

Scientific Management

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the concept of scientific management, through the definition and discussion of:

1. McDonaldization of Society
2. Scientific Management

1. MCDONALDIZATION OF SOCIETY

McDonald's is a ubiquitous aspect of both American and global life. In urban centers, there seems to be a McDonald's on every corner. Ronald McDonald is second only to Santa Claus in terms of visual recognition by children all over the world. The McDonald's Arches, for people outside of the U.S, symbolize aspects of America. It's an unimaginably successful business, yet how did this happen in just a half century? What principles underlay the success of McDonald's?

The **McDonaldization of society** is the process where society itself has evolved to mirror the practices evident in McDonald's restaurants. **George Ritzer**, a theorist and sociologist of consumption working at the University of Maryland, identified four principles of McDonaldization, arguing that these four principles came to dominate American society as a whole and permeate aspects of our culture that go beyond fast food restaurants:

1. Efficiency
2. Predictability
3. Uniformity
4. Control



BRAINSTORM

Think about your last visit to a local McDonald's. What did you see the workers doing? What was the food like? Compare this trip to other times you've gone to McDonald's. Were the trips similar?

These questions pertain to the four principles of McDonaldization. McDonald's is predicated on getting food out in an efficient manner, quickly, in a predictable fashion. You go to McDonald's when you're traveling because you know what you're going to get; you could predict your experience. McDonald's wants to be efficient and control the process so that it produces a predictable, uniform commodity. Ritzer argues that this business model came to revolutionize society, and that the principles of McDonaldization have come to dominate society as a whole.

IN CONTEXT

You can see these principles in other areas of society. Now you can bank online with smartphones. You can go to self checkouts at grocery stores or other businesses, where you don't have to interact with a human. Humans introduce a whole level of variability in any process, so if you are able to cut the human out of the process, you can more accurately ensure efficiency, predictability, uniformity, and control.

In this model, everything is the same, as would be the case if everyone bought the same toys from the same department store. When you go to a Marriott in Manhattan, the hotel room is going to look a lot like the hotel room of a Marriott in Dublin. If you've ever been on a Disney cruise, you experienced a 'McDisney' style of tourism, meaning that the experience was highly controlled, standardized and predictable.

➦ **EXAMPLE** If you show up to your job at McDonald's in a bad mood, you might not work very quickly or efficiently. Therefore, removing the human element from the process makes it easier to ensure efficiency and predictability.

The four principles in the process of McDonaldization are intended to facilitate an effort to become more rational--they're a part of the process of rationalization. However, this shift to rationality can have some negative consequences and related backlash.

IN CONTEXT

Consider the example of couchsurfers--travelers who prefer to stay with complete strangers rather than stay in those uniform Marriott hotels, where the Marriott strives to shape the experience.

It has been theorized that this trend is a reaction against the overly dominant rationality in society, and the need to have everything the same--efficient, predictable, uniform, and controlled. Instead, it is theorized that the couchsurfers were seeking authentic experience that were more naturally occurring and organic, and less contrived and controlled, essentially less McDonaldized.



TERM TO KNOW

McDonaldization of Society

The idea that many aspects of life are modeled after the approach taken by the restaurant chain. There are four main principles: 1) Efficiency, 2) Predictability, 3) Uniformity, 4) Control.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

George Ritzer

American sociologist who studies American patterns of consumption, as well as globalization and social theory. Ritzer developed the "McDonaldization of Society" in a book of the same name.

2. SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

The push towards rationality in society and production began with what is called **scientific management**, or 'Taylorism,' named after the man who helped to create the concept. Scientific management is the application of scientific knowledge and principles to increase the efficiency of the production process.

IN CONTEXT

Ford Motor Company epitomizes the use of scientific insights and mechanization to increase and control the workflow in production. They were the first to implement scientific management effectively, such that the image of mass, uniform production on an assembly line is now known as 'Fordism.' The term 'Fordism' can be used to label other production processes that are similarly structured.

In the type of production that is governed by scientific management, or Fordism, the workers are simply cogs in a vast machine of production. They have specialized tasks, which they singularly perform, in order to keep the whole process moving. Nobody's trying to build an entire car by themselves—they each specialize in one aspect of it, thereby increasing the efficiency throughout. McDonald's food production is no different; it, too, is underscored by principles of scientific management.

There was a time in society when mass production was championed as a great thing. Everybody wanted the same commodities that were being produced en masse. Today, you can see a backlash against mass production and the McDonaldization of society. People don't want to be given mass commodities to consume. They want to be seen and treated in a socially differentiated fashion, so as a result you see the emergence of new, non-mass produced commodities. People use these commodities as a way to assert something about themselves and their identities.



TERM TO KNOW

Scientific Management (Taylorism)

The application of scientific principles to analyze workflow and efficiency in business and production.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about sociologist George Ritzer's theory on the **McDonaldization of society**, and the related concept of **scientific management**, or Taylorism.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



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