

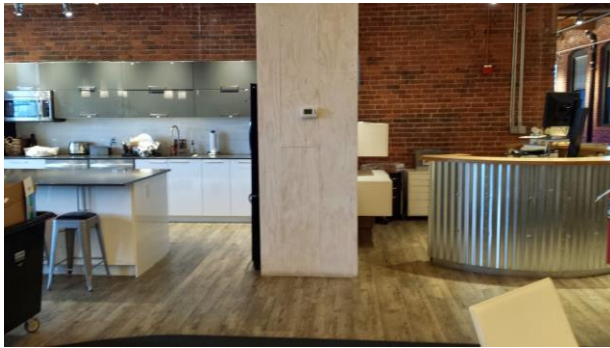
Matt Schroer

HCI

Ethnography

The Company Kitchen

For this ethnography assignment, I thought it would be fun to examine a location that I spend quite a bit of time in, and pay fairly little attention to. The company I work for has a fairly sizeable kitchen, with a large island and tables for employees to eat at. During the noon hour, the company provides lunch on the island, and many employees eat lunch at the tables. In a company with 100 employees, the kitchen becomes the hub of all activity during lunchtime. However, the off-peak hours later in the day are more varied in activity, and what I chose to study.



I took up a spot at one of the kitchen towards the end of the day. As employees began to leave for the day, they would often stop by the kitchen to drop off the dishes they had accumulated. In the hour I sat in the kitchen, 23 people passed through. People entering the kitchen fall into two broad categories: those quickly grabbing something, and those planning on staying awhile. Those who stayed awhile were interested mostly in chit-chat. They proved to be not particularly useful for this study. On the other hand, I recognized that those making quick stops in the kitchen followed a few patterns, such as grabbing a beverage or snack, or dropping of dishes.

I decided that the first person I should interview was the office manager. Her desk is right next to the kitchen, so she is very aware of the traffic patterns in the kitchen throughout the day. Her responsibilities also include cleaning up the kitchen and managing the dishes. It was my conversation with the office manager that directed my observations. I started my conversation with her by asking about the kitchen in general; however she quickly began discussing the dishes in particular. She proclaimed that “people are monsters,” often leaving their unwashed dishes on the counter when they

leave for the night. I pressed her for details, and she replied that many people adhere to the “letting it soak” method of cleaning dishes, and that 1 to 2 people end up just leaving their dishes in the sink every day. While the office has two dishwashers, by the end of the day they are full, and dishes must be washed by hand.



With these thoughts in mind, I spent the rest of my time studying the sink/dishwasher area. Two other people fit the criteria of my study. The first person was very meticulous in their dish washing. They approached with a bowl and some utensils, and washed each of these with the sponge and soap. He then cleaned a Tupperware that had been left in the sink, placing it in the drying rack. He finished by wiping up water that was on the counter. I asked the person why they took so much time to clean their dishes, and he replied that it “wasn’t fair to [the office manager] to leave them piled in the sink”, and that cleaning them himself just seemed like the right thing to do.

The last person I talked to also made some effort to clean her dishes. She walked into the kitchen briskly, and put spent much less time cleaning. She decided against using soap on them, just wiping each with the sponge. When I asked her why she had cleaned in this fashion, she responded that she had things to do, and left the office.

With my observations completed, I went through my notes and identified a few artifacts that were used. The two dishwashers played a minor but significant role, setting up the situation. The magnets placed on the dishwashers indicating they were full may have also affected the mindset of people in the kitchen. Other more important artifacts included the sponge and soap, the dishes being washed, and the sink.

My studies showed that there is an issue with the current dishwashing setup. The easiest solution would be to install another dishwasher, however this is not practical. Therefore, a change in policy is probably required. Although many emails have been sent out, the problem persists. One possible solution could entail increased signage in the area encouraging proper dishwashing. Ultimately, some solution is needed, and this remains a problem that requires more thought.