

Living in the Eye of the Storm: Controlling the Maelstrom in Silicon Valley

Draft Working Paper

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1. Background

That the pace of life is fast and getting faster has become a truism for the new century. This sense of speed is an amalgam of several different elements. Some activities do occur more rapidly than in the past. Increasingly rapid product cycles (especially in high tech industries) and widespread use of the Internet to investigate products and consummate purchases are only two familiar examples. Other activities have not speeded up, but we cram more of them into our lives. The logic of “running lean and mean” has permeated organizations, public and private, thereby increasing the number and variety of tasks many workers perform. Likewise, consumers face a dizzying array of choices involving such disparate products and services as financial instruments, utility providers and educational options for their children. These, too, increase the burden of daily chores and our sense that we are whizzing down a speedway, so that roadside attractions are but a blur. Furthermore, life in such a world becomes tightly coupled so that the effects of a single incident, like an accident on the freeway or a dead battery in the cell phone, can disrupt well-orchestrated plans and increase the sense that life is indeed out of control. Several effects combine to create the maelstrom—the flurry of rapidly occurring activities in lives already crowded with activities; and the constant looming threat of minor catastrophe.

Silicon Valley is perhaps the paradigmatic place for such a way of life. Economically dominated by thriving, fast-paced high technology companies, it is a place where many people are available to work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. For many people, work flows easily from the office to car to home and back again. Commutes are long, as housing prices soar to the highest in the nation, forcing people to live farther and farther from their jobs. Technological solutions to the mundane problems of everyday life are eagerly embraced. To be other than “in touch,” “in contact,” or simply “connected” through cell phones, pagers and E-mail is unthinkable for many denizens.

Families, of course, are not sheltered from the maelstrom. Parents must individually deal with workplaces that make specific demands on their time, while coordinating their schedules with their spouses. Children must be regularly delivered to schools, lessons and recreational activities. Exceptions to predictable schedules are commonplace, adding further complexity to already stressful days. In such a world, family may partially dissolve as a distinct cultural domain and become yet another site of work, while workplace relationships become assimilated into the rubric of family.

We have explored issues of work, family and community in Silicon Valley through two major projects. In the first, Work, Identity and Community in Silicon Valley, partially supported by the National Science Foundation,

we conducted repeated semi-structured interviews with 173 people who live and work in the region. Interviewees work for major high tech companies, such as Adobe, Apple, Cisco and Hewlett Packard, as well as smaller high tech companies and a variety of supporting firms. Other interviewees work for municipal governments, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. The sample includes people at different organizational levels (loading dock workers to corporate vice presidents) and in fields as diverse as software engineering, human resources, marketing, and manufacturing. Interviewing ended in autumn 1998 and analysis of the data is being completed.

The second project is a two-year project supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation; it is currently in progress. Here we are conducting intensive ethnographic fieldwork with thirteen dual career, middle class families. Fieldwork consists of accompanying adults and children during their daily activities, taking meticulous notes in the tradition of anthropological fieldwork. We go to work and to school. We shop and eat dinners and watch homework being completed. We attend birthday parties, baptisms, and myriad social gatherings. We spend between 150-200 hours with each family and fieldwork concludes in August 2000.

Together, these research projects allow us to explore three questions that are germane to family life as it is lived in the maelstrom. First, how do families articulate, enact and rationalize “control” in daily life? Second, what are the recurring challenges, episodic events, and significant crises that threaten control. Third, what strategies do families use to maintain control and create calm in the eye of the storm?

2. Control

2.1. Logistics and Being in Contact

The issue of control for the families we study is centered on the movement of people through space at particular times. This is the everyday world of control that is built out of logistical planning and maintaining contact. Logistics here refers to the movement of people through space and time. It is a world of bodies hurtling through space and, regardless of popular imagery of the virtual, it remains basic for most families. The logistical planning we observe is built out of several different understandings by family members. First, there is the question of who is to be moved by whom; i.e. the issue of relevant personnel. Second, destinations and routes, or where people are to be moved, must be elicited, often a non-trivial task. Third, when movements can and must be made is discussed. This is the domain of deadlines and windows of opportunity. Fourth, the means of transportation, including sneakers, automobiles and public transit is settled. Finally, issues of legitimacy are explicated and debated. For example, what requests are reasonable to make under what conditions? Who is obligated to whom for what purposes? Where do specific requests fit in a grander scheme of exchange of favors? This then is the domain of logistics. Discussion here is seemingly matter of fact and pragmatic, but tacit assumptions about relationship and power lurk nearby and often punctuate discussions.

Maintaining contact refers to passing information among people to ensure that the desired or necessary logistics occur. Families refer to the constant need to “be in touch,” “keep in contact,” or “be connected,” typically through a complex ecology of technological devices. Some of these are provided by family members in the form of purchases and gifts, while friends and employers provide others. However, maintaining contact requires more than devices, for it transpires through a system built out of social relationships among family, friends, and co-workers.

Maintaining contact is critical to many families and threats to it may provoke frantic scrambles to reestablish communication. Contact allows family members to know the current status of the logistics and any threats to it. It does so by letting the relevant personnel know where they are, what they are doing and what

they are planning to do. Occasions for contact may take other forms, such as when one spouse calls the other to say they love them or E-mails them about a pending department store sale that they just won't want to miss.

Maintaining contact exists within a larger context of understandings about other people's daily lives, including the resources they have available at specific times and places. For example, does the spouse typically have their cell phone with them on Thursday mornings or are they "out of touch"? Do they have access to an automobile or public transit on days when they carpool? Likewise, knowledge of the constraints on spouses becomes salient. Some constraints can be transient: Is the new supervisor amenable to making and taking personal phone calls? Others are structural: Can the other person leave work for an emergency, and of course, just what constitutes an emergency? Does the person have the power to reschedule at least some appointments?

Maintaining contact can be critical for families and it is manifested in tangible messages between people, but it is also constructed in distinct ways in individual families. For one family, hourly E-mails or phone calls might define acceptable contact, while in another it is the daily phone call between 1 and 2 PM that suffices: plans are reviewed, changes are noted and negotiated, and preparations for the evening are made. The exigencies of contact also have profound implications for "accessibility." The very proliferation of communications devices make contact so easy that many people devise strategies to restrict their own accessibility while simultaneously seeking to maximize their ability to reach others. Thus, maintaining contact is embedded in larger systems of channels and buffers that are generally created for the conflicting goals of being in contact while not being contacted.

Much of the communication that we see and hear concerning logistics and being in contact takes characteristic forms. Description of plans and decision points is ubiquitous. Commands and instructions, especially from parent to child, are common and are typically couched with precision and urgency. There is considerable negotiation among personnel, especially those who must transport others. Conversation is not neutral here, for family members are often building cases for the primacy of particular activities, for the legitimacy of their requests, and for getting something back in the future for today's investment of time and effort. Most of all, conversations are about efficiency and precision, and of the responsibilities of all parties to make the system work.

The days of the families we study are built out of plans and improvisations. We can view these families' strategies along a continuum, with "planning strategies" and "improvisational strategies" anchoring the extremes. The purely "planning strategy" establishes formal plans that, if followed, will result in the desired logistics. There is no need for being in contact except to comfort the relevant personnel that their world is unfolding as it should or to address other issues not related to immediate logistics (e.g. Can we schedule dinner with Joe next week?). Planning families usually rely on formal record keeping via Palm Pilots, daily planners, charts and lists.

The purely "improvisational strategy" responds to each logistical demand as it arises. It depends heavily on being in contact and requires extensive resources and minimal constraints on the personnel. People figure out who is going to do what in real time and trust in the accessibility and availability of others to make it all work.

In reality, of course, we find no purely planning or improvisational families that wholly enact these polar strategies. Planning families typically find that circumstances change during the day and plans cannot be followed due to changes in needed movements or the capacity of personnel to move others around. The pure planning strategy also assumes perfect information and unbounded rationality that is impossible to exercise. Plans

seldom unfold exactly as anticipated and being in contact allows adaptation to changing realities. Even if plans do unfold as desired, the family members we see fear that they will not and so they maintain contact just to see if anything has changed.

Improvisational families, in fact, live under constraints and limited resources so that some anticipation—planning—must occur. Minimally, the constraints of space and time mean that some warning must be given to personnel if an impending move is to occur on time. Improvisational families construct their improvisations out of familiar, routine building blocks so that what occurs is far less free-form than might first appear, or than they might articulate. There are always tacit and explicit limits or constraints on improvisations. People have ideas about what is possible and not possible and they negotiate these frequently.

It can be difficult to know whether a family engages in “planning” or “improvising” based only on watching the activities of members. How people talk about their preferences is only loosely connected with what they do. It is also dangerous to think of families as simply placed along the continuum. They typically combine planning and improvisation together into idiosyncratic combinations during the day. For example, family members might rely on planning during certain periods of the day to avoid the interruptions of contact and then maintain close contact during an agreed-upon window of time in order to adjust plans—i.e. arrange improvisations—to complete the day.

It is an empirical and analytical task to unravel what drives the daily practices of a particular family. There are often critical logistical demands that send ripples throughout the day. These critical demands need not be the most “important” event during the day, only the one that, by virtue of its place in a larger set of demands, shapes how other demands are met. Likewise, specific constraints concerning accessibility may be drivers of daily practice, as when someone cannot accept phone calls because of employer policy but can quietly receive E-mails when they are near a computer.

2.2. Controlling the Context

In addition to daily logistics and being in contact, control is also articulated and enacted through longer-term efforts to shape the context within which family members’ everyday lives are lived and will be lived. These efforts to control context can be usefully distinguished from the plans and improvisations of everyday life. First, they are often directed toward a near or distant future. They are not about how to improve logistics and being in contact today or even tomorrow, but about how to change the very lives in which particular logistical demands and ways of being in contact make sense. Second, they are often built in reaction to what people find frustrating about their own current everyday situations and from positive assessments of what they think works for other individuals and families. They are thus often less an ideal to aspire to than merely the negation of that which is currently annoying. Third, they are often indirectly expressed so that issues of control may be tacit. Family members may be talking about topics seemingly far removed from everyday life but also interjecting claims about controlling the context. For example, discussion with a child about the choice of high school courses might be framed in terms of aptitudes, interests, and potential jobs, as well as the supposed capabilities of people who hold those jobs to control logistical demands. Finally, discussions of these issues are often wrapped up with the “big issues” of defining the family. For example, much of childrearing may be focused on inculcating skills and knowledge that will hopefully provide children with control over their own everyday lives. Or career and job choices of spouses might be construed as statements about the future of the couple’s relationship. Although it is useful to distinguish between these two faces of control, it is important to remember that these context-controlling efforts play out in logistics and being in contact. Educational goals for children, for example, shape current logistical demands.

Preparation for a career change that will hopefully provide more control can reduce someone's immediate capacity to provide logistical support or be in contact. Indeed, we argue that many of the logistical demands on our families can only be understood as efforts to control context in the future, and perhaps the next generation. It is precisely here that fundamental values and assumptions about family, work, community, and identity converge to shape everyday life, often with complex and unintended consequences. We are documenting a variety of strategies that families use to control the context within which logistics and being in contact become meaningful.

- 1. Education.** The use of education to control context is a ubiquitous and visible means to enhance control. On the one hand, education is closely connected to knowledge acquisition and skill building. These take the form of tutoring, self-study, and an array of classes and workshops. On the other hand, education is an investment in a self-presentation that is important in an information driven economy in which it can be difficult to measure individual contributions to outcomes. Degrees, work histories, and skill sets are the coin of the realm in such a world. Children are made aware of the great divide at an early age: Educational choices made in childhood play out in the logistical constraints of adulthood.
- 2. Bundling Selves.** The self is not taken for granted as an entity, but rather it is the site of considerable work. Rather than a "real self" or "true self," the self becomes a bundle of attributes that can be "worked on." Attributes can be discarded if they are no longer needed (i.e. "marketable"), just as new ones can be added. The self can be "reinvented" when existing attributes are rearranged or presented in novel ways. Indeed, a variety of selves are developed and tactically presented to diverse audiences. Corporate reorganizations and absorptions provide a ready template for creating such bundled selves, and children learn to recognize and respond to the different realities of parents, nannies and schools. This social code switching is part of the work of the self. The family becomes a site for discussing and rehearsing the various selves that are projected into work relationships, just as family roles are discussed and rehearsed at work. All this prepares the person for a life of change and for adapting through the construction of selves designed to meet the new "specs." This strategy facilitates tactical shifts from blind alleys that limit control over context.
- 3. Social Relations.** Selves are necessarily embedded in larger social systems so that creating them is done in wider networks of relationships. While not impugning the authenticity of the feelings of people, these relationships often reflect a conscious instrumentality. In a world of time pressures, relationships are assessed in terms of their "value added." People analyze relationships for current or future usefulness, thereby placing a specific judgement on other people while simultaneously knowing that others are sizing them up for their own purposes. Sometimes the process is explicit, as when guests at a party come equipped with business cards hoping to identify people who might be useful in their endeavors. At other times the process is subtle, as when workplace favors are exchanged, such as providing technical support or social advice. These social relationships provide fundamental logistical support. They can provide regular services as well as help in an emergency. Without them, the family is left on its own to manage its logistical affairs, a difficult task at best.
- 4. Self-Marketing and Theatrical Production.** Selves are not simply created, but their attributes are communicated to others, often through theatrical performances that

demonstrate a person's attributes and their usefulness to other people. Much of the work practice we observe is explicitly intended for viewing by co-workers and clients. Piles of work are moved around, telephone calls are staged for both a receiver and an audience, and meetings become arenas in which to demonstrate one's value. The workplace can be as much about exchanging information about each other as it is about performing tasks. Children learn how to present themselves and not make unnecessary enemies, since they never know who they will need or who can hurt them.

3. Challenges to Control

The very effort devoted to establishing control suggests the ubiquitous challenges to it. These challenges we categorize as systemic constraints, episodic events, and significant crises. Systemic constraints are the relatively unchanging conditions under which logistics are arranged and contacts are made. Episodic events may require modifications to routine logistics or being in contact, but they do not fundamentally transform them. Significant crises fundamentally threaten logistics and contact, and they may fundamentally alter them.

Systemic constraints in Silicon Valley range from the very general to the highly specific. The former includes a high cost of living that is steadily rising. The effects are various: unemployment is low and many people work several jobs; housing is expensive, forcing many workers out of the region and into lengthy commutes; and there is a palpable sense of transience as families seek out places they can better afford.

Local geography and the distribution of destinations are other systemic constraints. Silicon Valley is relatively compact when compared to places such as Los Angeles and people routinely change jobs without changing residences. While development along the San Francisco Peninsula is compressed into a narrow strip between hills and bay, the northern Santa Clara County heart of Silicon Valley is less geographically constrained. Development is more distributed and most jobs do not line up neatly along public transportation routes. Despite efforts by local governments, jobs are still concentrated in the northern part of the county, housing in the south. These features mould local commutes and people often try to find schools and other services that minimize logistical problems. Likewise, timing becomes crucial, as when a five-minute delay in reaching the carpool on-ramp to the freeway translates into a thirty-five minute delay in getting to work.

The characteristics of industries and jobs also constrain everyday logistics and being in contact. Some industries are very fast paced and long hours are typical. It is simply assumed that a full time job entails working fifty to sixty hours a week, and begging off of weekend duties can jeopardize a career. Some companies allow employees to work from home at least one or two days a week, while others insist that their workers be on-site. Some jobs are heavily driven by the convenience of clients; others are not. Project-based work often follows distinctive patterns in which periods of frenetic activity and long and unpredictable hours alternate with relative tranquility. Business travel punctuates some jobs, but the details matter. For example, whether trips are regular or irregular or whether they are frequent but brief or infrequent but lengthy all constraint family life in specific ways.

Structural changes driven by what is sometimes called the New Economy also constrain daily logistics. The importance of rapid product cycles, the advantages to first entry into many markets, and the intangible, almost mysterious nature of some work in high tech industries drives theatrical presentations of one's worth. The global nature of much work is also salient here. This work necessitates intercultural contact and the need to be available in various time zones: People might "do" Europe by getting up early and "do" Asia after the late night news. Even when work across time zones is not an issue, much work requires close

coordination of effort and thus the demands of people elsewhere often drive important parts of the daily routine, as well as exceptions to that routine. Thus, people often seize upon any opportunity to coordinate or reach understandings with different colleagues. Work and socializing often blur, and people often simultaneously juggle diverse cultural domains. What is really going on is chimerical, since both performances and interpretations are multi-layered.

The middle class families we study work to maintain or advance their class status. Education is central here, both as it is linked to purchasing the accoutrements of the middle class and as a marker of possessing the right bundle of attributes. The desire to ultimately control one's own time and activities is ubiquitous as a topic for discussion at work and home, and it is perhaps the ultimate status symbol in the families we observe. Class reproduction is complex and convoluted in Silicon Valley. For example, the time of original arrival is critical to finding affordable housing and desirable schools. People with comparable incomes live in vastly different circumstances depending on whether they arrived in time to make a down payment on a home. The meaninglessness of national income indicators is indicated by informant comments that, by definition, middle class households must have incomes of between of \$80,000-150,000.

Episodic events also affect daily logistics, and the need and ability to be in contact. Routine illnesses or injuries are perhaps the most significant impediment to smooth logistics. Stories abound about the impact on daily logistics of a sick child and the dreaded call from the school. Even anticipation of such a call because a child is not feeling well in the morning can cause the parents to alter plans so someone is available "just in case." The families we study also frequently assume responsibilities for responding to a variety of requests by their own parents, such as helping out during illness or injury, performing household repairs, or providing entertainment during periods of depression or boredom.

Episodic events also include ordinary life passage markers, such as baptisms, marriages, first days of school or of confession that necessitate celebrations and the arrival of distant friends and family members. Other events or occurrences include the arrival of temporary houseguests or offering substantial help to friends during personal crises. Family members, too, may change jobs or hours, and children may move to different schools or develop a sudden passion for soccer camp or trombone lessons.

This listing of episodic events is not intended to be exhaustive, but only to illustrate the ordinariness of the events that challenge even the best efforts to meet logistical needs and be in contact. As most of our families have expressed in different ways, "Things just don't stay the same." Of course, families typically encounter several of these episodic events simultaneously, further complicating everyday life.

Finally, we distinguish a category of crises that are significant in their impacts on logistics. Job losses or transfers to other regions threaten lifestyles, as do some changes in career paths. Deaths and acute or chronic illnesses often drive major logistical modifications. Divorces, too, transform the family, as do marriages that combine previously autonomous families with their own logistical patterns into larger and even more complex systems, ones that might now have more resources and logistical demands.

These categories are heuristic only and we do not claim that they represent the fundamental categories of challenge. Specific exigencies of daily life are always taken from the perspective of individual families, and what for one is a systemic constraint might, for another is a significant crisis. For example, a serious illness may represent a significant crisis for many families, but for others, in which several family members are already ill, it is just a systemic constraint.

4. Strategies for Control

Faced with challenges to logistical constraints and ways of being in contact, the families we study develop strategies to maintain and reestablish control over people moving through space and time. Establishing such control is itself a complex process that is constituted out of various strategies, some of which may produce contradictory effects. We describe some of the basic strategies we are seeing below. Most families use several simultaneously and their success fluctuates over time.

1. Planning and Coordination. Clearly, the families we are studying invest considerable energy in planning, scheduling and coordination, and these activities are the basis for maintaining control. Indeed, management tools may be imported from the workplace into the family to facilitate rational planning; the Thanksgiving dinner scripted with a Gantt Chart is but an extreme example. Our discussion of strategies thus begins here, since issues of control become most evident when planning, scheduling and coordinating no longer provide a satisfactory basis for logistics.

2. Simplifying Lives. Some families attempt to consciously “simplify” their lives by changing some of the fundamental, driving logistical demands. Some such decisions are quite focused and direct, as when a family “consolidates” its children in one school or avoids organized sports to reduce the need to transport kids. Other decisions are more global, as when a family decides to change its standard of living to reduce the need for paid employment.

3. Infrastructure Building. Family members provision themselves and others with devices that facilitate sound logistics and the ability to be in contact. Big-ticket items include purchasing reliable and comfortable vehicles that compensate for the hassles of transporting bodies during hectic commutes. More common is developing the contact system through the purchase of myriad devices, such as pagers, cell phones, voicemail, answering machines, portable computers and mobile devices, and digital assistants such as the Palm Pilot.

4. Enhancing Flexibility. “Be flexible” is the mantra within many families, although it is inconsistently defined and used. Sometimes it is used to justify the purchase of infrastructure to support logistics and contact. The dream of a completely seamless communication system in which someone can instantaneously reach other people is powerful, as is the desire to filter the attempts at contact by others. Redundancy is a related concern, since devices frequently fail to work as anticipated. In a second use, flexibility refers to a state of mind in which you are not overly attached to specific plans. Related, is the ability and willingness to constantly anticipate changes and make contingent plans. Yet a third common usage of flexibility is as an admonition, typically to children, to accommodate to the demands of the logistical system. A premium is placed on being in particular places at particular times for the convenience of the next driver, and the willingness to be graciously hauled around is encouraged. Ironically, this “flexibility” implies both a lack of spontaneity and conformity to the demands of others, typically adults.

5. Strategic Coupling. The work skills and knowledge of spouses may be both divergent and convergent. True, they may work for different companies or hold different jobs, but there is often considerable overlap between them. Many couples are each other’s consultants on a dizzying array of work-related issues. They offer not just solace at the end of a hard day, but professional advice about how to handle sticky personnel issues or

the best way to frame a presentation to a potential client. This strategy brings work-related skills and knowledge into the home so the latter is partially a staging area for the workplace. In workplaces where many people might be too busy for the informal conversations that lubricate much of work life, such talks can occur at dinner, in the car, or after the nightly news.

- 6. Chunking and Recombining.** A common strategy is to take longer sequences of activities and decompose them into smaller chunks that can be fit into the shorter time slots available. These smaller chunks can then be recombined opportunistically so ultimately the larger activity gets done, but over a longer duration and with ambiguous benchmarks along the way. For example, a person might take a regular, hour-long meeting with a co-worker, break it down into its constituent topics and order them by their importance to the individual (rather than their logical connection) and how they fit into the fleeting opportunities for brief chats. The important points are mentally “checked off” as they are handled and the hour-long meeting becomes distributed over brief exchanges during several days.
- 7. Blurring Boundaries.** Related to chunking and recombining, the boundaries around cultural domains can be blurred so that it is not clear what or how many activities are being done at once. The most striking example of blurring is that between the domains of work and family. Family gatherings and social occasions, for example, can be occasions for work-related discussions. For example, one person told us of singing children’s tunes in a circle at Gymboree while another parent tried successfully to recruit a third parent to her company. Whether they—and he—were “with” their children or at work is ambiguous.
- 8. Outsourcing.** Families make decisions about what activities they will perform and which ones will be exported or outsourced to various providers. Eating meals at restaurants or “cooking” by picking up a roasted chicken at the supermarket deli on the way home are familiar and indeed, families have long used the services of outsiders. Gardeners, housekeepers, mechanics, and nannies are nothing new, but somewhat more exotic services are increasingly used. Internet grocery delivery, taxi services that specialize in the timely delivery of children at lessons and events, and even personal assistants who purchase gifts and entertain the visiting relatives suggest the extent of outsourcing. Other less obvious forms of it consist of the networks of friends, relatives, and co-workers who at least occasionally provide services by loaning their cars, delivering a child in a pinch, or providing informal daycare in the workplace.
- 9. Reinterpretation.** Families reinterpret how roles, relationships and activities define family membership in light of new realities. The paradigmatic phrase here is “quality time,” spoken as if the loss of “quantity time” can be replaced with well-managed and scheduled experiences. Even being a parent can be reinterpreted as a specific set of responsibilities and rights that a person exercises vis-a-vis particular children under some, but not other, conditions.
- 10. Buffering the Core.** Families define a core of calmness around which chaos may swirl, and then they buffer that core from threats. Often the core is more pronounced as an article of faith than as observable activities. For example, family members may project a calm, less frenetic image of their everyday lives into the future. This image becomes a goal and demonstrations of faith that it can be realized come to define the core of the family. In

other cases, the core is a set of observable, often prosaic activities that regularly define membership. These include activities as diverse as regular pizza nights and sleep-overs, weekend karaoke parties at which everyone gathers, and family vacations to secluded condominiums or cabins.

11. Doing Family. The broadest and most profound strategy we have seen is arguably the transformation of family into a verb. Family members may speak as if family is less something that is, than it is something that is done. References to “doing family” and to activities that define the family are ubiquitous in our fieldnotes. Family becomes something that is difficult to separate from the strategies used to manage logistics and keep in contact. Participation in efforts to change the context within which everyday life is lived and to buffer a core of calm comes to define the family.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework of control, challenges and strategies is not an a priori one that determines data collection. Rather, it reflects the practices and discourse about how work and family articulate that we observe daily during fieldwork. We make no claim that other conceptual frameworks can not be fruitfully used, only that this one is useful for explicating many of the important issues that fill the daily lives of the families we study. Specifically, it allows us to address the following issues:

1. The articulation of the minutiae of daily life with a variety of macroscopic social changes. The latter include the increasing importance of working across international boundaries in a global economy; the power of corporate actors to penetrate previously private recesses of personal life; and the creation of new cultural forms.
2. The salience of the practical issues of daily life to larger issues of morality and meaning as they are played out in families. How families manage everyday logistics and being in contact provide an arena in which the very nature of the family is negotiated and enacted.
3. Contradictions, apparent or otherwise, between different strategies that families develop to cope with the issues of logistics and being in contact. Attempts to simplify, for example, may be justifications to purchase new communications devices that ultimately increase complexity.
4. A vision of families as dynamic innovators when faced with ubiquitous challenges to control. One approach to maintaining control typically yields to another as the partial nature of solutions is discovered or logistical demands change.
5. Sensitivity to the secondary effects of control strategies. For example, if outsourcing is a family practice then it often entails performing favors for other individuals and families. Alternatively, it may take the form of hiring service providers such as nannies or daycare workers who then introduce alien beliefs and values into the family.

The ultimate value of this framework lies in its capacity to sensitize us to the strategies for buffering families from the maelstrom that all too often characterizes contemporary life. It allows us to identify the strategies that families use and to explicate their often-complex consequences, as well as how families define what “works,” and what does not. This endeavor, in turn, should provide a resource for individuals and families, as well as public and private policymakers who are grappling with similar issues.