

Routine replication and embodying process: An ethnographic study on the impact of the body in routine replication in the Royal Air Force

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Abstract

We examine the relationship between routine replication and embodiment by studying how the Royal Air Force replicated an arduous loaded march in its Initial Officer Training programme from its Ground Combat Training programme. The routine (also called ‘tabbing’) was adapted to fit its new context, as the replication was affected by the differences in the trainees’ bodies, but it was kept recognisable as the same routine in both settings. Using qualitative methods and 30 months of data collection, this ethnographic case study involves a novel methodology in which we collected data through an enactive ethnography. Our research advances the study of Routine Dynamics, more specifically routine replication and embodiment, in two ways. First, we show how routine participants’ bodies play an important role within routine replication process and how they impact its dynamics. To deal with the ‘replication dilemma’, a constant interplay between flexibility and recognisability occurs through three overarching bodily mechanisms, namely, ‘playing with rhythm’, ‘coping with injuries’, and ‘dealing with emotions’. Our research adds to the scarce body of research on the role of embodiment in routine replication. Second, we contribute by introducing a novel way of conducting an ethnography. The first author not only observed the phenomena but also participated in the loaded marches together with the other officer cadets physically experiencing the routine performing and patterning. This study hence responds to recent calls to explore novel, seldom-used methodologies and uses enactive ethnography to study embodiment in practice.

Introduction

Organisations use routines to accomplish work and store knowledge; thus, routines are fundamental building blocks to successful strategizing (Cohen et al., 1996; Feldman & Pentland, 2022; Nelson & Winter, 1982). Once good practices are established as routines, replicating those successful routines can become a source of competitive advantage for organisations (D’Adderio, 2014; Davies et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2018; Gupta et al., 2015). As a result, routine replication has attracted the attention of both organisation studies and strategic management scholars (e.g., D’Adderio, 2014; Szulanski & Jensen, 2004).

Defined as “the creation of another routine that is similar to the original routine in significant respects” (Szulanski and Jensen, 2004, p. 349), routine replication is a challenging

process due to the tension between replicating the exact routine and adapting the original routine to the new context (Winter & Nelson, 1982; Winter & Szulanski, 2001). Research has explored, among other things, the nature of this ‘replication dilemma’ (Szulanski & Jensen, 2004; Danner-Schröder & Geiger, 2016), the barriers to replication (Maurer et al., 2011), the need to adapt to new contexts (Ansari et al., 2014; Bertels et al., 2016; Peeters et al., 2014), how organisations can separate or enact replication and innovation goals simultaneously (D’Adderio, 2014; March, 1996), as well as the roles of people, their feelings, and relationships in the replication process (Blanche & Cohendet, 2019).

We also know from past research that routine replication affects and is affected by the context of the recipient’s organisation. Scholars (e.g., Blanche & Cohendet, 2019; De Rond et al., 2019; Michel, 2011;2023) have considered embodiment as a dimension of the context and shown that the body is central to how agents perceive, relate, and act in the world and therefore impacts how routines are replicated and enacted.

Although this previous research provides useful insights into understanding the role of embodiment in routine replication, our knowledge is still very limited. First, the overall absence of bodies in this literature results in studying the “people” involved in organisational routines as ‘disembodied routine participants’: “One consequence of this is that progress toward a theory of ‘routines as practices’ has tended to ignore how bodies contribute to their unfolding” (Wright, 2019, p.153). Also, little is known, for instance, about the influence of embodying rhythm, injuries, or varied emotions in the process of routine enactment and replication. Furthermore, extant work examines the body only as a generic concept, neglecting the individuality of routine participants’ bodies in enacting routines, which adds further complexity in the replication of routines. Hence, we ask: *how do the specificities of routine participants’ bodies impact the enactment of the replicated routine in the new context?* Answering this question can shed new light on the replication dilemma by showing how organisations can successfully replicate (tightly controlled) routines while striking the right balance between flexibility and recognisability in the replication process.

To answer our research question, we studied a training routine in the Royal Air Force (RAF), namely Tactical Advance to Battle (TAB, or tabbing). The RAF has replicated the routine from its Ground Combat Training (GCT) into its Initial Officer Training (IOT) to

‘militarise’ the cadets who have joined the service mainly from civilian educational and professional backgrounds. The tabbing routine, also known as ‘loaded march’, is a fast march in which the trainees cover a given distance carrying equipment. From 2018 to 2021 and over 30 months, we conducted an ethnographic study based mainly on participant observation (including gathering data through enactment), document analysis, and 16 semi-structured interviews. Having the first author experiencing TABs as a cadet in IOT and then subsequently as an officer in GCT allowed us to research the routine in both contexts.

Although still recognisable as the same routine, in IOT, we observed a more flexible form of tabbing replicated from its arduous version in the GCT context: the specificities of the initial officer cadets and the ground combat officers’ bodies varied significantly, in that the cadets’ bodies in the replicated routine’s setting were less rhythmic, more prone to injury, and less emotionally robust. This prompted an adjustment to the routine enactment in the replicated context. We observed embodiment mechanisms and processes (sub-mechanisms) through which the routine was replicated flexibly but stayed recognisable as the same routine within the broader context of the organisation. We also found that, by joining the cadets and the students in their loaded marches and enacting the routine, we were able to enhance our data collection in a way that was not possible with mere observation.

Our research advances the study of routine replication and embodiment in two main areas, responding to calls for novel empirical research in these areas (Blanche & Feldman, 2021; De Rond et al, 2019; Gartner, 2013). First, it develops theory through advancing an embodied framing of organisational routines. We show how the human body and its diversity plays an important role within routine enactment and replication process: officer cadets were not as robust or rhythmic as their ground combat colleagues, thus leading to a scaled-down version of the marches; the routine was adapted (although kept recognisable) through a cooperative interplay of standardisation and flexibility within three mechanisms: ‘playing with rhythm’, ‘coping with injuries’, and ‘dealing with emotions’. Our findings complement scarce research on embodiment (Blanche & Cohendet, 2019; De Rond et al., 2019; Michel, 2011) and the extant body of literature on the replication dilemma (D’Adderio, 2014; Danner-Schröder & Geiger, 2016; Szulanski & Jensen, 2004), by showing how bodies’ specificities come into play as an important aspect of the organisational context to shape and modify the routine replication and enactment.

Second, we used an enactive ethnography to collect data and, by participating and experiencing tabbing together with the cadets, we were able to generate insights that could have been missed otherwise. In so doing, we raise the awareness of enactive ethnography (Wacquant, 2015) in RD research, responding to calls from Blanche & Feldman (2021), Feldman et al. (2021), and Dittrich (2021) to use innovative research methods in studying RD.

Theoretical background

RD and routine replication

Routines are defined as “repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, involving multiple actors” (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 96). As the building blocks of capabilities and depositories of organisational skills (Cohen et al., 1996), routines are an essential part of organisational strategy because they are “the central mode of production in organisations” (Feldman & Pentland, 2022, p. 846) and can thereby be a source of competitive advantage: “organisations with certain routines do better than others” (Nelson & Winter, 1982, p. 14). Organisations often develop good practices and learn skill sets that can differentiate them from their competitors (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1996; Wenzel et al., 2020). Winter and Szulanski (2001), noting that organisations could also benefit from replicating successful routines, coined the term ‘replication as strategy’. Defined as the “creation of another routine that is similar to the original routine in significant respects” (Szulanski & Jensen, 2004, p. 34), replication entails a unit transferring a routine to a recipient and, despite differences in the contexts, maintaining enough similarity for it to still be recognised as the ‘same routine’ (Baden-Fuller & Winter, 2005) – that is, the same recognisable pattern of actions (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

Scholars have also identified how organisations acknowledge the role of context in routine replication. Szulanski and Jensen (2004), for instance, have researched context within multinational enterprises and observed how cultural adaptation can reduce comparability with the original routines in replication. Bertels et al. (2016) studied the role of culture in the integration of mismatched routines in a major Canadian oil producer and found that participants undertake additional ‘cultural work’ to compensate for mismatches between desired and actual performances rather than rejecting routines with poor fit outright (see also, Deken et al., 2016). Howard-Greenville (2005, p. 634) studied a high-tech manufacturing organisation and found that

“the more strongly embedded a routine is in other structures, the greater command an individual must have over these structures in order to produce change over time”.

These works, among others, underscore that routine participants should understand that some form of adaptation is necessary when replicating routines because context differs, and this difference matters. However, maintaining the right balance between replicating the exact routine and adapting it to the recipient’s location is not easy. As D’Adderio (2014, p. 1325) argues, the replication process creates a tension between “the need to reproduce the template exactly (replication) and the need to change the template (innovation)”. As noted previously, this tension has been called the replication dilemma (Winter & Szulanski, 2001) and referred to as the trade-off between copying the exact template and changing it to suit the new context.

The replication dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that the organisational context is often complex, with multiple organisational goals competing and co-existing. D’Adderio (2014), for instance, investigated the replication of a complex server product from the United States to the United Kingdom and observed simultaneous pressures for innovation and replication. Contrary to the assumption that these competing demands would follow an orderly sequence (exploration first and exploitation second; e.g., March, 1991; Winter & Szulanski, 2001), she observed that tensions manifested constantly throughout the transfer, with one goal taking the centre stage at a given time while another took a back seat.

As a result, context is a key variable determining the replication process and its chances of being successful, and previous researchers have studied important organisational factors such as organisational identity (Christianson et al., 2009), culture (Bertels et al., 2016), occupational norms (Bruns, 2009), and macro-cultural values (Essén, 2008). Several studies also show the importance of agency (Feldman, 2000; Feldman et al., 2016) when referring to the context and the replication dilemma. However, as Blanche and Feldman (2021) point out, the human body is a part of the context that has been largely neglected in routines replication research and requires further scholarly attention.

RD and embodiment

The importance of the body in organisational studies, although identified very early in such studies as Taylor (1911), remained untheorized until recently (Blanche & Feldman, 2021).

Organisational routines is one of the few areas in which scholars have embarked on the study of the body in organisations (Blanche & Cohendet, 2019; Wright, 2019). RD researchers have identified that the routines cannot be decoupled from those enacting it; in other words, to understand routines, researchers must look at the actions performed by those who feel and care (Blanche & Feldman, 2021; Feldman, 2000). Blanche and Feldman's (2021) extensive literature review focuses on 13 articles that studied routine enactment by observing actors; they found the ubiquity of bodies in RD in three main theoretical concepts: embodied orientation 'to/from performative/performing', 'to/from artefact/materializing' and 'to/from ostensive/patterning'. Their work is relevant as it confirms the relevance of embodiment in RD and demonstrates the entanglement between agentic bodies and routine enactment. Michel (2011; 2023) conducted a nine-year ethnographic study that sheds light on this link between routine enactment and the agents' bodies. She followed the lives, work, and bodies of investment banking professionals and tracked how that relationship evolved over time. She found that, in their early years, those bankers neglected their bodies to focus on hard work but that, as time progressed, that lack of focus on embodiment led to breakdowns and a decline in performance. She shows that eventually the balance is restored and, with a renewed focus on their bodies, those employees benefited from increases in creativity, judgement, and even ethics (ibid, 2011).

The recent advancement in studying embodiment in organisational studies has resulted in exploring how specific aspects of being embodied shape coordination and sensemaking in daily organising (Bouty & Godé, 2022; Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Heaphy, 2017). Bouty & Godé (2022), for instance, in their study of a French military air display squadron, reveal three threads (training, sensitizing, and distinguishing), which intertwine organisational coordination and the bodies. By studying the physical and symbolic body in organisational coordination, their findings show how organisational coordination routines and routine participant bodies co-produce each other. Their study hence enhances understanding of organisational coordination by "showing that there is more to bodies in coordination than just embodied cognition or communication" (ibid, p.1769). Interestingly, the authors also show that, in that case, the bodywork was not limited to learning new practices but was also crucial in enabling actors to continue enacting that practice (ibid). Fresh calls have also been made to study emotional reactions for a greater attention to the "lived experience" of embodiment, "bodily sensations, felt experiences, emotions, and sensory knowing" (Cunliffe &

Coupland, 2012, p. 64). As highlighted by De Rond and colleagues (2019, p. 1962), “to focus only on the cognitive and discursive aspects of sensemaking, then, is to miss how sensemaking unfolds in action, perhaps fleetingly, through immediate and embodied ‘absorbed coping’ (see also, Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

These interesting contributions notwithstanding, the importance of the body in routine replication has been rarely studied. As an exception, Blanche and Cohendet’s (2019) ethnographic study of a ballet being remounted in a different location highlights the role played by embodiment (as part of the intangible differences between contexts) when the routine was transferred. The authors argue that replicating the exact routine was impossible for many reasons, including the people, their feelings, and relationships with one another. The key to a successful replication, the authors found, is to achieve an equivalent choreographic intent and to have a common professional culture. As a result, despite recognition that the body plays an important role in RD, one key area that remains underexplored is the impact of the body and the diverse features of the agents’ bodies enacting the routines on the replication process. So, in this paper we aim to respond to the calls for novel empirical research into embodied sensemaking and coordination mechanisms (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; De Rond et al., 2019; Gartner, 2013; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Recent advances in management and organisation studies demonstrate that “bodies are far more than vehicles that enable work to be undertaken, but are agentive actors in the constitution of work and working selves ... [leading] to the need for more empirically derived understanding of the agency of flesh in the performative corporealization of working, embodied selves” (Harding et al., 2022, p. 649). Besides, bodies, similar to routine participants, are different and not a generic dimension, and these specificities might have an influence in how routines are enacted and replicated. Hence, in this article we ask: *how do the specificities of routine participants’ bodies impact the enactment of the replicated routine in the new context?*

Research methods

In this qualitative research, we used an explorative, phenomenon-driven case study approach studying an intra-organisational replication process (Van de Ven & Sminia, 2012). Following other scholars who have conducted similar research studies (De Rond et al., 2019; Suarez & Montes 2019), we adopted an insider perspective from IOT as well as GCT within the RAF. This

enactive ethnographic case study (Wacquant, 2004; 2005; 2015) is based on participant observation (with data collection through enactment), interviews, and document analysis (Emerson et al., 1995; Patton, 2005; Van Maanen, 1979). We collected our data between August 2018 and January 2021.

Case selection

We selected the RAF because it provides a unique setting for our research. First, it is the defence sector organisation usually classed as ‘traditional’, with long-established routines, which makes it an appropriate setting to study routine replication alongside change and stability. Second, the military provides a striking example of an organisation based on replication of routines in varying contexts. Indeed, its *raison d'être* is based on routine replication: service personnel maintain peacetime and wartime routines (Hannan & Freeman, 1984), and wartime routines are practiced extensively during prevailing peacetime. So, in such a context, with its strict procedures that must be followed in daily enactment of organisational routines, adaptation in routine replication requires explanation. Third, because the RAF is part of the armed forces, gaining access to its data is not easy, and thus, research in this context can yield interesting results and provide the opportunity to identify and study a case of routine replication in an organisational context that differs from those usually found in extant studies. Fourth, the military setting encompasses physical routines such as marching and fighting and. Thus, provides an opportunity to observe the body in action in routines enactment.

Research setting

i. The RAF

As of January 2021, the RAF had roughly 33,000 active men and women divided between six functional groups dedicated to key activities such as fighting capability (fast jets), support (force protection and air mobility), recruitment, and training (RAF, 2017). Some of these branches function similarly to civilian organisations (e.g., engineering, administrative, medical), whilst others, namely the RAF Regiment (RAF Regt), are militarised and operate as a ground combat unit providing force protection.

ii. IOT

The journey to become an officer starts with IOT. Throughout 24 weeks, cadets from different educational and professional backgrounds are grouped together in a squadron and trained to become officers. Every cadet, independent of the branch being pursued, undergoes the same training programme and, over the course, is led by a group of senior instructors assembled from various branches within the RAF.

Despite the managerial nature of an officer's job, the RAF has included a militarisation phase within IOT; it is inspired by ground combat techniques and includes skills such as weapon handling, fieldcraft, basic combat drills, and tabbing. RAF has done so because it aspires to the notion of 'aviator first', meaning, regardless of whether members are in the medical, engineering, or any other branches of the service, they should still possess the military skills to take up arms and defend their forward operating base and RAF assets.

This militarisation phase has been delegated to the RAF Regt, the organisation's ground combat specialists. They are responsible for delivering lectures, training sessions, and assessing whether the cadets have successfully militarised. One of the routines taught during the course is tabbing, our unit of analysis in this research.

After IOT is completed, successful cadets move to their next phase of training, which is specific to their branch. For most officers, phase 2 training differs substantially from initial training and does not include militarisation (e.g., an engineer will learn how to maintain aircraft, a medic will learn to perform medical procedures). As a result, for those officer cadets, IOT is the only time they will be required to tab. In contrast, phase 2 training for officers who have chosen to specialise in ground combat is a 26-week long commander's course focused on infantry training. The first 10 weeks of the course are focused on refining individual soldiering skills and building up fitness and the remainder of the course tests the students' abilities to command a group of up to 30 gunners. In GCT, tabbing remains an important routine, and students will tab more frequently than they did in IOT.

iii. Loaded march (tabbing)

Tabbing (from tactical advance to battle – tab) has been a long-standing routine within the British Armed Forces and is a basic military skill. It gained prominence during the 1980s

because it was crucial during the Falklands War: Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment were required to traverse nearly 100km over three days carrying heavy loads to move their troops and equipment to the front line. We chose to concentrate our study solely on tabbing because, in addition to being an arduous physical routine, it has been replicated in another context, which provides opportunity to reduce our unit of analysis to a single routine whilst maintaining our focus on the study of the body during the replication process. Tabs can vary in the distance covered (2 to 10 miles), the pace (13 to 9 mins/mile), and on the load carried (15 to 45 kilograms). An illustration can be found in picture 1 below.

Picture 1. Tabbings in the British Armed forces



Source: British Army, 2019.

We consider IOT a different context from GCT because, despite both being part of the same organisation, they differ considerably. The two have different organisational identities (based on their regimental heritage), wear different uniforms in their day to day (green vs. blue), target different audiences (generalist vs. ground combat officers), use different teaching methods (classroom vs. field work), and are based in different geographical locations.

In GCT, the original routine setting, tabbing is considered an essential skill. RAF Regt personnel must be prepared to cover long distances carrying their equipment, ammunition, and food and still be operationally effective. To ‘train as you fight’, tabbing sessions are always done with a rucksack and weapon system and, when on field exercises, combat troops will tab often, in tactical settings, over rough terrain and carrying heavier loads, over longer distances, and at a faster pace.

In IOT, tabbing was also deemed a crucial routine for the officer cadets; they should militarise and be ready to bear arms regardless of their future job within the RAF. Whether a cadet was training to go into engineering, logistics or ground combat, to graduate from IOT they needed to possess military skills to defend an airfield and tabbing is a key component of that. However, this decision to replicate tabbing from GCT into IOT was accompanied by a difficult dilemma: should tabbing be as arduous for a cadet training to become a medic as it was for a future ground combat officer? Considering the different career paths (purpose) and the different audiences (bodies), how much of the routine should the RAF copy from GCT and/or how much should it adapt for the new context? This is the replication dilemma which guided the research project.

Therefore, in IOT, in contrast, tabbing is performed more flexibly. During routine tabbing sessions on base, the cadets tabbed using weighted vests (instead of carrying rucksacks), carried less weight, covered shorter distances, and kept a slower pace. During field exercises, tabs were longer and slower, but still, the cadets had the option to decide which kit would be carried, which resulted in lighter loads being carried.

The routine had been adapted to fit the new context (IOT) and, although still recognisable, showed considerable differences. Nevertheless, we also observed that, in both the original and replicated contexts, the routine participants were still taking part in loaded marches and covering a given distance at a pace set by the instructors. The march was done as a group alternating between walking and jogging (i.e., ‘marching’ and ‘doubling’) and all members wore the same green uniform, including combat boots.

Data collection

Participant observation in an enactive ethnography allowed us to have a detailed account of the training routine in both settings. Wacquant (2015) defines ‘enactive ethnography’ as a method to study social behaviour based on carnal sociology, which involves treating action as embodied and embedded – in other words, the body and mind are viewed as a single entity that shapes how individuals relate, act and reflect on the world; thus, the methodology focuses on acquiring knowledge through action, in our case, ‘of the body’ and ‘from the body’. Throughout the research, the first author held two roles: he was a researcher but also an officer cadet who joined the RAF without any prior military experience. He began his military training in August 2018 and graduated as an officer six months later. In June 2019, he progressed to specialist ground combat training for another six months and, in December 2019, became part of the RAF Regt. As a result, he took part in the tabs, experienced what they felt like, observed their impact on the course, and talked to other participants about their experiences whilst going through training. He generated more than 110 pages of diary entries during that time that recorded experiences and conversations. The two authors extensively discussed these observations and field notes to draw unbiased insights from the data, comprehensible for a nonmilitary audience.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has published general doctrine and policy documents (e.g., the *Infantry Pocketbook*, the *All Arms Tactical Aide Memoire*, *Guide to Fieldcraft and Battle Lessons*). The RAF College Cranwell also has a multitude of IOT-specific documents available, such as its joining instructions, force protection aide memoire, and material for the leadership lessons. As part of the research, we reviewed these and other documents from the MOD and the RAF, for a total of roughly 900 pages of information.

Finally, we carried out formal and informal interviews with RAF personnel including former officer cadets, RAF Regt officers, and training staff. Informal interviews took place as countless informal conversations during the data collection period with key notes loosely recorded in the research diary; these conversations were helpful to direct the research and to validate insights but were not recorded, transcribed, or coded for analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and coded formal interviews, 16 in total. They lasted between 20 and 35 minutes each, and we conducted them in the style of semi-structured interviews. We chose participants using a mix of snowballing and convenience

sampling techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and we obtained an appropriate ratio of students/staff, ground combat/non-ground combat officers, and blue/green informants. The interview questions changed as the research progressed; as themes emerged in the first round of interviews, we adapted the questions to dig deeper and follow the unfolding story more closely (Langley, 1999); therefore, every interview was slightly different than the previous one and became increasingly theoretically sampled (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data analysis

We used an iterative process and constant comparative method to analyse the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In 2018, starting from observations during IOT and informal conversations with fellow officer cadets, we questioned the differences and perceptions in tabbing in the two contexts. We performed data collection and analysis concurrently between 2018 and 2021. We class the process as iterative because, as themes and findings emerged, we often returned to our informants, as well as collected primary and secondary data for guidance while consulting the extant literature. In 2020, after themes had emerged, we began to link the findings with theoretical concepts from the RD literature. This allowed us to further adapt the interview questions and to refine our data collection and coding further.

Using interpretivist qualitative research techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Van Maanen, 1979), we coded the transcribed interviews and, by performing first-order analysis, identified 23 data categories raised by the informants, such as ‘forming up as a squad’, ‘preparing to march/double’, ‘getting blisters’, ‘shin splints’, ‘complaining on a tab’, and ‘motivating the troops’. Revisiting the RD literature, carrying out second order analysis using constant comparisons (Gioia et al, 2012; O’Reilly et al., 2012) to link with theoretical concepts, we condensed the data into three aggregate dimensions: ‘playing with rhythm’, ‘coping with injuries’, and ‘dealing with emotions’. Furthermore, within those dimensions, we identified two standardisation processes (intervening and withdrawing) and six processes that brought flexibility (assessing, adjusting, flagging, triaging, complaining, and motivating) to the routine enactment, all which are detailed in the following section.

Findings

Herein, we explore the role played by the body in routine replication. To do so, we examined how the RAF replicated a routine (tabbing) to militarise a group of cadets who were transitioning from a civilian background into military service¹.

We found that although the replicated routine was enacted more flexibly in IOT, it remained recognisable as the same routine that occurred in GCT. In the following section, we describe how it was enacted differently. To this end, we describe the aforementioned mechanisms ('playing with rhythm', 'coping with injuries', and 'dealing with emotions') that explain the differences and similarities (recognisability) we observed and provide examples to describe what tabbing looked like in the original and replicated contexts. We also delve deeper to highlight the processes within those mechanisms that promote recognisability and flexibility in both settings, which explains how the routine enactment differed between the two settings and yet remained recognisable as the same routine within the RAF.

a. Playing with rhythm (assessing, adjusting, intervening, and withdrawing)

The experience of tabbing whilst collecting data allowed the first author to experience the routine first-hand. Although he had spoken to the instructors, read the guides, and watched videos prior to joining IOT, it was through tabbing that he noticed an intricacy that he would have otherwise missed: tabbing rhythm. Like dancing, tabbing has a rhythm to it and for some that was easier to follow than it was for others. The first author recorded how he began to understand the role the terrain plays on a tab and how it dictates the flow of the tab to cope better with the sessions when they get more difficult, faster, and longer.

Tabbing has two basic speeds: The group can either march (walk at around 5km/hr) or double (gentle jog at around 8km/hr). Usually, the staff would conduct the tabs in an alternation between the two speeds to keep the session interesting and to give people a chance to stretch their legs.

Process I: Assessing. On the first week of IOT, the instructors had planned a fitness test, which consisted of a bleep test (running), press-ups, and sit-ups. The gym staff conducted the test, but

¹ IOT is composed mainly of direct entrant cadets who have joined the RAF from a civilian background. However, the RAF also offers an internal commissioning scheme for serving personnel, who comprise roughly 30% of an IOT intake.

all the IOT instructors came to the gym to watch the cohort conducting the test. As soon as the test finished, they rushed to see the scoreboards and to see how the cadets had scored (obs² 15/Aug/18). One of the interviewed instructors (Sgt Penny³), noted:

We went to the gym to see what we had to work with. Sometimes an intake is stronger than another so you're sizing the cadets up to see how much we think we'll be able to push them on the tabs. We know that people are different so we can't expect all the tabs in IOT to be the same (int 03).

A few weeks later, the first author's cohort finally took part in their first tab session led by the physical training instructors. The staff asked the cadets to line up in height order, inspected the cadets one by one making remarks about their fitness test performance (e.g., "you're a fit lad, aren't you, Mr Thompson?!"), and then put the group into a two-column formation in ascending order with the shortest in front and the tallest in back (obs 25/Aug/18). The intent, as outlined by another instructor, was for them to gauge a suitable pace for all, as the general rule is that those of shorter stature will have shorter steps and thus a slower pace (int 14).

The cadets then received weighted vests (5kg) and told they would tab at a slow pace alternating the pace between a walk and a jog; the instructors did not brief a specific pace or distance, and later on an interview, one of them confirmed this omission was intentional to give the group flexibility during the first tab (int 14).

At the start of that first tab, the instructors quickly got the cohort into doubling and pushed the group hard for around 200 yards to see how the cadets would react and if their initial ratings were correct. The group quickly separated into three: the fit, the middle pack, and the stragglers. This gave the instructors a gauge on how to continue with that session. Hence, after that initial push, the staff reverted to a pace they deemed comfortable for everyone in the group for the rest of the session, thus allowing the group to tab together (obs 25/Aug/18).

In the preceding excerpts, we observed a process (sub-mechanism) that we labelled 'assessing'. It was only observed during IOT and offered an opportunity for the instructors to analyse the intake they were working with. Tabbing was part of the syllabus but, in IOT, the

² We use the following abbreviations throughout the text to reference data collected during our study: "fn" for field notes, "obn" for participant observation, "int" for interviews, "doc" for documents, "dia" for diary, "Sc" for screenshot and "pic" for pictures/videos.

³ All names are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

instructors knew it was impossible to follow the rigid, official tables of pace/distance and load. As every IOT cohort had cadets with different fitness level, shapes, and sizes, instructors could use assessing as a tool that allowed them to enact tabbing a bit more flexibly and to plan their tabs accordingly. In contrast, during GCT, tabbing instructors followed the rigid standards from the beginning of the course, and they had fixed parameters to follow; therefore, we did not observe assessing in that context.

Process II: Adjusting. The tabs had their own rhythm, which sometimes emerged on its own and other times was moulded by the instructors. The pack's formation, in contrast, had almost a life of its own. The cadets in IOT always stayed in a two-column format, but its extension and composition were flexible and determined themselves naturally throughout the tab. Those that were fitter or more robust would eventually overtake others and gravitate towards the front regardless of stature; similarly, less fit cadets would slowly drop to the back of the pack (obs Aug to Dec 18).

We observed that the instructors in IOT often stepped in and practiced some flexibility to fine tune the sessions. As mentioned in the previous process, the instructors often aligned the cadet according to their height to make it possible for the shortest cadets to dictate the speed, rather than following rigid instructions. On one occasion, for example, the group entered a downhill part of the route ,and Sgt Penny, who was at the front, ordered them to go into a double; however, as he looked back, he noticed that some of the cadets were already behind the pack so he immediately reverted the group back to a march, reducing the pace and allowing the stragglers to slowly catch up with the group (obs 1/Oct/18).

During another session, the first author saw cadets dropping off from the loaded marches on four separate occasions just before the end of a downhill session – his legs were tired as well and at one point even cramping and, yet he knew that the group would go from a double to a march change soon and that he would get some rest as the group would go back to walking, so he kept going. If those cadets had known the rhythm changes better, they might have kept on rather than accepting that their bodies were at the limit (obs Aug to Oct/18).

After a few tabbing sessions, starting to notice this rhythm, the first author documented in his diary:

You must read the ground to see what's coming next. If you see a downhill session ahead, you simply know that staff are going to double and therefore your body needs to be ready... Similarly, if there is a hill coming up and your legs are about to give up, you just need to change your gears, push hard and keep going because you know that we'll go back to marching soon after – a lot of people miss this and just give up when their legs are gone (dia 3/Oct/18).

These examples illustrate a process we call 'adjusting'. Instructors used tactics to flexibility adjust the rhythm of tabbing sessions and would often do so based on the physical and mental specificities of a cohort and the individuals in that cohort – as long as they still kept it a tabbing session, they could shorten or slow the pace if they felt it would benefit the group or better match their ability. Through time, learning and joining that rhythm played an important role for cadets to better manage their bodily response to enacting the tabbing and be able to adjust their performance themselves to the terrain, push a bit harder, or rest at the right moments to make sure they could complete a tabbing session. Instructors thus adjusted less towards the end of each training period.

Akin to what we observed in assessing, this adjusting process was not present in GCT as the tabs had predefined paces, weight loads, and distances and thus offered almost zero flexibility in the routine enactment. Here, instructors did not align cadets according to their height, as we observed in the IOT (mentioned in the first process) either, because all tabbing sessions followed rigid instructions with little or no flexibility.

Process III: Intervening. Another good example of rhythm is how the warning of an incoming obstacle (e.g., a root on the ground) will travel down the line of troops with everyone shouting 'footing' to prevent the person down the line from tripping and falling (fn 1-30 Sep/18).

The first author noted that, during IOT, that system would work when the group was rested and marching but that, as the cadets got tired, they often lost that discipline, meaning they would not intercede for others. He recorded in his field notes that being warned of obstacles on the ground was important because they travelled so close to the person in front that one could only really see their backs – so if cadets did not step in to warn someone behind, they risked getting them injured because it was so easy to trip over something (fn 1-30 Sep/18).

In GCT, these warnings were also in place, making the routine enactment very recognisable; nevertheless, it was a bit more disciplined, as the students simply could not allow

loosening on maintaining protocol and warning colleagues of incoming obstacles. They were often carrying more weight on their backs and more often tabbed at night; therefore, they had to keep alert and consider others in the process more seriously – even when tired. The first author recalled how this discipline was instilled and that they did not let their bodies take control; when asked about this, Josh reflected on his time during GCT:

When you are tabbing it's like being on patrol; you must be in charge of your body. You could be tired, wet and cold but you can't switch off ... So, if you see something, you have to get involved and warn your mates down the back; otherwise, someone might trip and you'll end up with someone hurt. Imagine being on a patrol and seeing enemy activity; you'd step in and warn your troops about that wouldn't you? It's the same with tabbing, even if your body is at a breaking point. (int 02).

We labelled this process, which we witnessed in both IOT and GCT, ‘*intervening*’, in which one intervenes on another person’s enactment or behaviour – in the preceding examples, the routine participants interceded to prevent someone else from tripping on an obstacle. Another instance of intervening on IOT was during a tab in which Louise (known to the instructors for being unfit): although she began at the front of the group, she slowly dropped to the back. The instructors watched her as she drifted farther and farther from the pack towards the safety car at the back. Sgt Campbell (one of the instructors) signalled to the safety car to slow down thus increasing the buffer and allowing Louise to stay on the tab, as they were close to the end of the session (note that a cadet would be removed from a tab if they lag behind more than a certain distance) (obs 12/Feb/19). In an interview, Sgt Campbell explained that if the safety car had caught up with her, he would have had to remove her from the tab, so he intervened to give her a bit of flexibility; he said that she was a smaller person who was not very fit and that, as she had already missed several sessions, failing that tab could have cost her IOT graduation; he also mentioned that she was commissioning as an administrative officer so would probably never have to tab again in her military career (int 16).

Another example case of intervening, this time during GCT, was when one of the students (Eddy) began to struggle on a tab. As he started to fall just a few meters behind the pack, Sgt Davies immediately ran up to him to get him back together with the group; the instructor knew the rules and that he could not intercede on the distance to the safety car; however, in his words, “*by simply running side by side with him, I was still able to motivate him*

to pick up his pace, control his body and get back in – he is a strong guy and I knew he could do it so I simply stepped in” (int 15).

Intervening is a sub-mechanism (process) that both the cadets/students and the instructors used to address rhythm issues, thus allowing their friends’ bodies to cope better with the tabs. It was also a control mechanism to recognise tabbing as the same routine in both IOT and GCT.

Process IV: Withdrawing. As the preceding sections demonstrate, tabbing has a rhythm that in many ways is influenced by the body of those enacting it. Despite some degree of flexibility in how the instructors ran a tabbing session and on how the cadets/students managed themselves during the tabs, especially in IOT, the routine was still much more difficult for some than for others. The cadets’ bodies were different in IOT and in GCT but also within each of those settings: cadets had different statures, body composition, and robustness, and therefore, not everyone could cope with the rhythm and finish every tab.

In both IOT and GCT, if a cadet/student dropped behind the pack and could not stay with the group, they would be removed from the session and asked to get in the safety car. However, in IOT, the safety car would usually be 75–100 meters from the group giving the cadets and the staff much more flexibility, whereas in GCT, that car was only 20–30 meters behind the pack, making it much more difficult for a straggler to recover back to the group.

Still, during IOT training (seven months), the first author recorded 13 occasions in which cadets were removed from a tabbing session. In eight of those occasions, their bodies gave up – they stopped tabbing and just got into the safety car. On the other five occasions, they were ordered to drop out of the session by the instructors because they became stragglers and fell too far back. The first author wrote that, as a rule of thumb, once a cadet fell behind the pack more than 20 meters, it was rare that they would recover to complete the tabbing, and their bodies were more likely to give up (fn Aug/18 to Mar/19).

Interestingly, the field notes from GCT training (also seven months) indicate few occasions in which a student did not finish a tab – only three and all initiated by the instructors – even though they were tabbing more frequently and harder. The students from the group, when fatigued and starting to fall behind, would push their legs and lungs harder and actually fight their way to the front of the pack to make sure they could stay in the tab (fn Jun to Dec/19).

In both IOT and GCT, we identified a process we called ‘*withdrawing*’, cadets would use to withdraw themselves or instructors would use to remove someone from a tab if their bodies could not follow the rhythm and keep up with the pack. This ability for routine participants to withdraw or be withdrawn made the routine enactment recognisable in both settings.

Summary. We observed that the body played a significant role in allowing the cadets and the students to tab with rhythm, and this in turn had a direct effect on how they enacted the routine in both original and replicated settings. We also found that, aware of the differences in the cadets’ bodies, the instructors in IOT anticipated issues with tabbing and thus made use of two processes to respond more flexibly: By assessing and adjusting, they were able to tailor the tabs to match the physical and mental ability of the group, thus ensuring their success. The routine’s rhythm still remained recognisable, and through intervening and withdrawing, the routine maintained a degree of control and standardisation across the two contexts.

b. Coping with injuries (flagging, triaging, intervening, and withdrawing)

Throughout IOT and GCT, injuries were a prominent theme that haunted the routine participants. And although the instructors on both settings still had a duty of care to intervene and even withdraw a participant from a tab if needed, we found that in IOT there were some additional processes that gave more flexibility to the routine enactment while keeping it recognisable.

Process I: Flagging. While the first tab on IOT felt very easy to some, other cadets found it very challenging, and their bodies did not cope well; some experienced minor injuries. Their ‘military issued’ leather boots had only been worn for two weeks and, therefore, did not have not much time to ‘break in’. That, combined with the novelty of the experience, meant that three cadets reached out to the instructors to highlight that they had blisters – the instructor who was leading the tab praised the cadets for informing him and told them to let him know if their feet were getting worse (obs 21/Aug/18). Every IOT intake was different, and so was each tab (the terrain, the weather, and the cadets’ fitness varied); it was impossible for the instructors to anticipate which injuries they would have to deal, with and so they had very flexible plans – if needed, for instance, they could shorten a session and usually kept close to paved roads for vehicle access. Feedback like the aforementioned blisters was therefore welcome by them.

On another tab during IOT, Andy kept complaining to his friend Mark that his left foot sock was slipping making it very uncomfortable to tab. Mark told him to tell the instructor, but Andy did not want to do so because he did not think it was that bad; as the instructor came side by side with the pair, Mark took the initiative and told the instructor that Andy needed to adjust his boots – the instructor thanked them and told them to sort it on the next water stop (obs 25/Oct/18). This and similar examples illustrate a process we labelled '*flagging*'. As shown, cadets had the freedom to flag to the instructors or to another cadet if they had any issues; they could also flag if they thought another cadet was coping with an injury.

The instructors had a plethora of options to deal with a situation (e.g., they could slow the pace, add a water stop, even ask the cadet to stop tabbing), but they could not plan how or when someone would get injured. Flagging was a tool to give early warning to the instructors that something was potentially wrong, and this in turn gave them time to react and flex the tabbing session accordingly.

However, flagging was not present in GCT; in that setting, the students were expected to look after themselves before and during a tab. The course organisers' risk tolerance was also much higher, which meant they would be away from roads and much more difficult to reach. Tabbing in GCT was much more arduous, and the lessons were fixed from the beginning, so the instructors had much less room for flexibility; thus, flagging was neither present nor needed.

Process II: Triaging. As IOT progressed, minor injuries became more widespread, and so did flagging. Gavin, for instance, was struggling with heat rashes as he was sweating profusely during the tabs and had to see the nurses, who prescribed a cream to help him deal with it and notified the instructors. At the next tabbing session, the instructor pulled Gavin to the side and asked him to remove his boots so his feet could be inspected (Obs 25/Sept /18). On his interview, Sgt Smith, the instructor who had 15 years of military service, said he wanted to see the gravity of the injury before deciding to take a hilly route that would make Gavin sweat even more (int 07).

Another example of this process, which we named '*triaging*', happened a few weeks later after a long tab in a rainy day. Sgt Smith, who had led the tab, asked all the cadets to sit down in a long row, and remove their boots and their socks. He then walked along checking each of the

cadet's feet for blisters. Smith wanted to ensure everyone was still fit; he had planned fieldcraft lessons and wanted to make sure he did not need to adjust his plans (Fn 7/Oct/18).

Once again, triaging was only observed during the IOT training, in which the staff knew the cadets were unexperienced to military life and to tabbing. They used this process to keep some flexibility in their plans in assessing the severity of an injury before deciding whether to continue with a tab, add a water break, remove a cadet from that session, or, in the worst cases, stop the activity altogether.

Process III: Intervening. In many instances, in both IOT and GCT, a routine participant interceded in a situation to prevent an injury from happening or from getting worse. The first author witnessed, for instance, cadets in IOT and students in GCT helping each other stretch their calves and hamstrings during scheduled water breaks on long tabs; as fatigue started to creep in, having these improvised stretch sessions were a way to prevent their legs from cramping. We labelled this process '*intervening*'.

Another example of this intervention process, was during GCT when Josh (one of the students), was tabbing with his 15kg rucksack with the shoulder straps 'undone'. Sgt Davies (the instructor) noticed this and, on the next water break (2 miles from that point), went to Josh and helped him properly fit his rucksack and adjust all the straps to prevent an injury (Fn 12/Jul/19). This type of behaviour was not uncommon; the field notes contain at least three other occasions (Fn Aug to Oct/18).

Similarly, the first author also started to have blisters with the higher intensity in GCT. He also did not want to draw attention to something so minor and so, instead of flagging it, he intervened by using different military boots for tabbing that were lighter and had softer leather. He recorded that one was substantially better than the other and that his blister problem disappeared with the new boots (dia 2/Sep/19).

Intervening was another way to prevent injuries from getting worse and could occur top-down (by the instructors) as well as laterally (by the routine participants). Instances of cadets and students telling a friend that boot laces were undone, lending blister kits during water breaks, sharing foot powder, or even lending dry socks were commonplace in both IOT and GCT, such that the routine enactment was recognisable despite the different settings.

Process IV: Withdrawing. Although routine participants could flag and triage during IOT and intervene during both IOT and GCT, instances still arose in which the cadets/students could not cope with their injuries and thus had to be removed from a tab to enact the routine in a recognisable way; we labelled this process ‘*withdrawing*’. As an example, during IOT, the first author saw how the instructors had to pull one of the cadets out of the tab (obn 12/Nov/18):

Today Aidan was so exhausted that he collapsed during the tab and ended up twisting his knee. He had to be pulled out from the session and taken to the medical centre. Unlucky. (dia 12/nov/18)

Spoke to Aidan again today and unfortunately, he has torn a ligament on his knee and will need surgery. So he won't continue training with us and will probably have to delay his graduation by a year. (dia 19/nov/18)

During IOT, the first author recorded that a total of five cadets were removed from tabbing sessions due to injuries. In addition, many IOT cadets withdrew themselves from tabbing sessions because of blisters, cramps, and rashes. Claire, for instance, was struggling with the weight on her shoulders and, at one point, just stepped to the side of the column and stopped tabbing. As the instructor asked what was happening, she simply said her shins were hurting and that she could not go on; the instructor got her into the safety car that followed the group (fn 8/Feb/19).

As mentioned previously, we also observed withdrawing during GCT. During the last month of the course, for instance, one of the night tabs was conducted on icy/snowy terrain, so boots were getting wet. No one complained or stopped, but during one of the breaks, Sgt Davies was chatting with the students. He asked Tom (a student) how he was doing (Obs 3/Dec/19):

Tom: all ok, but can't feel my toes...

Sgt Davies: what do you mean?

Tom: well, I am sure it is fine. Just a bit numb and tingly...

Sgt Davies: how long has it been like that? Why didn't you say something beforehand?

The conversation went on for a bit longer before Sgt Davies disappeared to talk to the other members of staff. He returned about ten minutes later and said to Tom:

Sgt Davies: I am sorry, but I'll need to pull you out of the tab to go see the medic. This could well be a NFCI (non-freezing cold injury) and we can't let it get worse.

Tom expressed his desire to continue the tab even though he could not feel his toes, but Sgt Davies still withdrew him from the activity and sent him to the Medical Centre back at the base because he knew the injury could have longer-term consequences. The medics did not allow Tom to return to the field, and he did not complete ground combat training despite that incident happening on the final week of the course (Fn 12/Dec/19). It was interesting to note that although Tom had been struggling with his feet throughout that tab, he did not flag it to the instructors or to his colleagues; in GCT, the students and their bodies were expected to be tough enough at that final stage of the course.

Summary. We saw that routine participants in both IOT and GCT had to cope with injuries, but in IOT, to keep the routine functional, the instructors had to enact this process more flexibly. So, those participants used flagging and triaging as additional processes to anticipate injuries, thus giving them early warning to change and adjust the tabbing sessions. GCT, in contrast, was made up of a different group of students who were more inclined to maintain their physical fitness. They found tabbing in IOT easier than other cadets destined to the other areas of the air force (e.g. engineering) and also had the entire duration of that course to build their robustness through lighter tabbing sessions. Minor injuries were not uncommon in that setting, but the way the students and their bodies coped with getting hurt was different: the students would simply not flag issues and the staff did not triage, instead focusing on intervening to prevent issues from getting worse and withdrawing to keep the cadets safe and the routine enactment recognisable.

c. Dealing with emotions (complaining, motivating, intervening, and withdrawing)

During the observations and interviews with routine participants about their tabbing experiences in IOT and GCT, we found that the body had an impact on the cadets' emotional state and, more importantly, on how they dealt with those emotions in the enactment of tabbing routine. For most cadets in IOT, tabbing was a frustrating experience; in contrast, the students on GCT usually found tabbing less physically challenging, which in turn led to more positive feelings in GCT.

Process 1: Complaining. Most cadets on IOT entered the RAF mainly interested in their professional branches: they wanted to be engineers, administrators, pilots, air traffic controllers, and so on, and so they did not take part in GCT. They only tabbed during IOT and often held a

critical view of tabbing as a routine. The following quote gives voice to some of the feelings cadets held during IOT:

There's no need to make an engineer tab with a big bergen (rucksack) in and around the defensive area. There's just literally no purpose in doing it because I'm never going to do it in my job or in real life (int 05).

This quote shows that the cadets in IOT vocalised their feelings in an attempt to deal with their emotions. As an example of this process, which we labelled ‘*complaining*’, we present a quote from an engineering cadet, Gavin, who noted whilst tabbing:

Realistically, no one who is not regiment or police, is ever going to be expected to carry this sort of load! This is crap! (obn 14/Jan/19).

Katie, who was next to him, also expressed her frustration:

Why are we doing this? I am just going to get through it. We're not going to have to do it again.... This is s..t. I just need to get through IOT and then I'm not going to do it [tabbing] again (obn 14/Jan/19).

The instructors overheard the conversation but did not reprimand them. As Sgt Penny explained in an interview, the cadets needed to vent their frustrations, and doing so helped them get through the tabs; therefore, he gave them some leeway rather than trying to discipline them, something he would not have allowed on GCT (int 03).

An interview with a cadet hoping to become an air traffic controller officer illustrates the importance of complaining during IOT:

I honestly don't think that people are going to get anything out of putting a bergen (rucksack) on their back and telling them, you know, to tab with it for a mile and a half Sometimes you just want to quit because your legs and your lungs are burning, and you are knackered! For me, bitching, moaning and getting angry during the harder bits helps me get through it! Just venting I guess... (int 08).

Looking at our field notes, the link between the body and complaining becomes evident. We observed that it was more frequent, for instance, in the winter than it was in the summer months, because it was more difficult for the cadets to tab on snowy ground and breathe in cold air (fn 1-31 Jan/19 and fn 1-30 Jun/19). Similarly, we observed that the cadets complained more when tabbing on consecutive days in a field exercise because their legs were fatigued and their

feet sore: the exhaustion in their bodies led to negative emotions, which they in turn voiced (fn Jun to Dec/19).

IOT Cadets used complaining to deal with their emotions during tabbing. It gave them an escape valve to keep their bodies going when the sessions were getting more difficult. In contrast, this process was not tolerated during GCT, where military discipline was instilled even during tabs. As our data demonstrate, the instructors practiced flexibility on IOT because they knew the strain placed on the cadets' bodies during those loaded marches was hard and allowed them to vent it out during the sessions (fn Aug to Nov/18).

Process II: Motivating. We also saw that the cadets in IOT encouraged one another to get through the sessions. As an example, the first author recorded in his diary that on a tab, as the group was slowing down on a hilly section, one cadet started shouting out to the group, "Keep going lads, once we're past this hill we'll go back to marching so just keep pushing yourselves!" (dia 10/Nov/18). That cadet was driving the group forward in a process we observed often on IOT, which we named '*motivating*'.

Not only did cadets use this process to keep each other going; in IOT, the instructors who were leading the cohort through the tabs also used it. They understood that some of the cadets were struggling with the tabs and wanted to help them complete the sessions as these were part of their IOT graduation criteria. So, on one long tab, for instance, the instructor addressed the group towards the end of the session, saying:

Troops, just keep going... we only have another mile to go and I know you have it in you! Just keep the legs moving and let's get to the end together. You can do this. (fn 1/Oct/18)

We also saw that complaining and motivating often coexisted. As the cadets were weeks from graduating, for instance, they took part in a tabbing challenge competing against another cohort. The cadets had to complete the tab to commission as officers, and the instructors were aware of that. We observed how three cadets started to fall behind the pack and to get closer to the safety vehicle as they jogged in; they were complaining about the competition, saying it had nothing to do with leadership and how it was all very unfair when one of the instructors also dropped to rear to join them side by side:

Troops, I want you to get angry and to shout! Get angry!! I want to hear you shout because you will finish this tab and you will commission into my RAF! Keep running because we only have 100 yards to go! (fn 23/Feb/18)

The instructor tabbed side by side with those three cadets, not only encouraging them verbally to vent (complaining). but changing their focus away from their body and towards their graduation ceremony; he motivated all three to get to the finish line and one step closer to completing IOT.

Using positivity to keep the cadets' emotions under control was very common. Instructors not only allowed but also encouraged motivating as a process to counter negative emotions and to generate positive ones, thus enabling the cadets to continue enacting the routine despite being uncomfortable. Interestingly, although common on IOT, motivating was not witnessed on GCT. There, the expectation was that students should be on top of their physical fitness and of their mental robustness, so there was no need to encourage or drive one another, and there was no flexibility on the instructors' part. This was a hard-learned lesson on the first week of GCT – as the group finished their first tab, they got together to congratulate each other, and immediately, the instructors reprimanded them, reminding them there was nothing to celebrate and that they should behave as officers (fn 13/Jun/20).

Process III: Intervening. The aforementioned example, in which the instructors criticised the GCT students, illustrates another tool the routine participants used to emotionally deal with tabbing – something we labelled '*intervening*'. This allowed the instructors (and to a lesser degree, the cadets/students) to step into a situation, control it, and to steer others in dealing with their emotions.

In IOT, for example, one of the cadets was struggling particularly more than his peers on a tab and started complaining; at first, the instructor was flexible and allowed him to do so in hopes it would help him to vent his frustrations. However, as the cadet kept moaning, the instructor felt it was negatively affecting the group and therefore intervened:

Mr Brodie, you have had your say but that's enough now; so stop complaining and be quiet. You're training to become an officer, a leader, so just get on with it. (fn 8/Sep/18)

We also observed cadets on IOT intervening on each other's attitudes towards their emotions. Vince, for example, was tabbing next to Lisa and started complaining to her that he hated tabbing, and she intervened straight away by telling him to 'get a grip and stop moaning'. The first author, who was behind Lisa on that tab, recorded the incident on his field notes (obs 31/Aug/18).

The first author also witnessed these participant-led intervention examples on GCT, in which students used this process to control and regulate emotions within the peer group. In that setting, as an illustration, we recorded how Josh (student), who thought that Liam (another student) had been looking a bit down during a couple of weeks, went to see his friend in his room and spoke about how he used journaling to keep a positive outlook on GCT and how that was helping him get through the course (fn 30/Jul/19). Josh was intervening to try to improve Liam's morale on the course, because he knew the importance of being emotionally strong to get through the tabs.

The intervention process did not always occur on a one-to-one basis but sometimes in a group. Whilst on GCT, for example, we observed how the group's morale sank during a rainy two-week field exercise in which the students were tabbing daily on wet ground whilst wearing wet clothes and wet boots; no one was complaining, as that was not done on GCT, but the staff set out to intervene when they noticed lethargy within the group, which clearly indicated they were dealing with difficult emotions: subsequently, a RAF Regt officer (in his late twenties) who observed them tab visited them and spoke to them as fellow officers, saying they needed to change their posture and improve their morale, or they would not get to the end of GCT. He talked about his time on the course, how he also struggled at times, but then he noted that it was a necessary part of the training. In his interview, this RAF Regt officer explained that the GCT instructors had asked him to step in and give the students a pep talk to try to improve their morale (fn 26/Jul/19; int 01).

This process of intervening was an attempt to reset or overturn the group's emotional state, which, if not addressed, could jeopardise their chances of completing IOT or GCT. This form of controlling how routine participants dealt with their emotions was not unique to the GCT; we observed it in both contexts, which enabled us to recognise the replicated GCT routine in IOT.

Process IV: Withdrawing. Unfortunately, not everyone could cope with their emotions, and in some cases, participants would not finish a tab or, as we labelled it, were ‘*withdrawn*’ from it. This process, which was already also explored in the previous mechanisms, was the last resort for the cadets, students or instructors and could also triggered by emotional responses.

On IOT, for instance, the first author witnessed how Lewis, a cadet who had been complaining about a tabbing session on a cold rainy day, just stepped to the side of the pack, watched the group walk by, and told Sgt Penny he had had enough; he just withdrew himself from the session and got into the safety car; despite knowing he would be disciplined at a later stage, he had had enough and could not cope emotionally with the tab.

In our field notes during IOT, we recorded three other instances in which a cadet’s emotional state was so fragile that instructors withdrew them from a tabbing session. In those instances, the cadets were so overwhelmed by the task that, with their bodies already fatigued and aching, they burst into tears during a water break saying they could not complete the tab. The instructors, seeing they could not intervene, flexed their approach to the situation on all three counts, going from a military figure to a coach; they spoke calmly, reassured the person and ‘*withdrew*’ them so they could go back to their rooms to recover (fn Aug to Oct/18).

During GCT, in contrast, we did not see anyone removing themselves or being withdrawn by an instructor from a tab because of how they were dealing with their emotions; that said, we did observe how an instructor (Sgt Davies) threatened to do so if Matt did not change his attitude towards the session:

Mr Kennedy, stop looking like you are going to cry. I’ll will pull you out of this tab and send you to the safety wagon [car]. You want to be in the RAF Regt so you better get used to tabbing. Pick yourself up and change that attitude, otherwise I will remove you from the group. (fn 8/Sep/19)

As mentioned previously, the students on GCT were more robust; they were stronger and could also deal with their emotions better than the cadets did in IOT due to bodily differences. They had also underdone tabbing throughout IOT, which meant they knew the routine and how to enact it. Nonetheless, both IOT and GCT participants used withdrawing as a process to deal with emotions; the cadets, students, and instructors could use it if someone could no longer enact the routine due to their emotional state.

Summary. In this section, we described several processes that enabled cadets, students, and instructors in IOT and GCT to deal with their emotions, thus adding flexibility to how the routine was enacted. In IOT, aware that the cadets were not as strong, the instructors were ‘flexible’ with their military discipline and allowed routine participants to complain when tabbing to vent out their emotions and keep tabbing. They also permitted the cadets to motivate one another through the sessions and often did so themselves to ensure emotions were kept under control. Although these two sub-mechanisms made the replicated routine in IOT a bit more flexible, we also observed two others processes that kept the routine under control in both settings: intervening and withdrawing. By using these processes, the routine not only set and enforced tabbing standards to control the enactment, but also allowed us to recognise it despite the flexible replication in IOT.

Discussion

Extant literature indicates that organisations should take the context into consideration when replicating routines (Bertels et al., 2016; Howard-Greenville, 2005; Szulanski & Jensen, 2004). We also know that contexts are often complex and that routine participants usually adapt a routine when enacting it in a new setting (D’Adderio, 2014). Recent advances in management and organisation research have also shown us that ‘the body’ is a part of the context in enacting routines (De Rond et al., 2019; Michel, 2011; 2023) and replicating them (Blanche & Feldman, 2021). Scholars of management and organisational studies have recognized that the body plays a much more significant role in the work we do than just simply being the vehicle by which the work is performed. Bodies are ‘agentive actors’ in shaping work and one’s sense of self as a worker (Harding et al., 2022). For example, Blanche and Cohendet (2019), in their study of a ballet being remounted in a different context, showed how embodiment impacts routine replication. The authors highlighted the intangible differences (linked to embodiment) that affect the replication process and outlined the importance of a shared professional culture.

However, the overall absence of bodies in this literature may result in studying the “people” involved in organisational routines as ‘disembodied routine participants’ with a consequence of advancing a theory that ignores how bodies contribute to the unfolding of ‘routines as practices’ (Wright, 2019). We also observed that the body is often treated in the extant body of literature as a generic concept, although, in reality, individual bodies are diverse

and full of specificities which can influence how routines are enacted by those individuals in different contexts (Blanche & Feldman, 2021). This highlights the need for “more empirically derived understanding of the agency of flesh in the performative corporealization of working, embodied selves” (Harding et al., 2022, p. 649). To address this gap in the extant body of literature, in this paper we examine how bodies’ specificities impact routine replication and enactment in a new context. In doing so, we also respond to calls for novel empirical research into embodied coordination and sensemaking mechanism (Blanche & Feldman, 2021; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; De Rond et al, 2019; Gartner, 2013; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). The study improves understanding of embodiment and routine replication as a revelatory case. As an early study that investigates the impact of embodiment on routine replication (Blanche & Feldman, 2021) and the replication dilemma (Szulanski & Jensen, 2004), this research offers complementary insights into the generic view adopted in studying body in organisation studies and RD. And although this setting offers a very clear case in which the body influences RD, the contributions still extend beyond this context and the findings can help researchers and practitioners in many fields (examples include workers in emergency services, managers replicating practices in other geographical locations with different climates and even to the impact of corporate travel on the body).

First, this paper advances theory on an embodied framing of organisational routines by highlighting the differences between the routine participants’ bodies, collectively and individually, in the original and the replicated context and their impact on perceiving the replication process. In IOT, the cadets came from a civilian background, and most were recruited for technical or administrative jobs. Hence, they had never done as much physical activity prior to joining the RAF and struggled with the physicality of military training; those cadets in IOT, for the most part, also did not see the point in tabbing as it was irrelevant to their career, so the experience could be frustrating. In GCT, in contrast, the students were not only naturally more robust, but also had six months to learn tabbing, familiarise themselves with the routine, and become stronger; so, they had positive emotions toward tabbing (Heaphy, 2017), viewing it and making sense of it as something important for their jobs (ground combat) (Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). These findings supplement the limited work on embodiment in routines replication (e.g., Blanche & Cohendet, 2019) by exploring in detail that the body goes beyond being an intangible contextual difference and is actually a crucial part of

the context in which routines are embedded, enacted, and replicated. Stepping away from routine participants' bodies as a generic entity also helps address a gap identified by Blanche and Feldman (2021); we show how individuals' different bodily specificities affected their ability to enact the tabbing routine.

Second, by comparing tabbing in both settings, we revealed that there is more to bodies than just 'embodied cognition or communication' (Bouty & Godé, 2022, p. 1769) in replication process. Our findings, hence, have implications for our understanding of replicating routines within and across organisations as we found that the routine had been replicated in a milder format from GCT into IOT. Our findings show that the differences in the trainees' bodies posed different challenges to the two training programmes; facing the replication dilemma, the RAF could not copy the routine exactly and had to adapt it. This link between embodiment and the replication dilemma contributes to the extant collection of studies (D'Adderio, 2014; Szulanski & Jensen, 2004) by adding an important dimension that impacts and complicates the difficult process of replicating routines. Tabbings had to be changed according to the participants' bodies; thus, for a group of 'civilians' in IOT, tabbing was less frequent and covered smaller distances, and the participants carried lighter loads than their colleagues in GCT.

Furthermore, we noticed that there was a link between purpose and emotions. Those cadets who were training to become ground combat officers could see that tabbing was a skill relevant for their future careers and, as such, held a positive attitude towards the training; despite the arduous nature of tabbing, they wanted to enact it, to become stronger and train their bodies and thus welcomed the sessions. The vast majority of cadets, on the other hand, had joined the RAF to do managerial and technical work (e.g. engineering, logistics, personal administration) and knew they would probably never have to tab again in their lives; this meant they did not see the purpose behind tabbing on IOT which in turn meant they dreaded those sessions and held negative emotions towards tabbing sessions – this link between purpose and the body (emotions) had a direct impact on the routine enactment and on the replication dilemma.

Therefore, the comparison of the routine enactment in the two contexts also provided insights on how the body functioned in new ways after it is acquainted with the routine: it functions not "inside-out as a biological imperative but outside-in, fluidly adjusting to changing situations" (Michel, 2023, p. 44), as in GCT and after having six months to learn tabbing during

IOT, the cadets not only became stronger but also regulated their emotions better. These findings, including the link between purpose and emotions, also add to the existing literature on routine replication and embodiment by highlighting that replication process often involves structured bodywork aimed at improving bodies, which goes beyond just learning the practice and is essential for maintaining consistent performance (Bouty & Godé, 2022).

Third and most important, we uncovered the mechanisms and sub-mechanisms (processes) through which the routine was adapted in the replication process while staying recognisable as the same routine in both contexts within the organisation. As an empirical qualitative analysis of the RAF replication process, and by successively ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ from cadets’ doings, feelings, and sayings, we revealed three body-related mechanisms by which replication process and routine participants’ bodies are intertwined and coproduce the routine in the new context (Blanche, 2019; Blanche & Cohendet, 2019; Bouty & Godé, 2022). This happened through an interplay of standardisation and flexibility within three mechanisms of playing with rhythm, coping with injuries, and dealing with emotions. In both settings, intervening and withdrawing provided control and stability to the routine to ensure tabbing was identifiable as an arduous military routine; when the instructors maintained the standards by interceding to alter unacceptable behaviours, they did so in the same format in both IOT and GCT. For example, on the one hand, when boundaries were crossed, the instructors would remove cadets/students from a tab, thus enforcing the military discipline that characterises tabbing. On the other hand, sub-mechanisms such as assessing and adapting added flexibility to the routine enactment during IOT: the instructors could tailor the sessions based specifically on the cadets’ bodies, thus playing with the tabbing rhythm. Similarly, in IOT, the cadets and instructors took advantage of flagging and triaging to get early warnings on how participants’ bodies were coping with injuries, and the instructors could flex their tabbing sessions accordingly. Finally, by allowing cadets to complain and by motivating the troops through the tabs, the instructors were influencing how emotions were dealt with, which in turn altered how their bodies responded to a tabbing session in the two contexts.

The embodied flexibility and stability (recognisability) mechanisms that coexisted in our case add to what D’Adderio (2014) found when studying a large electronics organisation facing the replication dilemma. She discovered that routine participants could balance the pressures to

copy and adapt by performing conflicting goals at the same time in a negotiated truce in which the conflicting goals were relegated to the background. We add to her work by showing a case in which these mechanisms complemented each other through embodiment rather than competing or substituting one another. The RAF understands that bodies differ between and within the two contexts and, as such, accepted the need for allowing mechanisms to give flexibility to the routine enactment; however, it also ensured that boundaries were present so that tabbing remained a recognisable military routine.

In addition, our micro-level analysis of the three mechanisms not only reveals an interplay between flexibility (change) and standardisation (stability or recognisability) (Danner-Schröder & Geiger, 2016; Turner & Rindova, 2012) but it does so within a routine replication context with embodiment at the foci. Similar to Blanche and Cohendet's (2019) findings (see also Blanche, 2019), the RAF sent its instructors from Regt to IOT to maintain that shared professional culture, and those instructors were constantly patterning to keep tabbing recognisable whilst adding the flexibility the cadets' bodies demanded in IOT. This constant and simultaneous interplay of microlevel dynamics of flexibility and standardisation (Blanche & Simon, 2021; Danner-Schröder & Geiger, 2016; Geiger and Danner-Schröder, 2021) enabled the success of the routine replication: it kept the routine identifiable to GCT whilst giving it the embodied flexibility required by IOT.

Altogether, our findings connecting embodiment and routine replication could be of relevance for organisations seeking to replicate routines to expand their operations: those leading the process should add the body to their (already extensive) list of factors when considering whether to replicate a routine in a different context. This should include understanding the differences of individuals and managing the emotions of those routine participants enacting the routine in the new context. Furthermore, when planning and executing the replication, our findings also shed light on some mechanisms that can help managers set the balance between standardisation and flexibility: taking the body in consideration can assist them in deciding how much to copy and how much to adapt a routine (D'Adderio, 2014; Danner-Schröder & Geiger, 2016).

Our work also brings an additional contribution, albeit a methodological one: the first author tabbed with the cadets and the students to add enactive ethnographic methods to his data

collection methods. When he went through tabs in his IOT and then during GCT, he noticed nuances about the routine that he would have missed if he had not taken part in its enactment. He noticed, for instance, the impact of ill-fitted boots on his feet and consequently in his ability to tab. In addition, when he tabbed on summer sunny days and then on winter snowy days, he noticed the difference it had on his body and how that caused him to perform differently. These insights would probably not have emerged if he was just observing the cadets tabbing; furthermore, routine participants might not have mentioned these things during interviews, and valuable data could have been lost.

Despite the peculiarity of this routine, we argue that capturing action by enacting the routine adds value to the methodology; in this case, using the body to take part in tabbing was revelatory and enriched our data set. This aligns with Blanche and Feldman's (2021) recommendations that RD researchers should consider new ways to capture data by mobilising our sensory apparatus, as well as De Rond et al.'s (2019) similar enactive ethnography of rowing on the Amazon River.

Conclusion

By following a group of cadets and students in an enactive ethnography, this paper demonstrates the importance of the body and the role its specificities play in routine replication dynamics. This study, focused on the RAF and its replication of loaded march (tabbing) routine from GCT to IOT, confirms the role played by the body in replication processes. It also goes further by showing that the differences in those bodies influence how routine replication takes place and how flexibility and recognisability are achieved at the same time. Our research shows that, through an interplay of flexibility (change) and standardisation (stability) within the mechanisms of playing with rhythm, coping with injuries, and dealing with emotions, the routine was adapted to a new setting and yet kept recognisable. We recognise that, using a single case study based on a military organisation, our findings might be limited and that the body may not necessarily play such a relevant role in all organisational routines. Nevertheless, we believe important lessons can be drawn from our research for organisations looking to replicate operating routines in different contexts. We also believe that our findings and our use of enactive ethnographic methods adds to the scarce body of this new research methodology, which can be of use to other RD and organisation study scholars.

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Routine replication and embodying process: an ethnographic study on the impact of the body in routine replication in the Royal Air Force

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