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Organizational Time: Temporal Demands and the Experience of Work in Restaurant Kitchens

Gary Alan Fine

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Abstract

All work is temporally structured. The challenge for sociologists interested in organizational dynamics is to understand these timely sequences. I

describe how organizations, because of the interplay of external and structural demands, set the temporal dimensions of work, to which workers must adjust and negotiate. Work patterns lead to behavioral and emotional responses, and, in turn, the lived experiences of workers affect their use of time and their orientation to the organization. Organizational demands affect temporal order, which, in turn, affects how workers experience their work, and, to some degree, this experience recursively influences temporal order and organizational efficiency. Temporal constraints contribute to social control, but workers also use time to undercut elements of organizational control, achieving some measure of autonomy by creating temporal niches. To illustrate these connections, I draw upon participant observation and in-depth interviews with cooks in four restaurants. Restaurants are temporal worlds in which external demands influence the use of time by cooks and their lived experience of that time.

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