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The virtuous circle of ephemeralization and the vicious circle of stress: a systemic perspective on ICT worker burnout

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Highlights

- Globalization and the relentless evolution of digital technologies transform the temporalities of organizations.
- The virtuous circle of ephemeralization has been triggering the vicious circle of stress.
- ICT workers experienced acceleration as a constant time pressure, work intensification and frequent organizational changes.
- Consequences of acceleration for ICT workers were stress, burnout and work-family conflicts.
- There were some significant differences between French and Norwegian groups' experiences.

Abstract

Ephemeralization, that is, an accelerating increase in the efficiency of achieving the same or more output while requiring less input, may give us ever-increasing standards of living. However, it may also result in mental health problems such as stress and burnout. The acceleration discourses and dispositifs such as ICT systems have resulted in automatized and accelerated work processes making work more intensified and stressful. The pace of internal and external communication in organizations has also increased, resulting in information overload. The enablers of this acceleration, namely the ICT workers, experience also acceleration. The subjective experience of acceleration as a source of stress for ICT workers has been overlooked in the burnout research. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and mobilizing concepts from critical theory, cybernetics, and discourse theory, this paper presents a systemic perspective on acceleration and ICT worker burnout. The participants have experienced acceleration as a constant time pressure, work intensification, hyperconnectivity, frequent organizational changes, short-termism, and rapid pace of technological change. Consequences were stress, burnout, and work-family conflicts. They felt alienated and

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