

LITME@WORK



Digital and media competences in distant collaborative work: discourses, workers practices and work organization

COP NWOW, 13rd December 2018

AGenda

- 1. Introduction to the research project**
- 2. Competences as discursive elements**
- 3. Competences in workers practices**
- 4. Work organization and development of competences**

CONTEXT

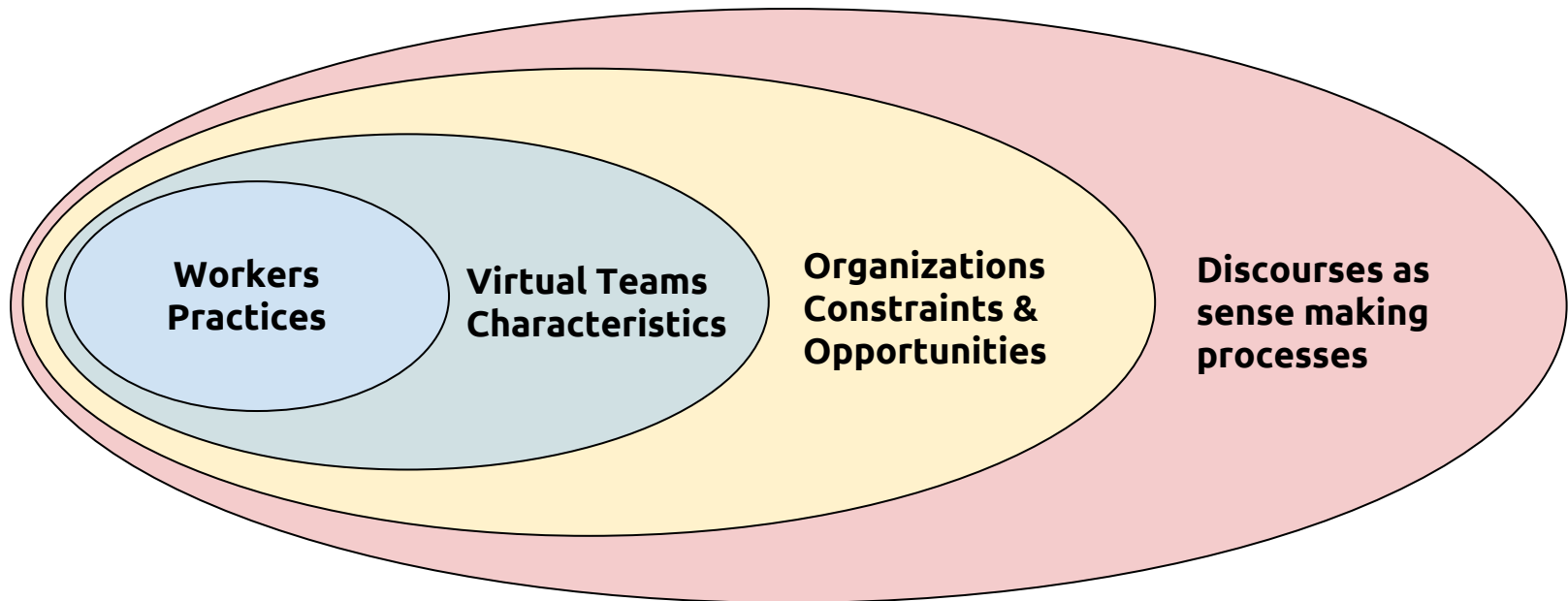
- Digital tools and digitalisation of the work (paperless)
 - Problems of mobility
 - Reducing workspaces -> reducing costs
 - Improving workers well-being
- ➔ Teleworking, distant team work and new organizational models as NWOW ("Bricks, Bytes, Behavior")

RESEARCH QUESTION

What digital and media competences are required to collaborate at a distance?

→ A 4-years project funded by **BELSP0**
(Brain-be)

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS



Teams

Macro - WP2
Discourse analysis



Meso - WP3
Work organization

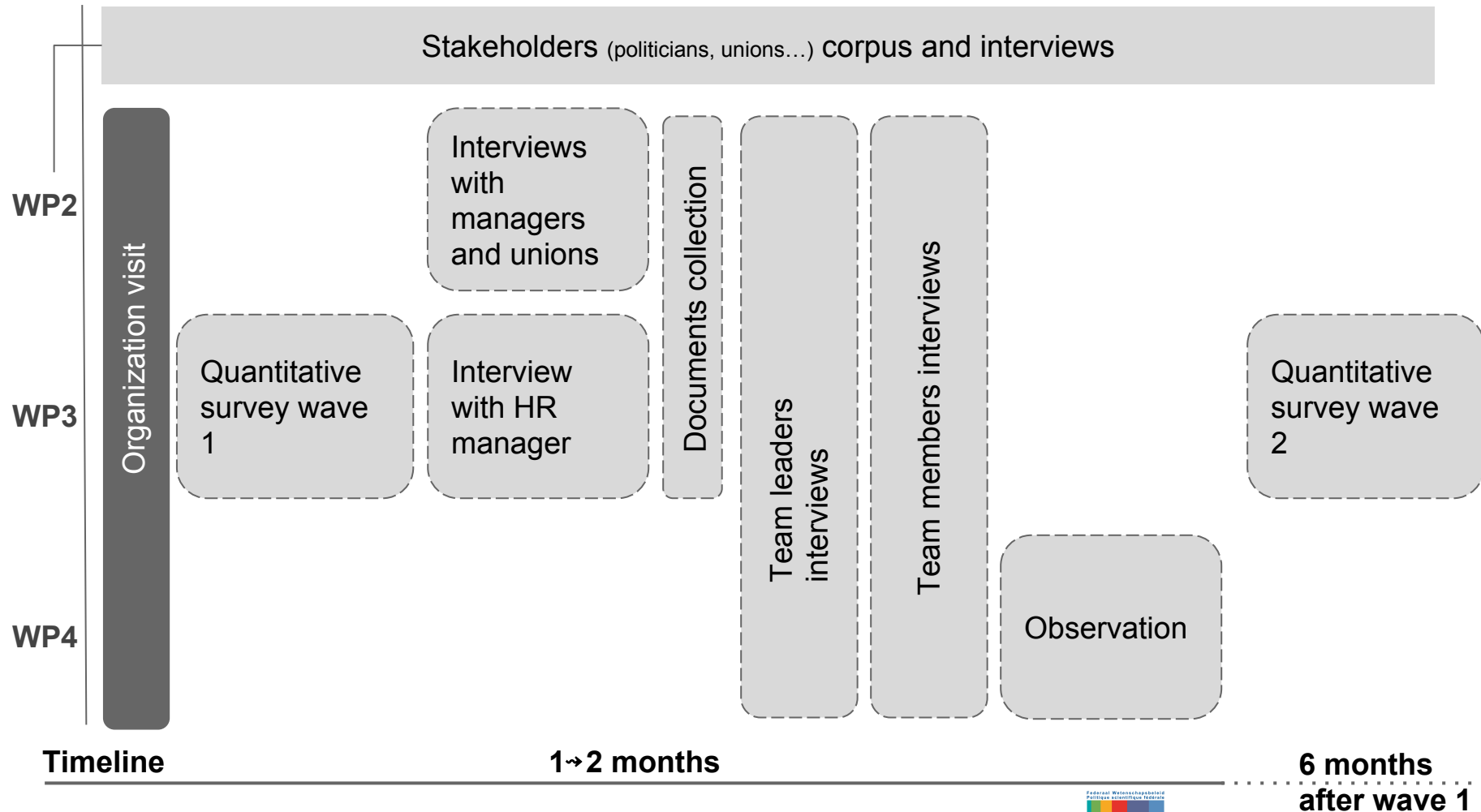


Micro - WP4
Workers practices



INTEGRATED APPROACH

WP2: The social and discursive construction of new work competences (DML)
WP3: Work organization, workplace design and structural conditions for competence utilization and learning
WP4: Digital media uses and competences in new work practices





Reshaping the logics of office work:

Reflections on the issue of competences in NWOW discourse

WP2 analyses the logics structuring NWOW discourse:

We seek to identify the different ways in which office workers and managers make sense of, contest and/or criticize NWOW in general.

We focus on competences to the extent that is discussed in interviews with office workers.

The way a notion such as 'competence' is understood shifts and changes depending on the logics office workers relies on.

WP2 asks what logics office workers rely on in order to make sense of 'competences' in today's office environments.

The meaning of 'competence(s)' also shifts along with the other notions, concepts, practices to which it is connected in (NWOW) discourse.

Research Question

According to what logics do office workers conceptualize 'competences' in office environments marked by a transition towards New Ways of Working in public and private organizations?

Data Collection & Organization

Interviews with 29 respondents with different functions (NWOW managers, Team Leaders, IT personnel, employees, union members, ...) active in **public and private organizations** shifting to NWOW

Qualitative coding of values (e.g. autonomy, respect, participation) and interview topics via NVIVO for Mac

29 analytic memo's containing preliminary observations and discourse analyses of individual interviews.

What are 'logics'?

Discourses - e.g. NWOW discourse - are not random but structured by socio-interpretive logics.

We all rely on such logics in order to make **sense of ourselves, our practices and society in general** with some degree of **coherence**.

Logics articulate signifiers (e.g. 'autonomy', 'competence', 'NWOW) with each other in a way that **fixes their meanings** in specific contexts.

The **question** is according what logics office workers draw on when talking about NWOW competences.

What is discourse?

Discourse conditions what is sayable or thinkable in a given society.

It refers to **ways of speaking and thinking that** impact on the way we **define reality** and deal with it.

It operates through symbols, metaphors, arguments, narratives, texts or genres but cannot be reduced to any of these (cfr. Foucault 1969).

Discourses structure social relations and practices in society and are structured by society by them at the same time.

NWOW discourse calls into being a whole techno-managerial apparatus potentially reshaping (our relation to) the world of work.

General remarks about discourse on ‘competences’

Competences are often defined in terms of attributes and performances: ‘the candidate should be able to’.

Our interviewees often understand (NWOW) **competences as abstract values** such as ‘autonomy’ or **soft skills** such as being ‘sympa’.

There is often a **mismatch between strict definitions** of competences in the literature and the **way office workers talk about them**.

Competence discourse individualises workers. It also **supports meritocratic management systems**.

Competences are **linked to questions organizational control**: their assessment informs decisions on the distribution of objects of desire (e.g. jobs, promotions, responsibility, increases in salary, ...)

Managerial Logics structure the meaning of 'competences'

Managerial logics are **not only** to be found **within** 'the **discourse produced by managers**'.

Managerial logics **aim to bring** the identities, values and practices of the **members of an organization in line with** the interests, goals and/or missions of the **organization itself**.

The associated process of **adaptation can occur in two directions**. **Most of the time** adaptations are made **in function of the organization** rather than the other way around.

These are **some of the logics we identified** in NWOW discourse: (1) a **neoliberal**; (2) a **participatory**; (3) a **(pseudo-) participatory**; (4) and a **humanizing logic**

These **logics** can be shown to have an **impact on the way interviewees talk about competences** (implicitly and explicitly).

1. a (dominant) neoliberal managerial logic

This logic **sets the tone** for discussions on company culture, the ideal office environment, office worker and way of working.

It articulates values/competences such as **autonomy, trust, flexibility, collaboration and responsibility**, while **subordinating these values to efficiency and/or productivity**

It is a matter of trust and values. The fact that we are into NWOW does not mean we are at Club Med now. (external consultant to insurance firm)

these values are often talked about as 'competences' in our interviews.

Managers should 'trust and let go' and deploy a **result-oriented management style**, allowing for teleworking and other NWOW practices.

This logic is **recognized as being the 'core' of NWOW discourse** - no matter if one agrees with its goals and underlying logic or not.

1. a (dominant) neoliberal managerial logic

NWOW is seen to be a **matter of culture** where individuals are incited to **responsibilize themselves**. The **new NOWOW culture is supposed to be superior** to an 'old' administrative culture based on hierarchical control.

in the past employees supposedly found themselves in 'a hierarchical mode' that created a specific attitude:

I don't do anything my manager does not tell me to do. (external consultant to insurance firm)

So they don't take on responsibility, even if you have a manager who is very transparent, who lets go, who delegates, there will still be people who say 'no, no, no, no, I don't take on, it's not up to me to do this. (external consultant to insurance firm)

The **neoliberal managerial logic does not automatically wipe out the 'old' culture**: 'bureaucratic dinosaurs' are seen to coexist with 'NOWOW'.

1. a (dominant) neoliberal managerial logic

The neoliberal logic **holds office workers responsible** for the development of **their** careers, productivity, subjectivity and associated **competences**.

The **IT manager of an insurance firm** argues that **digitalization implies** a reduction of personnel and a **need for 'other competences'**.

He adds that **some people's inability to acquire relevant competences**, may be a **matter of technical know-how** but is **also a matter of attitude**:

People who are not open to change, exclude themselves.

People who keep on living in their past, well, at some point the past is gone.

The *'the individual also has a responsibility'*: *'take your career in your own hands'*, *'let's be open to change'*, if not *'the story stops'* - **individuals** are ultimately **responsibilized** for their (lack of) **NWOW competences**.

2. A Participative team-oriented managerial logic

The participatory team oriented logic **promotes an egalitarian and democratic organization of decision-making processes at the level of teams.**

According to one Team Leader this participatory logic **can be combined with NWOW** discourse.

There is kind of the same philosophy behind it , in the sense that teleworking implies a loss of control on the part of the hierarchy and an increase in trust. (Team Leader about NWOW and participatory management)

*I think that the fact that **one should be more involved in the worries of work and to make these a bit your own worries.** (Team Leader)*

The **participative team oriented logic** places the following **competences/values** at the top of an organization's value hierarchy: collaboration, expression of opinions, autonomy etc.

3. A pseudo-participative managerial logic

Several interviewees identify and criticize a pseudo-participative logic deployed by managers who merely claim to listen but push through their vision on NWOW:

He moves a bit like a bulldozer. I mean, he gives the impression of consulting with us but he does not really consult. He asks questions and provides us with information but he has his goal and knows where he's headed. (Union member and Team Leader about an NWOW manager).

Others embrace this pseudo-participative managerial logic, claiming that at some point an authoritative decision is needed:

One has to rub it in intelligently for a while and then at some point you have to stop the massage and say 'listen here, we have talked enough, now the pool is there and we need to jump in'.

Moreover, at some point the CEO has to lead by example and say *I do it, so I don't care how, but you do it as well*.

4. a humanizing managerial logic

Discourse marked by this logic **emphasizes physical, psychological and social values**. Human **well-being** is placed **at the top of the value hierarchy**.

The 'humane' managerial logic **pleads for an adaptation of the organization to human needs** instead of the other way around.

This logic **potentially undermines** aspects of the **neoliberal managerial logic**:

- It legitimizes guarding the boundary between work and private life.
- It is often linked to critiques on perverse effects of NWOW on well-being (burn-out, noise in open office environments, ...)

It provides a **basis for addressing the risks** of the NWOW techno-managerial apparatus.

4. a humanizing managerial logic

This **humanizing logic** has implications for the **way office workers value** certain **competences**.

Several interviewees rely on a **humanizing logic** in order to problematize some (potentially) **negative consequences** of **NWOW** on **wellbeing**

- increased noise in open office environments
- no opportunities to personalize office spaces in clean desk policies
- Negative implications on social life & life/work balance

Several employees highlighted the importance of 'adaptability'. The **ability to adapt to NWOW** environments **implies competences** such as:

- the ability to concentrate and to filter out noise
- the ability to disconnect psychologically without an impact on efficiency
- not having much need for social isolation

The **way one evaluates NWOW** is often linked to these **competences**.

(E) CONCLUSIONS

According to what logics do office workers conceptualize ‘competences’ in office environments marked by a transition towards New Ways of Working in public and private organizations?

- **Depending on the logics office workers** draw on in order to make sense of a changing world of work, they **will value competences differently**.
- In our interviews the **line between ‘competences’, ‘values’, and ‘soft skills’ is often difficult to draw**.
- The **distinction between ‘skills’ and competences is also rather blurry** in the discourse of most office workers.
- **Office workers rely on** neoliberal, participatory, pseudo-participatory and humanizing **logics for making sense of NWOW** changes. There are others.
- The **meaning and value** that **offices workers attach to** particular **competences** can only be assessed **by considering the logics** at play.



Competences in Workers Practices

Objectives :

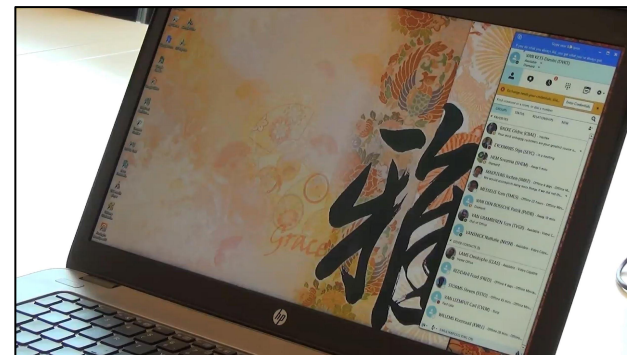
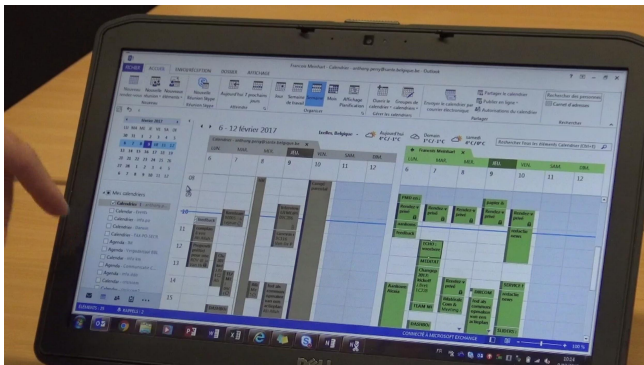
- Analyze ICT-supported work practices involving team and distance work
- Mapping the relationship between uses and competences
- Defining the competences of ICT-supported teamwork and distance work practices from the perspective of workers, their « lived experience of work » (Sandberg, 2000)

Approach :

- Based on field observation
- Avoid tool-oriented approach to take into account the variety of technologies
- Understanding the technical, informational & social dimensions of activities and competences

Method:

- 60 semi-structured interviews (20 team leaders, 40 team members)
- 10 ethnographic observations
- 10 Belgian organizations (diversity in sector, size, telework policy, teamwork)



5 Activity Areas

1. Interdependent Tasks

2. Team Meetings

**3. Remote
Communication**

4. Information Spaces

5. Document Production

5 Activity Areas	10 Actions
1. Interdependent Tasks	Collectively allocating tasks
	Implementing tasks interdependency
2. Team Meetings	Organizing team meetings
	Meeting with the team members
3. Remote Communication	Organizing communications means
	Interacting with coworkers
4. Information Spaces	Organizing shared information spaces
	Sharing information in dedicated spaces
5. Document Production	Organizing the collective edition of a document
	Authoring a document collectively

White = **coordination work**
 Settling the conditions of collaboration (preparation, planning, management...)

Grey = **cooperation work**
 Collective performance of collaboration (participating to a meeting, collectively producing a document...)

5 Activity Areas	10 Actions	Sub-actions
1. Interdependent Tasks	Collectively allocating tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify coworkers working time and work responsibilities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the nature of tasks
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the workload related to tasks treatment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the team's tasks and deadlines visible
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a balanced collective workload
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure one's individual balance toward collective workload
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify constraints of media apparatus

5 Activity Areas	10 Actions	Sub-actions	Operations
1. Interdependent Tasks	Collectively allocating tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify coworkers working time and work responsibilities 	Sharing a document on a shared server with the work schedule and functions of the workers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the nature of tasks 	Sharing a document on a shared server with tasks and deadlines
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the workload related to tasks treatment 	Sharing a document with a list of tasks on Google Drive
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the team's tasks and deadlines visible 	Creating collectively a job description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a balanced collective workload 	...
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure one's individual balance toward collective workload 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify constraints of media apparatus 	

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5 Activity Areas	10 Actions	6 Dimensions					
		Tasks	Time	Space and Distance	Information	People	Tools
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	Meeting with the team members			•		•	
3. Remote Communication	Organizing communications means						
	Interacting with coworkers						
<p>Identifier la nature des tâches:</p> <p><i>“Quand cela se présente, nous devons publier sur notre réseau social d’entreprise le résumé des nouveaux projets que l’on souhaite proposer aux collègues pour inciter ceux qui ont envie de participer au projet à être présents à la prochaine réunion d’équipe.”</i></p>							
5. Document Production	Organizing the collective edition of a document						
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2. Team Meetings	Organizing team meetings				•	•	•
	Meeting with the team members						
3. Remote Communication	Organizing communications means						
	Interacting with coworkers						
<p>Identifier le moment approprié pour se réunir:</p> <p><i>“Je clique simplement sur les agendas ici. Je regarde la plage horaire, je vois s'ils sont ici ou pas, je vois si c'est avec des rendez-vous externes, je n'y touche pas. Parfois si on a un staff interne, je sais qu'il y a moyen de négocier. Mais ça c'est super pratique.” (team leader)</i></p>							
5. Document Production	Organizing the collective edition of a document						
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Identifier le moment approprié pour se réunir:

“Pour la réunion d’équipe, **les dates et l’heure sont choisies au début de l’année, ensemble**. C’est généralement moi qui suis la planification. **Est-ce qu’elles sont respectées? Je ne trouve pas. D’un côté je peux le comprendre, nous échangeons sur le terrain tous les jours.** Est-ce que c’est nécessaire d’avoir des réunions d’équipe chaque semaine?

(...) **Skype** a 3 fonctions que j’utilise régulièrement. **Je consulte le statut...** Mon équipe directe est ici dans le bâtiment, **ils travaillent activement sur leurs PC**, c’est pourquoi ils ont le petit “V” vert. [prénom] **a indiqué qu’elle est à la maison**, son statut est sur orange, donc je sais qu’elle n’est pas derrière son PC pour le moment. Ici par exemple, je vois une autre personne [...] qui a le statut rouge, elle est réunion. **Ca c’est lié à ton agenda Outlook.** (...)” (team member)

Indicators of competences:

- Capacity to "frame"/"understand" the complexity of the collaboration process, and to act accordingly and meaningfully

First recommendations:

- Importance of both coordination and cooperation work
- Fostering reflexivity
- Embracing the complexity of collaboration (dimensions, activity areas, actions...)



Work organization

WORKPACKAGE 3: work organisation and workplace design

How are teamwork and distant work shaped as **a result of organisational choices** and **with what effect** on DML competences?



- **Objectives :**

- Analyze role of **organisational design** in virtual teamwork
- Understanding the structural conditions of required and enabled competences and **learning**

Method

Mixed method design:

- **Qualitative data collection**
 - Interviews
 - Workplace observation
 - Document analysis
- **Quantitative data collection**
 - Validated questionnaire at two points in time

Results **qualitative** study:

- Important role of organisational design
 - Absorption vs reinforcement
 - No organisation took organisational design into account when implementing virtual teams
- Role of technology

Results **quantitative** study:

- Importance of team trust for skill development
- Consistency in hours of telework important for technical and communication literacy

Merci! Bedankt!

Final conference on 8-10 May 2019

Book on May 2019 (Presses Universitaires de Namur)

Policy brief on the web site

www.LITmeatwork.be