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Learning from All Operations

Understanding the reality of work-as-done

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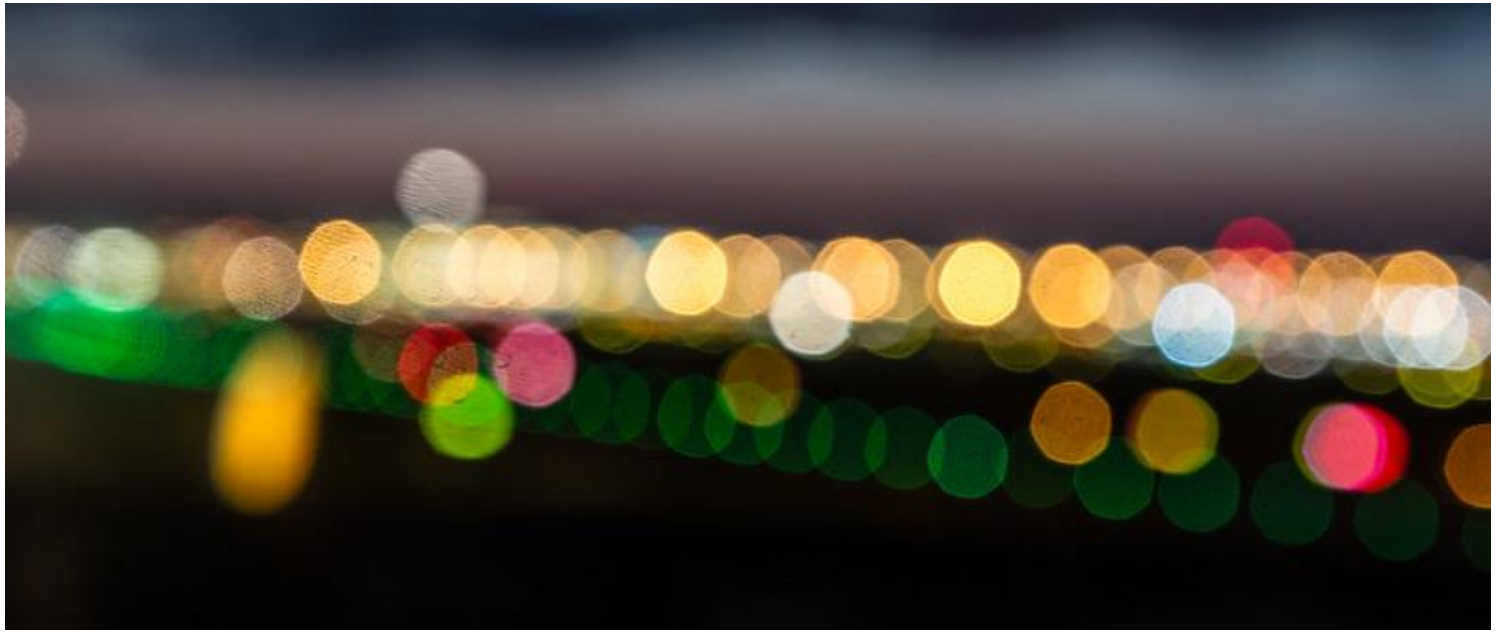
Hopes for this session

1. Provide some accessible and applicable ideas about work
2. Help to inspire curiosity and learning



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‘All Operations’

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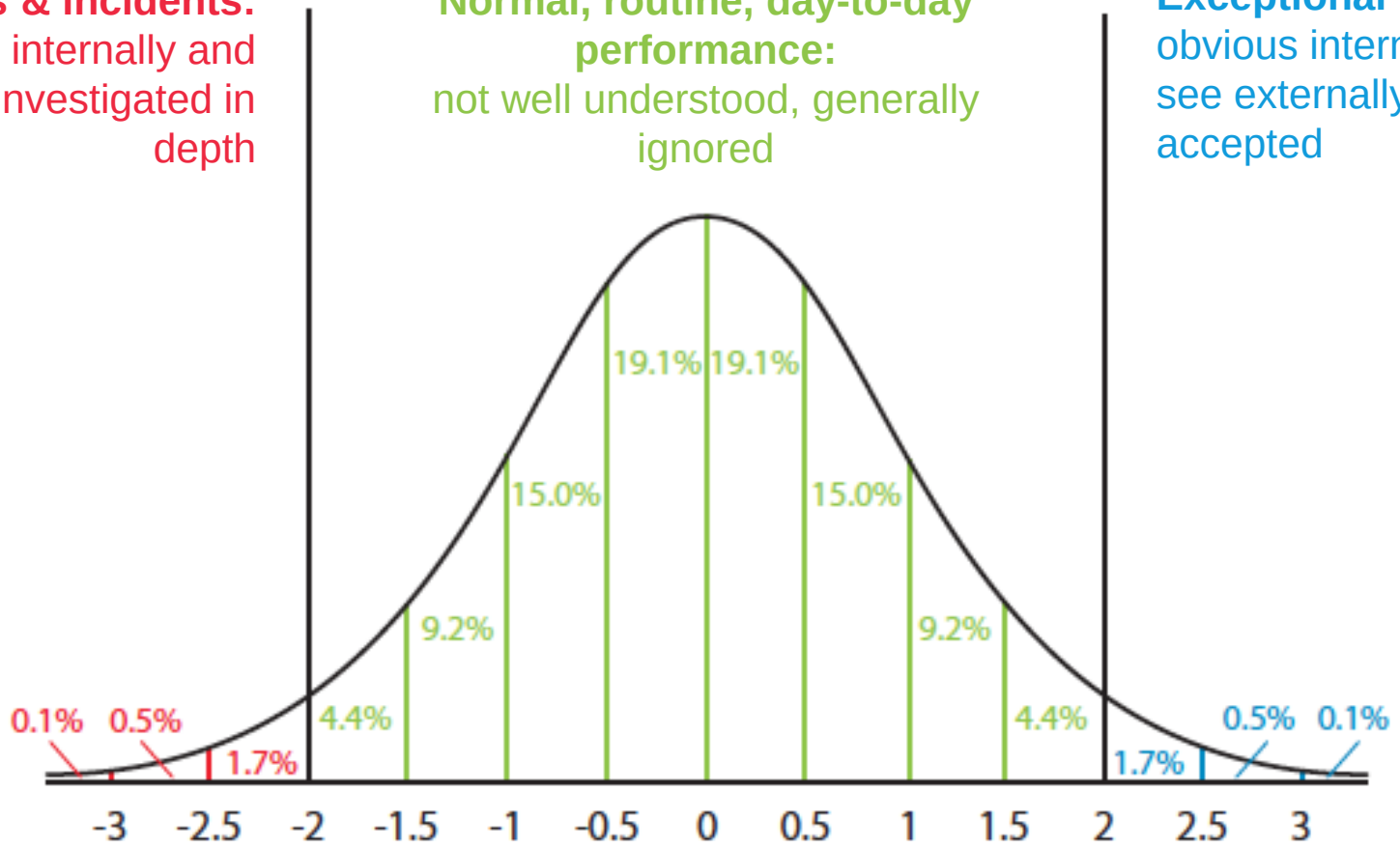
Why learn from all operations?

1. It helps to improve all aspects of performance and wellbeing
2. It does not require unwanted events
3. It helps to see and build on what's strong
4. It helps to see slow changes
5. It can involve everyone

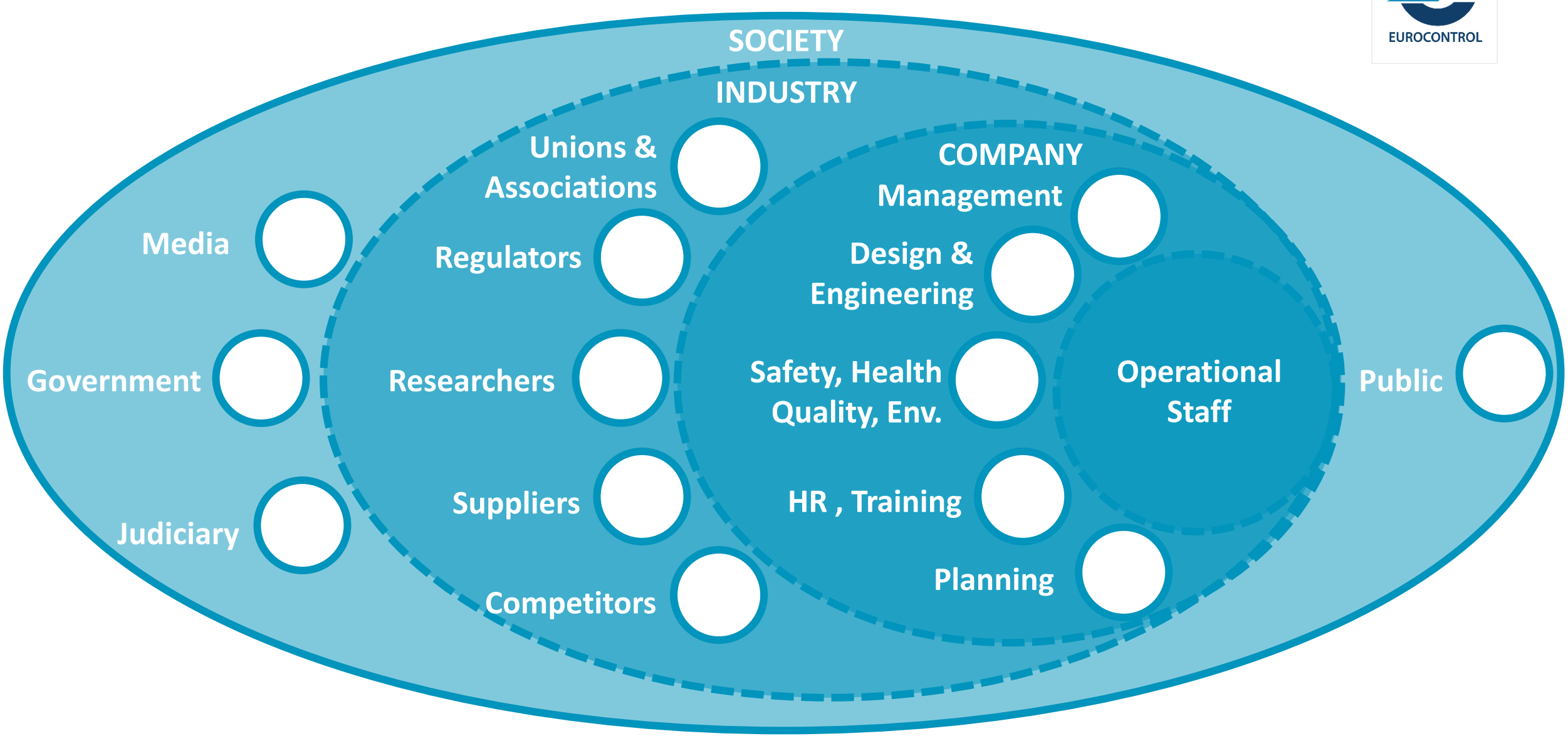
Accidents & incidents:
obvious internally and externally, investigated in depth

Normal, routine, day-to-day performance:
not well understood, generally ignored

Exceptional performance:
obvious internally, hard to see externally, gratefully accepted



Adapted from EUROCONTROL (2013). From Safety-I to Safety-II. A White Paper



Shorrock (2021)

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The Realities of Work-as-Done

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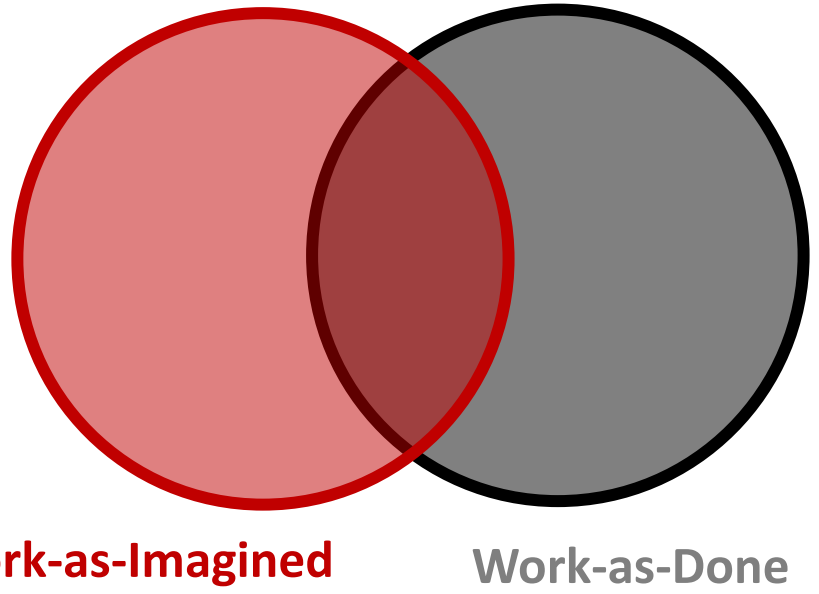
1. Real work is rarely as we imagine it to be

- Imagination of others' work is always inaccurate and incomplete
- Work-as-imagined becomes part of the work environment
- Closing the gap requires constant dialogue between interfaces



What is it about your work that others would find surprising (and that might be relevant to their work)?

2. People make trade-offs, compromises and adjustments to get the work done

- These are necessary for systems to work
- They occur at all levels…and interact and combine in unexpected ways
- They require expertise and communication

Work-as-Done

3. People do things that make sense to them at the time, given the context

- Our intentions and decision making are ‘rational’ given our situation (‘local rationality’)
- With hindsight and knowledge of outcomes, others’ decisions can seem ‘irrational’
- Try to understand why a decision or plan made sense to the person at the time

Work-as-Done

4. People have unique strengths, but also limitations

- Humans have abilities that no other part of any system has
- Every individual has unique contributions to bring to work
- People also have limitations (and even Olympic athletes perform below their average half of the time!)

5. Work is influenced by multiple interacting contexts

- All outcomes are influenced by the multiple contexts of work
- Some are available to the senses, but others are not
- When something goes wrong, much of the context isn't available for 'replay'

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Understanding the Reality of Work

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1. Be curious about others' work

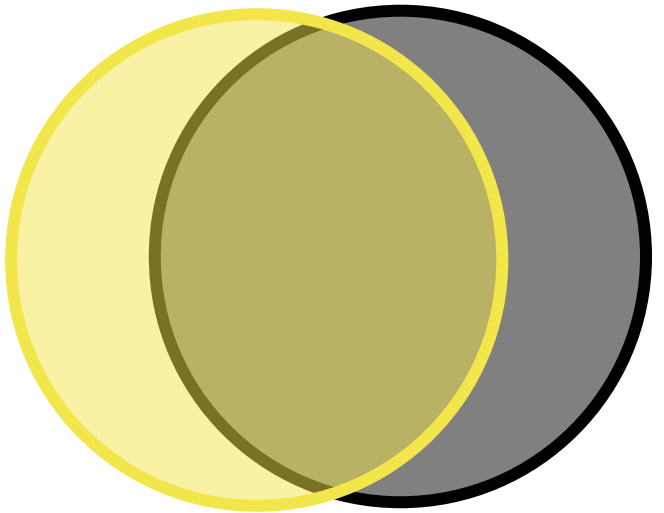
- People are the experts in their own work
- We often have most to learn from those we interact with least
- Find out what is working well, and what makes' work more difficult than it needs to be

2. Keep in mind what kind of work you're thinking about

- Work-as-done is the real thing…and can never be fully understood
- All others are 'proxies' for the real thing
- But combining these 'proxies' can help you to approach an understanding of work-as-done

3. Assume goodwill and make it easy for people to say what's on their minds

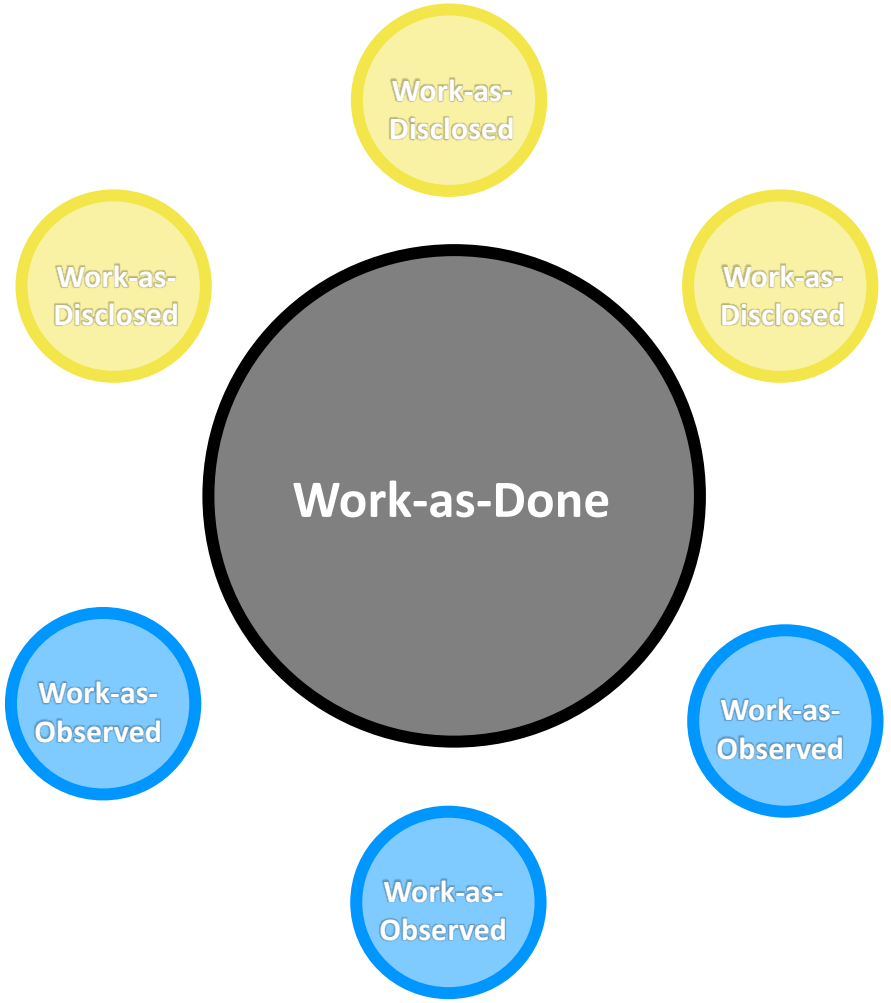
- Nobody goes to work to have a bad day
- Fear of consequences drives almost all non-disclosure
- Create relationships and an environment where people feel safe to be open and honest



Work-as-Disclosed Work-as-Done

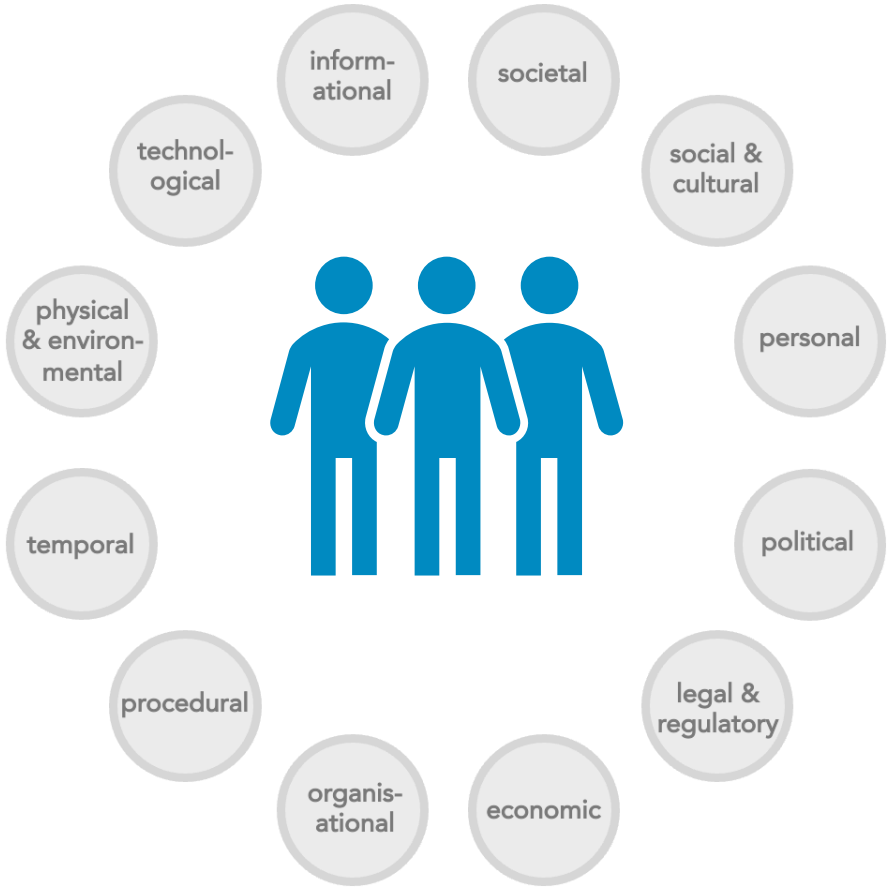
4. Get multiple perspectives

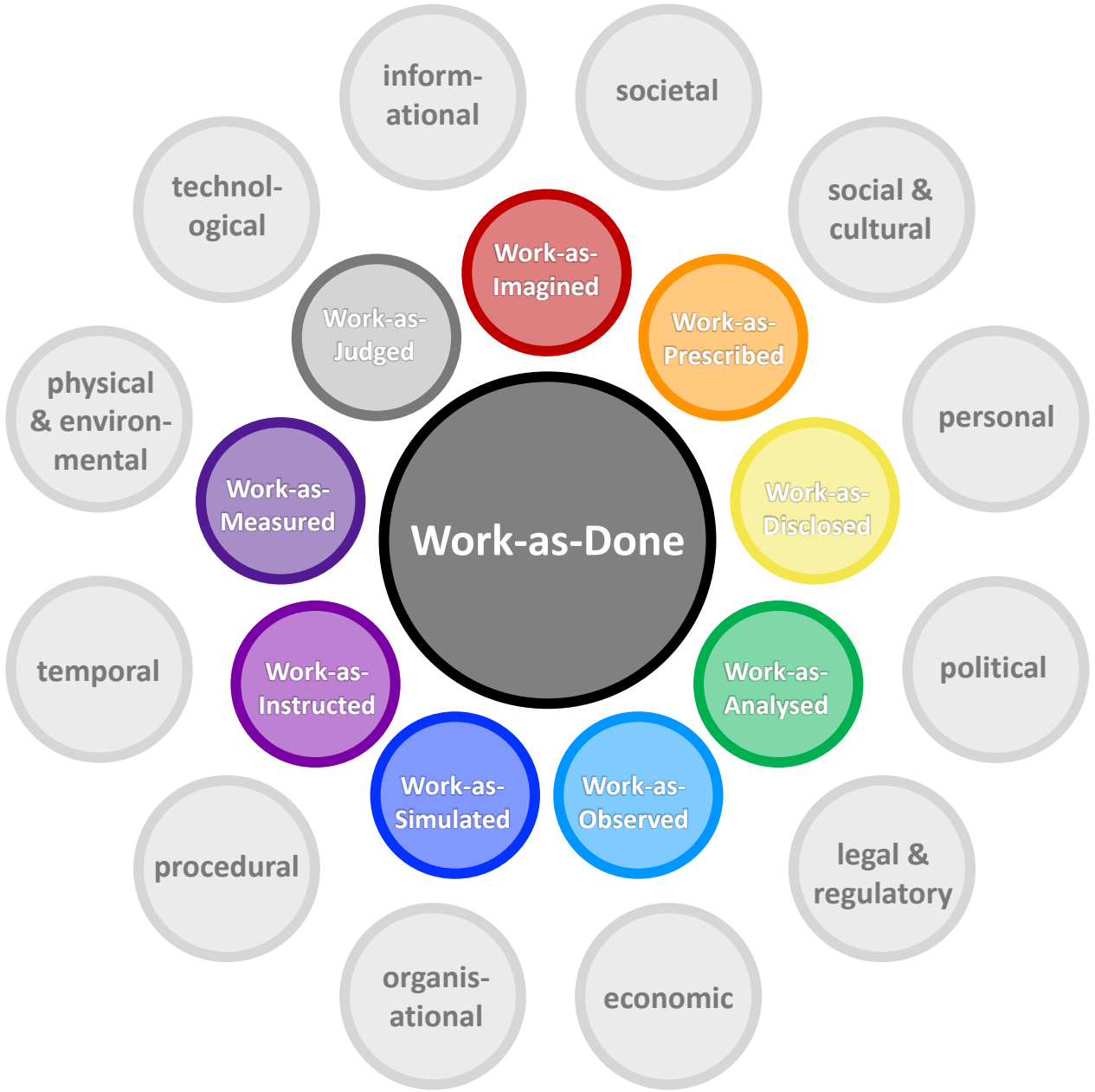
- Different people have different insights into work
- Different people see different problems and different influences on these
- Different people see different solutions



5. Consider the multiple influences on performance

- All performance has multiple influences
- Influences on performance can be internal and external, local and distant, acute and latent, visible and invisible
- You can’t change the human condition but you can change the conditions of human work





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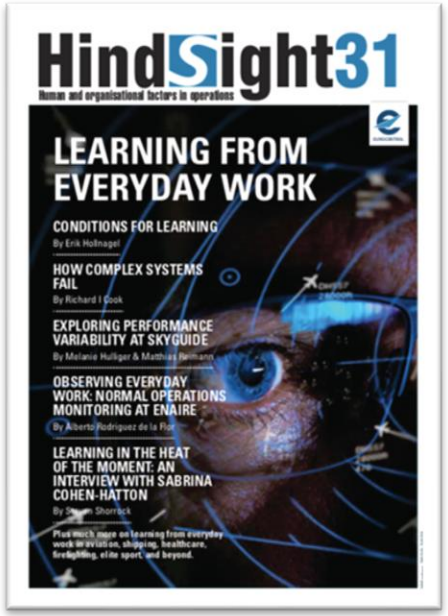

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