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Working on People

The logic of work routinization is simple, elegant, and compelling. Adam Smith's famous discussion of pin manufacture laid the groundwork: instead of paying high-priced, skilled workers to do a job from start to finish, employers could split the job into its constituent parts and assign each task to minimally qualified workers, thus greatly reducing costs and increasing output (Smith 1776). Frederick Taylor's system of scientific management, aimed at removing decision making from all jobs except managers' and engineers', pushed the division of labor still further. Routinizing work processes along these lines offers several benefits to managers. First, designing jobs so that each worker repeatedly performs a limited number of tasks according to instructions provided by management increases efficiency, through both greater speed and lower costs. Second, it results in products of uniform quality. And its final and most enticing promise is that of giving management increased control over the enterprise.

These systems for dividing and routinizing work were conceived for manual labor and were first widely implemented in manufacturing; therefore most sociological work on routinization has been based on studies of this sector (e.g., Blauner 1964; Burawoy 1979; Sabel 1982). As the clerical work force grew in importance, the principles of routinization were applied to what had been considered "brain work," transforming some clerical functions into rote manual tasks and reducing the scope, variety, and opportunity for decision making in many jobs (see Braverman 1974; Garson 1975; Glenn and Feldberg 1979a; Mills 1951). In recent years the service sector has come increasingly to dominate the U.S. economy (Mills 1986; Noyelle 1987; Smith 1984), and the routinization of jobs that require workers to interact directly with customers or clients—what I call "interactive service work"—has been expanding as well, challenging

employers to find ways to rationalize[1] workers' self-presentation and feelings as well as their behavior. As routinization spills over the boundaries of organizations to include customers as well as employees, employers' strategies for controlling work affect not only workers but the culture at large.

Although many of the rationales, techniques, and outcomes associated with routinizing other kinds of work are applicable to interactive service work, the presence of customers or clients complicates the routinization process considerably. When people are the raw materials of the work process, it is difficult to guarantee the predictability of conditions necessary for routinization. Organizations attempting routinization must try to standardize the behavior of nonemployees to some extent in order to make such routinization possible (see Mills 1986). It is part of the labor process of many interactive service workers to induce customers and clients to behave in ways that will not interfere with the smooth operation of work routines.

In addition to the issues of deskilling, autonomy, and power already associated with work routinization, the routinization of interactive service work raises questions about personal identity and authenticity. In this sort of work there are no clear distinctions among the product being sold, the work process, and the worker. Employers of interactive service workers may therefore claim authority over many more aspects of workers' lives than other kinds of employers do, seeking to regulate workers' appearance, moods, demeanors, and attitudes. But even when management makes relatively little effort to reshape the workers, interactive service workers and their customers or clients must negotiate interactions in which elements of manipulation, ritual, and genuine social exchange are subtly mixed.

Routinized interactive service work thus involves working on people in two senses. The workers work on the people who are their raw materials, including themselves, and the organizations work on their employees.[2] These processes can be problematic, both practically and morally. This book explores these practical difficulties and moral and psychological stresses through case studies of two

1. Here, as in Max Weber's work, "rationalization" means the use of abstract rules and precise calculations to organize social action to meet given ends.

2. For managerial views on the distinctive features of interactive service work, see, e.g., Lovelock 1988; McCallum and Harrison 1985; Normann 1984.

organizations that have taken the routinization of interactive service work to extremes, McDonald's and Combined Insurance.

ROUTINES AND RESISTANCE

The literature on work routinization is centrally concerned with the relative power of employers and workers. Braverman's influential account of work routinization as a process of deskilling (1974) presents the struggle for control in its starkest terms. When workers rather than employers are most knowledgeable about how best to accomplish tasks, management does not have absolute control over the work process: how long tasks take; how many people are required to do a job; how much work can reasonably be completed in one shift. When management determines exactly how every task is to be done, it loses much of its dependence on the cooperation and good faith of workers and can impose its own rules about pace, output, quality, and technique. Moreover, since the removal of skill from jobs makes workers increasingly interchangeable, management's power to dictate wages, hours, and working conditions is expanded.

Among the most serious criticisms of Braverman's account is that it overstates the capacity of management to get its own way (Friedman 1977; Littler 1990; Thompson 1989). Historical and sociological research has documented the capacity of workers acting individually and collectively to resist managerial plans in ways that affect how routinization is implemented or even undermine it altogether (e.g., Edwards 1979; Halle 1984; Montgomery 1979; Paules 1991). The amended picture depicts workplaces in which the interests of workers and employers are, almost invariably, directly at odds, with outcomes determined by the resources each group has at its disposal in the struggle for control.

This revised account is still inadequate, however, for understanding interactive service work. There, the basic dynamic of labor and management struggling for control over the work process is complicated by the direct involvement of service-recipients: customers or clients, respondents or patients, prospects or passengers.[3] All three parties are trying to arrange the interactions to their own advantage,

3. There is no commonly used term for the nonemployees involved in service interactions. I will frequently use the inelegant term "service-recipients" for this generic category, since, unlike "customers" or "clients," it can include people involved in noncommercial or nonvoluntary interactions. It is not an ideal term,

whether they want to maximize speed, convenience, pleasantness, efficiency, customization of service, degree of exertion, or any other outcome they feel to be beneficial. And in many instances the interests of workers are at odds with those of management. Telephone companies want each operator to handle as many calls as possible, while operators prefer a less harried pace; employers insist that the customer is always right, while workers who deal with the public want to defend their own dignity when faced with customers who behave outrageously. In other circumstances, however, workers' and management's common goals, especially their mutual interest in exerting control over service-recipients, are at least as salient as their differences.[4] For example, commission salespeople are as eager to maximize sales as their bosses are, and nurses and other medical workers want patients to cooperate with hospital regimens. Whether workers ally themselves primarily with service-recipients or with management in a given situation depends on the type of service being rendered, the design of the service system, and the preferences of those involved.

This variability suggests that we need a more nuanced understanding of the meanings of routines for workers than the sociological literature provides. There is a high degree of consensus among analysts on how routinization affects workers: it oppresses them. It robs their work of interest and variety, it eliminates the opportunity for workers to use and develop their capacities by solving problems and making decisions, and it prevents them from deriving self-worth, meaning, or deep satisfaction from work by detaching it from workers' wills (see, e.g., Braverman 1974; Garson 1975, 1988). Routinizing interactive service work seems to extend this oppression to deeper levels. Hochschild (1983) has shown in the case of flight attendants how regulating what she calls "emotion work" legitimizes employers' intervention in the very thought processes and emotional reactions of workers, alienating workers from their feelings, their faces, and their moods.

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however, since some types of participants, such as survey respondents, do not receive any service.

4. The point is, not that the contradiction between the interests of workers and management under capitalism disappears under some circumstances, but merely that in a given work process both parties may have interests that are served by a similar outcome.

The heroes of the historical and sociological literature on routinization are the workers who resist, those who do not allow the "time-study man" to observe them (Montgomery 1979: 115), who refuse to smile (Hochschild 1983), or who insist on their right to their own style (Benson 1986). The literature seems to assume that those who do not resist are nevertheless discontented. It is true that some workers report themselves to be satisfied with their tightly scripted jobs, even to enjoy them. Such workers, a theoretical embarrassment to critics of routinization, can be understood in two ways. One possibility is that management has succeeded in duping them, perhaps by leading them to value the limited rewards available to them, perhaps by persuading them to accept at face value managerial schemes that merely give the appearance of choice or influence to workers (Howard 1985). The other is that the workers' satisfaction reflects the absence of an alternative model or vision of what work can be, a void which leaves workers with no basis for comparison that would make clear how paltry are the satisfactions for which they have settled (Mills 1951).

Rather than assuming that workers who do not resist routines are either miserable or duped, it would seem more fruitful to consider whether there are circumstances in which routines, even imposed routines, can be useful to workers. In the case of interactive service workers, this question is closely tied to how the interests of the three parties to the service interactions—workers, management, service-recipients—are aligned. Workers have good reason to embrace any imposed routines they see as expanding their ability to control service interactions. The insurance agents I studied, for example, believed that their routines gave them power in sales encounters and helped maximize their sales commissions. When workers do not see the routines as enhancing control over service-recipients, they are more likely to resist standardization, as did many of the fast-food workers I studied. Some, however, accepted and even welcomed tight scripting, for, in addition to sparing them some kinds of effort and clarifying the standards for good work, the routines could act as shields against the insults and indignities these workers were asked to accept from the public.

Although the presence of service-recipients can provide a motivation for workers to cooperate with routinization, managers of interactive service workers are not necessarily more successful than other types of managers in seeing that the work is done according

to their designs. Even when workers do their best to implement routines as management would like, there is no guarantee that service-recipients will do the same. A major feature distinguishing routinized interactive service work from other kinds of routinized work is the requirement that the behavior of nonemployees be standardized to some extent. In some circumstances service-recipients do their best to fit smoothly into routines, perhaps because they believe that doing so is the surest way for them to get the service they want, perhaps because they feel they have little choice. Some service-recipients, however, resist routines.

Resistance is especially likely when the service-recipients have not chosen to become involved in the interaction (as in many types of sales), but it is also common when the service-recipients do not believe that compliance will get them the outcome they want, either because they think the routine is badly designed or ill-suited to the circumstances, or because they want customized service. Even cooperative service-recipients can inadvertently upset routines if they are unable to understand how the routine is supposed to work, if they are unable to play their part correctly, or if the routine is ill-suited to their situation. The workers of both McDonald's and Combined Insurance dealt with some service-recipients who were cooperative and some who were not, but their typical experiences differed sharply. The counter workers dealt exclusively with people who had already decided to do business with McDonald's, most of whom were very familiar with the service routine and wanted to play their parts smoothly. The insurance agents called on "prospects," many of whom would have preferred to be left alone and some of whom made clear that they did not want the service interaction to proceed at all.

In any setting, whether service-recipients are more eager than workers to see that the routine is followed correctly or are motivated to keep the workers from carrying out the routine at all, their behavior is never entirely predictable. Organizations have a variety of means of standardizing service-recipients' actions. Cues in the setting, printed directions, and taken-for-granted norms may provide sufficient order, since tailoring behavior to meet the needs of anonymous, bureaucratic organizations is a common enough experience for most adults in the United States. When the task is more difficult or the service-recipients more recalcitrant, it is likely to be up to interactive service workers to guide or pressure them to behave in

organizationally convenient ways. As Stinchcombe (1990a) has noted, "ethnomethodological competence," the capacity to make use of unspoken norms of behavior to control interactions, is an occupational qualification for many jobs. By scripting interactions, employers can try to limit their reliance on the ethnomethodological competence of their workers.[5] The routines of Combined's agents were expressly designed to give the agents control over the sales interactions, showing them how to use words, gestures, and demeanors to overcome resistance. At McDonald's, in contrast, the routines were intended to constrain the workers more than the customers. While these two sets of workers had different organizational weapons at their disposal, both had to face some service-recipients who seemed intent on thwarting the routines or on interfering with the workers' preferences about how to proceed.

Interactive service workers are located on the boundaries of organizations, where they must mediate between the organization and outsiders. They have to try, simultaneously, to meet their employer's requirements, to satisfy the demands of service-recipients, and to minimize their own discomfort (see Glenn and Feldberg 1979b; Lipsky 1980; Prottas 1979). Corporate spokespeople, employee trainers, and other professional cheerleaders frequently make the case that the interests of the three groups are harmonious, since all benefit from efficient and amicable service interactions. In fact, though, there is a great deal of variation in how closely the preferences of the three parties are aligned. The degree of congruity of interests determines much of the character of an interactive service job: its degree of difficulty, the nature of jobholders' incentives and disincentives, and the quality of relations between workers and service-recipients.

The rules set down by management often require that interactive service workers displease service-recipients, either because the routine does not allow workers the flexibility to meet customers' requests, because the service-recipient does not want to participate in the interaction at all, or because the logic of the routine runs counter to interactive norms. Service-recipients can become frustrated by their inability to get what they want, and they may perceive the workers as pushy, unresponsive, stupid, or robot-like. In

5. Problems arise, however, when strict routinization prevents workers from using the ethnomethodological competence they already have.

any case, even if the dissatisfaction felt by the service-recipient is attributable to the rules set down by the employer, it is likely to be experienced by the service-recipient as the fault of the worker, and it is the worker who has to deal with the problem. Interactive service workers thus serve as buffers, absorbing the hostilities consumers feel when organizational routines do not meet their needs or expectations (Glenn and Feldberg 1979b: 12–13).

In interactive service work, as in other kinds of work, understanding employers' designs for routinization is only the first step in understanding how the routines function in practice. We must also examine how employers try to persuade or coerce the relevant actors (in this case, service-recipients as well as workers) to cooperate and how the behavior of these actors, and other contingencies, alter the routines in action. In interactive service work, the patterns of shared and opposed preferences among the three parties to the interactions are crucial determinants of the outcomes, including the degree to which workers and service-recipients resist organizational attempts to standardize their behavior.

ROUTINE INDIVIDUALITY

In speaking of workers and service-recipients acting on their preferences, I do not mean to imply that they are necessarily guided by conscious decisions about how to maximize material interests. Among the greatest obstacles to successful routinization of interactive service work, and among the most troubling difficulties it raises for participants, are tensions between the self-conceptions of service-recipients and workers and the ways they are treated and are called upon to treat others. The practices of routinization call into question taken-for-granted norms about social interaction and deeply felt beliefs about authenticity, individuality, and personal integrity. Not only does the routinization of interactive service work complicate the problems of alienation traditionally associated with the elimination of self-direction from work, but it alters cultural understandings of acceptable conduct toward others and manipulation of self.

Employers who routinize interactive service work seek to legitimate intervention into areas of workers' lives usually considered to be the prerogative of individual decision-making or to comprise aspects of individual character and personality. Employers may try to specify exactly how workers look, exactly what they say, their

demeanors, their gestures, their moods, even their thoughts. The means available for standardizing interactions include scripting; uniforms or detailed dress codes; rules and guidelines for dealing with service-recipients and sometimes with co-workers; instruction in how best to think about the work, the service-recipients, and oneself; and manipulation of values and attitudes through consciously constructed corporate cultures and through training programs that provide indoctrination. Surveillance and a range of incentives and disincentives can be used to encourage or enforce compliance (see, e.g., Albrecht and Zemke 1985; Biggart 1989; Fuller and Smith 1991; Hochschild 1983; Howard 1985; Van Maanen and Kunda 1989).[6]

The routinization of human interactions is undoubtedly disconcerting, and reports or satires of the latest instances are common in popular culture. *Harper's*, for instance, regularly documents examples of routinization in both commercial and private life. The sources of these reports are varied, and the routines were designed to serve a broad range of purposes, which are not always the purposes of those to whom the standardization is applied. The script for operators of a New York phone-sex service, for instance, specifies that they tell callers whose time is up, "Sorry, tiger, but your Dream Girl has to go. . . . Call right back and ask for me" (December 1990: 26). A letter-writing kit for military personnel provides parents with a monthly schedule of sample topics and messages for letters to their children, such as these ideas for January: "Tell about your coldest day. Draw your favorite snowman's face. P.S.: 'Keep warm!' " (May 1991: 28). The guidelines on personal appearance for employees of Walt Disney World include the dictum, "Fingernails should not extend more than one-fourth of an inch beyond the fingertips" (June 1990: 40). Managers who are not sufficiently wily by nature can consult a pamphlet on how to inspire fear with "power strategies based on the unknown," such as inquiring, "Wasn't that tried someplace else, where it flopped?" (March 1991: 24). Timid people uncomfortable with mingling can turn to the section on "Great Opening Lines" in *How to Work a Room* for such suggestions as "Are you

6. Since disgruntled interactive service workers are often well-situated to sabotage organizational objectives through their treatment of service-recipients (see Benson 1986; Fuller and Smith 1991), their employers may be more inclined than others to court workers' consent using persuasion, indoctrination, and incentives rather than to enforce standardization through coercion.

alone by choice or by chance?" (January 1990: 26). And tongue-tied lovers with no Cyrano to do their wooing may subscribe to a romantic monthly letter-writing service, so that they need only insert the name of their beloved in the prepared text that begins "My dearest, sweetest F3" (February 1989: 26).[7] *Harper's* prints these texts without interpretation or comment, other than droll headlines such as "The Relationship Is in the Mail" and "The One-Minute Machiavelli." Whether readers are amused or appalled, they will presumably see something ludicrous in the excerpts. Collectively, these excerpts tell us that no detail is too trivial, no relationship too personal, no experience too individual, no manipulation too cynical for some organization or person, in a spirit of helpfulness or efficiency, to try to provide a standard, replicable routine for it.

These scripts and instructions make various kinds of assumptions, some more morally problematic than others, about the actor and the target audience, but they raise interconnected questions about the status of the self and the treatment to which others are entitled. When scripts and rules of self-presentation are imposed on workers, the questions concern the relative boundaries of legitimate employer intervention and worker autonomy and privacy. Disney World employees are asked to fit themselves to a corporate image that has been specified down to the fingernails. The phone-sex operators are not strictly limited to scripted conversation, but they have to manage to combine expression of erotic interest and involvement with attention to profit maximization and bureaucratic details of time-keeping. They, like virtually all followers of scripts, have to dissemble. So do people who choose to use scripts in personal or professional life for mingling, letter-writing, or corporate game-playing. This acting, whether it involves the simulation of a feeling that is entirely absent or merely the pretense that the expression of an emotion is spontaneous, involves a degree of emotional self-management and a willingness to be less than straightforward with the intended audience.

7. The original sources for these excerpts are: training manual for operators of 970-LIVE, a phone-sex service in New York City; the instruction booklet for the Military Edition of The Write Connection Program, created by Positive Parenting of Phoenix, Arizona, at the request of the U.S. Navy; "The Disney Look," guidebook for employees of Walt Disney World; Susan RoAne, *How to Work a Room: A Guide to Successfully Managing the Mingling* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1988), 89; "The Office Manager's Handbook of People Power Strategies," pamphlet published by Prentice Hall Professional Newsletters, Englewood, N.J.; letter mailed to subscribers of Incurable Romantics, New York, 1988.

The deception of the audience is sometimes completely self-interested (the "power strategies"), but it may be intended generously (the letters to children). The fact of the scripting or emotion work need not always be hidden. The phone-sex callers, we may assume, are aware that their Dream Girls are acting as part of their job, although to get the most out of the service the callers may persuade themselves otherwise. In other circumstances the script works only if the audience is persuaded that the interaction is not planned, manipulative, or routine at all, as in the display to a loved one of apparently spontaneous and sincere feelings. Almost all scripting of interactions, regardless of motive and degree of deception, is based on some unflattering premises about the intended audience. Routinization assumes that people are largely interchangeable, that they are not deserving of sincerity, possibly that they can easily be duped, assumptions that are more offensive in some contexts than others.

Since the targets of scripted exchanges are also participants, they must decide what stance to take in response. When the scripting is obvious, they can choose to play along or not, perhaps withdrawing their participation, perhaps trying to make contact with the actor instead of the role, perhaps judging the skill of the performance. They may not mind the scripting—the carefully rehearsed mingler may sound stilted to the listener, but who doesn't in such situations?—or they may take offense—"Does he expect me to fall for that line?" Service-recipients may appreciate routinization if they feel that it offers reliable service, relieves them from the obligation to provide any emotional investment in the interaction, or ensures equitable treatment to all.

However, in many cases service-recipients resent being treated as interchangeable. They are more concerned with satisfaction than with equity, and they want to feel that they are engaged in a real conversation with a real person who listens to them. As Roman (1979: 15) warns in a book on telemarketing:

> Paradoxically, as the consumer has become part of a conditioned mass market, he or she has also become more demanding in insisting on being regarded as a unique individual whose own special personal needs must be attended to.

It is indeed a challenge to construct scripts for dealing with someone who "regards himself as a highly special individual and will react favorably only to those who treat him as such" (Roman 1979: 15),

but employers have gamely sought ways to graft personalizing touches onto standard interactions. In such cases, part of the employees' work is likely to be sugar-coating or concealing the routinization.

When the service-recipient has any doubt about the spontaneity or uniqueness of the interaction, choosing a response can be tricky. If one assumes sincerity and responds accordingly, there is the danger of being a trusting fool, allowing oneself to be manipulated. Suspicion and aloofness, on the other hand, cut one off from potentially gratifying human contact. Responding in kind to surface cues despite recognition that the situation is contrived, an interim strategy, is problematic as well. It signals acceptance of the terms of the interaction although one might in fact resent them.

And what about the actors themselves? What does participation in routinized interactions do to their sense of self? Employers who manage the self-presentations and emotions of employees are aware that they must pay attention to the relation between the workers' self-conceptions and their behavior on the job. While airlines try to get their flight attendants to throw themselves fully into the cheerful, solicitous, unresentful persona assigned to them (Hochschild 1983), the employers of the phone-sex operators are apparently conscious that role distance (Goffman 1961b) can provide protection from any demeaning implications of fulfilling others' fantasies. "Remember," they counsel in the "Professionalism" section of the employee manual, "you are not your character on the phone" (*Harper's*, December 1990: 27).

Sociologists need not believe in the existence of unmediated emotional responses or of an inviolate individual with a stable core of self in order to recognize that participation in routinized interactions presents dilemmas of identity. When such participation is a condition of employment, as it is for many interactive service workers, these dilemmas are everyday concerns.

First, there is the problem of managing the disjunction between actions and feelings. Hochschild (1983: 7) argues that workers whose emotions are managed by their employers become alienated from their feelings in a process parallel to that described by Marx of the alienation of proletarians from the actions of their bodies and the products of their labor. These workers thus have difficulty experiencing themselves as authentic even off the job, for they lose track of which feelings are their own. As Wharton and Erickson (1990: 21) argue, "An essential facet of experiencing one's self as

real is the congruence between action and self-feeling regarding that action." How able are workers to maintain a sense of self when their actions do not reflect their feelings, or when their feelings are manipulated to produce the desired effect?

Second, there is the question of the content of the routinized behavior, the ways the worker is required to act. Some workers' routines call upon them to take on characteristics they may value, such as patience, good cheer, or self-confidence, but in other cases the required behavior is more problematic. Because we read character from actions, workers who must behave in ways they ordinarily would not somehow have to reconcile the contradictions between their self-conception and their behavior. Can they manipulate people without thinking of themselves as underhanded and disrespectful? Can they stifle their ordinary responses without thinking of themselves as doormats? The problem of detaching oneself from the implications of work behavior is not unique to interactive service workers whose jobs have been routinized. All interactive service workers—salespeople, clergy, teachers, doctors, waitresses, and so on—face similar tensions, whether or not their jobs are scripted and standardized. But routinization calls attention to the inauthenticity, thus heightening the discordance between workers' self-identities and the identities they enact at work.

Problems of identity are raised by how interactive service workers are treated as well as by how they behave, and routinization can shape the interactive style of service-recipients. Sociologists do not generally hold that identity can be created and maintained autonomously. As Cooley's idea of the "looking glass self" (1902) and Mead's elaboration of the sources of self in interaction (1934) convey, people's self-conceptions are shaped by the treatment they are accorded. A sense of self is formed in childhood, but throughout life it remains vulnerable to messages from others. If car salespeople are treated with suspicion (Lawson 1991), phone solicitors with rudeness, restaurant servers with condescension or familiarity, domestic servants as non-people (Rollins 1985), how will they react? Certainly they need not accept the implied judgment of the service-recipients. But they must construct some means of defending themselves from demeaning treatment or some account that allows them to accept such treatment without thinking of themselves as demeaned. Hochschild (1983) stresses the difficulties of protecting oneself from the implications of treatment on the job, but Hughes

(1984 [1970]) and Rollins (1985) show how "the humble" can salvage a sense of control and self-esteem or even construe themselves as superior to "the proud." My account acknowledges both workers' agency in interpreting their own behavior and the treatment they receive from others, and the constraints that the conditions of employment set on the possible range of workers' interpretations and responses.

Routines may actually offer interactive service workers some protection from assaults on their selves. Where workers are often exposed to rude, insulting, or depersonalizing treatment from service-recipients, routines can make that treatment easier to bear. Workers who follow scripts need not feel that they are being personally attacked when they are subjected to slammed phones, nasty comments, or tirades about poor service. Employers often provide training in how to think about and respond to poor treatment. Philadelphia's parking authority workers, for example, receive instruction on how to react to being spit on by people angry at receiving a ticket (Matza 1990: 19).

Whether or not workers appreciate all or some aspects of routinization, they have available a range of possible responses to it. They may reshape their self-concept to fit what they see as a positive new identity (see Biggart 1989 on direct sales workers); hold on to their own identity but set it aside at work, where they assume a new "situational identit[y]" (Van Maanen and Kunda 1989: 68); try to alter or vary the routine to reflect their own will and personality; distance themselves from the work role by willing "emotional numbness" (Van Maanen and Kunda 1989: 69); or interpret their own behavior and the treatment they receive in ways that are positive or at least neutral. Which of these responses are used depends not only on the workers' personal characteristics but also on the nature of the service interactions designed by their employers. Almost inevitably, however, their jobs require them to take an instrumental approach to their own identity and to relations with others.

THE RESEARCH

I did not choose to study McDonald's and Combined Insurance because I thought they were typical interactive service organizations. Rather, both companies took routinization to an extreme, and I was interested in examining how far working on people could be

pushed. I believed that extreme cases would best illuminate the kinds of tensions and problems that routinizing human interactions creates, and that a study of long-established and successful companies would provide clues to the attractions of routinization and the means by which managers can overcome the difficulties of standardizing workers and service-recipients.

Although these two companies both pushed routinization almost to its logical limits, their public-contact employees did very different kinds of work and had different kinds of relations with service-recipients. The companies therefore adopted dissimilar approaches to routinization, with distinctive ramifications for workers and service-recipients. McDonald's took a classic approach to routinization, making virtually all decisions about how work would be conducted in advance and imposing them on workers. Since Combined's sales agents worked on their own and faced a broader range of responses than McDonald's workers did, their company had to allow them some decision-making scope. It did create routines that were as detailed as possible, but it pushed the limits of routinization in another direction, extending it to many aspects of workers' selves both on and off the job. It aimed to make a permanent, overall change in the ways its agents thought about themselves and went about their lives.

At each company, I collected information through interviewing and participant-observation. I examined routinization at two levels. First, I learned as much as I could about the company's goals and strategies for routinization by attending corporate training programs and interviewing executives. Next, I explored how the routines worked out in practice by doing or observing the work and by interviewing interactive service workers.

At both McDonald's and Combined Insurance I received official permission to do my research. The managers I interviewed, the trainees I accompanied through classes, and the workers I interviewed, observed, and worked with were all aware that I was conducting a study and that my project had been approved by higher levels of management.[8] The customers I served and observed were the only participants who did not know that I was collecting data.

I carried out my research at McDonald's in the spring through

8. Pseudonyms are used throughout the text, except for top-level officials of McDonald's and Combined Insurance.

fall of 1986. I began by attending management training classes at corporate headquarters. Next, managers at the regional office arranged my placement at a franchise that was apparently chosen largely on the basis of its convenience for me. The manager of the franchise arranged for me to be trained to serve customers; once trained, I worked without pay for half a dozen shifts, or a total of about twenty-eight hours of work. I then conducted structured interviews with workers who served customers, obtaining twenty-three complete interviews, as well as several that were incomplete for a variety of reasons. I also spent long hours hanging around in the crew room, where I talked informally with workers, including those not in customer-service jobs, and listened as workers talked with each other about their job experiences and their reactions to those experiences. I supplemented the participant-observation and worker interviews with interviews or informal talks with most of the franchise managers and its owner, with management trainers, with a former McDonald's executive who had been in charge of employee research, and with numerous former employees and current customers of McDonald's.

Most of my research at Combined Insurance was conducted in the winter and spring of 1987. I received permission to study the work of its life-insurance agents and was assigned a place in a training class. When the two-week training period ended I was put in touch with a regional sales manager who arranged for me to work with a sales team. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of ways this team may have been atypical.) Because one must be licensed to sell insurance, I did not actually do the agent's job, but I spent a week and a half in the field with the sales team, going out on sales calls with each of its members in turn. Since these daily rounds included a lot of time spent driving from one prospective customer to another, I had ample opportunity for informal interviews with the agents. I also conducted a formal interview with the sales manager, and I attended an evening team training meeting and two morning team meetings, one of which was attended by the district manager. In addition, I interviewed several Combined Insurance executives, including a vice president in charge of introducing a new sales presentation, a regional sales manager, the director of market research and one of his assistants, and a manager responsible for developing sales routines and materials.

In the summer of 1989, I conducted follow-up interviews at

Combined Insurance to learn about major changes the company had made in its life insurance products and sales approach. I reinterviewed the director of market research and the man who had been the regional sales manager but who now was responsible for overseeing one-half of the company's life-insurance agents. I also interviewed two regional sales managers, one the man who now managed the region where the sales team I had studied was located, and one located in a part of the country where the new sales system had been introduced more recently. The follow-up research allowed me to learn about the subsequent careers of the agents I had known and, more important, to find out how the agents' jobs and the company's results had changed under the new sales system.[9]

I supplemented my research at these two companies by gathering information on other kinds of interactive service work through interviews, site visits, and examination of employee scripts. I visited a Burger King training facility and interviewed a training manager there; I interviewed an executive from Hyatt Hotels and attended an orientation session for Hyatt workers; and I interviewed people who worked, or had worked, as an AT&T customer service representative, a waitress, a door-to-door canvasser, and a psychologist.[10]

OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 lays out the main obstacles to routinizing interactive service work and the strategies organizations have employed to try to overcome them. One obstacle arises from the difficulty of defining quality in the provision of services. Routinization is intended to ensure consistency in the quality of work, but, as Garson (1988: 60) asks, "Is a more uniform conversation a positive good?" Can consistency be equated with high quality? Since workers cannot be separated from products in interactive service work, the question next arises: how much intervention in workers' lives is justifiable in order to ensure a uniform appearance, attitude, and work process?

A separate problem is that the raw materials of interactive service work, people, are never entirely predictable, and routinization makes sense only if stable conditions of work can be guaranteed. Given the intrinsic fluidity, negotiability, and indexicality of interaction

9. See Appendix 2.
10. For further details of the research process, see Appendix 1.

(see Prus 1989a), how can prepared scripts replace flexible individual response? A service interaction must work on two levels: as a work process with a specific goal, and as a human interaction. The danger in routinizing human interactions is that if workers do not, or are not allowed to, respond flexibly, form may come to supersede meaning, thus increasing the likelihood of failure on both levels. In other words, rigid routines strictly enforced can actually prevent workers from doing an adequate job, harming both customer satisfaction and employee morale (Koepp 1987b; Normann 1984).

Employers have responded to these dilemmas in several ways, as I show in Chapter 2. First, they employ a variety of strategies intended to reduce the unpredictability of work specifications by standardizing the behavior of service-recipients. Second, they try to overcome resistance to mass-produced service by finding ways to personalize routines, or to seem to personalize them. Finally, in circumstances where too much unpredictability remains to make it possible to dispense with worker flexibility, employers may use a strategy I call "routinization by transformation," which is intended to change workers into the kinds of people who will make decisions that management would approve. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of how managers' and workers' efforts to control interactive work processes are complicated by the participation of service-recipients.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide descriptions and analyses of how McDonald's and Combined Insurance, respectively, go about routinizing the work of employees who deal with the public. Each chapter gives an overview of the company, describes its training process in detail, and examines how the routines work out in practice, noting how actual working conditions and procedures compared to the companies' stated policies and goals.

The processes of routinization at McDonald's and Combined Insurance were similar in many ways, despite the dissimilarity of their products and organizations. Both companies were faced with the two basic challenges of routinizing interactive service work: to standardize the behavior of employees, and to control the behavior of customers. Both companies paid close attention to how their workers looked, spoke, and felt, rather than limiting standardization to the performance of physical tasks. Emotion work was an integral part of serving McDonald's food and selling Combined's insurance, and smiling was a job requirement shared by the food-service workers

and the insurance agents. Both groups were expected to behave deferentially and to try to please their customers.

Nevertheless, the jobs were dissimilar enough to allow a comparison of differing approaches to routinization practicable in different circumstances. Some of the major distinctions between the two cases were the extent of efforts to affect workers' personalities, the gender of the workers, and the degree of supervision. Moreover, the companies' routines varied greatly in scope and content, since interactions at McDonald's are briefer and less dependent on workers' initiative than insurance sales calls. Many of the differences between the two jobs stemmed from differences in the predictability of service-recipients' behavior and demands. This variable influenced the complexity of the work routines and the nature of the relations between workers and service-recipients. Where the behavior of service-recipients is relatively unpredictable, interactive service workers may be responsible for getting them to cooperate, as was the case at Combined Insurance.

Mills regards customers as subordinates of service providers (1986: 121), but the extent to which they were experienced as such varied greatly in these cases. Both the food-service workers and the insurance agents had to sell and to serve, but their jobs differed in the emphasis placed on each. Service-recipients therefore played very different roles in the interactions. At McDonald's the work was done for them, while at Combined Insurance the work seemed to be done to them. Variation in the nature of the worker-customer relation helps explain several important differences between the two cases, including differences in the types of attitudes workers were expected to cultivate, the range of personal qualities subject to standardization, the scope of decision making left in the job, and workers' reactions to routinization.

As Chapter 5 shows, the two cases also differed markedly in how the interests of managers, workers, and service-recipients were aligned. These variations were determined in part by managers' decisions about how to set up routines, how to compensate workers, and how to balance customer satisfaction with efficiency and profitability. Both companies tried to ensure that the workers would take the customers' interests as their own, while defining the customers' interests in ways that were organizationally convenient, but the degree to which the three parties actually shared interests varied. At McDonald's, customers and managers generally had similar

preferences about how the interactions were to proceed, which limited the workers' range of action. Combined's agents and management, by contrast, shared an interest in controlling prospective customers in order to maximize sales. For this reason, Combined's agents' routines enhanced their power over customers, while McDonald's workers' limited theirs. In each setting, however, there were many specific situations in which the interests of the three parties parted from these general patterns, and these shifting stakes helped determine the outcomes of the carefully planned routines imposed by management. Chapter 5 documents how those routines worked out in practice.

Throughout the book, the relevant contrasts are not only those between these two jobs, but also those between routinized interactive service work and other kinds of routinized work, and those between routinized service interactions and nonroutinized interactions. The special character of routinized interactive service work is the focus of Chapter 6, which examines the ramifications of routinization for authenticity and identity, including gender identity. I discuss the dilemmas raised for workers' sense of themselves and the range of workers' responses to routinization. These responses varied both between the two companies and, especially at McDonald's, within the company. In each setting, some workers resisted in various ways the identities imposed on them, and others embraced the routines and willingly took on the persona prepared for them by the company.

The degree to which workers can benefit from embracing routines depends largely on the kinds of relations among workers, managers, and service-recipients that routines set up. How particular individuals weigh the benefits and drawbacks of the routines and how they respond to them is more complicated. The meanings workers assign to their own behavior at work and to that of the managers and service-recipients they work with are to some degree fluid and indeterminate. Workers interpret actions, their own and others', and the interpretations they construct, often with the guidance and influence of their employers and their peers, can heighten or mitigate dissatisfaction, allow for some satisfactions and close off others, and lead workers to evade or to embrace their imposed routines.

To underline the importance of interpretation in shaping workers' responses to their jobs, Chapter 6 provides an extended analysis of

the construction of gender meanings in the two jobs. I show that when jobs are segregated by gender, workers can interpret similar job characteristics as suitable either for men or for women, as they try to make sense of the existing pattern of employment or to bolster their sense of entitlement to the job. Despite the scripting of their words and actions, both they and the public can interpret workers' behavior as expressing preexisting gender differences that account for the gendered division of labor.

The concluding chapter draws out the implications of routinizing service interactions, arguing that employers who standardize these labor processes exert a cultural influence that extends beyond the workplace. Their organizational control strategies reach deeply into the lives of workers, encouraging them to take an instrumental stance toward their own personalities and toward other people. Moreover, service routines subject people who are not employees of service organizations to organizational efforts to standardize their behavior. Through participation in encounters that violate the norms of social interaction even as they exploit those norms, service-recipients learn not to take for granted that the ground rules that govern interaction will be respected. As they adjust their expectations and behavior accordingly, the ceremonial forms that bolster individual identity (Goffman 1956) and social cohesion (Durkheim 1965 [1915]) tend to be treated as indulgences rather than obligations.

My analysis of interactive service work addresses several shortcomings of the literature on work and routinization. Sociologists of work have not kept pace with the rapid shift of jobs out of manufacturing. Despite some excellent studies of service jobs (e.g., Biggart 1989; Hochschild 1983), generalizations about work under capitalism have not been recast to encompass interactive service work. The enormous increase in the proportion of the labor force engaged in service occupations is widely acknowledged, but models derived from industrial work continue to guide the thinking and research of theorists of the labor process.[11] In these models, workers and

11. Braverman (1974) set the pattern. He acknowledged the significance of the rise in service employment but stressed similarities in how manufacturing, clerical, and service jobs have been organized to deskill workers. Although many defects in his analysis have been identified and corrected by subsequent writers (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979; Littler and Salaman 1982), Braverman's emphasis on the general attributes of labor under capitalism and the common features of work in different settings still characterizes much discussion in this field. Two recent reconsiderations of labor-process theory (Knights and Willmott 1990;

capitalists (or managers) are the relevant parties, the creation and sale of a product is the focus of analysis, and workers' attitudes and emotions are relevant only insofar as they affect willingness to accept the conditions of work. When these models are applied to interactive service work, we find that some of the basic analytic distinctions fit awkwardly at best and that important areas of inquiry are overlooked. The role of service-recipients in the labor process is not analogous to that of either workers or managers, for example, and the manipulation of participants' selves cannot be satisfactorily analyzed as a form of deskilling.[12]

My approach to analyzing routinization takes from the labor-process tradition its emphases on concrete work practices and on issues of control and autonomy. Early work in that tradition has been criticized for overstating employers' success in imposing work routines and for assuming that these routines necessarily serve the goals management intended (see Littler 1990). Such oversimplifications are untenable when applied to interactive service work, where not only workers but service-recipients vie with management in a three-way contest for control and satisfaction. My analysis highlights the various means by which each party tries to exert control and the shifting patterns of alliance among them, allowing for a relatively fine-grained consideration of outcomes. In sharp contrast to the traditional picture of routinization, my analysis shows that, in some situations, service routines provide workers and service-recipients with benefits that help account for their frequent acquiescence in managerial designs.

A major shortcoming of labor-process theory is its unsatisfactory

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Thompson 1989) fail to explore the theoretical difficulties raised by service work. Noyelle's recent work (1987) generates useful propositions about service firms, but he gives little attention to the nature of the work process or to workers' experiences.

12. Although sociologists have been slow to give full weight to the distinctive aspects of labor processes in service jobs, the management literature on service work has boomed. Some early work on managing services stressed the possibilities for extending industrial methods of production and assessment to service provision (e.g., Levitt 1972). Soon, however, writers advising managers came to focus on the peculiar attributes of service work, examining such questions as how to define quality in a service, how to manage customers' expectations, and how to inspire front-line workers (Albrecht 1988; Cziepel, Solomon, and Suprenant 1985; Heskett, Sasser, and Hart 1990; Lovelock 1988; Mills 1986; Normann 1984). This trend suggests that controlling service work poses problems that methods applicable to other kinds of work do not address. However, the management literature, focusing on technique, treats a relatively narrow range of issues.

treatment of workers' subjectivity. Braverman's work (1974) excluded this topic altogether, and subsequent theorists have too often limited it to class-consciousness and consent or resistance to oppressive structures of work (Burawoy 1979; Thompson 1989).[13] As Hochschild (1983) showed, questions of subjectivity are not separable from the analysis of actual work practices in interactive service work, since workers' identities are actively managed by employers. Hochschild emphasized the distress felt by workers subjected to organizational exploitation of their feelings and personalities, but I find that not all workers resist the extension of standardization to their inner selves. Rather, many attempt to construct interpretations of their work roles that do not damage their conceptions of themselves (cf. Hughes 1984 [1951]; 1984 [1970]).

I do not take the position that the routinization of service work and the standardization of human personality that it can entail are in fact benign, benefiting workers, customers, and companies in a happy congruence of interests. Often, these manipulations are invasive, infantilizing, exasperating, demeaning. But if we are to understand how routinization works in service jobs and what outcomes it produces, we need an account of the relations among routinization, skill, control, interaction, and self that is both more precise and more subtle than we have yet been given. These outcomes of routinization are felt throughout society as participants adjust their assumptions about the norms guiding social interaction. The study of interactive service work thus provides a bridge between the sociology of work and broader examinations of culture and society.

13. Knights (1990) and Willmott (1990) take on the challenge of integrating subjectivity into labor-process theory.