

Keeping track: the social organization of planning work in everyday life

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There is a lot of talk today about how busy life has become and many of us get the message that it's important to "manage time," "stay organized," or "plan ahead." There are lots of how-to books and many tools like calendars that claim to have the best ways to plan and organize. However, for real people there *is* no "best" way. We know from others' research that:

- people use a wide variety of ways of keeping track, and what they do depends a lot on the specific context of their lives and the roles they occupy (e.g., parent, worker, student, volunteer, member of a community organization);
- some people use one system for everything (for example, keeping things in their heads, relying on someone else to keep track for them, or carrying around a datebook or a personal digital assistant);
- other people use a number of different systems (for example, a calendar on the wall at home, a web calendar at work, and sticky notes as reminders in both places), each of which may be good for some things and not so good for others;
- regardless of what people's systems of keeping track are, they are never perfect;
- because of this, people often feel that they should be doing a better job of "being organized."

In this study, I am interested in learning more about how people keep track of the things they need to do across the many different roles they may play in life. I am also interested in what happens when roles clash, for example, when an important work, school, or community activity happens on the day a family member needs care at home, or when plans have to be completely changed because of conflicts or complications beyond the person's control, such a change in a school policy or an unexpected weather pattern. I am *not* interested in evaluating whether people's planning and organizing strategies are "good" according to some outside standard.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact keepingtrack@uwo.ca or call 519-551-2111 ext. 88514.