

THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Unwritten Job Description.

FIELD GUIDE / VOLUME 02

An investigation toolkit for the tasks that keep an institution functioning but rarely make it into the contract.

WORKBOOK + RESEARCH READER + FACILITATION NOTES

Not a productivity manual. Not a diagnostic scale. Not permission to observe anyone without consent. This guide asks a structural question: when necessary work disappears from the document, where do its demands, its credit and its risks actually go?

Includes nine categories of invisible work; four fictional cases; a five-day observation method; five structural intervention tests; an equity and privacy audit; a 45-minute discussion format; 10 annotated sources; eight linked Sahilverse works; and blank templates you may print.

Companion interactive experience: ghostshift.sahilverse.online

Written for Sahilverse / Sahil Tayal · 26 October 2026 · Original editorial teaching material

CHAPTER 01 / ORIENTATION

See the system, not just the employee.

A job description is a selective map. It is useful because it names responsibilities. It is incomplete because teams also rely on interpersonal repair, missing information, temporal coordination, translation and the work of keeping other work possible.

The most important distinction in this laboratory is between three questions.

Question	What to observe	A misleading shortcut
What is done?	Specific work episodes and dependencies	Assuming the formal list is exhaustive
Who carries it?	Actual ownership, time and authority	Assuming work is shared because everybody benefits
Who receives credit?	Review, pay, praise and attribution	Assuming an acknowledgment eliminates overload

A claim worth challenging

“Make all work visible” sounds straightforward. Yet visibility can offer acknowledgment and expose workers to recording, surveillance, retaliation or fresh paperwork. Star and Strauss (1999) make the very idea of visible work contextual. Ask who controls the record, who can correct it and what the record will be used for.

How to use this book

- Choose a fictional scenario, or create a role title without importing a real worker’s identity.
- Follow a week of ten tasks; name task owner, credit recipient, visibility and whether the duty is negotiable.
- Compare the structural reforms; distinguish less work from the same work simply being transferred.
- Use the research reader to examine opposing perspectives; consult the limits before drawing conclusions.
- Leave with a rewritten role agreement and an audit of what remains unknown.

CHAPTER 02 / THE VOCABULARY

Nine kinds of work the chart can miss.

Physical care

Making a workspace usable; supporting safe access. **Audit:** Who makes the environment workable?

Emotional regulation

Handling charged encounters and helping interaction continue. **Audit:** Is this expected, bounded and supported?

Coordination

Linking schedules, decisions and handoffs. **Audit:** Who prevents duplicated or missing work?

Administrative repair

Correcting records, approvals and exceptions. **Audit:** What did the official workflow fail to handle?

Translation

Making knowledge, language or policy usable. **Audit:** Who bridges the explanation gap?

Mentoring

Passing on tacit practical knowledge. **Audit:** Does onboarding allocate time for this?

Conflict absorption

Resolving friction before escalation. **Audit:** Who pays the emotional and time cost?

Memory

Remembering exceptions, promises and past decisions. **Audit:** Would the dependency survive leave?

Teamwork

Covering absent links in a chain of work. **Audit:** Is the help reciprocal or concentrated?

These categories are created for this exercise. They overlap and are not a validated measurement taxonomy. Context can change which actions are formally visible.

CHAPTER 03 / FOUR FICTIONAL SETTINGS

One method, four institutional logics.

Early-stage company

Official: release tracking, coordination, reports.

Hidden: customer translation, morale repair, mentoring, invoice cleanup.

Investigate: What gets called “initiative” without receiving time or authority?

School

Official: timetable, resources, attendance.

Hidden: calming visitors, interpreting notices, carrying exception memory, room access.

Investigate: Whose teaching time is displaced by maintaining the learning environment?

Hospital operations team

Official: shift logistics, non-clinical handover and supply escalation.

Hidden: queue repair, supplies, operational translation and dispute absorption.

Investigate: Which non-clinical handoff is safety-relevant but rarely in a formal role?

Neighborhood shop

Official: inventory, purchase records, opening and closing.

Hidden: customer access support, supplier exceptions, queue disputes, helper orientation.

Investigate: How do informality and trust make dependencies both resilient and fragile?

Each case is invented. None describes an identifiable organization, school, hospital, patient, customer or employer.

CHAPTER 04 / FIVE-DAY OBSERVATION

Observe a week without surveilling a person.

Monday

Where does necessary work enter from outside the formal role? **Move:** Name the unofficial dependency and the official responsibility it enables.

Tuesday

Does a one-off workaround become someone’s new recurring duty? **Move:** Separate unexpected incident from repeated demand.

Wednesday

Do execution and credit point to the same role? **Move:** Record both the carrier and recipient of formal acknowledgment.

Thursday

Who holds unrecorded operational memory? **Move:** Imagine a handover or leave period without demanding personal disclosure.

Friday

Which seemingly small task is a critical support point? **Move:** Ask what stops if it is removed and who would legitimately decide.

Print worksheet / task ledger

Duty & category	Who carries?	Who receives credit?	Essential? / listed?
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

What cannot safely be inferred from observation? _____

CHAPTER 05 / THE STRUCTURAL HEARING

Change the rules, not the worker.

Structural choice	What can change?	What remains at risk?
Rotate duties	Spreads ownership across roles.	Total demand remains; handoff and training need resources.
Reduce demand	Stops or simplifies genuinely negotiable duties.	A service may disappear; who carries the resulting cost?
Compensate work	Makes support labor eligible for pay and formal role recognition.	No money moves in this toy; actual pay needs a budget and negotiated terms.
Change authority	Gives task owners decision rights; removes avoidable approvals.	Without genuine discretion, “empowerment” becomes a label.
Document dependencies	Creates a shared register, owner and review practice.	Better visibility can create surveillance or new reporting burden.

How to interpret an apparent improvement

- If total task units stay constant, the work did not disappear: it may have been redistributed or documented.
- If unlisted units fall, ask whether work became recognized or whether demand actually fell.
- If peak load falls, check every recipient load and include handoff cost.
- If credit improves, ask whether authority, time and compensation were also adjusted.
- If a risk indicator improves, do not mistake a toy formula for observed safer conditions.

CHAPTER 06 / THE DISPLACEMENT AUDIT

Don't move the burden off the map.

Compare before and after. Do not ask the team to be individually faster when the real question is whether the institution has enough labor, usable authority, realistic demand and fair recognition.

Indicator	Before	After	What this cannot reveal
Total work demand	_____	_____	Whether the service quality changed
Unlisted work demand	_____	_____	Whether recognition affected pay
Highest role burden	_____	_____	Whether handoff cost moved elsewhere
Unassigned essential work	_____	_____	Whether someone will quietly pick it up
Credit mismatches	_____	_____	Whether attribution is experienced as fair

Authority

Who may actually discontinue, reassign or redesign a task?

Consent

Who can object to documenting their emotional or interpersonal labor?

Fairness

Whose capacity and rewards change? Do not infer from identity.

Safety

Could the change expose private information or discourage raising problems?

Persistence

What is maintained after the reform sponsor leaves?

Watch for the false victory: an impressive fall in “invisible work” achieved by moving a duty to someone else whose work the register does not cover.

CHAPTER 07 / REWRITTEN CONTRACT

A template with institutional responsibilities.

This template is fictional, nonlegal teaching material. It is not a substitute for local labor law, bargaining, an employment agreement or an occupational safety review.

Role and intended contribution

The role exists to _____; its primary outcomes are _____.

Support dependencies

Support work needed for those outcomes includes _____. These duties are allocated rather than assumed.

Time and staffing

Allocated capacity: _____. Demand to pause or remove when capacity is exceeded: _____.

Authority and escalation

The task owner may decide _____ and should escalate _____. Documentation must not expand scope without review.

Credit and compensation

Credit goes to _____ for _____. Compensation, if needed, will be determined through _____; do not confuse acknowledgment with pay.

Privacy and monitoring limits

Do not capture personal disclosures, protected characteristics or client details. Review data use, access, retention and opt-out where relevant.

Review and correction

Revisit after _____. People doing the work can correct errors in this description without being penalized for raising a concern.

CHAPTER 08 / FACILITATOR NOTES

A 45-minute session without a leaderboard.

Minutes	Activity	Question to leave open
00-05	Clarify fiction, privacy, no worker assessment.	What do formal descriptions help and hide?
05-15	Observe five simulated days in pairs.	Where did support demand originate?
15-25	Compare ownership and credit.	What is visible? To whom?
25-35	Choose an institutional intervention.	What became smaller versus relocated?
35-42	Read one research counterpoint.	Which assumptions are unsupported?
42-45	Draft one revised policy sentence.	What evidence would test the change?

Guardrails

- Do not use names or identifying stories about real coworkers without consent.
- Keep roles neutral and fictional; do not assign invisible work based on sex, caste, class, disability or identity.
- Refuse to treat the task-unit counters as performance scores.
- Allow participants to decline personal disclosure; invite structural descriptions instead.
- Distinguish a qualitative question from a validated causal conclusion.
- Use disagreement constructively: transparency, privacy and compensation can pull in different directions.

Discussion prompt

If making a hidden duty visible increases monitoring pressure, what governance would allow recognition without surveillance? Answers may differ across settings; each answer should name its trade-off.

CHAPTER 09 / ANNOTATED SOURCES

Ten publications, ten useful questions.

01 Star & Strauss (1999)

Layers of Silence, Arenas of Voice: The Ecology of Visible and Invisible Work (Theory / CSCW).

Why: Visibility is a negotiated way of representing work; creating a record changes what counts.

Limit: No task is intrinsically invisible in every context; the paper does not calibrate this simulator.

[Original publication](#)

02 Kaplan, Slonim-Franco & Lifshitz (2024)

“Leave me out of it and raise my salary”: Invisible work in the labor market and the gender wage gap (Empirical / Israel).

Why: Mixed-methods research explicitly examines unseen physical care, emotional labor, administration and teamwork in relation to wages.

Limit: The Israeli sample and observational analysis do not establish universal wage effects or justify invented scores.

[Original publication](#)

03 Babcock, Recalde, Vesterlund & Weingart (2017)

Gender Differences in Accepting and Receiving Requests for Tasks with Low Promotability (Experiments / allocation).

Why: Shows why low-promotability requests and who receives them can matter to a workplace.

Limit: Do not infer who in a fictional team would do this work from identity or demographic traits.

[Original publication](#)

04 Gagné & Deci (2005)

Self-Determination Theory and Work Motivation (Theory / motivation).

Why: Separates autonomy-supporting motivation from externally pressured compliance.

Limit: Recognizing work is not automatically autonomy-supportive; compensation and monitoring can coexist.

[Original publication](#)

05 Hackman & Oldham (1976)

Motivation Through the Design of Work: Test of a Theory (Empirical / job design).

Why: Classic job-design research links task design and psychological experiences of work.

Limit: Its model is not a complete theory of invisible work or modern organizational inequality.

[Original publication](#)

CHAPTER 10 / ANNOTATED SOURCES

From job design to institutional care.

06 Edmondson (1999)

Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams (Empirical / teams).

Why: Asks whether teams can surface problems and learn without making every admission costly.

Limit: Do not equate this simulator's invented "trust index" with psychological safety research measures.

[Original publication](#)

07 ILO — Addati, Cattaneo, Esquivel & Valarino (2018)

Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work (Institutional report / care).

Why: Examines paid and unpaid care work and the institutional arrangements surrounding it.

Limit: Its broad care-economy framing does not imply every support task is paid employment.

[Original publication](#)

08 ILO — Razavi et al. (2024)

Making Social Protection Work for Gender Equality (Working Paper 132) (Institutional paper / policy).

Why: The user-supplied working paper situates unpaid care and employment inequality within social protection design.

Limit: This paper concerns gender-responsive social protection; it is not solely a workplace invisible-labor study.

[Original publication](#)

09 International Labour Organization (2026)

The Psychosocial Working Environment: Global Developments and Pathways for Action (Institutional report / work design).

Why: Shifts attention from worker resilience alone to demands, clarity, control and fair organizational systems.

Limit: Do not use simulated risk indices as a health assessment or compliance audit.

[Original publication](#)

10 International Labour Organization (2022)

Psychosocial Risks and Stress at Work (Practice resource / prevention).

Why: Summarizes organizational risks such as workload, poor role definition and limited job control.

Limit: This is general guidance, not a diagnostic protocol for a fictional team.

[Original publication](#)

Evidence rule: these sources inform the questions. None supplies the invented scores, trade-off weights or scenario events.

CHAPTER 11 / RELATED SAHILVERSE

Eight doors; distinguish live from archived.

01 The Human Capital Commons · LIVE PUBLIC WORK

A teaching library about autonomy, institutional access and human potential. Compare job descriptions with the conditions that make contribution possible.

02 The Treaty of Things · LIVE PUBLIC WORK

A miniature world where changed rules shift outcomes. Counterpoint: this site dissects paperwork and recognition instead of governing agents.

03 The Kirana Laboratory · LIVE PUBLIC WORK

Everyday retail questions around trust, informal processes and exceptions. Compare how a small shop distributes work beyond a formal title.

04 Humans Aren't Resources · ARCHIVE DOSSIER ONLY

A recorded dossier questioning instrumental views of people; the live standalone version is not verified.

05 People to Flourish · ARCHIVE DOSSIER ONLY

A neighboring archived idea: evaluate organizational life beyond extracting output.

06 Fake Job Descriptions · ARCHIVE DOSSIER ONLY

An archive dossier about the distance between advertised duties and lived expectations.

07 Hiring · ARCHIVE DOSSIER ONLY

An archive dossier about who specifies a role—and what happens when essential dependencies are absent at recruitment.

08 Before Fame, There Was a Life · LIVE PUBLIC WORK

A reflection on visibility, recognition and value: what disappears when applause becomes the metric?

An archive link describes a recorded dossier in COMPLETE. It does not claim a separately deployed live site. Linked public works were checked on 26 October 2026.

CHAPTER 12 / METHODS & PROVENANCE

What the instrument does and does not do.

Simulation mechanics

The browser-only simulation contains four invented institutions, ten fixed tasks per institution and four neutral role labels. A reproducible local seed shuffles task order using a deterministic pseudorandom procedure. Each task has category, load, essentiality, owner, credit recipient and listed/unlisted state. The user can change owner, credit and visibility; these choices do not change underlying task demand.

Five interventions use editorial transformations: redistribute ownership; remove selected negotiable tasks; list work for a proposed compensation review; subtract limited modeled rework from selected administrative or coordination tasks; and document all dependencies. No actual pay, health, hiring, psychology or economic outcome is calculated.

Provenance ledger

Category	Origin and status
Research citations	Attributed publications, with links and scope notes.
Connected projects	Public live sites and COMPLETE archive dossier titles.
Nine categories	New editorial grouping, not a validated classification.
Task narratives & scenarios	New fictional writing; not actual workplace observations.
Indicators & formulas	New deterministic illustrative mechanics; not measured or trained AI.
This PDF	Original research-oriented teaching text; not copied article content.

Useful exit questions

- What essential work disappeared from the formal document?
- Which worker became the organization’s unofficial infrastructure?
- Which reform actually removes demand, and which only changes its presentation?
- What would falsify the claim that this reform helped?
- Who gains authority to disagree with the new arrangement?

[Open the interactive laboratory](#) · [Sahilverse main entrance](#) · [COMPLETE archive](#)