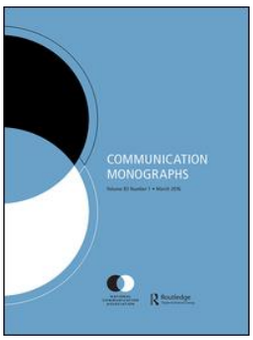

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Genre as textual agency: Using communicative relationality to theorize the agential-performative relationship between human and generic text

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes an explanation for textual performance grounded in communicative relationality. Specifically, genre is theorized as a form of *textual agency* whereby generic texts and organizational actors form *agential-performative relationships* that script action and shape professional epistemologies. The case examines how agential-performative relationships between wildland firefighters and safety rules changed when a new US Forest Service policy, Doctrine, altered safety rule practice. Findings from 12 years of Doctrine documents and firefighting accounts from 37 firefighters revealed that pre-Doctrine *commissive* relationships with safety rules compelled members to follow them, enabling dissent and passive learning about hazards. Post-Doctrine, *directive* relationships enabled flexible decisions, but expanded the job's scope and constrained dissent. Theoretical contributions to textual agency and genre studies are discussed.

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For several decades, scholars have contributed to a growing interdisciplinary literature on the role of texts in influencing organizational behavior (Cooren, 2004, 2015; Miller, 1994; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). A key theme in this work is explaining how the relationship between actors and texts transports organizational procedures, missions, knowledge, and so on, across space and time. This scholarship has developed into two distinct schools of thought. One school draws from discourse analysis to examine how generic texts mediate organizational activities while their socially recognized forms and habitual uses enable generic content to act from a distance in relatively stable ways (Bazerman, 1994; Miller, 1994). An important aspect of genre theorizing is explaining how the relationship between actor and text shapes professionals' epistemologies or how professionals draw from texts to see and manage their work in everyday practice and across dispersed sites (Bazerman, 1994; Geisler, 2001; Miller, 1994). A second school of thought examines how texts speak and act on behalf of an organization as they become removed from local practices, enter new settings, and exist simultaneously in multiple locations. This work examines how textual agents traverse space and time through incarnation, presentification, and ventriloquism (Brummans, 2007; Cooren, 2004; 2006, 2010;

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Cooren, Matte, Taylor, & Vásquez, 2007; Jahn, 2016). Considerable research on textual agency explains how texts are active participants in organizational life through accomplishing speech acts (Cooren, 2004; Searle, 1979).

Both of these lines of theory suggest that the *relationship* between organizational actor and textual object enables and constrains how the organization traverses space and time, yet each tends to focus asymmetrical attention on one side of the relationship. For instance, research on genres typically focuses on what *members do* to write texts and use them in professional settings (Bhatia, 1993, 2002, 2010), while research on textual agency focuses on the *active contributions of texts* in organizing processes (Brummans, 2007; Cooren, 2004, 2010). The current study builds from both of these schools to propose a third explanation grounded in communicative relationality: that *genre is a form of textual agency*. In particular, I argue that generic texts and organizational actors form *agential-performative relationships*, and the co-action resulting from these relationships, constitutes professional epistemologies, scripting professional practice in particular ways.

To develop a theoretical explanation of *genre as textual agency*, this study builds from a strand of communicative relationality extending from actor-network theory (Kuhn, Ashcraft, & Cooren, 2017; Latour, 2005; Robichaud, 2006) and textual agency (Cooren, 2004). In a communicative relationality perspective, communication is "not *only* about people talking or writing to each other, it is *also*, more generally, about links/connections/relations being established between various beings" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 72, emphasis in original). This study specifically extends from Cooren's (2004) textual agency theorizing that texts can perform speech acts with humans as their interlocutors. However, rather than focusing on humans or texts performing speech acts, this study considers how speech acts inscribed in a generic text's linguistic features (e.g., prescriptive language, formality, directive commands, etc., see Bhatia, 1993) *link* organizational actors and generic texts by setting them into a performative relationship. This agential-performative linkage between actor and generic text provides a *scripted trajectory* (Latour, 2013; Robichaud, 2006; Vásquez, 2013) informing the actions they co-produce (i.e., their hybrid agency). In doing so, it shapes professional epistemologies by delimiting the preoccupations of, and what is possible to know about, one's work.

Examining agential-performative relationships between humans and generic texts contributes to explaining how changes in a genre alter how organizational knowledge (and so forth) traverses space and time. By exploring genre as a form of textual agency, researchers gain a better understanding of ways that scripted trajectories arising from agential-performative relationships make consequential courses of action more and less possible (e.g., enacting organizational knowledge, exercising dissent, etc.) through genre change. A second contribution is to genre theorizing. By examining scripted agential-performative linkages, this study provides an alternative explanation for situated text uses. Thus, rather than relying on "context" to explain how generic texts participate in practice, we can instead examine a *plenum of agencies* (Cooren, 2006) that are made to speak, and which request certain actions from their human interlocutors.

The empirical case examines a genre change, particularly how the link between wildland firefighters and safety rules changed when a new policy, Doctrine, altered the US Forest Service's philosophy and practice for using safety rules. A textual analysis examines how Doctrine-related policy and training documents spanning 12 years redefined the role

of safety rules in firefighting. In addition, firefighting accounts from wildland firefighters explore how safety rules participated in practice both before and after Doctrine's implementation. Examining a genre change provides a unique opportunity to map how human- and textual-agencies combined into different trajectories of action both before and after the change, thus evincing changes in both professional epistemologies and practice.

The performative and epistemic nature of generic texts

Genres consist of conventionalized and structured forms of communication that members of a professional community habitually enact to achieve recognizable ends, such as memos, presentations, rules, and progress reports (Bhatia, 1993; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Swales, 1990). Genres are recognizable by their form, which is observable through the medium (e.g., document, instruction manual, e-mail message), structural features (e.g., a document's format), and linguistic features (e.g., technical language, informality, prescriptive language). Genre-based studies variously map stable features of a generic text (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990), examine communication practices that produce texts (Knievel, 2008), and explore how texts are appropriated in professional practices and cultures (Bhatia, 2002; Geisler, 2001; Miller, 1994).

Generic texts transport organizational knowledge, missions, and procedures across space and time through fixing the meaning of a text. The meaning of a text becomes fixed, in part, during its writing. Iedema and Wodak (1999) note that meaning gets "recontextualized" as genre writers "shift meaning and materiality away from their previous instantiations" (p. 13). This means that the lived, *physical experience* of a routine work process becomes recontextualized when it is nominalized and codified into a text as a *written* procedure. Translating meaning from one modality to another (e.g., lived to textual) abstracts meanings away from specific interpersonal interactions or individual experiences. Through abstraction, meanings of a text become taken-for-granted or "black-boxed" through their habitual uses (Callon & Latour, 1981; Iedema & Wodak, 1999). Thus, "what previously relied on extensive specification now becomes a matter of (newly conceived) background assumption" (Iedema & Wodak, 1999, p. 13). The fixing of meaning in generic texts is a primary reason why scholars consider them to constitute professional epistemologies. In particular, a dominant perspective within genre studies considers *genre as social action* (Bhatia, 2002, 2010; Geisler, 2001; Miller, 1994). Genres are epistemological because members of a professional community come to see their work preoccupations through the generic texts they draw on in practice. Miller (1994) described this phenomenon as:

> [W]hat we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have … We learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potentials for failure and success in acting together. As a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality. (p. 165)

Bawarshi (2000) similarly noted that "genres are both functional and epistemological – they help us function within particular situations at the same time [as] they help shape the ways we come to know these situations" (p. 340). Both Miller and Bawarshi highlight

the importance of genres in shaping what we come to know about our work (e.g., Miller's *cultural rationality*), but also crucially, what we are able to know in the first place. Genres contribute to professional epistemologies by functioning as repertoires of discursive practices enacted over time and by becoming institutionalized interaction patterns.

Genre change is an important focal point in this body of work because these studies show how participation with a generic text unfolds differently, and how professional epistemologies and practice change, as a result of a genre change. For instance, Knievel (2008) studied how police officers altered their use-of-force policy (a genre) and related policing practices after a controversial shooting of a teenage boy. The police department, state governor, and members of the public revised the policy to emphasize valuing human life and de-escalating conflict. The re-drafted policy shifted from being an informational, procedural resource for officers to being a discursive resource mediating interactions between officers and the public as both parties sought to understand their evolving relationship in light of changing policing practices.

Genre analyses are often multi-method. For instance, Bhatia (2010) proposed examining both text-internal and text-external aspects of genre. Text-internal analyses of the "textual space" can track genre change through noting how a new text references, re-interprets, and combines previous texts to shape new professional expectations and intended uses of it (i.e., intertextuality). In contrast, text-external analyses examine the "socio-pragmatic space," noting ways that various discourses (e.g., cultural, institutional, etc.) influence the interdiscursive construction of a text and its uses in professional practice.

Overall, genre analysis acknowledges that texts are active participants in organizational life that transport the organization across space and time by fixing meanings through habitual, socially recognized uses. However, by focusing largely on ways human actors appropriate them, the work pays less attention to ways texts perform actions on their own, and how the combination of human and text accomplishes something more than either could do alone. Theorizing on textual agency (Cooren, 2004) addresses this shortcoming in the genre literature.

Communicative relationality

A second way to examine how organizations traverse space and time through texts is by considering communicative relationality, which posits that textual performativity is possible through hybrid action (Cooren, 2004; Kuhn et al., 2017). This section introduces communicative relationality, describes textual agency as an example of relational thinking, and proposes to extend textual agency, by exploring how linkages between humans and generic texts result in scripted agential-performative relationships with practical and epistemological consequences.

Kuhn et al. (2017) offer several premises to guide relational thinking. First, communicative relationality rejects a substantialist ontology, or the idea that entities exist as stable, separate, pre-bounded *things*. Instead, entities "exist" only through links with other agents, and their co-produced actions characterize what we recognize as an entity. Second, what we understand as reality becomes produced and apparent through ongoing action (rather than existing as pre-formed). Organizational action, while often repetitive, always has potential to produce indeterminate trajectories of activity. This means that "the real" is "enacted, multiple, and flat" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 32). The flatland metaphor refers to

the idea that there are no micro or macro influences imposing on our actions; rather, we (re)produce our social reality in the *flatland,* of communicative interaction (Latour, 2005, 2013). Third, communicative relationality decenters human agency in order to consider how objects, ideas, and other *figures* make a difference in interaction (Cooren, 2010). Specifically, a relational ontology is fundamentally *sociomaterial* (Barad, 2003), meaning that it rejects attempts to bifurcate between ideational and material aspects of experience (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009), such as mind/body, human/non-human, and social/material. Instead, attending to the flatland of interaction, this view considers how ongoing *practice* materializes linkages by mobilizing humans, objects, concerns, ideas and so forth into trajectories of *hybrid* co-action (Kuhn et al., 2017). The notion of hybridicity is grounded in actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), and refers to the idea that organizations materialize (i.e., become present) through joint actions involving humans and objects (e.g., generic texts) that embody or otherwise speak on its behalf. Finally, a relational ontology recasts notions of linear cause/effect as trajectories of practice that enable and constrain future action in particular ways. Thus, action is always considered indeterminate, but consequences of previous actions come to bear in current situations (Kuhn et al., 2017).

Communicative relationality explains several ways that texts transport an organization (e.g., knowledge, missions, procedures, etc.) across space and time. For example, *presentification* is the idea that any collective (e.g., group, organization, society) exists through the various entities that speak or act on its behalf, such as logos, buildings, uniforms, and safety rules (Cooren, Brummans, & Charrieras, 2008). Presentification refers to "activities involved in making something or somebody present to something or somebody else" (Cooren, et al., 2008, p. 1343). Presentification occurs through communication that *ventriloquizes* or *incarnates* the organization (or other collective). Ventriloquization refers to ways that *figures* (e.g., rules, roles, objects, etc.) make the organization present in ways that make a difference in a conversation's outcome or direction (Cooren, 2010). For example, workers might reference safety rules to invoke lessons they inscribe or to justify an alternative course of action (Jahn, 2016). Incarnation entails interaction linking human and non-human agents to make a social collectivity present. Incarnation occurs as macroactors – spokespeople or spokes-objects – speak on behalf of a collective. For example, a mission statement might be considered a macroactor that speaks on behalf of what an organization's members collectively aim to accomplish.

Two central concerns in communicative relationality include agency and performativity. That is, a relational ontology explains how linkages among actors (human and otherwise) combine their various agencies into co-action (i.e., hybridicity), and how this co-action is performative (i.e., makes a difference) rather than being strictly representational in nature (Kuhn et al., 2017). Cooren's (2004) theorizing on textual agency exemplifies these aims.

Textual agency and performativity

Textual agency theorizing considers *agency* not as an attribute or capacity that one possesses, but rather as a hybrid endeavor whereby actor and text combine their agencies to produce something new within the flatland of interaction (Cooren, 2004). Textual agency, then, involves "texts," referring specifically to documents, or concrete texts,

while "agency" refers to a hybrid relationship between human and textual agent that makes a difference (Cooren, 2006). Scholars examining textual agency explore how texts shape expectations for behavior (Cooren, 2004), represent or speak for an organization (Cooren, 2004; Cooren et al., 2007), and influence the content and process of strategizing (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011).

Textual agency is also performative, meaning that texts act in ways that produce, alter, or bring about a state of being (Austin, 1962; Kuhn et al., 2017). Cooren (2004) demonstrates how textual agency is performative by highlighting how texts perform speech acts with humans as their interlocutors (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979). Specifically, this work posits that texts are capable of illocutionary force, which refers to ways an "utterance counts as a certain kind of move in verbal interaction: a command rather than a question, an assertion rather than an apology or a promise" (Sbisà, 2001, p. 1793). Texts are able to perform such speech acts as assertives, commissives, directives, and declarations, among others (see Cooren, 2004, 2015; Searle, 1979). For instance, a contract is a generic text capable of performing a commissive speech act because it *commits* its signers to take specific actions in the future. A safety checklist might perform a directive speech act as items on the checklist *request* a worker's attention. The difference between a commissive speech act versus a directive lies in who/what is acted upon (Cooren, 2015). A commissive commits the speaker to do something, whereas a directive involves a speaker issuing a request that the interlocutor do something (Cooren, 2015). The next section reviews Cooren's (2004) theorizing on textual agency, then recasts the link between generic text and actor as a kind of "conversation" that scripts action in particular ways.

Genre as textual agency

Generic texts are important to consider with regard to textual agency, because to some extent, a text's performative potential has been scripted into it both during its writing, and as particular uses become habitual in organizational practice (Bhatia, 1993, 2002). The hybrid relationship linking an organizational actor and generic text creates a third actor – an *agential-performative relationship* between the two. This linkage is *agential* because human and text combine their agencies into co-action; it is *performative* because the hybrid action brings about a particular state of being. Robichaud (2006) explained that the "third actor" accomplishes something different than either comprising it could do alone: the "script, the path, the direction, and the program of action of the new 'hybrid agent' … is channeled by a new goal path that redefines the interest, the will, the functions, the roles, and the identities of the two agents involved" (Robichaud, 2006, p. 106).

The meaning of a generic text is never uniform or completely fixed (Kuhn et al., 2017). Instead, there are various possible trajectories for organizing through hybrid action. Vásquez (2013) flags this multiplicity of trajectories as a key challenge for organizing processes that are intended to unfold similarly in different places and times. She proposed that organizations align their geographically and temporally dispersed operations through a *scripted trajectory*, or a main story of what an organizing effort aims to accomplish. The notion of *scripting* is important because it captures the intention of an organizing process. Thus, agential-performative relationships script particular trajectories of action. Drawing from Latour (2013), a script is a program of action. Acting *above script* refers

to efforts to "write" the script through talking or by codifying it – to plan how to act and interact, to discuss preferred trajectories of activity, to write new policies or revise existing ones. To act *under script* means that organizational actors speak and act on behalf of those plans, preferred trajectories of activities, and policies. Actors might also act inside/outside of, or before/after, the script (Vásquez, 2013).

To better understand genre as a kind of textual agency, it can be helpful to think about the link between generic text and organizational actor as a kind of "conversation." Building from Cooren's (2004) notion that texts are able to perform speech acts, I propose to reframe speech acts not as utterances, but instead as agential-performative linkages between organizational actors and generic texts that *script* hybrid action in particular ways. The organizational actions resulting from agential-performative relationships have epistemological consequences for professionals because the co-action of the actor and generic text shapes how professionals see their work, and in turn, how organizational knowledge and missions traverse space and time (Bawarshi, 2000; Miller, 1994). The next section adds detail to this proposal by illustrating a changing agential-performative relationship between safety rules and wildland firefighters.

Breaking rules: Re-scripting professionals' risk epistemology and practice

Safety rules are a somewhat unique genre due to how they are typically written, used, and disciplined. When writing safety rules, organizational actors translate lessons learned from accidents from a lived modality (i.e., the experience of an accident) to a written modality, or the codified lessons extracted from the investigation of members' experiences (Sauer, 1998). For example, Figure 1 shows the *10 Standard* [*Wildland*] *Firefighting Orders* and the *18 Watchout Situations*, referred to together as the *10 and 18* (see Ziegler, 2007), which were written based on the "common denominators" of several fatality wildfires. Though the intended uses for the 10 and 18 for US Forest Service (USFS) wildland firefighters have fluctuated over time, members have typically treated *the 10* as rules that should not be broken, and *the 18* as possible dangers to be aware of (Ziegler, 2007). Importantly, the safety rules genre writ large has long been associated with notions of compliance and violation, such that "breaking" rules often can mean disciplinary action, termination, or even legal liability (Hale & Borys, 2013; Hollnagel, 2014). Rules are lessons derived from accidents, and in cyclical manner, these lists are used in investigations to ferret out wrongdoing, violation, non-compliance, and accident cause.

We might consider, then, that safety rules are typically linked with firefighters in a *commissive agential-performative relationship*. To illustrate, Cooren's (2004) notion of textual agency considered that when a text (e.g., a contract) performed a commissive speech act, the text engaged in a kind of conversation with a human interlocutor, compelling him or her to make a promise to fulfill the contract. Now, applying the idea of a commissive speech act to explain the *link* between firefighters and safety rules, we might consider how a *commissive agential-performative relationship* scripts the connection between organizational actors and generic texts such that actors make a promise to the text to act on its behalf. In the case of safety rules, this implied promise to act through rules stems from the long history (and fear) of disciplinary action and possible termination associated with breaking rules. Acting *through* the rules – incarnating them (Cooren,

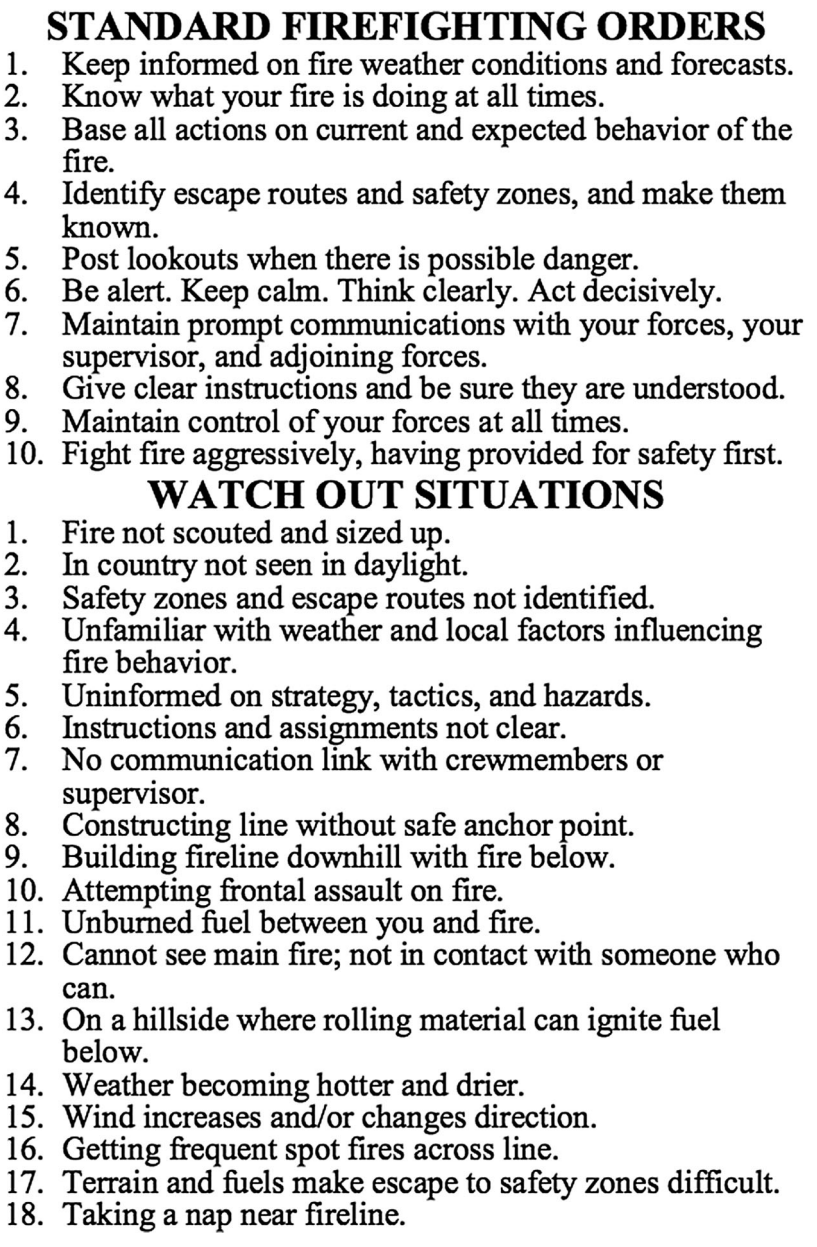

Figure 1. The wildland firefighting 10 Standard Firefighting Orders and 18 Watchout Situations (NWCG, 2018, back cover).

2010) – in a commissive relationship means that trajectories of action are to some extent based on whether or not they can be followed.

A problem with considering safety rules as strict prescriptions, and harshly disciplining rule violations, is that this approach can limit workers' ability to do what the situation demands (Hale & Borys, 2013; Hollnagel, 2014). This is especially true in complex operations like wildland firefighting. In response to firefighters' needs to remain flexible (i.e.,

not be hindered by strict rules) in unfolding fire situations, the USFS introduced a policy called Doctrine in 2005. Doctrine emerged from a series of events in which the USFS used the safety rules to control firefighter actions on scene and to discipline them after fatalities and accidents (see Ziegler, 2007 for a genealogical analysis). For instance, the fatality report for the 1994 South Canyon wildfire invoked safety rules to evaluate the actions and decisions of the fallen, determining that the 14 deceased firefighters had "violated" several rules and "caused" their own deaths (Thackaberry, 2004). The 2001 Thirtymile fire similarly blamed firefighters for wrongdoing; one firefighter even faced manslaughter charges (Bowermaster, O'Hagen, & Cornwall, 2006). In both cases, USFS management emphasized that safety rules should be used to restrict and control firefighters' action. However, after these fatality fires, perspectives in the wildland fire community began to change. Management and firefighters agreed that it was untenable to treat safety rules as strict prescriptions in the dynamic wildland firefighting environment.

The Doctrine policy codified managements' visions that rules should serve as flexible guidelines so firefighters could adapt to unpredictable circumstances (Thackaberry, 2004). However, Doctrine did not replace rules, nor did it result in discarding any of them, which signaled that management still held the safety rules as a valuable contribution to firefighting practice. We might consider, then, that Doctrine linked firefighters and safety rules into a *directive agential-performative relationship*. Cooren (2004) noted that when a text performs a directive speech act, the text makes a request of its human interlocutor. Directives also carry the "force of law" such that interlocutors feel compelled to attend to directives (Cooren, 2004, 2015). Applying the idea of a directive speech act to explain the link between text and actor, we might consider how a *directive agential-performative relationship* scripts the connection between organizational actors and texts such that the text issues requests, which actors may or may not choose to heed. In this agential-performative relationship, the actor does not make a promise to the text, he or she merely considers what the text "has to say." Ultimately, however, decisions on the overall trajectory of action might be based on something other than what the rules suggest, such as worker judgment and pressure to get the job done.

These contrasting commissive and directive agential-performative relationships *link* firefighters and safety rules such that their agencies were combined differently before versus after Doctrine's implementation. However, we still need to examine how the connection between safety rules and firefighters altered (if at all) how the organizational knowledge written into the rules traversed space and time. Toward that end, the empirical study explores whether and how firefighting practice changed as result of the Doctrine policy, and how the new agential-performative linkage between worker and text might have altered firefighter risk epistemologies.

Methodology

Studies grounded in communicative relationality entail several methodological commitments to remain consistent with its ontological assumptions, including examining the *flatland* of organizational practice and interaction, and analytically attending to ways that agencies (human and otherwise) forge connections through practice (Kuhn et al., 2017). This study attends to these commitments by gathering critical incident accounts of wildland firefighting practice using interview methods. While ethnography is often

preferred for relationality studies, interviews were appropriate here because it is not feasible to observe wildland firefighting directly. Instead, I relied on my eight years of professional background in the profession to relate with interviewees' accounts.

It is important to acknowledge my biases. Talk of the Doctrine policy preceded my exit from wildland firefighting and was formally implemented the year after I left. During my years in the profession, safety rules held the force of law – a weathered sticker inside my red hardhat said of rules, *We don't bend 'em. We don't break 'em*. To me, Doctrine was a stark departure from the professional practice I had known. Nearly a decade of socialization into strict safety rule compliance informed the questions and probes I asked about Doctrine, and potentially introduced bias regarding how I made sense of Doctrine policy and participants' accounts of it.

The data analysis for this study proceeded in two parts. First, a text-internal analysis examined a change in the safety rule genre resulting from Doctrine. This step examined how Doctrine policy documents referenced, re-defined, and delimited uses for safety rules. Second, a text-external analysis examined interview accounts of safety rules in firefighting practice both before and after the Doctrine policy.

Data collection

Archival texts

I collected publicly available archival data, including official documents, handbooks, and training materials specific to Doctrine and safety. These data spanned 12 years and consisted of 186 pages of safety documents. The documents included: Fire Suppression: Foundational Doctrine (23 pages), Leading in the Fire Service (72 pages), 2 pages of the Ten Standard Firefighting Orders and 18 Watchout Situations, 11 online Doctrine Dialog newsletters dated from 2001 to 2012 (16 pages), and the Facilitated Learning Analysis (FLA) guide (73 pages). Documents that provided background information but were not analyzed, included the Incident Response Pocket Guide (130 pages), and Fireline Handbook (437 pages).

Semi-structured Interviews

Over a two-year-period (2009–2010, in the midst of Doctrine's implementation), I conducted individual interviews with wildland firefighters on two specialist helicopter crews, asking how they made sense of Doctrine. In effect, the interviews were a form of sense-making in which I, as the researcher, played an active role in co-constructing participants' accounts (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). I drew from my professional background to build rapport with interviewees, ask questions I deemed relevant, and probe for depth. I alternated between positioning myself as a colleague who understood firefighting practice, and as an outsider inquiring about a policy with which I was unfamiliar.

Helicopter crews were an appropriate sample because they conduct a range of activities (e.g., firefighting, search and rescue, and logistical support), often with a great deal of autonomy. This independence makes them an ideal typical instance sample (Tracy, 2013, p. 137) because they were among the most likely in this professional community to encounter dynamic situations, and choices to use rules flexibly, as Doctrine intended. Specifically, this study focused on experienced, specialized front-line firefighters, as opposed to entry-level firefighters who mainly follow orders, or upper management

who might not be working on the front lines. Participants included 37 members (5 females and 32 males) from 2 heli-rappel crews located in the US Southwest and Intermountain West. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 44 (median of 29). Their experience levels ranged from 3 to 26 firefighting seasons (median of nine). The two crews were geographically distant, each facing a different range of professional demands. Interviewing geographically distant crews allowed for comparisons between them that could surface similarities and highlight differences in the situated participation of safety rules in firefighting practice before and after Doctrine.

Semi-structured respondent interviews (Tracy, 2013, p. 141) were conducted as part of a larger project related to firefighter safety and learning. Participants were asked to talk about memorable firefighting experiences (i.e., critical incidents) they felt contributed to their expertise as a firefighter. It happened that the stories disproportionately related to safety rules and Doctrine in some way, which prompted me to pursue a line of questioning specifically about rules and Doctrine in firefighting practice and to probe with questions such as: How does the organization expect you to use the 10 and 18 and other safety rules? What, if anything, do you know about Doctrine? How, if at all, does Doctrine change how you use safety rules? Please note that asking firefighters to recall their use of safety rules and Doctrine yielded accounts of how they *appropriated* those texts (in line with genre studies), whereas the unprompted stories firefighters told about learning experiences that *happened to involve* rules and Doctrine often yielded accounts in which it was easier to discern hybrid performativity between rules and workers. While textual agency and hybridicity are analytically identifiable to the researcher, interviewees were likely not discursively aware of these phenomena. All interviews were audio recorded, took place privately in a closed-door office at each crew's station, and lasted from 25 to 90 minutes. The interviews for the larger project yielded 856 pages of double-spaced transcripts; I focused here on accounts that explicitly mentioned Doctrine or safety rules (about 20% of the interview dataset).

Data analysis

Text-internal analysis

First, the text analysis involved identifying key documents related to the Doctrine policy (e.g., Doctrine handbook, incident investigation guide, and training manuals, identified in the previous section). Second, all instances in which Doctrine documents mentioned safety rules were coded thematically. This step identified how management re-scripted the espoused uses of various safety documents in firefighting activities. Second, all excerpts that mentioned safety rules, contrasting new versus previous intended uses for them, were examined. Third, I conducted a close reading of the primary Doctrine text: *Fire Suppression: Foundational Doctrine*, hereafter "Doctrine handbook" (USFS, 2005). For simplicity, the findings focus on this singular text. Fourth, I checked my reading of the Doctrine handbook against ways other Doctrine-related documents compared and contrasted Doctrine with safety rules.

Text-external analysis

The first step of the interview analysis involved extracting all accounts of firefighting practice mentioning Doctrine or any specific safety rules. Second, I conducted an inductive,

open coding process on selected data (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010) noting how interviewees characterized the role of safety rules in their firefighting accounts (e.g., helping them learn about hazards, aiding in voicing dissent etc.), and their opinions of rules (e.g., restrictive, helpful, etc.), before and after Doctrine. The third step involved coding deductively (Hennink et al., 2010), by noting concepts and processes I expected to find, given theorizing on genre and textual agency. In particular, I examined how firefighting accounts seemed to set workers and safety rules into commissive or directive relationships with safety rules, before and after Doctrine. I noted how safety rules made a difference in members' firefighting accounts (e.g., to voice dissent, justify use of judgment). I also examined firefighting accounts of safety rules before and after Doctrine to identify how they participated in practice by structuring work activities and informing efforts to look for hazards (i.e., their epistemological role). Fourth, I triangulated the interview findings with those of the text analysis; I read the interview findings looking for themes that emerged in the document analysis, namely, interviewee mentions of a *bias for action*, *leader's intent*, use of *judgement*, specific comparisons between Doctrine and safety rules, and ways interviewees described firefighting practice before and after the Doctrine policy. Finally, I assessed the validity of the findings, sharing them with interviewees, and wildland firefighters not associated with the study. Overall, firefighters were generally versed in the Doctrine policy, but were less attuned to changes in safety rule use over time.

Findings

This study theorizes how organizational lessons written into generic texts traverse space and time through agential-performative relationships between texts and organizational actors. The case examined how firefighters and safety rules performed in a hybrid manner both before and after Doctrine was implemented. The findings first explore a commissive relationship between workers and safety rules before Doctrine, and how that relationship shaped firefighting practice for noticing and evaluating hazards or how rules participated in developing workers' professional epistemologies. Second, analysis of Doctrine documents shows how management re-scripted the role of rules in firefighting practice. Third, the findings present a directive agential-performative relationship between workers and safety rules, and its epistemological consequences, after Doctrine was implemented.

Pre-Doctrine: A commissive relationship between workers and safety rules

In a commissive agential-performative relationship, organizational actor and generic text entered into a hybrid relationship such that the actor made a promise to act through the rules. This hybrid relationship ordered action into a particular sequence: A rule compelled workers to follow it, such that they first examined their circumstances to see *whether* they could comply. Workers then proceeded to plan actions that allowed for rule following, while avoiding actions that bent, broke, or disregarded rules. Due to the particular ordering of practice stemming from the commissive linkage, several interviewees discussed a phenomenon of passively enacting a lesson embedded in rules, simply because they were obligated to comply. The act of following the rule – putting it first in their risk assessment – enabled them to learn the wisdom of a rule when they encountered close-call

situations that rules were written to address. Several interviewees discussed how they gained wisdom through close-call experiences involving Fire Order #4 (i.e., *identify escape routes and safety zones, and make them known,* Figure 1). For instance, Bradley (squad leader, 13 seasons) provided a moving account of his role in recovering the bodies of two firefighters who were burned-over on the 2002 Cramer Fire in Idaho. Bradley explained that the deceased likely identified an escape route and safety zone while flying into the work site, but speculated that they did not hike the escape route from the work site to the safety zone to see how physically arduous it was, or how long it would take. The fire overran the two men, who could not reach the safety zone quickly enough. After a visceral description of the body recovery, Bradley described what he learned about Fire Order #4, and how his practice for "following it" changed as a result of his experience. He said:

> Well, this [Cramer incident] definitely is an example of keeping your escape route and safety zone with you at all times [Fire Order #4] and also having them timed out all the time … You really want to … carefully establish those escape routes and safety zones in accordance with the timeframe of the slowest guy [on your crew]. And honestly, I would also add more time, a safety buffer, taking their fatigue into account … Those two guys were maybe having a great time up there on the Cramer fire. It was maybe a beautiful day to start with, and they were happy to be there, and it's possible that they didn't take these [escape route] factors into account to the extent that I have based on what happened to them.

Through the jarring experience of recovering the bodies, Bradley came to realize and articulate a deeper understanding of Fire Order #4 – why the *practice* of marking and timing the escape route (even though the rule does not specify to do those things) provided a realistic sense of how long it would take to travel its distance when an emergency arose. About half of interviewees' accounts pertained to gaining wisdom about improving one's practice for implementing Fire Order #4. Specifically, interviewees gained this practice-based wisdom while running from a flame front. For example, Ben (squad leader, 18 seasons) and Paul (crewmember, 6 seasons) described separate instances of identifying safety zones from the helicopter while flying into their work site on a fire. In both cases, their helicopter landed "in the green" (i.e., grassy, brushy, flammable area) because it was safer for the helicopter than landing in the dusty, ashy "black" (i.e., already burned area serving as a safety zone). Both Ben and Paul had to run some distance to "the black" once they landed because the wind and fire changed direction. Robin (senior firefighter, 12 seasons) described running from a fire while marking and timing an escape route. She similarly noted a knowledge threshold between passively enacting the wisdom of Fire Order #4 by putting it first in her risk assessment. She said, "It was proactive for the crew boss to have us measure it, time wise. I don't think many people do that – *they just go, 'there's an escape route'* … Now, whenever I'm crew boss, I have people *walk and time it*" (emphasis added). In each case, the act of running from the fire *while* "following" the rule *materialized* the risks the rule was written to address. That is, this combination of actions shifted the *existence* of a hazard from a textual modality to a physical one.

Complementarily, a commissive agential-performative relationship between workers and rules, which entailed a promise to follow rules, was accompanied by a similar promise for non-action if rules could not be followed. Such a promise for non-action gave rules authoritative weight in worker's attempts to exercise dissent. To illustrate, Robin (senior firefighter, 12 fire seasons) explained a situation in which the small group

she was with began to get pulled into one person's overly aggressive plan for fighting the fire. They were able to take control of a challenging group interaction by invoking the commissive agential-performative relationship between workers and rules to bolster their efforts at dissent.

> It was late at night, going in an area without ever seeing it, for no reason, nothing threatened, but one of the guys with us really wanted to get started [fighting the fire]. There wasn't any real escape route or safety zone. It was really heavily timbered … burning in the middle of nowhere, and the risks you go to, it wouldn't make any sense … Anyway, we pulled out the risk management checklist and followed it down … [We] basically brought up the lack of safety zone and escape route [Fire Order #4] as a basis for denying what he wanted to do.

Robin's account illustrated how the commissive relationship between workers and rules committed people to adhere to them. In this case, Robin's effort at dissent was effective because the other firefighters present felt compelled to use safety rules in a particular time order – to implement Fire Order #4 *before* fighting fire. The rules, then, scripted that members take action in a particular sequence, and as such, were invoked as a powerful tool for dissent (e.g., we will *not do this* because it involves breaking rules that we have committed to following).

Safety rules provide incomplete codification of lessons learned from accidents and fatalities (Sauer, 1998, 2003; Ziegler, 2007), such that one might follow a rule on numerous occasions and not understand the lesson written into the rule. The value of a commissive relationship between rules and workers meant workers were compelled to follow rules; in doing so, they passively enacted the lessons embedded in a rule before fully understanding why it existed in the first place, thus directly shaping how they looked for and managed hazards (i.e., their professional epistemologies). Moreover, rules were important discursive resources for exercising dissent because, as Geisler (2001) has noted, the public nature of them, and their recognizable genre, made compliance (or violation) an observable fact. Doctrine, however, changed the linkage between workers and safety rules in ways that altered both firefighting practice and professionals' epistemologies.

Doctrine: Scripting a new agential-performative relationship and trajectory of practice

In the change to Doctrine, the US Forest Service did not discard any of the past rules or checklists. Instead, the Doctrine policy changed the meanings and uses of the existing rules. Notably the Doctrine handbook cast safety rules, somewhat pejoratively, as explicit examples of what Doctrine was *not*. For example, the handbook said,

> Fire suppression Doctrine does *not* consist of *procedures* to be applied to specific situations so much as it sets forth general guidance that requires judgment in application. Therefore, while authoritative, Doctrine is *not prescriptive*. Doctrine is about tools, *not rules*. (emphasis added, USFS, 2005, p. 10)

The above passage casts rules as prescriptive procedures to be applied to specific situations, while contrasting Doctrine as "tools" and "general guidance." These contrasts suggested that rules impeded judgement by forcing prescriptive, procedural action. For instance, the handbook justified the need for Doctrine as follows:

> Though the environment and the mission of the wildland firefighter is demanding increased agility in decision making, the firefighters' ability to adapt and react has become *more constrained* [because] … fireline performance expectations have become *increasingly rules-driven* … . (emphasis added, USFS, 2005, pp. 1–2)

The above excerpt casts rules as constraining judgment and reducing "agility" in decision making. However, the Doctrine handbook did not discard rules as a result of those drawbacks; rather, it reframed them as "principles" and "values." The following passage from the handbook referenced several safety rule lists and checklists (in italics) that, prior to Doctrine, management generally expected firefighters to follow:

> The primary means by which we implement decentralized command […] is through the use of universal principles of suppression operations. These principles […] include but are not limited to the *Standard Fire Suppression Orders*, the *18 Watch Out Situations*, *Lookouts, Communication, Escape Routes and Safety Zones* [*LCES*], and the Downhill Line Construction Checklist. These principles are […] not absolute rules. They provide guidance in the form of concepts and values. (USFS, 2005, p. 12)

Reframing these specific safety rule lists and checklists as concepts, values, and principles offered permission to firefighters to exercise their own judgment more than had been allowed prior to the policy. Contrasting Doctrine's principles-driven flexibility with the confining rigidity of the safety rules provided a foundation for advancing two essential goals of Doctrine: reinforcing the chain of command through *leader's intent*, while promoting a *bias for action*.

Leader's intent referred to the expectation that workers respect the chain of command by following orders from those in formal supervisory roles (i.e., leaders). The Doctrine handbook explained that "safety is the ability firefighters have to deal with risks or hazards to avoid damage or losses and yet still achieve the leader's intent" (USFS, 2005, p. 18). While leader's intent reinforced the chain of command, it provided opportunities for firefighters to exercise judgment in how they carried out their orders. Specifically, the Doctrine handbook promoted a *bias for action*, which advised firefighters to avoid restraint:

> On a chaotic and rapidly developing wildfire, one person taking the initiative can make all the difference in seizing and taking advantage of an opportunity. Being hesitant, risk-averse, or indecisive can expose firefighters to greater long-term risks and translate into a waste of time, opportunity, energy, and money". (USFS, 2005, pp. 27–28)

The bias for action reinforced workers' use of judgment by suggesting that they had permission to rely on their own discretion (rather than rules) in making decisions, and that their discretion should favor action over hesitation.

Sprinkled throughout the Doctrine handbook were block quotes from higher-level agency administrators. Notably, it opened with a quote attributed to the National Director of Fire and Aviation Management, who said, "Simple clear purpose and principles give rise to complex intelligent behavior. Complex rules and regulations give rise to simple stupid behavior. We are focused on defining those simple clear principles that will encourage complex intelligent behavior" (USFS, 2005, p. 1). Another such quote was attributed to the Risk Management Team responsible for writing and interpreting Doctrine for field use; it said, "Our Doctrine is designed to empower employees to make decisions by limiting the number of rules that are non-discretionary … " (USFS, 2005, p. 18). These block quotes were important because they conveyed opinions of important actors in the agency

in order to marshal support for Doctrine. However, the block quotes – and the Doctrine handbook generally – marginalized rules as obstacles that got in the way of exercising judgment and taking swift, decisive action.

It is important to make a link here between how Doctrine documents characterized the texts (i.e., Doctrine and rules), and workers' evolving opinions about the value of safety rules in practice. The interviews took place in the early years of Doctrine's implementation. As a consequence, the interview sample included a mix of people who had concrete accounts of using Doctrine (presented in the following section), and those who merely held perceptions or opinions of what the policy meant. Consistent with the document analysis which revealed a somewhat pejorative framing of safety rules as limiting prescriptions for action that obstructed the ability the do what the situation demands, the interviews also surfaced member interpretations that cast rules as blinding and distracting in deciphering the vital cues on-scene. Participants generally equated Doctrine with using "common sense," and cast safety rules as the opposite of that. For instance, Amy (crew member, 9 seasons) claimed that Doctrine allowed firefighters to "actually look at the situation" instead of "filling out all this paperwork … looking to this huge pile of paper and rules that tell you how to do it [which] makes you less safe … and distracts from the job." Similarly, William (crew member, 9 seasons) viewed Doctrine as a tool to "stand back and think, look at the big picture … [to] see what you're getting into." Gordon (crew member, 4 seasons) observed that there are "so many different scenarios, so many different aspects to fire" that it was important to "use *common sense* because it's not always good to have rules, it's better to have guidelines." Overall, workers' opinions of safety rules appeared to be changing in parallel with the Doctrine-related messaging found in the formal documents.

The doctrine era: A directive relationship between workers and safety rules

Wildland firefighting safety rules originally served as recipes for how to engage in fire situations and structure actions (Ziegler, 2007). When documents structure action, they provide a template for what to do, including rules to follow, and problematic situations to note. Ostensibly, workers first evaluate whether they can follow rules. Then, specific decisions on how to act follow that initial evaluation. However, interviewees suggested that Doctrine's *bias for action* (see previous section) instructed firefighters to act first and then select from an assortment of rules to justify decisions. Doctrine prompted a shift from a *commissive* to *directive* agential-performative relationship. If we consider action as a "conversation" between actors and generic texts, a directive agential-performative relationship is one in which the text makes a request of the organizational actor to heed safety rules, but the actor may or may not elect to do so. In general, a directive relationship resulted in more extreme actions than firefighters were previously allowed to perform, in two ways, Doctrine: (1) formally allowed rule breaking, and (2) allowed members to operate outside the typical scope of their job.

Authorizing rule-breaking

Several firefighters provided accounts of implementing Doctrine in everyday practice. Overall, these accounts emphasized that Doctrine justified their decisions to break

everyday safety rules when it made practical sense. For instance, George's (supervisor, 26 seasons) example of implementing Doctrine involved sending one of his employees, a supervisor of a fire engine, to respond to a wildfire close to where the engine was working, but in an area outside their jurisdiction. George said, "it made sense to send the engine, he could see the fire – go deal with it … He was out of line [based on regular procedures], but Doctrine-wise he did the right thing."

Doctrine also provided justification for breaking safety rules under extraordinary circumstances. For example, Dustin's (supervisor, 13 seasons) account of implementing Doctrine involved evacuating vacationers at a campground close to an advancing wildfire. In doing so, he disregarded rules and practices central to helicopter safety.

> We landed and it was pure chaos … People were just running out to the machines [helicopters] – women, children, dogs. We really didn't have the daylight to do Forest Service protocol, say, give everybody a briefing and getting weights and everything. We basically opened the doors and piled people in, flew them back into [town] … By the time we were done, it was well after what we call "pumpkin time" – you know, we're not supposed to fly after a half hour past sunset. I was worried there might be repercussions from being out so late … Basically what I learned from that is that if life and property's threatened, we can throw the IHOG [Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide, a rule book governing helicopter safety procedures] out the window … We knew we'd be breaking all sorts of rules. We just decided to go for it.

Dustin's scenario pertains to saving lives of imperiled campers, with the trade-off being that he would break rules by flying after "pumpkin time" and foregoing the usual safety procedures (e.g., safety briefing, recording weights, IHOG procedures). Given his description of the event, the trade-offs seem justified, even heroic. However, extraordinary accounts like Dustin's were extremely common in the dataset – of 37 interviewees, only two did *not* recount a harrowing fire experience like his. If these seemingly extraordinary experiences are instead quite ordinary, it raises questions about how workers might stay within the scope of their roles, and indeed, what the role expectations are, a point that is expanded upon in the next section.

Authorizing extra-role actions

Mostly, members described accounts of Doctrine as being a justification for breaking rules. However, several firefighters talked about instances when Doctrine authorized them to take actions that exceeded their role or training. The following exchange with Stan (supervisor, 17 seasons) illustrated such extra-role action:

> Stan: … you need to do what needs to be done as long as you don't grossly go outside of the box and be negligent in your duties. Doctrine gives you latitude to do the right thing … Because we've had some gnarly fires where people were pretty outside the box, but they did a lot of good.
>
> Interviewer: How were they outside the box?
>
> Stan: [they were doing] structure firefighting, basically, where houses are burning down. And so guys are doing some pretty radical stuff out there. [I tell them] if they're safe and can use the equipment on hand to get rid of the problem and save the house, then go for it … But at the same time, if you step outside of the box [the regular rules], you're kind of hanging yourself out to dry there. And so as long as we do what's within our scope, we're covered under Doctrine. Theoretically.

The exchange with Stan shows how firefighters invoked Doctrine as a justification for exceeding their role or training. Stan's crew was only trained to fight *wildfires*; they received no training, equipment, or formal permission to fight *structure* fires. Stan interpreted that Doctrine gave his crewmembers permission to get closer to a structure fire than they would if they were staying strictly within their wildland fire training. Stan said Doctrine allowed his crew to engage structure fires *to a limited extent* ("stepping outside the box") to enhance their efforts to then protect the structure using tactics "within [the] scope" of their existing wildland training. He hedged slightly at the end (i.e., "we're covered under Doctrine. Theoretically.") indicating a lack of clarity about how accident accountability would be determined under Doctrine, and further justifying his reluctance to stray too far from the rules when acting on behalf of the new policy.

Like Stan, several interviewees recounted ways they used Doctrine to exceed the regular range of their duties. For instance, Philip's (supervisor, 9 seasons) example of using Doctrine entailed his wildland firefighting crew responding to medical calls when they were closer to a medical incident than an ambulance with trained paramedics. He justified these actions by saying "if you follow what Doctrine says, then the right thing is to go assist the person who's having seizures or whatever it might be, because we might be the first module on scene." In sum, Doctrine did not simply open up options for action, it encouraged firefighters to be aggressive in taking action by not only breaking rules but also stepping beyond the scope of their training.

Hazardous industries rely on safety rules to embed lessons from accidents and fatalities because opportunities for trial and error learning are both sporadic and dangerous (Hale & Borys, 2013; Sauer, 1998, 2003). The findings showed how a genre change altered ways that lessons entered practice and contributed to developing workers' professional epistemologies. A commissive relationship enabled passive enactment of lessons when workers were developing embodied knowledge about complex environments. However, Doctrine prompted a shift in the safety rules genre such that workers and rules were linked in a directive agential-performative relationship. The directive linkage resulted in rules becoming external and supplemental to workers' exercise of professional judgment. Notably, rules still held the "force of law" because firefighters were not willing to disregard them completely. However, Doctrine's encouragement that workers use professional judgment in their selective application of safety rules meant that rules were not the *first* consideration when assessing potentially hazardous situations or deciding how to act. The result was that the professional role expanded, and rules became a discursive resource for exercising assent (rather than dissent).

Discussion

This study began by asking how agential-performative relationships between generic texts and organizational actors transport organizational lessons across space and time through influencing practice and constituting professional epistemologies. This discussion examines what we gain by considering generic text participation as an agential-performative relationship. Focusing specifically on generic texts is useful because they contribute to professional epistemologies. That is, generic texts fix meaning such that they transport organizational knowledge (e.g., lessons from accidents) across space and time through their intentional writing and socially recognized, habitual uses. Examining a genre change

made salient the different agential-performative relationships between actors and generic texts before and after the change, further highlighting how both firefighting practice and firefighters' risk epistemologies changed as a result of the new linkage. First, changing the safety rule genre altered how organizational knowledge was preserved (or not) through changes in the agential-performative linkage between humans and texts, and associated changes in professional practice. Second, changing the safety rule genre altered the authoritative potential of the text before and after the change. Third, adopting a communicative relational ontology contributes to genre theorizing in that it aids in opening the *black box* of "context" by directing analytical attention to the *plenum of agencies* implicated when mobilizing generic texts.

The agential-performative relationship between firefighters and safety rules influenced how fatality lessons inscribed in safety rules were practiced and materialized (or not) across space and time. Communicative relationality assumes that the process of organizing is flat, and rules are always enacted for *another next first time*, which makes the transport of lessons across space and time a precarious, contingent endeavor (Kuhn et al., 2017). Scholars of written communication note that rules codify lived experience in necessarily incomplete ways because rules need to be universally applicable across a range of possible scenarios (Sauer, 1998, 2003). Furthermore, the embodied knowledge from which rules are written is too nuanced to be captured in terse phrases such as *Identify escape routes and safety zones, and make them known*; or, *Know what your fire is doing at all times* (see Figure 1). This is where the agential-performative linkage between actor and generic text becomes important. How a rule is *practiced* impacts whether and how organizational action enacts (or helps build) the embodied knowledge (e.g., accident lessons) a rule inscribes. It is through organizational practice that rules – and the lessons they codify – are back-translated from a written to a lived modality. Examining how the genre change was associated with a similar change in the linkage between worker and rules, suggests that scripted trajectories play an important role in how members developed embodied knowledge (Vásquez, 2013).

An epistemological consequence of the genre change is that it might have increased equivocality for firefighters as they sought to develop embodied knowledge about hazards. Equivocality refers to the idea that there are multiple explanations of what is occurring, and multiple possible courses of action to take (Weick, 1979). Because there is no singular explanation of cause/effect to explain unfolding events, members seek to reduce equivocality by selecting a plausible explanation of what they are experiencing, and a fitting trajectory of action. The safety rules genre, through setting up a commissive relationship with workers, has long functioned to reduce equivocality in complex circumstances by limiting action. Further, acting through the rules or *incarnating* (Cooren, 2010) their lessons through habitual practice enabled members to passively enact knowledge they did not have, and importantly, *did not realize* they did not have. This insight is significant because it suggests that embodied knowledge is built through a commissive relationship between member and rule, combined with a close-call event in which "following" the rule under duress materializes its lessons on the landscape. In contrast, the directive relationship increased equivocality in concert with Doctrine's *bias for action*, by making action a priority, and casting rules as supplementary to worker judgment. Thus, the decision to act had already been made, and options for non-action were closed off. The main epistemological consequence from the shifting agential-performative

relationship was that it altered how members *looked* for hazards. In a commissive relationship, members asked, "How can I *follow* rules?" If rules could not be followed, then action was curtailed. In contrast, the question stemming from a directive relationship became: "How can I accomplish *something*?"

The change in the agential-performative relationship between safety rules and firefighters also altered the authoritative potential of safety rules. Specifically, the findings suggest how possibilities for a text's use in leveraging authority changed when the genre changed. Communicative relationality casts *authority* as a kind of authoring, whereby the disciplinary power of a text stems from its growing distance from the author (e.g., writer or speaker), through processes variously referred to as distanciation (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) and depersonalization (Iedema & Wodak, 1999). A text gains authority as it becomes distanced from its author and is considered to speak on behalf of a collective, as a *macroactor* (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The findings suggest that members acted through the rules by incarnating them as a macroactor (Cooren, 2010). Because other members recognized rules as a macoractor, they deferred to the organizational disciplinary authority associated with them. It is through this incarnation process that a commissive linkage between workers and rules enabled members to voice dissent. In effect, the act of incarnating the rules provided a way to harness their *depersonalized* authority (Iedema & Wodak, 1999), thus rendering dissent an impersonal process by aiding workers in avoiding face threatening exchanges (i.e., *I'm* not dissenting from *your* plan, *the rules* direct *us* otherwise). In comparison, the directive agential-performative relationship resulted in members *ventriloquizing* rules (Cooren, 2010). In this case, the rules were "made to speak" in support of decisions that workers had already made. Actors did not act through the rules by incarnating them, nor did they disregard them completely. Instead, they heeded Doctrine's "bias for action" by acting on the pressure to "do something" based first on judgment, and second, backed up by whichever rules could justify the actions. Overall, the genre change expanded the scope of the professional role.[1] In writing more encouragement for aggressive action into the Doctrine texts, the organization stripped the safety rules of their disciplinary authority, likely rendering them less impactful in efforts to voice dissent – one could simply counter by saying that rules do not apply to a situation. In effect, if the disciplinary authority of rules is grounded in their depersonalization, then it could be stated conversely that Doctrine *re-personalized* the safety rules by placing worker judgment ahead of expectations to follow them. Because firefighting practice became based first on professional judgment, efforts to dissent through ventriloquizing rules became personal and possibly face-threatening (i.e., *these rules* do not align with *your* judgment). The shift in the organizational authority associated with safety rules had epistemological consequences for workers because it changed the array of discursive resources members could draw from to justify actions, propose alternatives, and offer dissent.

Finally, taking a communicative relationality lens aids in opening the black box of "context" that typically provides an explanation for situated genre uses (Bhatia, 1993, 2002). Like communicative relationality scholars, those working in genre studies also acknowledge that a text's meaning is not stable, nor is action determinate. As such, genre studies typically explain genre usage as situated in a "context" to explain the indeterminacy of its participation. Relying on context-based explanations for genre use creates a *black box* (Callon & Latour, 1981) that obscures the communicative and relational

processes that are occurring when mobilizing a text (Iedema & Wodak, 1999). Communicative relationality contributes to unpacking the black box of context by considering that action is co-produced through a *plenum of agencies* (Cooren, 2006). When we understand organizing as mobilizing a plenum of agencies, we can reframe the notion of "context" as instead agential-performative relationships that combine multiple heterogeneous actors into hybrid trajectories of practice. These agential-performative linkages script actions associated with a generic text in particular ways, as humans and texts act through engaging in conversations with each other – compelling actions, making requests of each other, etc. Furthermore, attending to a genre change directs attention to efforts to script organizing both through policy revisions that redefine how safety rules should participate, and through examining how an agential-performative relationship scripts professional practice before and after a change.

Conclusion

This study examined how the agential-performative relationship between organizational actors and a generic text changed when the text's genre changed. Broadly, this study contributes to constitutive explanations of how organizations persist over time and across space. This study takes as its focus the co-action between generic texts and organizational actors. A communicative relationality view considers that organizations are precarious, and that they are acted out through ongoing actions and interactions. This study suggests that agential-performative relationships are central to the continuous (re)enactment of organization. Examining a genre change allowed for comparing how different agential-performative linkages (commissive, directive) materialized (or not) organizational lessons, and enabled and constrained authority.

Note

1. Indeed, the USFS in 2011 added a document to its collection of Doctrine-related texts, called *Foundational Doctrine for All-Hazard Response*, acknowledging the role USFS employees play in disaster response operations coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This document states:

   > All-hazard response environments are not limited to the large, national incidents. They can include *any situation* in which a Forest Service employee encounters an imminent threat to life and property *outside of the Agency's jurisdiction*. Such environments include potential scenarios that range from being first on scene at a vehicle accident, to a district ranger committing Agency resources to protect a local community (USFS, 2011; p. 3, emphasis added).

   This document was not analyzed because it did not relate to safety rules.

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