

EARLY SHUT DOWNS: ROUTINE DEVIANCE OF THE WORKING DAY

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BACKGROUND

In a recent survey, Nash (1980) revealed that: "...hardly anybody works a full day on Friday...about 55 percent of those telephoned after 2 p.m. on Friday had left for the day." And, Friday is not an unusual day. Leaving early is a widespread part of people's everyday routine. The early shut down, an event of obvious importance to employees and employers, has drawn little notice from sociologists. However, studies of closing behavior and examinations of closing in conversations indicate that people invoke routines just to terminate a conversation (Schlegoff & Sacks 1974; Davidson 1974).

In exploring how people end or shut down their work day, it becomes clear that this widespread form of rule violation is orchestrated as a well-planned part of the work day. The social organization of the shut down, with its recognized deviance, has four major dimensions: 1) the transitional time period which is negotiated and understood by the participants; 2) the way the physical setting is used to support the negotiation; 3) the mobility of the individual; and 4) the volume of business and the division of labor in the organization.

METHOD

Data on shut downs were gathered through participant and non-participant observation and by written case descriptions of how individuals end their work day. Observations were made in a hotel, snack bar, university library, bank, supermarket, university book store, office, and a fast-food restaurant. At the hotel, participant observation continued from June through August 1969, and most recently at the book store, from January 1978 through January 1980. The researchers performed several jobs for the organizations, giving different vantage points of observation. The other organizations underwent systematic, though casual, observation for at least three years, in accordance with what Glaser and Strauss call theoretical sampling.

Case descriptions were written by 26 persons attending evening classes at a community college, chosen so as to represent 24 different occupations. The occupations include childcare, assembly-line work, cus-

tomian, sailor, bank teller, painting contractor, material handler, delicatessen worker, administrative secretary, secretary, photocopy clerk, nurse, nursing assistant, student nurse, teacher's aide, laboratory mechanic, maintenance worker, police officer, deputy sheriff, criminal investigator, jailer, floral designer, and pet-store clerk. They were asked to describe in as much detail as possible how they ended their work day.

FULL AND SEGMENTAL SHUTDOWNS

There are three types of shut downs: full, segmental, and continuous. In a full shut down, the organization comes to a complete stop. Employees leave, and the doors are locked. Business does not completely stop in the other types of shut downs. In the segmental shut down, some workers stop and others continue working. In a segmental shut down, there is no sharing of facilities. A part of the facilities are shut down when those workers leave, but other facilities continue to operate.

CONTINUOUS SHUT-DOWN TRANSITION

In shift work, there is a transition between shifts. At the hotel, the clerk of the evening shift, from 3 to 11 p.m., could leave on the arrival of the night clerk. At the start of the summer, the night clerk arrived at about 10:45 p.m. The evening shift clerk would leave immediately, but the favor was not returned by the morning shift. Therefore, the night clerk began to wait until exactly 11 p.m. to relieve the evening shift.

In other occupations, better reciprocity was found. The deputy sheriff said: "It's common respect to relieve the next man 15 minutes prior to a shift change. While I'm on the 8-4 shift, I usually come in 15 to 30 minutes early so maybe the man I relieve will show the same to me, but it doesn't always work that way."

The photocopy clerk used the transition for overlapping shifts to help finish the job early, even though the clerk must be physically on the job until 4:30 p.m. "Serious concern of the end of the day begins between 3 and 3:30 p.m. when one of the student employees is scheduled to arrive at work. When the student arrives, we usually take a few minutes to chat...I explain what

I've done and what remains to be completed...After all this is done, I usually wind up with about half an hour to kill before I can leave...I just sit down with a soft drink and watch the clock until 4:30 when I can officially end my work day."

The transition time may involve elaborate routines. A police officer says, "My shift ends at 3 p.m., but I start to end the shift at 2 p.m." He calls the dispatcher and asks for permission to go to the town lot to top off the gas tank, check the oil and battery, and record the maintenance in the log book. He may finish up an accident report before checking back to the dispatcher. "I have to work a school crossing at 2:45 p.m...but before I get out of the patrol vehicle to do the crossing, I close my briefcase and do my daily activity sheet. After finishing this sheet and the crossing, I drive to within a block of the police department so when I get called in to be relieved I can hurry and get my paperwork turned in and approved first."

In these examples, the rule governing how long individuals must work is intentionally bent. The employees negotiate around the rule with a closing routine.

Physical Setting & Blockages.

A nurse suggested the use of the structured disappearance. "At 7:10 a.m. I leave the nursery to go change from scrub clothes to uniform so I can leave the hospital at 7:15 a.m." Having left the nursery, she has left her responsibility, the babies, though technically still at work. This is a blockage to ensure that she can quit by shift's end. The police officer says he stays off the air, "...because when I check back on the air I may get a radio call to a complaint and not finish by the end of my shift." He uses the off-air time as a form of blockage to prepare for the end of the work day.

There are less obvious signs of blockage where the setting takes on a meaning of shutting down. A nursing assistant described the symbolic ending of her work day: "I always felt as if my day was over around 1 o'clock, but I did not have to sign out until 3:15. Nursing assistants were given a paper with how many patients they were to be assigned for the day and what special things were to be done. It was not to be handed in until 2:30, but I always had it turned in around 1:30...I felt my working day was over when I turned in my paper, even though I would go to talk with the

patients...to other employees...run errands, if necessary. It always seemed like a long afternoon: waiting for 3:15 to roll around."

Mobility

Clearly, the type of work affects the worker's mobility. The photocopy clerk is an off-floor worker insulated from the library users' demands, which allows for easy shut down. For the jailer, physical mobility was essential to the routine of ending the work day: "I make rounds through the jail's cell blocks and check on the prisoners...I make sure the evening meals have been started. I check to make sure all the necessary medicines have been administered. Next, I check to see if the number of people listed on the master board corresponds with the number of prisoners locked in the cells."

Volume & Division of Labor

The volume of work and the division of labor also affect negotiation. The jailer depends on the kitchen and medical staff to help bring an end to the day. The police officer needs clearance to begin his shut down, and the volume of work and the division of labor dictate whether he can begin: "...if the other officers on my shift are not out of their cars on other duties, I get permission..." (to go to the town lot).

In the continuous shut down, information is often passed on to the next shift. The jailer and the nurses indicated that reports were made to incoming shifts. The division of labor aids the ending of the day by helping to complete the required tasks. For positions of responsibility and authority, like the nurse or jailer, it may seem impossible to leave early. Reports and information have to be passed on for the transition between shifts. A nurse was called on to perform a procedure which had been started by the previous shift. She was unfamiliar with the procedure. When asked if she had talked this over with her predecessor, she said: "Sure, we talked about it!" But as she explained, there is a big difference between talking about it and actually being able to do it. The first nurse did not insure that the procedure would be continued properly. She left before the transition had been completed. She left on time, but earlier than she should have in terms of her professional responsibility, and in terms of the purpose of overlapping shifts.

SEGMENTAL SHUT-DOWN TRANSITION

Because there may be problems with the shut down, workers in the bank, library, supermarket, and fast-food restaurant must plan ahead. The bank teller said: "I make preparations to end my day shortly after I arrive at work. I start by filling out all the general ledger cards in the morning, but I really start preparing for the end of the day at the window about 1 o'clock." This occurs though she may not leave the bank until 5 p.m.

Physical Setting & Blockages.

At the library, factors that tend to delay closing are the presence of unwanted clients or unwanted tasks. To avoid such problems, precautions are taken with the physical setting. Posted hours announce that on Saturdays, the closing is at 6 p.m. Another sign states that the photocopy machines will be turned off 15 minutes prior to closing, and that no books may be checked out in the final 15 minutes. The entry doors are locked at 5:50 to exclude late arrivals. Library workers announce that the library will be closing by buzzing each floor, and by turning off the fans and closing the windows. Finally, a few minutes before closing time, they turn the lights off, except at the exists.

The line in the supermarket is somewhat dependent on the good will of the customer not to enter it, once it has been shut down. But the cashier sees the late shoppers, and asks them to leave. If the store is crowded, the cashier may find an almost constant flow of latecomers. To stem this, the cashier may leave the register and block the passage with a shopping cart or a carton. Sometimes a sign of blockage is used, such as a *closed* sign.

As with the continuous shut down, mobility is helpful. Non-physical mobility, such as bell signals and light blinking, signal the shut down.

Volume & Division of Labor

The volume of work to be done at the end of the day and the division of labor available to handle the work affect the segmental shut down. The bank teller, on a slow day, starts counting the coins and cash a few minutes before the doors are locked. Workers in the fast-food restaurant punch out on the time clock when their task is finished. The cashiers may leave first, those working the grill next, then those who clean up the dining room, and finally those responsible

for locking up. Where volume is high, a thorough cleanup may prolong the day too long, and it is done only partially.

FULL SHUT-DOWN TRANSITION

About 70 percent of the workers were in jobs with full shut down in which the business stops and all employees leave, locking the doors for the night. The employee must assume control in the transition period, as shown in the gymnasium custodian's report. "Closing time for the gym is 9:30 p.m. Around 9:15 I announce that the students should start getting dressed and ready to leave as it takes 10 to 15 minutes for everyone to leave. As they leave, I lock the door...When everyone is gone, I start the cleaning process by sweeping, cleaning the weight room, and straightening the office so it will be ready for the next day. By then, it's 9:20. I turn off the stereo and lights, and lock the door as I leave."

Routines are the core of the shut down. Negotiation plays an important part in shutting down the work day. The way in which the transitional time period is negotiated protects the routine. As an administrative secretary shows, with control, one can insure proper transition. "On a typical workday one always seemed to know when 3:15 approached. At this time of day, I would never start anything new that would take more than 15 minutes. If someone did come into my office and asked specifically for something to be done before I left for home, he would be cross-examined to be sure it was necessary that he have it before I leave rather than first thing in the morning."

Physical Setting & Blockage

The case descriptions supplied by the workers showed that they used the physical setting to produce actual blockage and signs of blockage. The most effective blockage is that of physical disappearance, which, as a pet-store employee notes, is demanded at some jobs.

The store was divided in two main parts, the front, with sundries, equipment, and fish room, and the backroom, which housed the back of the kennels and other small-animal cages or tanks. There would be one employee on the evening shift who would work the backroom. The job consisted of feeding and cleaning all the animals and their cages. The emphasis was put on taking care of the animals first, and

then the customers. So there was much less of a customer problem in the back for closing down, and the backroom person was usually the first finished. So at 9:00 p.m., closing time, all you really needed to do was to sweep up, scrub sinks, and make sure the animals had plenty of food and water. All of these jobs depended on doing your work earlier and without much bother from the customer at 9 p.m. It made closing up in the back the easiest in the store.

Signs of blockage arise from the absence of specific groups of employees. The administrative secretary astutely noted "...that at 3:30 p.m. the executive types would appear to be very involved in their work as we were preparing to leave, but on my many afternoons of overtime, it was obvious that they just waited for us to leave, and by 3:40 p.m. that office was completely emptied except for us few who were involved in our particular 'urgent' task."

Mobility

In the discussion of actual blockages, the concept of disappearing near the end of the day was stressed. If the maintenance man could not be found, he could not be asked to do more work. The progression of the shut down from one's immediate area to the entire organization is often mentioned. People put their office in order, clean their work area, or straighten up things on the desk. The spread of shut down is depicted by the administrative secretary. "By 3:25 p.m. one of the secretaries would be in my office announcing that there were only 5 minutes more to go—which would prompt desk-picking-up time." One secretary cues the others, and their departure cues the executives.

Volume & Division of Labor

The full shut down, like the others, may be prolonged by the volume of work. As the floral designer said, "A late customer or phone order could delay departure of individual employees by 30 minutes or more. Holidays destroyed all schedules, and we often left a littered, messy work area at 3:00 a.m. or later." High volume was universalistic in its extensions.

A successful shut down depends on the division of labor. Those who had completed their shut-down tasks could relieve others who had not. Thus, at the pet store, the backroom worker, who finished first, came out to help the others shut down, and

so avoided the charge of incompetence from fellow workers.

Finally, the nursing assistant put it best: "...We all were caught up in the habit like millions of other Americans: we finished our day's work a little bit earlier so we wouldn't have to work overtime." To finish early, they invoked special routines which were developed for that purpose.

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