this is taken into account, performances of a routine appear as "effortful accomplishments" rather than automatic responses (Pentland and Rueter, 1994) and routines can be a source of change as well as stability (Feldman, 2000, 2003).

These early advancements coalesced in the theoretical model proposed by Feldman and Pentland (2003). Drawing on theories of practice (e.g. Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990), their model posited a recursive relationship between distributed abstract understandings of a routine (ostensive aspects) and its specific performances (performative aspects). Ostensive and performative aspects have a recursive relationship in that they are mutually constitutive, and equally necessary to explain routines: actors enact the abstract idea of the routine in performances; while the actions performed create, maintain and modify the repetitive pattern that constitutes the ostensive aspects of the routine (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). This theoretical model of routines was decisive in bringing actions to the foreground, and in making the study of their relationship to observable patterns of such actions the focus of Routine Dynamics research (Feldman et al., 2016).

Second shift: turning to materiality

Initial discussions of artifacts in Routine Dynamics aimed to challenge the view of SOPs and other “artifactual representations of routines” as determining action, and therefore analytically interchangeable with the routine itself (D'Adderio, 2008; Pentland and Feldman, 2008). Such “naïve top-downism” regarded actions in routines to be automatic and mindless, and therefore largely driven and constrained by the artifacts that managers design and put in place, precisely to that end. RD scholars, by contrast, emphasized the symbolic nature of many of the artifacts involved in routines, which participants interpret and use in various ways during performances of the routine (Pentland and Feldman, 2008).

Further, RD scholars have examined the process through which artifacts are created and how they impinge on subsequent action. D'Adderio (2008) described a process of articulation, codification and standardization whereby rules and procedures are “disentangled” from local context and embedded in artifacts. The value of the resulting de-contextualized artifactual representations of action stems from their being easier to “describe, visualize, share, transfer and reproduce” across multiple organizational sites, where they can serve as common interpretative frames of reference which guide and constrain “intentions, views and actions across the organization” (2008:782). In this way, artifacts are central to the design, transfer and coordination of routines, as they mediate the relationship between ostensive and performative aspects of routines (D'Adderio, 2011).

Third shift: from ostensive aspects to patterning

RD scholars initially located the basis for repetitive organizational action in a socially distributed stock of knowledge about the routine in the abstract, the “ostensive aspects” of the routine (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). However, Feldman (2016) laments that some researchers mistake the two aspects as “separate entities”, with the ostensive seen as a shared cognitive element operating at a different level from action. To avoid this pitfall, she calls for

theorizing both performative and ostensive aspects as actions, and indeed recommends dropping the two-aspect terminology to speak of “performing” and “patterning” instead. In doing so, researchers should shift their attention to “the work of recognizing and articulating or narrating these patterns” (Feldman, 2016:40).

Several studies have examined the activities through which routine participants [re]create ostensive aspects through collective action and reflection. Rerup and Feldman (2011) found that ostensive aspects of routines emerge through trial-and-error experimentation. When organizational members confront problems, they try novel courses of action. If a set of actions repeatedly proves successful in addressing a class of problems, participants may interpret and justify that set of actions as appropriate, and individually held ostensive patterns of the routine thus emerge. Further, Dittrich, Guérard, and Seidl (2016) found that talk enables routine participants to reflect collectively on both specific performances of the routine and the overall pattern of actions; and thereby work out new ways of enacting the routine. Similarly, Bucher and Langley (2016) found that routine participants establish social, physical, symbolic and temporal boundaries in order to set up reflective spaces where they develop new conceptualizations of the routine, and experimental spaces where they test these new concepts in provisional performances. Finally, Glaser (2017) examined the actions organizational members undertook to create artifacts intended to effect change on routine performances. Through iterative “design performances”, members produce assemblages of artifacts, theories, practices and actors that, in turn, produce changes in the routine’s performances Glaser (2017).

Next move: situating routines

The developments described above constitute very significant progress in understanding the internal dynamics of routines, and have underpinned a remarkably rich body of empirical research. However, important conceptual difficulties remain in explaining

how participants enact a specific performance as part of a pattern they can recognize—particularly if we wish to avoid conceptions of ostensive aspects and patterns as residing in the mind (Feldman et al., 2016).

Overcoming these difficulties, I argue, requires a fourth shift that furthers the recent emphasis by RD scholars (Feldman, 2016; Feldman et al., 2016) on studying routines as *situated actions* (Suchman, 2007). RD scholars have tended to view action as discrete steps, purposefully taken by individual actors in pursuit of particular ends—e.g. “actions are simply doings and sayings” (Feldman, 2016:30), “by action we mean the things that actors do” (Pentland et al., 2012:1484), or “action refers to steps in a process of accomplishing an organizational task” (ibid.). The apparent simplicity of these definitions is in fact deceptive, in that they gloss over the social processes by which meaningful collective action is achieved in actual settings. Describing actions as “doings and sayings” implies that a bodily movement *does something*, or an utterance *says something*, that is, that their consequence and meaning are inherent in the movement or the utterance, or in the intention with which the actor performed the movement or the utterance.

A situated action perspective grounded in ethnomethodology helps us realize that it is only looking in retrospect at already-accomplished events that action appears closed, planful and attributable to an individual actor, an enactment or realization of a pre-existing cognitive abstraction, “a series of steps toward a foregone conclusion” (Rawls, 2002:34). For EM scholars, action is always open-ended and tentative: its consequence and meaning are only established *collectively* in the sequence of movements and utterances that constitute the action in the first place (Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron, 2011). Further, an EM perspective of action de-emphasizes the role of cognition as it is commonly understood in other traditions, as abstract conceptualizations existing and acting at a higher, more general level of reality than the concrete, contingent settings that actors inhabit. For EM scholars, action is

processual and material: it has a *durée*; it is open-ended and emergent; and it involves bodies, utterances, objects and spatial arrangements that are visible and hearable in the world in front of us.

Thus, an EM approach affirms relationality, materiality, emergence, processuality and situatedness, as constitutive features of action, not just of routines, performances, or patterns. Crucially, it enables the empirical examination of the processes through which concerted action is constructed, in situ, by actors who do not interact with each other at a conceptual level, but through their bodies' movements and utterances as part of a material setting (Rawls, 2002). This fourth shift thus provides the opportunity to develop a more fully performative understanding of organizational routines in Latour's original usage of the term, that is, routines "as a consequence *instead of* a cause of collective action" (Latour, 1986:271, emphasis added; Yamauchi and Hiramoto, 2016). To paraphrase Latour's observation that "as Garfinkel has taught us: it's practice all the way down." (2005:135), EM provides the theoretical scaffolding for an exploration of organizational routines as action all the way down.

3 Ethnomethodology

Since the beginnings of the RD literature, and throughout its subsequent development, ethnomethodology has been—along with related perspectives, practice theory and actor-network theory—a major source of ideas and vocabulary (Feldman et al., 2016). RD scholars have often cited EM authors when theorizing fundamental features of routines, such as relationality, materiality, emergence, processuality and situatedness, including Garfinkel (1967), Heritage (1984), Hutchins (1995), Suchman (2007), and Zimmerman (1970). However, the piecemeal adoption of EM concepts has meant that the full potential of a

coherent EM approach to Routine Dynamics is yet to be realized. I suggest that adopting EM's understanding of *situated action* (Suchman, 2007) is central to such realization.

3.1 Situated action

EM scholars have used the term “situated action” to characterize their distinctive approach to the study of collective concerted action (Goodwin, 2000a; Suchman, 2007; Mondada, 2019). The key insight that Garfinkel pursued throughout his work is that mutually intelligible collective action can only be constructed from—and is therefore available in—the *witnessable* (visible, audible, etc.) details of each interaction (Rawls, 2002).

Similar to Wittgenstein's (1953:§201-2) thinking on rules and rule following, Garfinkel's (1967) stance is grounded in the principle that concerted action cannot result from individuals following or acting out a pre-existing shared abstraction (Rawls, 2002). His perspective, however, goes further than asserting the indeterminacy of abstract rules and the need for actors to “know how to go on” (Wittgenstein, 1953:§154) in that ethnomethodology provides the means for empirical examination of just how actors do indeed manage to go on (Koschmann, 2011; Lynch, 2011; Rawls, 2011).

In this regard, Garfinkel insists that meaningful interaction can only be achieved through means that are public and accessible in the setting, “just here, just now, with just what is at hand, with just who is here, in just the time that just this local gang of us have” (2002:99n). Interactions are fundamentally embodied and material: actors can only interact through their bodies, by producing movements and utterances that are seeable and hearable by other participants in the interaction. Actors are thus members of a *social scene*, a public interactional space where they construct concerted action *and* shared meaning *at the same time and through the same means*, through sequences of witnessable bodily movements and utterances (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2002).

3.2 Accountability

Actors attempting to produce collective action need to ensure, first and foremost, that mutual intelligibility is achieved and sustained in their interaction (Rawls, 2008). For Garfinkel, such intelligibility, or common understanding of the unfolding interaction, does not rely on a pre-existing agreement between actors at a conceptual or abstract level, but on members' "competent use of shared methods of organizing action" (Rawls, 2008:702). EM takes as its phenomenon of interest these shared methods or systematic ways by which members create concerted action and common meaning, which Garfinkel (1967) calls *ethnomethods*.

Members of a social scene share a "background of expectancies": they hold a mutual expectation that they will produce movements and utterances in ways that are recognizable to all competent members of the scene, against a set of shared taken-for-granted, commonsense, background expectancies as "natural facts of life" (Garfinkel, 1967). They also expect others to see the meaning of their acts against the same commonsense expectancies, and expect others to expect the same of them.

Thus, members achieve mutual intelligibility by producing movements and utterances in ways that are recognizable to their peers, that is, by making their actions *account-able*. Accountable action is action prospectively produced to be patently recognizable in its details as coherent, consistent, rational, planful, or methodical, as just the sort of action a competent member would produce (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2002, 2008). The accountability of action is embodied, not talked about; it is evident in the "observable-and-reportable" features of members' visible and hearable practices, rather than in retrospective characterizations of their actions (Garfinkel, 1967). Likewise, accountable action is *instructable* action, that is, irreducible to a set of descriptive accounts and yet demonstrably reproducible, "available to members as situated practices of looking-and-telling" (Garfinkel, 1967:1).

3.3 Indexicality

An important concept to understand how members of a scene construct collective action and meaning in situ is *indexicality* or *orientation*. Objects, bodies, movements and utterances are oriented in the social scene, that is, they do not have meaning in themselves, but acquire their situational meaning from their spatial and temporal position relative to other elements of the social scene (Rawls, 2008).

Thus, members' bodies are not just *in* the setting, they are oriented to elements of the social scene (Rawls, 2002; Mondada, 2016): facing in one direction and turning its back on another, closer to some things and some actors' bodies and further from others, gazing at something or someone, adopting a particular posture as the result of a preceding action or in anticipation of an imminent one... Every movement and gesture of the body is similarly oriented to elements of the social scene: turning towards or away, approaching or leaving behind, following or anticipating, elements of the evolving social scene.

Utterances, likewise, are always indexical (Suchman, 2007). It is not only that the use of deictics such as "I/you", "this/that", "now/then", "here/there", which directly reference elements of the setting, is pervasive in speech. Rather, *every* expression is indexical, in the sense that it acquires its meaning by virtue of the specific space and time in which it is uttered, to whom it is addressed, to whom it may be audible, what was said before or might be said after, what else is going on in the scene and so on (Rawls, 2008).

Objects are not "just there in front of us" (Rawls, 2008:713); they are temporally and spatially oriented, relative to elements of the scene including people's bodies and other objects. Moreover, members physically manipulate objects in order to alter their orientation, and use talk and bodily displays such as looking, pointing and so forth, to display their appreciation of the object. They also attend to each other's subsequent public display of orientation to ascertain the extent to which the other has "found the object" (Hindmarsh and

Heath, 2000). Through such sequences of talking, pointing, touching, holding, showing, etc. members construct in situ a common understanding of the relevance of features of the object to the specific interaction.

Finally, through their changing orientation to elements of the setting, members continually define and re-define the space and time that is relevant to the unfolding interaction. Members display, through their gaze, body position, posture, movements and utterances, a common orientation to elements whose discussion or manipulation is the joint focus of the interaction (Goodwin, 2000a). The social scene itself is therefore “a practical interactional achievement” (Mondada, 2011a:289), whose shape changes moment-by-moment through the oriented actions of its members (Suchman, 1996).

3.4 Reflexivity

The social scene is thus not just the setting in space and time occupied by members’ bodies, but constitutes a public domain that members produce collectively in the interaction (Rawls, 2002). In this sense, actions are *reflexive*, that is, each movement or utterance develops and elaborates the social scene in a particular direction, casting new light on what came before, and/or extending the unfolding sequence of moves (Rawls, 2006). Through orienting objects, utterances and their own bodies, members collectively produce a social scene that is recognizably coherent (Rawls, 2002). The reflexive nature of actions and expressions thus forms the basis for the construction of intersubjective meaning that is not cognitive or abstract, but witnessable in the material details of the unfolding interaction (Rawls, 2006; Mondada, 2011b). In this sense, shared understandings have a situated, physical and material presence in the ordinary world—rather than being “a transcendent ‘something’” inhabiting some other level of existence (Lynch, 2011:555)—and are therefore discoverable in the observable detailed features of the unfolding interaction.

3.5 Multimodality

Members of a social scene have at their disposal a vast and diverse array of oriented elements that they can reference, manipulate, combine and juxtapose in situationally meaningful ways. Bodies, utterances, objects and spatial arrangements constitute *semiotic resources* that participants orient in order to produce shared meaning (Goodwin, 2000a; Streeck et al., 2011). In any interaction, members construct collective actions *and* meanings through the “temporally unfolding juxtaposition” of multiple semiotic resources, such as talk, gaze, gestures, body posture, position and movement, objects, artifacts, tools, technologies documents, spatial arrangements, and the material structure of the setting (Goodwin, 2000a).

The materiality of these semiotic resources is of importance here, as their physical properties enable different configurations of permanence, sequentiality and simultaneity (Goodwin, 2013; Mondada, 2014b). Human interactions can therefore be characterized as *multimodal* in that they typically combine semiotic resources with very different material properties, simultaneously or sequentially, in ways that mutually elaborate each other to create rich *contextures of action* that underpin broad repertoires of concerted action (Goodwin, 2011; Mondada, 2019).

3.6 Sequentiality

Human interactions are sequentially organized. The situational meaning of any movement or utterance is not intrinsic to its content or the intention of its actor, but is reflexively displayed in the response that it gets from other members of the interaction (Rawls, 2008). Thus, the construction of mutually meaningful action cannot be achieved in one move, but requires an organized series of turns where members talk, point, look, hold, touch, show, etc. in sequence (Mondada, 2014b).

Moreover, the sequence itself is built in the interaction, by members, through embodied practices of turn taking, turn construction, and demonstrations of understanding

(Rawls, 2008; Mondada, 2016). Members constantly monitor and respond to such public displays of orientation towards the developing sequence, and hold each other accountable for sustaining the unfolding sequential order (Rawls, 2008).

Sustaining the sequential production of the interaction constitutes for members an enforceable moral obligation to each other. When actors fail to display a commitment to producing recognizable actions in this way, the coherence and intelligibility of the interaction breaks down, producing “bewilderment, consternation and confusion” (Garfinkel, 1967:38). In this sense, human interactions are *co-operative* (Goodwin, 2011, 2018): not necessarily characterized by harmony or solidarity, but demonstrably committed to building a mutually intelligible interaction “as a morality” (Garfinkel, 1967:53).

3.7 Instructed action

Ethnomethodology takes a central interest in *instructed action*, that is, action performed in accordance to an instruction, a plan, a rule, a procedure, a precedent, a directive, or any other abstract representation of action (Garfinkel, 2002; Suchman, 2007; Lynch, 2015). Instructions, plans and rules are always incomplete and ambiguous and, therefore, their relationship to the situated actions they prefigure can never be direct or causal (Suchman, 2007; Mondada, 2011b). However, the incomplete and ambiguous nature of instructions is not a shortcoming, but precisely what makes them effective and applicable to a diversity of settings, in a diversity of ways. Thus, the relationship between instructions and the action they prefigure is indexical: instructions acquire their sense and coherence in the achievement of the action they instruct (Garfinkel, 1967; Rawls, 2002).

The task of members attempting to “follow” an instruction, plan or rule is to work out what can be done in the situation at hand, within the constraints of validity set by the instruction (Bittner, 1965; Rawls, 2002). The instruction constrains practices in this indirect way, but it is not constitutive of action as it unfolds: the correspondence between abstract

representations and subsequent live actions is subject to demonstration of their praxeological validity, i.e. “it must work, and must be seen to work by others” (Rawls, 2002:41). In this sense, instructions are prospective accounts of the actions they instruct: if the action achieves its projected outcome, the instructions can retrospectively serve as “an account of ‘what was done’” (Amerine and Bilmes, 1988:329).

3.8 Institutional orders

EM is well known—and, indeed, often pigeonholed and criticized—for its keen attention to local interaction orders; its relevance to explaining phenomena of institutional order that extend beyond local interactions is less often recognized (Rawls, 2008). In fact, for EM scholars, interaction orders are fundamental in explaining institutional orders (Rawls, 2002).

In EM terms, institutions can be described as “contexts of accountability” that work by “imposing accountability constraints on action” (Rawls, 2002, 2008). In many everyday settings, members are subject to multiple, overlapping contexts of accountability beyond the interaction unfolding at hand. In such settings, members attend to a combination of local and institutional accountabilities: they produce acts that are recognizable to members of the local ongoing interaction and, simultaneously, reportable according to institutional practices for accounting for actions as having followed institutionally sanctioned norms and rules (Ueno, 2000; Rawls, 2002, 2008). How participants to a local interaction become “hooked” onto webs of institutional accountabilities becomes a focus of empirical inquiry for EM scholars (Smith, 2001, 2005).

In formal organizations, practices of accounting are largely mediated by *texts* (Smith and Whalen, 1997; Smith, 2001; Anderson and Sharrock, 2018). From an EM perspective, texts carry instructions for producing, recognizing, accounting and making sense of members’ actions as *organizational* actions. Such instructions may come in the shape of

plans, procedures, rules, model cases, examples, vocabularies, lists, visual aids, categories of participants, objects or events, and so on (Smith, 2001; Kameo and Whalen, 2015).

Analytical emphasis is made on the *material presence* of the text—“definite forms of words, numbers or images that exist in a materially replicable form” (Smith, 2001:174)—as it enters the scenes of action and is variously taken up by members in the construction of their specific interaction. As instructions and prospective accounts of actions, the presence of a text makes the task of members to work out what can be done in the situation at hand, in a way that is demonstrably accountable to it (Bittner, 1965; Rawls, 2002). Across multiple sites and occasions, the continued, repeated presence of the text fosters the production of actions that share a common relationship of accountability to the same text (Smith, 2005).

Thus, the possibility, consistency and ease of replication of the text is key to the operation of formal organizations, as coordination rests on the presence of the *same form* of the text across multiple sites and occasions, and how it becomes part of local interactions in ways that give rise to recognizable patterns, across multiple settings, of actions accountable to a single text (Smith, 2001; Kameo and Whalen, 2015).

Moreover, although much EM research on institutional orders has highlighted the role of *written* texts on paper or electronic support, the argument has been extended to other resources that can be considered *oral*, *iconic*, or *artifactual* “texts” in that they exist in a more-or-less durable and/or replicable material form—such as diagrams, signs, tools, technologies, stories, vocabularies, phrases and sayings (Goodwin, 2000b; Ueno, 2000; Cooren, 2004). Indeed, it is typically by juxtaposing multiple “texts” of different sorts that institutional, organizational and professional communities develop the specialized ways of accomplishing concerted activities that distinguish them as collective actors (Goodwin, 2000c, 2000a).

A final point of interest in how EM scholars have investigated institutional orders refers to the origin of many of the texts/resources that coordinate activities in formal organizations, where many of these resources are designed, authored and distributed by actors in centrally located settings (Smith and Whalen, 1997; Smith, 2005). These actors use textual technologies to establish “accountability circuits” (Smith, 2005) whereby they organize activities across multiple settings, creating and maintaining an accountable relation between the institutional order represented in the texts and interactional orders achieved locally by actors (Suchman, 1997). This forms the basis for the ability of certain actors to influence the actions of others, which is arguably the essence of management as an activity (Anderson and Sharrock, 2018).

4 An ethnomethodological perspective of Routine Dynamics

Equipped with the concepts and vocabulary that underpin ethnomethodology’s approach to social phenomena, we now turn to outlining an EM perspective of routine dynamics. In what follows, I first review recent ethnomethodological studies of routines (LeBaron et al., 2016; Yamauchi and Hiramoto, 2016, in press); and then suggest possible avenues for extending this line of research.

4.1 EM studies of routine dynamics

EM studies of routine dynamics have examined how action in routines is collectively constructed through sequences of oriented/indexical body movements and utterances.

LeBaron et al. (2016) examined end-of-shift handoffs at a hospital’s intensive care unit. They recorded videos of handoff interactions between pairs of outgoing and incoming physicians as they discussed each of the patients in their care, and subsequently interviewed those physicians. Through their interviews, LeBaron et al. (2016) found that participants held “strongly shared expectations” about how handoffs should be conducted, including specific

steps and their sequence. Their video recordings however showed that instances of handoffs varied, so that steps were skipped or rearranged according to different circumstances. Moreover, even when a handoff followed the standard sequence of steps, participants devoted time and effort to signal to each other—through synchronized talk, body posture, gaze, movements, and gestures—when individual steps were sufficient and when to move from one to the next. These observations allow the authors to reach two important conclusions. First, even in settings where actors strongly agree on the steps that should be followed to achieve an action, ongoing coordinating is needed to produce concerted action. Second, members used the “sequential features” of their shared expectations as a resource to produce varied courses of action which, while suited to the specific circumstances of each interaction, remained recognizable as performances of the routine.

Yamauchi and Hiramoto (2016, in press) studied service interactions in high-end sushi bars in Tokyo, where customers are often unfamiliar with deep traditions regarding the ordering of food and drink. Yamauchi and Hiramoto’s (2016) analysis showed how participants presented their understandings of the ongoing action through their talk, body posture, movements and gaze; and how they responded to the understandings displayed by others in this same way. The authors conclude that prior shared understandings are not necessary for successful performance of routines: members achieve successful performances through a sequential process of exhibiting their understanding of the ongoing interaction and adjusting their performance to the understandings exhibited by others. Further, Yamauchi and Hiramoto (in press) revealed how participants make their actions recognizable as performances of a routine through the same sequential process, by which actors align their actions and assemble the materials necessary for the performance.

Together, these studies provide a critique of the view that coordination is enabled by overlaps in the preexisting subjective understandings of individuals: a shared understanding

is not necessary (Yamauchi and Hiramoto, 2016), nor is it sufficient (LeBaron et al., 2016), to achieve repetitive collective action. Rather, coordination in routines relies on the situational understandings that members construct and demonstrate *in situ*, through sequenced embodied displays of orientation to elements of the material setting and the unfolding interaction (Yamauchi and Hiramoto, in press). It is through the sequence of turns of talk and action that participants construct an interaction that is meaningful to them and recognizable as a performance of a routine, independent of individuals' expressed or tacit understandings of that routine before or after the interaction.

4.2 Further research

As exemplified by these works, EM studies of routine dynamics take a primary interest in members' methods for producing actions as part of a repetitive pattern, that is, the taken-for-granted yet systematic ways in which members produce actions that are accountably "the same" across sites and occasions. In what follows, I propose a number of areas where this research program may be developed further, and suggest examples of recent EM research that provide valuable insight.

First, an EM perspective could shed further light on how participants achieve situated performances of a routine: what displays of orientation they make to ensure their actions are recognizable as part of a pattern and what resources they orient to for that purpose. One class of resources of particular importance in the study of routines is formal procedure. LeBaron et al. (2016) have shown how physicians achieved handoffs flexibly by orienting to the sequential features of a standard set of steps. EM research provides further insight into how participants make such formalized sequences of steps relevant to the interaction at hand. For instance, Koschmann et al. (2011) describe *procedure work* as the work of "locally producing the procedure as procedure". They show how surgeons used deictics (e.g. "now", "here") to align the procedural account of the surgery with the action in progress, and then talked and

manipulated the objects referred in the procedure into being part of the collective course of action. Through such work, members brought into relation their unfolding interaction with the prescriptive account contained in the procedure.

Another class of resources of interest to RD scholars is the various artifacts and material arrangements that constitute durable features of the settings in which a routine is performed. Yamauchi and Hiramoto (in press) showed that sushi bar chefs and customers relied on the material properties of spatial arrangements and their own oriented bodies to render their actions recognizable as performances of a routine. Other recent EM research has shown different ways in which participants made use of materiality in achieving repetition and variation in collective courses of action. For instance, cooking instructors spent time pre-arranging ingredients and utensils in ways that prefigured their use in a recipe, as a way to ensure that the recipe was then completed by the students in a consistent way (Mondada, 2014a). In another study, museum guides and guests collectively and continually produced the interactional space of a guided tour by orienting their talk, gaze and bodies—a process that was constitutive of each distinctive performance of the guided tour routine (Best and Hindmarsh, 2019). Finally, a study of fine art auctions found that a seemingly simple action involving an unsophisticated artefact, such as striking the gavel, could be variously articulated, through embodied multimodal displays, to accomplish different types of action (Heath and Luff, 2013).

Secondly, an EM perspective can provide useful insight into how action in routines is organized across multiple sites. One way of doing this would be to examine the overlapping, multilayered accountabilities to which members orient in constructing their interactions. For instance, a study of a call center found that sales representatives simultaneously oriented to the ongoing conversation with the customer, and to various documents available to them on paper and computer screens (Whalen, Whalen, and Henderson, 2002). In this way, the reps'

actions simultaneously enacted the local interactional order of the conversation with the customer, and the various trans-local institutional orders prefigured in the documents.

Alternatively, researchers could examine the means through which actors create and sustain routine-specific accountabilities for others, through different types of textual technologies (Smith, 2005; Anderson and Sharrock, 2018). For instance, Kameo and Whalen (2015) studied how emergency call takers produced standardized person descriptions from callers “vernacular accounts” and inputted them as part of a computerized incident record. The authors showed that call takers’ work was part of talk-text-talk sequences that reified persons and events, and established courses of action as “organizational”. The designed features of the computer form and other supplementary materials made the work of call takers accountable to an authorized standard. In another study, Moore, Whalen, and Gathman (2010) examined the role of work-order paper forms in linking the activities of front-desk and back-office workers at a reprographics center. They showed how standard forms were made to work as coordination devices through non-standard practices such as free-text notes, annotations and tagging. In this case, the flexibility afforded by the paper form to accommodate situationally relevant encoding practices ensured the reliable coordination of actions separated in time and space.

Thirdly, an EM perspective could provide a useful framework for RD scholars to examine how participants become competent in the methods of interaction relevant to a routine. Such research may be particularly useful in providing insight into how actors achieve performances of a routine. For instance, Yamauchi and Hiramoto (2016) contrasted performances of the food ordering routine when inexperienced customers were involved to those where customers were regulars or sushi connoisseurs. Such research strategy helped highlight the taken-for-granted methods of interaction that may be harder to observe when actors are highly experienced.

Other EM research has examined how novices learn to engage in a broad array of organized activities in both formal and informal settings. For instance, Tulbert and Goodwin (2011) studied how children learn to brush their teeth in their family setting. They found that learning to brush your teeth entailed training the body to perform “choreographies of movements” through the household’s architectural space and the objects in it. Their analysis highlighted the role of architectural space in creating and sustaining patterns of family life. In a more formal—and professional—setting, Hindmarsh, Reynolds, and Dunne (2011) studied dentist training. They found that instruction episodes progressed through sequences of modelled behavior and online commentary on the part of instructors, and students’ verbalized and embodied displays of understanding. These sequences provided insight into what understanding dental practice entails, not as a cognitive inner process, but as a “public and witnessable doing” (2011:501).

Finally, RD scholars could take an EM perspective to study how details of interactions in routines may lead to differential outcomes for organizations and individuals. For instance, Best and Hindmarsh’s (2019) study of museum guided tours highlighted the importance of “how bodies and spaces are marshalled” for fostering understanding and enjoyment in audiences—and, thereby, for the attainment of a museum’s aims. Mondada (2011a:313) found that the democratic and participatory character of town-hall meetings was “practically and locally achieved through the way in which [space was] interactionally organized”. Finally, Tulbert and Goodwin (2011) found that parents’ embodied displays of either cooperation or domination in teaching their children activities such as brushing their teeth fostered differential socialization outcomes for those children.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of ethnomethodology's approach to the study of social phenomena, and has pointed to ways in which it could contribute to understanding routine dynamics. Researchers in the field should feel encouraged by the abundant opportunities that an EM perspective provides for empirical research on the methods that members use to produce action in routines, and the means for managing those actions. Additionally, the RD literature would benefit greatly from incorporating the findings of ethnomethodological studies of work, which over five decades have examined repetitive organizational actions in a huge variety of settings.

Adopting an EM view of action as situated should help the field move towards a more fully performative understanding of routines, and underpin an empirical research program grounded in the observable material and embodied processes of interaction that constitute repetitive action patterns.

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