Aim of this paper is to show how the analysis of work practices can provide an important contribution in support of a process of assessment of human resources within companies. Through the analysis of work practices discussed in this case-study, we were able to pinpoint the skills required for daily work, and based on an in-depth analysis of these skills we devised an assessment process. The process consisted in the design and use of assessment tools built on the basis of concrete work practices identified through an ethnomethodological analysis.

THE CONTEXT

The intervention which we shall discuss here was carried out at a multinational company which manages the yard of an important commercial port in Italy. The company we are speaking of is Contship, which deals with the handling of goods at the Gioia Tauro port. The company's operations are focused on tradeshipment, that is, the specific nature of Contship's work is to deal with the movement of containers from long-distance ships (which come from America and other continents) onto smaller ships which have the possibility of docking in the smaller ports located in Italy and the Southern Mediterranean. The port serves the entire Mediterranean area and is considered a high quality facility not only for the local area, but for all of Italy. In fact, due to the number of containers handled, it is among the leading ports in the world in terms of goods handled. The port's profitability is measured through the number of containers handled per hour. The average productivity index is 22/24 containers per hour. To reach this threshold, is essential that the personnel involved in the loading and unloading processes make every effort to work in a coordinated and rapid manner, thus allowing the result to be reached.

The port is located in a very particular socio-cultural context, where an industrial culture which could help the personnel identify with the company's mission is lacking entirely. Gioia Tauro is known for being one of the targets of investigations by the Italian Judiciary, due to the significant penetration of the mafia in the area, which tends to monopolize and manage all activities in the local territory. The owners of the company decided to adopt a dual, challenging objective: that of monitoring and limiting the presence of organized crime through constant contact with the Judiciary and the national police force, and guaranteeing that the majority of the port workers are from the local area, in order to make a contribution to the economic and social recovery of the area itself. However, these choices make it essential to pay particular attention to the care and development of the personnel, who in many cases, have not internalized an industrial-type working culture. The training of the personnel is thus an area which requires special attention at the company.

Following particularly critical events, which indicate an ambivalent involvement and merely utilitarian attitude on the part of the yard personnel (the laborer level) towards the company, the managers asked themselves how they could sustain positive engagement towards the work on the part of the company's employees. Behavior denoting a lack of participation in the company is often noted, indicated by a high level of absenteeism, lack of coordination between the work teams, and

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dependence on the orders coming from the hierarchy, without taking responsibility for dealing with critical situations which arise in the yard. Over time, these trends have led to a significant slowing of loading/unloading operations, to the point of reaching the critical level of 15/16 containers unloaded per hour (average index for the teams). Below this level, the company loses money.

The company management has thus promoted an assessment process with the goal of launching a promotion program for middle management in order to enhance the roles of individuals with high potential. The idea is to then rely upon those individuals to sustain a positive organization of the work teams and a good level of engagement on the part of the laborers. This segment of the company population is often left at the margins of assessment of potential, as it is has little involvement in the processes of career development. In the organization we have considered, the management's intention was to imagine that the assessment process and career development could involve the segments closest to the company population's actual work operations, in order to give each employee the possibility to construct his or her own professional future. In the final analysis, this process was conceived in order to support the commitment towards the organization of the first levels of the company population.

The managers of the port thus drew up a request for intervention addressed to the Catholic University of Milan (Italy), asking if it was possible to design and launch an assessment program to guarantee and monitor the indispensable skills, starting with the role of the Team Supervisors in the port yard.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PORT

To understand the functioning of the port, it is important to refer to the organizational structure and how the organizational chart is set up. A total of approximately 1,000 people work at the port. 800 of those individuals are yard employees with the task of dealing with the loading and unloading of arriving ships. The workers are organized into teams of about 10 people each, coordinated by a Team Supervisor. There are 7/8 ships present at the port's wharf at any given time, on which an equal number of teams work continuously, 24 hours a day. The work day is organized into three shifts, each of which has a Shift Foreman who coordinates the allocation of the teams working on the ships based on urgency and unforeseen events. The teams are then grouped into three large units, each of which is coordinated by an Operational Unit Supervisor. The Shift Foreman and the Operational Unit Supervisor are in radio contact with the Port coordination center, which controls the operations through the monitors, keeping watch over the operations in the yard and the movement of the containers. From an organizational standpoint, this is a critical area of interaction. In fact, the operator at the monitor (Controller) has an important coordinating function because he has to decide how the teams work, on which ships, and with what priority. It should be stressed that all of the figures described above are constantly in contact with each other by two-way radio in order to exchange information and data on the operations which are being performed. We include a scheme which depicts the port yard's complex system of functioning here below:
This method of work requires an efficient coordinating function which must be capable of allocating the human resources based on urgent needs, unforeseen events, and the importance of different clients. Decisions on how to organize the work are made based on the overall monitoring of the loading and unloading movements in the yard. However, the decisions made by the Operational Unit Supervisor depend on the possibility of integrating the numerical data communicated by the Controller and the data reported by the Team Supervisor in the yard. The Controller reads the numerical data on the monitor which indicate the progress of the loading and unloading operations for each group. However, the Team Supervisor has a more concrete viewpoint on these operations, because he knows the origin of the problems which may arise. When a critical piece of data is present, it must be interpreted, in order to understand what has caused the critical situation. For example, a slowdown in the pace of unloading a ship can be caused by various problems (a broken-down lift truck, a health problem among the workers, different degrees of malfunctions). Based on the nature of the problems, the Shift Foreman, in agreement with the Operational Unit Supervisor, decides how to allocate the teams working on the ships. The efficiency of the unloading process depends on the interpretation of the work situations which arise in the yard, but the nature of this interpretation process is a process of sensemaking which involves at least three/four individuals as protagonists: the monitor operator, who recognizes the inconsistency of certain data which deviate from the anticipated data flow; the Team Supervisor, who provides additional situational data to interpret the number shown on the screen; and the Operational Unit Supervisor, who comes into play to make a decision on how to manage urgent needs. In the event that the problem at issue is the result of a technical malfunction, the decision on how to proceed becomes more complicated, because the interpretation of the situation now requires the presence of the Maintenance Team Supervisor as well, and in serious cases, also the Port Maintenance Manager. The decision-making process and the process of interpreting the data which appear on the Controller's monitor is a process of extended social cognition, and the organization of the work is the result of the efficacy of the interaction and exchanges among all of the operators involved. A critical aspect is represented by the fact that, despite being monitored as regards their loading and unloading operations, the yard workers have a certain amount of autonomy which effectively allows them to influence the flow of containers based on how they manage routine operations and how they deal with the unforeseen situations which periodically arise. The influence that these factors
have on the loading and unloading operations is not absolute, but it is sufficient to cause the productivity index to fall below 16 containers per hour, which, as we noted above, is the level below which profitability is lost.

THE REQUEST FOR INTERVENTION

The request for intervention from the Port Management was driven by the intention to succeed in determining which skills are critical for the Team Supervisors who manage the work teams in the yard. The managers' initial intention was to assess those skills based on criteria of the workers' compliance with general skill levels which are normally measured by assessment programs, for which many different protocols and measurement methods have been developed by now. Once that initial request was made, the group at the Catholic University began a process of working together with the managers in order to reformulate the request. A shift was made, from the request to use standardized tools to assess skills, to the proposal to develop an assessment process based on the measurement of skills actually deployed by the workers in their daily operations. In the past, many personnel assessment processes resulted in lists which differentiated the individuals based on monitoring their abilities and skills in a manner that was completely abstract and scarcely significant as regards the management of urgent needs and the difficulties of port life. In order to succeed in setting up an assessment process focused on the actual skills and knowledge used by the workers, the decision was made not to proceed with the application of only standardized tools (questionnaires, etc.), but rather to develop a process of elaboration of specific tools derived from the observation of the real organization of the work at the port yard. In the first phase, through a process of ethnomethodological observation, the work practices of the port workers were studied.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK WHICH ASSISTED US IN THE INTERVENTION

To state the reasons for the researchers' proposal to redefine the request for intervention, we will now explain the theoretical framework which guides our actions as consultants/researchers. We believe that assessing workers' skills is a process which must necessarily begin with the comprehension of the specific organizational context to which we refer. Organizations develop differing functional cultures and support the consolidation of work practices which are the expression both of certain work goals pursued and the processes of construction and exchange which people set into motion in their daily actions. Within the organizations, styles of local functioning develop that implicate the activation of typical work practices which include working knowledge that the workers have developed over the course of time. We use the concept of "work practice" as defined by Gherardi, who gives the following definition: "I define a practice as a mode, relatively stable in time and socially recognized, of ordering heterogeneous items into a coherent set" (Gherardi, 2006, p. 34). Referencing the contribution of Lave and Wenger (1991; 1998), we support the hypothesis that in organized contexts, communities of practices develop which are the result of interactions and exchanges which people initiate in a specific context. With Wenger (1998), we understand the concept of communities of practices as a recurrent and typical mode of working, the customs and habits which form an organizational culture which guides the exchanges and interactions among people. Practices are thus socially constructed, locally situated activities (Gherardi, 2006, 2007) which support the development of a typical and recurrent mode of work within an organization. We can argue that practices influence and give rise to a specific mode of experiencing and constructing the organization through a process of continuous sensemaking and interpretation of what happens (Weick, 1969, 1995). In our analysis, the focus of the research is on the detection of recurrent work practices, which are generated in the daily exchanges among the persons in the port yard. The repeated nature of the
exchanges supports the creation of typical and recurrent methods of functioning which give shape to a specific mode of organizing the work among the teams, and between the teams and the Management Center. The working hypothesis we have adopted is that in real operational situations, it is possible to intercept the (more or less functional) concrete modes through which people develop responses to problems they must face, exchange and circulate knowledge and learning, and share and develop practices and recurrent systems of action with respect to the work needs with which they are faced.

Implementing an evaluation and assessment process without considering the comprehension of local cultures and practices developed over time by workers in an organization would mean initiating an abstract process detached from concrete working conditions. In our research/consulting work, we have acted with the goal of contextualizing our intervention, launching a fact-finding process aimed at reconstructing the local cultures of organizational functioning. We then reconstructed the work practices in the yard in order to monitor them with the managers and begin an assessment process. Thus, the assessment did not take place based on the adoption of an abstract model of the organization's functioning, but rather through the reconstruction of the practices actually used in the port yard.

This process involved the structuring of the intervention in three steps:
1. the monitoring of recurrent work practices
2. the identification of work practices judged to be promising, through the comparison of data collected with the client
3. the development of assessment tools based on the work practices defined as critical and central for the production process

The goal of the work was to highlight, with a good empirical foundation, the actual methods through which the company's inputs are translated into practice, attempting to come closer to the existing work micro-cultures, through exploration and survey in the field (participatory observation carried out by two researchers).

The field survey had the purpose of acquiring repertoires of work practices to be used in the subsequent assessment phase, including through highlighting areas of interaction, critical points, and typical aspects that are useful for a more structured understanding of the existing operational context.

A METHOD FOR COMING INTO CONTACT WITH THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION AT THE PORT

The survey of the work practices was made possible by ethnographic observation work in the field, which allowed for taking note of the work processes, critical points, and real difficulties encountered by the men in the yard.

The researchers negotiated with the port managers to devise an ethnographic observation plan which allowed for accompanying the yard teams in all phases of their work, on each shift. The observations lasted for 14 days, divided into two sessions lasting one week each. For each day, each researcher was assigned to a team, and accompanied that team as it performed its work. The researchers also negotiated permission to take notes in the presence of the workers.

The observation process was guided by certain specific questions which, after having been discussed with the management, represented the viewpoints which the researchers adopted to direct their observations when they were involved in the work situation in the yard. The questions which guided the observation were the following:
how and through what processes does the passage from the inputs to the implementation of
the company plans take place;
what is the proximity/distance between the representation of the anticipated profiles/skills
and their translation into practice in the system of action;
what methods of promotion and management of knowledge in use are adopted and
supported;
what points of strength and weakness seem to characterize the organizational situation
observed.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK PRACTICES BEGINNING WITH
THE ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES

The review of the ethnographic forms was a process which initially involved the researchers, who
attempted to identify macro-areas in order to understand the material that had been gathered.
Recording the information on ethnographic forms allowed for an initial identification of certain
critical areas with respect to which the personnel in the yard appeared to develop differentiated
work practices, showing different levels of skills in managing unforeseen situations in daily work.
This process consisted in the detailed analysis of the data gathered, with the purpose of registering
the episodes which, in order to be dealt with, required the ability to activate a process of
sensemaking by the groups of workers. The researchers then identified different types of critical
episodes dealt with, which in order to be overcome required the activation of different areas of
skills. The outcome of the first re-elaboration of the ethnographic forms was the preparation of a
report for the Company Management which was discussed with the managers in order to decide
which skills and abilities underlie the modes of work detected. With the managers' contribution, we
reconstructed the data which emerged and identified which skills and practices were to be
considered relevant and appropriate for monitoring during assessment, based on the company's
goals and the management of the work.

Based on the results of this process of identifying skills, which was performed in close collaboration
with the Management, specific assessment tools were devised which presented the workers with
recurrent work situations and critical situations resulting from the real organization of the work at
the port.

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<tr>
<th>Areas and Skills</th>
<th>Management of work team groups</th>
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<tr>
<td>Human resources management area</td>
<td>Promotion of personnel motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge Communication and Management Area</td>
<td>Management of informal working networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment Area</td>
<td>which arise based on immediate urgent needs</td>
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<td>Working Style and Ability Area</td>
<td>Competent exchange and knowledge circulation</td>
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<td>Communication styles</td>
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<td>Management of priorities and urgent needs</td>
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<td>Safety management</td>
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We shall now provide examples of and analyze one of the areas that was considered critical for the performance of the role of Team Supervisor in the port yard, stressing that the choice of skills to evaluate in the assessment phase was the result of the review of the ethnographic forms.

COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AREA

Operations in the yard are organized in the following manner. There is a coordination meeting among the managers first thing in the morning to monitor the arrival of the ships and the departure of those for which the work has been completed. In this operational meeting, priorities are decided on and the most serious urgent requirements are managed. It is important to consider that the port's wharf is approximately 4 kilometers long; 8 to 10 ships are present simultaneous, and there is a continuous flow of ships arriving and departing. Thus, the managers' ability to manage the situation means being able to organize the process of loading/unloading the ships in such a manner as to guarantee a continuous, efficient process which is not interrupted by unforeseen events. The decisions made in the operational meeting are communicated to the supervisors in the yard, who are 5 middle management employees with the title of Operational Unit Supervisors. They coordinate the performance of the work in the port yard. The loading/unloading operations for the ships are performed by teams of workers consisting of approximately 10 members each. Each team is coordinated by a Team Supervisor who works with his men on the loading/unloading wharf of a ship. The distribution of the teams working on the ships is monitored by a Shift Foreman who coordinates all of the teams present at the same time in the yard. We again note that the port work is organized based on a continuous work cycle of 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Therefore, a significant coordination ability is required, which must take into account business priorities which the Operational Unit Supervisor in particular is aware of, the proper allocation of the teams working on the ships, managed by the Shift Foreman, the involvement of the workers, and the monitoring of their work, which is principally managed by the Team Supervisor.

Let us take a closer look at the description of the organization of the work, introducing and describing the work of another crucial position, the Controller.

The work process on the wharf is monitored through a computer system managed by the Controllers, individuals who are located in a control room dedicated to the monitoring of the port work processes. These workers monitor how many containers are handled by the teams, and how and where they are moved in the yard; they have a series of statistical indicators on their monitors which, in short, indicate the overall productivity of the port, as well as the specific productivity of each team. Their task is to be in constant contact with the Team Supervisors in order to provide them with feedback on how their work is going and receive information on any problems which may arise in the yard. The communication between Controllers, Team Supervisors, Shift Foremen, and middle management always takes place by radio. The following scheme summarizes the organization of the work at the port.
Now, let us examine what happens when an unforeseen event slows down or blocks the loading and unloading operations of the ships.

When a problem arises, the Controllers immediately recognize it, as they see the productivity index decrease on their screen. The system for deciding how to manage the problem is a complex process which always involves contact within this social microsystem that is activated every time an unforeseen event occurs. Each of the actors involved, whom we described above (the Operational Unit Supervisors, the Shift Foremen, the Team Supervisors, and the Controllers) possesses only a portion of the information necessary to make sense of the event which is occurring. As an example, let us take the slowdown of the unloading of a ship. The first to detect the slowdown is the Controller, who does not know the reason for it, however. It is the Team Supervisor who has that information. If the slowdown is caused by a technical malfunction, then the maintenance team intervenes and the Maintenance Team Supervisor is the one who knows the extent of the damage. The Shift Foreman, on the other hand, knows the potential availability of other resources (men and equipment) to be activated to support the work team which is having difficulty. Lastly, the Operational Unit Supervisor knows the company's business priorities and the overall urgent needs of the entire port (which are discussed in the morning coordination meeting). That is, each of the actors involved possesses a portion of the information which must be integrated in order to initiate a process of sensemaking which helps in making an operational decision on how to deal with the problem. There can be many different solutions based on the composition of the various types of information: the decision can be made to activate other equipment and teams, or in the alternative, to allow the maintenance team to do its work, which requires the suspension of the unloading operations, if there are no other business priorities to be guaranteed. What we wish to stress here, is that although there are specific roles and responsibilities (in the situation described, it is the Operational Unit Supervisor who decides what actions shall be taken), in the concrete situation linked to the unforeseen event, a work group is activated spontaneous and has the task of exchanging the portions of information possessed by each individual, and in that exchange, a social process of sensemaking takes shape which allows the group to interpret what is happening and reach a decision. In effect, a spontaneous decision-making unit is formed, which has no correspondence in the official organizational charts, and which ends up devising a definition of what is happening, and making operational decisions together.
In this situation, as in other situations referenced, at a first level of analysis, certain considerations emerge:

- The flow of communications can not be traced back to linear and rational sequences of transmission of information, even if they were considered to contain and resolve distortions and dispersions. It depends structurally and significantly on the logic and interpretations (of the roles, events, goals, critical points…) that are widespread and prevalent in the system of action, and on the concrete regulation of the social transactions present in it. It is through this interaction that the input takes on meaning, starting with continuous exchanges, negotiations, and co-constructions, through which the individuals learn to give a particular meaning to the events;

- The procedures for implementing the anticipated plans are actually processes of translating the inputs, which also vary in relation to the more or less functional communication styles adopted by different organizational actors and their methods of interpreting and acting on aspects of authority and discrentional power, which derive from their organizational positions and responsibilities.

- Among the critical nodes of the flow is that regarding a plurality of figures that interact, with functions and tasks that are in part distinct, and in part overlapping and confused, which converge on the same work objects and operational and/or managerial tasks. That is to say, that the translation into practice of the company inputs passes through a sort of web of relationships between different figures who in turn mediate/move/transfer inputs to other operational figures. The chain requires constant processes of regulation and mutual harmonization, in which depictions and perceptions of one's own role are in play.

In terms of assessment, this means monitoring how the Shift Foremen, Team Supervisors and Controllers are able to depict the complex functioning of the port's operations, knowing how to interpret a role in which they become active in the management of communication processes where the effort is not only that of transmitting to others the portion of information possessed, but to be able to put oneself in the shoes of one's co-worker in order to better understand which portion of information is necessary to allow the other individual to interpret what is happening. We also stress that these exchanges occur in a situation characterized by elevated emotional intensity, since any erroneous decisions entail a substantial loss of productivity which then lowers the port's
productivity index, and thus the ability to sustain the competitiveness of the employees’ own company.

In the concrete situations observed, the individuals' styles of functioning were very different: some Team Supervisors have an excellent ability to participate and function in an effective manner in the decision-making units which are spontaneous created in each critical situation, while others interpret their roles in a very individualistic manner, and thus are unable to activate broadened sensemaking processes with their own colleagues. Below we show an observation/ethnographic form in which two critical episodes observed are recorded.

**Control Observation**
12:30-1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 24
Effective interaction

The Controller is located in the Dispatcher office, next to the Shift Foreman's Office. There are four workplaces which monitor the yard. Two others deal with other tasks.
The four Controllers monitoring the yard work using a PC, a telephone, and the two-way radio.
Their work is frenetic. The Controller is contacted directly by the yard by phone. He generally communicates using the radio.
His activity is dedicated to monitoring productivity in the yard and distributing the equipment (lift trucks, cranes).
During the observation, two critical problems arose:

**Unapproved areas erroneous approved**
An order was given by a manager to unload the containers in an area of the yard that is very far from the ships. This entails an increase in the unloading times due to the greater distance the lift truck has to cover. The Controllers immediately recognized the mistake and informed the Operational Unit Supervisor. In the meantime, frenetic phone calls come in from the lift operators, who are waiting for directions. Together with the Operational Unit Supervisor, the Controller decides to change the location in which the containers will be placed. To do this, he has to involve the Shift Foreman and ask if there is a free area to be used. The Shift Foreman immediately calls a Team Supervisor to have him inspect the situation. He has to look at the yard and decide how and where the containers can be placed in an adequate manner.

Controller: “What a mess, now we're short on time. My replacement won't even have time to go to the bathroom. The entire next shift will be hampered by the fact that the greater distances mean longer unloading times. So the work to be done is to quickly relocate as many containers as possible in positions closer to the ship.”
Lift operator: “Can you give me directions? Where should I go with my container?”

**Control Observation**
12:30-1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 24
Ineffective interaction

**A truck to be unloaded, but an adequate area can't be found**
At the beginning of the observation, a problem arises: there is a truck which has to unload "five pieces" of material, which I then realize are trestles.
The Operational Unit Supervisor is going between the various offices of the Operational Management in a somewhat hectic manner, interacting with the various directors and operators. He consults a computer and calls a person down in the yard by radio.
M. goes into the Yard Planning Office to figure out how and where to put the material, which consists of trestles which have to be assembled. The Supervisor moves through the computer files to find a solution; he gets mad and swears: "This is bullshit."

The problem with the request is that it was expected to be only one piece, not five, but above all, that an area is needed which has electricity, because the pieces have to be assembled. M. involves the Team Supervisor, discussing the question with him in the office hallway.

M.: “There are five pieces, not one, and they want them put in an area where there's electricity, because they have to be assembled. The Manager gets mad and shouts: "Tell them that this is what Pietro decided: unload the pieces in an available area for now and leave his truck free!!!" He tells M. to call the person who his waiting for an answer regarding the unloading of the truck, giving M. that person's cell phone number, and directing him to call him and tell him to unload the material for now, that will be moved to another area with electricity later, which is not available now.
The other individual specifies that he had sent an e-mail to the Manager with this request.
The Operational Unit Supervisor asks the individual to meet him in the yard, which they do. The meeting is short and terse.

The Operational Unit Supervisor repeatedly uses the
Operational Unit Supervisor to the Controller: “What are we going to do? I'll try to talk to a Foreman!”
Operational Unit Supervisor to Foreman: “Hey, how would you fix this mess? I don't know what to do.”
Foreman to Operational Unit Supervisor: “Listen, let’s have an available Team Supervisor gather information and tell us if there are closer areas that are free, then we’ll decide together if we can occupy them for the morning.”
Operational Unit Supervisor: “OK, talk to a Supervisor.”
Foreman to Supervisor: “Hi, talk to your men and go see if there is a free area somewhere. Then let me know.”

When I ask why the Team Supervisor hasn’t been activated, the Operational Unit Supervisor explains that it didn't happen in this case because the problem regards the yard, not a ship. If the six Team Supervisors who were supposed to be on the job had been present, it could have happened, but there are only a few Team Supervisors, as usual, and thus it wasn't possible to involve them.

The episode continues: The Director of the Yard Planning Office calls the Technical Director on the phone, to use a technical area which is momentarily being used for the assembly of the new SCs. He speaks frenetically and manically. Then the Operational Unit Supervisor and Director go to the Manager, who answers by shouting: “I don't care. Tell them that this is what Pietro decided”, reaffirming the decision to unload the trestles in the first available area and then move them later. M. calls the person he had met with to communicate the decision, and then calls a guy in the yard to direct that the work be performed. A little while later the guy calls the Operational Unit Supervisor: "Massimo, we need some pieces of wood to put under the trestles." The Operational Unit Supervisor acts to solve this problem as well, finding a solution by sending a third person.

These two episodes represent, respectively, cases of effective and ineffective interaction. In the first instance, there is effective interaction centered on collaboration: the joint activation of all of the roles generates a process of activation of a decision-making unit which is able to identify the problem and deal with it in an adequate manner, thus succeeding in remedying the error committed by the Management. In the second case, on the other hand, the decision seems to move in a top-down manner, without the Operational Unit Supervisor considering the problem of involving people and explaining the sense of an order.
METHOD OF DESIGNING THE ASSESSMENT: CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOOLS

The design of the setting and assessment tools took place starting with the analysis of the work practices made visible by observation in the field. The work on the practices detected saw active cooperation between the group of researchers and the clients, who participating in identifying a grid in which the dimensions to be assessed were listed by order of importance. The specific nature of this step is that the identification of each skill took place following an analysis of the practices used in the port yard, and that "context of use" for each of them was made explicit. The forms were analyzed, and the study which was performed jointly by the researchers and managers allowed for identifying the recurrent work practices associated with successful work in the yard. Subsequently, the skills necessary for effectively managing the work practices that are considered strategic were identified.

The process of monitoring the skills took place by presenting the individuals under assessment with some of the work situations and practices in use, detected during the phase of observation in the field.

The tools prepared for the assessment were of three types, as indicated below.

**First type of assessment tool: Group discussion starting with forms which depict recurrent problems to be managed**

This type of assessment situation allowed for highlighting the mental schemes activated with respect to problematic situations, which the individuals under assessment were asked to comment on and discuss as a group.

For example, in the situation reported in box No. ..., the communication process is confused because the Manager calls the Team Supervisor directly due to a slowdown of the lifts. The latter has not been notified by the Controller. We are describing a process, which occurs very often, where the establishment of the temporary decision-making unit can not take place because a clear exchange of information between the actors is lacking; the manager intervenes, but without activating the Controller. Thus, what prevails is interaction between individuals who remain
isolated, and the decision-making unit described above is not established. A communication process is created which does not activate the network consisting of the Shift Foreman and Controller, who each have a viewpoint on the organizational dynamic which is partial, but essential in order to develop an overview of the problem. The middle manager and Team Supervisor alone do not possess the wealth of information necessary to manage the episode in the best manner possible.

Furthermore, in the episode chosen in the box, there is a reference to a problem of managing the men in the yard. It often happens that slowdowns of a technical nature are taken as an opportunity to further slow down production and not work up to one's own abilities. The referenced event can serve to attempt to manage this type of recurrent problem in the simulation. Thus, in this situation, the Team Supervisor must indicate a type of thinking which allows for defining the situation as stated above, while having certain hypotheses in mind as to how to manage his own work group.

Sequence 1

Loading operations are underway involving a strategic ship for a potential new client. The Operational Unit Supervisors have directed that close attention be paid to the process in order to avoid any type of problems or delays. It is known, however, that the yard is full of containers, and this could slow the process down considerably. Thus, it is necessary for everyone to cooperate in order for the shift to perform well.

Shortly after the beginning of the shift, while doing a check of the cranes on the terminal monitor, the Shift Foreman calls the Team Supervisor to check on why certain lift trucks have long work times.

Shift Foreman: “Hey Giacomo, check on lift truck SC 17. The Dispatcher told me that its times are too long. We're at an average of 4.5, which is a bit too low. What's going on?”

Team Supervisor: “OK, I'll check on it now.

Team Supervisor (calls the lift operator): “SC 17, what's going on? Your times are too long; is there a problem?

Lift operator: “Yeah, I'm picking up from position xxx, which is far away, you know. The problem was known. The yard is full and we have to do pick-ups in the rear sections.

Team Supervisor: “OK, got it, I'll inform the Dispatcher and Shift Foreman

Team Supervisor to the Dispatcher : “Hi, how come you didn't inform me of the delay with SC 17? The Shift Foreman called to tell me. Anyway, it's because the route is slow.”

The Shift Foreman again contacts the Team Supervisor. Shift Foreman: “can't we speed this up a bit?” Team Supervisor: “we'll check now, we'll try, but you know how the situation is, don't you?”

Team Supervisor: “OK, OK.”

The environment is quickly "heating up" during the afternoon. Due to the request to increase the loading speed, which is slower than expected, the operators began to get nervous due to the tension. The Team Supervisor realizes that the far-away position of the containers is slowing down the loading times, but that this is being used as an excuse to justify a certain laxity by the lift operators, who are taking it “easy.”

Delivery for discussion.

At this point, how can the Team Supervisor manage this situation?

Second type of assessment tool: Role Playing

The second type of tool proposed for the assessment is the use of role playing, where people are asked to identify themselves with a professional role and dialogue with their colleagues based on a specific situation which is presented. The role playing scenario was designed based on the analysis
of the ethnographic forms, and points out critical situations for which the individuals under assessment are asked to explain, in a group discussion, how they would react if they were involved in such a situation.

In this case, based on a situation outlined starting with the results which emerged from the observations, they are asked to participate in a discussion in which they interpret the role of the Team Supervisor with given tasks.

In the case presented here, the problem is represented by the lack of motivation of the men in the yard, and the use of this role playing scenario clearly identifies the hypotheses regarding the methods the Team Supervisors can use to motivate the workers. During the assessment, a meeting between the Shift Foremen is simulated, who comment on the situation described.

The Team Supervisor realizes that he is asking a lot of his team, and he also knows that the problems which are occurring have various different causes. There are slowdowns due to the full yard, technical malfunctions, and things aren't working the way they should. He also knows that his group is following procedures properly, but without doing its best. If only the lift operators were to put a bit more grit into it and the crane operators worked harder, the limitations and technical problems could be overcome or at least held in check, allowing the group to maintain a good level of productivity. If the team's mood is good, then it is possible to lessen the impact of the delays due to technical problems.

He decides to intervene with his workers at the end of the shift, to try to motivate them a bit….

Delivery for role playing.

You are a group of Team Supervisors. Try to imagine what you would do in this situation. Decide on a common strategy to adopt, as operation managers, identifying and describing four potential actions, in order of priority.

You have 45 minutes.

Third type of assessment tool: Questionnaire for monitoring recurrent episodes

A final assessment tool, devised using the analysis of the practices, was the questionnaire for monitoring recurrent episodes. This tool was devised starting with the construction of boxes which depict the most common recurrent situations monitored by the research group. These situations were summarized and presented to the workers in the form of a multiple choice questionnaire. The possible answers were developed based on direct observation of behavior in the field. Each alternative represents an actual form of behavior detected during observation. This tool thus requires the worker to put himself in a certain situation and identify the behavior considered most proper based on one's own knowledge.

We provide an example in the box below:

There are slowdowns and delays in the loading and unloading operations in the yard (lines of lifts at the cranes, different needs in terms of loading speeds, critical situations,...) which are affecting productivity.

The operation manager implements certain solutions and:

- Uses his visual control of the yard and suggests moving some lifts from one crane to another, because he knows that they will not be used to capacity.
- Leaves it to the Operational Unit Supervisor to intervene and manage the problem: it's his responsibility.
- Knows that the Controller is overloaded and therefore does not communicate the problem to him.
- Having to manage multiple ships at once, he doesn't have time to deal with these things!!
- He concentrates on providing support to the lift and crane operators who have to accelerate their work for certain ships, knowing that a special effort is required of them in these situations.
You can't take care of everything! With the yard full there are many moves and there just isn't time for communications which slow things down…

CONCLUSIONS

The assessment process designed based on the analysis of the work practices detected through participatory observation, allowed for reaching three important results:

1. The implementation of an assessment procedure which monitors the skills actually required for the work in the yard.
2. For the managers, this process was also useful in order to become more familiar with the dynamics of the yard. The reflection on the ethnographic forms produced an outcome in terms of very in-depth knowledge of the real work processes and led to considerations with respect to new methods of organizing the work of the teams.
3. During the assessment process, there was a high level of participation. Despite being an evaluation/development session, most of the participants participated actively, considering the work setting to be useful as training. The people were not only individually active, but they effectively recreated the group dynamics which characterize their daily functioning. The Team Supervisors were more concentrated on the interpretation of their role focused on the resolution of contingent problems, while the Controllers played the role characterized by a greater distance from the problems in the yard. This difference often causes difficulties in communication and interpretation between the two roles. Being able to deal with the same problems, from two different viewpoints, and having the possibility of removing the ambiguity related to different positions and viewpoints, allowed for modifying people's own manner of interpreting work situations based on the viewpoints of their colleagues as well. This led to a positive perception of the work setting which allowed for a close exchange between two professional figures who cooperate with each other daily, but do not have the opportunity to understand the different viewpoints used to interpret work situations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY