

Fast food work, McJobs in India

Abstract: *This study explores the nature of fast food work in the Indian context using an qualitative case-study approach. To understand the context, the production and service systems at an India based fast-food chain outlet are analyzed using McDonalidization as the framework. Standardization and routinization at this outlet is not comparable to that of multinational chains like Domino's or McDonald's. Workers resist standardization of personal appearance and use of standard scripts as they consider these practices to be alien to their way of living. However, hectic work load, poor pay and limited potential for growth become acceptable to young and vulnerable workers due to lack of alternate job opportunities. Such exploitative nature of the work is seen as normal and common.*

Keywords: **Fast-food work, India, standardization, McJobs, young workers**

A lot has been written about the nature of work in the fast food industry. There is a debate about the dehumanizing nature of work in this industry. Several studies have reported pervasive supervisory control, poor pay, work hustling and poor growth prospects (see Royle, 1999). Standardization and routinization is seen as resulting in such dehumanizing nature of work (Ritzer, 2011). Standardization and routinization of work is also one of the central themes of such research (Leidner, 1993; Ritzer, 2011).

Levitt (1972) describes how production line approach can be adopted to service industries to improve quality, efficiency and uniformity. He argues that the highly centralized, carefully organized, tightly controlled and elaborately engineered conditions in manufacturing lead to products of uniform quality and features. Further, he attributes the success of McDonald's as a fast-food chain to the replication of such conditions in its organization. Following McDonald's, many other fast-food chains, successfully replicated such environment. According to Mayhew and Quinlan (2002), the underlying production systems in fast-food industry "can be termed as Fordism which is "production of standardized products using equally standardized and inflexible technologies (such as the assembly-line), standardized work routines based on Tayloristic minute division of labor and deskilling of tasks" (p. 263). The implication of such standardization has

gone beyond the fast-food industry to affect the society at large. Ritzer (2011) defines McDonaldization as “the process by which the principles of fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of rest of the world.” (p. 1).

Indian fast-food industry is of considerable size and has been growing rapidly (Parker, 2009). It consists of several multinational as well as local Indian brands. While the nature of work in the multinational brands has widely been studied, studies in the Indian context are surprisingly low. The present paper therefore aims to address this issue. As standardization and routinization of work is seen as central to the fast-food work nature, the study begins by studying the extent of standardization and routinization of work. The paper utilizes the concept of McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2011) to first understand the amount of standardization at work. It then goes on to discuss the demeaning nature of work in the industry.

Literature review

Indian Fast Food industry

The Indian fast-food industry is of considerable size, with a latent demand of around US \$ 12 billion as of 2009 (Parker, 2010). The industry is also projected to grow very rapidly almost doubling in a span of ten years. While in 2004 the latent demand was US \$9 billion, the demand in 2014 is projected at around US \$16 billion (Parker, 2010). There are several players in the industry. Few of them are multinational brands like Pizza Hut, McDonalds, KFC, Domino’s Pizza, Coffee Day and Barista while others are Indian brands like Nirulas, Indian Bread and Pizza corner (Jauhari, 2003).

The multinational brands, McDonald’s, Domino’s and Pizza Hut, all entered India in 1996 (“mcdonaldsindia”, n.d.; “dominos.co.in”, n.d.; “pizza hut”, n.d.). Currently all of them have nation-wide presence and more than 100 outlets. McDonald’s has more than 160 outlets

("mcdonaldsindia", n.d.), Pizza Hut has more than 140 ("pizzahut.co.in", n.d.) and Domino's has more than 378 ("dominos.co.in", n.d.). The success of these chains can be attributed to the application of successful manufacturing and supply chain practices to deliver their unique brand image. Several studies have elaborated standardization and routinization in all these chains (Leidner, 1993; Ritzer, 2011; Schlosser, 2005). On the contrary, the Indian fast-food brands like Indian Bread, Pizza Corner and Nerula's lack such nationwide presence, though they started at around the same time (Jauhari, 2003). Besides, these brands have only less than 100 outlets (Jauhari, 2003). The processes in these Indian brands may not be as efficient as in multinational brands. However, such comparative studies could not be found.

While the production and service systems in these multinational fast-food brands has been extensively studied, the literature in the Indian context, particularly on Indian brands is not found. It is necessary to study the processes in order to gain an understanding about the nature of work. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the systems in Indian fast-food brands. McDonaldization as defined by Ritzer (2011) provides a useful framework for understanding these processes.

McDonaldization

Ritzer (2011) identifies four different dimensions of this McDonaldization.

Efficiency is about optimum method of doing work. The entire process at McDonald's is broken down into simple, repetitive tasks. Further, each task is perfected over time, in order to reduce any unnecessary movement and the layout of the work place is designed to facilitate speed and efficiency. Process settings such as temperature and time are also optimized.

Calculability is the idea of quantifying in order to remove subjectivity or discretion. At McDonald's such measurement is pervasive. The raw material patties are measured and cut

according to pre specified sizes. Not only is the entire process broken down into simple steps, but also the time it takes to complete each step is clearly defined. Several indices like the number of customers served in a day, the number of customer complaints received, and the level of customer satisfaction, help the management keep track of its performance (Ritzer, 2011).

At the heart of McDonald's, success is uniformity and predictability. The food is supposed to taste same everywhere and over time and is served quickly and courteously. Uniformity is achieved by institutionalizing the 'best way'. Detailed procedures mention precisely how to carry out each step of the entire process and how long it should take to carry out each step. These procedures are encoded in standard manuals. At McDonald's, the "six steps of the window service", describe the rules for standard attitudes and demeanors as well as actions and words in detail (Leidner, 1993).

Control is exerted through close surveillance and supervision in order to ensure adherence to routines. Besides, efficiency, calculability and predictability make it easy to control. Breaking down tasks helps in deskilling and takes away the need to have qualified workforce. When tasks are simple, they can be quickly taught to any new worker. This takes away the power of the worker to bargain or negotiate. The workers become easily replaceable and thereby controllable. Quantifying the work and having elaborate set of rules also make it easier to enforce control.

Demeaning nature of work

One of the criticisms of fast-food industry comes from the demeaning nature of the work (Allan et al., 2006). In fact, so much has been the criticism that the term McJobs (McDonaldized jobs), has evolved to refer to jobs which are demeaning in nature. Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary (as cited in Allan et al., 2006) defines McJobs as those jobs that are "a low-paying job

that requires little skill and provides little opportunity for advancement”. As per Munro (1992) (as cited in Mayhew & Quinlan, 2002), this kind of job is demeaning, alienating and “not big enough for the human spirit”.

Braverman’s labor process theory (as cited in O’Doherty & Willmott, 2001) is central to the criticism of fast food work. He argued that exploitative capitalist organizations are incessantly looking to deskill and routinize the work. Tasks are broken down into small and simple steps, which make it easier to standardize and automate work. Ritzer (2011) quotes one of the employees at a fast food center noting, “Any trained monkey can do this job.” Workers use only a part of their skills and abilities. The employees’ decision-making and discretion is removed by routinizing the work. Such deskilled labor is easy not only cheap but also easy to control.

Ritzer (2011) argues that McDonaldization is dehumanizing in many ways. He contends that there is irrationality in the seemingly rational system of standardization. According to him, that the process of standardization leads to loss of enchantment, as anything that is considered as magical, mysterious, fantastic and dreamy is considered inefficient. The qualitative aspects of work are lost in the mad rush for quantitative aspects and efficiency. The job becomes boring after a while, as the worker has to repeat the same steps at a great speed. Moreover, the tight control imposed in the work place lead to loss of autonomy and control.

There is little skill enhancement, little prospect for future growth and high turnover (Reeders, 1988; Tannock, 2001 as cited in Mayhew & Quinlan, 2002). Therefore, these jobs are perceived as “dead-end” or “short-gap”. The stop-gap perspective sees the job as temporary and a trade-off between immediate material needs and doing a mundane, repetitive job (Gould,

2009). In addition, satisfying personal relations between the employees are not likely to develop due to the part time and temporary nature of the job

As per (Allan et al., 2006), crewmembers perceive work intensification. The managers try to hurry up the workers, to get the work done faster. This exhortation to hustle was also reported by Vidal (as cited in Allan et al., 2006), as being widely prevalent in McDonald's management ethos. In brief, the work does not offer either job satisfaction or stability leading to high level of resentment, job dissatisfaction, alienation, absenteeism, and turnover.

Young and vulnerable workers

Several studies take a view that fast-food industry specifically recruits certain sections of society. Several authors (Lucas, 1997; Lucas and Ralston, 1996; Curtis and Lucas, 2000; Royle, 1999 as cited in Allan et al., 2006), contend that fast-food industry recruits young and vulnerable workers as they are compliant and flexible. Another study (Mayhew & Quinlan, 2002), mentions that fast food industry grew with young and temporary workers and that in future it is reliant on these workers. According to Robinson (as cited in Gould, 2009), fast-food employers prefer teenagers because these workers cannot adequately assess if they are being treated fairly and reasonably which is in turn due to their lack of prior exposure to employment. According to Royle (1999), because of this lack of prior exposure, these young workers have little else with which to compare their working conditions. These workers can therefore, be made to toil in ways other experienced workers resist to (Royle, 2000; Schlosser, 2002 as cited in Gould, 2009). Gould (2009) found that chronologically older employees were more likely to be dissatisfied with work in fast-food industry.

Royle (1999) also argues that, in various countries, McDonald's employs weaker and marginalized sections who lack alternative employment opportunities. Because the workers

desperately need the job, they are not likely to resist management control. He uses the term “recruited acquiescence” to describe recruiting suitable individuals who do not resist control. According to him, the corporation is able to take weed out those who resist control and take advantage of others.

A positive view of McJobs

However, not all studies point to such negative view of fast food work. Some literature contends that fast-food jobs help young workers advance in their career. According to Robinson (as cited in Gould, 2009) the fast food industry gives many their first experience of paid work. Others (Daniels, 2004; Feder, 1995; Smith & Wilson, 2002; as cited in Gould, 2009) argue that this opportunity to be employed in fast-food industry can be a career advantage for several reasons. Firstly, it is difficult for teenagers to find alternate entries into the job market other than through fast-food industry (Allan, Bamber & Timo, 2002 as cited in Gould, 2009). Secondly, working with multinational employers in fast-food industry, gives teenagers a chance to develop effective work habits and attitudes towards work, apart from giving them a chance to observe good management practices (Feder, 1995; Morse, 1997 as cited in Gould, 2009). This learning can result in self-development and future-employability (DiNome, 2001; Goldeen, 2004 as cited in Gould, 2009). Lastly, fast-food industry also offers some people a chance to rise through the hierarchy from menial roles without conventional forms of education and diverse work history (Cantalupo, 2003 as cited Gould, 2009).

Questioning the determinism in the labor process theory, Taylor and Bain (1999) argue that it understates both the management need to get commitment from workers and the voluntary dimension of the labor. They contend that the workers possess individual and collective forms of resistance. Unionization leads to collective resistance. Individually, the workers find various

ways to avoid work. O'Doherty and Willmott (2001) argue that management control is mediated by the subjectivity of the workers.

Studies, which take a positive or neutral view of the fast-food work, talk about compatibility. Some people are compatible with the McDonald's culture and are content with routine and simplicity (Kincheloe, 2002 as cited in Gould, 2009). According to Royle (1999) and Kincheloe (as cited in Gould, 2009), these compatible workers show enthusiasm on the job. Royle (1999) identifies two such categories. First category is those who have qualifications and are capable of finding a better job, but are "coasting". Second category consists of those who lack the qualifications and stay due to the lack of alternatives.

Few studies argue that employees carry positive attitude towards fast-food industry. In the study conducted by Gould (2009) on employees in fast-food industry, participants often indicated that they are treated well, expressed a positive view of the way work is organized, and said they had access to training and human resource-related advantages. The study also reports that the younger employees who intended to stay long term in the industry showed greater enthusiasm at work. Allan et al., (2006) also reported positive experience of employees in fast-food industry. In their study, most employees felt happier about receiving training and learning career skills at Fast-food industry. He reports that one worker believed that he was doing important work. The participants in that study also reported that work in fast-food industry is a springboard in to the labor market. Allan et al. (2006) also reported that the workers reported customer relations to be satisfying. The study also mentions a strong social bond among the workers. It reports a spirit of cooperation among workers and a perception of opportunity to meet and make friends. The study also reports positive views about management.

In summary, the literature seems to be divided on the demeaning nature of the jobs in fast-food restaurants. While few studies take a negative view of these jobs, others take a positive view.

Indian fast-food industry provides employment to large numbers. While Domino's and Pizza Hut employ more than 10,000 people, McDonald's employs around 4,000 workers ("mcdonaldsindia", n.d.; "dominos.co.in", n.d.; "pizzahut.co.in", n.d.). In view of such large work-force, it becomes necessary to study if the work in the fast food industry in India is demeaning.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach has been used in order to provide a thick description of the context and thus enable to see its effects. The author faced the same difficulty as was faced by previous researchers in gaining research access. Employers, especially major ones are suspicious and therefore reluctant to give access (Allan et al., 2006). Authors either relied on interviews with workers away from workplace or used secondary resources. One of the Indian Bread (name changed) outlets in the city of Ahmedabad has been chosen for the study. Indian Bread is an Indian brand Pizza chain. In order to come out with insights, in depth interviews with the staff and non-participant observation have been used. Accessibility and availability of the interviews primarily decided the size and composition of the interview sample. However, effort was made to ensure to bring out perspectives of different stake holders by talking to people at different levels of hierarchy.

Data collection and management

Data was collected in two stages. In the first stage, the author was able to gain access into the Indian Bread outlet after revealing his identity and clarifying the purpose of the study. Broad questions were prepared before proceeding for interviews. In total six interviews were conducted during this stage. The interviewees belonged to different levels of the hierarchy in the outlet: store manager, the assistant store manager, kitchen supervisor, one kitchen crew and two-service crew. All interviewees were males. One of the service crew joined just before a month. Except for the store manager, the rest were all under 25 years of age. The experience of the participants also ranged from one month to six years. Four of the interviewees did not permit voice recording of the interview. Detailed notes were taken during these interviews. The other two interviews were recorded and transcribed. Non-participant observations were also carried out during this stage for ten days, almost at an average of an hour per day. Detailed field notes were made during this observation.

In the second stage however, the outlet management did not allow the researcher to enter the outlet. The researcher therefore, gained access to the interviewees outside the workplace. Two interviews were conducted during this stage. Both these interviewees were also delivery boys who also worked as service crew inside the restaurant. Both were males and had an experience between one to two years. However, the interviewees did not allow voice recording, citing trouble from the management. Detailed notes were taken during these interviews.

The McDonaldization framework as detailed by Ritzer (2011) was used to analyze and understand the systems and processes in place at the outlet. The framework served as a tool to understand the differences in context between this outlet and other multinational brand outlets belonging mostly to North America, Europe and Australia. This understanding, in combination

with the backgrounds of the employees and their perceptions about the nature of work was used to bring out a critical perspective.

The context: Indian Bread, Ahmedabad

Indian Bread claims to be the number one Indian Pizza brand. Established in 1994, it has pioneered freshly baked Pizzas in India and has expanded by franchising. In 2008, it has 90 odd stores in 34 cities across 12 states. The outlet where this study has been carried out has started only six months back. The revenue turnover of this outlet is also low. It is around Rs Seven lacs per month which is very low when compared to any McDonald's outlet or a Domino's outlet (Jauhari, 2004).

There are various aspects specific to this Indian Bread outlet when compared to multinational fast-food chains. This Indian Bread outlet is a Dine-in restaurant where the customer is serviced at the table. On the contrary, McDonald's is a self-service restaurant which emphasizes on quickness of serving (Leidner, 1993). Domino's has a focus on home delivery and take away (Jauhari, 2004) and therefore, the focus is again on quickness. It guarantees a home delivery within 30 minutes or else the Pizza is free. McDonald's is aimed at turning the tables faster, where the customers go to grab a quick meal. In a typical McDonald's restaurant, the ambience encourages eating quickly and moving away (Ritzer, 2011). The seats by design are not cozy and the outlet is cramped. On the other hand, this Indian Bread outlet offers an ambience where customers can enjoy their meal in a relaxed manner. The outlet is spacious and sofas are cozy and comfortable. There is upbeat music in the background. Therefore, though, quickness in delivering the Pizza to the table is important in case of Indian Bread, it is not of paramount importance as in the case of McDonald's or Domino's.

There are other peculiarities of Indian Bread as a fast food restaurant. It offers on the menu “Unlimited Pizza” which is the most frequently ordered item on the menu. For a fixed price, unlimited pizza is served along with salad and dessert. This menu is not available on the menu of other multinational brands. Frequently, the place is also used for parties where “Unlimited Pizza” is usually the only menu item. Several “Unlimited Pizzas” ordered at once lead to pooling of demand and can help mitigate the demands on the staff. The salads in the “unlimited orders” are also prepared at once and kept on the salad counter from where the customer serves himself. Salads are not served individually to each customer on the table but the salad counters are frequently replenished.

However, “Unlimited Pizzas” and parties can sometimes place severe demands on the make-line, as there are too many orders to be filled in a short time. Therefore, the work in Indian Bread has small periods of hectic work interspersed with large periods of lull. Though this is natural to any fast-food restaurant, the periods of hectic work are smaller and much more hectic at Indian Bread.

The restaurant manager and the franchisee owner are at the helm of the organization structure of the outlet. Only the restaurant manager is on the payroll of Indian Bread. All other staff is on the payroll of the franchisee. Below the restaurant manager an assistant manager, shift supervisor and kitchen supervisor manage all the day to day activities. All the dining and maintenance staff (nine) report to the shift supervisor and the kitchen staff (seven) report to the kitchen supervisor.

The manager and the franchisee together decide on the salary for the other members. The pay structure is not the same across all Indian Bread outlets. All the employees are paid on a monthly basis and not hourly basis. The salaries are based on work experience and the kind of

references the employee is able to get. The work is scheduled in two shifts, the morning one from 9am to 2pm and the evening one from 2pm to 11pm. Employees take turns to serve in different schedules.

Findings

Understanding the production and service process

The processes at Indian Bread mimic the process of McDonaldization at least in theory. The design of the process and system design reflect the underlying theme of McDonaldization. The processes are designed to be efficient. The menu at Indian Bread is limited which aids in making the process amenable for streamlining and standardization (Ritzer, 2011). There are in total 16 kinds of Pizzas served in three different sizes, and two types (Thin crust or deep pan). The variety of other menu items is also limited, for e.g. there is only one type of dessert (brownie) and two types of salads.

Indian Bread replicates a standard industry practice of making Pizza. The process is similar to that followed at fast-food giant Domino's. The entire process is broken down into small, simple steps and streamlined. The approach seems to be that of "one best way" approach of scientific management by Taylor (Leidner, 1993).

First is par-baking the dough... par-baked crust undergoes a sequence of steps in becoming the final Pizza; Oiling the pan, saucing, itemizing, cheesing, topping, baking, cutting and serving...

The kitchen is designed to optimize worker movements and eliminate unnecessary steps. There are four basic sections: cutting and utility, dough preparation, salad making and make-line. The make-line section in particular resembles a factory layout. It has a 'U' shaped layout with two ovens one over another on one side, pizza preparation stage on the opposite side and a

cutting section on the third side. It is designed so that a single worker can handle all the stages, however, multiple workers can also work on the line during peak hours. When multiple workers, work on the line, the make line truly resembles an assembly line, where each worker does his job and then passes the product to the next stage for further processing. Each section is also designed to minimize the hand movements of the workers.

Quantification is quite pervasive throughout the process of food production. It starts with the process of dough making. In the words of the shift manager,

All the ingredients are mixed according to the “portion chart”. It gives how much of each ingredient are to be mixed to form 12 kgs of dough mix..The worker physically weighs them and then mixes..This ensures right composition..

The amount and size of toppings added to make a particular type of Pizza is also mentioned in a “portion chart”. Besides, the process of baking the Pizza is controlled, by specifying the exact temperature to which the pizza is heated and for how much duration of the time. In the words of the supervisor

We have guidelines for the right temperature and time for each process.. par baking, baking .. or making a brownie..We set the oven accordingly in the beginning..Then it is automatic..

The spirit of calculability (Ritzer, 2011) is most conspicuous in the customer service process. As one of the crewmember narrates the standard process.

*We serve water in **one minute**.. within next **30 seconds** we give the menu..then we take order within next 5 minutes.. It takes **12 to 15 minutes** to make Pizza, therefore we have to serve the customer by the **16th minute**.. If it is “unlimited” order then we start with the soup, we have to serve the soup in **two minutes**.. salads are self-served.*

There are also hygiene rules where the quantification is conspicuous.

*There is a specific hand washing process, a standard process of washing hands in lukewarm water for **three** minutes and cleaning with paper towel before starting the work..*

*Clean the kitchen table every **two** hours.*

Such quantification helps in removing subjectivity and discretion and decision making on the part of the crew members (Ritzer, 2011). It helps in uniformity and predictability. Uniformity in quality cannot be achieved when there is worker discretion (Levitt, 1972). Like many fast-food chains, Indian Bread also strives to ensure that its product is uniform in quality over time and across all the outlets. The shift manager says “*Product will be of same taste, quality, size and price at any of the Indian Bread branches.*”

Uniformity is achieved through standard routines and scripts. Scripts are used during customer service aspect. The host (the service boy who receives the customers at the door) is supposed to follow a standard script of wishing the customer.

We wish the customer according to the type of the day, If it is morning, we say “Good morning”.. If it is after, we say “Good after, Sir”..Then we say “welcome to Indian Bread”..We ask “how many persons, Sir”..If it is two persons, we make them sit in the table for two..

The process of serving the customer on the table as described earlier is also standardized. There is a specified sequence of steps to be followed. In addition, the time within which these steps are to be enacted in a sequence is also specified. Even in an “unlimited” order, the sequence of steps for serving is also predictable. The shift manager describes the elaborate sequence, as follows.

*Request for type of soup the customer wants.. then serve the soup.. request the customer to help himself with type of salad on the salad bar.. wait for the customer to finish the salad.. then request for serving the plate.. serve the plate, then serve garlic bread, then serve varioIndian Breads in given sequence.. ask for the next item that the customer is going to eat.. then serve that.. **if that is not available**, inform the kitchen supervisor and the assistant restaurant manager.. inform the customer that it will be ready in a while, serve a different Pizza meanwhile..ask if the customer is finished, then remove the plate.. then ask for desert and serve it..wait for finishing it , then ask for removing the desert cup.. handover the bill, collect the bill money, pay it at the counter, give back the receipt ..greet with a smile before leaving.*

It is important to note that the detailed instructions also take care of the contingencies. This exemplifies how discretion and decision making is removed from the crewmember's work. Routinization and scripting also extend into the personal space of the crewmembers of Indian Bread, as was observed by Leidner (1993) in case of McDonald's. All crewmembers wear a uniform and are asked to groom in a specific way. *"It is the dressing rules... like shaving daily.. having the haircut short.. being clean and wearing a clean and pressed uniform.. having the nails cut short.."*

All the above elaborate steps, sequences in work are codified into the Standard operating procedure (SOP) process manual. The manual lists down, in great detail, various processes at Indian Bread, besides also detailing how these processes should be carried out. For e.g. in the cleaning section of the manual, the type of broom, cleaning liquid, mopping equipment are listed down in pictures. The frequency of cleaning, and the method of cleaning is explained in detail. Detailed SOPs also exist for the process of dough preparation, pizza preparation and baking and

salad making processes. The SOP gives the minute details like the composition and amount of ingredients and the method of preparation.

These standard systems have controls in place to ensure adherence to routines. A Kitchen order token (KOT) is one such measure, which can be used for keeping track of the customer service time. The manager describes it thus, *“The moment a customer orders, KOT is generated.. It has the details of time, the order items etc.. Three copies of it are made. One goes to the kitchen, one to the billing counter and one to the records..The time on the KOT can be used for tracking.. if the customer is serviced in time..We do random checks once in a while on five to six tables..”*

There are several other measures like customer feedback form, which is given to each customer at the end of the meal. The customer can also send feedback through email to the central office. The manager sums it up thus *“If the Pizza is left there without serving, it gets cold.. regular customer can make out the difference between a standard product and the product of low quality if it is served cold.. customers can send their feedback either through the form they fill or through the online site..”*

The uniformity across outlets is also maintained by limiting the control of the franchisee on the processes inside the outlet. The restaurant manager is on the payroll of Indian Bread. All the staff is also controlled by Indian Bread. Further, the central office also does frequent audits to ensure that the outlet is run as per Indian Bread standard practices. The manager says, *“There is also station observation checklist used by Indian Bread to check all the outlets... If customer complaints are more, then mystery audits are also done..”*

Is Indian Bread really McDonaldized?

There are elaborate rules and the system has been designed at least in theory to mimic standard processes in multinational fast food chains like McDonald's and Domino's. The spirit of central management is to replicate such standard systems. The store manager puts it as *"The central office is trying to improve our systems. We want to be better than Domino's. We will overtake Domino's in a few years."*

However, these rules and standard practices are not strictly enforced at the outlet. The deviation from standard practices is significant. There is a difference in what is in the book and what is practiced. There is also difference in what is said and what is done. Personal observations at the outlet on a number of occasions and cross verifying the statements made by several employees have led to the conclusion that the rules are not enforced stringently. Such non-adherence is primarily due to lack of standard training systems and the realization of the need for adherence at the outlet management.

Indian Bread does not have any standard training programs for the employees. According to Leidner (1993), crew-training process is critical to McDonald's standardization. McDonald's central administration supplies videotapes and other training material to its franchises in order to train its crew. Managers at McDonald's are recommended to follow a standard four-step process in training the crew members. First, the trainees watch the videotape, then they watch an experienced worker perform the task, then they try out the job themselves under trainer's observation while the trainer makes corrections if needed. In contrast, there is no such centralized formal training at Indian Bread. The manager, kitchen supervisor and all the workers have stated that the training is mostly on the job with occasional instructions given by the supervisor. Crewmembers are initially given simple tasks and slowly moved on to complex

tasks. The manager clarifies *“Training is mostly on the job as of now. There is no formal training. Recently the central management has recognized the need for a centralized formal training. Corporate trainers with audio visual aids have visited our store once.”* Lack of such has resulted in lack of clarity among crewmembers especially regarding quantitative aspects of customer service. Upon interviewing, each of the employees spoke about numbers in how the customer is served. However, each one mentioned a different number. For e.g. the following statements by two crew members *“take order within next 5 minute”* as against *“Within 3 minutes take order”*. When the supervisor was asked for confirmation, he provides a range instead of an exact number *“three to four minutes is the time to come and take order”*. Thus, though the standard mentions, an exact number, adherence to it is not strict. Supervisors themselves are not very clear about the numbers.

The management at this Indian Bread outlet interpret the standards as guidelines for or benchmarks to be aimed at rather than seeing them as them directives to be adhered to. The manager confirms the flexibility in the rules.

*Service rules like one minute to serve etc.. **They are not measured.. they are like bench marks..** If many customers are not served in that limit, it can lead to issues..But, these are not measured..The standards are randomly checked **only mentally.. no actual measurement** is done. Five to seven tables per day are randomly seen..*

Moreover, the outlet management is not convinced of the need for such strict adherence. They see that enforcing strict adherence adds no additional value. The store manager says *“Our customers are happy with our service. They do not expect more than this...We have grown well in the last year.”* According to Leidner (1993), if the organization is convinced of steady demand irrespective of uniformity if quality of service it does not push for standardization of work. The

central management also appears not to see the need for strict enforcement. The store manager says *“As long as we grow..as long as there are no customer complaints, they do not care.”*

However, there is also resistance to rules from the crewmembers especially with regard to those rules that extend into their personal space and appearance are most resisted. The author observed that most of the crewmembers did not groom themselves according to standard appearance expectations. There is also resistance to scripted routines. On most occasions, it was noted that greeting of the host is not as per the standard script. The feeling among the workers is that the management should only mind their output and not interfere too much with their personal space. One of the crew member says, *“I do not mind the work. I am paid for that. It is my duty. But these rules do not make sense. Ultimately, the customer does not care... He does not care if I speak English or Hindi. As long as I am courteous and respectful he does not mind..it does not matter..I know how to behave..I will not be disrespectful of course.”* Another crew member says, *“I am paid for my work..Not for cutting my hair short..The customer..he does not have time to see my hair..Of course I am clean..I take bath daily, I wash my clothes.”*

Most of the workers come from poor rural backgrounds. Moreover, hygiene and grooming rules like having nails neatly clipped, shaving regularly, wearing ironed clothes, having the haircut short etc. seem unnatural for them. Therefore, they resist demands to strict adherence to such rules. Most of the crewmembers are undereducated to understand English. They have minimal education. They therefore, do not understand standard scripts which they are asked to use. For e.g. The host wishes just *“Good after, Sir”*, instead of *“Good afternoon, Sir. Welcome to Indian Bread”*. He does not know what the term ‘afternoon’ means. Following standard scripts in English is a difficulty for most of them.

The supervisors and managers realize this fact and do not insist too much on adherence. As the kitchen supervisor says, *“People are fed up with dressing rules.. Clipping nails short..cutting hair short..shaving frequently..They are not educated..So they do not like..When the manager insists, they get irritated and leave..the management also knows it is not so important, so we don’t insist..”*

There is also shortage of “good workers”, according to the managers. By “good workers” they mean either workers who are very hard working. “good workers” also mean workers who demonstrate management skills who are suitable for promotion to supervisory roles. Such workers easily get noticed and are poached by other franchisees of other Indian Bread outlets. The manager says, *“there is dearth of good workers. Our own outlets are poaching them. We are trying to stop it. But other franchisees find ways to poach them.”* Therefore, the supervisors do not enforce strict adherence, which they fear will lead to such workers resigning the job.

To conclude, though the aim of the standards manuals and spirit of the central management are in the direction of standardization and routinization in line with multinational chains like McDonald’s and Domino’s, the practice of such standardization is not found. First, the management at the outlet is not convinced of the need for such strict standardization. Further, lack of formal training, resistance from workers who see some rules as unnatural and alien to their nature make it difficult for management to enforce such rules. Thus, McDonaldization at Indian Bread is not comparable to McDonaldization in multinational brands like McDonald’s and Domino’s. As the supervisor says, *At Domino’s there are many “hard rules”.. Here, it is much more flexible..* This finding has implications for understanding the nature of work in the Indian context. Issues of control and autonomy relegate to secondary importance in understanding work.

Extracting surplus labor

There is hectic work in peak hours. As the supervisor puts it

The work is hectic during peak hours..In “unlimited order” you have to do sometimes around 25 trips back and forth into the kitchen for one single order. So people get fed up..There is intense activity with people moving around in a short space while carrying different things..There is confusion..People pick up others’ orders and serve it, it leads to tension in the air..Sometimes the kitchen staff cannot cope and there are backlogs and delays..During peak hours there are three people on the make-line in the kitchen..in that short space..making Pizzas very fast..It is difficult..

In addition, the salaries paid to the employees are also low reflecting the general trend in the fast-food industry (Allan et al., 2006). The crewmembers are paid between Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000 per month, which is just more than Rs 100 a day. In 2007-08, the average daily wage rate of casual male workers in rural areas of Gujarat was Rs 68.5s while the corresponding rate for regular male workers in urban areas was Rs 215.02 (Hirway and Shah, 2011). Therefore, the current wage rates of Indian Bread crewmembers are closer to that of a casual worker rather than that of a regular worker in 2007-08. Sometimes they do not get their salaries in time. They do not enjoy any additional employee benefits apart from the pay. Payment for sick leave is left to the discretion of the owner. Sometimes they also do not get their salaries in time. This discretion to pay late gives the owners a form of control over the workers. Getting the salary on time is an incentive for the workers to work better. One of the supervisor accepts, *Sometimes, they do not get salary on 20th of the month, while they are supposed to get by 10th ..*

They are asked to work overtime on Saturdays and Sundays and do not get paid for it. Even on regular days the workers are not allowed to go home after the shift has ended if there is

work pending. The workers also suggested a tendency on the manager's part to hustle during the peak hours. The manager agrees that the work is hectic especially during peak hours on Saturdays and Sundays if few crewmembers report sick or absent. These findings are in line with other studies on fast-food industry (Allan et al., 2006).

Dead-end jobs

Besides, skill enhancement is low for the crewmembers and therefore growth prospects are miniscule. Breaking the process into small and simple steps eliminates the need of a trained chef. These steps can be easily taught to any person with rudimentary skills (Leidner, 1993). The training given to the crewmembers is minimal and is also not formal. Supervisor gives a few instructions then the new worker learns by watching others on the job and then by doing it himself. As noted by the kitchen supervisor, *"people easily learn with in ten to 15 days."*

The skill enhancement is minimal in fast-food chains supervision (Reeders, 1988; Tannock, 2001 as cited in Mayhew & Quinlan, 2002). The manager says *"They do not know anything else other than making Pizza..So they come back..They cannot go elsewhere.."* The limited menu also limits the learning for the employees. They only learn to make a Pizza. On the contrary, in a general restaurant the menu is not limited. Therefore, the crew learns more. The supervisor says, *"The crew in Chinese or Punjabi restaurant learn more.. Those guys are also paid more..Here we only learn to make Pizza.. We can only go to Domino's or Pizza hut.."*

Recruited acquiescence

In spite of the hectic load and poor pay and limited growth prospects, the author noted employees working for more than four years with Indian Bread. However, according to the manager the turnover is quite high. He explains the discrepancy, *"They do not work continuously for long periods.. Most of them come from other places.. they take a break once in three months"*

and go home..But some of them join back..If their place is filled by someone else, they go to other Indian Bread outlets.”

Therefore, though people work for longer periods, they do not work continuously at the same outlet. They go home and their place is filled by someone. They switch to other outlet, where there is vacancy.

The employees seemed to accept such demeaning job as the very nature of work possible for them. This reflects a phenomenon of recruited acquiescence noted by Royle (1999).

Typically, fast food chains employ younger crew as it is easier to control them (Royle 1999). Similarly, crew employees at this outlet are young. The entire crew is less than 20 years of age. The shift manager says, *“We do not hire people above 25 years in the crew..It is difficult to manage older people..”*

According to Royle (1999) and others as noted earlier, fast food industry employs marginalized sections of the employees in the society in order to exercise better control. Findings at Indian Bread support this argument. The maximum education for the crewmembers is 11th grade. Most of the crew can only read and write in Hindi. Few could not even manage to pronounce “Good afternoon”. The crew also did not have an awareness of alternate employment. They did not think through about available employment opportunities before joining the outlet. A timid looking worker from Nepal says, *“I came here on a trip to India..When you have people from your village in India.. you go for a trip..My friend was working in Indian Bread..He asked me to join.. I joined.. there was another Nepal guy here.. So I joined..I did not like it in the first two weeks.. After that I got used.”* This worker studied only until fifth grade and joined Indian Bread when he was around 16 years old. He is working since then with Indian Bread.

Most of the crew is also from places outside Ahmedabad. They are from places like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. Hirway and Shah (2011) observe that Ahmedabad attracts a large number of workers from neighboring states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Workers also come from distant states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand part from neighboring country Nepal. Intra state migration within Gujarat to places of high growth such as Ahmedabad is also high. The prevalence of high unemployment rates in these places is the prime reason for migration to Ahmedabad. Hirway and Shah also point to the general trend of poor quality of employment in Gujarat where workers are considered as a mere factor of production. Lacking security of employment, these workers are unlikely to complain about nonpayment of wages and violation of other labor laws. The number of such informal workers is high in Gujarat when compared to other states in India.

Acceptance and helplessness

In addition, few of the employees showed a lack of aspiration to grow and move higher in life. They seemed content with the present job and showed disinterest in growth. An employee says, *“I was given the supervisor shirt.. I did not take it..There was my senior, who deserved it.. He trained me..before him I could not take it..It is additional responsibility..unnecessary tension.”* This employee also recollects few of colleagues who ignored promotions and seemed happy to be doing their current job with no concern for growth. The very coworker for whom he sacrificed the supervisor promotion was said to be disinterested in taking up additional responsibility and growing.

With their limited education background, and no prior work experience, learning to work in a proper work setting and learning to utter some English words seems to be a great skill enhancement. A kitchen crew notes, *“People in service know more..They speak with customers*

only in English.. They also learn to manage customers.” Another service crew notes. “We can learn by observing the supervisors..how to talk to customers.. how to manage customers..”

The crew also displayed a feeling of acceptance of the boredom in the job. They seem to have expected and subsequently accepted the job as being and routine. *“This is our work, how can we feel it is boring..It is work..We have to do it.”* Such acceptance might stem from the lack of alternate employment. They do not complain of the job because they do not have alternatives. As one of the employee puts it, *“We are educated..It is ok that we are not doing **“hard work”**”*. By “hard work”, he implies hard physical labor such as in construction. Therefore, the lack of good alternative employment opportunities seems to have made the crew accept the present job as a better one.

The workers also seemed to accept working overtime for free as their own responsibility besides seeing it as a norm in the industry. When asked about overtime one of the crew members says, *“This is our responsibility, so we have to finish it before we leave.. Our pay comes from owner and not the company, if it was the company we could have asked for overtime pay..company will have a lot of money, owner will not.”* The crewmember seemed to accept the management logic that the franchisee owner will not be able to pay for overtime without much questioning.

The employee background as described above is in line with “recruited acquiescence” as described by Royle (1999). Like other fast-food industry, this outlet seems to recruit young and vulnerable workers who lack alternate employment opportunities.

Fringe benefits and Stop-gap perspective

Indian Bread offers these people with basic amenities like free food inside the restaurant and free accommodation in a common apartment very close to the restaurant. Since, most of the

crew is from places outside Ahmedabad, these amenities are very attractive. The kitchen supervisor says, *“They get free food here..In Domino’s you have to take your own lunch box.. Most guys are from outside, so they cannot cook..It is also helpful for those studying part time.. we do not have part time people here.. but at other outlets we have..”*

The crew is also not the sole bread earner for the family. Typically, they have their father earning. Their income is a substitute to the parents’ income. Therefore, there is not much pressure to earn and sustain the family. They are happy with whatever little they get.

The employees seem to have strong social bonds with each other. As one of the employee puts it, *“Everybody is good here. All staff is good. Whenever someone has a problem, they take care also.”* Further, people join Indian Bread because they have their friend or at least an acquaintance there. This implies few of them know each other even before joining Indian Bread. Social bonding is also enhanced by living together in the same apartment, some of them even sharing the same room. As crewmembers come from places outside Ahmedabad, they do not have local friends or acquaintances. In such circumstances, living together with the crew they are working leads to strong bonding within the employees. People also help each other in times of need. One of the employees says, *“If a friend is ill, we need to work for him... When we are ill, someone else will work for us.”*

Social ties seemed to play a big role for those who work as delivery boys. One of the delivery boys exclaimed. *“With friends it is fun..We were also getting money for that..There was not much to learn..But it was not boring.. I was just roaming with friends..”* In an interview with delivery boy of McDonald’s, the author found the same idea of looking at the delivery job as “roaming with friends”. This interviewee is studying part time and his family is not dependent on him for money. His income is a supplement income. He says, *“This job is the best*

job..Sometimes, you are busy..otherwise you are hanging out with friends.” This finding contrasts the view taken by Ritzer (2011), which contends that the social bond between coworkers is low due to temporary nature of the job. However, another study (Allan et al., 2006) notes good bonding between coworkers. Such social bonds can serve as a buffer against job dissatisfaction.

Discussion

Control, Consent and Resistance

The issues of job autonomy are less important in the Indian context as routinization is not comparable to that of multinational chains. However, as is evident from the above description the management is able to levy good control over workers by system design and supervision and is able to extract surplus labor for the given pay. This is made possible by recruiting young and vulnerable workers. The workers accept the poor pay, hectic work load and limited growth prospects that the job offers as the nature of the work possible for them due to lack of better alternatives. The workers also lack of an aspiration to grow and do not take a long-term perspective. The workers seem helpless and accept the nature of the job for lack of alternatives. They however resist the standardization of their personal appearance and using routine scripts as these practices seem alien to their way of living apart from seeing them as not related to work. It is to be noted that while hectic workload, poor pay and limited growth potential are common across the fast food industry in India, the emphasis on standardizing personal appearance and following standard scripts is uncommon. If the managers insist on personal appearance then they fear that the workers would leave to work at other places where there is no insistence of such standardization. However, the workers do accept the hectic load because such exploitation is more or less common in the industry.

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