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WORK AND AUTONOMY: CASE STUDIES OF CLERICAL WORK

STEPHEN TAYLOR

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the impact of marketization, through the introduction of Total Quality Management (T.Q.M.), upon work autonomy within the clerical labour process. Marketization is currently transforming many areas of what was formerly known as 'clerical work'. It is argued that this process means that it is increasingly difficult to identify a coherent 'clerical labour process'. It is simultaneously claimed by a wide variety of authors that marketization and T.Q.M. within former clerical work enahnces employee discretion. However, drawing upon ethnographic research into three separate labour processes, it is argued that T.Q.M. represents a sophisticated and ideological managerial attempt to erodeworker autonomy and affect 'total' managerial control. The potential for the latter particularly resides in electronic and individualised surveillance techniques developed at one of the research sites. This ensures greater managerial prescription of the labour process than at one research site, where T.Q.M. was not implemented in such a thoroughgoing manner, and another, where T.Q.M. had not been introduced. The implications of such restricted employee autonomy are discussed, in relation to the 'self', 'identity' and 'personality' of clerks. Managerial attempts to control workers' social interaction with superiors and customers, and the attendant management of such employees emotions and feelings, is given special attention. It is argued that 'total' managerial control, and thus the eradication of work autonomy, is *not* achieved through T.Q.M. within the cases studied. There is evidence of worker resistance and autonomy (particularly over the management of feeling and emotion), concomitant with 'consent' and 'self-

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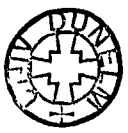
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Ph.D. THESIS

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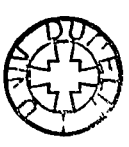
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INTRODUCTION

This project began as a broad investigation into the nature of employee autonomy within paid clerical employment. The researcher set out with a general notion that the experience of clerical work was changing and that this was related to wider developments within contemporary western economy and society. Thus, it was suggested in the late 1980s that much clerical work was being reorganised, with the implementation of 'new production concepts' (Dankbaar (1988)). However, it was while conducting preparatory fieldwork that a particular 'managerial strategy' was noted as popular within many areas of clerical employment. The introduction of Total Quality Management (T.Q.M.) appeared to be transforming the occupation. Furthermore, both practitioners and academics were claiming that T.Q.M. enhances employee discretion. Consequently, the aim of the research was to analyse and evaluate, in detail, the impact of T.Q.M. upon clerical worker autonomy. This has *not* been covered within existing literature and research. It will be argued throughout that our 'research problem' constitutes a significant gap within the sociology of work and employment.

The concept of 'autonomy' has occupied a central place within the social sciences. It denotes the 'self-control' of human activity. This thesis is motivated by 'the emancipatory interest' (Adorno and Horkheimer (1944)) (1). One can argue that the majority of humans within contemporary capitalist-patriarchal societies are subordinated to the forces of class power and all women are subordinated to the forces of male power. The *social structures* of capitalism and patriarchy can limit the opportunities for engagement in autonomous activity amongst the majority within society. Rather paradoxically, it is only through *expanding* the sphere of autonomy within society, by *developing* autonomous capacities amongst the



majority, that these constraining social structures can be effectively challenged (Adorno (1951); Gorz (1985), (1989)).

This thesis will contend that an *understanding* of the *opportunities* (however limited) for the majority of humans to engage in autonomous activity, is crucial to understanding the needs, interests and motivations of the majority within contemporary society, their quality of life *and* the strength of the dominant social order. Chapter one will discuss the social significance of autonomy further. The concept of *work* autonomy will be de-constructed through explaining its meaning and significance. We shall argue that an appreciation of the nature and extent of employee autonomy within the 'employment relationship' (Brown (1988)) is crucial to appreciate autonomous opportunities within contemporary society more generally.

Following Giddens (1979),"the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and outcome of the practices that constitute those systems" (p.69). He terms this the 'duality of structure'. Furthermore, power relations are always "relations of autonomy and dependence...however wide the asymmetrical distribution of resources involved" (p.149). This is known as a 'dialectic of control'. Such observations are crucial to understanding the nature of the employment relationship within capitalist-patriarchal society. In what follows, it will be argued that the social relations of paid employment are clearly shaped by the structural properties of capitalism and patriarchy (Brown (1988); Walby (1990)). Private ownership of the means to produce goods and services, private appropriation of the benefits of production and global competition between producers means that employment organisations explicitly aim to produce *profitable* goods and services (2). Male domination of powerful positions within employment organisations means that male interests and

patriarchal assumptions also govern the employment relationship.

These structural properties can shape and constrain human action within the employment relationship. The exercise of human agency could also shape, and transform, the nature of the employment relationship, and ultimately the social structure. However, given the 'asymmetrical distribution of resources' within capitalist-patriarchal society, the majority are unable to exercise agency and autonomy in ways which could *transcend* the structural properties of the employment relationship and threaten the social order. Nevertheless, the actions of human beings are crucial in shaping the nature of particular employment relationships at particular points in time. The 'negotiation of (employment organisational) order' (Brown (1993)) takes place *within* the the structural properties of the employment relationship - capitalist and patriarchal social relations - while shaping the form of the latter. We are specifically interested in the nature and role of employee autonomy in the social construction of capitalist and patriarchal work organisations.

We will be focusing upon a particular aspect of the employment relationship - the labour process. This refers to the process wherein workers capacity to work (labour power) is translated into actual products and services (labour). "Employment represents...the buying and selling of labour power...what the employer secures by employing someone is their capacity to work, and this potential can only be realized over time...employment necessitates a continuing relationship between the buyer and seller of labour power" (Brown,1988,p.55). We shall concentrate upon how this 'continuing relationship' shapes, and is shaped by, employee experience of the labour process, in particular the nature and extent of employee autonomy.

One consequence of our theoretical approach for understanding the nature of work is that employee autonomy can only be studied through detailed empirical research within particular work organisations. We have identified structural properties which are common to all capitalistic and patriarchal employment relationships and thus *shape* the nature of the labour process within contemporary society. However, the *exact* constitution of organisational order - including the 'employee's contribution' in terms of skill, effort and *discretion* (Brown (1988)) - is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated through time within particular institutions. Employee experience of the labour process can be shaped by a multitude of factors and circumstances (Thompson and McHugh (1990)).

Thus, in attempting to investigate the impact of T.Q.M. upon the clerical labour process, we have engaged in empirical research within particular work organisations. It cannot be claimed that our findings are in any way representative of the experience of all clerical workers under the influence of T.Q.M. However, this thesis does provide *indications* as to the nature and extent of *contemporary* clerical worker autonomy.

CHAPTER ONE

WORK AUTONOMY

The purpose of this chapter is to examine, through a review of relevant literature, the distinctive meaning of work autonomy. It will be suggested that a failure, within some sociological discussions, to recognise this distinctiveness facilitates a misunderstanding of the *nature* and *significance* of work autonomy.

The Significance of Autonomy

Within the social sciences, autonomy is a widely discussed concept, despite being notoriously difficult to define and research. Within Marxist theory and critical social theory, pioneered by the writings of the Frankfurt School, autonomy is assumed to be of great significance. For Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), following Marx, the expansion of autonomy amongst the subordinated of capitalist society is the *only* way to challenge the reproduction of the dominant social order and the structures of domination which accompany such reproduction.

The centrality of autonomy remains within some contemporary social theory (Offe (1984), (1985); Gorz (1989), (1994); Lodziak (1995)), which continues to be concerned with the 'emancipatory interest'. Thus, Gorz (1989) argues that the building of a 'new utopia' to "liberate humanity from scarcity, injustice and misery" rests upon minimizing the realm of 'heteronomous' or 'socially necessary' activities and expanding the realm of 'autonomous' or 'free' activities (p.8).

This immediately raises two questions: what are autonomous activities ?; why is such value placed upon them ?

Gorz draws on Marx to answer the first question, arguing that autonomy refers to "'that development of human energy which is an end in itself'...I refer to those activities which are themselves their own end as autonomous activities...In short, they have to stem from a conscious choice which nothing forces me to make" (Gorz,1989,pp.165-68). This meaning, and the social significance of autonomy, is illustrated further by Marx's theory of human nature. This, however, is controversial theoretical terrain. Many believe there are inconsistencies in Marx's work. In particular, it is argued that the perspective on human nature put forward in the early writings of Marx, and the centrality of this for his critique of capitalist society, is missing from his later work. Others have suggested that differences between 'young Marx' and 'mature Marx' are merely differences of emphasis rather than substantive theoretical divisions (Giddens (1971); McLellan (1973), (1976)) (1). In fact, it can be argued that *all* of Marx's work is driven by a common and specific conception of human nature (Arthur (1970)). To illustrate this argument, while simultaneously avoiding the intricacies of a lengthy theoretical debate, we shall draw chiefly on Marx's *later* work when examining his theory of human nature.

Marx's Theory of Human Nature

The starting point for Marx's theory of human nature is his distinction between human nature and non-human nature. This lies in the mode of satisfaction of human survival needs. In The German Ideology, Marx and Engels (1965) state;

> Men *(sic)* can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or by anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to

> *produce* their means of subsistence,
> a step which is conditioned by
> their physical organization (p.42).

According to Marx, human beings differ from animals as they do not simply *utilize* what the world provides in order to fulfil their physical needs; they also *transform* the world. Humans *must* transform natural resources to satisfy their survival needs. Within Capital, Marx (1970) delineates this distinction further *and* indicates the importance of human autonomy for truly 'human' productive activity;

> A spider conducts operations that
> resemble those of a weaver, and
> a bee puts to shame many an
> architect in the construction
> of her cells. But what distinguishes
> the worst architect from the best
> of bees is this, that the architect
> raises his *(sic)* structure in imagination
> before he erects it in reality. At
> the end of every labour process, we
> get a result that already existed in
> the imagination of the labourer at it's
> commencement. He not only effects
> a change of form in the material on
> which he works, but he also
> realises a purpose of his own
> that gives the law to his *modus*
> *operandi*, and to which he must
> subordinate his will (p.178).

Human behaviour, contrary to the activity of animals, is conscious and purposeful. It involves a unity of thought and practice. Marx termed it 'praxis.' The essence of praxis is the purpose driving human activity. When considering the

nature and extent of human autonomy within contemporary society, we are essentially concerned with how far (if at all) the meaning and purpose of activity is *externally imposed* upon human beings. To what extent does the *product* of praxis cease to be the objective embodiment of a human being's personality, a distinctive expression of their creative powers and interests ? How far is the development of the 'truly human', autonomous being impeded by social organisation ?

A further defining characteristic of praxis is that it is a *social* phenomenon. It is co-operative, invariably involves some division of labour, and draws on the knowledge, skills and experience of other, and earlier, human beings. As Jagger points out, according to Marx, "the worker's (human's) conception of what needs to be done, how it should be done and when it has been done successfully are all determined in outline by previous social experience and *by the social context within which the individual is working*" (p.54,my addition and emphasis).

For Marx, the way in which the members of a particular society organise their productive activity in order to satisfy basic human survival needs - in short the 'mode of production' - shapes the nature of praxis within that society. Praxis shapes the nature of human beings within society and, in turn, their capacity to undertake other forms of praxis. Jagger (1983) explains, with illustrations from The German Ideology:

> Praxis is directed toward satisfying human needs, needs based on human biology;
>
> 'Men *(sic)* must be in a position to live in order to 'make history.' ...life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a

habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself'

But praxis does not end there;

'The second point is that the satisfaction of the first need (the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfactions which have been acquired) leads to new needs; and this producing of new needs is the first historical act...The first historical act, therefore, has a double aspect. It provides the means of satisfying existing needs and simultaneously creates new needs. In this way, praxis changes not only the non-human world but also the human producers themselves. As new needs emerge, people develop new means of satisfying those needs; the new products, in turn, give rise to still further needs, until the original human nature is completely transformed...human beings create their own nature through productive activity' (p.54).

We are what we do. Crucial to the argument is the concept of human 'needs'. Again, this is contentious theoretical ground which has invoked lengthy political and philosophical debates. However, it is possible to distinguish between basic,

physical, survival needs of human beings and other 'beyond survival' needs.

It is uncontroversial to assert that humans require the satisfaction of certain universal, physiological needs. It is also uncontroversially accepted that humans do have needs beyond survival. Frequent reference, particularly within social theory, to 'existential needs,' 'identity needs' and 'the need for meaning' demonstrates this. The expression of grief (and horror), with regard to societies which enable little more than basic subsistence for the majority of their populations, is a powerful testament to the widespread belief that there is more to human life than mere survival.

Many of the debates surrounding the issue of human needs are centred on what actually constitutes 'beyond survival needs'. We shall attempt to side-step this controversy by positing that 'beyond survival needs', in general, refer to the 'the need for meaning', or 'existential need'. However, what is meaningful and satisfying cannot be prescribed for us. The substance of such need is *defined by the individual who experiences it*, given that what is experienced as meaningful and satisfying is as potentially varied as the total number of existing human beings (2). However, of particular relevance to the concerns of this thesis are conceptions of existential need which suggest that the greater the *self-investment* in human activity, the greater the *meaning* experienced (Gorz (1989); Lodziak (1995)). Self-investment and self-expression are likely to be found in activities offering opportunities for *autonomy* (Gorz (1985), (1989)). Experiencing meaning is clearly central to the experience of a *meaningful self-identity*. The attainment of meaning is closely bound up with the exercise of autonomy. Both are experienced through praxis. We can refer to a human need for autonomy (3). We cannot assume that everyone experiences this need. Rather, it derives

from the need for meaning. This is an issue to which we shall return in some detail.

As intimated earlier, the mode of production of a society shapes the praxis of that society and the 'human nature' within it. The mode of production shapes the needs, both survival and beyond-survival, which humans can satisfy through praxis. We are taking an explicitly Marxist and historical approach to understanding human nature. "Far from seeing human nature as changeless, Marxists believe that people's capacities, needs and interests are determined ultimately by the mode of production that characterizes the society they inhabit. Thus, human nature itself is a historical product" (Jagger,1983,p.56).

The Manipulation of Human Nature Within Capitalism

Informed by the Marxist theory of human nature, we shall now articulate key elements of Marxist economic theory. It will be argued that the capitalist mode of production, whilst enabling the satisfaction of survival needs for the majority within western societies, largely prevents the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs (Gorz (1980), (1985), (1989)). We shall attempt to illustrate this by using the example of autonomous activity as a beyond-survival need (4).

If we assume that the satisfaction of survival needs is a priority for most human individuals, we can also assume that this majority will act in ways which fulfil these requirements. Under the capitalist mode of production, however, the majority do not have direct access to the means of their own survival. We must enter into relations of dependency with those who control such necessary resources. As Mandel (1970) argues, the separation of humans from their means of production "is the fundamental condition for existence of the capitalist system" (p.31). Within

contemporary western society, this entails social relations of dependency with employers, the state or someone who is also dependent. The means for producing the necessities of life lie in the control of a minority social group - the capitalist class (5).

It can be argued that paid employment, into which the majority must attempt to enter in order to satisfy basic survival needs, is not explicitly designed to satisfy the survival or beyond-survival needs of employees. It is *primarily* organised for the *profitable production* of goods and services. Some claim that the prosperity and advancement of employees can be a concomitant development of such organisation. According to Marx, however, profitable production is primarily achieved through the *exploitation* of employees. For example, one way in which this is achieved is through the extraction of 'surplus-value' from the labour process (6).

Crucially for the focus of this thesis, in Marxist terms, activities which are undertaken within the capitalistic employment relationship constitute the 'realm of necessity'. Such activity is not *voluntarily* chosen and often, the way it is undertaken does not depend upon the conscious choices of employees. Parker (1973) notes how frequent reference to these activities as 'subsistence' activities "lays emphasis on the *purpose* of work to the worker, that is, enabling him *(sic)* and his dependants to subsist" (p.395).

The very act of selling labour power to an employer - entering into the employment relationship - gives the *employer,* rather than the worker, fundamental control over how that labour power is translated into productive labour (Offe (1985)). Fox (1974) notes that such power has developed into legal rights of the employer within contemporary capitalist society.

Negotiation and struggle between employees and employers over the way in which labour power is translated into labour (the nature of the labour process) has been a major focus of industrial sociology for the past two decades. This study aims to contribute to, as well as draw upon, what is often referred to as 'labour process theory' (Knights and Willmott (1990)). For the moment, we are merely suggesting that the satisfaction of employees needs (particularly beyond-survival needs), if they are met at all, will be a *by-product* rather than explicit aim of paid employment (Gorz (1989)) - a major form of productive activity within capitalist societies.

The foregoing suggests that the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs, which can often be developed through participation in autonomous activity, must be achieved in time left *after* participation in the realm of necessity - 'leisure' time or what Marx termed the 'realm of freedom' (7). However, those who have developed Marx's work argue that the nature of 'leisure time' under the capitalist mode of production does *not* enable the satisfaction and development of beyond-survival needs (Adorno and Horkheimer (1944); Adorno (1951), (1977); Marcuse (1964); Gorz (1980), (1985); Lodziak (1986), (1995)) (8). Furthermore, contemporary social theorists have argued that the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs has become further restricted by *recent* social and cultural change (Habermas (1973); Offe (1984); Lash and Urry (1989); Lodziak (1995)) (9).

It is important to point out that a major component of arguments suggesting an *increased* manipulation of human nature, and a concomitant reduction in the opportunities for autonomous activity within contemporary society, is the notion that the employment relationship offers less 'meaning' to employees than it once did (Lodziak (1995)). In fact, many theorists use the arguments of some industrial sociologists and labour process theorists to support this contention. Thus,

Braverman's (1974) 'de-skilling' argument, by which he meant the progressive *elimination* of autonomy from the productive activity of employees throughout capitalist development, is pointed to as almost conclusive evidence of the increasing degradation of paid employment within western societies (Gorz (1989)). The validity of these claims will be discussed later in the thesis.

Stanley Parker (1973) argues that human activity should not be rigidly divided between 'work' time and 'leisure' time, or 'compulsory' and 'freely-chosen' activity. He suggests that 'leisure' time can be colonized by compulsory activity (i.e. preparing for, recuperating from employment) and 'work' time can involve freely-chosen activities. Parker proposes a continuum of human activity, with constraint at one end and freedom at the other. Activities undertaken within the workplace and within what is conventionally considered to be 'free' time can vary along this continuum. However, given the foregoing, it would seem that most human activity within capitalist society takes place at the 'constraint' end of this continuum.

Patriarchy and Human Nature

Many of the above arguments have historically been advanced in a 'gender-blind' manner (cf. Adorno (1951); Jagger (1983); Gorz (1989)). We do not wish to propose any difference between female and male 'human nature'. However, it can be argued that patriarchy - "a system of *social structures* and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby,1990,p.20,my emphasis) - can importantly constrain female human activity.

Following Giddens (1979), Walby goes on to argue that social structures are both enabling *and* constraining in terms of human action. This is an important point which will be

returned to later. The six social structures identified by Walby (1990) are: the patriarchal mode of (domestic) production; patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal relations in the state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. These structures both shape, and are shaped by, female and male activity - the process of 'structuration' (Giddens (1984); Walby (1990)).

Crucially, for Walby, the social system of patriarchy is dynamic and fluid rather than static. Each of the six identified structures interrelate in different ways, within different societies, at different points in history, and in relation to different classes, cultures and ethnic groups thereby producing a particular historical, spatial and cultural patterning of gender relations (10). Furthermore, Walby argues that particular patriarchal structures are dominant within particular societies during particular periods of history. She suggests that contemporary western societies are currently undergoing a historical transition from a form of 'private patriarchy' to 'public patriarchy'. We will be concerned later with identifying aspects of patriarchal relations in paid employment, how they interrelate with other patriarchal structures and how they shape 'public patriarchy'. However, for the moment, it is vital to recognise that, in addition to the constraints identified above, *female* human activity and the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs (including autonomous activity) is also constrained by the patriarchal structures identified above.

Alienation and the Underdevelopment of Autonomous Capacity

It was stated above that, when considering autonomous activity as a beyond-survival need, we are using Marx's theory of human nature as a basis. It was also established earlier that this theory argues for an *historical* notion of human nature - as

constituted by the dominant forms of praxis within a particular society. We have argued that the dominant forms of praxis within capitalist-patriarchal society do not mould a human nature which is continually involved in autonomous, freely chosen activity. This lack of engagement in autonomous activity, it is argued, would seem to have increased, or at least not decreased, with the development of contemporary capitalism (Gorz (1989)).

Following Marx, many authors have described this particular human nature or human condition as one of 'alienation'. However, "the concept of alienation has been so widely applied that some commentators doubt whether it remains open to salvage as a useful analytical tool" (Fox,1976,p.46). Furthermore, utilising 'alienation' to depict the human condition under capitalism involves crucial theoretical assumptions (Lukes (1977)). These are examined in the following section. For now, we shall briefly examine the meaning of 'alienation'. A crucial aspect of this Marxist concept relates to the underdevelopment of human *autonomous capacities*.

When depicting the 'alienated' condition, Marx was arguing that people can become divorced from their 'true selves' or 'species being'. As intimated throughout the preceding sections, the natural activity of human beings - what Marx termed their 'active function' or 'life activity' - is 'free conscious activity.' If the majority are constrained from fully carrying out this function, then man *(sic)*, in capitalist society, is alienated from "his *(sic)* own body, external nature, his mental life and his *human* life" (Lukes,1977,p.77). Autonomous activity is a vital part of what Marx regarded as the 'natural' human condition. Prohibition from such activity is crucial to the definition of alienation.

In accordance with Marx, Blauner (1964) and Fox (1976) argue that paid employment in capitalist society - the central form of praxis - is centrally involved in developing the alienated condition. Fox (1976) suggests that the most fundamental elements of capitalist work organisations can be grouped under the single crucial category of *control*. This covers a wide range of phenomena, prominent among them: (a) control over the use of one's time and physical movement; (b) control over the environment, both technical and social; and (c) control in terms of freedom from hierarchical authority.

> If men *(sic)* realize their full and essential selves only through *freedom* from control in their productive labour, then the greater the domination imposed on them in the work situation the more they are blocked, cut off or estranged from their essential nature. In other words, the more they are alienated (Fox,1976,p.47).

Significantly, Fox goes on to argue that frustration and dissatisfaction with capitalist society are not *necessary* consequences of the alienated human condition. He believes that the very nature of paid work in capitalist society - that the activities themselves do not lead to the satisfaction of human needs, work activity is a *means* for satisfying need - leads to an *instrumental* attitude amongst the *majority* of the workforce. That is, the majority of the workforce are concerned with the *extrinsic*, rather than the intrinsic, satisfactions which paid employment offers. However:

> To the extent that men *(sic)* are constrained to adapt to a context in which work offers only instrumental, extrinsic satisfactions and rewards, they may not actively aspire to self-

> actualization through work that Marx had in mind. And to the extent that men do not actively aspire to self-actualization, they submit to its absence without necessarily manifesting active and overt dissatisfaction (Fox,1976,p.47).

It must be remembered that we are also suggesting that activities beyond the workplace can develop the alienated condition. Significant engagement in autonomous activity is not widespread within the total activities of the majority in capitalist-patriarchal society. However, humans can "acquiesce in and even value highly their alienated...condition" (Lukes,1977,p.85). As Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) rather simply point out, if individuals do not have significant and lengthy experience of autonomous, self-actualising activities, they are unlikely to miss them or experience them as a need requiring satisfaction. Soper (1981) argues:

> If you are deprived of food, you feel the pangs of hunger; if you are deprived ...of opportunities for creative activity, or of the space and time that are preconditions of any self-development, you do not so much feel the loss as lose the power to feel - you become the victim of a vicious regress, caught up in a process that numbs sensitivity in the very act of depriving it (p.184).

It is the possibility of underdevelopment of the very capacity for autonomous activity, and thus the lack of a meaningful and 'true' self and identity within society which so concerned Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) and Marcuse (1964). Such a development continues to concern Gorz (1989) and Lodziak (1995). If opportunities for autonomous activity (within both

paid employment and 'leisure' time) are receding even further within contemporary society, resources vital to such activity being progressively eroded, we could face a situation where humans no longer experience a need for autonomy and meaning. This, would entail a 'manipulation of human beingness' over time (Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), and the ultimate form of social violence and barbarism (Gorz (1989)). For Adorno and Horkheimer and Gorz, such a situation would mean that the very mechanism through which capitalist-patriarchal society can be effectively opposed, enabling the establishment of a society where full human potentialities can develop, would be blocked. Any effective political opposition amongst subordinated groups must simultaneously be an independent, autonomous opposition (11). This, in turn, can only be developed through expanding autonomous activities and capacities *within* capitalism and patriarchy (Gorz (1985), (1989)).

Nevertheless, Adorno and Horkheimer and Gorz recognise the complexity of both human nature and human consciousness. They argue that the majority in capitalist-patriarchal society do not regularly experience engagement in autonomous activity and, as a consequence, may not consider it a need requiring satisfaction. However, they also contend, as does Lodziak (1995), that the *capacity* for autonomous activity still resides within humans under capitalism and patriarchy. Within an amenable social context, this capacity could be fully developed.

The arguments presented here counter claims that autonomy, or a general 'need for meaning', cannot be considered genuine human needs worthy of study. The justification for such claims is often that individuals do not experience such needs and do not express dissatisfaction at their absence. However, we have argued that individuals can become adapted, over time, to a situation in which such needs are absent. "If men *(sic)* were

incapable of adapting their aspirations to the lot which they see as inevitable the mental hospitals would be even busier than they are" (Fox,1974,p.45). At the same time, however, we cannot assume that all humans not given the opportunity to exercise discretion, do not experience it as a need.

It is also being suggested that autonomous activity, although notoriously *difficult* to study, is *not* a wholly subjective phenomenon or a 'state of mind'. Arguing the latter would be tantamount to accepting the impossibility of empirically researching the existence and experience of autonomy. We have argued that certain social conditions constrain the development of autonomous activity; other social contexts will liberate discretion. The aim of this study is to objectively research the constraint/liberation of autonomy within particular social conditions.

The Need for Autonomy ?

As indicated above, our argument concerning the significance of autonomy for the quality of life for human beings, and the alienation inherent within the human nature developed by capitalist-patriarchal society, fundamentally rests upon some important theoretical assumptions. However, the assumptions are ultimately non-empirical - they must remain assumptions (Lukes (1977)). Some social concepts are essentially contestable.

As Lukes suggests, Marx's theory of human nature, his concept of alienation and, by implication, the human need for autonomy and self-actualization, only make sense if one considers what he saw "as the 'natural' (or 'human' or 'normal' or 'healthy') condition of the individual in society" (Lukes,1977,p.81). Alienation is only identifiable "if one knows what it would be *not* to be alienated...that is, if one applies a standard specifying 'natural' states of institutions, rules and norms

and individual mental states. Moreover, this standard must be external" (Lukes,1977,p.81).

In essence, we are arguing that freely chosen activity would significantly improve the lives of the majority in contemporary society. Contemporary society does not provide even an approximation of the 'external standard' which Marx proposed. However, by its very absence from the lives of the majority, this external standard ultimately involves non-empirical presuppositions. As Lukes puts it, we are asserting that "individuals in situation *S* are unable to experience satisfactions that situation *S1* is held to make possible for them and which they would experience and value highly." Further, it is not "necessary that such statements refer to actual *discontents* of individuals in *S*" (pp.84-85). Lukes argues that it is an empirical and testable question whether the satisfactions in question are precluded in *S*. In fact, this is a debate to which the arguments of this thesis, based upon empirical research, aim to contribute. Lukes suggests that it can even be investigated, albeit indirectly, whether these satisfactions would be available in *S1* and whether they would be actually experienced by individuals in *S1*. Obviously, direct investigation of the latter two assertions can only be pursued by social experiment, i.e. a fundamentally different society. However, even then, by whom is the condition of human beings in *S1* said to be preferred ? As Lukes argues;

> An appeal to men *(sic)* in *S1* is self-defeating, for it carries the presumption that their evaluations are privileged, which is what is at issue. An appeal to men *(sic)* in *S* will not do either, for they would not ordinarily have the necessary evidence, and, again, why should their judgements be privileged ? Worse still, what criteria are appropriate ? If men *(sic)* in *S1* are satisfied, fulfilled, contented

> in certain ways, what is privileged about judgements which value these states rather than others ? (p.86)>

Thus, it is clear that, in asserting the 'need for autonomy', we are unavoidably asserting a particular and partial view of human nature.

Work Autonomy - A Contradiction in Terms ?

Having argued that paid employment is not orientated towards the satisfaction of employees survival and beyond-survival needs, and having identified such activity under capitalism and patriarchy as important in developing the human condition of alienation, it may appear strange to turn our attention towards *work* autonomy. As Fox (1974) suggests, this form of praxis involves 'external enforcement' upon the activities of the worker. This is the exact opposite of autonomous, freely chosen activity.

> (Industrial) organisations exist because and in so far as those who establish and/or control them are able to employ others to undertake work...to accept employment is to enter into a situation involving loss of freedom and autonomy, of being prepared, within whatever limits, to do as one is told. Without such power employers would be unable to ensure that the work for which they are paying would actually be done as and when they wish it to be done. Much of the administrative apparatus of large-scale employing organisations can be seen as comprising the means of 'closing' the employment contract and ensuring the performance to the desired standards of the

> tasks for which workers are being employed. *The exercise of authority would be needed in any circumstances in order to ensure that tasks were completed to time and in a co-ordinated way. In the context of capitalist ...society it is all the more necessary, from the employer's point of view, because the interests of employer and employee are in conflict* (Brown,1993,pp.56-58,my emphasis).

Within the employment relationship, the employee "does not develop freely his *(sic)* mental and physical energies. It (work) is not the satisfaction of a need but a *means* of satisfying other needs" (Lukes,1977,pp.76-77). As Seve (1978) reminds us:

> In capitalist society, alienated social labour is not only not my prime need but constitutes its radical negation ...it is not labour which is my prime need on the contrary it is my prime need which necessitates labour: I need to labour as a means of 'earning' my (alienated) living and through the same need I waste it, finding 'time to live' only outside labour in forms which are themselves atrophied (p.328).

For these very reasons, Gorz (1985), (1989)) rejects the argument that autonomy, and hence liberation, can be developed *through* paid work. He argues that autonomy can only be developed *from* paid work by the (contemporary) possibility of minimizing socially necessary labour time. Clearly, paid employment can never be a *truly* autonomous activity. As Gorz (1989) argues, work only becomes a truly autonomous activity if: "a) it is organized by those performing it; b) it consists

in the free pursuit of a self-appointed aim; c) it is fulfilling for the individual performing it" (p.78).

However, we can still specify the nature, meaning and significance of work autonomy. It is not as if the scope for autonomous activity, in any situation, is either present or absent. We must conceive of differing *degrees* of work autonomy (Fox (1974)). Obviously, the development of work autonomy has definite limits. All work roles contain some element of prescription. "No work role can be totally discretionary" (Fox,1974,p.19).

However, this does not justify any claim that all work is essentially the same, in terms of the discretion embodied within it. Nor does it legitimate a dismissal of work autonomy as insignificant. On the contrary, one can argue that an understanding of the nature and extent of worker autonomy, within particular employment relationships, is vital in understanding the needs, motivations and interests of the workers involved.

Furthermore, while Gorz argues that the development of autonomous activities and capacities is vital to the 'emancipatory interest', he also recognises that some kind of social *movement*, with this aim in mind, is crucial to enable this. Gorz outlines two major obstacles to the development of autonomy amongst the majority in capitalist society.

Firstly, owing to the manipulation of human needs and human nature outlined above, Gorz recognises that the majority do not feel the need for autonomous activity. In fact, rather paradoxically, many people within capitalist society argue that they already *are* autonomous. However, as argued above, autonomy is not only a 'state of mind' or subjective feeling. In fact, many of the social contexts which can produce subjective feelings of 'autonomy' and 'self control' within

capitalist and patriarchal structures can often involve simultaneous, enhanced forms of dependence upon a social order which prevents the *full* development of autonomous capacities as envisaged by Marx and Gorz (Offe (1984)).

Secondly, according to Gorz, creating the predominance of autonomous activity within society is not merely an existential or ethical choice, it is fundamentally a political matter. Any movement genuinely interested in its realisation must presuppose "not only that...(it)...is able to open up new spaces of autonomy through its practice but also that society and its institutions, technologies and legal systems can be made compatible with the expanded sphere of autonomy" (Gorz,1980,p.12). Gorz (1989) recognises the lack of any, or any *potential*, political or social movement capable or interested in mobilising the majority around the issue of greater human autonomy.

Given the general lack of movement toward greater human autonomy within contemporary society, surely it makes sense to examine the exact nature and extent of the underdevelopment of autonomous capacities within contemporary society. An appreciation of this is required before social and political movements, facilitating autonomy, can be developed. Further, given that the majority of people within capitalist-patriarchal society still spend large amounts of time undertaking activities within the confines of the employment relationship, and that these activities can shape what they do in other areas of social life, an understanding of the nature, extent and limits of autonomy within the employment relationship is vital (Fox (1974); Offe (1984)).

To assume that all employment is the same is to conceal "differences of the utmost relevance not only to the individual's experience in work, to the structure of rewards and to the dynamics governing the nature and growth of rules

and relations generally in the work situation, but also to group and class relations and to the nature of the social bond" (p.16). We have suggested that the stability of the capitalist-patriarchal social order is, at least partly, dependent upon the *restriction* of autonomous activities amongst the majority. In order to adequately understand the 'way forward' for emancipatory politics, an analysis of current opportunities for the exercise of autonomy is important.

The Distinctiveness of Work Autonomy - What Does it Mean ?

It can be argued that some degree of autonomy, however minimal, exists within all employment relationships (Jaques (1961); Fox (1974); Cressey and McInnes (1980)). Jaques' discussion of discretion is particularly instructive here. He argues that all employment work roles contain a prescribed content and a discretionary content. "There are always to be found two different aspects to the responsibilities which a manager sets out to be discharged" (1961,p.71). Responsibilities are set out partly in prescribed terms; in such a manner that the subordinate will be in no doubt *how* to complete the task and, because the regulations to be adhered to have been set out in objective terms, when s/he has completed the task and completed it as instructed.

Responsibilities are also set out partly in discretionary terms; in such a manner that the employee will come to use her/his discretion to choose not only how and when to complete a task but also to decide when s/he has pursued the particular activities to the point where the result is likely to satisfy the requirements of her/his manager. This is what is meant by autonomy: choosing between alternatives of action, which have uncertain outcomes,consequently demanding the willingness and ability to accept responsibility for one's choice and tolerate the attendant anxieties. "Choice is of

the essence" (Fox,1974,p.20). - not only a choice of how to do tasks but also when to do them and when they have been completed successfully . According to Jaques (1961), it is not only general work *roles* that contain both prescribed and discretionary aspects:

> It is impossible for any manager to issue an *instruction* that has no prescribed limits. There are always prescribing policies, limits, results to be achieved. On the way to achieving these results, however, some discretion must be used, since it is only the end result which is prescribed. Therefore, there is no such thing as an executive instruction which does not incorporate both prescribed and discretionary elements (p.73,my emphasis).

As Jaques goes onto argue, the very "essence of human work lies in the use of discretion within a framework of regularised procedures." The fact that human labour can use discretion is the very rationale for it's use in the production process. "Reduction of the discretionary content of a job to near zero is to dehumanise it. It can be better done by a machine" (1961,p.75). Some (Braverman (1974)) have argued that this dehumanisation is inherent to the historical development of the capitalist mode of production (12). The validity of this argument has been significantly challenged and undermined (Littler (1982); Thompson (1989); Brown (1992)). Rather, it can be argued that employee discretion, however minimal, has an enduring nature within *all* employment relationships. The source of this argument is also Marx, and his notion of the 'dual nature of the labour process' within capitalism. This is articulated by Cressey and McInnes (1980):

> From the point of view of the social form of the organization of production, it is quite correct to say that *capital employs labour*. However, even in the most highly developed capitalist (and patriarchal) society, from the point of view of material production, from the aspect of *use-value, labour employs capital*. Only by controlling the means of production, in the sense of subjecting them to their own physical and mental operations, its own will, does the workforce actually expend any labour (p.20).

According to Cressey and McInnes (1980), the enduring nature of employee discretion within the employment relationship, not only means that all work is simultaneously crippling and enriching, monotonous and creative. It also facilitates, for the employer, a 'control-engage dilemma'. On the one hand, employers (or their agents in the form of management) must continually attempt to direct and control the activities of employees within the labour process in an attempt to close the inevitably 'open-ended' employment contract. This is forced by 'the logic of accumulation' and 'the forces of competition'. On the other hand, employers are reliant upon some form of employee 'engagement', 'consent' or 'commitment' to their aims to ensure that discretionary elements are carried out in a 'positive' manner - in a way which does not seriously damage managerial aims and interests. The interests of capital (and patriarchy) demand employer control of the labour process *and* employee co-operation with the aims of employers. As we shall see, much hinges upon what we actually mean by 'consent', 'commitment' and 'co-operation'. The above argument will become increasingly significant throughout the thesis.

It is important to further delineate the discretionary from the prescribed content of employment. As Fox (1974) notes, that objective standards are embodied in the prescribed aspects of work means that the worker must display *conformity* to these standards. "Certainly he *(sic)* must be trained, indoctrinated or educated in the appropriate ways" (p.19). By contrast, performance of the discretionary content requires, not trained obedience to specific controls, but the exercise of wisdom, judgement, expertise. "The control comes from within (the worker) - it is, in the literal sense, self-control" (p.19).

The prescribed content of work demands nothing of the worker's self, personality or identity. "We can distinguish the person as an individual from the...act, since the nature of the act requires no contribution from him *(sic)* as an individual. Anyone capable of conformity to the prescriptive rules will do as well as any other" (Fox,1974,p.83). Herein lies the connection between the prescribed aspects of all work roles and the part this plays in human alienation and the manipulation of human nature in capitalist-patriarchal society:

> To the extent that discretion is excluded from work, therefore, a wedge is driven between the person as a unique individual and the...acts with which he *(sic)* discharges his trust; he is, as it were, alienated from those acts...The low-discretion role alienates its occupant from the moral nature of work as it can be (Fox,1974,p.83).

We must now distinguish the concept of 'autonomy' from that of 'skill'.

Skill and Autonomy

Many have conflated the discretionary content and the skill requirements of the employment relationship (Braverman (1974); Sturdy et al. (1992); Gallie (1991)). This obscures the distinctive nature and significance of work autonomy (13). 'Skill' is notoriously difficult to define. In order to distinguish skill from autonomy, one requires a general, 'objective' definition or theory of skill. Some claim that such an invariant definition is neither possible nor useful (Sturdy et al. (1992)).

Cockburn (1983) outlines three meanings of 'skill'. Firstly, skill can be seen as knowledge and mental/manual abilities, *residing within individuals*, enabling the completion of particular tasks. New experiences develop knowledge and abilities. Those required to undertake and complete particular tasks have to be sufficiently complex to be labelled as 'skilled'. Obviously, such knowledge and abilities must be more complex than that required to complete work labelled as 'semi-skilled' or 'unskilled' (14).

Cockburn's second meaning of skill refers to complex knowledge and abilities demanded by particular labour processes. Certain *jobs* are seen as 'skilled', 'semi-skilled' or 'unskilled'. This is clearly different to a definition of skill as a phenomenon inhering within human individuals. The majority of jobs do not draw on the total skills and abilities of those who carry them out.

Thirdly, Cockburn refers to the 'political definition of skill'. Owing to the inevitable *contestability* of the concept of skill (which knowledge, abilities, tasks and jobs are sufficiently complex to be labelled as such) and the subsequent difficulty in measuring or assessing it, there is

much space for argument. This space becomes an area of social, cultural and political contestation and negotiation.

Some employees clearly have more power than others during this contestation and negotiation. This can accrue from trade union power (Cockburn (1983), from male power (Phillips and Taylor (1980) or from a 'strategic position within the labour process' (Littler (1982)). Through this power, some employees are able to define and defend their work as 'skilled' against the challenges of employers or other employees, securing the advantages that accompany 'skilled' status.

Littler (1982) notes there is both a '*strong*' and a 'weak' version of the above thesis. The former argues that skill is *entirely* socially constructed. Thus, the definition of certain knowledge and ability as skilled is totally dependent upon power in the area of negotiation. Some tasks and jobs are apparently labelled as skilled whatever their technical content.

The 'weak' version of the social construction theory of skill argues that whilst all jobs labelled as 'skilled' demand the exercise of knowledge and ability complex enough to be objectively seen as such, attainment of the 'skilled' label does depend upon the exercise of political power through negotiation. Thus, many jobs *not* labelled as 'skilled' will also possess such characteristics. The workers occupying the latter roles do not possess sufficient power to attain such status (Cockburn (1983); Roberts (1993)).

It is this very social and political contestation of skill which leads Sturdy et al. (1992) to suggest that a general definition of the concept is not possible. They argue that skill can only be defined and examined within specific labour processes and particular social relations of employment.

However, it can be argued that through combining Cockburn's three meanings, a very general definition of skill can be outlined. Skill refers to complex knowledge and mental/manual abilities of which human beings possess varying degrees and varying types. This enables the completion of particular tasks and activities. Only some of this knowledge and ability may be demanded by the particular work roles occupied by workers. Furthermore, only certain groups of employees have the power to define their complex knowledge and abilities as skilled and to benefit from the rewards which accrue from such definitions. Skill is usually acquired and developed through education, training and experience (15).

Beyond this general definition, however, it is clear that skill can only be analysed and examined within specific labour processes and particular social relations of employment. Only then will it be possible to identify what knowledge and ability is actually exercised, and the extent to which it is socially and politically constructed or socially and politically denied.

Having defined skill, it must be distinguished from work autonomy. Braverman (1974), when discussing the ideal of craftsmanship, as constituted by 'craft skill', refers to skill as 'the unity of conception and execution'. It appears that this is where much of the confusion originates. It can in fact be contended, on the basis of the foregoing arguments, that it is the exercise of work *discretion* which *always* fundamentally involves the unity of conception and execution.

Clearly, *exercising* work discretion - to be able to plan a particular task, to know how to carry it out and be able to actually implement it - often simultaneously involves the exercise of skill (Cockburn (1983)). However, this is not always the case. The unity of planning and activity can be demanded within work which is 'semi-skilled' or 'unskilled'

(Manwaring and Wood (1985)). Furthermore, the unity of planning and activity can be present where the particular work situation is unknown or uncertain and workers have no or little experience, training and education to draw upon. Discretion may well be exercised when responding automatically to particular situations. These responses could then become part of the workers accumulated experience and thus part of their accumulated abilities and skills.

The exercise of skill can also be present in tasks where the demand for the unity of planning and activity is absent - where it is performed elsewhere, perhaps by management. Skill can be prescribed, complex abilities being utilised to implement the prescribed aspects of work. Workers can be trained, educated or experienced in particular knowledge or abilities and be subsequently instructed to implement these abilities while closely supervised.

Thus, it can be argued that skill and discretion within the employment relationship are analytically distinct. Skill can be important in the actual exercise of discretion but is not always vital for the exercise of discretion and vice-versa. Clearly, jobs with significant amounts of discretion are also more likely to demand the exercise of skill but the two demands are not always simultaneously present within work roles.

The Postmodernist Challenge

It must be recognised that the approach to work autonomy developed in this chapter, located as it is within a theorisation of the capitalistic and patriarchal employment relationship briefly outlined in the introduction (16), has been substantially challenged in recent years. Some of this theoretical challenge comes from recent trends in 'critical'

organisational and labour process theory. The 'postmodernist challenge' to our own approach will be briefly outlined here.

The postmodernist paradigm of organisational and labour process analysis argues that a broadly structural approach, which underlies our approach to understanding work autonomy, is actually unhelpful when attempting to account for the rapidly changing nature of work organisations and the experience of people within them, in a rapidly changing 'postmodern' society (Clegg (1990); Knights (1990); Hassard (1993); Linstead (1993); Knights (1995)).

We can actually identify two distinct postmodernist arguments (Thompson (1993)). Firstly, the 'postmodernist 'epoch' position' (or the 'sociology of postmodernity'). Secondly, 'postmodernism as epistemology' (Hassard (1993)). Under the former, it is argued that we are moving towards a different epoch - an era of postmodernity, characterised by postmodern organisational forms (Clegg (1990)). This perspective will be outlined further in chapter three. However, for the moment, we can note that some postmodernist epoch authors argue that work organisations are explicitly designed to meet the beyond-survival needs of employees. Through the collapse of managerial and hierarchical control and the 'empowerment' and autonomy which the postmodern work organisation offers, employees are able to attain a sense of meaning and identity from their work organisational participation (Clegg (1990)). For sociologists of postmodernity, this is the only way in which work organisations can survive in an increasingly globalised and competitive environment.

The postmodern epistemological approach to understanding the nature of work is essentially a radically different way of interpreting work organisational life, and the world in general, to the one advanced thus far within this thesis. Postmodern epistemologists (Linstead (1993); Knights (1990),

(1995)) dispute the notion that it is possible to uncover an empirical 'reality' or 'truth' about the nature of work in particular work organisations (Knights (1995)). All that we can produce are differing interpretations of reality, differing competing *discourses*.

This particular theoretical position also argues that work organisational life is itself discursively constituted. Employees are able to construct an identity through discourse, by choosing which particular interpretation of their work situation provides 'meaning' and a sense of 'self-identity'. Their acceptance of particular discourses will, in turn, shape their workplace behaviour. Authors from within the postmodern epistemological position, often drawing upon Foucault (1980), argue that work organisational order and managerial power are discursively constituted. Thus, the extent to which employees act in ways which meet organisational objectives is shaped by the extent to which managerial discourses are accepted as valid. This is, in turn, dependent upon the way in which the discourses in question enable employees to construct a sense of self-identity (Knights (1995)).

Allied to such arguments is a vehement dismissal of the concept of a 'true self' and 'true identity' (Knights (1990); Sturdy (1992); Cohen and Taylor (1992)) which has been argued for in this chapter. Crucial then to the experience of work is the *subjectivity* of employees. "Subjectivity is not fixed or latent in character, but is continually produced and reproduced throughout life through the development of self-consciousness and interaction with and, therefore, dependence upon, others" (Sturdy,1992,p.119).

Clearly, this approach codifies many of the challenges, alluded to throughout this chapter, to the way in which the concept of 'work autonomy' has been defined and analysed thus far. In contrast to the postmodern epistemological

perspective, it has been argued that it *is* possible to produce a general 'objective' definition of work autonomy, outside of particular social and discursive relations of work organisational life and as a framework for empirical research. We have suggested that work autonomy refers to an aspect of the labour process (within the employment relationship) wherein employees *choose* between alternatives of action in terms of how particular tasks/actions are to be undertaken, and/or when they are to be undertaken, and *decide* when these actions/tasks have been completed. Furthermore, it has been contended that such human discretion is inherent to all forms of paid employment and the implementation of all managerial prescriptions. Beyond this general definition however (which refutes the notion that autonomy is a wholly subjective phenomenon or 'state of mind'), the precise nature and extent of work autonomy within particular labour processes *must* involve detailed empirical study and analysis of specific social relations of paid employment.

The debate between the postmodernist challenge and the arguments presented within the rest of this chapter, as different ways of interpreting the empirical research upon which the thesis is based, will be more fully explored in subsequent chapters. We shall now attempt to situate our preceding discussion of work autonomy within a review of the existing literature and research on clerical work.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CLERICAL LABOUR PROCESS ?

The aim of this and the following chapter is to examine the development and nature of clerical work, and the autonomy workers are *likely* to experience within it. These discussions will inform the empirical research upon which this thesis is fundamentally based. The two chapters will conduct an examination of the development of clerical work within British society, and a critical review of existing literature on the nature of clerical work within capitalist-patriarchal society. It will be argued that much of the existing literature on, and research into, clerical work is not particularly helpful for the specific objectives of this thesis.

The very term 'clerical work', in a similar fashion to 'service work' has become a rather chaotic concept. Clerical work, and by implication its academic representation, now refers to such a heterogeneity of occupational experience that one wonders whether the term makes any coherent sense. Partly, this 'diversity' can be attributed to the profound changes which are currently transforming many clerical employment relationships. Consequently, we shall, albeit somewhat artificially, divide the experience of clerical work, and the attendant literature which attempts to interrogate it, into the 'old' and the 'new'. Firstly, however, we shall justify our study of specifically *clerical* worker autonomy.

Why Clerical Work ?

One can identify a significant lacuna within the sociology of work in contemporary Britain. The following gaps in the literature on clerical work formed one of the basic rationales for embarking upon this study.

There has been very little empirical examination of what clerical workers actually do and the autonomy embodied within such activities (Crompton et al. (1982); Lockwood (1989)). Authors who do discuss clerical worker autonomy (Braverman (1974); Poulantzas (1978)), do so without analysing the detail of clerical work itself. Close interrogation of clerical work which does exist, both old and new, is primarily related to wider sociological debates concerning, for example, the 'proletarianization' and 'feminization' of white-collar work, which involves studying aspects of managerial control, deskilling/upskilling or organisational restructuring, within clerical work, in relation to the class structure and gender relations (Crompton and Jones (1984); Fearfull (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)), or worker consent/commitment/militancy (Downing (1980); Crompton and Sanderson (1989); Cressey and Scott (1992)). Often, within such debates, studies of what Lockwood (1958) termed the 'work situation' of clerical workers are not viewed as significant as analyses of their 'market situation' - "that is to say the economic position narrowly conceived" - and 'status situation' - "the position of the individual in the hierarchy of prestige in the society at large" (p.15).

Although Lockwood (1958) recognised that 'work situation' was an equally important component of class position, on the basis of the arguments presented thus far, we can argue that even he does not adequately emphasise the important experiences embodied within the concept of 'work situation'. He defines the latter as "the set of social relationships in which the individual is involved by virtue of his *(sic)* position in the division of labour" (p.15). This includes the *detailed* content of the labour process. Although an important aspect of class position, we have also emphasized its importance when considering the stability of the capitalist-patriarchal social order, and the quality of life for humans within such societies. (1).

The argument of the previous section suggested that paid employment in capitalist-patriarchal societies is largely designed, and accepted, as *instrumental* in nature, with "an emphasis on the practical *outcome* of work, as against the value of the *work experience itself* for those who do it" (Fox,1974,p.16). This instrumentalism does not necessarily mean the reduction, to a minimum, of the autonomous content within all jobs. Instrumentalism *can* lead to "jobs being shaped in ways which *incidentally* afford their occupants some intrinsic meaning" (Fox,1976,p.28,my emphasis). There are sharp differences in the autonomy offered by different employment relationships. Fox (1976), when evaluating jobs according to the employee discretion within them, talks of a relatively deprived 'majority' and a relatively privileged 'minority.' "This is an acceptable language provided that we remember that there is no sharp cut off...but rather a graduation of differences" (pp.21-22).

This suggests a continuum of worker autonomy within paid employment, with minimal discretionary content and high discretionary content at the extremes. Fox (1974, 1976) argues that this continuum is *largely* compatible with both the occupational hierarchy and the class structure. In other words, as one moves *up* either structure, the discretionary content of employment *tends* to enlarge. However, "the emphasis must be on the word 'tends'...The discretionary content of a given role cannot...be inferred from its location in the hierarchy and must always be subject to empirical enquiry" (Fox,1976,p.24).

Crucially, there "is a certain amount of overlap in the middle ranges which makes categorization specially debatable at certain points" (Fox,1976,p.22). One can argue that clerical work occupies this middle range. Fox (1974) places clerical workers within his "middle range of discretion". The clerical work situation displays "characteristics drawn from

both...low- and...high-discretion syndromes" (Fox,1974,p.37). Categorization of clerical workers, according to the autonomy embodied within their work, in the same way as their class position, is 'specially debatable'. Curiously, however, this is a debate which has not fully developed.

This hiatus within industrial sociology is even more surprising given the increase in clerical work over the past century. Lockwood's (1958) comment that "in the course of the last seventy years the number of clerks has increased more rapidly than that of any other comparable occupational grouping" has further increased in relevance since he made it (Lockwood,1958,p.13). A large percentage of the working population will have been involved within clerical work at some point during their occupational life. Evidence suggests that clerical and related employees have grown in size more than any other occupational group, concomitant with the rise of the service sector (Industrial Relations Research Unit,1990,Table 5).

What is Clerical Work ?

The ambiguous work situation of clerical workers, especially in terms of the nature and extent of worker autonomy, within sociological representations could certainly be related to a lack of clarity over what is actually meant by the term 'clerical work'. Such a label must be considered problematic. Given the heterogeneity of settings in which clerical work is carried out, and the varied nature of the tasks involved, one can question whether a unified clerical labour process exists.

Such a sense of unity is even missing from the old sociological literature. Here, the term 'clerical work' is randomly applied to various forms of office work. Some include secretarial work within their categorization (Lane (1988)). Others do not (Crompton et al. (1982)). Furthermore,

there is a recognized problem of establishing boundaries between official categories of 'clerical,' 'administrative' and 'managerial' work. Clearly, the *nature* of work should be the major factor in determining what is a 'clerical' job:

> In practice, however, the nature of the work itself plays a rather less important role in defining a job title...A considerable 'grey area' exists between 'clerical' and 'administrative' work - a situation which is to some extent recognised by the fact that the top end of 'clerical' pay scales at times overlap with the lower ranges of the 'administrative' pay scale. The aim of management is to ensure that a particular job is adequately carried out by a suitable individual. Management will, of course, be under pressure to minimize labour costs. If a post can be adequately filled at the clerical level, there will be little incentive to designate a position as administrative, whatever the actual work content...In some cases, it seemed to us that the designation of a job as 'clerical' depended not so much on the nature of the work involved as on the nature of the incumbent (Crompton et al.,1982,pp.56-59).

Research suggests that much clerical work may demand greater discretion than is officially described or remunerated. Under-recognition and under-remuneration of complex knowledge, abilities and autonomy is common within clerical employment relationships given the feminization of the clerical workforce (Crompton et al. (1992); Fearfull (1991), (1992)).

Nevertheless, from the old literature, one can extract a very *general* definition of the clerical labour process. Littler and Salaman (1984) argue that the raw material of clerical work is *information*. "People and machines in offices generate new information, collect information from outside, store, copy, process, transmit and present it in a variety of ways" (p.97). Traditionally, clerical workers have been defined as all those undertaking such tasks within 'minor group 31' of the widely recognised Manpower *(sic)* Services Commission's (1972) classification of occupations.

However, even this very general definition has been problematized by a current and ongoing radical restructuring of many areas of clerical work. These profound transformations have been particularly driven by the interrelated developments of increasing competition between the producers of clerical and related services, the implementation of the most recent information and communication technology (I.C.T.) and the development of new managerial strategies. Such change is most apparent, perhaps because it has been the prime focus of new sociological representations of clerical work, for clerks within financial services. Here, legal deregulation has also been an important precursor of change.

It can be argued that emerging trends in the changing nature of the clerical labour process coalesce around the phenomenon of *'marketization'*. Recent research indicates that the primary tasks of much clerical work, especially within financial services, involve the *sale* of products and services, rather than solely the collection, generation and presentation of information (Morgan and Knights (1991); Fearfull (1992); Cressey and Scott (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)). It has also been suggested that marketization is re-shaping some clerical work within the public sector (Pinch (1989); Halford and Savage (1995)). It must be stressed, however, that such developments have not uniformally affected all clerical

workers, or all clerks within particular sectors. Thus, much of the above quoted research suggests a *segmentation* of the clerical labour force within financial services between those (core) workers - themselves divided between 'professionalised' head office/managerial staff and 'proletarianized' service workers - primarily responsible for the sale of products, and those (largely female clerks) involved in routine, mundane clerical work (often casual, temporary and part-time labour) (Morgan and Knights (1991); Cressey and Scott (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)). Furthermore, even for those clerical employees whose employment experience has been touched by marketization, we are not suggesting a complete, wholesale transformation of the labour process. Empirical research has revealed that the experience of clerical work can be an ambiguous, and often contradictory mix of 'old' and 'new' elements (Cressey and Scott (1992); Fearfull (1992)). In fact, Cressey and Scott's (1992) comments regarding the current situation in the banking industry can be increasingly applied to many areas of clerical work:

> (a) new fast-changing environment currently co-exists somewhat uneasily with the traditional, conservative banking environment in which many of the current generation of bankers began their careers...the nature of the remaining jobs for the clerical workforce in Britain is still an open question (pp.84-90).

Given the wholly uncertain and ambiguous nature of clerical work, in both its old and new guise, this question can only begin to be answered through detailed empirical research. This thesis aims to contribute some kind of answer to the 'open question'.

Clearly then, the phenomenon of marketization is currently throwing the notion of a coherent clerical labour process into

further doubt. Bearing this problem in mind, the remainder of the chapter will conduct a critical review of the literature, both old and new, on the development of clerical work, illuminating particular factors which have been identified as affecting the nature and extent of clerical worker autonomy.

The Development of Clerical Work

Wide variety has always been a characteristic of clerical work. However, the nature of the tasks involved have changed considerably throughout the past century and a half.

Lockwood (1958) describes the period prior to the increase in clerical work, and the concomitant development of the 'modern office,' as the era of 'the counting house.' This dates roughly from 1850 to 1880. Clerical work was primarily concerned, in commercial and industrial enterprises at least, with business accounting. This was largely because "the period of economic development with which this old type of office was associated was that of individual enterprise capitalism. In banking as in railways, to be sure, the newer form of corporate business was established; and the enhanced functions of central and local government were also swelling the labour force of clerks. But by far their greatest representation was in commercial and industrial employment" (Lockwood,1958,p.19).

As Lockwood goes onto point out, "Work in the office was oriented to the meticulous keeping of...ledgers upon whose accuracy business decisions depended" (p.20). This work had a significant discretionary element to it. The records were used as a rule of thumb guide to business decisions, rather than a statistical basis for rational costing and sales. There was no standard statistical method for the maintenance of ledgers - techniques were developed throughout a clerical career, within a particular firm. It is clear from Lockwood's

account that the mature clerk of the counting house was proficient in all tasks to be undertaken within the office. The division of labour was slight and intimate. Lockwood argues that only *general* literacy skills were a prerequisite for such a career. Most ability was gradually developed 'on the job'. In fact, most of the knowledge required to carry out the tasks of the counting house was specific to particular firms. Lockwood presents a picture which suggests that the labour process of such clerical workers demanded great responsibility and discretion.

It is worth pointing out that not all clerks within commercial and industrial employment had significant autonomy over the tasks demanded by the labour process. There was a division between the 'book-keeper-cashier,' who dealt with financial records, and the 'ordinary' clerk, who was responsible for correspondence, filing, elementary book-keeping entries and routine office matters. However, the very fact that autonomous capacities, the scope for discretion, were developed *throughout* a clerical career and were specific and indispensable to a particular firm meant that the latter category tended to be occupied by those developing the abilities enabling movement into the former category.

As Lockwood argues, there is no sharp dividing line between the era of the counting house and the modern office. In fact, within banking, the railways and central and local government, characteristics of the modern office existed alongside the counting house in commercial and industrial employment. However, it is when, in these latter sectors, towards the end of the nineteenth century, corporate business was established that we can see a significant rise in the presence of the modern office. This led to an increase in size of the normal establishment and brought changes which "revolutionized office administration" (Lockwood,1958,p.19).

Bendix (1956) describes these changes as 'bureaucratization' which "seen historically...may be interpreted as the increasing subdivision of the functions which the owner-managers of the early enterprises had performed personally in the course of their daily routine" (pp.211-212). These functions included labour management, technical work, administrative management and mercantile functions of purchasing, sales and finance. As business and industry has increased in size and complexity, sub-divisions of these functions constitute the tasks of separate administrative staffs consisting of technical and administrative specialists as well as a number of employees performing routine work.

This, however, was a gradual rather than a sudden development. Perhaps the most significant result of such change was the increase in numbers of clerical employees. In 1851 clerks made up 0.8% of the British labour force, in 1901, 4.0% and in 1951, 10.5%. Simultaneous with this increase was a change in the sexual composition of the occupation. In 1851 female clerks made up 0.1% of all clerks, in 1901, 13.4%, in 1951, 59.6% (Lockwood (1989)).

The numerical increase of clerical workers, and the feminization of the sector, has continued since the 1950's in Britain (Industrial Relations Research Unit (1990)). This has been facilitated by an increased and more general requirement for non-manual, service functions, within both the private and the public sector.

Concurrent with numerical explosion have been significant changes in how clerical work is organised and experienced (Smith et al. (1991)) (2). We will now move on to consider these changes, concentrating upon factors which supposedly influence clerical worker autonomy.

The Public/Private Divide and the Exigencies of the Market

Clerical work within Britain has expanded within both the private and public sectors. It is very difficult to draw a sharp analytical division between the nature of clerical work within the respective sectors. However, the albeit limited, 'old' literature on the 'divide' suggests some important factors which *could* lead to differing degrees of worker autonomy.

Research into the differing *orientations* to work of clerical workers in the private and public sectors suggests that one important factor could be workers differing perception of their job *security* (Weir (1973)). Weir argues that clerks in the private sector feel more unsure about the future of their jobs. Furthermore, when asked why they considered their own job to be 'safe' or 'unsafe', it was revealed that private sector clerical workers were more exposed to the exigencies of the product market and the labour market than their public sector counterparts.

According to Weir, public sector clerks saw their own job security as "to some extent *controllable* by them" (p.174). "If you keep to the rules, no one can touch you", "with my seniority, I'm absolutely safe", "I have passed my exams and have done as much or more as I could be expected to do" (p.174). In contrast, private sector clerks felt that their job security depended either on the market situation for the products and services produced by their firms and/or on the market situation for their own skills and experience. In short, dependence upon a situation *uncontrollable* by themselves.

> The clerk in private industry...
> perceives that there is an uncertainty
> built into the structure of the

> situation which makes his *(sic)*
> future and his economic security
> not susceptible to rational prediction
> ...when he looks forward toward his
> organizational future he perceives
> only a 'wall of darkness'. (Weir,1973,p.174).

Weir does advocate the importance of considering "particular aspects of the position and role occupied by specific types of clerical worker in a specific and limited market situation" (p.174), rather than aspects of the market situation in the community in general, or for clerical workers in general - further recommending the importance of detailed empirical research within particular organisations in order to understand aspects of the clerical employment relationship. The factors which we must consider are specific to particular organizations. This is, in turn, connected to the public/private divide within clerical work.

Differing worker orientations of security/insecurity, which Weir argues are affected by these 'particular factors', can have important consequences for worker autonomy. We have identified the importance of *job* security afforded to workers by their organisation. Weir's findings suggest that those workers who feel secure in their jobs are more likely to exercise discretion over work tasks. Given the opportunity, such employees are more likely to feel able to act upon their own judgement and take responsibility for their own actions.

Weir's argument suggests that public sector clerical workers are more likely to be given the opportunity for discretion. Their greater security of employment is a result of less competitive and economic pressures upon public sector organizations in comparison to private sector firms. This will also supposedly mean that there will be less concern to

tightly control, supervise and prescribe the labour process of clerical employees.

Clearly, Weir's findings, and the above argument, should not be uncritically articulated. His findings were based upon research conducted into the work and orientations of a sample of workers "drawn from a group who occupied an intermediate position in the structure of authority of the organisation" (Weir,1973,p.172). This is not representative of all clerks. Moreover, all clerical workers in the public sector do not necessarily experience the type of insulation from the exigencies of the labour and product markets as those interviewed in this particular study. Significantly, Weir's analysis was based entirely upon research with male clerks. Weir's findings would seem to exaggerate the extent of job security and job discretion open to clerical workers in the public sector. There has been much subsequent evidence, even within the old tradition, to suggest that male clerks are much more likely to experience greater job security and job discretion (Lane (1988)).

Weir's findings are more seriously problematized by recent trends towards marketization. As suggested above, this is a process beginning to transform both private sector *and* public sector clerical work.

Within the private sector, competitive pressures, the introduction of new I.C.T., the changing nature of clerical tasks (towards more sales-orientated and 'product dependent' work) and new managerial strategies (many of which aim to reduce the numbers employed by enhancing the 'flexibility' and task range of those remaining) have combined to precipitate colossal job loss within many areas of clerical work (Cressey and Scott (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)). For example, within banking, Rajan and Pearson (1986) and Cressey and Scott show the 'job squeeze' to be a long-term trend. Here,

the globalization of financial markets and the legal deregulation of financial services in Britain have added to competitive pressures and the large British clearing banks uniformally aimed to shed between 10 and 15 per cent of their labour force between 1990-93 (Cressey and Scott (1992)). The enhanced freedom of alternative institutions to market financial services, and the freedom of access of individuals and institutions to financial markets, which legal deregulation allowed almost inevitably led to job loss in an industry where labour costs account for two-thirds of total costs (Cressey and Scott (1992)). However, Cressey and Scott also show that the introduction of recent I.C.T. and new managerial strategies are also important in facilitating long-term employment decline within banking. The new clerical work literature has begun to suggest that many other clerical services are being re-shaped by competitive pressures, I.C.T., new managerial strategies and attendant employment reduction (Urry (1987); Fearfull (1992); Filby (1992)). We can tentatively suggest that the marketization, and numerical reduction, of clerical work within financial services is emblematic of the future for other areas of clerical employment.

Following Weir's reasoning, this would suggest that the marketization of private sector clerical work (much of which has been privatized from the public sector or 'liberated' from some form of state regulation since Weir's argument) has further exposed clerks to the exigencies of the labour and product markets, increasing job insecurity and reducing the scope for employee autonomy.

Marketization is also transforming some aspects of clerical work within the public sector. The collapse of the Keynesian welfare state, in the context of a western economic and political crisis, and the re-shaping of local state institutions in the context of Thatcherism, have subjected

many parts of the British public sector to the same competitive pressures as private sector firms (Offe (1984); Smith et al. (1991); Halford and Savage (1995)). It is increasingly suggested that many elements of marketization - new managerial strategies (many of which are aimed at enhancing service quality and attractiveness while increasing employee 'flexibility' and 'responsiveness'), the implementation of I.C.T. and the accompanying employment reductions and job insecurity for those employees who remain (often facilitated by 'market testing' - an attempt to introduce public service 'efficiency' and 'accountability' through evaluating and restructuring, particular services in line with those in the capitalist marketplace) are re-shaping clerical work within the public sector (Urry (1987); Pinch (1989); Smith et al. (1991); Halford and Savage (1995)). More generally Pinch (1989) suggests public sector examples for all eleven of the restructuring strategies observed by Urry within the private sector. "The traditional career path (of the public sector clerical worker)...(which) rewarded time-served individuals and those who successfully replicated the organization (Halford and Savage,1995,p.113) and, following Weir's argument, experienced the job security that was important for job autonomy, is rapidly disappearing.

We have suggested that relative insulation from the exigencies of labour and product markets can enhance feelings of clerical job security which have been seen as important for the exercise of workplace discretion. However, processes of marketization and concomitant employment reduction, have disrupted much of the security that was once available within the 'traditional' clerical career. Moreover, these processes appear to be affecting both private sector and public sector clerks, the latter of which have traditionally been identified as more insulated and secure.

The Impact of New Office Technology

The development of new office technology has profoundly shaped the organisation and experience of clerical work in the British post-war period. Evaluating this has been one of the major concerns of research and literature on clerical work, both old and new. It is one area where much has already been written. Again, however, the majority of it is related to debates over the proposed 'proletarianization' of clerks, or 'feminization' of clerical work. Consequences for the actual content of clerical work are discussed at a very general level. Thus, much of the detail which is relevant to the interests of this thesis is obscured by discussion of the impact of new office technology at the wider level of the social structure.

The old literature dispels the myth that *all* forms of clerical work have become fully automated over the past two decades. Large areas of clerical work have been mechanised for a very long time, prior to the introduction of mainframe, micro- and interactive computers, word processors, electronic mail facilities, VDU telex systems and other aspects of telecommunications. Secondly, it is argued that the diffusion of new office technology within clerical work varies greatly, both between and within economic sectors (Daniel (1987); Lane (1988)). The impact of new technology upon clerical workers autonomy has been uneven and fragmentary.

Differences in the adoption of new office technology between clerical work organizations in different economic sectors are also identified. Daniels' (1987) nationwide survey of technical change within British workplaces reveals that offices in the private sector have significantly more new technology than offices in the public sector. Furthermore, new office technology has been more widely adopted by the private manufacturing sector than by the private services sector.

However, these rather general figures conceal differences of the utmost significance to the particular interests of this thesis. Referring simply to the presence of new office technology says nothing about the type, sophistication or extensiveness of that technology. As Lane (1988) points out, the term 'new technology', within clerical work, can mean anything from one mainframe computer, in a small clerical department in a private manufacturing firm, to an integrated system linking interactive computers/word processors with new developments in telecommunications, which is most common within the financial services sector. These differences obviously have huge significance for the impact of new technology upon clerical labour processes and workers autonomy.

Following the above, it cannot be assumed that the work of *all* clerks within sectors, or even establishments, with a high diffusion of new office technology are affected by such changes.

> Degree of technological diffusion varies according to the size of the non-manual component within establishments and according to function...Although new technology thus potentially touches upon the work of a majority of office workers only a small minority work with it for any length of time (Lane,1988,p.70).

It is thus a difficult task to assess the influence of new office technology upon clerical workers autonomy. Nevertheless, although pitched at a general level, workers autonomy within the clerical labour process has been a concern of the new technology literature. In fact, new technology is widely thought to significantly affect the

nature and extent of clerical workers discretion. However, as Lane (1988) argues, "the impact is not always seen to be a direct one...The most striking feature revealed by recent empirical studies is that, even when technological development is similar, an extreme variety in patterns of work organization exists" (p.73). The impact of technology within labour processes is not fixed or necessarily determined by the technology itself - it depends, to a large part, upon the use to which it is put and the social relations of employment within which it is embedded. "The new technology facilitates certain patterns of work organization but other factors mediate its impact in significant ways" (Lane,1988,p.73). Lane goes onto argue that managerial strategy, and practice, would appear to be the most important of these factors.

The old literature examines the impact of both 'low level' and 'high level' new office technology. An oft-cited example of the former is the replacement of the typewriter by the word processor (W.P.). It is argued by some (Downing (1980); West (1982)) that the introduction of W.Ps led to decreased clerical worker discretion. However, the majority of the empirical research conducted suggests both a shift and an increase in the type of discretion and skill required (N.E.D.O. (1983); Wainwright and Francis (1984)Buchanan (1985); Taylor et al. (1985)). This literature does suggest that the extent to which workers actually experience a discretionary increase from such office technology partly depends upon the size of the clerical sector or establishment in which low level technology is introduced. In smaller firms, operators are given responsibility for all the tasks connected with word processing, whereas in some larger firms tasks are split up and distributed among positions in a word processing hierarchy (Buchanan and Boddy (1982); Wainwright and Francis (1984); Baldry et al. (1986)). The nature of managerial strategy/practice was also found to be important.

> Although the work of word processor operators may have been changed along several dimensions, the extent and direction of change was found to vary significantly between cases. None of the case studies detects an unambiguous deterioration in their position in the labour process and several claim an increase in skill (Lane,1988,p.78).

It is generally agreed in the old literature that the arrival of on-line, integrated computer systems in many organisations within the financial services sector constitutes high level new office technology. Similarly, there appears to be a consensus over the idea that clerical work in this sector was already highly specialised, routinised and controlled prior to the above development in the early 1980's. Employment within insurance and banking, up to this point, was seen as a prime example of the industrialisation and Taylorisation of office work - 'the paper factory'. This is, however, where the consensus ends.

It is contended that the impact of integrated computer systems upon workers discretion is significantly moulded by managerial strategy and practice within particular work situations and to a smaller, but still significant, extent the size of the clerical section/organisation under scrutiny.

On-line computerisation could *potentially* lead to greater discretion in the work of the insurance clerk. For example, Barras and Swann (1983), Storey (1986), Rajan (1984) and Gourlay (1987) all found that the introduction of this technology led to the combination of what were previously separate functions within insurance. Individual staff could now perform a *cycle* of work rather than being tied to one specific task. This cycle includes customer enquiries, liason with brokers, processing of new applications, underwriting and

claims handling. This was largely because the new technology enabled, for everyone, much easier creation of, access to and manipulation of, relevant information and documentation for the accomplishment of such tasks. For many workers, this does not only mean more task variety. Previously, only a small group of insurance clerks were involved in tasks which involved interaction with customers and brokers. As will be developed later, such work can be highly discretionary and notoriously difficult to prescribe. The introduction of the new technology potentially increases the number of insurance clerks undertaking such tasks. Lane goes as far as to claim that, within clerical work in the insurance industry, there has been a change toward "problem-solving and diagnostic skills, not tied to the execution of specific tasks" (p.79). This potential increase in insurance clerk discretion, via an increased cycle of work, is more likely to be fulfilled within smaller rather than larger insurance organisations, where a smaller division of labour is more likely.

It must noted that not all insurance companies have adopted interactive computer systems. Thus, not all insurance clerks have potentially higher discretionary work roles. However, the trend is towards the adoption of these systems in the industry.

Both Lane and Storey argue that managerial strategy/practice within particular insurance work situations is also vitally important in determining whether clerks actually experience higher discretion in their work as a result of the new micro-electronic office technology. "The division of (insurance) labour is an organisational choice which appears to be associated with, but not determined by, the extant technology" (Storey,1986,p.53).

The pertinence of this old sociological literature, for understanding much contemporary clerical employment, can be

questioned. The recent introduction of much I.C.T. has been informed by, and helped to strengthen, processes of marketization in many areas of clerical work. Once again, this can be illustrated through recent empirical research within financial services which we have suggested is the 'leading edge' of emerging trends within clerical experience more generally. Again, there has been little specific investigation into the impact of recent I.C.T. upon clerical worker *autonomy*. This 'open question' also forms one of the motivations for the empirical research upon which follows. However, some relevant generic suggestions have been made by recent authors.

In their study of the banking industry, Cressey and Scott (1992) viewed the development and implementation of I.C.T. as important in enabling employment *security* and *expansion* for clerical workers. We have already suggested that job security may be significant for the exercise of workplace discretion. Technological development not only helped to create new technically-based products during the 1980s (such as home banking, smart cards and debit cards) which facilitated new business opportunities. It also helped to ease the processing of consequential and phenomenal increases in business volumes while staff numbers gradually expanded.

However, I.C.T. in the 1990s has actually been integral in the transformation of the banking labour process - from one where the major tasks involved the collection, storage and generation of financial information and transactions to one where the direct sale of financial products is now demanded (Cressey and Scott (1992); Kerfoot (1995)). In particular, I.C.T. has facilitated the automation of many routine clerical functions, such as the processing and clearing of cheques and credits. An expansion in electronic debiting has meant a much reduced requirement for paper-based recording and processing of financial transactions. I.C.T. also allows much quicker and

easier access to a wide range of financial, product and customer information. Linked P.Cs have apparently eliminated the need for specialist roles, such as mortgage advisor, insurance advisor or those responsible for loan advice (Cressey and Scott (1992)). Both Cressey and Scott and Kerfoot report that this has led to a major reorganization of functions within the banking industry. The most common response involves the centralization of routine bank administration - e.g. customer telephone calls, the processing and clearing of cash, cheques and credits - in specialist centres utilizing much smaller staff numbers. This leaves major branches in urban areas (many smaller suburban ones are currently closing or merging) to operate as "retail outlets where financial products and services can be bought and sold" (Cressey and Scott.1992,p.90).

The consequences of such changes, for the autonomy of clerical workers within banking, are unclear. The above quoted studies suggest that technological development has added to the segmentation of the banking labour force - especially dividing those involved in routine computerized administration and those predominantly involved in selling products. Cressey and Scott suggest that, in comparison to the 'traditional' bank clerk, the former group have experienced a reduction in autonomy and skill. In contrast, those remaining in the branches have witnessed an increase in both the range and the nature of tasks to be completed. The banking labour process now demands flexibility - the ability to undertake a number of formerly specialist roles depending upon customer demand. Branch staff "have to be coached in social and interpersonal skills, in 'customer care', to be knowledgeable about a range of products and able to promote and persuade the public about the qualities of the products concerned. Rather than administering a set range of tasks they have to be adaptable to new and changing demands" (Cressey and Scott,1992,p.93). The work autonomy enabled by this increased organizational

emphasis upon the sale of banking products through clerk/customer interaction will be discussed further in the following section.

We have concentrated our discussion of recent technological developments, and their intimate relation to processes of marketization, upon banking and financial services. However, there is evidence of similar trends (including the forms of spatial reorganization and labour force segmentation outlined above) within other areas of clerical work in both the private and the public sector (Pinch (1989); Filby (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)). We must beware, though, of assuming a complete 'de-traditionalization' of clerical work under the influence of I.C.T. development and marketization. Utilization of new technology may well demand 'traditional' clerical knowledge, abilities, skills and discretion while not being organizationally recognized - the deployment of 'tacit skills' (Fearfull (1992)).

Social Interaction, Emotional Labour and the Clerical Labour Process

Here, we turn to an issue which has received scant attention, not only within literature on the clerical labour process, but in relation to the nature and experience of paid employment more generally within capitalist-patriarchal societies (cf. Mills (1951); Hochschild (1983); Crompton and Jones (1984); Filby (1992); Fineman (ed) (1993); Sturdy (1994); Kerfoot (1995)).

Social interaction with customers and people external to the particular work organisation, as well as colleagues and management within the organisation, has *always* been inherent to much clerical work (Mills (1951)). However, as integral to the marketization of much clerical experience, it has recently become the focus of organizational and academic

attention. As suggested previously, within marketized clerical work, technological development, new managerial strategies, state deregulation and developments in the public sector have enhanced the significance, and time given over (organizationally) to clerk/customer interaction in particular (Hochschild (1983); Kerfoot (1995)). This is the sphere where products and services can be sold to customers (Hochschild (1983); Urry (1987); Filby (1992)). Some of the old clerical work literature suggests that, historically, the course of human interaction has been the most discretionary element of the clerical labour process. Social interaction with others is always, to some extent, *unpredictable*. This renders managerial prescription and supervision of the tasks involved very difficult. However, some theorists (Hochschild (1983)) have argued that increased organisational attention to social interaction within the workplace, facilitated by marketization processes, is beginning to erode employee discretion. In turn, others (Filby (1992); Fineman (1993b)) suggest that such claims are exaggerated.

In order to discuss this issue, we shall divide the social interaction demanded by many clerical labour processes into two - the *content* of social interaction and the *form* of social interaction. The former refers to the actual tasks which are demanded of employees, and *what* is communicated to the other person, for example, what type of information is delivered to customers and how this information is obtained. The form of social interaction includes the *way* in which information is provided and communicated by employees. Within much clerical work, the product of labour (a substantive service) and its mode of delivery are inextricably combined. These products "involve the purchase or transfer of an experience in which the quality of the social interaction is vital" (Filby,1992,p.23). It is argued within some of the old literature that both dimensions of social interaction within

clerical work can involve the exercise of employee autonomy, but particularly the second of the two.

Within the old literature, both Storey (1986) and Taylor (1991) provide examples of how the content of social interaction can facilitate the exercise of clerical worker autonomy, without explicitly recognising this within their studies. Taylor (1991) studied book-keepers and wages clerks within a small food manufacturers. The majority of work time for these clerks was taken up by checking, maintaining and creating sets of records related to the production process and the productive activity/wages of other employees. However, a small part of the book-keeping and wages clerks labour process involved dealing with enquiries, both face-to-face and over the telephone, relating to those records.

The clerks had been given precise training in their respective forms of record- keeping. The way of accomplishing these tasks was heavily prescribed. Moreover, the pace of work (keeping records) was not left to the discretion of the worker. Although there was no close supervision of the labour process, deadlines for the completion of work were very strict. Delays in the completion of records and reports by these clerks would lead to delays in the work of other departments. Taylor notes that any hiccup would immediately be noticed, and dealt with, by management.

However, the task of dealing with internal enquiries does give these clerks some discretion within the labour process (Taylor (1991)). The enquiries could relate to the records at any point in time. This can involve a variety of techniques in order to access and retrieve data, combining, for example, both manual and electronic file access and retrieval. There was no prescribed method for answering most enquiries - management relied upon the discretion and experience of clerks. Similarly, clerks exercised discretion as to whether

to fully answer enquires at all, or with the correct information.

Similarly, Storey (1986), in his study of insurance clerks at 'Hightech', shows that a substantial part of the clerks work involved liason with insurance brokers and dealing with customer enquiries, in addition to underwriting, claims handling and the processing of new insurance applications. The latter are largely accomplished in a prescribed manner (Storey (1986)). There was a standard procedure for accomplishing these tasks which involved limited employee discretion.

However, there was no standard procedure for dealing with the varied enquiries which come from customers and the varied content of interaction with brokers. Storey suggests that there is a standardised and prescribed pattern for dealing with the most common enquiries, however, the detailed content of *all* interaction is impossible for management to either prescribe or supervise.

It is argued within the old literature that employees will always retain discretion over this aspect of the labour process. It is the most difficult aspect for management to supervise and thus control. In order for the content of employee/customer interaction to be devoid of discretion, every social interaction with a customer would need to be supervised. Recent research into marketized clerical work within both private and public sectors (Pinch (1989); Filby (1992); Cressey and Scott (1992) Halford and Savage (1995); Kerfoot (1995)) clearly suggests that some clerical employees are now involved in much more extensive social interaction with customers. This has been enabled (for 'core' workers involved in selling products and services at least) by technological development and new managerial strategies. However, the same research also suggests that the content of clerk/customer interaction, given its increased significance,

is subject to greater managerial prescription and surveillance which may compromise employee discretion.

The *form* of social interaction with others is also seen within the old literature as facilitating employee autonomy. The way in which the products or services of clerical work are often delivered through employee/customer interaction or employee/colleague interaction often relies upon the unique *personality* of clerical employees, their tone of voice, facial expression, dress, hairstyle - in short, their 'presentation of self' (Goffman (1959)). The above quoted studies of clerical work suggest that workers have total autonomy over this particular aspect of the labour process (Storey (1986); Taylor (1991)).

Hochschild (1983) coined the term 'emotional labour' to depict the work of employees who are involved in social interaction with customers as part of their labour process. Drawing upon, and expanding, the work of Mills (1951) and Goffman (1959), this refers to the management of feeling within forms of paid labour in order to "create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p.7). Undertaking emotional labour involves inducing or suppressing feeling in order to sustain an outward countenance or bodily display. Crucially, the aim of this management of feeling is to produce a particular state of mind in others (*usually* customers).

Hochschild (1983) distinguishes between emotion *work and emotional labour.* In the former feeling is managed in order to sustain an outward appearance and produce particular states of mind in other people for *private* purposes. The 'feeling rules' which guide such management *can* be privately, personally negotiated. This opens up the *possibility* of engaging in 'equal emotional exchanges' with others while aiming to produce 'human happiness' (3). In contrast, emotional *labour* involves the management of feeling to create a state of mind

in another in order to serve the purposes of the employing organisation. Emotional labour is 'socially engineered from the top' (Hochschild (1983)). This can lead to the 'transmutation of the private emotional system'. In this view, it is possible to become estranged from the objects of emotional labour (one's facial and bodily expressions, feelings and emotions) in the same way as it is possible to become estranged from the objects of physical labour (one's bodily actions) and mental labour (one's thoughts).

Hochschild (1983) outlines three forms of emotional labour. Firstly, 'surface acting' which involves pretending "to feel what we do not...we deceive others about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves" (p.33). This involves changing how we outwardly appear. 'Deep acting' involves "deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others...we make feigning easy by making it unnecessary" (p.33). According to Hochschild, there are two forms of deep acting: deep acting through the direct exhortation of feeling; and deep acting through the use of a trained imagination. All these forms of feeling management are common within private life as well as within the world of work. In the former, they can be used for private purposes - to cement a sense of self and identity. Within the workplace, however, such feeling concealment is often mobilised for commercial purposes and the resulting danger is a *lack* of a sense of self and identity.

Hochschild (1993) has recently extended her definition of emotional labour to include "knowing about, and assessing as well as managing emotions, other people's as well as one's own" (p.x). In fact, she suggests that *all* jobs involve emotional labour - assessing and managing feeling in order to produce an outward countenance to others. These 'others' can include managers, the managed, work colleagues or even oneself. Managerial attempts to exercise authority over emotional labour can themselves involve emotional labour

(Hochschild (1993)). Employees can actively manage feelings of frustration for their own sense of well being within the workplace (4).

The concept of emotional labour can be seen as *particularly* relevant for an analysis of contemporary clerical experience. Within marketized clerical work, the ability to undertake emotional labour is increasingly the major human capacity which is sold to an employer, it is the major task demanded by the labour process as it is through social interaction with customers that products and services are sold *and,* simultaneously. It is within clerical work that *increasing* managerial attempts to control employees' deployment of emotional labour are being made (Hochschild (1983); Filby (1992); Cressey and Scott (1992); Halford and Savage (1995); Kerfoot (1995). It is argued by many that within clerical work, given the common difficulty of establishing a 'competitive edge' through the substantive product or service offered, the *way* in which the product or service is offered is often the main basis of competition (Urry (1987); Howcroft (1991); Filby (1992); Kerfoot and Knights (1994)). Thus, clerical employees are increasingly selected and trained for the purposes of undertaking emotional labour, and supervised when deploying it within the labour process. Hochschild (1983) argues that emotional labour is *increasingly* 'socially engineered from the top'. "Managing their own and others' feelings, *with more or less codified guidance,* is what many people now do for a living" (Filby,1992,p.24,my emphasis).

Hochschild argues that emotional labour, when given intensive organisational attention, is 'deskilled' in a Bravermanian sense (Braverman (1974)). "The 'mind' of the emotion worker...has moved upstairs in the hierarchy so that the worker is restricted to implementing standard procedures" (Hochschild,1983,p.120). The feelings displayed by emotion workers and the product felt by customers, clients, colleagues

or management, cease to be a product of the true self of the labourer. The danger, according to Hochschild, is that the labourer becomes estranged from her/his true self (through deep acting) and s/he loses the very capacity to act autonomously in the realm of feelings and emotions. Thus, the result of the 'complete transmutation' is that many workers take on such prescribed (commercially imposed) feelings as their own. Hochschild places great significance upon what she sees as increasing restrictions upon the autonomy of clerical emotional labourers.

Hochschild's thesis has been challenged. It has been suggested that the deployment of emotional labour is *inherently* autonomous and thus is impossible to 'deskill' in the Braverman sense. "The negative picture of corporate control over emotions is a seductive one, but somewhat overstated" (Fineman,1993b,p.19). Some research demonstrates that worker discretion, within some forms of clerical work involving social interaction with customers, has not diminished despite attempts to control and supervise the deployment of emotional labour (Filby (1992)); the methods of managerial supervision developed to date still afford workers discretion within the clerical emotional labour process. In fact, Filby suggests that much greater opportunities for discretion exist when clerical work involves emotional labour.

It is suggested that management control of emotional labour can be weakened by the belief that the ability to deploy emotional labour is *naturally* possessed by particular individuals - it is not a capacity which can be taught or prescribed. In particular, it is often assumed that the ability to 'manage feelings' is a natural talent possessed by many women. As part of his study of female cashiers within the off-course betting industry Filby provides evidence to show that managerial methods to control the deployment of emotional labour were limited to the *selection* of employees: women were

selected "because of their 'personalities', because they were attractive and could perform", and were then encouraged to exercise their autonomy in the deployment of emotional labour (Filby,1992,p.36).

Emotional labour is clearly a distinctly *gendered* phenomenon, which may be important for the reproduction and development of gender ideologies and gendered practices (Hochschild (1983); James (1989)). It could, however, given the above, also be seen as a site of worker resistance to and negotiation with, *through the exercise of employee autonomy,* both patriarchal and capitalist structures within the workplace. This could be particularly relevant if we are moving from 'private' to 'public' patriarchy (Walby (1990)).

Thus, both the content and form of social interaction have always been important when considering employee autonomy within clerical work. Marketization has clearly rendered this social interaction more significant to, and a more predominant part of, many clerical labour processes. However, concurrent with the marketization process are increased managerial *attempts* to prescribe the form and content of social interaction - through selecting and training workers for the very purposes of social interaction while supervising, and evaluating, the nature of social interaction within the labour process. The impact of these developments, upon the experience of clerical employment, is rather unclear and unambiguous within current literature and research. The empirical research which follows will attempt to enhance our understanding of these current trends.

The Feminisation of Clerical Work

Concomitant with the explosion of clerical work in Britain, it has been increasingly performed by women rather than men which has received much attention within sociological research

and literature. This trend has certainly not been reversed by the marketization of some clerical work. Some recent research indicates that the requirement for many clerical employees to become predominantly involved in selling products and services, and the 'routinization' and automation of many remaining functions in specialist centres dealing only with these, has *intensified* the demand for female clerical labour (Hochschild (1983); Cressey and Scott (1992); Filby (1992)). Furthermore, marketization *may* account for the slight increase in females occupying senior positions within largely clerical organisations in the private and public sector (Cressey and Scott (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)).

Nevertheless, the major observation made by those analysing the nature of the work which is undertaken by women, both specifically within the clerical sector and more generally within capitalist-patriarchal society, is that it is largely low-paid and of low-status (Hakim (1979); Walby (1990); Siltanen (1992); Cressey and Scott (1992); Halford and Savage (1995)). A major debate has arisen over whether this is because the objective content of the jobs largely occupied by women have a low market and social value and a low discretionary and skill content irrespective of who performs them, or whether they *are* low-paid and of low-status because it is women who perform them. We have already noted how 'skill' can be socially constructed within a patriarchal society (Phillips and Taylor (1980); Cockburn (1983)). It can be argued that the occupational segregation of women is the result of a complex social-structural process which involves factors both external and internal to the employment relationship - in short, the interrelation of patriarchal structures outlined in chapter one (Walby (1990)).

Some do suggest that the feminisation of clerical work is the result of a gradual deterioration in the market value of clerical work through 'deskilling' (Braverman (1974)). It is

suggested that a universal, and uni-linear removal of discretion from the clerical labour process has meant that women have increasingly displaced men as clerical workers. Women have taken over as the status and demands of clerical work have been reduced. However, this proposal of a universal and uni-linear erosion of clerical worker autonomy does not square with some of the (old and new) empirical evidence reviewed thus far.

It does seem that, simultaneous with the process of feminisation, much clerical work has generally decreased in terms of status, rewards and *perceptions* of skill and discretionary content (Crompton and Jones (1984)). Clearly, one can argue that, in many areas of the sector, this does not reflect the *actual* demands of the labour process and in particular the discretion required of many clerical workers. Discretionary content, in addition to the skill requirements, of clerical work is often socially, patriarchally constructed (Fearfull (1991), (1992); Filby (1992)). Given our concern to identify the way in which female clerical worker autonomy is shaped by, and shapes, the structuration of gendered social relations, this is a debate to which our research shall also contribute.

This chapter has reviewed a number of factors which are identified within the old literature as important influences upon the workplace discretion of clerical workers, despite the fact that the very term 'clerical work' was the subject of much confusion and critique.

We have simultaneously argued that the marketization of much clerical work has transformed, and further fragmented, the occupation within both the private and public sectors. Correspondingly, a new sociological literature has arisen

which suggests that many of the aforementioned 'influences' upon clerical worker autonomy are also being transformed. We have problematised both the notion that a homogenous category of 'clerical work' actually exists, and the relevance of 'older' research and literature for understanding much contemporary clerical experience. These will form central research problems throughout our study. Our empirical research will compare and contrast an 'old', 'traditional' clerical labour processes with examples which have undergone varying degrees of marketization.

Our particular research problem will be more specific than a general concern with a wide-ranging marketization process. Throughout this chapter, we have rather generically referred to 'new managerial strategies' as important elements within marketization, without actually specifying what is meant. It can be argued (and will be in the following chapter) that many of these new managerial strategies - such as Total Quality Management (T.Q.M.) - represent managerial attempts to cohere and implement many elements of the marketization process. T.Q.M. represents one managerial programme aimed at transforming the clerical labour process from one predominantly concerned with the collection, storage and generation of information to one dominated by the sale of products and services to customers.

Interestingly, it is simultaneously claimed by many academic representations of the T.Q.M. clerical labour process that such managerial programmes *enhance* clerical employee autonomy within both private and public sectors. It is for this reason that the impact of T.Q.M. upon employee autonomy within the clerical labour process (a specific, although integral, aspect of marketization) will form our central problematic. The academic claims, referred to above, will be reviewed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND CLERICAL WORK

Concomitant with other forms of paid work, and as an integral element of what we have termed 'marketization', the implementation of T.Q.M. has profoundly shaped the organisation and experience of clerical work. In fact, it is suggested that such initiatives constitute the most far-reaching forms of organisational restructuring within clerical work and the service sector (Kerfoot (1995); McCabe and Knights (1995); Walsh (1995)). This chapter endeavours to outline what, as claimed by some analysts, this new form of clerical work organisation entails and why it is argued that it enhances clerical worker autonomy. These claims are situated within wider social, economic and political discourses and theoretical paradigms.

The Cult(ure) of the Customer and The Discourse of Enterprise

Much contemporary organisational change has been informed by "the culture of the customer" (Du Gay and Salaman,1992,p.615). This refers to managerial attempts to reconstruct work organisations in ways which are *customer focused*.

Du Gay and Salaman (1992) argue that the "cult(ure) of the customer", which supposedly involves demanding enterprise and autonomy of employees, is part of a wider "discourse of enterprise" which is unquestioningly accepted by managements as 'rational' in terms of meeting current environmental challenges and competitive threats.

The "discourse of enterprise", which encapsulates a unique alliance of academic (both managerially-orientated and sociological) and political arguments, is grounded in a perception of profound contemporary social, economic and

political change. One of the prime 'talkers' within the discourse of enterprise is the postmodernist 'epoch' position or the sociology of postmodernity referred to earlier (Bauman (1988), (1992); Clegg (1990); Hassard (1993)). It is alleged that one of the major triggers of change has been the increasing *globalisation* of economic and social life. This, it is often argued, has facilitated a transition from an era of 'fordism' to 'post-fordism' (Sabel (1982); Piore and Sabel (1984)); from 'organised' capitalism to 'disorganised' capitalism (Lash and Urry (1987)); from 'modernity' to 'postmodernity' (Bauman (1988), (1992)); from 'old times' to 'new times' (Hall and Jacques (1989)).

Within these arguments, 'modernity' (or 'fordism' or 'organised capitalism' or 'old times') is characterised by stable consumer markets for mass, standardised products produced by large corporations with the help of an interventionist state. The 'modern' work organisation is characterised by bureaucracy, centralisation, hierarchical control and Taylorist task specialisation (Clegg (1990)). A further important aspect of modernity is that mass culture - the shared norms values, meanings and identities of the mass of the population were apparently drawn from their role within the *production* process (Bauman (1988), (1992), Hall and Jacques (1989)). This role, it is argued, engendered a sense of *collective* identity (often expressed in terms of conflict with employers drawn from a common position within the (organised) capitalist mode of production. The working class developed norms, values, meanings and identities within the occupational communities in which they lived, they were politically represented by mass, class-based trade unions and political parties (Lash and Urry (1987)).

According to the discourse of enterprise, we are currently witnessing the demise of such social structures and ways of life. Economic globalisation and accompanying advances in

information and productive technologies have dismantled the stable consumer markets, 'modern' forms of work organisation and stable, collective class-based cultures and identities which characterised modernity. It is argued that an important, if not *the* most significant, simultaneous development (partly facilitated by the above changes - particularly the erosion of class-based culture and identity) has been the emergence of differentiated, discerning and quality-conscious consumers (Clegg (1990); Du Gay and Salaman (1992)). The markets for mass produced, standardised goods and services have become saturated (Sabel (1982); Piore and Sabel (1984)). One of the reasons for this is that individuals within postmodernity seek to derive and express meaning, culture and identity through *consumption*:

> in present-day society, consumer conduct (consumer freedom geared to the consumer market) moves steadily into the position of...the cognitive and moral focus of life, the integrative bond of society, and the focus of systematic management. In other words, it moves into the selfsame position which in the past - during the 'modern' phase of capitalist society - was occupied by work in the form of wage labour. This means that in our time individuals are engaged...first and foremost as consumers rather than producers (Bauman,1992,p.49).

Thus, it is alleged within the discourse of enterprise that, largely due to wider social change, the mass production of standardised goods will no longer satisfy consumer needs and expectations. It is widely accepted within the discourse of enterprise, and beyond (re. Keat (1990); Hill (1991)), that there has been a "fragmentation and differentiation of demand for goods and services...a change in consumer values and

behaviour" (Du Gay and Salaman,1992,p.617). According to the discourse, the whole purpose of consuming goods and services within postmodernity is so that individuals can:

> distinguish themselves from those who do not have it (a particular good or service) ...Consumers will be increasingly willing to pay a premium for a variant of the good (or service) whose possession (or experience) sets it off from the mass; and as the number of variants competing for attention and encouraging further differentiation of tastes increases, it becomes harder and harder to consolidate production of a standard product (or service) (Sabel,1982,p.199).

As we shall see below, acceptance of this argument involves accepting the necessity for radical change of the structures and processes of work organisations and thus the experience of paid work. In short, it is argued by the sociology of postmodernity - the 'epoch position' (Hassard (1993), and accepted by the discourse of enterprise that:

> the stable markets, large corporations, mass production and interventionist state characteristic of Fordism is replaced by sovereign consumers seeking specialised goods in niche markets, served by decentralized companies with flexible products, technologies and manpower; with the state retreating to take a back seat (Thompson,1993,p.188).

The discourse of enterprise fundamentally asserts then that, due to external 'environmental' developments, we are witnessing the erosion of bureaucratic and hierarchical

control and regulation both inside and outside of contemporary organisational life. Furthermore, it is suggested that this development is necessary to enable individual, organisational and nation-state development and fulfilment within a rapidly changing global context. The discourse of enterprise stresses self-reliance and self-development.

It is argued by the discourse of enterprise that bureaucratic regulation inhibits the development of 'enterprise' and 'creativity' which it is asserted is necessary for fulfilment within a postmodern world. Thus, dominant neo-liberal political discourses frequently stress that state regulation of the economy and society can stifle the 'enterprise' which is required to succeed within the global economy. At an individual level, it is asserted that individuals must be enterprising in the development of their own 'human capital'. It is argued that they must continually develop new skills and abilities to succeed within an ever-changing economy (Department of Employment (1985), (1989)) (1). Currently dominant academic arguments celebrate the removal of bureaucratic constraints upon consumption. It is argued that within modernity, the mass production of standardised goods and services *prescribed* the development of style, taste and, ultimately, individual identity. The changes alluded to above are seen as facilitating the development of the 'enterprising' consumer who is constantly searching for, and demanding, increasingly differentiated goods and services to enable the development and expression of individual values, meaning and identity within an increasingly identity-threatening world (Featherstone (1987), (1991); Bauman (1992)) (2).

At the level of the work organisation, it is asserted that the removal of bureaucratic forms of organisation, hierarchical control of the workforce and Taylorist task specialization is vital to enable organisational, and nation-state, survival and prosperity within an ever-changing world (Sabel (1982); Piore

and Sabel (1984); Clegg (1990)). In short, if consumers are becoming more enterprising and 'quality conscious' and demanding differentiated goods and services, possessing ever-changing and unique needs and expectations, then work organisations must develop structures and processes which enable them to respond to and fulfil these needs and expectations. It is argued that "if firms are to meet this challenge they must develop new ways of working which encourage flexibility, innovation and customer responsiveness" (Du Gay and Salaman,1992,p.617). Crucially for our purposes, the discourse of enterprise identifies the development of 'enterprise' and *autonomy* amongst employees as a vital part of the organisational response. Such a response in turn "encapsulates the (wider) contemporary pressure to devolve responsibility to the individual" (Kerfoot and Knights,1995,p.223).

The Organisational Response

Researchers have charted radical organisational change as a response to the *perceived* changing economic, social and political environment outlined above. It would seem that the discourse of enterprise has been accepted as rational by those with work organisational power. *One* (3) common managerial strategy in response to the perceived change has been the adoption of 'quality improvement' programmes which involve the advocacy and implementation of new concepts of quality and service provision (Sisson (1989); Severance and Passino (1986); Hendry et al. (1988); Howcroft (1991)).

From the 1980's onwards, "quality programmes have assumed an overwhelming significance in contemporary management within Britain" (Kerfoot and Knights,1994,p.4) (4). Recent years have witnessed their exponential growth. Wilkinson and Willmott (1995) report that such initiatives are currently occurring in three quarters of companies in the United Kingdom and the

United States and that such initiatives are supported enthusiastically by 90 per cent of chief executives who regard it as 'critical' for their organisations (5). Pinch (1989) notes that quality programmes are common within forms of restructuring in the public, as well as the private, sector. Central to these quality-focused strategies is an explicit emphasis on the customer - both 'internal customers' and 'external customers':

> The common element of these programmes (of organisational change) is that they argue the need to impose the model of the customer-supplier relationship on internal organisational relations, so departments now behave as if they were actors in a market, workers treat each other as if they were customers, and customers are treated as if they were managers (Du Gay and Salaman,1992,p.619).

Within the proposed quality programmes, enhanced discretion is demanded of employees if they are to rapidly respond to the changing needs of internal customers and external customers/managers in order to produce a continually improving quality service/good. Customers are constructed as managers by internal management through various customer information technologies which can shape the behaviour of employees (Fuller and Smith (1991)). The rationale behind such strategies is clearly expressed by Lewis (1988):

> by satisfying the needs of its internal customers, an organisation upgrades its capability for satisfying the needs of its external customers...if...organisations care about both employees and customers, the pay off will be in terms of increased employee motivation and satisfaction; a

> high level of...quality as compared to the quality expected by customers, and therefore customer satisfaction; and, in turn, hopefully, customer loyalty and increased levels of business activity (pp.72-74).

According to Du Gay and Salaman (1992), the development of the "enterprising enterprise" - of which the adoption of quality programmes is but one facet - is as much a result of managerial acceptance of the *language* or *discourse* of enterprise and the "culture of the customer", which is a part of this discourse, as it is a direct, inevitable and 'rational' response to *actual* environmental pressures. Another major part of the discourse and culture is the prescriptive literature on T.Q.M, discussed below, as an apparent recipe for business 'success'.

The *idea*, also developed within what is often termed the 'excellence' literature, that commercial organisations must continually struggle to become ever more enterprising and maintain "total customer responsiveness" (Peters,1987), can, in a similar way to the sociology of postmodernity and political discourses stressing the importance of 'enterprise', be seen as a response to the *perceived* dislocation, uncertainty and rapid change which characterises the contemporary world capitalist economy and society. Similar social and economic changes are identified and viewed as significant - especially economic globalisation and the differentiation and specialisation of consumer demand. The 'excellence' literature (re. Peters and Waterman (1982); Peters and Austin (1985); Peters (1987); Deal and Kennedy (1988)) prescribes that the only way to 'run a tight ship' in the inherently 'chaotic' global economy is through 're-enchanting' the work organisation around the figure of the 'customer'. "If one really is paying attention to what the

customer is saying, being blown in the wind by the customer's demands, one may be sure he (sic) is sailing a tight ship" (Peters and Waterman,1982,p.32).

'Enterprise' and 'Autonomy'

The discourse of enterprise and the culture of the customer encourage organisations and their participants to become more 'enterprising'. Enterprise here refers to techniques for restructuring the internal nature of the organisation along 'market' lines in order to satisfy the needs and desires of the enterprising sovereign consumer. A variety of techniques, some of which are outlined below, are prescribed. One common theme, however, is that continually satisfying the needs of customers, and thus business success, can only be achieved through the active engagement of the self-fulfilling impulses of all the organisations' members. In other words, autonomy and discretion are demanded of employees. Enterprising enterprises are those where "staying close to the customer" means "gaining productivity through people" (Peters and Waterman,1982,p.166). According to the CBI, such enterprises must turn:

> to the people who work for them to develop ...competitive advantage. The winners are those who can organise and motivate their people at all levels so that they give willingly their ideas, their initiative and their commitment to the continuous improvement that winning requires...And it is up to these people as individuals to make the difference. They can no longer be treated as part of the collective mass... people want to do a good job, to have opportunities for self-development, to contribute their thoughts as well as

> their physical skills to the teams and firms for which they work, and to be recognised and rewarded for their whole contribution (1988,p.5).

Thus, for business success, the discourse of enterprise and the culture of the customer encourages the 'empowerment' and 'enabling' of all organisational members to add value - both to the company and themselves. "Total customer responsiveness" means a new form of control, "self control...Being fully responsible for results will concentrate the mind more effectively than any out of touch cop" (Peters,1987,p.363).

These ideas appear to have been particularly accepted, and implemented, by managements attempting to re-construct (or marketize) forms of clerical work within organisations attempting to achieve, or maintain, competitive advantage. We now turn to one particularly influential strand of managerial thinking and practice in this respect - Total Quality Management. This both reflects, and contributes to, the culture of the customer and the wider discourse of enterprise. Again, economic and social changes are identified, such as economic globalisation, nation-state deregulation of the economy and society and, most significantly, a consumer population with increasingly differentiated and specialised needs for 'quality' goods and and services (6). Total Quality Management is prescribed as a necessary response to these developments.

The T.Q.M. Philosophy

Dale et al. (1990) argue that from the early 1970's onwards, four discrete stages in the organisational implementation of quality programmes can be identified: inspection activities; quality control; quality assurance; and total quality management. They go on to suggest that organisational

implementation of the latter is significantly different to quality management programmes of the past (see also Tuckman (1992); Wilkinson and Willmott (1995)).

For many companies, embracing the 'quality' philosophy has entailed the adoption of a systematic and thoroughgoing approach to improving both products and service delivery through the inclusion of a formal T.Q.M. programme in their business plan. Such a programme principally involves attempts to generate organisational conformance to the requirements of both internal and external customers of the company (Kerfoot and Knights (1994)):

> Characteristics of companies aspiring to this level of quality management (i.e. T.Q.M.) are the widespread application of the concept that everyone in the organisation has customers and that customers deserve the highest quality of goods and services; so everyone should be committed to continuous improvement in their part of the operation. Total Quality Management uses a variety of methods to involve, motivate and imbue people at all organisational levels with the philosophy that improvement is a way of life (Dale et al.,1990,p.5).

The implementation of T.Q.M. has derived from the prescriptive writings of various management 'gurus' who stress the inherent connection between quality initiatives and business 'success' within a changing social, economic and political environment (Juran (1979); Crosby (1980); Ishikawa (1985); Deming (1986)) (7). Crucially, these authors articulate a conception of the term 'quality' distinct from the commonsensical association of quality with superior or exceptionally high standards of goods and services (Knights and McCabe (1994); Wilkinson and Willmott (1995)). From the quality 'expert' perspective, any

good or service can be labelled 'quality' when it meets standards and customer expectations that beat the competition within its market niche, however 'inferior' these standards could be. This is what is meant by "fitness for use" (Juran (1979)) and "conformance to requirements" (Crosby (1980)).

As Wilkinson and Willmott (1995) observe, the leading quality gurus listed above advocate the organisational implementation of 'hard' or 'technical' quality management techniques. They emphasise the importance of gaining statistical information about production processes and service delivery enabling error and waste elimination. The original gurus gave less attention "to the 'softer' process of winning employee support for, and commitment to, the T.Q.M. philosophy of continuous improvement", however, "there are signs that the balance between 'hard' and 'soft' formulations of T.Q.M. is beginning to shift, with the appearance of a new generation of gurus" (Wilkinson and Willmott,1995,p.8). The appearance of the 'softer' formulations of T.Q.M. has, as we shall see, implications for the nature and extent of employee discretion (8). Further, the 'new generation' of gurus includes those who advocate the implementation of T.Q.M. in clerical work (Oakland (1989); Dale et al. (1990); Howcroft (1991); Boaden and Dale (1993). We consider this work below.

T.Q.M. programmes seek to enhance the competitive position of work organisations through the establishment of qualitatively differentiated goods and/or services in line with customer expectations. This commits the *entire* enterprise to a philosophy of continual improvement in the quality of the goods and services provided to customers (Kerfoot and Knights (1994); Knights and McCabe (1994); McCabe and Knights (1995); Wilkinson and Willmott (1995); Hill (1995)):

> The real test of quality management is its ability to satisfy customers in the

> marketplace. T.Q.M. assumes that quality is the outcome of all activities that take place within an organisation. Accordingly, all functions and all employees have to participate in the improvement process and, to ensure this, organizations need both quality systems and a quality culture (Hill,1995,p.36).

Thus, T.Q.M. aims to provide 'fitness for purpose' with 'error free' products and services that subsequently lock customers into patterns of customer loyalty *and* which ensure cost effective, profitable mechanisms of provision. A wide range of techniques and procedures drawn from the prescriptive models of the 'gurus' may be, and have been, adopted organisationally:

> A quality programme may involve a variety of organizational procedures and management techniques such as the development of quality improvement teams, quality sponsor groups, customer care projects, use of the internal market where everyone is someone else's customer in a quality chain, methods of statistical process control to eradicate product defects, procedures for quantifying the cost of compliance to customer requirements, and generating a commitment to continuous improvement. Whereas a quality programme may experiment with some of these procedures and techniques in one part or division of the organization, T.Q.M. commits the entire enterprise to a programme consisting of a majority of these designs for improvement (Knights and McCabe,1994,p.4).

The particular techniques and procedures currently, and most generally, being applied to forms of clerical work are briefly reviewed below.

Within the writings of the new gurus, T.Q.M. is seen as a *process* of quality improvement. It is argued that T.Q.M. 'breathes new life' into the large corporation, facilitating its survival in the threatening circumstances of intensified competition within destabilised consumer markets (Dale et al. (1990)). Organisations have apparently and increasingly turned to T.Q.M. in order to maximise the potential for expansion and intensification of sales within their existing customer base, thus enhancing their marketplace profile and improving their competitive performance.

The widespread adoption of T.Q.M. signifies that quality of goods and service is being perceived as a, if not *the*, key 'differentiation strategy' of many organisations (Porter (1980); Howcroft (1991) Boaden and Dale (1993)). Thus, in relation to T.Q.M. within the service sector:

> The provision of a high quality service may be defined as a differentiation strategy. The supplier of the service is attempting to establish his *(sic)* product as unique compared with those of his *(sic)* competitors by offering a better standard of service (at the point of sale) (Howcroft,1991,p.12) (9).

T.Q.M. is perceived, within the prescriptive literature, as an organisational reaction to environmental conditions - intensified competition, trends in globalisation, nation-state deregulation of economy and society, the development of new and productive technologies and increased consumer choice (Lewis (1988), (1989); Boaden and Dale (1993); Kerfoot and

Knights (1994)). The adoption of T.Q.M. means that quality principles are applied to "*all* aspects of the business...T.Q.M. requires that the principles of quality management should be applied in every branch and at every level in the organisation" (Dale et al.,1990,p.5).

According to Howcroft (1991), the essential difference between previous quality programmes and T.Q.M. is the realisation by senior management of the need for *active management* of the quality improvement process, for example through *monitoring* the worker-customer relationship where the production of a product or service involves worker/customer interaction. The primary objective of this active management is to "enhance customer perceptions of quality of service (or/and goods) actually received and thereby equate them with customer expectations" (Howcroft,1991,p.13). Thus, in line with the culture of the customer and the discourse of enterprise outlined above, customer satisfaction is the overriding goal, supposedly achieved through the introduction of a quality programme and work restructuring based around the 'internal customer' model and external 'customer management':

> In the case of service industries with significant employee/customer interaction, customers are made to function in the role of management. In this sector, customer satisfaction is now defined as critical to competitive success, because of its importance in achieving high levels of customer retention. Quality is thus defined...in terms of giving customers what they want, yet at the same time traditional methods of control (i.e. bureaucratic control) are too overtly oppressive, too alienating and too inflexible to encourage employees to

> behave in the subtle ways which customers define as indicating quality service, many of which - subtleties of facial expression, nuances of verbal tone, or type of eye contact - are difficult to enforce through rules, particularly when the employee is out of sight of any supervisor (Du Gay and Salaman,1992,p.621).

Thus, it would seem that 'total quality', within employee/customer interaction for example, can only be achieved by encouraging worker spontaneity and responsiveness - in other words, the exercise of employee autonomy. These attributes are stifled by bureaucratic control. "The 'solution' is to seek to change behaviour, values and attitudes through culture change rather than structural change, and to measure the success of these programmes through customer feedback" (Du Gay and Salaman,1992,p.622).

T.Q.M. and Culture

The T.Q.M. philosophy is intimately connected to and has, in part, grown out of the 'excellence' literature referred to earlier which stresses the importance of "strong corporate cultures" to enable organizational success and 'excellence' (Peters and Waterman (1982)).

'Culture' is an endlessly contested concept (Williams (1976)). However, within the T.Q.M., excellence and sociology of work and employment literature, it is largely taken to refer to:

> The system of meanings which are shared by members of a human grouping and which define what is good and bad, right and wrong, and what are the appropriate ways

> for members of that group to think and behave (Watson,1987,p.83).

Thus, culture can be taken to refer to a shared system of meaning. Our ability to be part of a culture, to have norms, values, attitudes, morals and feelings, our ability to be reflexive and to develop and communicate meanings is, as suggested in chapter one, an essential characteristic of human nature as opposed to non-human nature. This ability *enables* the development of self-identity and personality (10). The ability is only possible *because* of culture and language.

Interestingly in relation to the discussion of chapter one, both Peters and Waterman (1982) and Watson (1994) argue that as human individuals, we have a basic human need for 'meaning'. Furthermore, they argue that participation within a particular culture offers resources for the development of a 'meaning system' - norms, values, attitudes, morals, feelings, and ultimately a sense of self-identity. By offering us principles or guidelines for human behaviour - cultural rules on how to think and behave - participation within a particular culture allows us to satisfy this basic human need.

Addressing the significance of 'culture' within the workplace has a long history within industrial sociology. The experience of paid work can both affect, and be affected by, our own meaning system. Some empirical studies (e.g. Beynon (1973), Pollert (1981)) have argued for the importance of recognising 'contending cultures' within the workplace. As long ago as the 1930's, Human Relations theorists argued that workers have a need for 'belonging' to a social group. Satisfaction of this need was seen as important for organisational 'success' (Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939)). This issue has been revived by the excellence literature of the 1980's and 90's. Curiously, Watson (1994) argues that the *novelty* of the excellence literature lies in its connection of

"the idea of managers shaping and communicating values to be shared throughout the organisation...to the idea of a basic human need for meaning" (p.16). *The* unique aspect of the excellence literature (as a managerially-orientated genre from within business studies) is the contention that the human need for meaning is exacerbated in the contemporary era by the increasing unpredictability, ambiguity and chaotic nature of the social world (Peters and Waterman (1982)). Again, the similarity with particular postmodern and political discourses (see above) is striking.

Strong Corporate Cultures

According to the excellence literature, the existence of a strong corporate culture is dependent upon the ability and willingness of *management* to create and maintain *common* beliefs and values throughout the work organisation. Companies with 'weak' corporate cultures are riven by 'attitudinal barriers' - i.e. the existence of norms, values, feelings and identities which contest or deviate from those which will facilitate continually improving organizational success (Peters and Waterman (1982), Dobson (1988)):

> Every excellent company we studied is clear on what it stands for, and takes the process of value shaping seriously. In fact, we wonder whether it is possible to be an excellent company without clarity on values and without having the right sorts of values...virtually all of the better-performing companies we looked at...had a well-defined set of guiding beliefs (Peters and Waterman,1982,pp.280-281).

Creating, disseminating and maintaining a strong corporate culture is seen as the path to organisational success and

excellence. Organisational culture is the 'glue' which holds successful organisations together within an ever-changing world. In short, the excellence literature assumes "that there exists in a real and tangible sense a *collective* organisational culture that can be created, measured and manipulated in order to enhance organizational effectiveness" (Meek,1988,p.454,my emphasis). Further, participation within this organisational culture will satisfy the basic human need for meaning and identity, particularly important within a social world which increasingly *threatens* our sense of meaning and identity. Thus, the development of a shared meaning system "is seen as the key factor in unlocking the commitment and enthusiasm of employees" (Thompson and McHugh,1990,p.222).

It is contended within the excellence and prescriptive T.Q.M. literature that a 'weak' organisation can be transformed into a 'strong' one through "changing the culture" (Dobson (1988)) - changing and developing the norms, values, attitudes feelings and identities of *everyone* within the organisation so that they are committed towards delivering quality products/services. It is also argued that this can never be an instant development - it is a gradual *process* (Peters and Waterman (1982), Dobson (1988), Dale and Plunkett (1990), Boaden and Dale (1993)). As we shall see, various techniques are prescribed within the T.Q.M. literature to enable the development of this process.

T.Q.M. and Worker Autonomy

As suggested above, the notions of employee 'empowerment', 'discretion' and 'autonomy' are integral to the T.Q.M. process and the wider discourses and practices of which it is a part.

As a managerial and organisational response to wider social change, it is claimed that the implementation of T.Q.M. 'empowers' workers. "Control. That is what the 'power' in

'empowerment' is about. The control of the social activity we call work" (Price,1993,p.5). The prescriptive, managerialist T.Q.M. literature stresses the importance of delegating responsibilities down the hierarchy and involving employees in decision making activities in relation to everyday workplace tasks through, for example, quality circles and teamworking. T.Q.M. has supposedly stimulated a process of making employees responsible and accountable for the content and quality of their own jobs. Dale et al. (1990) argue that key features of T.Q.M. are employee involvement and development plus a teamwork approach to deal with improvement activities. "If T.Q.M. is applied as its proponents suggest, the focus for responsibility for quality is in the hands of those who do the work" (Wilkinson et al.,1991,p.6). This responsibility is defined as 'employee empowerment'. "Nobody knows a job better than the person doing it, and most people want to be involved, participate and take a pride in the quality of what they do" (Hand,1992,p.11). Where 'quality' is defined as meeting the constantly changing needs of internal and external customers, it is claimed that worker discretion is vital in order to deliver such quality:

> Within employment...(there is) a
> preoccupation with the individualised,
> self-regulated and autonomous worker,
> of which quality management may be
> seen to represent its timely apotheosis
> (Kerfoot and Knights,1994,p.8).

Total Quality Management Within Clerical Work

Much of the prescription and analysis of T.Q.M., developed by 'gurus', academics, consultants and organisations has been in relation to manufacturing industry, particularly the 'productive' element of manufacturing, rather than the service sector.

However, there is currently a trend towards the application of T.Q.M. within the service sector and particularly in areas, such as financial services, where clerical work predominates (Lewis (1988), (1989); Fuller and Smith (1991); Boaden and Dale (1993); Kerfoot and Knights (1994); McCabe et al. (1994); Knights and McCabe (1994); McCabe and Knights (1995); Walsh (1995)). Moreover, the public sector has not been immune to such trends (Halford and Savage (1995)). Although little has actually been written about the applicability of T.Q.M. to clerical work, many authors believe that "there is considerable potential for these tools to be utilised and business benefits to be achieved" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.21). On the basis of research conducted within a large clearing bank, Boaden and Dale (1993) outline a framework for the 'successful' implementation of T.Q.M. within clerical work. This framework is a mixture of both analysis and prescription. They analyse the 'successful' implementation of T.Q.M. within one particular clerical labour process *and* prescribe a framework for such application to clerical work elsewhere.

It seems important here to specify further what is actually meant by 'quality' in this context. Groonroos (1984), Richardson and Robinson (1985) and Lewis (1988) distinguish between 'technical' and 'functional' quality. In the context of clerical work within financial services, 'technical' or 'hard' quality (Hill (1991)) includes product knowledge and knowledge of operational systems while 'functional' or 'soft' quality (Hill (1991)) comprises staff behaviour, attitude and appearance during interaction with internal or external 'customers'. Groonroos (1984) and Lewis (1988) argue that the techniques of T.Q.M. can improve both types of quality. "In general, a high quality of service may be defined as consistently anticipating and satisfying the needs and expectations of customers" (Howcroft,1991,p.13). Continual

quality improvement requires a consistent increase in both types of quality.

T.Q.M. and Clerical Worker Autonomy

For advocates of the application of T.Q.M. to clerical work, the role of the clerical employee, and the discretion they exercise, is crucial to the total quality management and improvement process. Boaden and Dale (1993) begin with the assertion that vital to the process are "people, both as individuals and working in teams, without whose enthusiasm and skills quality improvement will not occur" (p.18). More specifically, Howcroft (1991) argues that worker "autonomy...may well be a necessary prerequisite for customer service that is superior in terms of anticipating and satisfying customer needs" (p.13). Lewis (1988) argues that within clerical and service work where there is worker/customer interaction, the quality of service/product is often inseparable from the quality of the service provider. She suggests that scope for employee autonomy and creativity will enhance worker commitment and the quality of the end product.

A Prescriptive Framework for Understanding T.Q.M. within Clerical Work

Employee 'empowerment' is a central element in the analytical and prescriptive framework for quality improvement (from which both organisations and employees apparently benefit tremendously) which Boaden and Dale (1993) outline. This framework has four major elements: organising; changing the culture; using systems and techniques; measurement and feedback. It will be most instructive to consider each of these parts in turn. The framework consists of general, prescriptive suggestions for the implementation of T.Q.M. and

quality improvement and is substantiated by specific evidence from research into clerical work within a large clearing bank.

Organising

This element of the framework for the 'successful' implementation of T.Q.M. within clerical and service work is what Boaden and Dale (1993) refer to as the "foundation stage" and "the basis of the whole process" (p.18). It is fundamentally concerned with developing the strategy and infrastructure which, it is claimed, are necessary to develop the process on an organisation-wide basis. As noted above, quality programmes have been developing within Britain, albeit in a rather haphazard fashion (Dale et al. (1990); Howcroft 1991; Tuckman (1992)), since the 1970's. However, in contrast to the first three stages of quality implementation identified by Dale et al. (1990) above, "a more formal and comprehensive framework is necessary if the process of quality improvement is to be continuous and have an impact across the whole organisation" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.18). T.Q.M. is not merely concerned with implementing one particular quality management tool such as Statistical Process Control.

According to Boaden and Dale (1993), an essential part of the strategy and framework for 'successful' T.Q.M. within clerical and service work is top management commitment and leadership. This must be translated into a clear top down vision for the organisation, so that everyone is clear where the organisation is heading and why. "This vision, coupled with more detailed mission statements, policy plans and a clear strategy at every level, can have significant benefits in terms of motivation of employees in all aspects of their work" (p.19).

Thus, the large clearing bank which was studied by Boaden and Dale in 1992 displayed a commitment to the ideal of continuous

quality service through a number of their public statements, including their annual reports, from 1983 onwards. Throughout this time, it appears that the notion of employee 'empowerment' - of clerical workers being responsible for ensuring quality improvement - was central to this particular managerial strategy. Thus, the first 'Standards of Service' campaign of 1983 is described by Boaden and Dale as a four-stage process of increasing staff awareness of the importance of service excellence covering courtesy, use of customer names in day-to-day transactions, a customer response programme and a complaints reduction programme. The latter:

> encouraged branch staff to get involved in quality service improvements at a local level by requesting them to record all complaints over a four-week period. This opened up the quality service debate for branch staff and demonstrated that up to 60 per cent of the causes of customer complaints could be dealt with effectively by branch staff. The customer response programme...(meant that) individual branches obtained feedback from customers on the service provided to them (p.25).

Following such activities, a Quality Service Programme (QSP) was developed which included bank-wide education and the establishment of Quality Service Action Teams (QSAT). The latter directly involved bank employees - clerical workers. These were followed by the setting of quality service standards, a 'cost of making mistakes' initiative (quality costing) and various other activities. The bank consistently sought to generate an image of being a 'quality organisation', with papers presented at conferences on T.Q.M., and articles published in a variety of journals.

Crucial to the long term success of a process of quality improvement, according to Boaden and Dale (1993), is communication. The vision must be communicated effectively throughout the organisation so "that it penetrates the attitudes and habits of all the members of the organisation and so ultimately determines its ethos" (Howcroft,1991,p.15). There needs to be an appropriate methodology of policy deployment which can be influenced by factors specific to the organisation. Management cannot communicate too much on quality improvement and the multi-location characteristics of clerical and service industries, referred to below, mean that it is especially important that effective communication mechanisms are developed.

Thus, in the clearing bank researched by Boaden and Dale, at a national level, there exists a central department responsible for quality and customer service (Q&CSD), increasingly supplemented by quality co-ordinators in each operating region. These co-ordinators are "appointed and 'owned' directly by the regions" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.26):

> The regional structure and co-ordinating activities established by the bank appear to be addressing the difficulties of managing quality improvement across a number of sites in an effective manner. In particular, the monthly meetings of all Quality Co-ordinators and members of Q&CSD are an ideal forum for the dissemination of information and sharing of ideas and problems across regions (p.26).

Boaden and Dale (1993) argue that management need to set up a clear organisational structure for the introduction, promotion, development and standardisation of quality service improvement activities. Again, they point out that this is especially relevant to clerical and service organisations

which have a large number of comparatively small locations relative to manufacturing companies:

> The development of Total Quality expertise at all locations may well not be feasible, and so a central group with the responsibility of developing and communicating knowledge on quality service improvement might well be appropriate (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.19).

This infrastructure would appear to be present in the bank studied by Boaden and Dale. At regional level within the bank, the new role of Quality Service Co-ordinator is increasingly responsible for facilitating the process of service quality improvement within her/his region, with the help and direction of a steering committee which is concerned with matters of policy.

A centrally directed Quality Service Manager was formerly responsible for regional activity. "The QSM's were generally held in high regard by managers and staff alike. The majority of QSM's saw themselves as missionaries, spreading the message of quality service improvement to branch staff" (p.26). QSM's also carried out training for QSAT leaders and the leaders then cascaded the training down to the QSAT members. It is envisaged that Regional Quality Service Co-ordinators will gradually assume responsibility for quality improvement activities at regional and branch level while QSM's will concentrate upon national policy:

> As the ownership of quality service improvement is gradually transferred from national to regional level, it is expected that a number of different initiatives will develop at regional level, targeted at specific quality improvement issues.

> This devolution of responsibility is an important stage in the process of quality service improvement; the basic concepts are well established and local ownership must now be encouraged (p.26).

Changing the Culture

Organisation-wide culture change is regarded by many authors and many employers (Lewis and Smith (1988); Howcroft (1991); Hand (1992)) as a vital part of any process of quality improvement. Boaden and Dale (1993) argue that it must be *part* of the ongoing process of quality improvement rather than being attempted through large innovative breakthroughs. They argue that culture change will gradually emerge from the implementation and development of quality improvement initiatives and activities, such as teamwork and Quality Service Action Teams.

According to Dale and Cooper (1992), organisation-wide culture change can involve: creating an awareness of total quality principles; getting everyone involved and changing their way of thinking; people taking 'personal ownership' for process management; education and training on TQM and quality improvement; and use of teamwork.

As Howcroft (1991) points out, the motivation for culture change comes from "the belief that a high standard of service (or goods) will not be given (produced) unless the entire organisation actually believes in and supports the objective of quality customer service" (p.15).

Boaden and Dale describe a gradual process of culture-change at the clearing bank. Whilst they note that it is difficult to identify specific activities which have contributed to culture change, they suggest that a major factor was a one-day

awareness event held at prestigious locations and which was attended by all bank staff.

Perhaps the most important feature of this event, according to Boaden and Dale, was that it encouraged local, employee ownership of, responsibility for and involvement in the quality improvement programme. Firstly, only bank staff were used to present and run the day (although they were trained by management consultants). There was universal involvement of the bank in one exercise. Junior staff had some involvement with the region - they developed a sense of identity beyond their own branch. Everyone had a taste of training in interpersonal skills which had previously been reserved for 'management'. The events took place in prestigious locations and during working time which apparently demonstrated organisational commitment to their aims.

The day dealt with subject areas such as: awareness of customer needs; analysis of behavioural type of the individual; technical skills relating to quality improvement; and the importance of teamwork. "The final session involved 'brainstorming', illustrating how the local problem-solving process worked, and preparing staff for the opportunity to get involved in the improvement of service within their branch" (p.27).

Boaden and Dale report that:

> The 'bottom line' was that the involvement and support of all staff was vital to the success of the programme, and hence the success of the bank...The effect of the one-day events was the transmission of a corporate identity and feeling of responsibility for the success of the bank...in most branches even junior staff

> were able to outline the objectives of the QSP, and their part in it. After the one-day events there was a momentum of enthusiasm and heightened expectations that was carried forward into the next phase of activity; the setting up of QSAT's at branch level (p.28).

Using Systems and Techniques

There are a variety of systems and techniques that can be used to facilitate changes in both 'technical' and 'functional' quality. It seems that it is not possible to prescribe some as more 'successful' than others - it clearly depends upon the specific organisational context as to which is the most appropriate. Thus, Boaden and Dale (1993) suggest that the use of teamwork and staff feedback may be a valuable tool within large, bureaucratic organisations such as clearing banks, where staff involvement in decision making has traditionally been minimal.

Whatever the specific techniques implemented, the overall rationale for their introduction is that the "attitude of general trust and value towards staff will permeate throughout the organisation and will be reflected in an improvement in the staff-customer relationship (or an improvement in the quality of goods/services produced)" (Howcroft,1991,p.14). The specific aim of the generic techniques is to encourage staff "to nurture greater customer empathy" and for management to withdraw many supervisory, directing functions allowing "an unprecedented level of staff autonomy" - especially during worker/customer interaction (Howcroft,1991,p.13).

Training in the use of systems and techniques for quality improvement is also an aspect which cannot be ignored. "The superior performing companies have well-developed formal training programmes for T.Q.M. and have mechanisms in place

for determining how well the training has been understood and put into practice" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.22). Furthermore, according to Pirrie (1990), training must simultaneously promote the awareness that the business is run for the benefit of customers.

The main technique implemented at the clearing bank was the development of QSAT's. From their research, Boaden and Dale argued that these had led to improved communication, improvement in quality of service, increased commitment to the quality service concept and personal development of QSAT members. Quality costing initiatives have also been developed. Both consist of activities which demand employee responsibility for ensuring continual quality improvement. Training was also an area where the bank had made considerable investments.

Measurement and Feedback

Many academic authors argue for the obvious importance of having mechanisms in place to ensure that the systems and techniques developed do actually lead to quality improvement. This entails measuring performance. Such a task is fraught with difficulty however.

Firstly, in order to measure performance, there has to be a common understanding of what 'quality service' is or 'quality goods' are. Boaden and Dale suggest that an organisation-wide definition may be the best way to develop such an understanding. Many authors (Zeithaml et al. (1990); Boaden and Dale (1993)) argue that the customer must be *centrally* involved in constructing this definition. Secondly, related to the above problem, measuring quality improvement often means attempting to measure something which is essentially intangible.

Boaden and Dale (1993) suggest that these difficulties are particularly severe when applied to clerical work and the service sector. How does one measure degrees of product knowledge, or even more difficult, degrees of politeness or quality 'presentation' to customers or interaction with customers ? They go on to point out that most attempts at measurement have been entirely from the customers' perspective. Performance measures may be both quantitative and qualitative, and relate to internal performance standards (e.g. issuing a new cheque book within a specified period of time) as well as external customer perceptions (e.g. answering the telephone politely and promptly).

However measurement and feedback is achieved, the advocates of T.Q.M. are clear that it is vital:

> not only for employee motivation
> and renewing the commitment of the
> organisation to TQM, but also so that
> the organisation can gain some indication
> of the progress they have made and
> which steps to take next
> (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.23).

Boaden and Dale also argue that recognition and reward for individual and group employee achievements in improving quality service or goods is essential for motivating individual involvement. They point out that this can take two forms. Firstly, a formalised quality service or production award programme. This "is normally used for group reward, with regional and national awards being presented at special ceremonies, and suitably publicised. Token gifts or even cash prizes are used" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.23). Secondly, recognition and reward for employee quality improvement constituting part of the staff development and appraisal scheme operated by most organisations. Many clerical and



service organisations have changed their staff appraisal schemes to take account of contributions to quality improvements (Lewis and Smith (1988)).

Thus, both the general prescriptive literature of the quality gurus concerning the advocation and implementation of T.Q.M., and that growing body of work which is specifically concerned with its application to forms of clerical work, explicitly claim that the 'empowerment' and increased autonomy of clerical employees will be enhanced. It is these specific claims which will be analysed through empirical research into the clerical labour processes outlined in the following chapters. T.Q.M. is one managerial programme shaped by, and contributing to, the marketization of clerical work.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Problem and Research Design

The major aim of this project is to study the nature and extent of worker autonomy within the clerical labour process, in the context of the implementation of T.Q.M. as an element of marketization, within many work organisations employing clerical workers. Following the literature reviews of chapters two and three, it can be contended that much 'clerical work' has been profoundly transformed by the marketization process. T.Q.M. is one aspect of the latter. The effect of this is rather ambiguous, however, in terms of clerical employee discretion. Herein lies our research problem.

The most traditional and clear research methodology for our purposes would have been a longitudinal study of one or more clerical work situations where total quality management, as an aspect of marketization, was to be introduced in the future. A 'before and after' analysis would have enabled a precise identification of the changing nature and extent of, and the factors which shaped, clerical worker discretion. Furthermore, an assessment could have been made of the *long-term* effects of change, rather than conclusions being based upon a 'snap shot' of the immediate impact of what are very recent and ongoing developments. Such an approach does, however, demand huge resources. The most significant resource here is time. The *raison d'etre* of the longitudinal study is that it is conducted over a lengthy time period - to enable analysis before, during and after change. Such a procedure was beyond the temporal limits of this project.

Consequently, a *comparative* research design was constructed. The intention of this approach was to compare and contrast

interviewing of organisational actors; close, non-participant observation of all aspects of the work situation; and examination of relevant documentation.

The major advantage of this approach, for the interests of this study, is that it allows the researcher her/himself to identify relevant factors and processes in the development/underdevelopment of clerical workers' discretion. It allows her/him to evaluate the extent of worker autonomy, within each case, according to her/his own criteria. No other research method, with the possible exception of 'participant observation,' allows for such close and in-depth analysis of the processes and factors at work within the employment relationship.

Alternatives, such as 'the survey method', primarily involve research 'at a distance'. Such an approach would have been unsatisfactory given our research objectives. For example, the administration of survey questionnaires would have entailed relying upon organisational actors to define the concept of work autonomy, and indicate important factors which shape the nature and extent of discretion within their labour process. There would have been major weaknesses with such *dependence* on behalf of the researcher. As we have argued, autonomy is *not* a wholly subjective phenomenon. One of our prime concerns was to investigate the *norms, values and feelings* of employees, their cultural integration within the work organisation, as generated by the implementation of T.Q.M. Halford and Savage (1995) argue that the marketization and restructuring of 'clerical work' involves "changing the (personal) qualities of organisational members" (p.97). Clearly, researching such social processes demands *dialogue,* and a developed *social relationship* between researcher and researched. It also entails close observation of employee behaviour. Our investigation involved examining many contentious and sensitive issues. The *emotional experience* of

clerical workers is a case in point. The case-study approach allows a first-hand and detailed analysis of the work situation by the researcher, *in addition* to the definitions, thoughts and feelings of organisational actors. At the commencement of the research, it was also hoped that a simple questionnaire would be administered within each research site, in an attempt to ensure a representative sample - according to age, sex, ethnicity and occupational grade - of clerical workers were interviewed and observed.

The approach which perhaps allows closer analysis of employment relationships than our own is 'participant observation'. This also has drawbacks, both mechanical and theoretical, which made it very difficult to adopt as the method of research. Again, time was the most important factor. The amount of time required for participant observation, not least that involved in integrating oneself into an organisation, means that to study three cases through this method would have been beyond the time constraints of this study.

The Fieldwork

Three cases were chosen, two of which represented the 'newer' form of marketized 'clerical work' and had introduced T.Q.M. prior to the commencement of the research process. These were: the labour process of British Airways Telephone Sales Agents in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne; and the work of Bank Clerks within two branches of The Co-operative Bank. Our other case study represents the 'older' form of clerical labour process which has not been transformed into one predominantly demanding the sale of products to customers under the influence of T.Q.M. This involved studying the work of Death Claims Correspondence Clerks within National Savings, Durham. Further justification for these choices is provided in the following three chapters.

The administration of a short questionnaire amongst all employees within each case selected, planned within the research design, was *not* undertaken. In one case (British Airways), management would not allow this. It also became clear during the early stages of the research process that the selection of interviewees, and observation of the work situation, within all cases chosen was not totally under the control of the researcher. Thus, a 'snowballing' technique was adopted, whereby opportunities to observe aspects of the work situation and interview employees were developed through the contact made with previous respondents. Nevertheless, as demonstrated below, attempts were made, in each case, to interview as representative a sample as possible and observe the work situation as comprehensively as possible. A detailed breakdown of the fieldwork undertaken will now be provided.

Newcastle Telephone Sales, British Airways

This constituted the most comprehensive of the three case-studies. The hierarchical structure of the research site will be explained further in the following chapter. Staff at all levels within this structure were interviewed and observed. The one (male) Unit Manager was interviewed three times. Two of these interviews lasted approximately one hour, the other running for thirty minutes. Four (three male and one female) of the five (four male, one female) Sales Team Leaders were also interviewed - each lasting an average of forty five minutes. Thirteen (eight female, five male) of the forty (fifty two per cent female) Sales Team Supervisors were interviewed. These varied greatly in terms of length - between a minimum of fifteen minutes and a maximum of ninety minutes. Of the 360 Telephone Sales Agents (eighty one per cent female), 23 were interviewed (six male, seventeen female). Each interview lasted an average of forty minutes. These

included interviews with Team Representatives, Community Representatives and Transport and General Workers' Union representatives. A group interview, lasting approximately twenty minutes, was conducted with six Telephone Sales Agents. In addition, representatives from the Training Section and various working groups within the site were also interviewed (1). The opportunity also arose to interview the head of British Airways Telephone Sales, U.K. This lasted approximately thirty minutes. Interviews were semi-structured and all were audio-taped.

Approximately two full weeks were spent in non-participant observation of the work situation at Newcastle Telephone Sales. Much of this time was spent sitting with Telephone Sales Agents and 'listening in' to the main component of their labour process - interaction with customers over the telephone. The researcher was also involved in non-participant observation of various sales team meetings, the final training session and award ceremony for successful inductees, the British Airways Newcastle Telephone Sales Annual Conference and general Telephone Sales Agent-management interaction.

The Co-operative Bank

Once again, the hierarchical structure and organisational labels within The Co-operative Bank, under T.Q.M., will be explained in chapter six. The research focussed upon clerks within the Personal Sales Team at branches of the bank. Staff at all levels within this aspect of branch banking were interviewed. The two Business Development Managers (B.D.M.) within the two branches studied were interviewed in depth. At Sunderland, the B.D.M. (female) was interviewed three times, the length of these interviews varying between twenty minutes and ninety minutes. At Durham, the B.D.M. (male) was interviewed twice, each lasting approximately forty five minutes. Nine of the ten clerks (all female) within the

personal team at Sunderland were interviewed. These lasted, on average, forty minutes. In Durham, all six clerks (five female, one male) were interviewed, again, for an average of forty minutes. Research at the bank was originally intended to cover a wider range of banking activity, however, spatial restrictions prevented a full analysis of areas other than personal banking. Nevertheless, many other staff were interviewed, including: Relationship Managers; a Quality Co-ordinator; a Regional Trainer; clerks and management at the Account Management Centre, Skelmersdale; management and staff at a Regional Processing Centre. A small proportion of this latter fieldwork is utilised within the analytical chapters (8-11).

The semi-structured, audio-taped interviews were accompanied by approximately seven days of detailed non-participant observation within the two branches upon which the research focusses - Sunderland and Durham (2). In addition to the labour process of personal banking clerks, this aspect of the research encompassed observation of Sales Team Meetings. Some of this observation was not as detailed as was the case at British Airways, given the concern of both staff and customers over the confidentiality of many social interactions within the workplace. The observation did not include 'listening in' to customer telephone calls.

National Savings

Representatives of all levels within the Death Claims Correspondence (D.C.C.) branch of National Savings, Durham were interviewed. This involved interviewing: the one D.C.C. Manager (male - interviewed once, approximately one hundred minutes); two of the four, all male, Correspondence Managers for an average of thirty five minutes per interview; four (one female) of the fourteen (twelve male) Executive Officers; eight (five female) of the forty two (twenty eight female)

Administrative Officers; and six (all female) of the twenty eight (two male) Administrative Assistants. Union representatives were also interviewed. These interviews varied between twenty and ninety five minutes long. The majority were semi-structured and the majority were audio-taped. Approximately five days of non-participant observation was also undertaken at National Savings. The observation did not include 'listening in' to customer telephone calls.

Interviews and observation at all three cases focussed upon managerial prescription over, and worker discretion within, the labour process. In particular, the exact nature of managerial prescription, instruction and encouragement for the implementation of tasks was noted. How clerks accomplish these tasks *in practice* was then closely recorded. Attention was also paid to opportunities for employees to exercise what will be termed 'negative discretion' in later chapters - deviating from prescription in ways which may damage or disrupt managerial aims and objectives. The way in which clerical worker performance is evaluated and rewarded (both managerial claims and employee experiences) within the three cases was also an important focus of both observation and interviews. The consequences of all the above, for the workplace behaviour of clerical employees was observed. An important aim of the interviews was to elicit the views, attitudes, feelings and emotions of clerical workers within the cases chosen.

Obviously, both management and clerical workers within the two T.Q.M. cases were asked to explain their understanding and experience of the impact of the new managerial initiative. The way in which, and the extent to which, this understanding shaped behaviour and interaction within the workplace was closely observed. Many other aspects of the work situation were investigated through the fieldwork.

It is clear that British Airways Telephone Sales is the most extensive of our case-studies and this is reflected in the space given to this site in the analysis of T.Q.M. within marketized 'clerical work'. It became clear as the research process developed, for reasons outlined in the following chapters, that this was very much a 'critical' or 'classic' case of T.Q.M. It is most likely to provide illuminating indications for the future of the 'clerical' labour process.

The research upon which this thesis is based is *ethnographic*. An ethnography has been described as a "written *representation* of a culture (or *selected* aspects of a culture)" (van Maanen,1988,p.14,my emphases). It can be argued that the subjectivity of the researcher is crucial to the way in which a culture, and social processes and social structures, are represented. Any representation of social life is necessarily partial. As Tony Watson (1994) notes, with regard to his own ethnography:

> It is vital for...any...ethnographic researcher, to 'reveal the hand' behind the text...I was no neutral fly-on-the-wall...and I was not 'collecting' attitudes and other data like a naturalist netting butterflies. Like any other social researcher I was influencing those I was researching (p.7).

Consequently, a vital part of this chapter is an exposition of the 'reflexive' character (Hammersley and Atkinson (1983)) and nature of the research process - the ways in which research activity *inevitably* shapes and constitutes the object of enquiry.

Theoretical Assumptions

A crucial part of any research process is the theoretical framework within which it is conducted. It can be argued that theory is 'present' *throughout the research process,* as an 'input', as an important component in the construction and interpretation of empirical data, and as an 'output' of the research process (Merton (1957)).

It is vital that we are explicit about the theoretical assumptions which have informed all stages of this project. However, it can also be argued that the subjective, theoretical position of the researcher was controlled and critically reviewed, as far and as often as possible.

One of the research aims is to contribute to a critical and emancipatory use of social science (Harvey (1986); Watson (1994)). Our notion of 'emancipation' is undeniably, but inevitably, based upon subjective and non-empirical assumptions. However, the collection and interpretation of empirical data during the research process was as theoretically 'open' as possible. All empirical data collected was scrutinised, analysed and reviewed from differing, competing theoretical positions. For example, rather obviously, differing perceptions of employee 'autonomy' were related to the empirical material. As we *have* seen, some theorists claim that 'empowerment' is simply another term for autonomy and discretion. As we *shall* see, others claim that 'empowerment' is an ideological term which, when utilised, can actually constrain and limit worker autonomy. It is sometimes argued even further that it is not the ideological nature of the concept of empowerment itself which, through discursive power, limits employee discretion. Rather, it is the *enactment* of the ideology of empowerment by those in positions of organisational power, the embedding of ideology within organisational *structures* and *processes,* which can curtail the

discretion of employees. The empirical material collected - the thoughts, beliefs and feelings of actors, and observation of their behaviour, within the organisational settings studied was analysed in relation to each of these competing perspectives. Judgement was eventually made as to the appropriateness of particular theoretical arguments for making sense of the empirical material encountered and vice-versa.

The theoretical assumptions and subjectivity of the researcher were not imposed upon the subjects of the research. The approach adopted is one which views the collection of empirical data as a joint construction between the researcher and the subjects of the research. Ethnography is a process of mutual understanding between the two parties. Once again, theoretical assumptions and substantive arguments were constantly reviewed in the light of the views, feelings and experiences of the researched. This process, in many cases, modified our interpretation of empirical material.

Research Techniques and Reflexivity

Many research techniques were also utilised to counter the effects of the researcher upon the researched during fieldwork.

All interviews were audio taped and written notes were simultaneously recorded. These techniques acted as a 'double check' upon the validity of the researcher's interpretations. It is acknowledged that tape recorded interviews can limit access to particularly sensitive or contentious information. However, interviewees were made aware that the recorder could be switched off at any point during the interview should they so wish.

Approximately 70 per cent of all interviews with clerical workers were conducted within the workplace. The remainder

occurred within public houses and cafes in an attempt to assess if there was any constraint upon workers expression of their views, feelings and experiences when interviewed within the work situation. No significant differences were found in this respect.

The empirical data collected was constantly reviewed throughout the research process. Both a 'substantive diary' - recording important themes emerging from the research during each day - and a 'personal diary' - recording the feelings and interpretations of the researcher were kept up-to-date throughout the research process.

In order to maintain some consistency within the data collected, interviews were *semi*-structured. The researcher had a number of questions which were asked of every clerk and every manager.

We shall now outline the cases within which the research process took place.

CHAPTER FIVE

TELEPHONE SALES AGENTS

BRITISH AIRWAYS

The first labour process chosen for study is that of telephone sales clerks at the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Telephone Sales Centre of British Airways. This constitutes a marketized 'clerical' labour process where total quality management has been introduced. The research was conducted between April 1993 and September 1994.

The labour process is concerned with telephone sales of the vast array of travel-related services provided by British Airways (B.A). This primarily involves clerks ('Telephone Sales Agents' (T.S.As)) receiving, and dealing with, calls from people who are interested in purchasing or reserving a particular service or combination of services. T.S.As work within a large 'open plan' office (a community). They are equipped with a headset and a computer system. T.S.As themselves press a button when they wish to receive a call. 'Dealing with' calls usually involves placing the caller on hold and accessing particular information from the computer system. Full-time T.S.As work an eight-hour shift constituted by constant call taking. They are entitled to a ten minute 'machine break' every three hours (1) and a forty minute 'lunch break' within this shift. The centre is open from 06.00 to 22.45 and shifts rotate within this period. Many of the calls are from travel agents (acting on behalf of individuals) as well as direct customers. According to B.A. Telephone Sales Worldwide management, the overall aim of this work is to transform as many of the calls as possible into actual bookings and *sales*. It is a worldwide operation with international calls received. B.A. Telephone Sales Worldwide

(T.S.W) has five regional centres throughout Britain. There is also a centre in New York, USA.

Within the Newcastle centre, Telephone Sales Agents are divided into teams of nine. They are managed by one Sales Team Supervisor (S.T.S.). In turn, a team of eight supervisors is responsible to one Sales Team Leader (S.T.L.). There were three S.T.Ls at Newcastle at the beginning of the research and five at the completion. These are, as a team, responsible to the unit manager of Newcastle Telephone Sales. S/he is then accountable to the head of Telephone Sales U.K. Everyone within the centre is on 'performance related' pay. Each S.T.L. manages what is termed a 'community' - one office of T.S.As consisting of eight teams of nine agents each managed by one S.T.S. There were three communities at the commencement of the research and five at the completion. This meant that the number of employees within telephone sales rose from 216 T.S.A's, 24 S.T.S's, 3 S.T.L's and 1 Unit Manager in April 1993 to 360 T.S.A's, 40 S.T.S's, 5 S.T.L's and 1 Unit Manager in September 1994. There are also 5 people involved in the Training section, some ancillary and secretarial staff. Of all T.S.A's, 81% are female. 52% of S.T.S's are female. Above this level, only one S.T.L. is female. During the research period, Newcastle Telephone Sales became the biggest of all T.S.W. centres.

It must be pointed out that part of Telephone Sales U.K. underwent a form of reorganisation *during* the research period. The precise nature and consequences of this re-organisation, for the T.S.A. labour process at Newcastle, will be commented on throughout this chapter.

Background to B.A. Telephone Sales Worldwide

During the early 1990s, British Airways restructured their telephone sales function. Previously, these operations were

located alongside major airports at London Heathrow, Manchester and Belfast. In 1990 and 1992, new centres were opened in Glasgow and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. They were both opened on brand new, purpose-built sites located away from B.A. airport operations. These centres were to work alongside the existing ones. At the beginning of the research, all centres dealt with a mixture of individual customer and 'trade' (travel agent) calls. Towards the end of the research period, T.S.W. were in the process of dedicating the Manchester centre to trade calls only (2). Also during the research period, one community at Newcastle became dedicated to American calls - the surplus from the New York centre.

In addition to physical change - the opening of two new telephone sales sites - it is argued by management that the onset of the 1990's witnessed significant change in the *focus* of the worldwide telephone sales operation. Within all centres, both old and new, there has been a change in the organisation, accomplishment, evaluation and remuneration of the telephone sales labour process.

This development is summarised by telephone sales management as the introduction of a *sales culture* - i.e. marketization. Selling products has, according to management, become the focus of all activity within the centres. This stress upon the *active selling* of B.A. services over the telephone is a relatively recent and developing phenomenon:

> We are a telephone sales centre...what we are trying to develop here is a sales centre whereas previously it's been a reservations centre...it's a sales environment.
> (Unit Manager,Newcastle,1993)

Similarly, a former agent at Heathrow, London and now a supervisor in Newcastle argued that:

> In London, we were always called reservations, now we are telephone sales. It's all part of the way the culture is changing, we want to be viewed as a sales centre...the culture in London was get the calls answered, just turn the calls around. You never really had any sales training. They always employed you as a sales person but that was never really what was focused on. (S.T.S.,1993).

These developments took place in the context of corporate development and 'success' for B.A. as a whole. From 1990-93, during which time the airline industry suffered its first serious recession, B.A. "maintained clear leadership in the airline business" (Cowe,1993,p.16). In the financial year 1993/94, B.A. increased pre-tax profits by 63%, making an operating profit of £301 million (The Financial Times, 23/5/94,p.12). This "overall result is striking in comparison with the losses turned in by the industry as a whole...£2.8 billion in 1993...the B.A. chairman, Sir Colin Marshall, joked that although it was not acceptable for a company to blow its own trumpet, 'we might be allowed just a little toot on the horn'" (The Guardian,24/5/94,p.12).

The total of U.K. and Ireland sales of B.A. products in 1993/94 generated £4.1 billion pounds. Telephone Sales Worldwide contributed £100 million. The Newcastle Upon Tyne regional centre contributed £22 million of that - an achievement which "smashed our revenue target for this year" (Unit Manager, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne). The unit manager went on to state that during 1994/95 they were aiming to increase this

contribution to £30 million - an increase from 3.9% to 4.6% of total revenue.

B.A. continued its commercial success during the first quarter of the 1994 financial year, during which it "outperformed an improving airline market" (Betts and Tomkins,1994,p.15) - showing a 40% increase in overall quarterly profits (Donovan,1994,p.13). This has made B.A. "undoubtedly the world's most profitable airline" (Donovan,1994,p.13).

The specific corporate success of B.A. is often attributed, both by management and some academics (re. Peters and Austin (1985); Hamill and Davies (1986); Storey (1989)), to the culture change within the company since its privatisation from the public sector. Thus, when announcing the continued commercial success in the first quarter of the 1994/95 financial year, Sir Colin Marshall "unveiled a mural depicting the names of the company's 40,000 staff members whom he said were responsible for the financial results" (Donovan,1994,p.13). The mural had the word 'winners' emblazoned across it in large letters.

B.A. Missions and Goals

The mission statement of British Airways, at the time of the research, stated that the company intended to be "the best and most successful company in the airline business". The mission was intended to permeate all levels of the organisation - each branch having a vital role to play in its accomplishment.

It is suggested by B.A. senior management that the company's commercial success has been achieved through the adoption of a dynamic and 'realistic' market-driven managerial strategy. This approach is also a major part of B.A.'s future intentions. Dale Moss, Executive Vice-President of U.S. Sales, stated, "we can't take our success for granted, we

have to be practically paranoid...success is very fleeting, the day that we think we are great, we are in trouble...we have to cut costs sensibly and grow. If we do not grow and our competition does grow then we become a second division outfit...that is no good, we play the game to win" (D.M.,1994). Throughout a period of rising profitability (see above), the company has continually reduced its operating costs (re. Cowe (1993); Donovan (1994)). "By 1995 the airline will be making annual savings in operating costs of more than £700 million compared with 1991" (The Financial Times,23/5/94,p.12). However, an interrelated and vital element of B.A's managerial strategy of the recent past, and the future, is the 'culture change' or marketization of all operations. B.A. senior management place great stress upon raising revenue *and* cutting costs through continually improving the *quality*, and attractiveness to customers, of the services that they provide.

Following chapter three, 'quality' customer service can be divided into *technical quality* - the substantive service provided to the customer (in the case of telephone sales, product knowledge made available to customers) - and *functional quality* - the way in which the service is provided (the tone of voice or attitude of the T.S.A during interaction with the customer). A continual improvement in both forms of quality has supposedly been enabled by the 'culture change' which, it is argued, has occurred within B.A. as a whole. This is exactly what the much exalted culture and marketization process consists of. Within telephone sales, generating a 'sales culture' entails closely attending to the needs and expectations of customers, thus ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty. It is this 'customer orientation' through the provision of 'quality' service which has received much academic attention as a recipe for commercial success, both generally and in relation to B.A. specifically. It must be noted that B.A. as a whole has long recognised the

importance of 'quality' customer service (Hamill and Davies (1986); Lewis (1988)). They have been running customer care campaigns since 1983 "to enhance the quality of service and increase staff morale" (Lewis,1988,p.72). However, telephone sales management argued that it was with the more recent restructuring that they were able to implement the quality programme and quality management "throughout and as part of their structures and processes" (R.S.,Unit Manager,Newcastle).

The re-development of British Airways telephone sales took place within a corporation which defines itself as dynamic, market-driven and increasingly customer-orientated. This, according to senior management, is the result of operating within a highly, and increasingly, competitive market environment.

The Mission and Goals of Telephone Sales Worldwide

B.A. senior management believe that telephone sales has played an important part in recent commercial success. It has a vital role to fulfil in working towards the company's mission.

Telephone Sales is one unique part of B.A. where employee/customer interaction and the generation of revenue occur instantaneously. Such interaction is viewed as crucial, given the 'customer orientation' strategy. T.S.A's are often the first contact a prospective customer will have with the company. When speaking to the whole of Newcastle Telephone Sales, Dale Moss stated "your job is as important as any other in the company, the smile that you send down the phone can be vital...I cannot think of another part of the company where service and revenue come together" (D.M.,1994).

The managerial goals of B.A. as a whole are reflected within the mission statement of T.S.W. The role of the branch within B.A. is formally defined as follows:

> We in telephone sales will together
> achieve profitable growth in sales
> through professional delivery of
> quality customer service
> (Telephone Sales Worldwide,1994)

When unpacking this mission statement, firstly it must be noted that telephone sales management believe their operation must be driven by the customer. It is only through the 'professional delivery of quality customer service' that profitable growth in the telephone sale of B.A. services can be continually attained. Importantly, *quality* and *professionalism* are defined by the customer. "Quality is in the eye, and *ear*, of the beholder !" (R.S.,Unit Manager,Newcastle,1994). Providing quality customer service entails responding to customers' changing needs and expectations, thus ensuring satisfaction and loyalty:

> Probably the most important goal that we have
> is that we have to establish a customer intimacy
> that goes beyond our competitors. Customer
> intimacy. That is, going beyond just
> reacting to what the customer is wanting, if
> we can take it that next step we are going
> to be ever so much better and if we do that
> then the difference is our competition is
> going to be fighting after us
> and not after our customers and that is
> really what we want to see (D.M.,1994).

Customer satisfaction through the provision of quality service is a clear differentiation strategy of B.A.T.S.W. It is stressed by management that the adoption of this particular sales culture has been fundamentally driven by an increasingly competitive operating environment and increasing differentiation of customer demand. A former agent in London,

now a supervisor in Newcastle, when speaking of the move towards quality customer service argued that:

> In London, before the culture change, the way the market was there wasn't a great deal of competition on a lot of the routes and people would plump for British Airways anyway (S.T.S.,1994).

With increased competition, however, and as the T.S.A's are directly involved in service delivery, it is important that they "change with the times...we must change as our business changes. That applies to the future as much as to the past" (S.T.S.,1994) - continually monitor and respond to ever-changing customer needs and expectations. "The provision of a quality service is in the hands of agents really. They must use their discretion to deliver that quality, we (management) cannot do it for them" (Unit Manager,Newcastle,1994). As David Noyes, head of U.K. Telephone Sales, points out, in order for the sales culture to offer B.A. a differentiation strategy - for quality customer service to be delivered - the telephone sales operation must be subject to 'continual improvement'. "The hallmark of a quality organisation is that we must always seek to improve - that must be our goal. We must always seek to improve our customer service" (D.N.,1994).

Importantly, the mission of telephone sales to 'professionally deliver quality customer service' does "not only encompass delivery to the customer but how we work with each other within telephone sales, how telephone sales works with other departments within B.A. and how we work with the community outside of B.A." (David Noyes,1994). Within the sales culture, internal organisational relations and relations with non-customers are re-conceived as supplier/customer relations.

The mission (quoted above) implies a second major goal of T.S.W. - shareholder value or profitability. According to Dale Moss and David Noyes, this has been, and will continue to be, achieved through raising revenue and cutting costs. "It is not good enough for us to sell at any cost. We must always look to keep our sales up and our costs down" (D.N.,1994). The aim is to raise revenue through delivering quality customer service. David Noyes argues that continual quality improvement also cuts costs by increasing the revenue added by each employee "as more quality means more sales" (D.N.,1994)

A further (the third) telephone sales goal, implied by the mission statement, is to deliver quality customer service through the empowerment, involvement and teamwork of all employees. David Noyes states that:

> ('Together' is) the key theme of the mission statement for me. We've been very successful over the last two years and that success is down to everyone. Every one of us has contributed to that success. If we're going to continue to be successful, we've all got to pull *together*, we've got to *work together*, we've all got to be *involved* (D.N.,1994).

Dale Moss stresses the importance of developing what he terms "high performance people". "If we develop high performance people, the goals of customer intimacy and shareholder value will fall into place". When speaking to the whole of telephone Sales, Newcastle, Moss stated "You are probably the most important thing we have going for us" (D.M.,1994).

Vision 2000

Early in 1994, B.A. senior management formulated a clear and detailed plan for the implementation and development of the company-wide mission - to be "the best and most successful company in the airline business". This plan focuses upon the importance of quality customer service and specifies how this is to be achieved. The plan is termed Vision 2000, a managerial strategy intended to take the company to the year 2000. Vision 2000 has been clearly shaped by the prescriptive T.Q.M literature reviewed in chapter three.

Vision 2000 states that:

> British Airways' vision for the future is to build profitably the world's premier global alliance with a presence in all major world markets. The alliance will have as its hallmark superior levels of service, customer loyalty, and excellent operational and financial performance, drawing on the complementary strengths and shared values of all employees within the alliance. Every employee has a part to play in bringing about the wide range of changes that will be necessary if this vision is to be realised. The vision reflects and encompasses the airline's Mission and Goals. Realisation of the vision would require that:
>
> * Our attentions are focused on our customers, both external and internal, so that customer satisfaction and retention are our prime service considerations

* There is a clear understanding of our business strategy at all levels of the company and we all understand how we are involved in that strategy

* Teamwork develops across all functions

* There is a greater flow of information encouraging all employees to contribute their views

* Partnership prevails as a mechanism for building commitment, with all employees participating in the running of the business

* Individual potential is maximised as we grasp the new opportunities available

* High personal standards and business integrity maintain international respect for us

* We work towards developing the quality framework throughout the airline ensuring that continuous improvement becomes our way of life

(British Airways Vision 2000,1994).

This vision for the future was also broken down into seven specific corporate goals. These were:

* *Safe and Secure* - to be a safe and secure airline

* *Financially Strong* - to deliver a strong and consistent financial performance

* *Global Leader* - to secure a leading share of air travel business worldwide with a significant presence in all major markets

* *Service and Value* - to provide overall superior service and good value for money in every market segment in which we compete

* *Customer Driven* - to excel in anticipating and quickly responding to customer needs and competitor activity

* *Good Employer* - to sustain a working environment that attracts, retains and develops committed employees who share in the success of the company

* *Good Neighbour* - to be a good neighbour, concerned for the community and the environment

(British Airways, Vision 2000, 1994)

Telephone Sales, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

The telephone sales operation at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne was opened in January 1992. The unit manager of the Newcastle centre was explicit about some of the reasons for locating there:

> The reasons for coming here were numerous. One was cost - it's a lot cheaper here basically. Land, building and people are cheaper...Newcastle won partly because this is an enterprise zone or it was an enterprise zone when we built it.

He went on to state that "another reason was to enable growth, which it has, and another big reason was to enable us to change the way we do things...the idea was not to relocate people as such, to move people up here and relocate all the bad habits, the idea was to start afresh" (Unit Manager, Newcastle). This refers to the marketized 'culture change' that has been attempted throughout all sites within the U.K. and the USA.

Total Quality Management at Newcastle

In the light of chapter three, it can be suggested that British Airways as a whole, and T.S.W in particular, are attempting to manage marketized operations according to the principles of T.Q.M. Telephone Sales, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne is very much part of this development. In fact, Newcastle telephone sales management (3) suggested they were *driving* the T.Q.M. process within Telephone Sales Worldwide. It was frequently pointed out during the research that the Newcastle unit was referred to within B.A. as a 'centre of excellence' and a 'paradise centre'. The unit was often visited by representatives of other B.A. units and telephone sales operations from different service industries. The head of Telephone Sales U.K. agreed that the Newcastle unit was "spearheading telephone sales U.K." (D.N.,1994).

The implementation of T.Q.M at Newcastle can be illustrated via the heuristic TQM framework (Boaden and Dale (1993)) outlined in the previous chapter.

Organising

This element of the TQM framework is concerned with the development of a strategy and infrastructure which, according to the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, is fundamental to the implementation of any quality programme. A major part of this is top management commitment and leadership which is translated into a clear top-down vision for the organisation so that everyone is clear where it is heading and why.

We have seen that Commitment to quality customer service and thus customer satisfaction/loyalty has been a managerial strategy of B.A. generally (from as long ago as 1983) and, more recently, of B.A. Telephone Sales in particular. The ideals of quality customer service have been incorporated within the telephone sales mission statement and managerial strategy at Newcastle since 1992. From its inception, this organisation included the notion of quality customer service within its public statements, annual reports and selection, training and supervisory procedures. In early 1993, the Unit Manager at Newcastle described the sales culture being developed as one of 'putting people first':

> There is no doubt that you know we are more customer orientated than certainly ten years ago. We are also more profit orientated and we do believe that people are the way to increase profits - the better people work, the more profits you get because people feel good about what they are doing and when they feel

> good about what they are doing they do it better.

At this time, there was an explicit managerial aim to ensure that T.S.As 'feel good about what they are doing' and that this 'feelgood' factor is translated to the customer. As we shall see below, this stress upon 'customer orientation', the recognition that clerks are responsible for delivering quality customer service and the belief that the latter can thus be delivered through the 'empowerment' and 'involvement' of clerks were incorporated into the very structure and supervision of the telephone sales operation.

The managerial commitment to quality improvement was consolidated further by the managerial programmes of 'Winning for Customers' and 'Managing Winners', developed during 1993. These programmes involved the introduction of a 'quality framework'. This consisted of a set of guidelines developed by telephone sales senior management which were then communicated to Unit Managers, Sales Team Leaders, Trainers and Supervisors within the regional centres.

The supervisory staff were expected to use these guidelines - the quality framework - in their selection of T.S.As, in training programmes and, ultimately, in their supervision and evaluation of agent performance. This would supposedly lead to agents "maintaining customer loyalty" and "recovering lost customers" and "operating in a way that enhances the value they (agents) provide to them (customers - both internal and external)" (B.A. Telephone Sales, Managing Winners Quality Workshop, 1993). Thus, implementation of the quality framework - encouraging agents to deliver continually improving quality customer service - was seen as the main way to produce 'winning' agents and to 'win' customers.

It is clear then that quality of customer service has been incorporated within selection, training, supervisory and managerial processes at Newcastle since the operation began. However, it was with the introduction of Vision 2000 to Newcastle Telephone Sales during 1994 that this managerial strategy was translated into a *clear* top down vision for the organisation so that *everyone* is clear where the organisation is heading and why. Vision 2000 specified what is meant by quality customer service and how it can be delivered. As we have seen, this clear vision is perceived as vital for the success of the T.Q.M process (Boaden and Dale (1993)). With the introduction of Vision 2000, the notion of T.S.A 'empowerment' and autonomy increased in importance. One S.T.L., commenting on the introduction of Vision 2000, pointed out that:

> Quality has always been a vital and central issue before and outside of Vision 2000 but it was felt that, in terms of telephone sales *agents*, that simply trying to communicate and implement the quality framework, that quality was a bit intangible. We had quality but they (agents) didn't know what it meant (S.T.L,1994).

Vision 2000 and the seven corporate goals which emerged from it are interpreted by telephone sales management as a way of clearly communicating and operationalising the quality framework:

> The idea is we are working towards the corporate goals, we are tied into the corporate goals and in doing this, we are working *to* the quality framework (S.T.L.,1994).

An explicit aim of the adoption of Vision 2000 by Newcastle Telephone Sales was to encourage T.S.A involvement in, and responsibility for, the delivery of quality:

> We've always tried to get people involved from when we started, we're moving towards more and more involvement...what we really want to get to, and what Vision 2000 offers us the chance to do, is a better ownership of performance (by agents). What has happened is that we have been very successful because performance was driven by the supervisors driving their team but I think we are getting a better degree of ownership from the people (agents), knowing where they fit in, driving their own performance rather then being driven and I think quality is improving (S.T.L.,1994).

Following the B.A. - wide dissemination and publication of Vision 2000, each corporate goal was interpreted in terms of what it meant for Newcastle Telephone Sales. This followed separate conferences of all U.K. telephone sales Unit Managers, all sales team leaders and all supervisors where each corporate goal was presented and discussed in terms of its relevance for each of these three managerial roles within telephone sales. Each corporate goal has been integrated into selection, training, supervisory and management processes.

Telephone sales management were concerned that Vision 2000 was not imposed upon T.S.As in a hierarchical and top-down fashion. David Noyes, when speaking to all staff at Newcastle, stated:

> Missions and goals are not set in tablets of stone...to be meaningful they have to be dynamic, they have to change as we change and as our business changes so we want to hear your thoughts and get your feedback so we can develop the right framework for us all to work in. That is what Vision 2000 is, a framework. Your involvement can shape the missions and goals as much as anything else (D.N.,1994).

The aims of the vision, and its impact upon the T.S.A. role, were also communicated and openly discussed during workshops and training programmes. Seven 'working groups' were set up to assess and clearly communicate what each corporate goal meant for the operation and future aims of Newcastle telephone sales. These working groups were constituted by S.T.Ls, S.T.Ss and T.S.As. They reported their findings and outlined both short-term and long-term objectives to further develop each goal at a one-day conference in 1994. This was held during work time and was attended by all Newcastle Telephone Sales staff and various guests. The day was structured around the presentation of each corporate goal in both a serious and a light-hearted manner, involving all levels of staff (4):

> The main aim of the conference is to communicate the vision to the staff, let them know what work has been going on and get them to buy into it (S.T.L.,1994).

The conference was followed up with team meetings which reflected upon what had been communicated and how Vision 2000 could be implemented further.

The corporate goals were interpreted by Newcastle Telephone Sales, in terms of their operation, as follows:

Safe and Secure

"In telephone sales, each individual will take responsibility for safety and security" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

'Safety and security' was taken to refer to: providing a safe working environment for all employees; complying with all B.A. safety requirements at minimum inconvenience to customers (both internal and external); and improving the security awareness of all staff which forms part of the technical component of quality customer service. Providing a safe working environment for oneself and others (internal customers), it was argued, increases agent commitment and motivation and thus the functional quality they deliver to customers (again both internal and external). This, and delivering a safe and secure service to external customers, is seen as one of the constituents of quality service within the airline industry.

The Health and Safety officer at Newcastle stressed the importance of employee involvement in delivering and improving this aspect of quality:

> What is needed is for everybody, from our directors down to all members of staff to appreciate how they can play a part in achieving, and taking responsibility for, the corporate goal. We aim that everyone in telephone sales is trained and aware of their individual responsibility in all aspects of health, safety and security for both employees and customers...we want to

> achieve constant improvement in health and safety audits. With everyone's co-operation and commitment, by working together, we can achieve our goals (S.T.L.,1994).

Financially Strong

"We in telephone sales aim to deliver strong and consistent financial performance" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

It has already been demonstrated that management aimed to deliver this performance *through* the provision of quality customer service - contributing to, and in partnership with, a constant control on operating costs. It is only through agent commitment to continuous improvement that quality can be delivered. Part of eliciting such commitment entails communicating the financial position and future financial projections and aims of B.A. as a whole, the role of Telephone Sales Worldwide in relation to this and, in this context, the financial position and short and long-term objectives of Newcastle Telephone Sales. This was undertaken with particular vigour at the one-day annual conference attended by all telephone sales staff.

Global Leader

"We in telephone sales aim to play our part in securing for the company a leading share of air travel business worldwide with a significant presence in all major markets" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

Again, the securing of this 'leading share' of 'air travel business' is to be ensured, within telephone sales, through meeting and anticipating the changing expectations of customers. A further component of quality service is defined

by this corporate goal. Agents are expected to constantly improve their knowledge of all the global alliances with which B.A. is increasingly involved (for example with *U.S. Air* and *Hertz*). These alliances are vastly increasing the range of services and thus technical quality that agents can deliver. This knowledge is to be developed through communication, discussion and participation. Presentations and seminars deliver such knowledge to agents.

Service and Value

"In telephone sales we recognise worldwide the delivery of quality personalised service" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

It is stressed by those within the 'service and value' working group that in order to *serve* B.A. customers, the branch has to *know* its customers, find out what they need, what their expectations are and do their utmost to meet, anticipate and exceed those expectations to a greater extent than their competitors. It is argued, and established through customer feedback, that customers expect both service and value. Both of these can be delivered through *quality* customer service:

> It is vital that we acknowledge and value our customers. After all, we are not alone in this industry - there is at least one airline competing on every route that we fly. We have a reputation for kick-starting the industry. Customers needs are constantly changing as the world changes, we need to know and respond to these needs to make ourselves stronger, more profitable and more competitive. This can be done by providing service and value through quality. We must give customers what they want and not what we think they want - we are their

> first line of contact, we are so important. It's imperative that we get it right first time - we can make a difference as individuals. (S.T.L.,1994).

Thus, it is clear that the precise nature of the quality customer service to be delivered must, according to Telephone Sales management, be defined by the customer rather than the telephone sales operation. Agents must be aware of this definition as they are crucial to the response which B.A. as a whole delivers.

Although agents can be aware of the *general* expectations and needs of B.A. customers, through communication of the results of customer questionnaires and particular complaints, those within the 'service and value' working group stressed the importance of treating each customer as an individual with unique needs and interests. It is up to agents to discern these needs and respond to them in each unique case. One specific way in which this goal is operationalised is through the introduction of a 'service recovery' programme. This enabled agents to 'recover' dissatisfied customers with special customer gifts - it was left to their discretion what was provided, and to whom:

> Service recovery is not all about sending a bunch of flowers and leaving it there it's about seeing a problem through to the end, *owning* a problem and sorting it out so that both parties are happy. It's about how we deal with our customers and investigating an issue that is really important to them (S.T.L.,1994).

Customer Driven

"We want our customers to be completely satisfied with the service that telephone sales provides" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

Connected to the above, it is through delivering quality service that 'complete satisfaction' can be attained. An S.T.L., involved in the 'customer driven' working group, defined 'complete satisfaction' as "nine out of ten customers recommending B.A. to a friend or colleague":

> In order to be able to achieve this (complete satisfaction), we need to understand what our customers' needs are and to assess ourselves on a regular basis...this can be achieved through market research amongst customers to determine their definition of quality service and against that definition whether or not we exceed their expectations...there is a definite link between customer loyalty to B.A. as a whole and the level of service that Telephone sales provides. Our competitors are also providing quality service. It is agents who hold the key to continually improve the quality of our service to make sure that we are the tops.

Thus, telephone sales, through research, looks at how quality for customers is created and then at whether that quality is delivered on a reliable basis. This data is then used to drive continuous improvement in service delivery.

Good Employer

"We in telephone sales aim to attract, retain and develop committed employees who share in the success of the company and take responsibility for its future development" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

Telephone sales management argued that, as part of the T.Q.M. process, they implemented "internal marketing" (Lewis (1988)). By meeting the perceived needs of T.S.As, it is argued that this will increase the motivation for, and abilities of, clerks to improve the quality of customer service. T.S.W. claims to be a 'good employer' through offering various perks and facilities to employees, through researching and then meeting the needs of T.S.A's and through supporting and coaching rather than disciplining T.S.A's. Much of this is discussed further below (5).

Good Neighbour

"We in telephone sales aim to promote a cleaner and healthier working environment and to set up relations with the rest of B.A. and the local community" (Newcastle Telephone Sales, Corporate Goals, 1994).

This goal is concerned with the working environment, both internally and externally to Newcastle Telephone Sales. Contributing towards the internal marketing referred to above, it is is concerned with ensuring a clean and healthy working environment within the centre - through desk and office tidiness and the recycling of paper and cans. Again, individual responsibility is stressed. "We can all start doing our bit...if everyone plays their part, we will be successful" (S.T.L.,Good Neighbour Working Group,1994). It is argued that this will ensure that staff 'feelgood'. This feelgood factor will then be passed on to the customer. This goal also aims to

establish B.A. telephone sales as a positive member of the external community of which it is a part. They are thus involved in various sponsorship, charity and educational projects.

Changing the Culture

In similar fashion to the prescription of Boaden and Dale (1993), it was envisaged by telephone sales management that the introduction of an infrastructure and managerial strategy geared towards the implementation of a quality programme would, in turn, facilitate a gradual 'culture change' within the whole of the telephone sales operation. In fact, according to the T.Q.M. literature, such a culture change is a vital simultaneous development alongside the formation of an appropriate infrastructure. It was continually stressed by telephone sales management that it is only through the activities and attitudes, beliefs and feelings of telephone sales agents that continually improving quality customer service can be delivered.

In common with many other private and public sector work organisations within the 1990s (re. Watson (1994)) (6), the concept of organisational 'culture' adopted by Newcastle Telephone Sales management has been directly influenced by the 'excellence' literature which stresses the contemporary importance of "strong corporate cultures" (Peters and Waterman (1982); Peters and Austin (1985); Peters (1987); Thomas (1987); Deal and Kennedy (1988); Dobson (1988)). This was discussed in the previous chapter. As explained, 'culture' is taken to refer to shared human meaning - norms, values, attitudes and feelings. A "strong corporate culture" is apparently where everyone within the organisation shares the same meaning system and identity.

Telephone sales management claimed that their operation exhibited the characteristics of a strong corporate culture because of the subjective commitment of *everyone* (most crucially telephone sales agents) to the marketized principles and values set out within Vision 2000. The meaning system of the majority of T.S.A's - the cultural rules and regulations which shape the thoughts, morals, behaviour and identities of the clerks - revolves, according to management, around providing 'quality customer service' in the ways *defined* by management in the previous section.

> (As a new centre), what we lack in terms of experience, we have more enthusiasm, far more motivation here, people are far more sales-orientated...now we are two and a half years old, we have got experience up here now, we have got the technology...to make the technical side of the role so much easier so that isn't such a barrier...having a very simplified user-friendly system...the job is about building rapport, giving very good customer service and ultimately selling your product, the job is about interacting with customers, about talking to passengers, relaxing and interpreting the information that they are giving you (S.T.S.,1994).

There is a firm belief amongst Newcastle Telephone Sales management that they are developing T.S.As who have the ability to respond effectively to constantly changing customer needs and expectations:

> Our agents have selling skills...if you can question (customers) effectively and gather the information then you can identify what somebody is looking for...and that is a skill because that

> is something that I think most telephone sales organisations miss because they don't really want to know what you (the customer) want, they've got quite a clear idea of what they want you to buy and they don't spend time to find out (what the customer wants) and I think it is a very specialist skill to be able to do that and it takes time...the majority of people here do pick it up and do continue to develop it (S.T.S.,1994).

Thus, there is an assumption that satisfying changing customer needs and expectations in a superior way to one's competitors will inevitably lead to continually rising sales and profitability.

The move towards cultural regulation and engendering the subjective commitment of clerks is seen as vital to enable competitiveness and profitability:

> (In the past), the culture was very much sort of service rather than actively selling to people. I think it is possibly a little bit exaggerated to say it was more of an order-taking role, but basically people had to phone you up and had to ask you if they could book something...people's questioning skills weren't that well developed but that's because the business has changed. At that time, the majority of our business was done through travel agents, they would see us an information-giving service. We would sometimes encourage the agents to get that booking but there was no real incentive because of the market, there was little competition. Things have changed, customer

> needs have changed and there is much more competition (S.T.S.,1994).

Another S.T.S., formerly an agent at Heathrow, London, within the "previous culture" more bluntly put it:

> the whole culture in London was to turn calls around. There was little in the way of sales training...if you interacted well, then you did well. If you didn't interact well no-one knew and you would continue to be crap (S.T.S.,1993).

The 'culture change' (7) is in direct response to perceived changing customer needs and expectations within a rapidly changing world. "The culture here is about, well as business needs change and we have to adapt to these changes, and most of the changes have been beneficial to us. Its all quite theoretical stuff but looking for what those benefits will be and how to implement it with the people and we've always sold it very well" (S.T.S.,1994). As we shall see, the introduction of new I.C.T. to the labour process of B.A. Telephone Sales clerks has been important as part of and alongside the culture development.

It is important to stress that B.A. Telephone Sales management saw the substance of quality customer service (both 'technical' and 'functional' aspects) as dynamic rather than static. Customer needs and expectations and the services offered by B.A. are constantly changing and thus what constitutes quality customer service is also continually evolving and changing:

> Newcastle Telephone Sales is successful because it changes very quickly and we all try to encourage people (agents) to look at

> change, not be frightened of change and make suggestions for change which means... here particularly we do things fairly rapidly, we change things round to keep the idea of change there and when we need to change we can do it quickly whereas in London it takes a lot longer because people (agents) are less receptive to change. Here generally people (agents) because they know nothing else or haven't come across anything else so they change at the drop of a hat (Unit Manager,1993).

Within Newcastle Telephone Sales, it was frequently emphasised by management that:

> The attitude and belief of the agents is vital...we just can't have abuse of the system you know. Every customer who phones up, and we get 12,000 calls per day for telephone sales...and every one of those could be a valued customer, could be a thoroughly hacked off customer if you get it wrong, and that is a lot of calls basically and puts a great deal of pressure on everybody to deliver. If you are answering 100 calls per day, it's very difficult to get superb quality on all 100 (Unit Manager,1993).

Because telephone sales agents are one of the few groups within British Airways who interact with *potential* rather than actual customers, and (according to management) the quality of that interaction will determine whether potential is transformed into actual, it is seen as vital that they respond to the needs and expectations of these customers:

> What we are saying is, in U.K. Telephone Sales, if you pick the phone up to any one of our centres, you are going to get the same standard of service any time day or night...In training, what we say to them (agents) is 'If you treat people well they tell one or two people, if you treat someone bad they will tell about eight people'. If it's Joe Bloggs spending £50 to go to Ireland this Christmas, it doesn't matter...it's your common man (sic) that we want to increase because British Airways has this big shirt and tie image, it's the businessman's airline but we want to make our product completely accessible to everybody. So if you turn around and because he is only spending £50 you are bloody rude to him, then he'll phone Air France or he won't come back. No-one makes them book with B.A. (S.T.S.,1993).

> If someone is phoning to enquire about a Lufthanse flight arrival, if we give good service, and explain that we don't actually have that information but this is where you can get it from, then that person will leave thinking...'what a very nice person I've just spoken to' and we have got certainly the edge on a lot of our competitors in that respect (S.T.S.,1994).

A 'weak corporate culture', in this case, would mean the existence of norms, beliefs, feelings and identities which contest, or deviate from, a commitment to providing continually improving customer service within telephone sales.

Crucially, for the focus of this thesis, the perception of Newcastle Telephone Sales management is that an important part of the culture development - the development of a sales culture through agent attention to customer needs and expectations - involves the facilitation of agent empowerment and autonomy:

> We must respect that agents know what they are doing, that is the bottom line, we must never forget that, they do know, they know exactly what passengers want, what they have been through, exactly how they are feeling and what is going to work...We do encourage people to be themselves on the phone. There is nothing worse than phoning up and listening to that awful spiel that you get with a lot of companies and I think that people (customers) do genuinely feel that they are speaking to another human being which is quite an advantage certainly in a selling context because they can identify with that person, we do give people room to build rapport and you know some people do want to talk at length whilst they are making the booking. There is no harm in that, it is still a very cost effective way for us to sell our product, we are quite happy with that - our culture does support that (S.T.S.,1994).

For example, in relation to the service recovery programme, T.S.As autonomously decide, by judging the feeling of a particular customer over the telephone, which customers need to be 'recovered' and with what.

> Service recovery is a number of gifts that we can send out to disgruntled passengers. The

> decision making process for that, we said to our agents, 'please don't come and speak to us about it. You know the situation, you recover the passenger. If you want some advice, we will help you.' Nine out of ten of those gifts that we send out, a supervisor is never consulted and an agent is never questioned about it because they know what they are doing (S.T.S.,1994).

It is important to point out that clearly, management do not believe that the creation and development of a strong corporate culture ensuring the delivery of quality service to customers is complete - it is very much an ongoing process:

> I certainly think we have been very successful. The majority of people (agents) have picked up the necessary values attitudes, skills and continue to develop them. They are very specialist abilities and skills, it takes time. There is always room for improvement...it doesn't matter how good your people (agents) are because there are always times when you pick up a bad habit from somewhere or start doing something differently and lose what you've done...it's then our (managements) job to say...'can you remember when you used to do this ?' or 'have you ever tried this ?' and then it's 'oh yeah, why did I stop doing it ? - it really works' (S.T.S.,1994).

> You can feel that your people (agents) are perfect at one point in time but they can

> always be better. It is up to us to develop them. We don't have major problems but there is still a lot of work to do. (Unit Manager,1994).

Telephone sales management explicitly claim that the delivery of continually improving customer service, and thus the path to organisational success or 'excellence', has only been possible because of the clear communication, dissemination and *internalization by staff* of the overriding goals and beliefs of Newcastle Telephone Sales and Telephone Sales Worldwide. As one Sales Team Leader argued: "What has enabled our impressive financial performance over the past year or so, and why the future looks so rosy, is...because of the increasing ownership of our aims and objectives, our vision, by people at all levels within telephone sales" (S.T.L.,1994).

It has been already suggested that the management of Newcastle Telephone Sales felt that their chances of creating, maintaining and developing a strong, marketized corporate culture revolving around an organisational commitment to, and belief in, quality customer service was particularly enhanced by the fact that this was attempted from the very inception of the organisation. Newcastle Telephone Sales was developed on a greenfield site. *All* of the T.S.As employed there were recruited from outside of B.A. Consequently, it was felt that Newcastle Telephone Sales could, in the words of the Unit Manager, "start afresh". "Bad habits", i.e. deviating norms, values, feelings and identities would not be relocated:

> Setting up a new site, you can actually take those values (of quality customer service) and you haven't got any poison pond type people, you've got everybody you bring in on that understanding - no bad habits, baggage etc...We've taken

> the ethics of...the customer orientated business and we've developed that into the structure and organization that we've created here...London is the oldest centre and has the, for want of a better phrase, bad habits (Unit Manager,1993).

Furthermore, telephone sales management also suggested that the physical location, and external environment, of the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne site is also amenable to the development of a particular culture:

> One of the reasons we started here was because the union were very progressive here in terms of attracting jobs...we deal with the T.G.W.U...they have been very beneficial.
> The environment itself is pleasant to work in you know with being on the river etc., it makes you feel good.
> A few of our other sites are in the middle of towns or cities...difficult to park etc., you know, that has an effect. We also feel that the work ethic up here is good. You can't evaluate that but we just feel that people generally seem to work hard and if you treat them well they respond. Recruitment and quality of people is important up here because ...one of the reasons for moving out of London was we were losing people so quickly - we were training them up and then losing them whereas here because there is higher unemployment there is less ability to move on even

> if people want to and it means there is a large labour force to tap into who are looking for jobs, quality jobs. So, I think Newcastle generally has a lot to do with it...I think if we had moved to Manchester, it wouldn't have had the same impact, for example (Unit Manager,1993).

It makes sense, in this case, to speak of 'culture development' rather than 'culture change'. It is important to stress, however, that despite the obvious advantages listed above of locating in Newcastle, these were still secondary to the *overriding* importance of the potential for responding to customer needs and expectations (i.e. delivering quality) and thus selling products. In addition to the prospect of developing empowered staff with no 'bad habits' to relocate, the Newcastle location offered other benefits, according to management, in respect of delivering quality:

> We did research it very thoroughly as to where we were going to go. Obviously, there are a number of economic advantages to coming here. Apart from reducing our cost base generally by our overheads with salaries and rent of the building and all that but it was researched that this (Newcastle) was an accent which people like. We looked at a number of other sites and people don't particularly like the other options which perhaps shouldn't be a factor in deciding where to locate but it's business and it is a factor and it's very important...Reducing our overheads and the work ethic up here is perhaps not as high a consideration as what our customers want (S.T.S.,1994).

> I definitely think they are a friendlier bunch of people up here (Newcastle as opposed to London) and if they're (agents) good, it definitely comes over on the phone. The accent is warm and inviting ! (S.T.S.,1993).

It is argued by management that developing a strong corporate culture was not an instant development. As the excellence literature prescribes, this must be seen as a gradual process. According to telephone sales management, it is *through* the introduction and development of an appropriate infrastructure over a two-year period (as outlined in the previous section) that appropriate norms, values, attitudes, feelings and identities have developed, and they will (according to management) continue to 'improve'. Particularly important, it is contended, has been the clear *communication* of what 'quality of customer service' actually means, why it is significant and precisely how it can be delivered. "We (B.A. Telephone Sales) must see this as very much an ongoing process that we can always improve...a process that will go on forever" (D.N. U.K. Telephone Sales,1994).

Also vital in facilitating culture development, and the implementation of the wider T.Q.M. programme, has been the use of *systems and techniques* and methods for *measurement and feedback* which are discussed below. The following discussion of these aspects of Total Quality Management within Newcastle Telephone Sales will illustrate how managerial attempts to develop and maintain a strong corporate culture are reflected in recruitment and training for, and supervision and evaluation of, the labour process.

Using Systems and Techniques

A number of systems and techniques are utilised by management to ensure that T.S.As deliver quality customer service, that the principles of Vision 2000 - aimed at selling products rather than merely providing information - are incorporated into the labour process and that the above explained culture development is facilitated.

Selection and Training

Following the prescriptive literature reviewed in chapter three, important mechanisms for the development of any Total Quality management programme and culture change/development lie within selection and training (8). Consequently, in addition to selecting agents who "work well with other people, have an understanding of what the job is about and can accept the nature of the work, and are motivated towards telephone sales rather than any job within British Airways" (S.T.S.,Recruitment,1994), management claim that primarily they recruit people who are 'sales orientated':

> We look very much at applicants' sales aptitude, it is a selling job, it has been identified that it isn't an order taking job...we want somebody who has got a very positive attitude towards selling, somebody who is interested in selling and interested in learning more about selling, even somebody who has worked in sales before who can talk quite positively about why they enjoy it. We don't really want people who know all about the technology but somebody who is interested in selling (S.T.S.,Recruitment,1994).

To enable the development of this basic "sales aptitude" within the *particular* sales culture of B.A. Telephone Sales,

which stresses the intimate relation between delivering quality service through interaction with customers and increasing sales, other, more general, personal attributes are also considered important as selection criteria:

> When we're recruiting people...we look for sales-orientated people, it's not hard sales because obviously it's not phoning out, it's incoming calls. So, we need people who can make the most of every call...so we've recruited people who are friendly, open to ideas, open to change and open to the views we hold which is about developing people (Unit Manager,1993).

It was constantly stressed throughout all levels of telephone sales management that the important attributes of prospective telephone sales agents were 'personal' or 'social' skills - the ability to interact with customers over the telephone in a friendly and appealing manner - rather than 'technical' knowledge of the airline industry or of the computer system utilised by telephone sales.

The aim of delivering quality customer service through the implementation of the principles of Vision 2000, was also reflected in the training provision for Telephone Sales Agents. "Throughout the induction period, it is very much selling focussed, about how you say things, about how certain words make people feel...a very small amount of time needs to be spent on technical training which is a major breakthrough" (S.T.S.,1994).

Once selected, prospective agents have to undertake a four-week induction course. This was seen by management as a very intensive course:

> It is a hard course, I think a lot of people come in here and they think it's going to be so easy and they don't realise just how much work is involved within the four weeks, especially when you get to the second or third week, they are like oh god ! What have I done ? But by the fourth week when they've got through it it's really good (Trainer,1994).

Trainees are divided into teams of nine. One trainer is responsible for the development of each team. It is argued by telephone sales management, in particular the training section, that this course involves the initial development of both 'hard' and 'soft' knowledge and abilities, required in order to deliver quality customer service. These two dimensions match our own earlier observation of the 'technical' and 'functional' aspects of quality service.

The first part of induction involves the development of 'hard' knowledge and ability - the vast technical knowledge required for the telephone sales operation. Trainees are sent 'information packs' prior to arrival which they must read and learn. One aspect of this initial information, for example, involves the 'three letter codes' which exist for every possible travel destination in the world. These are widely used in the travel industry and are needed to operate the computer system with which telephone sales agents work in order to extract information for customers. Trainees are tested for their competence in such knowledge on arrival. This knowledge is developed further in the first days of the training programme when trainees are expected to be able to place every airport in the world on a geographical map and display knowledge of the destinations' I.A.T.A. (International Air Travel Association) number (9). Trainees are given five

separate examinations on 'geography' and have to achieve an average grade of 85% in order to qualify as agents. Examples of other 'hard' competences developed throughout the training programme are knowledge of worldwide fare prices, structures and modes of calculation and visa, passport and immigration regulations across the world. Throughout induction, intensive training is also provided on how to use the computer system. The ability to effectively use this system is clearly vital for agents to be able to retrieve information in order to respond to customer needs and expectations.

The 'soft' knowledge and abilities referred to above largely involve the development of what are labelled throughout the organization as 'selling skills', referring to the abilities involved in the *mode* of quality service delivery. Within the induction programme, customer service is defined as "the feeling (good or poor) that a service recipient has when with the service-giver" (B.A. Training Section,1994,p.1). *Quality* customer service entails "satisfying customers and...*meeting their needs*...a customer will evaluate service in his/her own terms" (B.A Training Section,1994,p.1). Trainees are given instruction in how to meet customer needs and thus deliver quality customer service. This largely manifests itself in the prescription of a 'call structure'.

For one day within the second week of the programme, the trainees are given an overview of the 'call structure' which they are expected to follow when interacting with customers. This structure is broken down into seven major elements: (1) greeting; (2) questioning, listening and gathering information; (3) matching customer requirements; (4) handling customer queries/problems; (5) closing the sale; (6) offering extra/'add on' services; (7) saying goodbye. This general overview of the call structure is then followed by separate workshops on each element of the structure.

Trainees and trainers engage in 'role play' and interaction with 'dummy' customers in order to develop the appropriate knowledge and abilities to perform each aspect of the call structure in the manner required by management. "We teach trainees to maintain the same standard of customer service throughout the call" (Trainer,1994). Trainees are also examined in their delivery of the call structure and are expected to achieve a 'grade' from their trainer of at least 90% in order to 'qualify'.

The training section of telephone sales management stressed that, despite prescribing the above call structure, the importance of agent autonomy when interacting with customers is also incorporated within the induction programme.

> The call structure is a guideline that we work to...because we're not a hard sell place, we put a big emphasis on customer service. We tell the people (agents) to be themselves basically and there is nothing wrong with building rapport with a passenger...you are not there like a little robot just to say 'what flight ?', book it, 'thanks very much', you are there to build a rapport with passengers...we really go with that (Trainer,1994).

It can be argued then, that agent autonomy - the encouragement for agents to 'be themselves' and to 'build a rapport' with customers over the telephone is seen by telephone sales management as vital in the delivery of 'functional' quality service - an important part of the 'soft' knowledge and abilities required for the accomplishment of the telephone sales operation. The call structure constitutes a framework

within which this discretion can be developed. As one S.T.L. (1994) put it, "we give them (agents) tools not rules".

Agent autonomy is also an important element of the 'hard' knowledge and abilities, initially developed within the induction programme but developed throughout the 'career' of a T.S.A, which enables the delivery of 'technical' quality of customer service. Management argued that this resulted from the fact that, once agents were interacting with customers over the phone, one could never predict the detail of the calls they would receive - i.e. the particular queries and problems that customers would pose:

> You could never even start to teach all the product knowledge that is required (by agents)...we've actually heard of questions that have come through from passengers, things that I mean we haven't got a clue on...'how fast does an aircraft have to go before it can take off ?', 'do they turn the lights off on a night flight when it's taking off and it's landing ?', it's incredible the amount of stuff you get. It's not a case of every single call you get is 'can we book a flight ?', you get everything (Trainer,1994).

> We even get a lot of children who are doing school projects, their parents will ring up and ask us the questions that we need to know and travel agents as well, they use it as an information service...there is absolutely no way working in telephone sales you could ever know the answer to every single question you are going to get because

> people use you as a point of contact, whatever their query is you've got to try and know or find out at least where they need to go to (Trainer,1994).

On completion of the induction programme, successful trainees are awarded a certificate. The newly qualified agents remain within the teams they trained with and become the responsibility of a sales team supervisor who manages and develops their work. Individual trainers write 'performance management reports' on each successful trainee and deliver these to the appropriate supervisor.

> Developing selling skills is difficult and has to be developed on the job as well...our reports say what they (trainees) have excelled in, what they need to develop in etc. and we feed it back to the trainees...and then we pass it onto the supervisor so the supervisor's got an understanding of how we felt about that person after four weeks then it's up to them (supervisors) to use their development skills and start progressing them on and on so it's a constant ongoing thing (Trainer,1994).

Management felt that the induction programme is not concerned with simply objectively measuring the suitability of trainees for telephone sales through stringent and impersonal examination. As noted, trainees are assessed on aspects of their work, however, an emphasis is placed upon the 'coaching' and 'development' of trainees *through* the induction programme. The relationship between individual trainers and members of their team was seen as especially important in enabling trainees to successfully complete the induction programme

which motivates them for their future work as telephone sales agents:

> People do fail and we do have people who have dropped out...but you find that we really do try and, as a training team and supervisors etc., to get behind them and say 'look, this is what's going to happen if you get through it, come on we'll help you the whole way if we have to'. Myself, personal experience, I've stayed behind with a trainee until 10.45 at night, helping them through things and I know other trainers have done exactly the same thing. We will put 100% behind them if we think they want to put 100% into it themselves (Trainer,1994).

> Everyone I think gets a shock within the second or third week...you have absolutely no social life when you do the induction... but it's worth it at the end...with this lot now (successful trainees receiving their certificates), we've got a mass of cream cakes for them and Bucks Fizz and everyone'll applaud them and it's such a high. They'll all go out to the pub and to the town tonight to celebrate with their trainers...you get a really strong bond - the groups themselves plus the trainers with them (Trainer,1994).

Telephone sales management were at pains to stress that 'training' is not a process which ends upon completion of the induction programme. As suggested above and demonstrated

below, supervisors are expected to constantly develop the 'hard' and 'soft' knowledge and abilities of agents within their team. The former trainers of individual agents are also involved in this process. They will often "floor work" (i.e. work with teams when they are agents) with new teams in order to "settle them in" (Trainer). "Because we (trainers) get to know them so well, a lot of them (agents) like to approach us for advice on how to develop their skills, how to solve problems ages after we have trained them" (Trainer,1994). This informal interaction between agents and their former trainers is actively encouraged by telephone sales management as a whole.

The training section also delivers a number of 'development courses' to groups of telephone sales agents. They provide 'refresher courses' on a number of different aspects of the business, such as new developments within the computer system and new techniques for improving one's selling skills and customer service.

British Airways is constantly involved in various 'promotions' of their services. The training section has a 'promotions team' which disseminates information on the current promotional activities of B.A. This is particularly important as customers are likely to enquire about such promotions. One example of a promotional activity during the research period was a joint promotion by B.A. and *Sainsbury Foods*. In short, purchasing customers at Sainsbury supermarkets were entitled to cost reduction on a number of B.A. services. The rules and regulations of this promotion were extremely complex. Thus, the promotions team delivered a presentation to the whole of Newcastle Telephone Sales. Despite time restrictions, given the need to constantly staff the phones during working time, this is seen as a vital training function. Furthermore, the importance of agent autonomy was again recognised by

management as important for the delivery of quality promotional services:

> There's not a lot of extra time available... it's a case of if it's a big promotion...then you've got to make time for it because people have got to know what to do and what's going on...again though we cannot tell them about every possible eventuality, every question or possibility - we can only give them the rules and regulations, general advice and guidelines - it is really up to them to use their initiative once they get on the floor (Trainer (Promotions), 1994).

Work Organisation

The delivery of technical and functional quality service to customers through the skill and autonomy of T.S.As is also, it is claimed by management, embedded within the organisation of the telephone sales labour process.

It is argued that the most important aspect of work organisation in this respect is the implementation of *teamworking*. From the beginning of the induction programme, telephone sales agents work within teams of nine:

> Generally within B.A., there's a belief that teamwork is a better way of working, the synergy of teamwork, getting people ...bonding...working well together...so here we thought...if we believe in that let's do it to the enth degree...there is lots of ways you can do teamworking... what we did here was say OK., what is a manageable number of people ?. We got

> the figure nine. Nine is a figure that tends to run through B.A...nine is a good figure to work with...if you've got nine people you can manage them as a team, individually, developmentally, you can get to know them very well - they are a small enough chunk (Unit Manager,1993).

The essence of the teamworking system within Newcastle Telephone sales lies in the assertion that nine people are a "manageable number of people". As noted above, each team of nine are recruited and start the induction programme together "so they develop together...and are at the same developmental stages throughout their time with us" (Unit Manager,1993). Following this, each team of nine becomes responsible to one S.T.S. The team and the same S.T.S. are always together - they start work at the same time, they finish work at the same time, they have breaks from work at the same time. In order to facilitate "the synergy of teamwork" and "people management", swapping shifts away from one's team was, until recently, prohibited. This rule was altered during the research period. Those teams recruited during 1994, all of whom were on temporary contracts, were done so on "variable working contracts". This meant that management could alter the number within these teams depending upon peaks and troughs in business activity (10). The teamworking system does remain, however. "We've done very strict teamwork because we believe that, in terms of performance, the better a supervisor knows their staff, the more you are going to get out of the team" (Unit Manager,1993).

Telephone sales management believe that the close relationship between the S.T.S. and the T.S.As, which teamworking engenders, is the key to delivering quality customer service. It is vital to observe that, according to management, this is *not* because it facilitates detailed supervision of the T.S.As

labour process but because teamworking enables S.T.Ss to *develop* their staff. This is often illustrated by management through comparison with work organisation and managerial practice within telephone sales prior to marketization, the development of T.Q.M., the 'culture change' and the use of teamworking - i.e. at the London Heathrow centre during the 1980's:

> (At Heathrow) it was structured similarly but there wasn't the interfacing. Your supervisor, you would probably see once or twice a month. Now here you are with them seven or eight hours a day...supervisors saw themselves as admin. come operational people not as people managers. What we have tried to instill here is you are a people manager first and foremost...we believe there are better ways of motivating people than wielding a big stick...the teamworking here is about motivation and getting people acknowledged and valuing them and all that good stuff that B.A. espouses (Unit Manager,1993).

> Our work was always monitored, certainly not as closely as it is now...but the main motivation there (Heathrow) was that you were afraid of getting something wrong and being caught doing something wrong which is obviously not an ideal situation to work in and how we've changed it now is we work very hard to catch people doing things right (S.T.S.,1994).

> The message that has always been given to everybody across the board at Newcastle is that 'if you feel something is right, do it and if it doesn't work, don't worry about it, look at what you learnt' (S.T.L.,1994).

It was argued by all managerial levels within Telephone Sales that this particular teamworking system *encourages* rather than stifles T.S.A. discretion. It is felt that S.T.Ss, because of the close working relationship with their team, are able to motivate, recognise and reward agent initiative in the delivery of quality customer service. "It is a real skill to motivate people to use their own brains and abilities, by going up to people and saying 'I really like the way you did that or said that' and it does make people feel alot more valued if they've got some say in what goes on" (S.T.S.,1994).

The operational and administrative elements of the S.T.Ss role, such as checking attendance, ensuring health and safety regulations are adhered to etc. still exist but they have supposedly been minimised so that supervisors can interact with their team members individually and as a whole in order to discuss ways in which their performance can be 'improved'. Because it is the agents themselves who actually interact with customers, their 'empowerment' - i.e. their decisions about how quality is going to be delivered which are encouraged, recognised and rewarded - and the enhanced motivation which is supposedly co-existent is seen as vital for the deliverance of quality:

> Because you're not just a number, because you're one of nine rather than two hundred and fifty, you get more autonomy. You get that feeling that you are close, you are one of nine,

> you feel that 'I can make a decision more' than being one of a large group. We certainly encourage agents to make decisions for themselves. That is one of our major objectives (Unit Manager,1993).

> We do try and get them (agents) to come up with the ideas, them to drive us, they know how customers think and feel...we don't ever want to get into the situation where it's we are telling you what you have to do. It's a case of 'we could do this, what do you reckon ? What are your views ?' Pull on them (S.T.L.,1994).

It is also stressed by management that the supportive environment, within which this individual, agent autonomy is exercised, is a crucial back-up and motivational resource. As one S.T.S. pointed out:

> Because of the way we work, there is normally somebody within earshot and although you are not listening to every single word that each team member says, you can hear when somebody is getting slightly stressed or having a difficult situation. What we encourage is that they alert somebody so that they can perhaps listen-in, give them some advice. Certainly when I am working with my team ...I know immediately. You do know your people (agents) very well because you spend so much time with them, it's almost like family !...the minute you hear something, I will always try to offer that support

> by going over...if someone is getting like that we wouldn't drag them out and say 'what are you doing ?'. We try and find out what their side of the story is...as a supervisor, most of the time you are out on the floor, you are looking for signs of stress or things to recognise that people have done well (S.T.S.,1994).

The teamworking system, according to management, is also favourable to clearer and quicker communication throughout the organisation. It was noted earlier that clear and effective communication is crucial to any T.Q.M. process (in this case for example the communication of Vision 2000), especially in a climate when customer needs and expectations, and thus the definition of 'quality service', are continually changing and developing:

> The teamworking system means that you know who your manager is...it facilitates communication because you've got the hierarchy to communicate down...it also facilitates up because you know who your person is (Unit Manager,1993).

According to management, clear communication provides informational resources for the enhancement of worker autonomy (for example information on new and developing products meaning that queries on these do not have to be referred up the hierarchy) and the provision of quality customer service:

> Communication is absolutely essential. One day you can go on the phone with a customer and say this is the right thing, the next

> day it's not. You have to keep up to date with it. This is a constant pressure, it's constantly changing but your ability to sell will depend on the amount of knowledge you have. If you get the information wrong, you're not delivering the expectations of the customer and you won't sell because of it (S.T.L.,1993).

Communication *between* team members is also important in this respect. Again, because of the close working relationship of all team members, it is felt by management that this facilitates a supportive environment for the delivery of service. If one agent has difficulties dealing with a particular enquiry, there are eight colleagues at hand who will be willing to help.

Overall:

> Teamworking here is about being recognised and knowing who you report to and who manages you well so that you have got constant dialogue with them. We call the supervisory role counselling and coaching. It's about understanding each person in the team well so that even if they (agents) have personal problems, they feel happy enough to talk to the supervisor about it. Rather than the supervisor sitting down at their desk and saying 'right, you've turned up at five to nine, tick, you go home at such and such, tick' and if you've got bad performances it's 'you'd better improve', here we want to get to know the individual, hopefully each person here is valued as an individual and that gives them greater

> stimulus to perform, come to work feeling good about it and making the place more relaxed and enjoyable (Unit Manager,1993).

It is noted by telephone sales management that teamworking is often identified as an expensive form of work organisation, for example, it is difficult to vary staff numbers according to peaks and troughs in business (because teams of nine must always work together) (11). However, it was widely believed that these costs were more than offset by the quality of customer service and thus constantly increasing sales of B.A. services which the teamworking system and agent empowerment allowed.

Communication and Participation

It has been noted throughout that communication and participation are vital in enabling agent autonomy and promoting quality customer service through T.Q.M. In addition to those identified above, there are other important mechanisms which, according to management, encourage communication and participation on both a local (within telephone sales teams) and global (company, divisional and unit-wide) basis.

On a local basis, according to management, the work organisation outlined above ensures that a continual two-way dialogue between Sales Team Supervisors and their team members is integral to the telephone sales labour process. It would seem that local communication and participation is also enabled through regular Sales Team Meetings, involving S.T.Ss and their team. Short meetings take place before every shift. Participation within these by team members is *voluntary*. The meetings consist of a team *briefing* by the supervisor who will outline any new developments (for example new promotions, developments with the computer system or 'new' customer

expectations) or problems which need to be addressed. The meeting is opened out to invite any suggestions for 'improvement' of the labour process, questions or problems which agents may have:

> If somebody comes in first thing in the morning feeling good, they will generally sell more than somebody feeling bad in the morning. What we try to do is get people in early, we encourage people to come in fifteen minutes early to have a meeting before they start work to discuss anything they want, to have a chat, to talk about the work...just to get ready to go, perhaps stimulate them a bit before they start on the phones otherwise its 'uh! the phones again!'
> (Unit Manager,1993).

Thus, the importance of agent autonomy and initiative in delivering and improving quality service is again stressed - giving autonomy to agents to decide whether to participate in such team meetings in the first place and encouraging them to suggest ways in which their own work, and thus the quality of customer service, can be continually improved.

There are other sales team meetings which agents must attend. These are weekly meetings within work time lasting approximately forty-five minutes. Again, these meetings are seen by management as vital in the empowerment of T.S.As - encouraging them to 'own' and deliver quality service. They are "for communication of information and if they (agents) have any ideas on how we should be doing things" (S.T.S.,1994).

Also within the weekly sales team meetings, distinct 'roles', which management perceive as important for 'running' the team,

are discussed and allotted to each individual team member. Each team member becomes responsible for a different set of activities. For example, one team member is responsible for organising social activities for the team outside of work time. These are viewed as beneficial by management in terms of developing 'team spirit' and 'team bonding' - important, it is claimed, as a context within which individual agent autonomy can be exercised. The organisational encouragement of these activities is demonstrated through their funding of regular team 'nights out', recreational activities such as international football tours and short stay holidays. Another member of the team is responsible for observing and alleviating technical errors and problems (there are also specially trained technical staff on hand) within the computer system encountered locally within the team. These representatives are expected to suggest, on behalf of the team (through the sales team meetings), the design of new elements to management.

Other members of the team become representatives within the various 'working groups' existent throughout the unit. These groups are constituted by representatives from all organisational levels - Telephone Sales Agents, Sales Team Supervisors and Sales Team Leaders. Many also include representatives from Recruitment and Training. As suggested above, there are working groups related to each of the corporate goals set out within Vision 2000, discussing how each of these corporate goals relates to Newcastle telephone sales and ultimately prescribing the contribution which the unit can make to the attainment of these goals and the vision as a whole. The results of this work are then clearly communicated to the whole of Newcastle Telephone Sales. These results were outlined above. Other working groups include the 'Business Awareness' group, the 'Quality' working group and 'The Input Survey Team' which conducts regular surveys of the views, needs, expectations and problems of all staff within

the unit. This working group is constituted entirely of T.S.A's. The results of these surveys are analysed, communicated to all staff and conclusions suggest ways in which staff needs and expectations can be met and problems overcome. The implementation of these conclusions is then also clearly communicated to the whole of Newcastle Telephone Sales. One S.T.L. commented this is only one way in which T.S.As "manage us (management)" (S.T.L.,1994). Other working groups include a unit-wide team organising the yearly Newcastle Telephone Sales conference. There are also national working groups within the telephone sales division of B.A. These, again, are constituted by representatives from all levels within all telephone sales centres. These again include working groups on each of the corporate goals articulated by Vision 2000, identifying what each one means for Telephone Sales as a whole and the contribution the division can make to their delivery. They also include working groups on new developments within B.A., such as partnerships with *Herz* and what this means for services offered. Telephone Sales Agents at Newcastle can become involved in these national groups.

Again, management see these communicative and participative structures as motivating and empowering agents to deliver continually improving quality customer service:

> Roles are decided at the Sales Team Meetings. We involve them (agents), asking them what they want to do. We are careful not to assign them with roles that they will be weak on, that would demoralise them. We are very keen for them to be successful. It is very different to before (before T.Q.M.) when the supervisors were responsible for individual projects. We try and involve agents in something that they are particularly good at but it is very difficult

> when they are so busy on the phones
> (S.T.S.,1994).

The views, abilities and initiative of all T.S.A.'s are assumed by management to be represented through this system. The nature of the employment relationship is apparently shaped, in the precise ways outlined above, by the needs, interests and abilities of telephone sales agents.

The development of a *coherent* national and local communicative and participative system also means that:

> There is very little repetition across the building (Newcastle) and across the division (Telephone Sales Worldwide). We have had people on projects before (T.Q.M.) but I would address a particular issue or problem, put it in and then find out or get back the same day the results of somebody else who had been working on the same thing
> (S.T.L.,1994).

Each team of telephone sales agents also has a 'team representative'. S/he meets regularly with the S.T.S. of the team to bring up any particular problems or issues which had been raised by her/his colleagues. All team representatives within a community also met with their respective Sales Team Supervisors and a Sales Team Leader to discuss particularly important issues or problems. Furthermore, one team representative is elected each year to represent Newcastle T.S.As in regular discussions with the unit manager at Newcastle and, sometimes, all unit managers within the division. Management felt that this representative structure was actually more important, and often by-passed, processes of management-trade union negotiation:

> I would say that the team representative system is far more effective and beneficial for everybody than representation through the union. We do have a good relationship with the union but most of our business in terms of solving problems and answering questions that our people (agents) have is done through team meetings and the team rep. system (Unit Manager,1993).

> The team rep. system has displaced the union to a certain extent. It mainly deals with local matters such as the toilets, the canteen etc., but these are matters that can really grind on people if they're not brought out into the open. They can severely affect their work. Team rep meetings are a great way of resolving these issues. It would all be so formalised, distant and bureaucratic if the union was involved, it could take matters away from the workplace, making them more adversarial and confrontational. This way it is much more amenable. It contains these matters within the organization. They are far more easily and quickly resolved... they don't become big issues which people get excited about, the majority of problems we get and questions we get asked are specific to us as a unit and we can solve them on a local level (S.T.L.,1994).

Negotiations over issues which have relevance beyond the unit, such as the introduction of flexible working contracts (see above), were conducted through management-union channels. T.S.A's are represented by the Transport and General Workers' Union (T.G.W.U)..

Measurement and Feedback

Some attempt to measure the extent of quality delivery is crucial to all prescriptive T.Q.M. models (e.g. Dale and Plunkett (1990); Boaden and Dale (1993)). It is argued that mechanisms must be in place to ensure the processes outlined above do actually facilitate continually improving quality customer service and the sale of products to customers. The implementation of T.Q.M. within Newcastle Telephone Sales is no exception.

The particular mechanisms utilised in this case would, particularly from an industrial sociological perspective, be seen as forms of managerial supervision aimed at controlling the behaviour of T.S.As, thus limiting rather than promoting worker autonomy. However, management argued that the processes outlined below fulfilled two major, *related* functions. Firstly, they were a form of 'quality assurance' - necessary to ensure that quality is being delivered to the customer. Secondly, they were a form of 'performance management'. From a managerial perspective, these mechanisms promoted rather than constrained clerical worker autonomy. Such management was seen as beneficial to agents as well as the telephone sales operation.

Targets

The major form of T.Q.M. measurement and feedback at Newcastle Telephone Sales consists of monthly targets which individual clerks have to surpass (12). Management explicitly divided these targets into 'hard', 'objective' and 'soft', 'subjective' dimensions.

'Hard' or 'objective' targets refers to the quantitative measurement of the work of telephone sales clerks. Firstly, each clerk has a revenue target, in terms of the value of B.A.

services which they *directly* sold to customers over the telephone (13). They are expected to surpass this each month (14). At the time of the research, this target was set at £8,000 per month. Sales Team Supervisors in turn had a team target of 9 x £8,000 (£72,000) which had to be surpassed each month. Thus, it is in their interests to ensure that each member of their particular team surpassed their targets. Further, Sales Team Leaders are targeted in terms of the monthly monetary performance of (eight) Sales Team Supervisors within their community (£576,000). The Unit Manager is ultimately responsible for ensuring that Sales Team Leaders deliver monetary returns to the value of 3 (S.T.L's) x 8 (S.T.S's) x 9 x £8,000 (£1.15 million) per month. The unit as a whole is targeted within the telephone sales division according to these calculations. As stated previously, during the course of the research, the unit exceeded this revenue target.

Secondly, there are other 'hard' targets, described by management as 'productivity' evaluation. This involves measurement, enabled by the computer system in operation, of the number of calls answered per agent per week, the amount of time spent in conversation with passengers per week and the amount of time spent per week within what is known in telephone sales as 'wrap up' - the time between the termination of one call and the opening of a new one. In other words, the time spent between calls 'keying' or finishing a booking.

The hard targets are devised by a core management centre based within London Heathrow Telephone Sales. Here, a forecast is made of the average number of calls which will be made during a particular period, based upon the number of calls received during the same period the previous year and various other factors such as the particular promotions running at the time. This is then divided up amongst the various U.K. units, the

various communities and the various teams so that each individual has a particular productivity target.

A further 'hard' target which is managed and monitored by the core management centre is what was termed a 'service factor of 80/20' - Telephone Sales Worldwide aims to answer 80% of calls received within twenty seconds. All calls made are connected to the core management centre and are then distributed around the various centres. "If they're phoning in the Newcastle area, within a twenty mile radius of Newcastle, they will be directed to Newcastle...we are hoping the majority of the calls are going to be from geordies speaking to geordies where they get kind of like a brotherhood going...if we're busy, they are re-directed to London who shoot them off somewhere else" (S.T.S.,1993). This happens without the knowledge of the customer and within twenty seconds. Within each community at Newcastle, an electronic board is visible to everyone which shows the number of calls waiting to be answered at that precise point in time (both nationally and by the Newcastle unit), the percentage of calls being answered within 20 seconds (again nationally and locally) and the number of calls answered during that particular day by the Newcastle centre.

Given the precise nature of the revenue targets which *everyone* within the unit was expected to exceed, and the fact that this achievement wholly depended upon the performance of T.S.A's, one would expect enormous managerial pressure upon the clerks to surpass their targets. On the contrary, management argued that:

> I would say the overriding aim of the targets is developmental, it's, 'let's see how we can help these people'...we are helping them to perform better and achieve greater reward. At the same time, it helps us and them

> (agents) to recognise under-performance. In this case, we need to make them think about the targets and what they can get out of it. This can make every call feel as if it is worthwhile (Unit Manager,1993).

As a consequence of the above:

> The targets that they (agents) get are achievable, they're not something that they are never going to achieve because I've worked in sales environments before this job where you've been given targets which are totally impossible to achieve and they don't do anything to motivate a member of staff so they have to be achievable in order to give them a boost of confidence, they can do it. My team, over the past two years, have probably not hit target only about two times...I think the majority of them do like working to target because it gives them something to aim for, plus you do get rewarded if you get the targets (S.T.S.,1994).

> If you give them (agents) access to their own stats and communicate the bigger picture, they know how they fit in, their contribution and what it means to B.A. (S.T.L.,1994)

Thus, the 'hard' targeting system was, in part, seen as a benevolent system by management, enabling the development of T.S.As in terms of their skill, discretion and ability in the deliverance of quality customer service.

The evaluation of clerical work by 'soft' standards is, inevitably, more 'subjective' and ambiguous. They were described by management as referring to:

> teamwork, commitment and also their actual call structure, their job skills if you like (S.T.S.,1994).

> It's all about how's your commitment, how much energy do you have, how much enthusiasm do you have, how good are you at making decisions, how good are you in the team, how flexible are you, do you understand, if it's busy, why you shouldn't spend fifteen minutes on tea or do you just think 'oh bloody hell, they are telling me off for spending fifteen minutes on tea (S.T.S.,1993).

Management stressed that agent evaluation was a 50/50 split between hard and soft standards. This evaluation shaped performance-related pay:

> We do look at the whole person rather than just at this machine that generates these results. It's good because if someone is very strong on customer service, isn't particularly sales-driven but is a great teamworker, is extremely committed, then they will fare reasonably well. We recognise every skill that's important (S.T.S.,1994).

> We say to them 'yeah !, you could be a great seller but if you're a shit, you are going to lose fifty quid'. You could be a wonderful person, but if you

> don't pull your socks up on the phone you'll lose out...it's good to have the mix (S.T.S.,1993).

These attributes are evaluated through: S.T.S. observation of, and interaction with members of their team throughout the working day; the participation of team members within team briefings and team meetings; the performance of team members within the working groups identified above; and 'remote' and 'known' monitoring. The latter of these evaluation techniques attracted the most attention and controversy within the unit. The telephone system within the unit enables S.T.S's, S.T.L.'s and trainers to 'listen in' to the content of any call between agent and customer at any time during the working day. This can be done with or without the knowledge of the clerk in question. Throughout the working day, S.T.S's claimed that they randomly engaged in remote monitoring, and sometimes taping, as a form of 'quality assurance'. Furthermore, S.T.S's routinely observe and tape the telephone interaction of each team member with their full knowledge. This is then used within review and appraisal weekly meetings between agent and supervisor. Within these meetings, the quantitative performance of each individual agent during the previous week, according to the above 'hard' targets, is produced on a computer spreadsheet and reviewed.

Again, these techniques are seen by management as 'development tools', which expand skill and discretion, rather than as mechanisms for control of T.S.A's. In relation to remote and known monitoring, one Sales Team Leader commented:

> The point of listening in is not to say 'listen to that, you were pathetic !'. It's not for control, it's a development tool...the initial reaction of agents is shock...you need to be careful as a manager

> not to use it as a 'big brother' tool and
> to use it as a quality assurance, performance
> management and employee development tool and
> I think we are careful here (S.T.L.,1994).

Every employee within the unit is remunerated on the basis of their performance. T.S.A. performance-related pay (15) is shaped by an S.T.S. monthly report which results from the weekly review and appraisal meeting. This is in turn based upon evaluation according to both hard and soft standards.

Management constantly stressed that the targeting system is flexible. Individual T.S.A's targets can vary from month to month depending upon their particular strengths and weaknesses. "Each month they (agents) are set two or three objectives that they have to work on for the following month, the theory behind it being that every month they are just building on the skills that they have. This is essentially how we manage people" (S.T.S.,1993). The need for these objectives, and the method of achieving them, to be clearly communicated to agents avoiding 'grey areas' was also observed:

> I could say to you, 'I want you to play
> a more active part in the team', period.
> What does that mean ? It needs to be
> clearly spelled out (S.T.L.,1994).

The targets of T.S.A.'s in general can also vary depending upon *average* strengths and weaknesses within the unit and the particular focus of customer service at any one point in time. Individual targets arise from the weekly meetings and monthly reviews and appraisals between Sales Team Supervisors and their team members:

> There are recommended figures, however what we tend to do, because people are performance paid here, we review those targets in line with the current focus so say productivity isn't particularly good, the number of calls they're turning over, the actual amount of time they're spending between calls...we would perhaps really emphasise how important that is and we have from time to time shifted the balance as to where the points are allocated, depending upon how those measures drive people ...if somebody had exceptionally high talk time...we can say 'why do you think you speak for so long on the phone ?' or 'why are your calls so short ?'. We can identify trends but it is not something that people look at their watch and think 'oh !, I've had two hundred seconds, I'll have to go now, thanks very much for calling'. It isn't that rigid. It is a good measure of what people are doing. If someone isn't selling very well and their calls are very short, perhaps they're not offering enough customer service to get that sale (S.T.S.,1994).

Furthermore, T.S.A's are empowered to 'own' and contribute towards their own evaluation and setting their own targets:

> What I say to them (agents) is that ninety per cent of the soft standards which are to do with how your attitude is and how responsible are you, this is only a perception based on how I perceive your conduct around the office. For me to write something else, you have to give me or show me something else. If you think this is unfair, then

> prove me wrong. I want to be proved wrong because I don't want to have to say that I think you should do this, that and the other (S.T.S.,1993).

Customer Feedback

It has already been noted that Telephone Sales Worldwide undertakes regular surveys (in the form of written questionnaires and face-to-face structured interviews) of customer views, feelings and further expectations of the service they receive from telephone sales agents. This data, along with customer complaints, is broken down and analysed on a unit by unit basis. Thus, it is possible to discern the satisfaction, loyalty, needs and expectations of Newcastle Telephone Sales' customers. This data can be used to further shape the selection, training, supervisory and evaluation processes outlined above.

The Case for Research

It is abundantly clear that the management of B.A. Telephone Sales, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne are attempting to marketize, organise, supervise and evaluate the labour process of Telephone Sales Agents according to the prescriptions of Total Quality Management. In fact, it can be regarded as a 'classic' or 'critical' case of the introduction of T.Q.M. to clerical work.

It has already been noted that Newcastle Telephone Sales has implemented T.Q.M. on a 'greenfield site', often with 'green' 'clerical' labour, in an attempt to ensure that vestiges of 'old' working practices which are often identified as the basis for employee resistance to marketization (Cressey and Scott (1992)) will be absent. Furthermore, the centre is widely recognised as a 'centre of excellence' in terms of the

implementation of T.Q.M. We have also seen how it has been specifically claimed that the new managerial strategy facilitating marketization considerably enhances T.S.A. autonomy within the labour process.

It can also be argued that B.A. Newcastle Telephone Sales exhibits many other important elements of the marketization process, which were introduced in chapter two. The move towards a 'sales culture' has been triggered by both competitive pressures and state deregulation. Moreover, it has been suggested throughout that the development and implementation of recent I.C.T., namely the computer system and the telephone system, has been vital in enabling marketization, the implementation of T.Q.M. to telephone sales and the consequent enhancement of T.S.A. discretion.

It was frequently stated throughout the research period, particularly by former T.S.As from Heathrow London, that the displacement of the former computer reservation system known as B.A.B.S. (British Airways Booking Systems) by the 'Quickres' computer system has transformed the demands of the T.S.A. labour process. In short, it has enabled a greater focus upon quality of customer service which has simultaneously, according to management, enhanced T.S.A. autonomy. This, it is argued, is reflected in the development of the selection, training, supervisory and evaluation processes outlined above.

The above argument is powerfully illustrated through some of the Newcastle managers reflecting upon prior experience at London Heathrow:

> I was on a nine week induction course in London heavily focusing upon how to use B.A.B.S...it used to be a set of long, long entries if you wanted to check an

> availability, you'd have to put it all in the right order - the date, the off point, the board point. If one of those characters was out you wouldn't be able to enter it...from a training point of view it was an absolute nightmare. Even after three or four months, every single entry you wanted to put in you'd have to look up, so it was very technical...if you didn't have your computer book, you couldn't do your job...'easyres', I actually call 'idiotres'. That's what people who used to work on B.A.B.S. call it...it's a system of boxes...it says 'off point' and there's another box 'on point' and there's another box with sixteen options on it - the same characters as on your keypad. Touch one on your keypad and this actions one on the screen. You don't have to remember anything, you only have to remember where it is, you don't have to remember four or five characters and if you put in something wrong, it tells you - 'wrong date', 'wrong on point', 'wrong board point' - so you just have to go back and change the thing that is wrong. On B.A.B.S., it just said 'invalid response' so you think 'what the bloody hell was wrong', you get your book out and check with the screen (S.T.S.,1993).

The introduction of this new reservations system enabled more attention to be paid to the *way* in which agents interacted with customers - as we have seen an important component of quality service and marketization - rather than simply ensuring that the correct service *information* was accessed through the computer system. This in turn led to a change in training and selection processes. Whereas in London, the focus

was to recruit and train agents who were computer literate and would be able to access appropriate information on B.A.B.S., recruitment and training under the auspices of T.Q.M. focusses upon the ability of agents to provide quality customer service - which involves social interactional and selling skills as well as appropriate 'technical' knowledge. These differences reflect the recent development of a 'sales culture' within telephone sales:

> Quickres is geared up for selling whereas B.A.B.S. wasn't...the training package has been cut by five weeks because they don't have to remember all those long drawn-out entries... we also take them away from the computer. This was never done in London because they always said 'sell if you want to sell' but learn how to use this computer first because this is really going to govern your life...the computer would not help you...whereas this thing (Quickres) might as well wipe their bums for them it's so helpful...in London, the training was all 'that's the technical answer, that's the technical input, this is the answer you get'. It was never 'if you said this to a passenger, they're going to say this to you', never anything about negative words or the types of questions you should use or if you say something how you could turn a sale off...this is why we say we have a new culture because we are taking people that have a basic selling skill and developing it in them (S.T.S.,1993).

> The old computer system was a barrier...all you were thinking about was 'how am I going to get this information out ?'...you didn't

> really have time to talk to your passenger, because you had to put such complicated entries in to get information out, you were talking in absolute jargon to these poor people who hadn't got a clue what you were talking about whereas having a very simplified, user-friendly system, that is a very small percentage of the job and the rest of it is about building rapport, using the information creatively, with your own style, giving quality service, and turning calls into sales (S.T.S.,1994).

It was also argued that the introduction of 'Quickres' helped to facilitate dramatic change in the roles of S.T.Ss and S.T.Ls. Formerly, these were largely 'technical' roles, a large proportion of which meant ironing out problems and answering queries arising from the use of B.A.B.S. S.T.Ss and S.T.Ls at Newcastle argued they were primarily concerned with 'people management' rather than 'technical management', As we have shown, management believe that this has had important consequences for T.S.A. discretion:

> There is an element of operational work... but that it is a very small part of the role (of S.T.S.)...we focus upon freeing supervisors for most of their time to spend time with people, developing them, make sure that they get the most out of what they're doing, we're getting the most out of what they are doing, and working on projects that get us known out in the airline and out in the community (S.T.S.,1994).

The 'Quickres' system is seen as an important support to the development of T.S.A. discretion. It was pointed out by management that British Airways is one telephone sales operation where those selling services are unlikely to have experienced the majority of products. Thus, they need to be able to access information regarding these products and use this imaginatively when attempting to capture a sale. Easy access is seen as important in enabling T.S.A. discretion:

> If somebody (an agent) comes up to you and asks 'how do I find this out ?'...you say, why don't you know it ? It's in the system'. We don't give them the answer, we tell them to go away and look it up. Sometimes, if people are very new, they don't like you for doing it but it helps in the long run, helps them to develop themselves and improve (S.T.S.,1994).

Furthermore, the computer system also has available a series of 'prompts' to help agents conduct particular calls - for example, a query about a particular 'Concorde' service, a fourteen day 'American Pass' or how to deal with a customer complaint.

Thus, it can be confidently argued that the labour process of Telephone Sales Agents at Newcastle Telephone Sales, British Airways represents a classic example of the newly emerging marketized 'clerical' work. It must be noted, however, that one way in which the experience of T.S.As may differ from many other forms of marketized 'clerical work' is their exposure to the labour and product markets.

The insecurity of the local labour market surrounding the location of the research site has been well documented (Sawbridge et al. (1984); Beynon et al. (1994); Brown

(1995)). This has also been noted specifically in relation to the northern service sector (Foord and Gillespie (1986); Robinson (1988); Brown (1995)). As we have seen, this was one of the major motivations for B.A. to locate in the Newcastle region. Labour market insecurity does however envelop *all* the research sites considered within this project.

Within the local labour market, the position of B.A. Telephone Sales Agents can be seen as relatively secure. This is also influenced by the product market, or at least B.A.'s currently strong position within this market. Agents are working within an organisation, industry and sector which is expanding rather than contracting. Morrison (1994) actually suggests that telephone sales is the fastest growing industry in north-eastern England. The financial success and development of Newcastle Telephone Sales, Telephone Sales Worldwide and B.A. as a whole is documented above. Newcastle Telephone Sales continues to expand. "We have gone from a workforce of 30 to 300 in two years. We have room in this building for a further 700 and I am sure we will continue to develop" (Unit Manager, 1993). Furthermore, it was expressed by management throughout the research that the skills and abilities developed by T.S.As are specific to B.A. telephone sales:

> We may take people with general selling skills but we train them and develop them in the effective use of *our* computer system, and in the selling skills which satisfy *our* particular customers...selling *our* particular products...the trouble with London (Heathrow) was that we were losing these people as quickly as we were training and developing them (S.T.S.,1994).

Thus, it would seem that there is a definite managerial intention to retain the services of the agents they select,

train and develop. In a rather perverse way, the insecurity of the local labour market offers security, and possible opportunities for discretion at work, to B.A. Telephone Sales Agents. "We are certainly prepared to invest in people here more, develop them, give them more responsibility, because we know they will not just leave when the going gets tough...this is what is so good about things up here" (Unit Manager,1993).

CHAPTER SIX

BANK CLERKS, THE CO-OPERATIVE BANK

The second case-study focuses upon the labour process of bank clerks within the Co-operative Bank. Initially, this entailed research within two medium-sized branches within north-eastern England - Sunderland and Durham. Due to factors outlined below, the research expanded to include a Regional Processing Centre (Durham), a Regional Corporate Centre (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne) and a central Account Management Centre (Skelmersdale, north-west England). However, it is the labour process of *branch* clerks which forms our second case-study - again, where T.Q.M. has been introduced. The research was conducted between October 1992 and April 1993.

A wholly owned subsidiary of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the Co-Operative Bank is a full clearing bank. It offers the same services as any other clearing bank. It has a network of 106 branches throughout Britain, supported by 3,000 in-store banking points within retail Co-operative stores. There are over 400 'Handybanks' where bank customers can cash cheques and deposit money and over 2,000 cash-a-cheque points where customers can cash a cheque with a cheque guarantee card. The bank has 1.5 million account holders and is a member of the LINK consortium which provides a network of over 6,000 cash dispensers nation-wide. The bank's head office is situated in Manchester and it is from here that bank policy is devised and communicated throughout the organisation. The bank has gained a particular reputation for introducing innovations which are later adopted by the rest of the industry. For example: in 1974, the bank was the first to offer free banking for personal customers who stay in credit; it was the first clearing bank to offer an interest bearing

cheque account; and in 1987, the bank became the first Visa card issuer in Europe to offer interest on credit balances.

The labour process of Co-operative Bank clerks demands the performance of a full range of banking functions, for example: cashiering, through a 'counter service' to customers (depositing/providing cash, banking and cashing cheques, crediting customers accounts); dealing with general enquiries (anything from small enquires and, in terms of business, minimal transactions to dealings with large, commercial and corporate customers and thus huge transactions); the processing, counting and collating of all cash and cheques handled (either received or distributed) during one day by each cashier and within one week by the bank as a whole; selling bank products, such as loans, pension packages, mortgages and insurance; administrative work generated by all business transactions, for example, the completion of ledger sheets entering all balances from transactions and forms for applications for overdrafts, foreign currency etc.

A Restructuring of Banking Operations

A major restructuring of the Co-operative banking network took place from 1988 onwards. This significantly affected the organisation and experience of the banking labour process. Co-operative Bank management also claim that clerical worker autonomy has been enhanced.

Prior to 1988, each branch occupied an autonomous position within the network. There was little centralised, co-ordinated planning and control and no central (either regional or national) pool of activities for common use. For example, there was no administrative infrastructure upon which individual branches could draw.

The restructuring of the banking network has radically transformed structures, processes and activities within the branches and has created new centres of banking activity. In 1988, a programme was put in place to address costs within the company. This focused upon the 'costs' of replicating work. It initially led to a reorganisation of administrative processes. The latter were removed from the branches and transferred to Regional Processing Centres (R.P.C's) and the Account Management Centre (A.M.C) at Skelmersdale which were opened during 1989.

Regional Processing Centres deal with bulk cash processing for a regional network of bank branches. Thus, in relation to the cases studied, R.P.Cs at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Durham undertake bulk cash processing for all branches within the north-eastern region. Where all branches would formerly have dealt with the counting, collating and recording of all cash relating to its wide range of customers, this is no longer the case. The only cash handled within each branch is that which is brought in by individual, personal customers and that which is provided to them. Commercial customers, for example, now have their bulk cash transported by the bank direct to an R.P.C. Bulk cash no longer comes into the branch. Furthermore, all cash remaining within the branch at the end of each working day is transported to an R.P.C. It is here that it is counted, checked and recorded. Besides counting cash in order to 'balance' their own work, there is now no requirement for branch bank clerks to be constantly counting, checking and recording all cash coming into the branch.

The A.M.C. incorporated the establishment of a Customer Services Bureau (C.S.B.). This constitutes the largest telephone banking service in Britain. It is open seven days a week and offers customers a full range of everyday banking services, 24 hours a day, 365 days per-year, over the telephone. Many of the administrative and routine aspects of

personal banking are dealt with by the A.M.C., such as cheque clearance and processing of credits to the customers' accounts, standing order and direct debit alterations, the transaction of shares and deceased or transferred accounts. Customers are encouraged to telephone or write to the A.M.C., for enquiries and straightforward transactions (such as balance enquiries, transfers between one account and another, the establishment or alteration of standing orders/direct debits, the payment of certain bills), rather than the branches. This deliberate strategy has been successful. The A.M.C. receives 4 million telephone calls a year and processes over 5 million pieces of paper per year. Customers are encouraged to telephone an 0345 number - the C.S.B. in Skelmersdale. All personal customer telephone enquires are dealt with by this national centre. Furthermore, written queries and applications for many of the banks products and services, such as overdrafts, foreign currency, personal loans and new accounts are now sent directly to the A.M.C. The latter can also be undertaken over the telephone. They are processed here rather than within the branches. Products and services which are sold within the branches are also processed administratively at the A.M.C. All administration arising from the service delivered to personal customers is undertaken at the A.M.C. From early 1995, new customers will no longer hold a Co-operative bank account at their local or regional branch. Their 'branch' will be 'central accounts' - based at the A.M.C. However, any Co-operative Bank branch will be prepared to act as the customers 'branch', depending upon the one s/he chooses to enter at any particular point in time. Co-operative Bank management claimed that there is no difference between the services offered by all branches to any customer.

During 1989-1992, further functions were relocated from the branches to specialised units. Regional Corporate Centres (R.C.Cs) and Regional Security Centres (R.S.Cs) were developed. R.C.Cs deal with large corporate customers of the

bank based within one region, such as local authorities and P.L.Cs, obviously taking such responsibility away from the branches. The R.C.C. within the north-east is based at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. This is staffed by 'relationship managers' who are responsible for a portfolio of large corporate customers. All matters arising from these accounts are dealt with by the manager responsible for the particular account and the clerks which s/he has working for her/him. R.S.C's co-ordinate the security for all branches and R.P.C's within one region.

The organisational division between those who deal with commercial and corporate customers and those who deal with personal customers is extended to include functional division within the branches.

Each branch is divided between personnel who deal with commercial, corporate customers and staff servicing personal customers. Commercial accounts which remain within the branch (smaller commercial customers, such as small shops and the self-employed) are administered by a branch manager who deals with all matters relating to these accounts through 'relationship management'. S/he is termed a 'Relationship Manager' (R.M.) and has clerks (1) working with her/him in dealing with these accounts. The substance of 'relationship management' is explored below. Personal customers are dealt with by Customer Service Officers (formerly known as cashiers) and Personal Advisors who are managed by a 'Customer Service Manager'. During the course of the research, this title changed to 'Business Development Manager' (B.D.M.). "I suppose in some respects it could be viewed as two managers in the location and in fairness...that is the case but...it's actually two managers looking after their own designated area of operations" (R.M.,1993). The title 'Branch Manager' no longer exists. The 'personal' team are collectively termed a 'personal sales team', "which brings out very strongly what

they are actually expected to do" (C.S.M.,1992). This commercial/personal split is examined further below.

The two branches studied each have one Relationship Manager and one Business Development Manager. Within one of the branches studied (Sunderland), the Relationship Manager (male) works with two clerks (both male), while the Business Development Manager (female) manages a team of ten clerks in total (all female). The Sunderland branch is split over two sites - one main branch within the high street and a satellite branch in a nearby shopping centre. The latter was developed as part of the restructuring and introduction of T.Q.M. - apparently enabling the meeting of customer needs and enhancing the quality of customer service. Within the other branch (Durham), the Relationship Manager (male) works with two clerks (both male), while the Business Development Manager (male) heads a team of six clerks (five of whom are female). Both branches have five extra 'supply' clerks (all female) who are called "whenever we need holiday or sickness cover or when we are exceptionally busy" (B.D.M.,1993).

The personal sales team within the branches is hierarchically structured. Following the B.D.M., there are: Senior Personal Advisors (S.P.A.), two in Sunderland, one in Durham; Personal Advisors (P.A.), two in Sunderland, one in Durham; Senior Customer Service Officers (S.C.S.O.), one in both branches; and Customer Service Officers (C.S.O.), five in Sunderland, three in Durham. Clerks are remunerated according to their seniority. The Senior Customer Service Officer was formerly known as the 'Head Cashier'. In Sunderland, the B.D.M., based at the high street branch, oversees personal teams in both branches. Thus, for the majority of working time, the satellite, shopping centre branch is headed by a Senior Personal Advisor. It is the work of personal sales teams within both branches which will be the focus of the research.

Total Quality Management

It is suggested above that the stimulus for the restructuring of The Co-operative Bank originated from a concern to address replication 'costs'. This concern has become part of a wider project, as the banking industry became increasingly competitive during the course of the costing programme and the restructuring process. This, in turn, led to a focus upon the nature of the service delivered to bank customers. This was perceived as an area where the 'value' of the bank's services (through improving their 'quality') could be enhanced, thus further reducing costs (2). However, it became obvious that the early phase of restructuring (i.e. 1988-89) had not focused upon 'service quality', only upon reducing costs through avoiding replication of work.

It is explicitly stated by all levels of Co-operative Bank management (3) that the 1989-1992 restructuring and the processes of recruitment and training for, and supervision and evaluation of, the clerical labour process have been "closely based upon the principles of total quality management" (R.M.,1992). Bank management claimed that the major aim of the restructuring and the banking operation as a whole was to continually improve their knowledge, meeting and anticipation of "customers' needs" (R.M.,1992). The aim of meeting customers' needs is to *sell* more of the bank's products to existing customers and attract new customers to the services provided by the Co-operative Bank - thus, a marketization process. It is claimed that enhanced clerical worker discretion is a concomitant of such developments. It was also constantly stressed by bank management that, although the major physical restructuring occurred between 1988 and 1992, marketization, the development of T.Q.M. and the provision of quality customer service is an ongoing process. "Quality service is never something you really *achieve*, it is something you are always aiming for because circumstances are always

changing, you (as a company) have to change and you can always get better" (B.D.M.,1993).

Prior to the implementation of T.Q.M., it was felt, by management, that the bank was insufficiently 'customer focussed'. The timing of the move "from recognising this...to actually doing something about it" (B.D.M.,1993) was shaped by the increasingly competitive nature of the banking and financial services industry, especially in the context of the legal deregulation of financial services (Chapter Two; Howcroft (1991); Cressey and Scott (1992); Boaden and Dale (1993); Dignan (1995)):

> Economic recession in the late 1980's hit hard in the banking and finance industry, resulting, over the same period, in organization takeovers, mergers and the loss of over 100,000 jobs. Banks came under the scrutiny of consumer watchdogs, and the media, and became the butt of extensive criticism for their poor service, their charging policies and for their perceived general lack of customer understanding and empathy. In short, banks became the organizations people love to hate (Dignan,1995,p.42).

Co-operative management stressed that one vital element of this increasingly competitive environment is increasingly differentiated and sophisticated customer needs and expectations within a shrinking consumer market. Thus, two B.D.Ms argued that:

> I think banks generally, led by the Co-op, are becoming clear that a relationship with

> customers is more important than perhaps volume of customers...they are going towards a relationship management side...
> I think what you are finding is that customers are becoming more sophisticated in their requirements and are generally starting to shop around...relationship management is now important. It's a lot harder for them to walk away from you if you've got a relationship than if you've never had a relationship and they disappear without you realising (1993).
>
> The 'big four' certainly went after market share aggressively during the 70's and 80's and now there isn't such a vast market out there to be had. If you think of the market, you look at new businesses coming on stream and everything else and it's not there as you can see by the economy...So it's very much look after what you've got and try and tap into perhaps the more quality end of the market by offering perhaps a better one to one service than they are getting already...
> I think customers now demand service, we've come to the demand culture now (1993).

Similarly, the Head of Group Quality:

> Things have changed, we need to spend more time with customers...in the old days, people came to the bank and the bank was up here and he *(sic)* was down here, he'd come in nervous...now he'll come in and he'll demand things from you and in certain situations we've got to go and get him and

> get his business. The competition is fierce now...we've got to be conscious of the products we are offering...without it, you'd fold now (1992).

It is argued by Co-operative Bank management that the introduction of total quality management, and accompanying attention to customers' needs and expectations, throughout the organisation has had a rapid and dramatic impact upon the financial performance of the bank. In the year to March 1993, the bank's profit before tax was £10 million, an improvement of £16 million on the previous year. The profit after tax was £6 million, an improvement of £9 million from the loss incurred in 1991 (The Co-operative Bank,1993,p.1). At this time, Terry Thomas, managing director, stated "In a universally depressed business climate, the results for 1992 are encouraging. We will continue our investment programme to improve customer service, processing efficiency and to develop new products" (The Co-operative Bank,1993,p.2). Furthermore, perhaps intrinsically connected to this financial 'success', the head of Group Quality at the Co-operative Bank points out that:

> Among all high street banks the Co-operative Bank has the highest customer satisfaction rating - according to the latest research findings by M.O.R.I. We scored a massive 94 per cent satisfaction rating among our customers (Dignan,1995,p.45).

Co-operative Bank management claim that "the dramatic turnaround in our fortunes...is due to...T.Q.M" (B.D.M.,1993). We can outline the implementation of marketization through T.Q.M. at the bank through the framework offered by Boaden and Dale (1993). The way in which T.Q.M. has, according to

management, increased personal branch clerks' work autonomy will be highlighted throughout the following exposition.

Organising

It will be remembered that this "foundation stage is primarily concerned with the motivation for starting a process of quality improvement and the resultant strategies and infrastructure which are necessary to develop the process on an organisation-wide basis" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.18). It was stated by management that the pursuit of quality service and quality improvement was a (marketized) differentiation strategy in the context of an increasingly competitive environment, in turn, shaped by factors such as globalisation, state deregulation of the financial services industry, the increasing sophistication and differentiation of customer demands and the introduction of recent I.C.T. Further, in keeping with the tradition of The Co-operative Bank, management argued that they were *leading* the development of quality improvement differentiation strategies within financial services. In fact, they claimed to be a model upon which academics such as Howcroft (1991) and Boaden and Dale (1993) developed their prescriptive frameworks.

Top management commitment to, and leadership of, the quality improvement process can be seen from the mission statement of the Co-operative Bank, developed during 1992:

> We, The Co-operative Bank Group, will continue to develop a successful and innovative financial institution by providing our customers with high quality financial and related services whilst promoting the underlying principles of co-operation which are...

1. *Quality and Excellence* - to offer all our customers consistent high quality and good value services and strive for excellence in all that we do.

2. *Participation* - to introduce and promote the concept of full participation by welcoming the views and concerns of our customers and by encouraging our staff to take an active role within the local community.

3. *Freedom and Association* - to be non-partisan in all social, political, racial and religious matters.

4. *Education and Training* - to act as a caring and responsible employer encouraging the development and training of all our staff and encouraging commitment and pride in each other and the Group.

5. *Co-operation* - to develop a close affinity with organisations which promote fellowship between workers, customers, members and employers.

6. *Quality of Life* - to be a responsible member of society by promoting an environment where the needs of local communities can be met now and in the future.

7. *Retentions* - to manage the business effectively and efficiently, attracting investment and maintaining sufficient surplus funds within the business to ensure the continued development of the Group.

8. *Integrity* - to act at all times with honesty and integrity and within legislative and regulatory requirements.
(The Co-operative Bank (1992a)).

The principles of T.Q.M. are firmly embedded within this mission. The mission was devised, and communicated throughout the organisation from head office, with significant input from Group Quality (see below):

> The changes have been driven from the top and the people at the top are very committed to it (R.M.,1992).

> Head office in Manchester drives the policy that demands the customer service from both the administration centres...and the customer service that we are expected to provide in our branches (C.S.M.,1992).

It was stressed throughout chapter three that missions detailing the implementation of T.Q.M. must be communicated effectively *throughout* the organisation if they are to shape the attitudes and actions of everyone within it. This is especially important and difficult within most service organisations, the Co-operative Bank being a prime example, where there are a "large number of comparatively small locations...the development of Total Quality expertise at all locations may well not be feasible, and so a central group with the responsibility of developing and communicating knowledge on quality service improvement might well be appropriate" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.19). This problem is compounded at the Co-operative Bank by the undertaking of different banking activities at different locations.

The Co-operative Bank began a bank-wide education on 'quality of customer service' during 1990, as part of the marketization and restructuring programme. The commitment of the bank to the ideal of continuous quality service improvement is reflected in a number of their public statements, including their annual reports. At national level, a central department - Group Quality - was developed in 1990 to oversee the quality improvement process. It aims to "communicate how customer service can be improved...how the mission statement can actually be implemented" (C.S.M.,1992), thus what 'quality and excellence' and 'participation' within the mission statement actually entail. Additionally, under the guidance of Group Quality, project teams were set up within the branch network to communicate and implement the improvement of 'quality customer service'. This is partly achieved through interacting with clerks and encouraging their involvement in, and ownership of, the quality improvement process, thus implementing the missions of 'quality and excellence', 'participation', and 'education and training'. Simultaneously, then, the importance of branch clerk involvement and 'empowerment', enabling them to deliver quality customer service, is constantly stressed throughout this process:

> The bank aims to...empower staff to make their own decisions...this comes through very clearly in bank policy from head office and the mission statement...we want as many people as possible to get involved in improving things for our customers (B.D.M.,1993).

Another fundamental part of the foundation stage of T.Q.M. is "a clear organisational structure for the introduction, promotion, development and standardisation of quality improvement activities" (Boaden and Dale,1993,p.19) - i.e. the implementation of the mission statement. The development of

such a structure within the Co-operative Bank can be seen by the functional restructuring outlined above.

It was felt, by management, that the organisational structure prior to the development of T.Q.M., with autonomous individual branches, placed far too much pressure upon the limited capacities of branches to meet the various, increasingly differentiated needs of a wide range of customers and thus effectively sell the banks products and services. Therefore, the aim of creating the R.C.Cs was to enable major corporate customers to be dealt with through 'relationship management' by specially trained managers and clerks who could concentrate upon meeting such customers' needs and offering appropriate products. Branch commercial teams could then concentrate upon the needs of commercial customers who remained within the branch.

Co-operative Bank management strongly argued that the centralisation of many banking activities and the commercial/personal division of functions within the branches has enabled the bank to respond to and meet the needs of personal customers more effectively and efficiently. The whole point of the development of R.S.Cs, R.P.Cs and the A.M.C. was to take many routine, administrative activities away from the branches to enable *all* staff within them to devote their working time to interacting with customers, meeting their needs and selling bank products such as loans, pension packages, insurance and foreign currency services (4). Even the physical layout of the branches was altered to provide a more customer-centred environment. At the Sunderland branch, a new sub-branch was opened in the nearby shopping centre. Branch management claimed that this was opened in 1992:

> because of the queues that were being generated here (the high street branch) of people cashing cheques. Many times

> there had been complaints of people queuing past Woolworths to cash a cheque here. As a result of that, the second branch was opened. Historically, I think people would have been quite happy to queue and wait. When you look at the fact that people now during their lunch hour have to cram a lot of stuff in, not only visit the bank, but perhaps shopping and going elsewhere, they've got limited time available and if we don't satisfy their requirements for an efficient service, they will go elsewhere (B.D.M.,1993).

Furthermore, *within* all the branches studied, children's toys are provided for amusement while their elders visit the bank. Customers are also offered a cup of coffee when they come in "just to add that little bit of atmosphere to what is in some respects a sterile atmosphere" (C.S.M.,1992). It is argued that by such focusing upon customer needs this enhances the quality of the service, in the eyes of the customer, provided:

> It may sound silly...but even down to buying a leggo table that children can play on...while their parents are transacting their banking business, it all has an effect. There can be nothing worse for a parent, and for other customers, coming in with an unruly child causing chaos and havoc...the impact of having a leggo table...has been unbelievable...it all adds to the customer service that we are trying to

> improve all the time and it does get appreciated (C.S.M.,1992).

It was claimed by branch management that clerks within the new structure would be able to attend to customers' needs more thoroughly and concentrate upon the sale of bank products within their particular labour process. Especially important in this respect, according to management, has been the creation of the Regional Processing Centres to deal with bulk cash work previously undertaken within the branch. As one C.S.M. stated:

> What we did was very much centralised cash processing...it's brought tremendous benefits. Certainly from a branch admin. point of view, dealing with cash all day has its headaches, by putting it in the centre where they've got trained staff to deal with just that aspect of banking, the improvement has been quite phenomenal. There are two ways of looking at it. One is workflow. It means that I can employ staff to be more focused to customers, to look after customers' needs rather than just physically counting cash day in day out. The other aspect is their own job satisfaction. In all honesty there is nothing worse during the day than counting cash (C.S.M.,1992) (5).

It is being suggested that the centralisation of cash processing and the removal of the functions of dealing with routine customer enquiries and a large volume of administrative work (now undertaken at the A.M.C.) is allowing branch clerks more time to spend in face-to-face interaction with customers. This is essentially what is meant by establishing, anticipating and meeting the needs of

personal customers. It is assumed that this will also lead to more sales of Co-operative banking products:

> It's surprising that you don't need to hard sell to people on the counter to generate business. If you get into a conversation with someone who says they are going on holiday, it's *natural* to then ask them if they have arranged their foreign currency requirements. If cashiers are under pressure, they are not getting the opportunity to ask those questions, getting into those conversations (C.S.M.,1992,my emphasis).

There is an assumption here, and amongst other branch managerial staff, that increased time and space for clerk/customer interaction will be automatically, unproblematically and *naturally* translated into increased sales and revenue. This appears to undermine the necessity for elements of the T.Q.M. programme (cultural integration, systems and techniques for the implementation of T.Q.M and mechanisms for monitoring quality service) outlined below. This is an organisational, and wider, debate to which we shall return.

'Meeting customers' needs' also involved the bank branches playing a particular role within the local community. Branches were frequently involved in sponsoring community events, and publicising their banking activities and products within the local community. Clerks were often asked to initiate this community involvement.

Changing the Culture

It is argued by Co-operative Bank management that the development of the infrastructure outlined above, and the structural mechanisms explored below, have facilitated the development of norms, values, attitudes and feelings amongst personal bank clerks within the branches studied that constitute a 'strong corporate culture', committed to providing quality of customer service and thus selling the banks products and services. Management believe that they are developing a 'quality' and 'sales' culture which is, crucially, a customer-driven culture:

> We do stress that by offering quality service to customers...they'll come back time and time again...if we get a wave of customer opinion about something in particular or we can tell that the customer is needing something, we can bring out a new product pretty quickly. The idea goes on the board, that is what customers want and we bring it out in no time (B.D.M.,1993).

The participation of clerks within this 'culture change' - the development of a 'sales culture' through meeting customer needs - is seen as crucial by management:

> It is crucial that staff (clerks) deal with customers in the correct manner, in a polite manner, in a way that meets their needs...it is they who really represent the Co-operative Bank, their whole job involves dealing with potential and actual customers. They can tell us what customers require (B.D.M.,1993).

It is suggested by management that T.Q.M. has given branch clerks more responsibility and autonomy. It is vital that they exercise this autonomy in the interests of the bank. This especially refers to personal clerks direct interaction with customers, either face-to-face or through telephone and written communication. It is here where staff discretion is greatest. Furthermore, management believed that this aspect of the labour process constitutes what is termed within some academic literature as "moments of truth" (Lewis (1989)) within service delivery. This phrase refers to critical points in service provision where staff interact with customers. It is during such interaction that customer perceptions regarding the quality of service received are formed (6). Thus, if quality service is to be delivered, clerk commitment to the cultural rules and regulations of the organisation, stressing quality of customer service, is vital.

The impact of the culture change within branches is explained by a branch B.D.M., a branch manager within the former structure:

> Before we changed things round, branch clerks had all on to get through their work...they didn't have time to think about how they dealt with people (customers), what their attitude was, and to be perfectly honest we (management) didn't care either, we didn't realise how important it was...it used to be about (clerks) getting through as many customers as possible. Now, their attitude, how they deal with customers is what counts. They are expected to spend time with customers, find out what they want and provide it. I think the majority of them

> do this very well because we have given them the space, time, training and support so that they can. It would have been impossible before the changes (C.S.M.,1992).

Similarly, a Senior Personal Advisor, formerly a cashier, personal advisor and commercial advisor before the implementation of T.Q.M.:

> Everybody now is told and taught to sell, put on business. It didn't used to be the case. It was an admin., clerical job. It's not the way the bank is now, the bank's selling now...for the first five years, I wasn't asked to sell anything...it wasn't part of it...there was no real push on selling...now everybody has really got to push the products (S.P.A..1993).

Thus, the development of an appropriate infrastructure for quality service improvement, outlined in the previous section, has enabled, according to management, a crucial culture change within the branches. In relation to the personal team:

> The emphasis in the old structure was very much upon volume of customers...the aim was to get through as many as possible...it was very much cashing a cheque, 'thank you, bye-bye, next !', getting on with their other work and then making sure that everything was balanced at the end of the day...our staff now *want* to get involved with customers, serve them, offer and sell the banks products...they have the time to

> do it, the training to do it and we (management) encourage them to do it (R.M.,1992, my emphasis).

> The traditional role in the branches say for a cashier, somebody comes in with a cheque or with a credit to pay funds into their account and that was it full stop, that was the extent of their duties. Now it's become more personal with customers and develop a relationship with them, that they feel proud to bank with The Co-operative Bank, that they will look at us as the first port of call for any needs they have. When you look at the personal side - mortgages, loans, investment advice, the whole shooting match, their (clerk's) role is very much to *engender that feel* from our customers to come to us first and others second...in many different ways, our staff *have to use their own initiative in order to achieve this* (B.D.M.,1993,my emphases).

It is argued by branch management that clerk commitment to the values of quality customer service, and the managerially-prescribed method of achieving it, is an inevitable outcome of the infrastructure outlined above, the systems and techniques and the measurement and feedback explored below. Particularly vital in this respect, according to all levels of management interviewed, has been a T.Q.M. training programme which all staff (old and new) have experienced:

> Every single member of staff has gone through T.Q.M. training, over 3,000 members of staff...it instills in everybody the

> management thread that if you are doing something wrong, you don't keep doing it wrong, you make sure you do it right next time. If there is a quicker way that you can do something, let's look at it, let's change it, let's do something about it, let's not gripe about what goes wrong, let's do something about it. I think the training that we did and that we continue to do has dramatically improved the culture of the staff...If we have a problem here at Sunderland...I say to three people 'would you like to get together at ten 'o' clock on Monday and solve it ?' and they are more than willing - they just go ahead and do it (B.D.M.,1993).

Also important, according to branch management interviewed, is the enhanced clerical worker autonomy and job satisfaction which it is alleged T.Q.M. has facilitated. It is believed that the exercise of discretion and autonomy in delivering service to customers has meant increasing clerk responsibility for the results of service provision. "The fact that they (clerks) have more control over their own work, they 'own' it more will also lead to more commitment...the service provided reflects upon them. They *want* to ensure that it is right" (B.D.M.,1993,my emphasis).

Furthermore, it was universally felt by branch management that the centralisation of routine functions away from the clerk's labour process, and the corresponding opportunity to spend more time interacting with customers, has inevitably led to an increase in job satisfaction:

> As people are getting a lot more involved with customers...the job satisfaction is naturally accompanying that (C.S.M.,1992).

> There is now variety in their (branch clerks') job. That variety is the people who come in...you will get the old lady who will spend ten minutes chatting away about her son...by the same token, you'll get youngsters coming in who begin to get physically aggressive, not pleasant but it's all variety in the job and that variety is the customers. The job is nowhere near as routine as it was. I firmly believe, and this is widespread, that the variety has led to more enjoyment and job satisfaction. This is...reflected in the much greater volume of new business which now comes off the counter (C.S.M.,1992).

All branch management interviewed strongly claimed that the desired culture change has been effected within their branches. Typical were the following arguments from two B.D.M's (1993):

> I think we, at this branch, offer an excellent and quality service to our personal customers. This is down to the belief and commitment of the staff... we chat genuinely and naturally with them letting the customers know what we offer and it's up to their choice whether they want to take it...it's down to getting to know customers, observing what they have in their accounts and

recommending products that will be better for them...if there is, for instance, a savings account which offers a good rate, we will make a strong point that they could get an extra 4%, it's always in the customers interest...it's quite natural... we are looking for sales opportunities and to develop the branch but we do this through customer service, there is no hard sell. Customers can see that whatever we are suggesting is genuine and for their own benefit.

Our staff do put themselves out for customers and customers notice that. I've heard members of staff say that they have rung customers at home, when they've got home. I haven't asked them to. They haven't been able to contact them during the day about a particular thing and they've contacted them at seven 'o' clock at night and the customers have been really thrilled to bits and it is by doing things like that, offering that little bit more which shows staff commitment to what we are trying to achieve and makes customers think 'well you know, you don't get that from many banks these days'...customers find that we offer more of a personal service. Instead of feeling that they are part of a big bank, where they are just an account number that comes in and out, we take the extra trouble to get to know people that come in...we are part of the community...it's nice that it has worked out that we are an all-ladies team

> here...everybody gets on so well and they like talking to customers...they like finding out about people and chatting... that is good customer service and as long as it's genuine. We don't want to get like America - going through the motions - our people do genuinely care that customers are satisfied.

Using Systems and Techniques

Selection

Management's aim to improve the quality of customer service has shaped the selection and training of Co-operative Bank clerks.

Thus, in relation to branch clerks, the ability to interact with customers in the way desired by management is the major selection criterion. This has replaced a certain level of academic qualification as the selection mechanism:

> For people who are coming into a branch environment now, we're looking for people who have that personality, that they can relate to customers, they can talk to customers, people who, dare I use the word, can sell products to customers which is the future of banking - selling products, meeting customers' needs. You're not, to a certain extent, looking at people coming in with three 'A' levels, five 'O' levels and being academically brilliant in that respect. You are looking for people who can relate to customers and that perhaps hasn't

> been the case in the past
> (C.S.M.,1992) (7).
>
> Selection for the branch environment is focused on people who can react to customers, who can converse, who can familiarise themselves. This reflects the change in the branches...before (T.Q.M.), the majority of your day was spent dealing with admin. and a small proportion dealing with customers. The ratio has now been turned on its head. The majority of your day with customers with the majority of admin. functions now in centralised bureaus (B.D.M.,1993).

Thus, 'personal' and 'communication' skills are seen as the most important selection criteria for branch clerks. More specifically, B.D.Ms also stressed that prospective clerks need to display an ability to use these skills autonomously and with genuine enthusiasm:

> The main thing is people need to be able to communicate, be a good listener, not necessarily a good talker. They need to be able to assess situations to communicate appropriately, *using their own initiative* in communicating...they need to be nice personalities, people for whom nothing is too much trouble, be enthusiastic about talking to people and finding out what they want (B.D.M.,1993,my emphasis).

B.D.Ms also stressed the importance of prior experience of teamwork and the planning and organising of activities under

one's own initiative (8). All B.D.Ms interviewed stated that, during selection, they search for applicants with previous cashiering experience. "This leaves more scope for intensive training having to be undertaken to give people the skills to interface one to one with customers" (C.S.M.,1992).

Training

As part of the implementation of T.Q.M., management claimed that training provision for branch clerks has become more comprehensive and formalised. Previously, much of the training for branch clerks was undertaken 'on the job'. Cashiers, for example, were often trained by the chief cashier. There was a regional training centre for banking staff. However, the training experience of clerks consisted of very short introductory courses teaching basic cashiering functions and use of the bank's technology. The trainers were bank staff themselves. Most induction was undertaken 'on the job':

> In the past, we have taken on people as office juniors, we've shown them basic office work and they move on to handling cash. We wouldn't these days take on an office junior...the days of coming in and starting at the bottom and handling very basic enquires have now gone (C.S.M.,1992) (9).

The training of personal branch clerks into the routine duties of cashiering (receiving/handling/providing cash, processing cheques, administrative tasks) is now a minimal part of the training programme. Management claimed that all branch clerks (personal and commercial) are "intensively" trained in "developing a comprehensive product knowledge of all products offered by the Co-operative Bank and in how to interface with

customers" (B.D.M.,1993). Thus, they are trained for both the technical and functional aspects of quality customer service:

> They (branch clerks) get very intense training. If I was taking a cashier on, I would look for someone who has had some kind of cashiering experience in the past...if they know how to handle cash, they would then get trained up on the technical aspects of using the bank's technology. If they've handled cash in the past, it's not that difficult, it doesn't take them long to learn about this bank's routines for processing cheques and credits. That could probably take no more than a day to train them on that side of things, but more important than that is product knowledge and how they interface with customers (C.S.M.,1992)

> I suppose in the past the training has been focused upon technical skills. Nowadays it is customer relationships and the bank's training course is very much geared towards how you present yourself, how you deal with customers, obviously based upon total quality lines...this selling skills training goes into psychoanalysis and all sorts of things. We use a phrase - neurolinguistic programming - it is very much about observing their (clerks') posture, their eyes, mirroring their movements and telling them how to improve. That is when you are in a one-to-one situation trying to sell a product. We go into that kind of thing very intensively.

> There is also training in the use of the telephone (Regional Trainer,1992).
>
> Selling skills training involves talking about customers' perception of you personally and how you come over to customers. We do role play and go into body language, how you relate to customers and how you interpret how they are feeling...other people on the training course give their comments on how they feel that people come over to them (B.D.M.,1993).

Induction training for all branch clerks lasts approximately two weeks. The majority of this consists of product knowledge and selling skills training. The latter is undertaken within two-hour modules (trainees take twelve during induction), away from the branch at a regional training centre. During induction, product knowledge training - for example, in relation to personal banking, what the features of a Co-operative personal loan are, the features of a mortgage - is undertaken within the branches. This lasts approximately four days. Clearly, product knowledge training continues throughout the Co-operative clerical banking career as new products are developed and old ones disappear. Some of this ongoing product knowledge training - on major new products such as payment protection insurance - is conducted away from the branch at the regional training centre. It is often driven by the type of customer enquiries being received. Issues which are particularly common become part of the ongoing training programme.

Management stressed that training is seen as a process which continues beyond induction. "We see training as vital, as perhaps the most important thing that enables our staff to

meet customers' needs...we provide constant training for established staff away from the branch as our products are always changing and so are our customers' needs...we can always improve our customer service" (B.D.M.,1993). All staff undertake regular 'refresher' courses on selling skills within the branches and at the regional training centre. Much of this involves pre-course work which they are expected to undertake within their own time. The bank invests much time and money in ongoing training for branch clerks.

Retraining was provided for staff who were inducted into the previous branch and organisational structures. This was labelled as 'T.Q.M. training'. Initially, this involved all clerks describing, in detail, the activities involved within their labour process. They were then asked to reflect upon and discuss, in conjunction with experienced trainers, the ways in which each task could be changed to enhance the service provided to customers. They also underwent product knowledge and selling skills programmes.

In order to accomplish such training, the bank has further developed the regional training centres which are now staffed by specialist, full-time training officers - not necessarily former bank staff. The bank also utilises external consultancy training staff and external training courses.

Management were keen to stress that training programmes provide a prescriptive *framework* within which clerks are expected to exercise their initiative and discretion. "We can give people particular selling skills and the skills to handle complaints, but really it is up to them to gauge the feeling and nature of the customer on the spot and to act accordingly. Their training can act as a support. We cannot tell them how to do everything" (B.D.M.,1993). Furthermore, in relation to product knowledge, it was frequently pointed out that training is useful "but when you've got a range of probably about 100

different queries you can get" (B.D.M.,1993), it is difficult to train for every situation. Thus, again, it is expected that clerks will use their discretion when interacting with customers.

Management also distinguished between training and 'coaching'. The latter refers to 'on the job' training which is still an important part of the bank clerk's employment relationship. In particular, all levels of management argued that coaching was vital to augment training and thus resolve the 'problem' of being unable to train for every possible instance of clerk/customer interaction

Management claimed that the bank as a whole has a very strong commitment to training, in order to enhance quality of customer service. This would appear to be demonstrated by the receipt of a national training award in 1992, following the development of the above training programmes.

Work Organisation

It is argued by Co-operative Bank management that a particular form of work organisation within the branches has facilitated the delivery of quality service by clerks within the personal banking labour process. It is also claimed by management that this form of organisation has enhanced the discretion and responsibility of Co-operative Bank clerks.

The work organisation of clerks within the branches studied centres around *teamworking*. As suggested above, each branch is split into two teams - a commercial team, dealing with the needs of commercial customers and a personal team, attending to the requirements of personal clients. The personal team are responsible to one B.D.M. Hierarchical division within the personal teams is described above.

Every member of the personal team is trained to cashier. The roles of Senior Personal Advisor, Personal Advisor and Senior Customer Service Officer are occupied by the most experienced personal bank clerks. It is felt by management that this greater experience equips clerks with a more detailed knowledge of the bank's products and enhanced abilities to sell those products. These roles, however, are not strictly separate. *All* clerks are expected to develop their knowledge of the bank's products and their sales experience and ability:

> It's not really a hierarchy as such. People do have people above them but that does not mean, as it did before, that they can't perform certain tasks...the people above them are really there as a support to guide them through things that they have not come across before. It is very useful to have someone there who has experienced things before when you are trying something for the first time...we do have members of staff who know and handle more specialised work...but it doesn't stop us training the staff who support them to do the same work ...you get a new query, somebody hasn't dealt with that one before so you go through it with them, it's constant. Before (T.Q.M.), there were set roles, such as 'cashier', 'personal advisor' and you didn't step outside of that remit (B.D.M.,1993).

Under the teamworking system, each team is *collectively* responsible for the tasks required of it. Thus, the "personal team is one big team, so everybody is expected to use their own initiative all the time, something is not a particular person's job, it is everybody's responsibility" (B.D.M.,1993).

Management claimed that the teamworking system within the branches facilitated service quality during the accomplishment of these duties:

> Training and organising workers for teamworking has brought tremendous benefits to the customer. Take product knowledge...This is now diffused throughout the branch. All staff are expected to know about the products we have in alot of detail. The days perhaps where you had an enquires clerk who would see somebody at the enquires desk and go away and get somebody else to deal with it, the 'it's not my job' kind of thing, that has now gone. Anybody who goes to enquires is expected to know, in alot of detail, what the products are. There is nothing worse, I think, if you put yourself in the customers position of coming in, ringing the bell, somebody comes over to talk about a personal loan - 'I'll just go away and get somebody to come and talk to you about it.' What happens here is that staff can perform all duties in their team (C.S.M.,1992).

Thus, it would seem that discretion and responsibility, which particularly comes from interacting with customers, is now diffused throughout the branch structure. Previously, this autonomy was only exercised by one or two members of staff. Branch management claimed that all clerks are encouraged to exercise autonomy and responsibility during the course of the

work, using the support of those in superordinate positions to help them:

> We expect them to all use their own initiative in situations and their common sense and...they all do...this is what total quality management is all about, giving everybody their freedom, actually empower them to make their own decisions. They know I'm always here, I've got an open-door policy. It's always open if they want to talk anything through with me they can do but if I put them in a particular position, I empower them to make their own decisions, then I will back them. You can't expect individuals to be in charge of situations if they feel they've got to come to you on every move...but I am there if they need me... it works very nicely (B.D.M.,1993).

> The key thing is it's not a heightened delegation. Yes you are delegating to other members of staff, empowering them to make their own decisions but you are still there. So you might give them a project or a task or an initiative to carry through but you are always there as back up, enquiring if it is going all right, if they need any support, financial support, extra staff...it's a matter of giving someone the responsibility of carrying out their day to day duties but you know that you are still solely responsible for making sure that it works - you are not just passing the buck (B.D.M.,1993).

The implementation of teamworking through T.Q.M. has also enabled greater *flexibility* in the deployment of branch

clerks. This again is apparently important to enable the meeting of customer needs and expectations and thus sales of Co-operative banking products and services.

For example, in relation to the personal team, within both branches studied, prior to the introduction of T.Q.M., two clerks were trained to deal with general enquiries and the majority of their working day was spent at the enquiries desk. A further three clerks were limited to general, routine administrative duties. There were ten other clerks whose main role was to provide a counter service to customers. This latter group were ranked according to levels of seniority. Only the head cashier normally dealt with non-routine service functions, such as general advice on personal loans and new accounts. Each clerk had a limited and specific role within the branch structure. Under the teamworking system, all clerks were trained for, and expected to accomplish when required, the demands made upon the personal team as a whole. As one B.D.M., a former branch manager, pointed out, "all service industries get slated at dinner times". The Co-operative Bank is no exception. In between the hours of 12pm and 2pm on weekdays, there is a far greater demand from customers for a counter service than during other periods of the day. Management have an obligation to staff all counters to meet peaks and troughs throughout the day. The former branch manager stated that, under the old structure, during lunchtimes, this often involved utilising clerks whose major role was general enquiries, clerks whose major role was routine administrative work and personal advisors to perform the cashiering role. It is argued that this brought significant problems which were eliminated by the teamworking system:

> If you had an enquiries clerk and that is all they did or personal advisors who were purely personal advisors, to ask them to

> come and perform a cashiering duty where they hadn't been properly trained - very, very difficult. Certainly, under this new structure where everybody is adequately trained and fully trained in each function, the pressure is off then (R.M.,1992).

Similarly, under the former structure, only personal advisors were trained and expected to provide detailed information on banking products. At particular times of the day, customer demand for information often exceeded the supply of labour able to provide it. This often necessitated asking "people whose job title was 'cashier', and that is all they did, to perform the function of providing specialised product advice - again very, very difficult" (R.M.,1992). Management admitted that, prior to the implementation of T.Q.M., it was not uncommon for huge queues of people waiting for counter service to form during lunchtimes. It was also not unusual for the branch manager her/himself to be called to perform duties on one of the counters. These problems, it was claimed, have also been eliminated by the introduction of teamworking.

Within the personal team, each person still has daily responsibilities (10), however, the teamworking system means that "people aren't frightened to jump out of one role...like yesterday...was very, very busy so one person thought 'ah, my work can wait an hour or two, it's not urgent, I'll go and help process the work that is coming off the counter'...so we do have that flexibility...and the members of staff that work in a branch have to have that type of personality so they can be flexible and not feel the old idea of 'well, this is my job and this is not my job'...that has gone completely...I also think that because everyone gets on so well, there is that personal feeling that if someone is struggling, 'we can't have this, I'll just go and help so and so' - that is lovely" (B.D.M.,1993). Branch management also stressed that the

teamworking system meant that cover was available for senior positions during holidays and sickness.

> The idea is that everyone can interslot with everybody else's job if need be and that is really the key to the success of the branch and how it has been able to run. It's the classic sort of teamwork and flexibility (B.D.M.,1993).

In fact, the only 'outside' cover utilised is for customer service officers.

All managers interviewed argued that a far more efficient dispersal of appropriately trained staff, to meet the demand of customers at peak times for the various forms of personal service, has enabled clerks to spend more time interacting with customers, ascertaining and meeting their needs through the provision of particular banking products (even during peak hours of business). For example:

> One way of generating business for the bank is from officers. If officers are not getting through customers who want a personal loan or whatever, perhaps they're working under too much pressure and we need to put more people on there with them...cashiers were under too much pressure under the old structure, they were very much quickly processing people, they were not getting the opportunity to ask questions about customers' needs and get into conversations with them. Now they are under less pressure. There is still the same volume of people coming through but with us being able

> to manage the counters more effectively and put people on there at peak times who can deal with it, it means that we can, as a team, communicate more effectively with customers (C.S.M.,1992).

The teamworking system has also devolved responsibility for work allocation to teams themselves. Thus, personal teams within the branches are expected to arrange the allocation of work amongst themselves. They are expected to design a rota system so that each officer, for example, works an equal amount of time within each role - enquiries, counter service and administrative work and spends *some* time, often alongside personal advisors, on the sales desk. The rota is checked and overseen by the B.D.M. During periods of peak demand, the officers themselves are expected to ensure that there is adequate cover to meet this demand:

> In the past...you very much had a number one cashier who was responsible for managing the counter...that's now gone. Everybody has equal discretion. If it needs more people down there, a clerk is expected to arrange for cover down there despite the fact that they may be relatively junior than the person they are asking. They've got that discretion to sort that out. I can remember in the not too distant past when a cashier would ring me up and say 'we need somebody on the counter' and I was expected to sort that out for them. They now don't ring me up, they sort it out for themselves which is partly the teamwork exercise that they can

actually communicate with each other (C.S.M.,1992).

Enhanced branch clerk autonomy in the allocation and completion of work and ultimately responsibility for the quality of customer service has, according to branch management, led to increased motivation amongst branch clerks and greater commitment to the provision of quality customer service. "Since we changed things around in the branches, they (clerks) see our aims and their goals as very much the same...their goal is to serve customers because ultimately it reflects upon them. They are involved in it now and they are trained for it. That is fine by us (management) because that is what we are after as well...I am not so sure we were all pulling in the same direction in the past" (C.S.M.,1992).

Communication and Participation

We have already seen how communication of The Co-operative Banking mission and the philosophy of T.Q.M. have been essential to the above explained infrastructural and cultural change and, also, training processes. However, communication and participation are, according to management, integral to the actual labour process of Co-operative Bank clerks.

Within the branches, each personal team meets with its respective manager for five minutes before the start of each working day. This enables the brief discussion of, for example, important product information, work requiring completion/targets to be achieved during that particular day, the discussion of any problems or queries that clerks may have. Further, a meeting lasting approximately twenty minutes, for more detailed discussion of these issues, takes place twice per week. Every three months, a quality training meeting is held where each team and their manager will discuss

ways in which the operation can be improved in order to enhance quality of customer service. "This is not just me talking. It is certainly a two-way process, we want their (clerks') suggestions, in some senses they know better than us what customers want, what they may be annoyed about because they deal with them every day...in the end, it's the customers who benefit" (B.D.M.,1993). This meeting also assesses the training needs of each branch team. Individual clerks also have appraisal meetings with their manager to discuss current progress and future targets. Again, branch management pointed out that they attempted to elicit suggestions from clerks themselves as to how their work, and thus customer service, could be improved. Clerks are given specific projects to undertake before their next appraisal meeting.

In addition to these formal mechanisms for communication, branch management were also keen to stress the utility of informal communicative processes. It is suggested that there is a constant dialogue between clerks and management and that the formers' ideas for the enhancement of quality service frequently arise from these. Informal communication is clearly prevalent within the very small commercial teams. However, B.D.M's are also keen to point out that:

> I'm always around, often I'll floor walk within the branch, chat to staff, see how things are going and if they have any suggestions... my door is always open. I don't make appointments. Both staff and customers know that they can come to me at any time and discuss anything that is bothering them... something will be done about it quick (B.D.M.,1993)

The teamworking system (see above) also encourages communication within teams.

Branch management argued that they are keen to involve clerks, and thus elicit the exercise of autonomy and their commitment, within all activities at branch level:

> If we introduce a project for some reason... years ago someone would say, 'well I'm going to deal with that personally'...but the nice thing about a team is that we get everybody involved in everything. Like we've got freshers day at the University of Sunderland. We have Jean, a senior personal advisor, and she will invite two officers to go with her. This year, we'll have a change of team so that everyone in the branch gets involved...even a simple thing like handing out Easter eggs to children during Easter week, I may have the idea but ask someone to actually organise it...it does demand development skills and organisational skills. It doesn't matter whether it's a big project (B.D.M.,1993).

Measurement and Feedback

There are a number of ways in which the quality of Co-operative Bank customer service, and thus the sales work of branch clerks, is evaluated.

Customer Feedback

One form of evaluation practised by management is the establishment and analysis of customer feedback. One simple mechanism of feedback is the account closure rate which is

monitored very closely. Customer views can be expressed through letters or comments of complaint or praise. For example, "if people start complaining that there is not enough cashiers on the counter, we need to ask questions why" (C.S.M.,1992). As clerks within each team are responsible for certain duties, complaint or praise is traceable to one or more particular clerks. "We make sure that we resolve any complaint, and we don't get many, to the satisfaction of the customer" (B.D.M.,1993).

Customer attitudes and feelings are also ascertained through anonymous customer surveys. One of the major administrative tasks of the A.M.C. is to take, at random, 200 customer account numbers and send each customer included a detailed questionnaire to complete on the service they feel they are receiving from the bank and the bank's staff, including such issues as: the service they receive from the service till; how long they wait in queues; what service they get from the sales desk; the general attitude of staff. This is undertaken at a national level, and in relation to individual branches throughout the year. Management viewed this process as especially important:

> The customer feedback that we get is vital. We can have our own perception of customer service and think that we are giving a good service but what they (customers) actually think and feel is more important. This feedback shapes what we do, how we organise things and improve our service (B.D.M.,1993).

All branch B.D.Ms interviewed were "extremely satisfied" (B.D.M.,1993) with the reports they received on the basis of these questionnaires, and the high level of customer satisfaction that was achieved.

Personal branch management also stressed that they, and their teams, elicit customer feedback more informally:

> We monitor our service verbally. We ask customers from day-to-day, 'are you happy with the service you are getting ?'. I, or my staff, will ask somebody after we have dealt with a query, 'how long have you banked with us ?. Are you happy ?'. This way we might be able to resolve little underlying problems that they mightn't tell us about. If they've just come in to cash a £30 cheque but if you ask them, 'oh yes, so and so has always bothered me', 'why don't you come to this desk and we'll chat about it'. It's always nice to ask people direct although I know you don't get to see everybody (B.D.M.,1993)

Another major way in which the bank, at national level, anticipates and meets customer expectations is through market research to establish what these requirements are.

Recently, this research has focused upon customer views on, and expectations of, 'ethical banking'. From 1990-1992, the bank undertook five market research projects on 'ethical banking'. Three were qualitative - talking to small numbers of people in some detail, and two quantitative - in order to get "numbers behind the ideas" (The Co-operative Bank,1992b,p.1). The research was intended to ascertain customer (both existing and potential) support for an ethical banking policy. "The majority (of respondents) - 84% - believed that it was a good idea for The Co-operative Bank to have a clear ethical policy; only 5% felt that ethical issues had nothing to do with banking...the issues that mattered most (to respondents) were:

human rights; armaments exports to oppressive regimes; animal exploitation; environmental damage; fur trade; manufacture of tobacco products" (The Co-operative Bank,1992b,p.3). As a result of these apparent customer concerns, in May 1992, the bank published an ethical policy stating clearly with whom it will and will not conduct business - i.e. invest customers' money:

> Based on the very positive feedback from the bank's largest ever research programme, it was agreed not to invest in or provide financial services to oppressive regimes, companies involved in the manufacturing or supplying of armaments to such regimes, tobacco manufacture, animal experimentation for cosmetics, exploitative factory farming, blood sports, production of animal fur or environmental pollution...the bank's refusal to speculate against the pound when sterling reached crisis point on 16th September (1992), soon became part of our ethical policy. Then and now the bank undertook only to deal for customers with genuine international trading requirements (The Co-operative bank, 1992c,p.1).

Managerial Supervision

Co-operative Bank management claim that managerial supervision is an important mechanism for ensuring that quality customer service is actually delivered.

Branch managerial supervision is often accomplished through simple observation of the banking labour process. For example, personal team managers often 'floor walk' in order to ensure that quality service is, on the surface, being delivered -

that, for instance, there are sufficient cashiers on the counter to service customers. However:

> I'm not necessarily looking to catch them out when I observe. On the contrary, I am looking for things to praise them about. I think that was a problem in the past, certainly when I was an old-fashioned bank clerk - we didn't get praised, only pulled up about things. People forget how important and motivating praise can be. If I do tell them things, I am only trying to help, improve their work...fortunately we work so well here, I don't have to point problems out very often. They sort them out without me (B.D.M.,1993).

Another way in which branch management claim that they evaluate the quality of customer service provided by the personal team is through observing the accuracy of clerks' administrative work. Particular attention is paid to whether clerks are able to 'balance' their work at the end of each day:

> If clerks don't balance on an evening that is worrying. It could be an indication that they are working under alot of pressure, they're rushing their job. We have to ask questions why. Is there not enough people on the counter to cover ? Have they not organised work amongst themselves effectively ? That kind of thing. Ultimately, if they are rushing their job, they will not be able to spend time with customers and effectively

> meet their requirements. That is no good to us (C.S.M.,1992).

Targets

Personal branch managers are in possession of a customer service manual which sets out national targets for the delivery of quality customer service. These targets include: the length of time (three rings) within which all telephone calls must be answered; that the sales desk be manned *(sic)* whenever staff are available; the length of time customers are permitted to wait in a queue (no longer than three minutes); the amount of complaints per branch per year; and a branch revenue target for the sale of bank products (11).

The branch is evaluated according to these targets largely through the annual questionnaire sent to customers and through 'spot checks' from head office:

> We do have mystery shoppers that visit the branches...from head office...we are not frightened of them coming into the branches, at the end of the day, we feel we are doing everything the best we can. They may pop into the branch today, we do not know. Someone from head office may ring tomorrow but we are not worried about that because at the end of the day, the phone gets answered within three rings (B.D.M.,1993).

Head office 'mystery shoppers' and the customer questionnaire also evaluate the 'softer' aspects of quality service such as staff attitudes, appearance, dialogue and teamwork.

These targets are applied at *branch* level, they are not explicitly applied to the work of individual clerks. Personal

management argued that the targets are "guided down to individual members of staff. They have an idea of what our branch targets are and what we are aiming to meet" (B.D.M.,1993). These targets are communicated in the meetings described above. In particular, within staff appraisals, clerks are given specific projects to work upon. The extent to which they achieve these targets form part of their staff reports and annual appraisal which, in turn, can shape their promotion opportunities. However, it remains that the work of branch clerks, and their remuneration, is not measured in terms of these targets.

The Case for Research

It can be clearly seen from the above that the principles of marketization and T.Q.M. are shaping the labour process of Co-operative Bank branch clerks. There has been a definite move towards a 'sales' labour process from a 'traditional' clerical role. Moreover, these trends have been directly stimulated by competitive pressures as outlined in relation to banking more generally within chapter two. Many of these competitive pressures, exerted upon The Co-operative Bank, have resulted from the legal deregulation of financial services. There is also evidence, specifically at The Co-operative Bank, of the segmentation of the labour force (see note 5) and the implementation of recent I.C.T. as important facilitators of T.Q.M. and marketization, while employment reduction has been a significant consequence.

The technology utilised within the branches was described by management as "second to none within the banking industry - it's absolutely superb" (R.M.,1993). It was argued by management that it has developed considerably in recent years:

> The technology that we utilise has come on tremendously in recent years...it has left

> some of us behind. The information that this generates relating to individual customer accounts, even from a couple of years ago where you were still maintaining a lot of paper records, it's improved beyond recognition to be quite honest...the information that is stored is quite phenomenal (C.S.M.,1992).

The information that is provided, extremely quickly, in relation to customer accounts, mortgage advice, loan applications, pension advice means that customer service clerks are able to interact directly with customers and provide a fast and efficient, 'on the spot' service:

> There is nothing worse than historically having a file that is inches thick and going through that file looking for information and everything because it takes up so much time, it looks so much better, is better and more satisfying for the customer when you actually have it all to hand (B.D.M.,1993).

In a similar fashion to marketized T.S.A. work at B.A., this allows more space and time for interaction with customers which *potentially* increases employee discretion.

It can also be argued that, in common with much marketized financial services work (see chapter two), the exigencies of the labour and product markets generate feelings of insecurity amongst Co-operative Bank employees. It was suggested in chapter two that such feelings can restrict the exercise of workplace discretion, especially negative discretion.

Marketization, restructuring and the introduction of T.Q.M. has itself involved a significant reduction in personnel. Within the branches studies, staff numbers have been

drastically reduced. At the Sunderland branch, in 1990, there were 26 full-time clerks including cashiers, personal advisors, commercial clerks, administrative staff and office juniors. By 1992, this had been reduced to 12 personal and commercial agents spread over two sites. In Durham, in 1989, there were 24 full-time clerks, occupying similar roles to those at Sunderland. By 1992, there were only eight full-time clerks. It is true that many of these former branch clerks who "it was felt were not suited to becoming sales-orientated, customer service clerks" (R.M.,1992) did actually remain within the bank and were relocated to the administration centres, such as Regional Processing and Regional Security. However, "a significant number were...unfortunately made redundant...they were no longer what the bank exactly needed" (R.M.,1992). It is safe to assume that such an environment is hardly likely to engender a sense of job security amongst remaining branch clerks.

All levels of Co-operative Bank management were keen to stress that marketization and T.Q.M. were very much ongoing phenomena. This sense of constant change and development, which management see as an inevitable consequence of a perceived constantly changing and uncertain external world, is likely to heighten fears amongst employees concerning their uncertain future:

> People are naturally worried when there is a restructuring, how it is going to affect them and their long term futures, what is going to come for them as an individual... we've really all just got to accept this as almost a fact of life because the bank, to be fair, now is going through constant restructuring (R.M.,1992).

The continual encouragement for customers to use the A.M.C. rather than the branches, reflected in the recent deliberate attempt to eradicate current accounts based within specific branches and replace them with current accounts which are based at the A.M.C., in an effort to enhance the speed and efficiency of customer service does not bode well for the future of the branch clerk. In many ways, such developments have been enabled by the implementation of I.C.T. at the A.M.C., such as that which links up with many private and public companies enabling customers to pay bills instantly over the telephone. Therefore, the expansion of operations undertaken there does not automatically mean that numbers employed at the A.M.C. will increase. One manager of a R.P.C., formerly a branch manager, argued that:

> I think we are seeing the first steps towards the demise of bank branches...it's very sad but I think with technology developing, we will see people being gradually replaced by machines, these people (branch clerks) will not exist, there will just be a hole in the wall where people will be able to do all their banking, or even they will do it from home on a television screen or a computer or a telephone...there may be a central admin. centre but that will be it...The Co-op is usually ahead of the others in most developments and we are ahead on this, which I'm not sure I'm happy about in the sense of our 24 hours telephone banking...that has taken many branch jobs away already (R.P.C. Manager,1993).

In many senses then, we can argue that bank clerks at The Co-operative Bank face a "wall of darkness" (Weir (1973)) as far as their organisational future is concerned. This, it is

argued, can seriously limit clerks autonomous disposition within the workplace.

The labour process of personal branch clerks at The Co-operative Bank constitutes a case where 'traditional' clerical work within banking has been marketized through the introduction of T.Q.M. It is also claimed that these employees have been simultaneously 'empowered'.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CORRESPONDENCE CLERKS, NATIONAL SAVINGS, DURHAM

The third labour process selected is the work of Death Claims Correspondence Clerks at the Durham branch of National Savings (1). This was chosen as a case of non-marketized, 'old' clerical work. The research was conducted between August 1993 and September 1994.

The Development of National Savings in Durham

The National Savings movement, which originates as one movement from 1916, has two main elements: the National Savings Board and Post Office Savings. As part of the Civil Service, the aim of the movement is to help central government meet fluctuating funding obligations. The movement is regulated by the Treasury and funds the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (P.S.B.R.) of central government.

The labour process chosen is located within the Post Office Savings Division of the movement. Specifically, the Durham site is concerned with the Post Office Savings Certificate Division (S.C.D.) of National Savings. The first series of National Savings Certificates were issued in 1916. The division was re-located from London to Durham during the period 1963-1969 (see Hammond (1968)).

Since world war two, National Savings, and especially the S.C.D., have operated within an increasingly competitive environment. During this period, National Savings has had to compete with increasing channels of investment for personal savings, as well as with the direct purchase of stocks and shares. Within the National Savings sector itself, Savings

Certificates have had to compete with the development of many other products, such as Premium Savings Bonds, Defence Bonds, National Development Bonds, and the Trustee Savings Banks. As documented previously (2), the competitive nature of the financial services industry has intensified fiercely over the past fifteen years.

Savings Certificates are still the largest of the various channels of National Savings. The S.C.D. in Durham deals with twenty million customers - i.e. holders of Savings Certificates. It also deals with holders of other post office products, such as Save As You Earn (S.A.Y.E.) bonds and Pay As You Earn bonds (P.A.Y.E.) (3). The majority of the work at the Durham centre involves dealing with holders of savings certificates.

In the late 1980s the S.C.D. employed 3,000 people. Despite dramatic reduction of employee numbers to 1,600, as one would expect of such a large-scale civil service organisation, it is currently split into large departments which are sub-divided further. The major departments of the S.C.D. are: Repayments, Purchases, Correspondence, Training Services and Holdings.

The Correspondence Department, S.C.D.

The labour process chosen is located within the Correspondence department of the S.C.D. This department is headed by one overall manager/principal. The department is divided into three branches: Death Claims Correspondence (D.C.C.); General Correspondence; and Repayments Correspondence.

Death Claims Correspondence

The purpose of this branch is to deal with all correspondence relating to claims made on savings certificates by those

acting on behalf of deceased owners. The overall aim of the branch is to ensure that certificates are either transferred or repayed to those who are legally entitled to such benefit. This can embroil D.C.C. clerks within complex legal disputes.

The Structure of the Branch

The management and work of the branch is hierarchically structured. The branch is headed by one overall manager (Senior Executive Officer (S.E.O.). S/he is then followed by four Correspondence Managers (C.M.). These are also termed Higher Executive Officers (H.E.O.) on an organisation-wide basis. Correspondence Managers are immediately responsible for fourteen Executive Officers (E.O.), forty two Administrative Officers (A.O.) and twenty eight Administrative Assistants (A.A.) (4). The S.E.O., manager of D.C.C., was male at the time of the research. All four C.Ms within the D.C.C were male. Out of fourteen E.Os, only two were female, while women constituted twenty eight of the forty two A.Os and twenty six of the twenty eight A.As.

The branch is divided into fourteen sections, numbered two to fifteen. These sections consist of one E.O., three A.Os and two A.As (5). Each section is responsible to one C.M. One C.M. manages three or four sections. The sections are seated in two rows within one long, open plan office. Each section sits together - all facing one another. The C.Ms office is situated out of sight of the 'shop floor'. It is the employees within the fourteen sections - A.As, A.Os and E.Os - which are the prime focus of this aspect of the research.

The Labour Process

At the head of the shop floor is a registration section. This is staffed by four A.Os and one office junior. The main function of this section is to sort and record within the

computer system all incoming correspondence (both written and verbal) relating to death claims - claims for a deceased's savings certificates or the value of those certificates. The stock of incoming correspondence is renewed and 'pigeon holed' every hour of each working day by the office junior.

Each item of correspondence is recorded on a standard record card by an A.O. within the registration section. Cards are then distributed, in equal numbers, to A.As within the sections. The A.A. keys in all relevant information from the card into a computer system. This operation involves various 'checks', undertaken by the A.A., including whether the case has already been registered and whether the individuals concerned (the deceased and the applicant(s)) have any other certificate holdings. Each piece of correspondence relating to a new claim then becomes a 'case' and is allocated a 'case number' by the computer system. One A.O. within the registration section also deals with 'general' claims enquiries over the telephone.

The computer system distributes an equal number of cases to each A.O. within the sections. The case is given a number which attaches it to one particular A.O. on one particular section. The corresponding cards are delivered accordingly. Each case becomes the responsibility of one A.O. and must be dealt with by that particular officer. Thus, every A.O., and every section, has an identical workload in terms of numbers of cases.

Each A.O. sees every case as it is allocated to them by card. They are expected to re-check the checks which have been made by the keying operator (A.A.) and they are required to note, on the case card, any further administrative checks/tasks which need to be undertaken by A.As located within the A.Os section. Importantly, A.Os note the date on which the enquiry was received and then 'date' the claim at twenty one days

later. The A.O. aims to reply to the customer within this time period. As explained below, this demand of the D.C.C. clerk's labour process developed during the research period.

Each case is 'opened' by an A.A. on the particular section to which it has been allocated. They undertake all administrative work concerned with the case before it is passed back to the A.O. responsible for processing it further. The tasks undertaken by A.As, in relation to each case, can involve: 'tracing' the certificates concerned - either from the computer system or manually retrieving the actual certificates from the holdings file as they may not have been converted onto the computer system; calculating the value to which the claimant is entitled (this can be a complex procedure); checking the legal entitlement of the claimant (for instance some certificates may have been 'nominated' to another person which takes precedence over the will of the deceased or a grant of probate); addressing envelopes for the A.Os reply to the enquiry/claim; checking for any anomalies (for example, in some cases dates on the certificates quoted by the claimant do not match those recorded on the computer system or in the holdings file). All of this work is further recorded on the 'case card'.

The major task of the A.O., when receiving the case from the A.A., is to process a reply to the correspondence of the claimant. In some cases, this may well involve 'keying' a repayment into the computer system or 'keying' a transfer to change a particular holding. Both operations will also entail issuing a warrant to the claimant. However, in relation to the majority of cases, A.Os are involved in corresponding with the claimant to request further information in order to proceed with the claim.

Correspondence is of two types. A 'substantive' reply is when the D.C.C. branch has processed all the information

available, has replied to the claimant with a valuation of the holding and to advise options available, and is awaiting their response. The generation of a substantive reply often involves undertaking a number of complex tasks. For example, each certificate holding has a unique value. The value can depend upon, among other things: the time at which the certificates were purchased; the interest rate at that particular time; the rate at which the certificates were set to 'mature'; whether they have matured or not; and the interest rate at the time of maturation or the time of the claim. The creation of an appropriate substantive reply can demand the exercise of considerable skill and discretion. An 'interim' reply is when the D.C.C. branch corresponds with the claimant to request further information for a 'substantive' response to be made. Often, D.C.C. clerks become involved within legal disputes as to who the legitimate claimant of savings certificates actually is. They are often required to use their skill and discretion to adjudicate within such cases:

> You get all sorts of cases, we had one the other day where this bloke was a murderer and he was claiming part of an estate, we have to get involved in disputes like that...you wouldn't believe the amount of times somebody dies and somebody'll say 'they're (the savings certificates) mine' and somebody else in the family'll say 'no they're not, they're mine' and you have to get involved in all sorts of disputes like that (E.O.,1994).

Despite the fact that cases are allocated to sections and to A.Os in equal *numbers*, cases can clearly vary in terms of complexity, length and volume of correspondence between clerk and claimant. Once a case has been allocated to a particular A.O. within a particular section, then the 'completion' of

this case - the transfer or repayment of savings certificates held by a deceased person to those who are legally entitled to receive such benefit - becomes the responsibility of that A.O. However, as one E.O. stated, "This can take anything from two minutes to eight months - depending on what is involved" (E.O.,1994).

Attached to the case number within the computer system, on the case card and on all correspondence relating to the case, is the reference number of the A.O. responsible for that case. All future correspondence is automatically directed to, and expected to be dealt with by, that same A.O.

The bulk of the work demanded by the D.C.C. branch labour process is undertaken by A.As, A.Os and E.Os. C.Ms are largely involved in supervising this operation.

Hierarchies of Discretion

The objective of the branch and thus, the work of the S.E,O., the C.Ms, the E.Os, A.Os and A.As is to ensure that savings certificates are either cashed by, or transferred to, those who are legally entitled to benefit. Savings certificates are distributed as part of the assets of the estate of a deceased person. As a team, each *section* undertakes all necessary tasks to *complete* the claims for which they are responsible. The only task undertaken outside of the branch, in connection with a death claim, is the *printing* of the 'warrant' to enable claimants to cash certificates, and the *printing* of correspondence letters often requesting information or warrants confirming the transfer of certificates to another person. The decision to issue a warrant, and who to issue it to, is taken within the branch. Similarly, the contents of correspondence letters are drafted and written within the branch.

The bulk of the work of a D.C.C. clerk, from A.As through to E.Os, involves answering telephone calls or letters from claimants of an estate. These claimants - or those acting on their behalf, often solicitors - usually request information as to how to proceed with a death claim.

Legal Constraints

Importantly, the labour process of D.C.C. branch clerks operates within legal constraints. The first fact about a case which is checked and recorded by A.A.'s and A.O.'s is the value of the savings certificates held by the deceased. If this value is over £5,000, claimants of the estate are legally bound to obtain a 'grant of probate' or a 'letter of administration' from the courts in order to prove their entitlement to the certificates of the deceased. As one E.O. pointed out:

> This fact is non-negotiable, they *have* to obtain a grant of probate whatever their circumstances. It costs them (claimants) money so they try and avoid it but there is nothing we can do however sorry we may feel for them (E.O.,1994)

The manager of the D.C.C. branch estimated that sixty per cent of applications ended up with the claimant producing a grant of probate or letter of administration. "This can take months, you get an application in, you reply to it and then the thing goes quiet, there's nothing you can do until they act - a claim can take months to sort" (Manager,D.C.C.,1994)

The £5,000 threshold is also important for the internal processing of death claims and the hierarchical nature of the labour process. According to D.C.C. branch management, any claims for repayment or transfer of certificates valuing over

this amount must be authorized by the E.O. situated within the section in which the A.O. dealing with the case is located. If the value of the certificates is under £5,000, in some cases, the certificates can be repayed or transferred immediately by A.Os without the authorization of the E.O. The manager of the D.C.C. department labelled this responsibility of A.O.'s as an area of 'risk taking':

> A high proportion of the values is over £5,000... If it's an under £5,000, you then have to work out what risks you are going to take...when I was a lad ...I actually was a Correspondence Clerk in Death Claims, this is back in the 60's the mid-60's and the formality you had to go through was terrific, you know, you had to produce a statutory declaration which you went to your J.P. or a Commissioner and you had to sign this, 'I, you know' and you had to sign this as that the holder of these certificates, there's the registration document to prove it, and they died on so and so and there the same person is mentioned in the certificate of death you know and in his *(sic)* marriage certificate and all sorts of, and these documents had to be typed out, signed by the claimant, a whole load of clart ! A lot more risk taking now...Quite a high proportion of the work, probably two-thirds, comes from professional agencies - solicitors, banks, accountants...we take a risk on that. For the stuff that is non-grant, we just say well okay, there's the money. They are covered by a code of practice so if the solicitor had his hand in the till then that's you know, he's going to cop it in the neck (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

Thus, for claims under £5,000 which are made by a 'professional agent' on behalf of a claimant, A.Os can immediately 'key' a repayment to the applicant or a transfer

of certificates to the applicant's name. 'Personal' claims for a value under £5,000 are an ambiguous area and the process for dealing with such claims appears to depend upon the approach of the particular E.O. within the specific section concerned. Some E.Os suggested that total discretion when dealing with, and resolving, such claims is exercised by A.Os. Other E.Os stated that they set an informal threshold, *within the section*, such as £1,000, above which the E.O. must authorize repayment or transfer.

In all cases, death claims must at least be supported by the original certificates (6), a copy of the deceased's will or a letter from a 'professional agent'. There are no *precise* managerial prescriptions for dealing with claims under £5,000 however. Their legitimacy is left to the discretion of Correspondence Clerks. All activities undertaken have to be recorded on the case card and on the computer system.

For cases involving certificates valuing over £5,000, case correspondence is often dealt with by A.O.'s. For final completion, however, these cases are passed on to the E.O. within the section. According to branch management, only the E.O. can authorize the cashing or transfer of certificates between the value of £5,000 and £20,000. In respect of cases involving certificates valuing over £20,000, branch management claimed that these are all passed on to C.Ms who can authorize the cashing and transfer of such holdings.

Managerial Supervision

Alongside different levels of clerical worker discretion is a multi-layered, and in some aspects newly-emerging managerial supervisory process. Some of the mechanisms for managerial supervision were introduced *during* the research period.

In addition to the checking, completion and authorization of cases between £5,000 and £20,000, a process which was present at the commencement of the research process, E.Os are now also involved in random checks on the work of A.Os on cases involving certificate holdings of under £5,000. Further, C.Ms randomly check the work of E.Os on cases between £5,000 and £20,000. The D.C.C. manager is also involved in random checks of the work of C.Ms on cases over £20,000. The cases to be checked are randomly selected by the computer system. This initiative was introduced during the research period. Thus, as the manager of the D.C.C. points out:

> Certain things...have percentage checks, like quality control checks. Now X per cent will be seen by the person at the next level and the system selects the percentage...so it's random...it's a true quality check...if you are doing a case, you don't know if the system is going to flag that case and push it out to your supervisor to be looked at (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

Furthermore, personal, direct supervision has always been available to E.Os in relation to the work of A.Os and A.As. For example, in relation to the interaction of A.Os and customers over the telephone, "they (A.Os and E.Os) are all close together...if you are on the phone your E.O. might say 'can I just have a word with you, I think maybe the tone was not right there', these are managers that are out there because they are sitting with the team" (Manager,D.C.C.,1994). Much of this type of supervision is actually informal and is an area of discretion open to E.Os. It often depends upon their particular idiosyncrasies.

Also, D.C.C. branch management claimed that E.Os will run a weekly check on the work of A.Os. They run through their draw of work and raise questions if few claims have been processed,

why there has been a delay in a particular case or if work has not been 'managed' effectively:

> As a clerk you have to manage the job, sort of like, I'll do that one next because the tone of the letter says that if they are not going to get a quick reply they might be on to me (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

Targets

According to D.C.C. management, an objective of the supervisory process is now to ensure the meeting of branch targets. Once again, these targets are a managerial initiative which was introduced during the research period. The targets relate to both 'output of work' and 'customer satisfaction'.

Firstly, there is now a branch target for *output* - the amount of cases that are completed from the original application to the eventual transfer or cashing of savings certificates.

This target is based upon a study by the Staff Inspection Department of National Savings, Durham. The branch has a target for complete claims for each month of the year. This is set by the staff inspector. This overall target is then broken down into targets for each separate section. There are no individual targets for D.C.C. correspondence clerks.

Secondly, the D.C.C. branch has a target in 'turnaround time' which aims to ensure 'customer satisfaction'. Interestingly, many managerial staff and clerks noted that the label 'customer' had only recently been applied by senior management to people who were traditionally known as claimants:

> Perhaps it is to do with the more competition that is effecting us, I

> don't know, but we do seem to be treating people more as customers now ...in the past we would never have tried to answer things in a period of time, we took as long as it took (C.M.,1994).

Through meeting its 'turnaround time' targets, the branch aims to ensure that all claimants receive a 'substantive' response to their claim within twenty one days, and that ninety five per cent of claims receive such a reply within eighteen days. If interim correspondence has to take place, clerks can add seven days, in addition to the stipulated twenty one days, to the target date by which a substantive response must be received by the claimant. These customer satisfaction targets are measured weekly and in relation to Correspondence Managers' areas of responsibility. Thus, A.As, A.Os and E.Os are not formally measured as to their *individual* performance in relation to these targets. They *are* each sampled and asked to record on a form the number of interim and substantive replies they have issued that day.

The targets are seen as meeting claimants' expectations and are viewed as 'realistic'. Management pointed out that the customer satisfaction targets are not continually lowered in order to try and increase levels of customer satisfaction:

> There is an argument which says a target should be challenging, that's not the purpose of it...there is no point in saying a customer should expect to get in 5 days if half the time you were going to go over the 5 days and it would mean that half your cases were potential complaints (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

The work of D.C.C. correspondence clerks is also now regulated through customer complaints. "As soon as a customer complains, this is jumped upon - they *must* be avoided" (Manager,D.C.C.,1994). Any customer complaint becomes a priority for the section responsible. Complainants are replied to instantly.

It must be noted how management felt that customer expectations may well shape the labour process of D.C.C. correspondence clerks more comprehensively in the future. As the research was being completed, the branch was about to survey all its customers on the level of service they feel that they receive. "This may well throw up things that we will then try and work on and implement" (C.M.,1994).

Worker Autonomy

Clearly, we can expect different grades of death claims correspondence clerks to experience differing degrees of discretion within the labour process.

The autonomy of A.As would appear to be severely restricted. Their role is confined to keying relevant information from each case card and undertaking various checks and administrative procedures as outlined above. However, as suggested, although each task undertaken (for example tracing appropriate certificates or calculating the values to which claimants are entitled) may involve the exercise of discretion, the results of each task are re-checked and thus closely supervised by an A.O. This may well restrict the discretion which A.As feel they can exercise within the labour process.

It can be suggested that A.Os and E.Os have scope for significant discretion over both the substantive service being provided to claimants and over the *way* in which that service

is provided. Both are able to exercise discretion over the transfer, or payment to the value, of certain savings certificates to claimants. They are also able, it seems, to exercise discretion through advising claimants of their options in relation to such transactions. The discretionary nature of these clerical roles is certainly claimed by D.C.C. branch management:

> As an A.O., this is a very popular branch to be in. I think perhaps there's more freedom for the individual A.O. to carry the case right the way through from beginning to end, without anybody else being on it... as long as it didn't exceed the value levels, it should improve even more because we are looking to seriously raise those levels, double or treble them and give them even more responsibility (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

> E.Os have a lot of decision-making to do and a lot of power I suppose...they are virtually left to get on with their job, they know what they are doing, they make their decisions...their work is very rarely supervised or checked in reality (C.M.,1994).

It was claimed by D.C.C. branch management, and recognised by managerial staff within other departments of the Durham centre, that the correspondence department involved the most challenging and discretionary clerical work and furthermore, D.C.C. branch clerks are the most autonomous within this department:

Possibly in a day, I don't know clerks may deal with sixty cases, eighty cases, a hundred cases and each one of them is different and can be very complex involving difficult decisions. You get little short handlings and you get long ones. This is the difference between here and the other correspondence branches. There, it tends to be a letter in, you do any referencing you want and you compose a reply and it goes and that's the end of the thing. Ours tends to be little nibbles right the way through over a period of months ...if you look at it, we've probably got something like twelve thousand cases out there...each one is different, involves far more decisions from our clerks than the type of correspondence dealt with by the other branches... it's all part of a legal process out there, you are waiting for replies and when they come they can be very complex (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

There are a fair number of straightforward cases, but you always have to be aware of the potential difficulties. This is one of the differences of the death claims side. In general correspondence, you get a case in and you say, this case is to do with lost certificates. You start off a death claims case, they all start off the same, but they end up going through different routes, they all become different, and they go through different routes because, for example,

> the records don't match, the customer's records, or they may change direction because of the legal aspect. Somebody may have nominated the certificates but the person who they've nominated them to, because it was so long ago, they would be 120 years old, so where are they ? Who is entitled ? There's all sorts of things like that and really it's up to the clerk to sort these things out (C.M.,1994).

It must be noted though that developing forms of managerial supervision within the D.C.C., in the form of 'targets' and random 'quality checks' may well severely limit the above employee discretion. As the manager of the D.C.C. branch put it, "there's a lot of change afoot, I can't keep up with it" (1994).

It would also seem that both A.Os and E.Os exercise autonomy over the nature of social interaction between themselves and claimants - both the content and the form of that written and verbal social interaction. Management argued that there was very little attempt to control the nature of this social interaction. Its course was very much left to the discretion of clerks:

> Customer care is seen as important now, we are supposed to be aware of the different needs of customers and meet these through our written replies and our telephone conversations...that's something that I never have any worry about...never worry about that because I know that's something I know the staff are all good at, dealing with customers and everything...I mean we

> get bunches of flowers arriving and thank-you letters, just sort of saying, you know, 'I thought your Mrs. so and so dealt with me very sympathetically and guided me through that' and that's something that, I don't think it matters what central government does to the civil service, I don't think that's something that will suffer...we don't really feel the need to actually monitor staff dealing with customers in any formal way (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

The form of social interaction can be seen as especially important when delivering a service to claimants who are often recently bereaved, and obviously distressed, relatives and friends of the deceased.

The Case for Research

It must be pointed out that this case was originally selected because it was seen as a non-marketized, 'old' clerical labour process with which to compare and contrast the newer forms of work described earlier. However, as the research unfolded, it became clear that what is an essentially information-based, rather than sales, labour process has *not* been immune from the influence of marketization processes (in a similar way to many other aspects of the public sector (Pinch (1989); Halford and Savage (1995)).

Developing managerial initiatives, such as work targets, quality checks and a customer complaint programme have been partly triggered by competitive pressures and are constraining, rather than enhancing, worker autonomy. Although not specifically implementing T.Q.M., National Savings management would appear to have been effected by the power of

the discourse of enterprise and the culture of the customer outlined in chapter three.

Nevertheless, it can still be argued that the D.C.C. labour process represents the older form of non-marketized clerical work as opposed to the newer form. Certainly, despite an insecure local labour market, the internal position of D.C.C. clerks is relatively secure. The increasingly competitive nature of the product market (the financial services industry),and the pressures exerted upon National Savings, are noted above. One can also note a dramatic reduction in employees within the Durham centre. However, *D.C.C.* employee numbers have remained static during reduction within the organisation as a whole. Branch management argued that this can be explained by the fact that the volume of business - i.e. claimants contacting the D.C.C. branch has increased, rather than decreased, since the late 1980s:

> I suppose we are lucky here in a way... our pool of customers is not really going to reduce. In fact, as the population gets older, it sounds morbid, but more people are likely to be dying and...don't forget that older people are more likely to have savings certificates...everybody had them in the old days as a matter of course...what we have also found, 'cos people actually look into this believe it or not...is more people make claims as times get harder... they can be looking for more and more ways of getting money...you'd be surprised how many thousands of people don't know they're entitled to savings certificates, or they

> don't bother to claim their entitlement...well, they seem to be bothering more nowadays (C.M.,1994).

As a result of this actual increase in claimants and correspondence concerning death claims, the D.C.C. branch has escaped the large-scale reduction of employees that has affected many other departments within the Durham centre.

D.C.C. management also suggested that the majority of clerks within the branch, especially A.Os and E.Os were vastly experienced in terms of service within the Durham centre. In fact, it was suggested that the majority of A.Os and E.Os had been working within the centre for over twenty years:

> We, and I suppose the correspondence branches generally, seem to be the place where people come after they've been everywhere else in the building...it's probably 'cos you have to know quite a lot, you have to know all the different quirks which dealing with our products can throw up...the correspondence departments are the most sought after in the building 'cos they are the most enjoyable and varied and 'cos they are the most secure...once people get in here, they don't seem to leave until they retire ! (C.M.,1994).

Management argued that the experienced and senior (in terms of time served) nature of the clerks within the D.C.C. branch meant that such employees were the least likely to be affected by attempts to make public sector organisations such as

National Savings more 'competitive' which often entails massive staff redundancies.

Thus, it can be suggested that correspondence clerks are likely to experience relative job security, insulation from the exigencies of the labour and product markets. This, we can tentatively suggest, can promote rather than constrain clerical worker autonomy.

The work of D.C.C. clerks has been effected by the introduction of new office technology. The most profound development has been the recent and ongoing transfer of 'paper holdings' (records of savings certificates held) to 'computerised holdings' - a process yet to be completed. The database being created was known organisationally as 'the system'. This means that information relating to any particular holding can be accessed more easily and rapidly:

> It has increased the access of everybody to the information that we hold and has actually increased the number of people who are able to make decisions about who is entitled to what and how much... less of a clerk's time is spent actually finding a holding and working out the entitlement, we can spend time assessing the best options for the right people... we can also respond to people more quickly (C.M.,1994).

> As we've changed from a sort of manual records system to a database records, the need for checks at a higher level in a lot of cases...goes, because it was all to do with having paper records, pieces of paper that either people

> could get wrong or they could manipulate to their own ends, I mean a lot of that disappears because every time you go into that system, everything you do in that is recorded against you...you've got to put a personal identity number in and a password and this password, you've got to keep changing every thirty days otherwise it'll block you out...the database record takes a lot of the risks of these little pieces of paper, losing them or getting it wrong. It takes the risks away and allows you to give more decision making and responsibility to lower levels (Manager,D.C.C.,1994).

It must be noted that some managerial staff within various departments of the Durham centre of National Savings noted how the introduction of new office technology had actually replaced much human labour, accounting for some of the reduction in employees mentioned above. Moreover, despite the fact that the implementation of new technology may have removed many 'routine' functions from the D.C.C. labour process, there was no suggestion that this had facilitated an increased organisational attention, or more time devoted, to clerk-customer interaction. There was more of a managerial emphasis upon the way in which the new technology enabled a faster response to a greater volume of customers.

However, as already outlined above, social interaction, both written and verbal, between D.C.C. clerks and claimants is the predominant aspect of the labour process. It will be remembered that we have already argued that this is the most

autonomous dimension of many clerical labour processes. It is suggested above that D.C.C. clerks are able to exercise considerable discretion over both the content and the form of social interaction. In particular, there is very little managerial control over the form of social interaction and thus no formal organisational requirement for clerks to engage in emotional labour.

It is important to point out that D.C.C. clerks at Durham are represented by the Civil and Public Service Association (C.P.S.A.) and the National Union of Civil And Public Servants (N.U.C.A.P.S.).

Having outlined our empirical cases, we shall now report upon our empirical findings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

T.Q.M.: WORKER AUTONOMY OR MANAGERIAL CONTROL ?

The literature on T.Q.M. is divided between those who argue that it 'empowers' workers, effecting employee discretion (see chapter three), and an emergent critical literature, some of which argues that T.Q.M. achieves the exact opposite - "the exercise of minute (managerial) control" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.271). This thesis will argue, along with other critical T.Q.M. theorists (Kerfoot and Knights (1995); Tuckman (1995)), that this debate is over-simplified and over-polarised. Both positions underestimate the complexity of the workplace impact of T.Q.M. initiatives. It is the critical paradigm of T.Q.M. analysis to which the argument of this thesis will contribute. However, even the discussions of Kerfoot and Knights (1995) and Tuckman (1995) lack empirical depth (1).

The Erosion of Work Autonomy ?

It is argued by some (Sewell and Wilkinson (1992)) that T.Q.M. is the most recent, and most effective, of managerial strategies to secure control of the labour process (2). It was argued in chapter one that 'managerial control' is one of the major *structures* of the capitalist, patriarchal labour process, which both constrains and enables human agency. It is often suggested that managerial control 'strategies' are variable and contradictory *within* work organisations (Hyman (1987); Thompson (1989), (1990); Watson (1994)) (3).

Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) suggest that managerial 'strategies' for control of the labour process, however contradictory, inherently involve attempts at *surveillance* of the workforce. Drawing explicitly upon the work of Foucault

(1977), they argue that surveillance is intimately connected to the exercise of power - "especially in the context of the practical undertakings of control in...formalised social systems", modes of regularising activities in time and space, which include work organisations (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.272).

Sewell and Wilkinson utilise a Foucauldian analytical framework to explain the implementation of T.Q.M. They especially focus upon the concept of the "Panopticon" (Foucault (1977)). Foucault draws the concept of the Panopticon as a form of surveillance, in turn crucial to the external control of human activity, from the work of Jeremy Bentham (1962). For Bentham, the Panopticon refers to an architectronic machine which was the ideal model of a prison in the eighteenth century:

> Briefly, the Panopticon as described by Bentham comprises a central observation tower surrounded by a concentric ring of peripheral cells. Observers reside in the tower and can gaze directly into every cell. Meanwhile, these cells are only open to the front, where the incarcerated individual has a clear view of the tower but is shut off from contact with any other inmates... the implications that derive from the ideas behind the Panopticon are profound for the construction and operation of any institution with an explicit or implicit hierarchy where the control of human activities in time and space is required. Bentham himself was confident that the *modus operandi* of the Panopticon could be generalised to many social

> institutions (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992, p.273).

The Panopticon engenders a particular surveillance process which effects total control over a subject population. Dandeker (1990) argues that the Panopticon facilitates the collection and storage of (useful) information, embodies the means of supervision (through instructions or physical architecture) and monitors behaviour and compliance with instructions. It means that:

> surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus (The Panopticon) should be a machine for creating and sustaining power relations independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the... (workers) should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers...The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad... (for the powerless) one is totally seen, without ever seeing...(for the powerful) one sees everything without being seen (Foucault,1977,pp.201-202) (4).

Sewell and Wilkinson go on to analyse different modes of workplace surveillance which are linked to particular managerial 'strategies' for organisation and control of the labour process and the constraint of employee autonomy. For example, they discuss the development of 'bureaucratic surveillance' during the early and middle part of the twentieth century, arguing that this constituted an "incomplete system of surveillance" (p.275). The 'dysfunctions

of bureaucracy' have been well documented (March and Simon (1958); Burns and Stalker (1961); Roy (1969)). Interestingly, for Sewell and Wilkinson, one of the major 'dysfunctions' (because bureaucratic regimes (5) involve an incomplete surveillance process) is the extent of worker autonomy present, much of which is exercised in a 'negative' (i.e. against the 'interests' of the organisation) *as well as* a 'positive' manner (to the benefit of management) (6).

In direct contrast to the arguments reviewed in chapter three, on the basis of empirical research within manufacturing industry (7), Sewell and Wilkinson argue that the introduction of T.Q.M. to work organisations is premised on "direct and detailed control, ideally 'total' control...characterised by a low degree of trust and strong management discipline...(and) characterised by systems of surveillance which more closely approximate the Panopticon than do those characteristic of the traditional bureaucratic pyramid" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992.pp.276-277). The authors accept that T.Q.M. principles entail "pushing responsibility downwards and the flattening of the hierarchy", however, "decentralisation of tactical responsibility occurs at the same time as strategic control is centralised...'responsibility' is devolved only under the condition of a strict monitoring of compliance with instructions" (pp.279-280). Such strict monitoring aims to ensure that the employee discretion facilitated by T.Q.M. is exercised in a positive rather than a negative manner.

For Sewell and Wilkinson, it is the surveillance processes integral to T.Q.M. implementation, enabled by advances in information technology, which consolidates centralised (managerial) control of the labour process and problematises those claims that T.Q.M. enhances employee autonomy within the employment relationship. Due to the very fact that T.Q.M. does involve the enhancement of worker autonomy during the completion of work tasks, according to Sewell and Wilkinson,

management require greater powers of surveillance to ensure that this discretion is being exercised in the 'correct' manner - i.e. not in 'damaging' or negative ways.

Clearly, in this context, the 'ideal' surveillance system would cover all the activities of every individual within an organisation. In the past, the development of this has been limited by the physical architecture of the workplace. However, simultaneous with the implementation of T.Q.M. is the development of surveillance systems which are:

> no longer constrained by the limitations of physical architecture - a Panoptic gaze which can penetrate walls and where the actual presence of the overseer is no longer required...the development and continued refinement of electronic surveillance systems using computer-based technology...provide...the possibility of...an *Electronic Panopticon*, where a disembodied eye can overcome the constraints of architecture and space to bring its disciplinary gaze to bear at the very heart of the labour process (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.283).

The purpose of the electronic Panopticon within T.Q.M. is to monitor employees' delivery of quality products/services to customers. These modern surveillance systems are able to trace 'defects' or 'poor quality' back to individual employees very rapidly. 'Negative sanctions' are often invoked to 'punish' such 'failure'. "In the same way that the Panopticon relied on the subjects of surveillance being aware that they were being watched...the knowledge that...basic work activity is subject to constant scrutiny...combined with the (possibility) of

immediate public humiliation...(accompanying) the exposure of their divergencies, invokes a powerful disciplinary force...the constant scrutiny of a Panoptic gaze which penetrates right to the very core of...(workers') subjectivity creates a climate where self-management is assured...the controlling function of middle management has...been incorporated into the consciousness of (workers)...In Foucault's terms...(they) have become bound up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,pp.283-284).

Thus, it is suggested that T.Q.M. does involve the delegation of responsibility and the expansion of employee autonomy, however the surveillance processes of T.Q.M. minimise the opportunity for such discretion to be exercised in a 'negative' direction. The same processes, and such "systems and techniques" (Boaden and Dale (1993)) as those outlined in chapter three, encourage the deployment of positive discretion. "Electronic surveillance...enables managers to reduce the negative divergences and exploit the positive divergences which individuals make (from managerial prescriptions)" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.287,my addition). Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) conclude that T.Q.M. regimes:

> do appear to offer certain advantages to capital over previous approaches, minimising problems associated with negative divergencies from management-defined norms and maximising the potential benefits that might accrue from positive divergencies ...(it) could be conceived of as a more efficient means of converting labour power into actual labour...it is the 'ownership'...or control of the means of surveillance - the mechanism of *Power/Knowledge* - that enables management

> to pursue a degree of devolution...
> whilst still retaining its authority
> (pp.286-287).

If one was to accept the above argument as the reality of T.Q.M. implementation, management (as agents of capital and patriarchy) would profit from both enhanced control of the labour process *and* the benefits (in terms of positive discretion) but not the damaging consequences (in terms of negative discretion) which flow from the exercise of employee autonomy which we have argued is inherent to every employment relationship within capitalist-patriarchal society. If this is the case, T.Q.M. represents the most sophisticated managerial attempt to date to solve its enduring 'control-engage' dilemma (Thompson (1989)) - addressing the seemingly irremediable dependence of capital upon labour (Cressey and McInnes (1980)). We could be witnessing the development of a strengthening asymmetry to the 'dual nature' of the clerical labour process, given that constraints to exercise mainly positive discretion begin to erode crucial aspects of work autonomy - *choice* over how, or whether, to undertake a particular task. An analysis of our empirical data will aid an assessment of this contention. The following chapters will also evaluate the impact of T.Q.M. upon patriarchal structures, and *female* experience within the workplaces studied. This aspect of T.Q.M. and the labour process is neglected by Sewell and Wilkinson.

CHAPTER NINE

THE DISCOURSE OF EMPOWERMENT 1: POSITIVE DISCRETION

The argument reviewed in the previous chapter contrasts sharply with the claims of both British Airways Newcastle Telephone Sales management and managerial staff at The Co-operative Bank. They argue that the introduction of T.Q.M. to their respective operations has enhanced clerical worker autonomy. In fact, if Sewell and Wilkinson's thesis is accepted, these claims (also advocated by those within the 'discourse of enterprise') can be reversed. We could expect analysis of our empirical data to reveal that the two cases where T.Q.M. *has* been introduced (B.A. and The Co-operative Bank) *minimize* clerical worker discretion, while the one site where T.Q.M. has *not* been introduced (National Savings), by comparison, actually provides considerable opportunity for the exercise of worker autonomy, particularly scope for 'negative' discretion.

We can now go beyond managerial, political and academic claims, discussing in detail the nature of managerial prescription and employee discretion which is embodied within the clerical case-studies selected.

Prescription and Discretion under T.Q.M.

Managements at B.A. and The Co-operative Bank claimed that the enhancement of worker autonomy is primarily enabled through the development of the 'systems and techniques' described in the previous chapter - selection and training, the form of work organisation, communication and participation. This ensures, it is argued, that the delivery of quality customer service, and thus the sale of products,

is largely the result of T.S.A. or bank clerk autonomy - their wisdom, judgement, expertise or "nous" (Jaques (1961)).

It was alleged by management that they may, to a certain extent, prescribe the delivery of both technical and functional aspects of quality service. Thus, they instruct, and expect clerks to display, certain product knowledge (i.e. the range of tickets operated by B.A. throughout the world or the various insurance products offered by The Co-operative Bank). They also prescribe how to utilise the respective computer systems in order to access such information and outline certain ways of communicating product knowledge to customers (i.e. through the 'call structure' at B.A. or the 'selling skills' programme delivered at the bank). However, in addition to allegedly involving the decisions and thoughts, the 'planning' (Mills (1951)), of clerks in the ongoing construction of these prescriptions, it is fundamentally stressed by both managements that these are very *general* prescriptions. As one S.T.L. at B.A. Newcastle Telephone Sales stated "On the job, it is really up to agents how to deal with customers, we can only give them general guidance, we don't want to give them detailed instructions even if we could, otherwise they would all be the same and that would be no good for our customers" (S.T.L.,1994). This would appear to endorse our chapter one claim that the unique ability of human labour to exercise autonomy is the prime rationale for its continuing deployment within contemporary work organisations.

Prescription, T.Q.M. and Clerical Work

Selection and Training

The primary mechanisms through which management within both of our T.Q.M. cases attempt to prescribe the clerical labour process is through selection and training processes. The

importance of training, for communicating managerial prescriptions to clerks and enabling them to exercise positive discretion (itself a managerial instruction), will be demonstrated below.

As suggested in chapters five and six, management also attempt to control clerks' attitudes and behaviour within the B.A. telephone sales and Co-operative Bank branch labour process through selection procedures. It can be argued that these processes simultaneously strengthen patriarchal and male heterosexual domination within both research sites.

It was noted previously that both managements have altered their selection criteria as part of implementing T.Q.M. and marketization. They attempt to select 'personalities' who they feel will be adept at interacting with customers to produce, within the mind and feelings of customers, the experience of a quality service - both technically and functionally. This means, according to both managements, that the total quality service, whereby appropriate product information is offered which meets the specific needs of each unique customer (technical quality) through 'natural' social interaction (functional quality) is more likely to be approximated throughout both research sites. It can be argued that, from a T.Q.M. managerial point of view, the perfect corporate cultural participation or emotional labour, as deployed by employees, is when there is no need for clerks to create and sustain an outward impression in order to 'produce' (managerially expected) feelings and experiences within customers. Rather, such feelings and experiences simply flow from 'naturally occurring' employee-customer interaction, or employee-colleague interaction, or employee-management interaction, as opposed to being 'worked at' or 'produced'. From a managerial perspective, the most adept emotional labourer or corporate cultural participant, under T.Q.M. within clerical work, is the clerk who does *not have to* engage

in emotional labour or be culturally integrated within the organisation. Both managements attempt to select 'personalities' who will be able to deliver quality 'naturally' - as an extension of their own personalities and true selves.

The assumptions intrinsic to the actual development of these processes within our T.Q.M. cases are distinctly gendered. The 'personalities' which are selected as appropriate for the changing demands of both types of clerical work, at B.A. and The Co-operative Bank, under T.Q.M. are overwhelmingly *female* personalities (1). When questioned, those involved in the selection procedures (who were overwhelmingly male) openly articulated their gendered, patriarchal assumptions:

> The vast, vast majority of the agents we select are women...it's not as if we don't get men applying for the job, up here you tend to get applications from everybody for everything. I don't know whether it's because this has always been a female job, traditionally anyway, but they just seem to fit it better, they're better at it...even more so now, I mean we perhaps had more men in London than we do up here...we are looking for people who can chat to people, interact, build rapport, what we find is that women can do this more, they're definitely more natural when they do it anyway, it doesn't sound as forced, perhaps they're used to doing it all the time anyway... what I would say is that some men are better at developing the selling skills but that is something that we can teach, it's no good having that

without the interactional skills, perhaps some of the women are too strong on this, we aim to achieve some kind of balance (S.T.L.,B.A.,Male,1994).

Part of the research we did suggested that people around the country not just found the accent up here attractive but they found that it was particularly...good, attractive if women are speaking it...we do tend to employ mostly women, not just for this reason but they come across better in interviews...in the job, they are more prepared to put themselves out for people, help customers find exactly what they want, persuade them to buy services, all the things we are actually about here (S.T.L.,B.A.,Male,1993).

As I've said, we are an all-ladies team here and I think it works very well... I think people expect to see smart, professional and attractive women behind the counter in a bank...I think we are particularly good at interacting with customers, taking the initiative with customers, we need to be good talkers and good listeners as well, taking notice of how people feel, how they are looking, and notice of the services people are either taking or not advantage of. Some people...

including myself I suppose
would say that women are
naturally good at that anyway
(B.D.M.,Co-op Bank,Female,1993,my emphasis).

Thus, when management within both cases make frequent reference to the requirement for clerks to possess and develop the appropriate 'personality', in order to deliver technical and functional quality, this notion contains important stereotypical and gendered assumptions (2). Furthermore, it can be argued that the selection procedures in evidence at both cases reinforce and reflect not only the 'horizontal' occupational segregation of women, but also 'vertical' occupational segregation (Hakim (1979)) (3) and 'the domination of men's (hetero)sexuality' (Collinson and Collinson (1989)) (4).

Thus, it can be argued that selection processes within clerical work and under the impact of T.Q.M. can contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of gendered and sexualised ideologies and identities. This can in fact be seen as a source of *restriction* upon employee autonomy. The assumptions about employees' 'personality' which are employed in their selection are expected to be deployed within the labour process.

Further Prescription at Newcastle Telephone Sales, B.A.

It can be argued that a major element of managerial prescription of the T.S.A. labour process at British Airways' Newcastle Telephone Sales is encapsulated within the 'call structure' outlined in chapter five. Agents are expected to 'lead' and develop each call according to this structure: greeting; questioning, listening and gathering information; matching customer requirements; handling customer

queries/problems; closing the sale; offering extra/'add on' services; saying goodbye.

Firstly, management prescribe that callers should be greeted in a particular, standard fashion - 'good morning/afternoon/evening, British Airways, Donna (for e.g.) speaking, how may I help you ?'.

Secondly, telephone sales management expect agents to gather relevant information from customers through questioning them and listening carefully to customer responses. Thirdly, it is expected that T.S.As will be able to match customer requirements with appropriate information accessed from the computer system. As outlined in chapter five, and expounded below, more specific prescription and skills training is provided by management to equip agents with the abilities to execute these two elements of the call structure. This is largely articulated through induction and continuing training. Thus, for example, agents are trained in the use of 'open' and 'closed' questions, the former of which are important in eliciting information from customers, even those who are simply *enquiring* about the existence, price, or availability, of a particular service:

> The call structure helps you to handle the customer, to turn enquiries into bookings and sales...after greeting them, you question them and listen for significant information...you start off by saying, if they say 'I want to fly to America in June', you say 'do you have any dates in June ?, how many seats are you looking for ?' and just like get it out of them slowly like that, you can just get it out of them as the conversation

> progresses and then offer them specifically what they want, pinpoint it...and by the end of the conversation you've basically done the booking for them and you can say 'look, I've done this booking, do you want me to hold it for you ?, it'll expire if we don't hear from you' (T.S.A.,1994).

Influenced by the argument of chapter one, concerning the distinction between skill and autonomy within the employment relationship, it can be contended that agent internalisation of such managerial prescription and the actual implementation of the prescribed content of the labour process, the call structure, simultaneously involves the development and exercise of *skill*. For example, complex knowledge, much of which has been acquired through induction training, continuing training (in the form of 'refresher' or 'promotional' courses) and 'on the job' experience, is required in order to select appropriate information to match a particular customers' requirements from the enormous range of services provided by B.A. and their global partners, such as *U.S. Air* and *Herz*.

Virtually every customer enquiry demands instant agent knowledge of all the routes which are flown by British Airways. Furthermore, the three letter codes for any airport or city in the world have to be known instantly in order to access information from the computer system. These codes are keyed to retrieve information to match a particular customer's requirements. Instant knowledge of a sophisticated and constantly changing ticketing system is also required of agents before even the most routine enquiry can be responded to. There are fourteen different classes of tickets, each which have their own separate rules and regulations on when and where they can be utilised at different prices. The major classes of B.A. tickets available are 'Executive Class',

'Business Class', 'Economy Class', 'Apex Class' and 'Stand-by Class'. Each class is split into a minimum of twelve different grades:

> Every single individual ticket has different rules depending on how many restrictions it has on it, the price on it, and many people just don't understand that... people just don't know how much we need to know, you can't know until you actually try and do the job for the first time...people coming out of training just cannot believe it when they go on the phones for the first time (T.S.A.,1993).

The ticketing system is also constantly changing as new offers and initiatives are introduced, such as 'The Executive Club' and 'The Business Club'. These allow regular customers to purchase B.A. services and those of their global partners through the use of a 'club card' which operates in a similar fashion to a credit card. However, there are restrictions upon when and where particular cards can be used. Moreover, part of the appeal of the card is that it offers the holder reductions and special purchases which increase as the card is used more frequently. The ticketing system is often complicated further by the promotional activities mentioned in chapter five. As outlined earlier, agents develop their complex and in-depth knowledge of the routes flown by B.A., the vital three letter codes and the ticketing system through induction training, continuing training and 'on the job' experience.

Fourthly, the call structure, as articulated by management, prescribes that agents attempt to 'close a sale'. This involves inviting callers to purchase the service which has been matched to their particular requirements. Various

techniques are prescribed by management to enable the implementation of this prescription. Thus, for example, agents are expected, in the first instance, to invite payment for any service which matches a particular customers' requirements. If this is rejected by the caller, they are advised to outline the benefits of travelling with British Airways, or utilising related services, as opposed to the products of competitors in an attempt to persuade the caller to purchase a particular product. Thus, for example, T.S.As frequently mentioned customer surprise, shock and even incredulity at the price of some of the services offered by B.A. However, through training, management prescribe an agent response to such customer expressions:

> Sometimes, some of the prices are shocking right, honestly, they are absolutely astronomical and you've got to say it so unbiased...'okay, so you want to go to Paris for the weekend, that will be £600.00 return sir' and they're like 'you whaaaat !' down the phone 'cos there's only that class available... like at the minute, the bank holiday weekend is coming up, we've got everybody deciding to go away from the 29th to the 31st May and we've got nothing anywhere, nearly every flight is full and they're coming up and we've only got Business Class left and they're like 'oh, we want to go from Heathrow to Newcastle', 'oh, that'll be like £200.00 sir', 'you whaat !, 200 quid to fly to Newcastle !' and you know for a fact there's no way you'd pay that...you cannot be sympathetic...when they do

> that, you're supposed to give them the advantages of British Airways, you've got to tell them why and 'we are the world's favourite airline' and 'we've got quality' and all of this (T.S.A.,1993).

If, following such discussions, a purchase has still to be made, management expect an agent offer to 'hold' a booking for the caller for a specified time period, during which time the caller can return and purchase the product.

Fifthly, management prescribe that following every sale, or potential sale, of a B.A. service, or during a non-purchasing enquiry, agents should always offer relevant extra or 'add on' services, such as travel insurance or car hire. This offer should be made immediately after a sale or potential booking has been 'achieved'.

Sixthly, it is prescribed that agents should always invite, and deal with, any particular customer problems or queries. Finally, the call should be terminated.

It is prescribed that agents should interact with customers in a polite and friendly manner, and as "naturally as possible" (S.T.L.,1994), throughout the labour process. As we have seen in chapter five, telephone sales management prescribe that T.S.As should exercise positive discretion, particularly in order to implement the latter managerial instruction, but also in relation to many of the above prescriptions. This is what B.A. management mean by 'empowerment'.

Further Prescription at The Co-operative Bank

In relation to the labour process of branch clerks at The Co-operative Bank following the implementation of T.Q.M., it

could be argued that managerial prescription is deliberately vague. Thus, although clerks are primarily responsible for a particular area of work according to their position within the hierarchical structure of the branch, there appears to be little detailed guidance on *how* branch clerks are expected to deliver technical and functional quality. Co-operative Bank management would argue that this is *part* of the T.Q.M. process. Furthermore, branch clerks are expected to be able to perform work roles within areas of work beyond their usual area of responsibility when required.

Firstly, it must be noted that many aspects of what management labelled as "the routine aspects of banking" (C.S.M.,1992) are prescribed in some detail. For example, in relation to the counter service provided to customers within the branch, all bank employees are trained, during induction, how to process a Co-operative Bank cheque and how to credit different customer accounts. Management expect them to follow these prescribed procedures:

> When they receive a cheque to be credited to a customer's account...I can guarantee that they will all check the date, check that it is signed, check the amount and print the date and branch number and account number on it...they will then credit your account and give you a receipt...if you are cashing a cheque, they will check the date, the name and the signature against your bankers' card. If the amount you're requesting is above a certain threshold, they'll ask you for some form of identification...if you don't have it, they may even ask you a particular question, the answer to which can identify you by checking

> with the records held on the computer system...you might not recognise that they do all of this, I suppose they might not. They become so used to it that it becomes a habit that they do without even thinking about it (B.D.M.,1993).

A further 'routine', and heavily prescribed, aspect of the Co-operative banking labour process is 'balancing' one's work at the end of the day. "Balancing is something that has been there for clerks since banks began...when I was a lad, a cashier, it was probably the most important and pressurised part of the job, people used to spend hours balancing, it was terrible if someone didn't balance, we all had to wait around for hours...now it is still an important part of the job but I wouldn't say it was so arduous now...a lot of it's to do with the technology we have in the bank now but... some of it's to do with the restructuring and the introduction of T.Q.M." (C.S.M.,1992).

At the beginning of each working day, every C.S.O. is issued, by the S.C.S.O. with a 'stock' of money, from the safe, which is placed in a draw beside them. The 'stocks' of money have been issued the evening before from the Regional Processing Centre (5). They can be replenished when requested by the C.S.Os. Obviously, C.S.Os are constantly receiving, and distributing, money from their own 'stock'. All transactions are recorded on the computer system. However, C.S.Os are also expected to keep their own manual record of how much cash has been distributed, and in what form, to customers.

At the end of each working day, the computer system will produce a total of how much cash has been distributed to customers and how much, in the form of deposited cash and 'cashed cheques' (i.e. customers who have written a cheque to 'cash' rather than those who have deposited a cheque within

their account), has been received by the individual C.S.O. The computer system will subtract the former from the latter. The result of this is added to the stock of money remaining. The result of *this* should 'balance' with the original stock distributed by the S.C.S.O. All individual 'balancing' is checked by the S.C.S.O. The failure of any C.S.O. to balance is referred to the B.D.M. Failure to balance usually results from mistakes made by individual C.S.Os through, for example, over- or under-paying customers. The source of the mistake can be traced through the computer system and the manual records of C.S.Os. Management demand that all clerks attempt to rectify mistakes. This can involve contacting personal customers in an attempt to recoup 'lost' money. If a C.S.O. fails to rectify a mistake more than once within a month, they are required to replace the 'lost' money from their salaries. As we have seen in chapter six, consistent failure to balance, and thus branch clerks' mistakes, are seen as a sign that clerks are working under too much pressure and are *not* consequently spending sufficient time with customers.

C.S.Os are only expected to balance their own individual records. All branch records and cash are passed to the Regional Processing Centre, via Regional Security Officers, for counting, collating and the balancing of branch records.

Other prescriptive demands made by Co-operative Bank branch personal management, in relation to 'routine' functions, include ensuring that cash machines within the branches hold sufficient supplies of cash.

Co-operative banking management also prescribe that all clerks should have an in-depth knowledge of all the bank's constantly changing products and services. Prescription is provided, in the form of induction and continuing training, to enable clerk internalisation of this knowledge. Training is also provided by management on how product information can be accessed from

the computer system. Drawing upon such knowledge, in a similar fashion to T.S.As at British Airways and within the labour process, can be seen as the implementation of prescriptive skill.

As we have seen, bank management argued that branch clerks are empowered, they must use their discretion, to decide *which* product knowledge will match the requirements of a particular customer. Once again, this is intrinsic to T.Q.M.

As for prescription of when and whether to attempt to offer or sell particular banking products to customers, management simply demand that clerks "should attempt this at every appropriate opportunity" (B.D.M.,1993) (6). Furthermore, branch clerks undergo selling skills training - a managerial attempt to prescribe further who should be offered particular products and also when and how this should be accomplished:

> The selling skills programme is good -
> it teaches you to listen out for
> things when you are dealing with
> customers...I suppose I would have
> just ignored them before...you look
> for key words which tells you about
> their priorities, you check whether
> they could be getting better value
> for their money somewhere else, you
> try and listen for anything that
> might arise from conversations with
> them, can you tell anything from
> their appearance, are they worried
> about the money or the service in
> some way ? It helps if you know
> them or you get to know them...
> then you are better equipped
> to offer them what they need...

> that is what the selling skills programme mainly concentrates on - 'getting to know your customer'. They tell us that this is the most important thing...I enjoy it, I'm naturally nosey anyway, I'll talk to anybody...we do role play and they advise you about what you should look for in customers (C.S.O.,1993).

Thus, some further managerial prescription on how to utilise product knowledge to meet customer requirements (technical quality) is provided. For example, during the selling skills programme, C.S.Os are taught to always observe the balance of a customer coming into the branch and using a savings account against the current rates of all other accounts to check if the customer can be offered 'a better deal'. C.S.Os are instructed to always ask a social question, such as 'are you going on holiday this year ?' during the summer months. If customers respond to this question, management argue that banking services, such as foreign currency arrangements, travel and money insurance can be offered. Should a customer attempt to pay bills through the branch, the benefits of telephone banking and the direct debit service should be outlined. However, as the last quoted clerk suggests, management expect that such dialogue should be part of an overall strategy on behalf of the bank clerk to 'build rapport' with the customer. "If the officer gets to know the customer and they talk naturally...you know as a matter of course, then the selling will come out *naturally* as well, they won't have to work on it" (Trainer,1993,my emphasis).

Some managerial prescription, with more depth than that provided by British Airways Telephone Sales management, of *how* services should be provided, and products offered, to

customers (functional quality) is given through the selling skills programme. Some clerks argued that "they really just encourage us to be polite, friendly but business-like, professional...they don't go a lot further than that" (Senior Customer Service Officer,1993). Within the selling skills programme though, clerks undertake role play and are given guidance as to what actually constitutes a 'friendly', 'business like' and 'professional' manner as portrayed through tone of voice, vocabulary utilised, accent and non-verbal communication. Bank clerks are encouraged to assess the mood and feelings of a customer through verbal and non-verbal clues. They can then tailor their own tone of voice, attitude and the type of product information they will communicate to the customer to suit the particular mood and feeling of the customer:

> I suppose we did learn quite alot about communication at the selling skills thingy ...some of it was really interesting, about how people communicate things through not saying things or how they can say one thing but actually be feeling another... meaning another and you've got to try and get at what they are feeling, what they are meaning...how can I give you an example ?...if someone comes in and asks for a balance, in the past...I would have just given them it and that was it, you wait for them to see if they want anything more, but now you can judge it, see if they are worried, they might look a bit depressed, they might go red or run their fingers through their hair, without actually saying something...you don't have to do it straight away but you can bide your

> time and at the end of the transaction, you can offer them something...it might be financial advice, it might be advice on a loan or an overdraft (S.C.S.O.,1993) (7).

In a similar vein to managerial expectations concerning the delivery of technical quality however, management prescribe, as articulated through the selling skills programme and management-clerk communication, that clerks attempt to 'know' customers, to build a continuing and developing 'rapport':

> If officers get to know our customers, individual ones, what their concerns are, what their personalities are... then the analysis of the customer and the appearance of the officer, in giving this friendly and open customer service, will be natural... it will come out naturally as if they are talking and helping a friend...that is what we're aiming for, you know all the stuff that you and I have read about, and I would say that with some of our customers we are there already (B.D.M.,1993).

Thus, as will be investigated further below, inherent to Co-operative banking management prescriptions under the impact of marketization and T.Q.M., and for the delivery of both technical and functional quality, is that clerks exercise positive discretion - use their own thoughts, techniques and personalities when interacting with customers in order to 'build rapport' and ultimately maximise the sale of Co-operative Bank products.

Management within the branches do prescribe the limits of branch clerks' appearance, which they perceive as important for conveying the impression of quality to customers:

> The appearance of our staff is very important ...we like them to appear friendly and approachable, but business like and professional as well...men can wear their own suits, as long as they are black, the women have to wear our uniform, but the way they wear it is important...they have to wear it smartly, I would recognise it if someone wasn't, if it was grubby or crumpled or the neckerchief wasn't tied properly...we like them all to have what I would call 'respectable' haircuts and jewellery, but having said that not too old-fashioned and stuffy, perhaps the traditional image of a bank...if someone went really over the top, like shaving their head or dying it, or having really long and greasy hair, then I would have to say something...luckily we have not had too many problems in this branch, the only sort of recurring problems that I can recall is over young lads with earings, I don't personally like that so I've had to tell them to take it out, I think it conveys the wrong image but that's just my personal opinion (B.D.M.,1993).

It can also be argued that embedded within this particular managerial prescription are assumptions which reflect and contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of patriarchal

and sexualised ideologies and structures. As a male B.D.M. commented:

> I really just want my staff to look attractive...but relatively normal at the same time...people who are attractive to the opposite sex, and that applies to most people... I do feel that my staff appeal to everybody (1993).

Prescription Without T.Q.M. - National Savings

The major prescriptive aspects of the varying D.C.C. clerks' labour process have already been outlined in chapter seven. Some further comments can be added however.

Selection and Training

D.C.C. branch management utilise contrasting selection and training procedures. When questioned, those involved in the selection process (D.C.C. Manager and C.M's) argued that there was no real requirement to enforce strict selection guidelines:

> The majority of our applicants are internal ones, people from within this gigantic building ...that is because the majority of our adverts, in fact all of our adverts recently only go out internally...we look for people with vast experience of dealing with Savings Certificates and most people who apply have got that...we basically look for people who have been recommended to us, are well organised, can work under pressure when required, for E.Os they need to show some

> experience nowadays of getting on with people and organising others, taking responsibility and all that...we can basically have our pick 'cos a lot of people want to come here...but unless it involves going up a grade, then people are transferred here, we don't have to interview them (C.M.,1994).

When specifically questioned as to whether they selected particular 'personalities' to meet the demands of the D.C.C. labour process, all of D.C.C. branch management offered only very general answers, such as "qualities of organisation and being able to communicate, apart from that not really...they need to know the products inside out but experienced people in the building all do" (C.M.,1994).

It can be argued, however, that one similarity between the selection processes in operation at the D.C.C. and our T.Q.M. cases is their reflection, and contribution to, patriarchal structures within employment and beyond (8). The simple fact that the majority of E.Os are male, while collectively the majority of A.Os and A.As female, illustrates that a *wholly* male D.C.C. management selects male 'personalities' for grades which involve the greatest 'managerial' and decision-making activity amongst the D.C.C. clerks, while female 'personalities' are selected for posts which, officially at least, involve the least discretion.

The training of D.C.C. clerks takes place entirely 'on the job'. The vast majority of D.C.C. clerks have long experience of working with Savings Certificates, the computer system and all other organisational procedures, *prior* to their employment as a D.C.C. clerk. Thus:

> There is very little training that we actually have to do...what we do do is done within the sections, new A.As sit for a while with an A.O. and other A.As. New A.Os sit with an E.O. and other A.Os and new E.Os largely just get straight on with it themselves... they might get a chat from us although that is about it...we don't tend to have that many problems...although the organisation is starting to bring in new training courses...we do try and resist them though, our lot are so experienced, we don't really need them that much and we're often too busy (C.M.,1994).

Another C.M. was a little more expansive about the new, developing training programmes:

> We've always had a centrally run training section in the building. Corres' branches historically haven't used them that much but now we do a little...they have all sorts of things now like customer care training, communication skills, letter writing skills, telephone skills, all sorts of things (C.M.,1994).

There was much cynicism amongst clerks as to the usefulness of such training. The following comment from an E.O. was representative of the majority of D.C.C. clerks:

> Most of them are a waste of time...I think as a branch we are getting more pressurised to use these training courses...certainly our C.M. is not that keen...and he's right.

> The ones I've been on haven't told me anything new...I'd rather have been here getting on with my work (E.O.,1994).

Both the managerial and legal prescription of the various D.C.C. clerks' labour process was outlined in chapter seven. Perhaps the most striking contrast with our T.Q.M. cases is the *lack* of prescription for interaction between D.C.C. clerks and their colleagues, managers and claimants. One form of prescription did exist in relation to employees' written communication with the latter group. 'Standard letters' did exist for the most common types of written communication. Clerks merely inserted the claimants name and any other missing details - the rest of the letter was pre-composed. However, management, and many E.Os, argued that:

> We are trying to get away from using standard letters...it's not very personal, we want to give claimants more of a personalised, friendly and less formal service (C.M.,1994).

Discretion Under T.Q.M.

Having briefly illustrated the prescriptive content of the T.S.A. and Co-operative Bank branch clerk labour process, in particular the skilled prescriptive content, we can now go on to argue further that both work roles simultaneously involve the exercise of discretion. In fact, it can be gleaned from our empirical research that actually executing the specific *prescriptions* and skills inherent to both jobs concomitantly involves the exercise of *autonomy*. This endorses Jaques' (1961) claim that there is "no such thing as an executive instruction which does not incorporate both prescribed and discretionary elements" (p.73). Executing any element of the labour process inevitably involves some clerk choice and judgement while not necessarily involving the exercise of

skill (Baldamus (1967); Fox (1974); Cressey and McInnes (1980); Manwaring and Wood (1985); Brown (1988), (1993)). Clerk autonomy is particularly evident over the *form* of social interaction within the T.Q.M. labour processes studied. Firstly, however, we will consider technical quality or the *content* of social interaction in which clerks, under T.Q.M., are involved. It can also be suggested that the discretion available to clerks within our T.Q.M. cases is, to some extent, *gendered*.

The Content of Social Interaction

When T.S.As and bank clerks were questioned and their labour processes were observed to uncover whether the above prescriptions are actually followed, it was found that clerk discretion is an important aspect of the two respective employment relationships. *How, when* and in fact *whether* to use the call structure at B.A. and the product knowledge at the bank, the further prescriptions managerially issued (for example in the form of the selling skills programmes experienced by both T.S.As and bank clerks) and the skills subsequently developed, would appear to be left to the discretion of employees.

Firstly, the prescribed and standard greeting of customers, in terms of the actual words spoken, vocabulary used, at B.A. was almost universally followed, with little discretion exercised by agents. Also, the 'routine' aspects of the Co-operative banking labour process outlined above, appear to afford clerks little discretion in terms of the tasks actually undertaken. Thus, the majority of bank clerks observed and interviewed followed a standard, prescribed procedure for the deposit and cashing of cheques. They were also careful when distributing and receiving cash from customers. The vast majority of bank clerks interviewed were keen to ensure that their work 'balanced' at the end of the day and that the cash

machines were adequately stocked. These routine aspects of banking can be seen as important components of the technical quality of banking services as their execution in the managerially prescribed fashion entails the avoidance of employee mistakes. The latter are clearly important to customer feelings and experience of the service received.

> Obviously, I want to make sure that I don't make mistakes and my work balances ...it costs me money if I don't, I can't afford not to balance on the wages that we get paid...also it's just less hassle all round (C.S.O.,1993).

The final comment made by this bank clerk suggests that clerks at The Co-operative Bank do not just feel financial pressure, in terms of their own salary, to ensure that their work balances. Many C.S.Os interviewed argued that it was 'less hassle'. The 'cost of making mistakes' within the labour process, for the bank clerks interviewed, meant spending time *after* work, "when everyone else bar the manager has gone home, having their tea, or they're in the pub" (C.S.O.,1993), attempting to trace and rectify the imbalance in their work. In the words of one C.S.O., "it's a real pisser when it happens" (1993).

Similar comments were made by bank clerks when they were questioned as to why they *did* closely follow managerial prescriptions, in ensuring that the cash till had sufficient cash to operate efficiently::

> It's just a real pain if a customer comes in and says that the cash till is empty. You can guarantee that it'll be at our busiest time. It's just less work, *causes less hassle* if someone always makes sure that there's

> enough in. We make sure that someone takes responsibility for it every week (S.C.S.O.,1993,my emphasis).

For the processing of cheques, branch bank clerks argued that, because the prescribed procedure was such a *habit*, it would actually involve more effort to utilise a different procedure or even to choose no procedure at all:

> You just get so used to doing it (cheque Processing) that way that it becomes second nature. I don't even think about it...not to do it, I reckon would be harder because you'd actually have to think about not doing it (C.S.O.,1993).

At B.A., similar arguments were made by T.S.As in defence of their consistent use of the prescribed greeting to callers:

> You just go on to autopilot...it's so easier to use those words at the beginning 'cos they come out automatic, you don't have to try and think of different ones (T.S.A.,1994).

It can be argued that the very *existence* of employee choice over how to undertake these tasks is evidence of clerk discretion, despite the fact that the majority of clerks actually followed managerial prescriptions. Crucially, it seems that, at least in part, constraints to follow these prescriptions are not imposed by management but are *self-imposed* by the clerks themselves (9).

However, it can be argued that clerk discretion is actually exercised in implementing other managerial prescriptions

outlined above. For example, one can argue that T.S.As ultimately decide how, when or whether to question the customer over the telephone and how, when or whether to match her/his requirements with information accessed from the computer system. It was frequently pointed out that the type of enquiries received, and a standard response to them, could never be prescribed by management:

> There are so many areas to the job, no-one could know everything, you always have to act on your own initiative to a certain extent (T.S.A.,1993).

It was further suggested by the majority of agents that their decision as to how to respond to customers was largely shaped by the nature of the particular customer and the nature of the communication. They argued that *they* decide *whether* to attempt to turn an enquiry into a sale in the fashion prescribed by management:

> You can tell really when the call comes through if you stand any chance with it really 'cos the majority of them will just say 'I only want the fare' and you say 'right, that's fine' or if you say 'do you want any date, is there any date in particular ?', 'no, there's no date' so there's no possible way they're going to buy anything, there's no point in even trying to sell them something...if they know what date they want to travel, then you think 'they've already planned what date they want to go', give them the fare, if that seems okay for them then you

> can start to turn it round. If you do it at the beginning of the call then it's easier (T.S.A.,1994).

It was vehemently stated by all T.S.As interviewed that the call structure is very much a framework within which worker autonomy was not only possible, but *necessary*:

> How you use the call structure and the selling workshops and selling skills learnt in training depends upon the customer you are talking to...you can ask people open and closed questions, which is helpful, but which ones and in fact whether you bother at all depends upon the customer...there is actually no point in giving some people a load of information to match their requirements or meet their needs, you know they are not going to buy anything, a lot of people use us as an information service... you have to judge people, whether it's time to offer them information, whether you should at all, whether it's time to close a sale, whether you should put something on option or whether you shouldn't bother at all, just by the sort of personality they are, you can judge what to do and you can judge the type of language to use as well in a way (T.S.A.,1994).

> There is that many people (customers) that you speak to, it's amazing really, from the old granny going to see somebody

> in Jersey to the businessman *(sic)* who are looking for ninety sector flights and things like that...you've got to judge what is appropriate for the individual customer...each one is different I suppose (T.S.A.,1994,).

Many agents argued that they exercised this judgement or discretion in deciding whether to offer appropriate services and products and what those products will be *during the course of conversations* with customers. It was frequently stated that one must 'go with the flow' of the conversation, and then instantly decide whether information and services should be offered and, if so, which ones. Skill - complex knowledge and abilities developed through education, training and experience - may well be utilised in deciding which products to offer or whether to offer products at all, but the very *opportunity* to make that decision and accept responsibility for the (often unknown) results indicates the simultaneous presence of discretion.

It can be argued that some Co-operative bank clerks exercise discretion in deciding *whether* to offer product information to customers and, to some extent, *what* particular information will match a particular customers' requirements. It was noted in the previous section that C.S.Os are required to develop in-depth product knowledge and to offer products to match particular customers' needs and feelings at every possible opportunity. Through the selling skills programme, management do prescribe particular ways in which employees can match particular products to particular customers.

The majority of C.S.Os argued that they did *not* offer product information to customers at every possible opportunity. This was supported by observation of the labour process.

> Sometimes, in fact a lot of times, it's just not appropriate. People come into the bank sometimes in a real rush or in the middle of doing something else, they just want to deposit a cheque, make a withdrawl or whatever and get out, they don't want the salesman's *(sic)* bit from us (C.S.O.,1993).

> I would say that really, nine times out of ten I don't offer anything, people just don't want it...you can tell the people who want something because they'll either ask or it'll be obvious...by the money they have in a particular account, then it'll be worth offering them another account...or it'll be really obvious from something that they say or the way they look (C.S.O.,1993).

Once again, the fact that C.S.Os can draw on skill - their knowledge of who it is appropriate to offer particular information to - in order to *choose* whether to offer information or not indicates the simultaneous exercise of worker autonomy.

Both C.S.Os and P.As (including the senior grades) argued that they also exercised discretion over *when* product information should be offered, once the decision to do so had been made:

> You've got to wait 'till the right moment... it's difficult to say in words when that actually is but you can tell when you're in the course of a conversation...it's when they say they're going on holiday, or they mention they're retiring, or they give the impression that they're

> worried about their job...they might want insurance...or you can offer life insurance to anybody...I suppose what they say, how they look is the spark... I suppose you decide that you are going to go for it and when you're going...at the same time, at the same instant (C.S.O.,1993).

The exercise of this discretion, in contrast to decisions over *whether* product knowledge should be communicated, can be seen as positive discretion. As suggested in chapter six, management encourage and value such employee 'empowerment' as part of the T.Q.M. process.

The discretion exercised by Personal Advisors over the distribution of product knowledge to customers in an attempt to sell Co-operative banking products is more complex. It could be suggested that such autonomy is constrained by the computer system utilised within the branches. This is clearly the case for C.S.Os when they are working in the P.A. role. The advice that they give, and the services that they sell, must all be authorised by the Senior Personal Advisor. Management demands that C.S.Os are only allowed to offer 'system-produced' product knowledge and communicate 'system-produced' decisions to applicants for banking services, such as personal loans and overdrafts. However, P.As, and especially S.P.As have more discretion within this process. Although it was suggested by all P.As that the majority of the information they distribute, and lending decisions which they make, are system-produced, a small proportion are the result of their own knowledge and decision-making:

> The computer system is very helpful, especially when you've been busy all day and you can't be bothered to

> think for yourself...it will produce appropriate information for you and make decisions for you...but what we say to some customers is that we are alot more flexible than simply keying things in and waiting for a decision. If we think that the computer is offering the wrong type of product information or making an unfair decision, we do have the power to amend it...to give you a simple example...I've just had a young man in wanting an extension on his overdraft limit...to cut a long story short, the computer refused this 'cos it assesses this on the way his account has been managed, in terms of incomings and outgoings, over the past six months...but he managed to convince me that he was worth an extension, he's just had a pay rise and the payments on his car are coming to an end so in effect he will have less actually coming out of the account but he needs an overdraft until just after Christmas, until this occurs, for six months. He will be able to be back in credit by then (S.P.A.,1993).

Senior Personal Advisors have total discretion to amend system information and decisions on all lending up to £6,000. Beyond this figure, all system amendments must be checked with the B.D.M. S.P.As check all the system amendments of P.As although the former argued that "I basically rubber-stamp their

decisions because basically, they are good and careful, they know what they are doing" (S.P.A.,1993). Thus, in actually implementing managerial prescriptions to offer *appropriate* product information, and attempt to sell products and services, to *appropriate* customers, we have illustrated the importance and endurance of employee discretion. Furthermore, in apparent contrast to some of the other examples of clerk discretion at B.A. and The Co-operative Bank being offered in this section, this autonomy can be seen as managerially-encouraged positive discretion. It can be suggested that such discretion is more likely to be acceded to *male* branch clerks as, at the time of the research, the only male clerks were P.As and S.P.As (10).

At B.A., implementation of the fourth element of the prescriptive call structure - attempting to 'close a sale' - also demands an instant clerk decision over whether to attempt such a task at all:

> You've got to know the right time to say 'do you want me to book that for you ?' or whether to say it at all. I don't think anyone can really teach you that, it's down to how you think the call is going, what type of person they are. It comes from loads of practice on loads of calls...I mean there was a man this morning, I was babbling on about kids, because he had two kids and you've got to try and find out as much information and play on it. He was on about the kids and I picked up he was quite concerned about them travelling so I was saying, 'well, it's a night flight but you can sleep on the flight, there are reclining

> seats and you get the pillows and the blankets' and I'm thinking 'god, you're going on and on' but I got the booking and the money (T.S.A.,1993).

It can be argued that the above agent is exercising skill, drawing upon training and previous experience to decide which particular information and services will match the requirements of the customer and whether he is 'the type of person' with whom the agent should attempt to 'close a sale'. However, crucially, the agent is also simultaneously exercising discretion in *deciding* these matters in the first place. The following comment illustrates the discretion that is routinely exercised by T.S.As:

> You are always deciding whether it's worth offering something and what it is or worth going for the sale...I am always trying to find out if people are quite flexible with their dates etc. and then you can say 'well I can get it for such and such a date, but if you want to travel the day before or an hour before, I can get it down to this certain price', try and push a sale this way, some people will go for that, you have to try and judge who they are. With these people, you are always trying to find alternatives, trying to match something for them and customers can be pleased with that (T.S.A.,1994).

The T.S.A. labour process involves the exercise of discretionary *and* prescribed skill (11).

T.S.A. discretion can also be observed in relation to how agents actually implement management prescriptions for dealing with customer responses to some of the high prices of B.A. products. These prescriptions are seen, by management, as important attributes required in order to attempt to 'close a sale'. However, many agents noted that they did not always deal with customers in the prescribed fashion:

> You're supposed to give them the advantages of British Airways to explain why that particular ticket is so expensive, you do that with some...whether you do or not depends, you've just got to go with the flow, whatever, if you know that it's Joe Bloggs ringing up and he only wants to go to Paris for fifty quid and you're offering him six hundred there's no point...you've just got to use your intuition really (T.S.A.,1993).

It must also be pointed out that, once an agent decision has been made to offer a particular product or service, how this information is actually accessed can also involve agent discretion. Given the range of product information held on the computer system, it was noted by many agents that they had never accessed the vast majority of this information. "You have to use your initiative a lot on the computer system because nearly every call is different and involves trying to put together a different package of information from the system...a lot of it you have just never come across before, you're almost making it up as you go along" (T.S.A.,1994). Again, this involves the simultaneous exercise of skill and discretion - positive discretion or 'empowerment'.

Agent discretion was also observed in relation to the implementation of the element of the call structure where T.S.As are expected to offer extra or 'add on' services or products to customers. Once again, all T.S.As argued that whether to offer such services as car hire or insurance to callers who have purchased B.A. products, and if so which particular extra services are offered, is decided by the agent and is dependent upon the nature of the particular customer being communicated to:

> We have so many extra products - car hire, hotels, all the different insurance... different services that can get the tickets out, we have a goods service, parcel post delivery...you're quite independent really, it's entirely up to yourself, whether you think you should offer them. You can just go with the flow of the call, if you think it's a businessman *(sic)* who is going to want car hire, he's going to want hotel accommodation or anything like that, you go for that. If somebody's already said to you 'I'm going out to see my relatives, then you know there is no point in car hire or you can try for it but invariably you don't get it (T.S.A.,1994) (12).

The Form of Social Interaction

The foregoing discretion can be seen as clerk autonomy over the delivery of technical quality to B.A. and Co-operative Bank customers. However, it can be argued that even greater clerk autonomy is exercised over the delivery of functional quality - *how* agents interact with customers over the

telephone - their tone of voice, vocabulary, language and attitude conveyed. During face-to-face interaction, clerks' appearance, facial expressions, dress, hairstyles, tone of voice, vocabulary and language.

When gathering information from customers through questioning and listening, T.S.As argued that they frequently, with the encouragement of management, interact with customers in their own personal or 'natural', rather than a tightly prescribed, manner. This is known as 'building rapport'. It was claimed by both agents and management that this is an effective way of gathering information and of appealing to potential customers - producing the experience of a quality service - thus increasing the possibility of turning an enquiry into a sale:

> It's the type of job, you'll never know what you are doing next...when you are training, they've got this strategy how you've got to do everything but then you lose it and they just say 'do it your own way, do it as it comes naturally'. If they want to ring up and speak to a machine, you can just get an answerphone to do it. You've just got to do everything as natural as you can (T.S.A.,1993)

Furthermore, many agents argued that their own 'natural' technique for interacting with customers is directly influenced by their own particular personality:

> I'm naturally quite a chatty person and I'm chatty on the phone. I like to find a common link, so if someone has gone to college in Brighton or they live in Brighton, I say 'ah, I went to college there, is such and such still there ?' and they like that. I've

> had feedback on my phone technique and they say 'keep that in, it's good, it establishes a rapport' which I don't mind doing because that is the sort of person I am anyway whereas some other people who may be different, they just answer the question and that's it (T.S.A.,1994).

'Building rapport' with customers was also encouraged by management at The Co-operative Bank. In fact, it was suggested above that one of the prescriptions managerially issued at branch level is for clerks to develop a 'friendship' with customers, ensuring that employee-customer interaction is as 'natural' as possible. Despite prescribing certain techniques for the establishment of dialogue, through the assessment of particular customers' needs and feelings, inherent within this managerial instruction is that clerks exercise autonomy. If employee-customer interaction is to be as 'natural' as possible then clerks are being expected to deploy their own personality, their own norms, values and feelings during such communication. There is certainly no requirement for clerks to engage in emotional labour in order to implement this managerial prescription - *managing* one's feelings to produce an *appearance* to the customer. The majority of Co-operative branch clerks confirmed that they *did* exercise discretion over the delivery of functional quality:

> I've got my own techniques for getting to know, building a rapport the official term is, with customers...I suppose every person has...what I'll do is if you come in first time or I reckon I've never seen them before, then I'll make sure that I smile alot, I'm as polite as possible...you can get to know people by asking the simplest of questions, it doesn't take

much...once you get to know someone, you know what they value...there's one bloke who's just come in, he enjoys it if I insult him, have a go at him, take the mick, I do that with alot of blokes, nothing too much, just a bit gentle like. Did you not hear me 'Here he goes again girls, getting his money out to try his luck on the town again, you'll never pull dressed like that', he always has a bit of a go back and he loves it, alot of them do... I'm sure they sometimes only come in for the patter...everyone reckons I'm the best at it here, especially with the blokes...it's great though because the boss loves it, I was wary at first 'cos in the old days you had to make sure the boss was out of sight or it was Friday afternoon and everyone had been to the pub, but she actually wanted me to do it the other day, I can't believe it, I'm only being myself (C.S.O.,1993) (13).

All the above examples perfectly illustrate the way in which many T.S.As and Co-operative bank clerks exercise positive discretion - they devise and implement their own individual ways of delivering quality of customer service attempting to sell products to customers. Under T.Q.M., such discretion is deliberately encouraged, and positively rewarded by management. This is what the 'empowerment' which is intrinsic to T.Q.M. actually entails. It was noted in chapters five and six that both B.A. Telephone Sales and Co-operative Bank managements aimed to 'catch clerks doing things well' and to compliment them for this. Employee suggestions as to the way

in which both technical and functional quality can be improved - clerks' own discretionary techniques for doing so - are invited within both research sites. Intrinsic to T.Q.M. is a managerial strategy of "identifying positive divergencies (from managerial prescriptions) and maximising their creative potential" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.271,my addition). T.S.A's are financially and symbolically rewarded for exercising such positive discretion.

The exercise of positive discretion under T.Q.M. is further evidenced by the fact that many T.S.As pointed out that they also exercise discretion over the type of language employed when interacting with customers. For example:

> At the moment, we are doing a lot of U.S. calls, we speak to American people at various times so the language really does vary...sometimes they just haven't got a clue what you are saying. If you say 'fare' they don't know what you mean, if you say 'rate', that is okay, you have to say 'round trip' instead of 'return' and 'coach' instead of 'economy' and stuff like that - even slightest things like that would lose them. You have to be clued into all that and use your initiative when you get an American call, for example, I found that they (Americans) react really well to being called 'sir' and 'madam' all the time. I think they see it as really quaint and English (T.S.A.,1994).

The issue of employee autonomy over the delivery of functional quality under T.Q.M. - through the form of social interaction

with customers, colleagues and management - is an issue to which we shall return in some detail.

Discretion Without T.Q.M.

The nature and extent of D.C.C. clerk discretion, in spite of managerial prescriptions and legal constraints, over the labour process has been briefly outlined in chapter seven. However, the majority of this exposition relied upon managerial claims as to the discretion exercised by the clerical workforce. The subsequent paragraphs will illustrate a slightly differing *reality* of D.C.C. clerk discretion.

The first point that must be made was alluded to in chapter seven. Despite the apparently rigid 'hierarchies of discretion' previously described, in practice, the three clerical roles within the D.C.C. often merge. This depends upon the approach of the particular E.O. responsible for a section. Thus, many A.Os pointed out that they are often *entirely* responsible for claims on Savings Certificates which value more than £5,000:

> I'm often totally in charge of claims over the supposed limit...it's largely because Dave (the E.O.) knows that we'll get it right, he very rarely checks our work at all really...some grade fives (E.Os) stick rigidly to the limits, that must be a real pain (A.O.,1994).

The research revealed no difference between the degrees of discretion exercised by female and male A.Os. This common merging of E.Os and A.Os areas of responsibility was tolerated by management. In fact, as noted in chapter seven, D.C.C. branch managements are considering considerably raising the

thresholds under which clerks can exercise total discretion in relation to death claims on Savings Certificates.

Assuming 'entire responsibility' for claims on Savings Certificates, as already noted, involves both A.Os and E.Os in a number of significant and autonomous decisions. For instance, these clerks must first of all decide whether they have sufficient information from the claimant in order to process a 'substantive reply', or even to key a repayment or transfer of certificates and issue a warrant. This can involve A.O. and E.O. discretion over the *legality* or *appropriateness* of a particular claim. Decisions must be made as to what particular, additional information is required from some claimants in order to produce a substantive reply. Furthermore, during all communication with claimants, A.Os and E.Os exercise total discretion over *when* communication takes place, *what* is communicated and *how* it is communicated.

It can also be suggested that, to a certain extent, the roles of A.A. and A.O. merge within the D.C.C. branch. Again depending upon the attitude of the E.O. and the A.Os within particular sections, certain tasks which are formally the province of the A.O. are undertaken by the A.A. For example, some A.As are given discretion over communicating to claimants from whom further information is required. They may also be asked to actually key repayments and transfers once decisions have been made. From the sample of A.As interviewed, they all claimed that *male* A.As are likely to be given greater discretion by their respective A.Os and E.Os.

The Organisation and Pace of Work

As mentioned in chapter seven, all D.C.C. clerks are expected to take sole responsibility for the organisation of their workload and the pace at which it is undertaken. This involves "prioritising some cases and putting others on the back

burner" (E.O.,1994). It is up to "clerks themselves to decide sensibly which ones need sorting quickly and which ones can be left a little while" (C.M.,1994). Furthermore:

> We do get very busy in the winter months, but for the rest of the year, clerks themselves can largely regulate their own speed, going fast sometimes to get things done, so that they can take things easier at other times...we all do it, we're only human...we also leave it for clerks to volunteer to help out on other sections if they're having a particularly quiet time (C.M.,1994).

Despite considerable opportunity, the exercise of negative discretion within the D.C.C. clerical labour process is minimal. The reasons for this will be explained and discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TEN

THE DISCOURSE OF EMPOWERMENT 2: CENTRALISED SUPERVISION

Crucial to any analysis of workplace discretion is the nature and extent of managerial supervision. Managerial control is crucial in shaping the prescriptive content of work roles. The prescriptive aspect of the labour process not only sets out how a particular task is to be undertaken but the result that is to be achieved. If managerial supervision and evaluation of the labour process was absent, managerial prescription and control would be meaningless. There would be no way of ensuring that managerial prescriptive instructions had actually been implemented by employees - no limit upon worker discretion. It is suggested by some that the nature of managerial supervision and evaluation of the labour process under marketization, and particularly T.Q.M., is eroding the discretionary element which has thus far been an inherent part of *all* employment relationships. Within our case studies, there *is* evidence of increasingly thoroughgoing and centralised managerial control mechanisms, much of which is effected through surveillance processes, simultaneous with the implementation of T.Q.M. to clerical work. There is also evidence that such enhanced managerial control is simultaneously *patriarchal* control.

Many T.S.As and some bank clerks actually argued that management, particularly S.T.Ss at B.A., encouraged and supported the exercise and development of employee discretion. The following statement was typical:

> They (management) encourage you to make your own decisions...I mean your

> supervisor's always there, there is always someone to ask and nine times out of ten you can do it yourself but you need somebody to say 'yeah'. There is so many areas of the job, that you can't know everything. There is always someone running over to the supervisors or running to your friends...there is times when I've been to my supervisor and Gail, my supervisor's said 'well, Donna, what do you think ?' and she'll say 'right, what did you need me for ?, you've just told us everything to do.' She says 'make your own decisions Donna, what would you do ?'...she'll talk you into giving yourself the answer and she'll say 'did you need to come over and ask me ?' and I'll say 'well, not really, but can I do something like that ?' and she'll say 'go for it, do it' and then she'll say 'well sweep up afterwards if you make a mess'. They really do encourage you to do everything yourself (T.S.A.,1993).

Clearly, as claimed in chapters five and six, and suggested in the previous chapter, agent discretion within the T.Q.M. labour process is encouraged, supported and enabled in many areas. Such devolvement of responsibility is however still consistent with Sewell and Wilkinsons' (1992) findings and argument. In fact, they suggest that such employee 'empowerment' is an important element in the 'total' managerial control which T.Q.M. constitutes. The crucial point

for Sewell and Wilkinson is that the decentralisation of 'tactical' responsibility - or positive discretion - occurs at the same time as 'strategic' managerial control is centralised through sophisticated workplace surveillance.

Returning to our cases, the major ways in which all of our clerical labour processes are supervised and evaluated is through personal, direct managerial supervision and the use of targets and customer feedback, as outlined in chapters five, six and seven. It will be remembered that, within the two marketized cases, management argued that these mechanisms are not supervisory or controlling. They are forms of 'quality assurance' and 'performance management'. As such, they are viewed as beneficial to agents, *promoting* rather than constraining work autonomy.

In contrast, following Sewell and Wilkinson (1992), the forms of managerial supervision which are used to evaluate the work of T.S.As and Co-operative Bank branch clerks, centralise managerial strategic control of the labour process, encourage the deployment of employee positive discretion or tactical responsibility and minimise employee opportunities for negative discretion, *while actually eroding clerk autonomy within the employment relationship*. These tendencies are inherent to the concept of 'empowerment' from Sewell and Wilkinsons' perspective (1). It would appear that this can be observed particularly in relation to the hard and soft targets which are used as forms of managerial evaluation within both research sites.

It will be argued that the extent of work autonomy is more restricted within both of our marketized cases, when compared to the D.C.C. labour process. As a result of hard and soft targets and supervisory techniques, and thus as a *direct consequence* of *T.Q.M.*, the constraint of employee discretion is particularly pronounced at B.A.

I.C.T., in the form of the highly sophisticated computer and telephone systems, in operation at Newcastle Telephone Sales, enabling *individualised* evaluation of T.S.As work according to both hard and soft standards, could be viewed as an electronic Panopticon - a disembodied and all-seeing eye (and in this case an all-hearing ear) which "can overcome the constraints of architecture" and facilitate "a Panoptic gaze which can penetrate walls" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.283). The surveillance process which this electronic Panopticon engenders ensures that Telephone Sales Agents "are totally seen (and heard), without ever seeing (or hearing)" while telephone sales management see (and hear) "everything without being seen (or heard)" (Foucault,1977,pp.201-202). By contrast, the surveillance processes evident at The Co-operative bank and National Savings are unable to transcend the limitations of physical, human managerial supervision. As a result, in the latter two cases lies the *potential* for greater employee discretion.

While, as illustrated above, T.S.As at B.A. do exercise discretion over: which information they communicate to particular callers; whether they communicate any information at all; whether they attempt to 'close a sale' or not; and the amount of calls which they choose to take in one day, it can be argued that the targeting system in particular ensures that this is *positive discretion* only. Tactical or positive discretion alone, and consequently the concept of 'empowerment', does not approximate the wider conception of work autonomy perceived as so significant throughout this study. By comparison, the less thoroughgoing, and non-individualised, application of targets and associated supervisory techniques to the work of Co-operative Bank clerks and D.C.C. clerks permits the exercise of both positive and negative discretion.

Revenue Targets and Disciplinary Force

T.S.As at B.A. have an obvious interest in meeting and surpassing both 'hard' and 'soft' targets. All agents interviewed and observed stated that paid employment at B.A. was their sole source of income and they, and often their dependents, relied upon its continuance. As stated in chapter five, constant individual failure to reach the 'hard' monetary target of £8,000 worth of direct monetary sales would eventually result in dismissal. Furthermore, given the existence of performance-related pay and the various rewards and prizes for surpassing monetary targets, agents have a clear motivation to implement the managerial prescriptions outlined above, and exercise positive discretion, in order to sell as many B.A. products and related services as possible.

In contrast, at the bank, the sale of products - the extent to which revenue targets are met or surpassed - is measured at branch rather than individual level. Management argued that these targets are guided down to individual clerks in the sense that they are aware of what they are and the branch's performance in relation to them. However, there is no general financial incentive, on behalf of individual branch clerks, to sell the bank's products.

The hard revenue targets at B.A. would clearly seem to limit agent discretion over the labour process, over the nature of their interaction with callers and over the pace of work. Implementing the prescriptions of management and exercising empowerment would appear to be in the financial interest of T.S.As:

> You get a basic wage...and then everything you do on top of that is more money for you...at the end of the year, you don't get deducted for anything you do wrong,

> you don't really get penalised for not doing really well, obviously if you don't reach your target, they're going to look into it...what you do wrong, you don't get extra money for it, that's the way it works...it's really in all our favours to try and do well (T.S.A.,1993).

From a managerial point of view, doing things 'wrong' would entail *not* implementing issued prescriptions *or exercising discretion in a manner which reduced rather than enhanced quality customer service*. The revenue targets ensure that agents are financially motivated to deliver management's version of quality service. Performance-related pay and the rewards and prizes outlined below increase this motivation. It must be noted that the majority of T.S.As interviewed stressed that the 'basic wage' referred to above "is hardly enough to live on...most people, I would say, like it here because of the perks and bonuses you can get" (T.S.A.,1994) (2).

It can be argued that at the bank, branch revenue targets do not exert such constraint upon the work and thus the discretion of branch clerks:

> To be honset, I don't actually know what the exact target is at the moment, I know we usually get them...no, you don't really feel any pressure from them (the targets). You certainly don't feel that you have to offer products to customers all the time. Some of us don't even see it as our job, it's really down to the Personal Advisors that...we are there basically to serve customers rather than force things down their

> throat. If they want something then they'll ask for it. That's basically what we get paid for - cashing their cheques, giving them withdrawls, taking their deposits and all that (C.S.O.,1993).

> I suppose the target is important but it's the manager that feels the pressure on that more than us I think...you certainly don't think 'oh, I could have sold this, this and this today, that means the branch might miss its target'...I know it sounds a bit...cold ...and I wouldn't let the manager hear me say this, although let's face it she knows this as well, we all get our salaries at the end of the month, not particularly good ones mind, and she (the B.D.M.) does as well, whether the branch reaches its target or not...it is good that the branch does get it's target though, its important for us all that the branch does well (P.A.,1993).

Consequently, it can be suggested that the bank clerks are given the opportunity to exercise greater autonomy over the labour process. This can be illustrated by the greater incidence of negative discretion, as exercised by bank clerks at the Co-op, for example over whether to offer product information to particular customers, and what that information actually is (technical quality):

> It just depends how you are feeling and what they're (the customer) are

> like. Some of them are so rude and arrogant that I don't want to offer them things, sometimes I don't or I'll deliberately give him *(sic)* something that is just not appropriate to his needs...the exact opposite of what we're supposed to be doing...I had a bloke in today who was a right pig, he was asking about upgrading his pension plan...I told him that we couldn't do that for him at the moment, we would need medical certificates and all sorts which of course we don't, but I just didn't want to deal with him...it happens quite a lot really (P.A.,1993).
>
> Even when customers ask about a particular product, I sometimes won't tell them about it...I hate some of them the way they go on, I don't want to do them a favour (C.S.O.,1993).

Female clerks at The Co-operative Bank suggested that the majority of these thoughts are directed towards *male* customers:

> I would say that the most I actually get so annoyed that I just clam up and don't offer them anything, even if it's obvious they want it...is when you get men in who just treat you like shit, a piece of meat ...this is only the really time I would

> do it but it does happen quite a lot (C.S.O.,1993).

The frequent incidence of general bank clerk negative discretion over whether particular customers are offered product knowledge, which is not necessarily constrained by the hard targeting system, was also illustrated, in relation to C.S.Os, in the previous chapter. Both the frequency and the nature of this negative discretion can be contrasted with what appears to be similar behaviour at B.A. We have already produced evidence of T.S.A. discretion in terms of communicating product knowledge to customers. Firstly, it can be argued that this particular instance of, what could officially be labelled as, 'negative discretion' at B.A. is rare when compared with similar examples at The Co-operative Bank. Secondly, the status of such agent behaviour at B.A. is rather ambiguous. Although management officially argue that 'every enquiry is a potential sale', some managerial staff accepted that many calls are purely enquiries. Furthermore, it was accepted by this section of management, that the nature of the call was obvious from the beginning:

> One of the things about this job (T.S.A.) is that you have to accept that ninety nine per cent of all the calls will be enquiries only. Out of them, you can turn some of them round into sales but some are so clearly enquiries that it is not even worth trying (S.T.S.,1993).

> We get so many calls here and we get so busy that you can't really attempt to implement the call structure with all of them, you have to pick and choose, sift out the calls that are sales or potential sales and the calls that are only enquiries.

> In a way, agents that do this are doing themselves a favour by being able to concentrate on the calls that mean revenue and will go towards their target and by keeping their stats. right - they will be getting through calls as well which again is good for them and good for the centre (S.T.L.,1994).

There is a feeling amongst some managerial staff, and the majority of T.S.As, that the exercise of this particular aspect of employee discretion - whom to offer product knowledge to and thus when to implement the call structure and when not to - is necessary to ensure the actual operation of the telephone sales labour process, the implementation of managerial prescriptions and the meeting of individual and centre targets. What appears to be negative discretion can in fact be seen in many ways as the exercise of positive discretion (3). It is certainly tolerated, and in some cases positively rewarded by many S.T.Ss. Thus, although a similar practice is recognised, and described in the previous section, in relation to the C.S.O. labour process, the nature of these forms of employee discretion contrast sharply with the undoubted negative discretion exercised by P.As and C.S.Os and outlined above. Here, product knowledge is withheld, or deliberately distorted, from customers who *wish to purchase* a particular banking product. The existence of individual T.S.A. revenue targets would appear to eliminate the exercise of such negative discretion at B.A.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the individualised revenue targets at B.A. also, in some ways, and especially in comparison to Co-operative Bank female branch clerks, erode the possibility of female resistance to male domination through the exercise of negative discretion within the

workplace. The following comment was representative of many female T.S.As:

> You get some real bastards on the phone... men just think they can talk to women how they want, especially the rich ones. You can just imagine them with their little woman at home and they just think you're the same...there's not a lot you can do really. You can't deny them what they want 'cos it's in your interest to sell them things...I just think to myself that 'at least I'm getting something out of it and that's the only reason I'm being nice to you'. You don't even have to be nice sometimes...some of them just want to buy things and get off the phone so you can be short with them...at least they're getting ripped off, or I suppose their company are probably paying, or it doesn't make any difference to them anyway (T.S.A.,1994).

It must be pointed out that there were some Co-operative Bank branch clerks, particularly C.S.Os, who did feel pressure, and constraint upon their work, from the revenue targets. Disciplinary force was particularly experienced when it was communicated to staff that the branch was under achieving in terms of its revenue target or if the branch had failed to meet the target the previous month (4). However, the source of such discipline was different to that present at B.A. For these clerks, the constraint was not exerted by the branch targets per se, but by the unforeseen implications of branch under-performance:

> Some people don't take any notice of the targets, but sometimes I do, especially if we've fallen behind. I take note, and I definitely offer more products and services during these periods. I only wish other people would take more notice. You never know what's coming next in this company...it used to be so stable...but because we are so sales-orientated now, the cashiering role could well disappear soon. With all the advances being made, people will be able to do all this over the telephone or by computer, from home, whatever...we will be purely sellers...if branches cannot do this, I don't think head office would think twice about getting rid of the whole branch. You have seen how quickly things have changed only in the past three years or so (C.S.O.,1993).

Thus, disciplinary force at The Co-operative Bank which can constrain the exercise of negative discretion, of which the branch targets are part, is given real power by the organisational, labour-market and product-market insecurity to which Co-operative bank clerks are currently exposed - wider aspects of the marketization process rather than the direct implementation of T.Q.M. It can be argued that disciplinary force at B.A. is constantly exerted by the individual revenue targets alone (5). Ironically, at the bank, it is those employees who felt less comfortable with actually selling products who feel most constraint from the revenue targets in the fashion outlined above.

It must be pointed out that, in some instances, the vast majority of the bank branch clerks did feel constrained to exercise only positive discretion in relation to providing product knowledge on, and attempting to sell, particular products. At certain times during the year, the bank 'promoted' certain products, such as payment protection insurance on personal loans, above all others. Employees were given incentives, in the form of holiday prizes or cash bonuses, for selling a certain amount of these products:

> When there is a promotion on, you'll find that we do go all out to sell whatever is being promoted...last year they had a prize of a trip to Singapore and the Maldives for the person in each region who sold the most payment protection insurance... I was offering it left, right and centre, and the personal loans and stuff that make you able to offer it in the first place...but I didn't win...a lot of customers knew about it though, it got quite cringey actually (P.A.,1993).

This supports our argument that when clerks are *individually* measured according to revenue targets, *and* when this affects their remuneration, the exercise of autonomy is more likely to be constrained within the employment relationship.

In direct contrast to both marketized cases, D.C.C. clerks are not targeted at all in terms of the revenue they earn for their work organisation. This is clearly where the autonomy exercised by employees within our three case studies is affected by the nature of the service they are providing.

The implementation of T.Q.M. at both B.A. and The Co-operative Bank is one vital element in the transformation of both labour processes from ones which were formerly organised around information and service *provision* to ones which are now based upon product and service *sales*. The predominant task demanded of both B.A. Telephone *Sales* and the Personal *Sales* Team in Co-operative Bank branches, is to sell products to customers. Often, depending upon how workers are supervised within this selling-orientated labour process, it can be contended that such a transformation, integral to marketization and T.Q.M. within 'clerical' work, can directly restrict employee autonomy. D.C.C. clerks at National Savings are perceived by management, and view themselves, purely as *service-providers*. Consequently, the need to directly sell products to customers does not in any way impinge upon their work autonomy. Directly opposing trends are developing especially at B.A. Telephone Sales and, to a lesser extent, within Co-operative Bank branches.

It is the electronic Panopticon - the I.C.T. at Newcastle Telephone Sales - which enables the measurement of *individual* agents' sales performance. The computer system records the result of every single call. Each 'direct sale' achieved by an individual is recorded against her/his personal name. Each booking 'held' by the computer system is also recorded against the name of the agent who constructed the booking. Management claimed that it is thus impossible for agents to 'claim' sales which have not actually been achieved or those which have been achieved by others. At the Co-op bank, product sales are not officially recorded against the names of individual workers, except in the case of promotions. When the final sale of a product is made, an employee (usually a P.A.) will complete a form which will contain her/his name. These forms are often checked by S.P.As and B.D.Ms. However, the main purpose of this is to verify the security of lending products which have

been sold. B.D.Ms argued that, often, they do not even notice which clerks have actually sold particular products:

> It is purely a check on the safeness of our lending, it's not to check on who has sold what. We're a team here, we work very well, it doesn't matter if someone sells more than somebody else, they may be stronger in another area, we work well together, we don't want our staff competing between each other, that could be unhealthy...if we did that anyway, it would give us a false picture because firstly, we only really check the lending propositions and we would miss out on everything else and also, selling a product might be the results of the efforts of more than one individual...perhaps a Customer Service Officer has introduced the customer to the idea, passed him *(sic)* on to a Personal Advisor for more specialised advice who has in turn involved a Senior Personal Advisor... if I haven't seen someone's name on a form for a long time, I might just mention it to them, do they have a problem with selling or particular products ? Because not everybody likes it... but no as a rule we don't check individuals sales performance, we don't feel we need to at the moment (B.D.M.,1993).

Following Foucault (1977), Dandeker (1990), Knights and Morgan (1991) and Sewell and Wilkinson (1992), one could argue that when employee performance becomes *individualised*, this can facilitate comprehensive clerk *self*-discipline and *self*-management (6).

Clearly, and in direct contrast to clerks at The Co-operative Bank, *individual* agents' financial performance does become very *public* within Newcastle Telephone Sales. As noted in chapter five, the centre runs an ongoing competition entitled 'Going for Gold'. League tables detailing the sales performance of the 'top' one hundred individual agents (measured in terms of volume of sales) are disseminated around the building every month. The 'top performing' agents qualify for monthly 'Going for Gold' awards, either monetary awards or B.A. travel products. Further, an annual 'Going for Gold' league table is produced and individuals are rewarded for consistently outstanding sales performance throughout one year at the Newcastle Telephone Sales annual conference, attended by all Newcastle staff, national management and various guests.

The targeting system at B.A., as a mechanism of power which depends upon the collection, storage and (managerial) control of information, can be seen to both 'normalize' and 'individualize' (Foucault (1980)) concurrently. It produces a 'norm' of sales performance, below which few will want to fall, while the financial rewards and status within the centre which accrue from an outstanding individual sales performance can exert an important disciplinary force upon T.S.As behaviour within the labour process. For example, in relation to the prescriptions of management, and the encouragement of agent positive discretion, concerning how quality service can be delivered and how enquiries can be turned into sales through using the call structure and associated selling skills, one T.S.A. commented:

> The things we are taught, the selling skills are to do with things that you should say and you shouldn't say and the way that you put things over...it's not the case that things are not allowed or you will be immediately 'told off' if you use certain words...you say whatever you want on the phones, whatever you feel comfortable with, but at the end of it, we are all targeted each month for the money that we make, our individual revenue, so if you want to make targets, earn more money and things then you are better off doing what we've been taught and using the proper words otherwise you'll not get your target. If you say to someone 'you can get a really, really cheap ticket', that's not going to persuade them to buy it. The procedures we have been taught does work if you put them into practice (T.S.A. 1994).

Another agent commented on the 'cost of making mistakes' which, he argued, is particularly relevant to T.S.As who have just come out of induction training and are starting on the telephones:

> The difficult thing about starting on the floor was you tend to be asking people all the time, you get buddied up with someone who is sort of experienced and they're there to look after you but obviously they've got their own targets and figures to reach...but it's better to be asking and doing it right, maybe

> asking twice and then doing it yourself than actually muddling through and getting it wrong because you're obviously live and if you cock anything up it's potential money that comes out of your pocket and off the company's budget (T.S.A.,1994).

There is also evidence from the research into the T.S.A. labour process that successfully meeting one's sales targets and winning awards and prizes through the 'Going for Gold' competition is important to the subjectivity and self-identity of individual telephone sales agents. This can be illustrated by one T.S.As contribution to the organisational debate over whether an outstanding sales performance is the result of agent skill and initiative or luck:

> I've always done well here...anyone that is doing a hard-working job can bring in forty or fifty grand a month...it cannot be down to luck...I've been on the floor six months, have you seen the Going for Gold thing on the wall downstairs. Out of the six months I've been on the floor, I've won something on that every month and out of three hundred people, you cannot be lucky for six month in a row. The same people go on it, they vary positions but you do tend to get the same nucleus of say twenty people in the building that'll always easily reach target...it's how you get your head round the job and the type of person you are. If you like the job and you want to do it, and you enjoy what you are doing, you work hard at improving yourself and then you'll sell more. I'm

> basically a hard-working person and I feel that I have improved myself and my skills here. I am proud of what I've achieved...If you cannot be be bothered with the job, you do not like it, and you want people off the phone quick, you are never going to pick up a lot of sales...there are people who come nine to five for the basic wage, get their money and go home, that's the type of people they are, it's up to them, I think every job has them (T.S.A.,1994).

Thus, it can be suggested that, in addition to the financial self-discipline of T.S.As suggested above, the individualised targeting system enabled by the apparently thoroughgoing surveillance of the electronic Panopticon also facilitates employee self-discipline in order to develop and maintain a sense of self-identity and ontological security (Knights (1990), (1995); Willmott (1990), (1995); Knights and Willmott (1992)). The individualised targeting system thus increases the possibility of workers engaging in an 'escape into work' (Knights and Morgan (1991), Sturdy (1992)) - rather than 'from work' - in order to fulfil psychological needs. The above agent's sense of himself as a hard-working person and skilful telephone sales agent would seem to be dependent upon continually exceeding his revenue targets and being rewarded for a high sales performance through the Going for Gold competition. The possibility of attaining this sense of identity through escaping into work has been heightened by the individualisation of performance measurement at B.A. - made possible by the electronic Panopticon - and the very *public* nature of *individual* success.

Such ontological consequences of individualising managerial control and evaluation of the labour process are consistent

with the findings and argument of Knights and Morgan (1991) and Sturdy (1992) (7). In relation to both the financial and ontological disciplinary force of the targeting system (8), which it is claimed can mould "individuals into subjects who are guaranteed to discipline themselves to a far greater degree than could be established through more direct controls" (Knights and Morgan,1991,p.217), it can be suggested that some T.S.As have become "bound up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers" (Foucault,1977,p.201). As Knights and Morgan go on to argue, "once individuals' identities are captured or 'caught up' in the successful accomplishment of specific practices, the exercise of power may truly be seen as localised or 'distributed in a capillary fashion throughout the interstices' (Foucault (1980)) of an organisation" (Knights and Morgan,1991,p.222).

In contrast, it can be argued that the *collectivised targets* at The Co-operative Bank do not facilitate employee self-discipline to the extent apparent at B.A. Clerks are not individually measured in terms of their sales performance and thus their success or failure in this respect often remains hidden from management let alone the branch or wider organisation. The targeting system at bank branch level leaves considerable scope for negative discretion, as illustrated above.

Nevertheless, at the bank, there is some evidence of self-discipline and self-management amongst branch clerks. The above quoted theorists would interpret such evidence as indicative of an 'escape into work' in order to fulfil psychological needs, in particular human needs for a sense of self-identity and ontological security. However, we shall continue to argue that, in relation to Co-operative Bank branch clerks, the roots of such self-discipline and the simultaneous *clerk* rejection of negative discretion lie within a fear of *material* insecurity, given the organisational,

labour market and product market conditions within which their employment experiences are currently structured - i.e. generated by marketization and the business environment it has responded to. Furthermore, it will eventually be argued that even where there is evidence of an 'escape into work' in any of our clerical cases, this is hardly something to be *celebrated*, as those writing from within the discourse of enterprise do (Sturdy (1992); Knights and Morgan (1991)). Rather, the existence of such evidence indicates tendencies towards the underdevelopment of human autonomous capacities, the transformation and destruction of human nature and the development of barbarism within the workplace and beyond.

Within the D.C.C. branch of National Savings, there is also evidence of clerical self-discipline. As indicated in the previous chapter, despite the greatest opportunity of all our three cases, there is very little evidence of D.C.C. clerk negative discretion. In fact, amongst almost all D.C.C. clerks interviewed and observed, we found a *strong commitment* to the notion of providing a public service. This may well be intensified by the fact that clerks are constantly interacting with those who have been recently bereaved and for whom great sympathy was often expressed by those under focus.

> We want to make sure we get things right if only for the claimants, they are the people who we serve...many of them are elderly and vulnerable and they're often desperate to know what the score is (E.O.,1994).

> I could easily delay things if I wanted, deliberately make the wrong decisions, really muck things up, but there's not much point. It's the people out

there who'd suffer and it's not
their fault (A.O.,1994).

I sometimes put off things a little more
than I should sometimes but I don't
like to do it too much and get behind...
I mean some of the people that ring
up, you feel so sorry for them,
especially some of the older ones,
some of them are desperate (A.A.,1994).

This commitment to the ideal of customer service exerts a remarkable constraint upon the exercise of negative discretion within the D.C.C. despite strong clerical resentment, and opposition to, departmental, organisational, public sector and wider societal developments. There was very little difference between male and female clerks regarding the exercise of this particular form of self-discipline.

At B.A., some T.S.As also reported that individual agents' poor financial performance within a team was occasionally traced by the Sales Team Supervisor responsible for that team who was her/himself measured according to the financial performance of the team as a whole. Further, as noted in chapter five, telephone sales teams earn a monetary award if they surpass their collective monthly target. Often, these awards were saved over a three or six month period and spent on a 'team holiday'. Three-monthly and annual team awards are also awarded to teams who surpass their revenue targets to the greatest extent. These are presented at the annual conference. Once again, these incentives can be seen as important in facilitating the *self-management* of agents' delivery of quality customer service and, in fact, eroding discretion over the labour process. Public humiliation resulting from a poor sales performance, particularly that resulting from feelings of having 'let down one's team', exerts a very powerful

sales performance, particularly that resulting from feelings of having 'let down one's team', exerts a very powerful disciplinary force upon the *way* in which T.S.A. discretion is actually exercised. This further strengthens forces which encourage agent implementation of managerial prescriptions and engagement with managerially endorsed empowerment. Such disciplinary force is enabled by the surveillance of the electronic Panopticon.

Productivity Evaluation and Disciplinary Force

The work of T.S.As and bank branch clerks is not only evaluated according to sales standards. A further set of 'hard' targets involve 'productivity' evaluation.

At B.A., the computer system - part of the electronic Panopticon - records and stores detailed information on the number of calls answered per week, the amount of time spent in conversation with passengers per week and the amount of time spent in 'wrap up', for each individual T.S.A. These statistics are immediately available to management for, and at, any point in time. They are also visible to T.S.As, S.T.Ss and S.T.Ls as they are being recorded. As one agent put it:

> They (management) know how long you've been on a call, how long between calls, how long you've been on the toilet, how long you had a drink the night beforehand. They know *everything* about you. Everything is there, they've got every statistic that you can think of ...they monitor everything (T.S.A.,1993,her emphasis).

Once again, each individual is targeted in relation to each of these statistics. A 'norm', below which every agent is not expected to fall, is devised by the Core Management Centre in

London. Each individual agent's performance according to these measures is reviewed in detail during their monthly appraisal meeting. This further constrains the behaviour of T.S.As within the labour process, particularly their discretion over the pace of work. Although it was claimed by many agents that "it's up to you, you press the button when you want to take a call the next time" (T.S.A.,1993), management do monitor the number of calls each individual answers, the amount of time spent in conversation with passengers and the amount of time spent in wrap up. Should individuals fall below the 'norm' for each of these measures, "one of their objectives for the next month, which we set during their appraisal and feedback sessions, will be to get back on target for whatever they have fallen behind on' (S.T.S.,1994). This was endorsed by one agent whose appraisal once stated that her 'talk time' was too high and, consequently, the number of calls which she answered was perceived as too few:

> I used to babble on and on, really lay it on thick sometimes, I just enjoy talking to people. My supervisor at the time said that it is good to build rapport but I was taking it too far and I simply wasn't getting through the calls...my sales were okay so he didn't tell me off as such, just gave me an objective to work on, to get my talk time down and the number of calls up, I managed to do this quite quickly, to get back above the targets...I think it is important that they (management) do give you that guidance so that you know what you're doing. I feel I've got the right balance now between talking and getting through the calls but if they hadn't told me I suppose I wouldn't have known that anything was wrong (T.S.A.,1994).

Once again, it could be perceived that this particular mechanism of power (the non-monetary 'hard' targets), also constituted by knowledge which is collected through surveillance and monopolised by management, facilitates agent self-discipline. One agent commented that:

> It does make you feel a bit stupid if they say that you talk too much or your wrap up is too long...after all, you should know how to do the job, you are doing it ...when they said to me that my wrap up is too long, it just makes you more determined to get it right next time to prove them wrong and prove to yourself that you can do it...I don't know why I got so obsessed, it doesn't affect my pay or anything, I guess I just felt kind of stupid (T.S.A.,1994).

This mechanism of power also normalises - provides a standard below which individual agents will not want to fall - and individualises - measures and evaluates individual agents in relation to one another.

There is some productivity evaluation of branch employees at The Co-op, measuring the length of time it takes to answer the telephone, the length of time which customers spend in branch queues and the extent to which the sales desks are staffed. Once again, these are measured at branch, rather than individual clerk, level. Each branch is targeted according to each of the productivity measures. Productivity is evaluated through a mixture of direct, personal managerial supervision, 'mystery shopping' from head office and customer feedback. In general, it was suggested by the majority of clerks that productivity targets and measurement did not *in themselves*

discipline their behaviour and discretion within the labour process.

In relation to the branch measurement of answering the telephone, there was very little direct managerial supervision. This was measured through mystery shopping and customer feedback:

> We're supposed to always answer the phone after three rings but sometimes it's impossible when we're really busy, we're all flat out on the floor and the phone is in the back room...even if you leap up as soon as it rings, which we don't, you can never catch it...if people ring during our busy time then it's tough really, why are they ringing us anyway ? They should be ringing telephone banking, that's the idea of it. Most of our phone calls are when telephone banking have told people to ring us 'cos they can't be bothered to do their job properly, 'get in touch with your branch'. They can do all the things that we can do, that's what I end up telling nearly all the callers, hopefully we will get less calls as they get rid of people having local branches, customers will hopefully get it out of their heads that we are their branch and we can do more than telephone banking...if we're still here of course and we haven't been totally replaced by telephone banking (C.S.O.,1993).

There was a feeling amongst all clerks that negative customer feedback over the length of time taken to answer the telephone was highly unlikely. The majority of people conducting banking business by telephone contacted the A.M.C. It was argued by many clerks that customers should not expect a telephone service from the branches. These same branch clerks tended to view calls to the branches as an 'irritation' and a 'disruption' within the working day. All clerks suggested that during busy periods it was inevitable that the telephone would *not* be answered within three rings. This was unavoidable "unless we are going to get an extra member of staff whose only job is to answer the telephone...but surely that is not what the branches are about now" (P.A.,1993). This general resentment among many branch clerks towards branch telephone calls was also reflected in clerks' attitudes towards head office 'mystery shopping' in relation to this particular productivity measurement:

> Head office do ring up when we don't know and when you get irritated with customer telephone calls it could be someone from head office but basically so what ?...if they ring up at lunch time, which they invariably do, they're only trying to catch us out, they'll get the answer they're looking for I'm afraid...what do they think we're doing if we don't answer the phone quickly at lunch times, sitting on our backsides and painting our nails ? (C.S.O.,1993).

Interestingly, both B.D.Ms interviewed expressed an ambivalent attitude towards head office monitoring of branch telephone calls. The following comment was representative of them both:

> Customer telephone calls are a bit of a sticky point in the branches given the huge amount of expenditure on telephone banking...we do try and meet the targets set by head office but if we don't, it means we are busy doing other things, the staff would say things that head office *really* expects us to be doing... I agree with them to a certain extent, head office may well be paying lip service to that particular measure, we will meet it where we can (B.D.M.,1993).

Branch clerks' response to the monitoring of branch telephone calls through mystery shopping and customer feedback hardly approximates the effect of Panoptic surveillance as envisaged by Bentham (1962) and Foucault (1977). It can be suggested that the extent of branch clerks' negative discretion, as opposed to limited T.S.A. productivity discretion, over this aspect of the labour process is partly the result of non-individualised productivity evaluation.

There *is* direct managerial supervision of the other productivity measures - the length of time customers spend queuing and the extent to which sales desks are staffed. B.D.Ms suggested that this is one of the major purposes for the 'floor walk'. In relation to both measures, branch clerks appeared to align themselves with managerial and head office values and expectations:

> Queues of customers is something that we all want to avoid...it's not like the old days where people expected to queue and I think it's safe to say we all hated it then...I think even

more now it's what really gives them the impression if they're getting a good service or not, we all know there's nothing worse than queuing...I honestly think that if people don't have to queue much, they will come back over and over again (C.S.O.,1993).

I hate it when queues build up...it does increase pressure on you but it also reflects badly on you. It's sometimes unavoidable but it still says to people that you can't do your job properly, for god's sake, we should be able to cope after all these years. People get really ratty after they've been standing in a queue for ages, I don't blame them, I do (C.S.O.,1993).

Our main priority is to make sure the sales desk is manned *(sic)* at all times, there's nothing worse to a customer than coming in, looking for advice and there's no-one there. I hate that, if they have to ask us to find someone to speak to. We try to avoid that at all costs (S.P.A.,1993).

It can be argued however that the discipline to avoid negative discretion, and exercise empowerment, in these cases is not necessarily exerted by branch targets for this form of productivity, nor direct managerial supervision. It would seem that the prime motivation for clerks to engage in such

practice, which does after all involve the 'successful' accomplishment of managerial expectations, is their own self-respect and self-identity combined with a desire to give *good customer service*. The latter is in turn connected to branch clerks' fear of material insecurity, and could additionally explain the motivation to follow managerial prescriptions with regard to the 'routine' aspects of banking, as outlined at the beginning of the previous chapter. The above comments suggest that clerks are concerned that long queues and unstaffed sales desks would reflect negatively upon their own *individual competence and identity* as C.S.Os or P.As (9). The first C.S.O. quoted above also stated that:

> It's really for my own sense of pride
> and for the customers that I don't
> like to see huge queues building up...
> I feel sorry for people if they're
> waiting a long time, especially
> those who've got kids with
> them (C.S.O.,1993).

C.S.Os and P.As suggested that they *could* ensure that large queues developed deliberately, by pretending that they were busy and therefore not available to serve customers. "We've all done it, pretend to still be busy finishing off the last job so you make it obvious to the customer that they can't be served yet. It gives you a break, especially when you just been at it one after the other all day...I suppose we all still do it at sometime, but some of us more than others" (C.S.O.,1993). Once again, the very opportunity for work autonomy indicates its presence even though the majority of clerks do not often exercise it in a negative direction. At both branches studied, certain C.S.Os were singled out as constantly exercising such negative discretion. The rest of the personal sales team did display some resentment towards such clerks who they often perceived as damaging their

attempts to maintain a sense of themselves as competent branch clerks and to give good customer service.

Within the bank branches, direct managerial supervision could do little to eliminate the above described aspect of work autonomy. Furthermore, branch clerks in both branches suggested that B.D.Ms tolerated the existence of these practices:

> There's not a lot she (the B.D.M.) can say unless she actually stands over you and catches you making up work... she usually just looks at the counter in general to make sure the queues are not too long, that there are enough people on the counter and that people have generally got things to do (C.S.O.,1992,my addition).

> I'm sure the boss knows that it (pretending to be busy and therefore delaying customers) goes on but as long as there aren't massive queues all the time I don't think she's that bothered...she used to be behind the counter herself so she knows more than anyone how knackered you can get, she probably used to do it herself (C.S.O.,1993,my addition).

Some branch clerks went on to suggest that the particular practice of 'pretending to be busy' actually *maintained* rather than damaged service quality:

> In many ways, it (pretending to be busy) gives you a chance to catch your breath, compose yourself, so you are ready for the next customer. If they just came one after the other, you would get sicker and sicker and you're bound to be more and more ratty with customers, anyone would...you end up just getting rid of some of them as quickly as possible unless you have a chance to think about it and put it in perspective (C.S.O.,1993).

Thus, in a similar way to 'tacit skills' at B.A., the status of this behaviour as 'negative discretion' is rather ambiguous.

Despite such behaviour, 'serving customers' and 'getting through queues' was seen by branch clerks as the pivotal part of their labour process. 'Pretending to be busy' was, for the majority of clerks, particularly rare during busy periods. Branch clerks' desire to give good customer service is also linked to their already outlined, justified fear of material insecurity. It was argued that customer feedback was one of the most important forces shaping head office policy. Should, as so many clerks feared, head office decide to reduce the numbers of branches or eliminate them all together as part of the ongoing restructuring, the majority of branch clerks felt that only customer resistance would reverse such a policy. Branch targets for the length of time customers spend queuing and the extent to which sales desks are staffed was, by comparison with the fears of redundancy, a weak disciplinary force:

> If we meet branch targets while serving customers all well and good but it doesn't really affect us, it's the manager who'd get it in the neck... head office will decide what'll happen to the branches whatever productivity we get (C.S.O.,1993).

> It's the customers who can keep the branches going as they are by saying that they need them, they value them. They (head office) listen to the customers not us (C.S.O.,1993).

Some bank clerks pointed out that their desire to give good customer service has always been present, even during times of relative material security:

> I've always wanted to give good customer service, I think a lot of people have... we've always done some of the things that they (head office) are now training people to do and telling us to do... it's a bit patronising really... I think the Co-op bank, as part of the Co-operative movement, has a tradition of having a special relationship with its customers, I'm not sure whether all these customer care and T.Q.M. stuff have actually changed a great deal in that respect...they (the bank) *used* to have a reputation for having a special relationship with the

> staff as well (C.S.O.,1993,my emphasis).

Even more general, and less constraining in terms of employee discretion, forms of productivity evaluation are in existence at the D.C.C. branch of National Savings.

We can firstly examine the D.C.C. branch measurement of, and targets for, 'turnaround time' or 'customer satisfaction'. A recent aim of the branch is to ensure that all claimants receive a substantive reply to their enquiry within twenty one days of the original communication. Seven days is added to this target if further information is requested by a clerk in order to facilitate the production of a substantive reply. This particular productivity target is a recent phenomenon within the D.C.C. At the time of the research, branch management were also aiming to ensure that ninety-five per cent of claimants received a substantive reply within eighteen days. Crucially, however, these targets have never actually been published anywhere. Claimants are unaware of the standards being set. Thus, we can suggest that the targets are likely to be less rigidly enforced and measured than those at the marketized cases. Clearly, these targets had little impact upon the discretion exercised by D.C.C. clerks:

> They're only general guidelines for the branch as a whole...you're not individually measured, no-one would actually know if it was you personally who hadn't replied within twenty one days, they might know it was someone on your section and then the E.O. might check up...but that's not the point I'm trying to put anyway... we always reply within twenty one days, that is ample time, we always have replied within twenty one days, I don't

> know why they bother with the target, it's always happened. Maybe they set it 'cos they knew we could reach it happily (A.O.,1994).

In fact, the vast majority of D.C.C. clerks interviewed argued that they have, and always have had, their own informal target for producing a substantive reply to a claimant. Within some sections, this informal target which is invariably met, is as low as ten days. The exercise of such positive discretion and the almost over-implementation of managerial prescription within the D.C.C. can again be seen as a result of this historical and continuing commitment to the holders of Savings Certificates. Clerks saw themselves as the providers of a public service to such people.

> We like to try and deal with people as efficiently as possible because they are just ordinary people like you and me, they're not big business, they're not trying to rip us off, most of them anyway, we're not trying to rip them off...really I suppose we are looking to see that justice is done in some kind of way, if that's what you want to call it...we want to do things right, as prompt as possible (A.O.,1994).

There is, in fact, much resentment at the introduction of forms of measurement and feedback, such as the target for 'turnaround time'. The following complaint was representative of *all* levels of D.C.C. clerk:

> It's a bit of a cheek really, we've always done it. They say it's for the

> so called 'customer', but they've never actually surveyed the customer to see what they want. How do they know claimants want a fast response ? Do they want this rather than the right response or a carefully considered one ? Many people see it as the start of things to come, like constantly trying to increase productivity and then getting rid of people (A.O.,1994).

Such resentment is part of a more general dissatisfaction amongst D.C.C. branch clerks at departmental, organisational, public sector and societal trends. The branch targets for turnaround time are viewed as the beginning of marketizing developments, such as market-testing and individualised productivity measurement and evaluation, which have engulfed other departments within National Savings more rapidly. These developments are in turn linked by many D.C.C. clerks to the Conservative government's gradual dismantling of the public sector and the welfare state, and creation of sharp divisions and conflicts within the wider society. However, despite often being expressed in very sophisticated politicised terms by many D.C.C. clerks, the simultaneous and continued commitment to public service was strong enough to ensure that this resentment and political disquiet did not witness an increase in the incidence of negative discretion at work:

> It's sometimes difficult in these times to get people going and to get yourself going at work. You often wonder what the point is...central government is to blame, not just in this organisation, but we can generalise. They are creating an underclass of people in society and a lot of people

> in the public sector who do not care about these people...but I will say that whatever central government does and whatever they try in this organisation, because we've got a Tory in charge here now, it'll be hard to undermine the commitment that we have to our holders and claimants, I don't like using the word customer, especially amongst the more experienced of us. It has been built up over years (E.O.,1994).

This enduring commitment to public service also meant that each section has little difficulty in ensuring that the D.C.C. branch as a whole meets its overall output target and satisfies the Staff Inspectorate.

A further hard target at Newcastle Telephone Sales - the attempt by Telephone Sales Worldwide to deliver a service factor of '80/20', *is* measured collectively. However, it can further constrain the autonomy of T.S.As over the labour process. This form of managerial supervision is immediate and ongoing. The electronic measurement board ensures that failure, *by the Newcastle centre,* to meet this target is immediately apparent to both managerial staff and agents. Such failure did temporarily occur at various times during the research period. S.T.Ss, eager to maintain an image of competence and efficiency within Telephone Sales Worldwide, would immediately 'floor walk', exhorting agents to increase the number of calls taken and decrease the time spent in conversation and in wrap up. As one T.S.A. pointed out:

> One thing they do get narked about is when the 80/20 thing, answering the calls, is not achieved, some of them can go a bit loopy actually, I think they see it as a slur

> on themselves...there's some kind of competitive thing with the other centres, because we are a new centre and we've done well, they (supervisory staff) are always saying that the other centres are always looking to blame us for things, pick up on things we do wrong...anyway we usually answer most of the calls in twenty seconds...it only really gets difficult if we have a promotion on and we get ever so busy (T.S.A.,1994).

Female clerks suggested that this aspect of telephone sales managerial control particularly constrained their autonomy within the labour process. They argued that male and female S.T.Ss immediately assume that failure to meet the 80/20 service target is the result of female clerks spending too long in conversation with passengers. The following comment was representative of these views:

> As soon as we fall behind, they always come over to our group...group of girls...they immediately assume that it's us...even supervisors who have nothing to do with us. We like to have a laugh but we get on with it...there are people, including lads, who spend ages on the phone...they should look at people's phone stats and talk time before they jump to conclusions...it really gets people's back up (T.S.A.,1994).

The open plan nature of each community means that those who are not in conversation with clients are immediately visible. This certainly constrains agent discretion over the pace of work. "If we're falling behind (the 80/20 target), you have to make sure you get your head down and answer as many calls as

possible...they (supervisors) get really annoyed if they find you doing nothing then...it's the only time I've really seen them bollock people in public" (T.S.A.,1993). Furthermore, the electronic Panopticon means that it is possible for management to ascertain whether those constantly in conversation with customers are actually answering the volume of calls needed to deliver the service target of 80/20. Many agents commented that the constant possibility of falling below the 80/20 target did constantly constrain their behaviour within the workplace:

> You can have a rest or a lark about if everyone else is working but you have to be on your toes...you can't do it if we're below the 80/20 target, that can happen out of the blue...you don't want to be the one who is singled out for letting the whole of the centre down (T.S.A.,1994).

Once again, detailed managerial supervision of this aspect of the labour process can facilitate a form of agent self-discipline and control, perhaps more effective than any direct control which could be exercised by management. Discretion over the pace of work is clearly limited by this form of managerial control.

In contrast, failure at a *worldwide* level to meet the 80/20 target did not exert a disciplinary (either directly imposed by management or self-imposed) force upon Newcastle Telephone Sales Agents, provided that the centre was delivering the target at a local level. In fact, agents appeared to revel in such a situation:

> If we're doing our bit but generally (i.e. nationally) the target is not

being met, why is it our problem ?...
in fact, we tend to have a bit of
a laugh and slow down if that happens
'cos I'm sure they would not help
us out (T.S.A.,1994) (10).

Subjective Evaluation

Employees within both of our marketized cases are also supervised and monitored according to 'soft' standards - a subjective managerial evaluation of their attitude and teamwork within the employment relationship, their performance within the various participatory and representative mechanisms outlined in chapters five and six and, perhaps most importantly, their social interaction with customers. Once again, however, the extent and effect of this supervision varies *between* the two cases. Within our non-marketized case, there is very little managerial supervision and evaluation of this aspect of the labour process.

It could be argued that such subjective evaluation of work, as a mechanism of power enabled through managerial collection, storage and monopolisation of knowledge of the labour process, enables almost 'total' managerial control of the T.Q.M. labour process. In fact, it could be further suggested that these surveillance processes fundamentally shape the norms, values, identities and personalities - in short, the corporate cultural participation - of employees.

Hard targeting systems within T.Q.M. constitute managerial supervision of the *results* of the labour process - the 'prescriptive limits' which management inevitably set as to what is to be achieved. It has been argued that these prescriptive limits, and the way in which worker performance is measured against them, have consequences for the exercise of work autonomy. It has also been *suggested* that different

hard targeting systems *could* have important and distinct implications for the self-identity and personality of employees.

Soft monitoring involves supervision, and evaluation, of *how* the prescriptive limits, the hard targets, are actually achieved - precisely how products and services are delivered and sold at B.A. and The Co-operative Bank. It has been suggested that this area of the *clerical* labour process is where employee discretion is greatest. Further, from empirical studies of paid employment, it has been argued that the exercise of such autonomy can form the basis of, often oppositional, collective sub-cultures within work organisations. These are in turn important for the development of *meaningful* occupational identity amongst employees (Beynon (1974); Cockburn (1983)).

The arguments of Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) and Hochschild (1983) suggest that the sophisticated surveillance processes accompanying the introduction of marketization and T.Q.M. to our cases, mean that worker autonomy, and therefore *employee* control of their norms, values, identities and personalities, is being eroded.

Involvement and Participation

The first important point to be made is that evaluation according to soft standards helps to shape the performance-related pay of T.S.As at B.A. Within the branches of The Co-operative Bank studied, management claim to evaluate work according to soft standards, but this does not affect the remuneration of clerks.

In both of our T.Q.M. cases, management evaluate employees' attitude and teamwork within the employment relationship. Within both organisations, management argued that such an

evaluation is only possible *because* of the close working relationship between B.D.Ms and their personal sales teams and S.T.Ss and their telephone sales teams. Evaluation is effected through observation of clerk behaviour throughout all aspects of the labour process:

> It's not just the hard targets that are important, we take the whole person... we are constantly watching them really ...our best people are not necessarily those who are always selling the most, they may not provide the best customer service on non-selling calls which might affect whether people come back to B.A. or not, they may not help others out in their team...we're not really looking for hard sellers, we're looking to develop people who can sell but who do it in a way that is good for the future of the business and the future of themselves (S.T.S.,1994).

> When I'm floor-walking, observing, leading meetings or training or whatever, I'm constantly aware of people's attitude, their commitment and how they work well with each other...that is the key to our success (B.D.M.,1993).

One example of the way in which the attitude and teamwork of clerks at both sites is evaluated is through their performance within the many communicative and representative mechanisms mentioned in chapters five and six.

At B.A., the 'team briefing' of each team by their supervisor, which takes place prior to every shift, is undertaken outside of paid labour time. According to management, the participation of agents is purely voluntary. However, all T.S.As interviewed and observed unanimously agreed that non-attendance at these briefings would be taken by S.T.Ss as a sign of non-commitment and a 'bad attitude'. This would, in turn, affect the S.T.Ss evaluation and appraisal of the T.S.A. in question. Thus, opportunities for negative discretion, which could be expressed through regular non-attendance at these meetings is constrained:

> You've just got to be there really. What we talk about varies. This morning we were talking about phone stats, sometimes we just have a chat, sometimes about what we've seen at the pictures anything... they see it as a way of building team spirit.. it wouldn't be looked on favourably if you didn't turn up for it (T.S.A.,1993).

The daily briefing of the Personal Sales team by the B.D.M. and the biweekly sales team meetings at The Co-operative Bank both take place within paid labour time. In contrast to B.A. Telephone Sales. clerk behaviour at such meetings has no effect upon their salary. Observation of both types of meeting, and interviews with clerks, revealed that there is, in reality, very little participation from employees:

> It's quite useful if anything new has just come out, or there's a new directive from head office which we might not be sure about...it's largely the boss talking to us, she'll tell us about any complaints that

might have been made...or she'll tell us a lot of things we already know...many of them are not that much use...I suppose I could participate more but what's the point ? Everybody's got their own individual way of doing things, most of them have been here about twenty years, or at least with the bank that long so I'm not gonna start and tell them how to do their job, they wouldn't listen anyway. The boss likes you to get involved and suggest things but...the way things are going with this bank, I don't think it makes the blind bit of difference whether you're committed or not, you'll still end up getting replaced by a computer or a telephone (C.S.O.,1993).

The above comment was typical of the majority of branch employees. It can be suggested accordingly that branch clerks routinely exercise negative discretion in choosing not to contribute and participate within team briefings and meetings.

The subjective evaluation of T.S.As by S.T.Ss, communicated to T.S.As through monthly appraisal meetings, shapes fifty per cent of an agent's performance-related pay. There is considerable evidence that greater managerial surveillance of the soft aspects of the labour process at B.A., as opposed to the bank, also facilitates greater employee self-discipline. This is constituted by more implementation of managerial prescriptions, the more frequent exercise of positive

discretion and heightened restriction of negative discretion. For example, one S.T.S. and a former T.S.A. at Heathrow, London argued that:

> Some people, although not many, don't like their feedback because some of the things they don't want to hear, but whenever they come out they always say like 'god, she's such a cow, I can't believe she's said that', they go away and next month most of them have adapted their behaviour in some way and it's for their own good. In London, you never knew if you were doing anything wrong and it's only when you happen to be caught and you were 'well how am I supposed to know that ? No-one's told me'. We can't expect these people to sell if we don't give them the feedback, the motivation and the skills which will enable them to do it (S.T.S.,1993).

Co-operative branch bank clerks also meet individually with their B.D.M. for an appraisal session. The B.D.Ms assessment of their attitude and commitment is communicated and they are given particular 'objectives' to work on before the next appraisal. However, given that the B.D.Ms assessment is not tied to clerks' financial reward, such meetings appear to have a limited effect upon employees' behaviour:

> We get given objectives to work on which come out of her (the B.D.M.) appraisal of your work, how you work with other people, your commitment, your attitude and all of that...it doesn't really

affect you, or at least it doesn't affect me that much...my objectives are just the same every month. She keeps telling me to get more involved, how important communication is...I've been a cashier for nearly twelve years and I can quite safely say that I'm not doing too much too different now than I've done for the past twelve (C.S.O.,1993).

The objectives we get are quite interesting, they give you something to work towards I suppose, but it doesn't really matter if you don't meet them, there're all about personal opinion really. She says the same to me every time about taking more responsibility for things like organising the rota and filling in for people when they're busy, or chatting more with customers, things like that, but I haven't really done it. It's not really my job, people who've been here twenty years aren't going to let me start telling them what to do. I don't get paid any more for doing it (C.S.O.,1993).

Many employees within both branches also pointed out that appraisal meetings were, in practice, very irregular. Some clerks had not been appraised for over one year. This perhaps reflects an unofficial branch managerial doubt over the effectiveness of such mechanisms for improving service quality (11).

Female clerks at both The Co-operative Bank and B.A. felt that daily, weekly and monthly meetings were, in general, male dominated. It was argued that their participation was limited by the dominance of the few male clerks within the respective organisations:

> They don't really listen to what we've got to say in any of these meetings, it's like as if they like the idea of having them, so they can say they have them but they don't really want to hear what you've got to say... it seems worse if you're a woman...we've got one bloke in our meetings, the S.T.S. and the S.T.L. will listen to him and take on board what he says...I can safely say that they've never acted upon anything that our group of women suggest or want...like the other day we said again that we want to discuss the idea of uniforms 'cos we spend so much on work clothes...they say 'yeah', but nothing will be done until the next meeting...it's seen as a woman's issue, 'ah, they're moaning again, I wouldn't want to be their husband'...it's as if they just humour us to the next time (T.S.A.,1994).

A further example of how managerial surveillance of the attitude and commitment of T.S.As at B.A. can constrain behaviour concerns breaks taken during working time. Despite some agents claiming they could take breaks when they wished and that the legally necessary 'machine break' every three hours (known organisationally as a 'tea break') often lasted as long as twenty minutes, other T.S.As suggested that they limited breaks generally and restricted the machine break to ten minutes (12). The latter T.S.As felt that this would display commitment and a 'positive attitude' to S.T.Ss which

would be rewarded through performance related pay. This view was validated by observation and the comments of many S.T.Ss, such as:

> Our system...tells you everybody's 'log on', gives you their name, tells you if they're on a call, tells you if they're off a call, tells you if they're doing a wee, tells you if they're picking their nose. If they've gone for tea for ten minutes, ten minutes is their allocated time, anything other than that then it blocks them out, it highlights the whole name and the line...so if you're passing it and it's blocked out, you go 'mmmm, mmmmm'...some people just try and get round the system...I would see it as a lack of commitment, as the wrong kind of attitude, it would affect my judgement of them...if you've got the figures in front of you, how can they argue ? (S.T.S.,1993).

> I just say to them 'take as long as you bloody want for your tea, but don't come to me when you don't get your target and in six months time when you don't get any money for it'...if they don't help themselves how can I help them...I think if you relate everything to money, it might really open people's eyes and they think 'oh god yeah'...I think if some people can get round the system, they'll try...I was eighteen when I joined (telephone sales) and I used to try it (S.T.S.,1993).

Once again, the development of this particular agent self-discipline has been enabled by the electronic Panopticon which collects and stores information on individual T.S.As. Many former agents from the London centres, prior to marketization, T.Q.M. and thoroughgoing surveillance, reported that the 'machine break' was often abused. However, it was impossible to measure individual abuses and sanction those who 'deviated'. On the whole, telephone sales management in London were forced to pragmatically accept the continued existence of this practice.

The financial self-discipline of T.S.As has been facilitated by the sophistication of the electronic Panopticon - the telephone and computer systems in operation at B.A. - in many other ways. Before the development of 'easyres' and a computer and telephone system which automatically records 'hard' data of agent performance, S.T.Ss and S.T.Ls at the London centres spent the majority of their working time dealing with technical problems arising from the operation of B.A.B.S. and painstakingly collecting 'hard' data, such as the amount of agents spent in the centre and the amount of sales achieved. The development of an *electronic* Panopticon, it can be argued, has enabled human managerial supervision to be constituted by general, personal observation of, and interaction with, their telephone sales team.

Personal, direct managerial supervision of the labour process and the attitudes of clerks within it, is available to B.D.Ms at The Co-op Bank. However, it can be argued that such managerial surveillance of the 'commitment' of bank clerks does not constrain discretion to the extent in evidence at B.A. This is largely because B.D.Ms appraisal of a clerk's corporate cultural participation does not affect her/his salary. Thus, in relation to breaks taken during paid labour time, outside of those permitted for 'lunch' (13):

> I manage to get a few breaks during the day, say if I need to nip out and get something. Obviously, I wouldn't do it at a really busy time when we were stretched 'cos that would just land everybody else in it...but I wouldn't not do it because the manager disapproved or because it showed a lack of commitment ...I don't know whether she approves or not, how can they expect us to be committed when they're not exactly committed to us, any one of us could be on the dole inside a year (C.S.O.,1993).

Clearly, the lack of *financial* incentives for branch clerks to become 'culturally integrated' within the organisation, exacerbated by clerk resentment at constant job insecurity which continues to accompany the ongoing marketization and organisational restructuring process, means that negative discretion is almost commonplace and a 'strong corporate culture' is struggling to develop.

It is argued by B.A. management that their subjective evaluation of the soft aspects of the telephone sales labour process - what they label the 'measurement of quality' - does not limit worker discretion. On the contrary, it is suggested that agent initiative (positive discretion) is rewarded by the soft targeting system *and* agents are able to disagree with, and discuss, the subjective perception of S.T.Ss. Of all T.S.As interviewed, however, only one had contested their S.T.Ss appraisal of them. This did not result in the alteration of their performance-related pay. The majority of agents felt that there was 'no point' in contesting the decision of an S.T.S.

Telephone Sales management also point out that 'how good you are at making decisions and taking responsibility' is one of the main criteria by which a T.S.As attitude, commitment and behaviour is evaluated. They consequently suggest that worker autonomy is positively encouraged. As one S.T.S. commented:

> What really counts against people in our evaluation of them is if they say things like 'yeah, but I didn't know anything about this new service we had' and I say 'well why ?', 'because we weren't told', 'well you have to make it your business to find out, it's your job' some of them...are always like 'you never told us, you never told me I could'. For god's sake, do you want me to come to the toilet and wipe your arse for you when you go to the loo ? ...try as I might, to some people I say 'look, you're going to have to say if you want something, if you want me to get you something or if you want to try and do this, try that, you have to come and say and if I can get it for you or help you I will, but for god's sake use your initiative, don't sit there moaning because you haven't got what you want or you can't make any decisions, you can but no-one will know you want to unless you say (S.T.S.,1993).

However, it can be argued that such 'empowerment' is the exact opposite of the meaning of worker autonomy or employee discretion forwarded in chapter one. T.S.A's are only rewarded (through performance related pay) for, and encouraged to

exercise, decisions and 'independent' actions which enhance technical and functional quality as defined by telephone sales management - meeting and anticipating customers needs and expectations, resulting in increased sales of B.A. products. This is what we have labelled 'positive discretion'. T.S.A's are penalised for decisions and 'independent' actions which damage technical and functional quality as defined by management. Thus, the very essence of work autonomy - *choosing* between alternative actions, where the results of the action decided are unknown, and accepting responsibility for the action chosen, is forced down narrow, 'positive' channels by managerial surveillance. The only discretion that is rewarded and managerially encouraged is 'positive' or 'tactical' discretion - employee choices which enhance the objectives of management. Perversely, this constrains employee choice in particular ways.

> It's very hard because when they come into the company, they go on to the phones and they think it's all like tell, tell, tell, 'you have to do this, you have to do that' and half the problem is, one person says 'oh, it's like big brother watching you' and then hundreds of others will go 'oh, big brother's watching you' and I just think you won't make it any different...unless you make it different...if you sit there all day going 'I can't believe we only get ten minutes for our tea and every time I'm late from my tea I do this, and I can't believe I'm not allowed to eat my tea', if that's the attitude you want to come in with then you just poison everybody around you and you have a whole group of militant people... if you can come up with a solution, or

> you can come up with something that you want done better, you have to come forward but ninety per cent of them don't, can't be arsed, they don't want to take the responsibility to change, they think that because it's been like that, that's how it has to be (S.T.S.,1993).

> We have to offer some guidelines but we want people to use their initiative as well, we need a good balance...but some people won't take responsibility, ...people just think that they're going to get in trouble for doing things they haven't been told to do...the phrase up here is 'get wronged'...these people always think they're going to 'get wronged' and they start thinking it's like school, we're treated like children, it's big brother watching you when in fact it's only a massive company trying to regiment 'cos if you had everyone on the phones doing what they wanted, it would be chaos, where do you draw the line ? (S.T.S.,1994).

It was argued by the majority of T.S.As interviewed and observed that such observation of agent behaviour did exert a strong disciplinary force. This was particularly the case amongst those who were extremely anxious to receive a high level of performance-related pay and those who aimed to move up the hierarchical structure at Newcastle (14). The following statement was typical of such agents:

> In this place, you've got to be outgoing,
> you've got to get yourself noticed,
> it's not the sort of place where you
> can just come in, get your head down
> and do your job, although I suppose
> you can do that but you're not going
> to get anything out of it. You've got
> to be a bit of a sort of big mouth,
> you've got to get a fairly high profile
> around the building...it does make a
> difference when you're going up for
> jobs, people know who you are (T.S.A.,1994).

Using Hochschild's notion of emotional labour, it can be argued that T.S.As are intrinsically involved in managing feeling during their interaction with *management*. T.S.As often aim to produce, within their *manager*, the feeling of managing committed and responsible employees. It would seem that demands for such labour are far more frequent and onerous within the labour process of T.S.As as opposed to the work of the Co-operative Bank clerks studied. The consequences of corporate organisation of emotional labour has been briefly discussed earlier. The discussion will be extended below, and in the following chapter.

There is *no* supervision or appraisal of the involvement, participation or commitment of D.C.C. clerks at National Savings.

Clerk-Customer Interaction

A further important mechanism for the evaluation of agent performance according to 'soft' standards at both T.Q.M. research sites is supervision of employee-customer interaction. At B.A., this is largely implemented through remote and known monitoring of agent-customer telephone

conversations. Once again, according to management, the results of such evaluation significantly shape agents' performance related pay. At The Co-operative Bank, clerk-customer interaction is largely monitored through mystery shopping from head office and customer feedback. There is very little supervision and evaluation of clerk-customer interaction at National Savings.

B.A. Telephone Sales

At B.A., remote monitoring of agent-customer interaction can occur at any point in time and be undertaken by any managerial staff member. It is not only undertaken by the S.T.S. responsible for the T.S.A. under surveillance. S.T.Ss pointed out that feedback from remote monitoring is usually given to agents during their monthly appraisal meetings. However:

> If we find something that is really bad, someone has a really bad attitude or they are just going about things in completely the wrong way we will go straight up to them and ask them why, what the problem is...they might need help, they might just need time off the phones, whatever. We sometimes have to act quickly before we lose more than one sale or more than one customer (S.T.S.,1994).

It can be argued that, through remote monitoring, the electronic Panopticon - this time in the shape of the telephone system - enables management to supervise a major element of the labour process (interacting with customers - and thus the delivery of technical and functional quality) without the knowledge of agents themselves. Almost directly following Foucault's arguments, some managerial staff suggested that this *capability* to 'listen in' to the conduct

of employee-customer conversations meant that 'total' control was exerted over *all* such interactions:

> They (agents) know that we can 'listen in' at any time, they don't know when...it is a good managerial, quality assurance and development tool 'cos it means they are always on their toes...they can't really be slap dash 'cos they know we can always pull them up...*in many ways, because it's there we don't have to use it that often - it varies between supervisors* (S.T.S.,1994,my emphasis).

In Foucault's (1977) words, agents are "totally seen (or heard) without ever seeing (or hearing)" while management "sees (or hears) everything without ever being seen (or heard)" (p.202,my additions). Such a surveillance process "is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action...the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary" (Foucault,1977,p.201). Some S.T.Ss were more explicit than others about the managerial power which accrues from remote monitoring:

> You can do it from your desk...you just tap their extension into your phone, Bob's your uncle, you can sit and listen to them...when people find this out, their initial response is... worry ! 'You can't do that'. What I say to them is 'if you have anything that you don't want us to hear, the doors are at the front of the office, see you later, what are you doing here ?. If you think of it, why would you be saying something that isn't

B.A., or isn't nice, or isn't polite ?'
(S.T.S.,1993).

Similarly, another S.T.S. described her response to the very common worries of T.S.As concerning the morality of remote monitoring:

> I argue back with them about remote monitoring. It is a very important tool for us...I say to them, 'you know you are here to sell so if I pick up a call, pick up a phone and listen to you and you have let a sale go, I want to know why because that is all we employ you for'. You know the bottom line Stephen is that we employ these people to generate revenue, you know. I could get on the phone and just be nice you know, we have to have that but it has to go hand in hand. If we have people missing sales, we would know. Our system means that they (agents) always feel like someone is sitting behind them. If someone's sitting behind you, you'd be like (friendly tone) 'Hi !, you are speaking to Stephen, may I ask whose calling ?, okay, I've just booked you two flights on that'. If no-one's listening to you, you'd be like this (change to aggressive tone), 'Look, I've already said, the flight goes at 10.15' and you'd be surprised at what you hear...the thing that kills me is that they (agents) know that we do it but we never do it to catch them out...I would never do it to catch someone out, but the thing is you do it as a check and it gets a bad press, so people become scared of it but the only people that are scared of it are

> the people that are crap anyway. I think 'well, why are you here ? We don't want you here if you are going to say (aggressively), 'well, it's 10.15, I've just told you it's 10.15' (S.T.S.,1994).

Another S.T.S. argued that, as part of the surveillance process, remote monitoring encouraged T.S.A's to exercise positive discretion/empowerment:

> I suppose it does mean that we can catch things we wouldn't otherwise hear and we can put those things right, but I don't just use it for that. It's their (T.S.As) chance to shine, to show us what they can do. If they're doing good things, using their own initiative, *if good practice comes from interacting with customers naturally,* then we'll notice that as well and praise them for it, they'll get more money for it as well (S.T.S.,1994, my emphasis).

Many agents endorsed the existence of permanent surveillance, through remote monitoring, of their interaction with customers:

> They can listen into your calls and that's the bit I don't like because you don't know they're doing it...it really does have an effect upon you because you know that if you don't do things by the book they could be listening and they could pull you up on it. You've got to be on your guard all the time...I suppose in some

> ways you can't just be yourself
> (T.S.A.,1993).

Remote monitoring is undoubtedly the element of managerial supervision which engendered the most controversy within Newcastle Telephone Sales and facilitated the greatest agent resentment. Many agents felt that this supervisory technique was contrary to managerial claims to be 'empowering' T.S.As, giving them responsibility and encouraging them to make decisions when interacting with customers:

> How can they be giving us responsibility when they can listen in to any of our calls and then pull us up for not doing things the way that they would have done it ? In one way they're saying 'do it how you want, build rapport, be yourself', on the other they've got big brother watching our every move and then telling us to do things the way that they would have done it...a lot of times it's just less hassle to do things as they want (T.S.A.,1993).

Other T.S.As accepted the use of remote monitoring in order to appraise, reward and develop people but there was unanimous resentment at the use of remote monitoring by any other managerial staff than the particular agent's S.T.S. or for the instant berating of T.S.As who were not interacting with customers as particular managerial staff desired:

> (Remote monitoring) is fair enough because they've got to judge people. If some people are not very pleasant or they've been quite rude or something like that then that's fair enough 'cos they've got to be pulled up on that, there's no way you can get away with

> being rude to passengers but the one thing that we did say, that we all hate is we don't want any other supervisors listening in, we only want our own supervisors listening in to their team and purely just to see what we're like on the phones, to monitor us to see what it's like for our performance pay and things like that...some supervisors just listen in to see what is happening on the floor, you just never know why they do it or how they use it...Some supervisors just pick people at random and go up to them and tell them off publicly if they think they are doing something wrong. We said we didn't want that, we want it all to be discussed in our appraisal sessions with our own supervisors (T.S.A.,1994).

The above suggested organisational conflict over the use of random remote monitoring constituted an ongoing debate throughout the research period. Through their team and community representatives, T.S.As demanded an end to the practice. Management felt, however, that it is an important managerial tool. During discussions with agents' representatives, they constantly stressed that the practice is used for the development of agents and as a form of quality assurance. According to management, it is *not* intended to be used as a way of 'catching people out'. During the research period, management refused to end random remote monitoring but agreed to reserve all resulting feedback for the monthly appraisal and review sessions. There was still much agent resentment at the completion of the research period:

> Nothing has really changed, any supervisor can still listen in at any time and you don't know why, what they might use it

> for...all that has changed is that they cannot instantly dress you down in public but they will still mention it to your supervisor who will pull you up in your appraisal and feedback session...I think what people were worried about was that if supervisors other than your own have a grudge against you or they might be jealous of the team's success then they can try and catch you out and damage your pay...they can still do that (T.S.A.,1994).

Thus, it can be suggested that for many agents, remote monitoring significantly shapes the way in which they interact with customers. It can facilitate agent self-discipline so that the prescribed call structure is actually implemented and positive discretion exercised within that.

The utilisation of this managerial tool facilitates continuous and intense demands for the deployment of T.S.A. emotional labour. The nature of this is discussed below. The consequences, for the 'selves' of employees, are discussed in the following chapter.

Known monitoring of employee-customer interaction also forms an important part of 'soft' appraisal and reward systems. During their monthly appraisal, each agent has a 'feedback coaching session' with her/his S.T.S. During the previous month, the S.T.S. has recorded approximately ninety minutes of clerk-customer interaction with the full knowledge of the T.S.A. The implementation of each element of the call structure is analysed:

> If it was your appraisal, we would have these sheets that we would go through and it would have: greeting, questioning and information

> gathering, matching, readback, dealing with problems etc. etc...I have listened to them for about an hour and a half, jotting down the calls. They know because I am sitting behind them...I will write everything down they say and check everything against every part of the call structure. I might say 'okay, your greeting is fine, you're really lively, great. If it's not, I say 'what kind of impression are you giving when you have this greeting ? British Airways are a lovely, warm company'. You ask them 'what kind of response do you get ?' 'Well, I got this response'. 'Is that the response you wanted ?' 'Well, not really'. 'So what should you have said ?' 'Well if I had said this'. 'Okay, great, yeah'. So, if Stephen had said blah, blah, blah, he'd have got this. So then what I say is, OK., next month because we do this, we should do this every time, I want you to work on saying this and that is what we call an 'objective'. Each month they are set two or three objectives that they have to work on for the following month, the theory behind it being that every month they are just building on the skills that they have. That is a very important part of how we manage people (S.T.S.,1993).

It is important to note that managerial analysis of employee-customer interaction and the meeting of set objectives are also important in shaping the precise financial remuneration received by an individual T.S.A. Agents are awarded points for their implementation of the call structure, recorded through

known monitoring, and also accrue points if they successfully meet the objectives set by the S.T.S. the previous month. More points mean increased pay. This is how the performance-related pay system operates. Thus, it can be argued that agents are constrained to follow detailed managerial prescription of how to implement the call structure while simultaneously incentives exist for the exercise of empowerment.

A further way in which employee-customer interaction is monitored and evaluated is through a system known as 'self-taping'. T.S.A's are required to plug a tape into their own sets at a time of their choice and record particular interactions with customers. This interaction is reviewed during appraisal sessions. The above quote suggests that known monitoring is particularly used to analyse the *form* of clerk-customer interaction as well as the content. Managerial supervision and evaluation of this area of the labour process is especially attempted through self-taping:

> I really do use self tape a lot because it's supposed to be them at their best. They are not going to pick a time when they are feeling lousy and they are obviously going to make sure that they go through the call structure and give the right information and so on but...a lot of the time it isn't what they say, it's the tone in which they say it. So I will play something (that they have taped themselves) and I'll just stop it and go 'shall we listen to that again ?', rewind it and then they'll go 'I didn't know I said it like that' and that's an excellent way of doing it...it makes them analyse themselves and really wake up to their mistakes. Before, they didn't even think they were making mistakes because

> they wouldn't have taped it in the first place (S.T.S.,1994).

Thus, it is not only the content or technical quality of clerk-customer interaction (going through the call structure, providing appropriate information and attempting to 'close' sales) which is being monitored but also, and perhaps most significantly, the form of employee-customer interaction (functional quality) - *how* agents go through the call structure, provide appropriate information and attempt to close sales to callers.

The Co-operative Bank

In direct contrast to B.A., it can be argued that branch clerks at the bank can exercise considerable discretion over their interaction with customers. Such discretion is invariably exercised in a positive vein. However, it can be contended that such thought and behaviour is not *primarily* shaped by managerial surveillance, more specifically the *fear* that one is under surveillance, of employee-customer interaction as appears to be the case at B.A.

Branch clerks argued that mystery shopping from head office does not significantly shape their interaction with customers. Firstly, given the size of the branch network, visits from mystery shoppers were extremely rare. Secondly, the results of the mystery shopper's report does not in any way affect the branch clerk's salary. Thirdly, the report does not even name individual clerks - only a very *general* report on the quality of clerk-customer interaction within the branch as a whole is presented to the B.D.M. Consequently, the following comment was representative of the majority of branch clerks interviewed:

> I would say that the majority of us like to give good customer service anyway, I certainly do *feel an obligation* to serve customers well and treat them with respect...if this means that we serve people from head office well and treat them with respect then that's good...they might catch us on an off day but then they must know that everyone has off days...I wish they would just trust us to give customer service...it's not very co-operative is it ? (C.S.O.,1993,my emphasis).

Thus, it would seem that similar pressures as those outlined earlier, arising from the need to maintain a sense of themselves as competent bank clerks and the *desire* to give good customer service, mean that the majority of branch clerks exercise the autonomy that is undoubtedly present during their interaction with customers in a positive direction. This does not appear to be the result of head office mystery shopping. In fact, many experienced branch clerks argued that a commitment to providing good customer service has always been displayed by Co-operative Bank clerks:

> I'm not sure if it's because of the type of bank we are, the way we were set up or the type of customers we have, or are perceived to have, but I can safely say that most people I've worked with during my time here...and it's over twenty years ...have been good at serving customers, at putting themselves out for them and providing what they want, representing their interests, all the things that youngsters coming into the movement are telling us that the company is trying

> to develop...I've always been polite and friendly to customers. I wouldn't have been in this job so long otherwise (S.C.S.O.,1993).

In fact, these more experienced clerks suggested that the introduction of marketization, T.Q.M. and associated attempts to prescribe, supervise and measure the nature of customer service, may well be eroding, rather than enhancing, bank clerks' commitment to what they saw as 'good customer service'. This situation is exacerbated by the job insecurity which has accompanied the implementation of T.Q.M. at the Co-op.

> There is all this talk about quality and total quality and what it really means is serving the customer, respecting the customer, meeting their needs. That has always been there in my book, but when they then start to try and tell people and retrain people to basically be polite to customers, it gets their back-up and causes resentment. Quality could well go down as a result...how can you expect people to be committed to the company and all that when they are so unsure of the future. I feel really sorry for the young ones coming into banking now, they must be constantly living on a knife-edge. They could decide tomorrow to start running down certain branches and there's little that we, or the customers for that matter, could actually do about it (C.S.O.,1993).

The nature of customer feedback, in the form of customer complaints and the results of the anonymous customer surveys, would appear to shape the behaviour of branch clerks more profoundly. In particular:

> If a customer makes a complaint, it's bad news...the boss and the bank generally take it seriously but to be fair so do we...the complaint is usually fairly specific and if it's anything to do with you, you do feel bad...customer service is valued here still believe it or not, the customers are just like us you know, ordinary people and times are so tight, when you're dealing with their money, you have to do it with the utmost care...we really do want to give most of the customers a good and reliable service although we're bound to have our off days, we're only human, we all make mistakes (S.C.S.O.,1993).

It can be argued that, during clerk-customer interaction at The Co-operative Bank, positive rather than negative discretion tends to be exercised. Thus, for example, observation of the labour process revealed that the majority of C.S.Os at both branches studied constantly enquired if customers were happy with the service they are receiving, if there is anything that they were concerned about or needed help or advice with. Furthermore, the majority of clerks at both branches confirmed that they always aimed to be polite and friendly to customers which often simultaneously involved deploying, of their own accord, techniques of emotional labour:

> I'll always try and be friendly with customers no matter how ignorant or rude they can get, you've just got to be friendly, bite your lip a lot and get on with it...there's no point in starting to argue with a customer, or being off-hand with them. The more of them there are that come back, the better for us really...some of the things we've learnt in training do help, they're good, like if you get a really rude or aggressive customer, the best thing you can do is to respond carefully and slowly...taking deep breaths in between...and by trying to feel some sympathy for him *(sic)*...if you try and get rid of your own feelings by feeling sorry for them, it really does help (P.A.,1993).

> It is actually quite good to try and build a rapport with the customer because you get to know them, that's what it is really, we've always done it but it's a fancy name for chatting to people and getting to know them, who they are, where they come from, what their interests are, basic things like that which are just part of being friendly (C.S.O.,1993).

Branch clerks' positive discretion is also evidenced by their total compliance with the dress regulations outlined previously and by constant attempts, amongst the vast majority of clerks, to remain 'smart' throughout the working

day. Employees did argue that discretion over this presentation of the self within the banking labour process was present:

> It would be quite easy to go against the dress and make up and that and hair code if you wanted to...you'd have to wear the uniform but it's the way you wear it that's important...I've seen people with too many buttons undone down the front, men with terrible ties or ties which are pulled to one side or with the top button undone...some of the sights you see...women who deliberately smudge their lipstick or make-up or let their hair go really hay-wire... these are just extreme examples from over twenty years...the majority of people now on *(sic)* in the past, want to look smart and presentable and business-like. I suppose people just don't take you seriously otherwise (S.C.S.O.,1993).

This argument was supported by observation throughout the research period.

Such compliance with managerial prescriptions, and the associated development of positive discretion, at both branches of The Co-operative bank studied is *not* primarily because management have 'changed the culture' with the introduction of T.Q.M. to one where employees are committed to providing customer service, or because employees are fearful of the B.D.Ms response to reported customer dissatisfaction, resulting from mystery shopping or customer feedback. Rather, the roots of the above illustrated positive discretion once again lie within a desire, amongst many but not *all* branch

clerks *all* of the time, to give good customer service which is connected to the self-identity and self-respect of branch clerks. This is, in turn, heightened by a fear of material insecurity which many clerks now *do* (partly as a result of marketization) feel might increase with customer dissatisfaction. This illustrates a fear of the consequences, in terms of *head office* decision-making rather than reactions at branch level, of customer dissatisfaction.

D.C.C., National Savings

At D.C.C., there is no *managerial* supervision of clerk-customer contact. Both E.Os and A.Os are involved in some random monitoring of written and verbal clerk-customer communication. However, the vast majority of clerks argued that such monitoring is rare. This supervision does not exert a strong disciplinary force upon the content and form of such interaction:

> All he (the E.O.) does when it's a random check of my work, and he doesn't do it regularly, definitely not as regularly as you've been told - perhaps once every three months - is that he just flicks through some cases chosen at random. He's really just looking for any obvious problems (A.O.,1994).

From both interviews and observation of the work situation, it was revealed that female A.Os experienced greater 'quality checks' upon their work than male A.Os:

> He (the E.O.) certainly checks me and this other woman in my team more than the lad

> in our team...he doesn't really do it through the random check from the computer... I think he tries to do it informally, like he'll just casually flick through cases we've just done or ones that are in the drawer (recently completed cases with correspondence awaiting to be sent to the customer)...I don't think he can help himself, he'll say 'I think you should change this word here', 'are you sure you mean this ?', really pinickity *(sic)* little things...to be honest, it gets right up my nose...I do like the old soul though, you should see him on a Friday afternoon 'cos we go to the pub...he can't do his own work for checking ours (A.O 1994).
>
> Our E O will sometimes pull us (the two female A.O's in the team) about phone calls with customers...'you sounded a bit too sympathetic there' you know 'be careful, don't give too much away at this stage', one time he said 'do you have to say it like that ?'...all I said was 'really' after a claimant had told me something, just 'cos I've got a bit of an accent...for all he knew it could have been a personal call. He never pulls the bloke in our team...it's as if there's a wrong way and a right way of doing it and theirs (the male way) is, of course, the right way, as you would expect (A.O.,1994).

There was very little evidence of any constraints upon the nature of clerk-customer interaction engaged in by E.O's (15),

or restriction of the limited interaction with claimants practised by A.As.

Emotional Labour and T.Q.M.

Social interaction at work (with customers, management and colleagues) inevitably involves the clerks studied, at B.A. Telephone Sales, The Co-operative Bank and National Savings, in the deployment of emotional labour. It has been suggested by some that the form of social interaction with customers - the way in which information or products/services are delivered - is the most autonomous dimension of the 'clerical labour process'.

Although emotional labour is intrinsic to all paid employment (Hochschild (1993)), it can be argued that our three research cases all constitute employment relationships within which the capacity to assess and manage feeling (other people's as well as one's own), in order to sustain an outward countenance or bodily display and produce a particular state of mind in another person (largely the customer), is one of the, if not *the*, main human capacity which is sold to the employer in exchange for a wage. As we have seen, at all the research sites, the substantive service being sold or provided by employees is inextricably bound up with its mode of delivery.

According to all three managements at the cases studied, the product being produced by all three labour processes is, in varying degrees, a particular state of mind or feeling within the customer. At B.A. and The Co-operative Bank, the feeling of the customer (whether they *feel* they have received a quality service from social interaction with clerks) *is* the crucial product of both labour processes. For both total quality managements, the quality of employee-customer interaction is central to the overall quality of the service produced. In fact, the whole aim of T.Q.M. is to enhance the

quality of this interaction (Fuller and Smith (1991); Howcroft (1991)). At D.C.C., National Savings, the feeling of the applicant (whether they *feel* they have received an efficient, reliable and objective service from social interaction with clerks) is *one* of the important products of the labour process. The deployment of emotional labour, in turn important to how services are delivered, is crucial to the production of these products.

It can be contended that one of the major differences between our marketized, T.Q.M. cases and the work of D.C.C. clerks at National Savings is that *active management* of employee-customer interaction, and consequently the deployment of emotional labour, is intrinsic to the very implementation of the T.Q.M. process. There is evidence to suggest that T.Q.M. within clerical work inherently involves managerial attempts to select and train employees for the very purpose of undertaking emotional labour, and managerial attempts to supervise and control the deployment of emotional labour within the labour process. T.Q.M. appears to be a fine example of a managerial trend, predicted by Hochschild (1983) and termed "the advanced engineering of emotional labour (by management)" (p.186). Fineman (1993b) terms such developments within the workplace, "the bureaucratization of feeling rules" (p.19).

As Hochschild's (1983) argument and Fineman's term suggest, increased managerial control of employees' emotional labour has important implications for clerical emotional worker autonomy. Furthermore, the reduction of employee discretion over this aspect of the clerical labour process could lead to the "transmutation of the private emotional system" (Hochschild,1983,p.90).. This can involve alienation from one's *true* feelings and emotions - as Hochschild argues, a crucial element of the true self and personality. For Hochschild, this *possibility* of 'transmutation' and alienation

results directly from increased managerial control of employees' emotional labour. The restriction of clerical emotional labour at our three research sites, *due to the impact of T.Q.M.*, will now be discussed.

Emotional labour is a process through which we *conceal* our true feelings during social interaction with others. It is accomplished through both "surface acting" and "deep acting" (Hochschild (1983)).

For Hochschild (1983), it is constant engagement in *deep acting* which particularly facilitates the danger of emotional alienation from one's true self and personality. Hochschild suggested in 1983 that increasing managerial attempts to control employees' deployment of emotional labour, as is characteristic of T.Q.M. in the 1990s, entails employers demanding deep acting as opposed to surface acting from emotional labourers. This would appear to match the experience of employees within our T.Q.M. labour processes. For example, it was explicitly argued by both T.Q.M. managements that customers can increasingly perceive the difference between "a front which is put on to serve the customer...this can be so false...and actual genuine customer service where our agents do want to serve people, they are genuinely friendly and pleasant" (S.T.L.,B.A.,1994) (16). As indicated above, both T.Q.M. managements - through selection, training, supervisory and evaluatory processes - attempt to ensure that B.A. and Co-operative Bank emotional labourers deep act rather than surface act. "We want our staff to develop a relationship with customers, build a rapport and get to know them. Really, we want that interaction to be *as natural as possible*...we don't want people to have a false smile, to be forced to be friendly...we want people *who are naturally friendly*...to *be themselves*...(so) in fact *there is no front to see through*" (B.D.M.,1993,my emphases). Deep

acting from employees has become part of T.Q.M. managerial prescription.

Management demands for employees to deep act, particularly during interaction with customers, has been stressed throughout our commentary on the T.Q.M. cases (17). This is often expressed through managerial expectations that clerks will 'interact naturally' with customers. The ultimate aim of total quality managements at B.A. and The Co-op is to control the form of social interaction with customers to the extent that there is no need for employees to engage in emotional labour - to 'work on' or manage their feelings and emotions - when delivering (quality) service. The implementation of managerial prescriptions, and the exercise of empowerment, in relation to the emotional aspects of the labour process will be *naturally* accomplished by the (transformed and alienated) personalities and identities of the personnel employed.

Within all of our three cases, there is evidence of deep acting amongst clerks. However, it can be argued that the deep acting evident at B.A., as opposed to the other two cases can be directly attributed to the implementation of T.Q.M. Within the other two cases, it will be argued, other forces are *primarily* responsible.

It will be argued that emotional labour, and emotional alienation, are distinctly gendered phenomena which appear to contribute to, and strengthen, patriarchal ideologies, structures and domination within the clerical cases studied. This does not only refer to the argument that women are specifically selected and trained for the purposes of deep acting (see above) (Hochschild (1983); Filby (1992)). Our research evidence suggests that female clerks suffer intensified managerial attempts to control their emotional labour, as opposed to the male clerks studied.

Deep Acting

Hochschild (1983) suggests that there are two forms of deep acting: deep acting through 'exhorting feeling' and deep acting through 'the use of a trained imagination'.

Examples of deep acting through 'exhorting feeling' were found at B.A's Newcastle Telephone Sales. When asked why, within the workplace, they didn't react to what they considered to be 'annoying', 'difficult' or 'strange' people, in similar ways to the way they would in private life, many agents argued similarly to the following interviewee:

> You can't *let yourself* be impolite towards a customer or feel angry with them. You have to always remember that they are a customer. As we are always told, they pay our wages... If I'm working on a Friday night, I often think (about customers), 'what are you doing ringing up for flight information on a Friday night, why are you not out - I would be - if you're not out, Roseanne and Cheers are on the telly'. I mean, I ask you, you don't ring *an airline* on a Friday night...But, then I think to myself that they must just be different people to me and the types that I know...most of them are nice people deep down (T.S.A.,1993).

This agent narrates one way in which the feelings of exasperation and frustration, brought on by having to answer calls on a Friday night, are actively fought and 'willingly' suppressed (18). If such feeling was not exhorted, customers could be offended and lost to the company. There is a

difference between this case and Hochschild's (1983) notion of 'surface acting'. Within the latter, feelings of anger and irritation would remain despite contradictory outward dispositions displayed by T.S.As. The private emotional system would not be transmuted. In the above case, the agent has ensured a friendly and efficient disposition by actually and actively *changing* her feeling towards the customer. This is done by constantly reminding herself that they are a 'valuable' customer and that they are 'different' types of people to herself.

When examined, it can be argued that the incidence of deep acting through exhorting feeling at Newcastle Telephone Sales has been fundamentally shaped by the implementation of marketization, T.Q.M. and, in particular, the individualised system for supervising and evaluating employees' delivery of functional quality. The above quoted employee continued:

> I suppose it's something I learnt to do since I came here. I've been dealing with the public in my last job (as a croupier), but you never really think about it much, you just get on with it and say what comes out...the customers are a lot more hardy there though mind...here, you're taught to think about the customers, to think about what they're like and to try and get on with them whatever they're like (T.S.A.,1993).

When questioned as to whether she thought working at B.A. and constantly dealing with customers had changed her in any way, the above agent replied that "it's broadened my mind I think. I tend to see the good in people a lot more which I think is a good thing all *(sic)* me mam says it's made me more of a

pushover, a soft touch...I know more about different places in the world and about different types of people".

Another T.S.A. stated that:

> They make you think about the customer really 'cos it's all part of the job, appreciating the different types of person you get and how everyone is different with their own values and expectations...you've got to try and learn not to get angry with people just because they might be different, do you know what I mean ?...I suppose the targets are good in that way because they make you appreciate people more, have a different attitude. If you don't do it, you might not sell and hit target or you might get pulled up because of listening in. in your appraisal or whatever... a lot of people keep telling me I've actually mellowed since I came here so it's done something for me. Mind, I wouldn't say that I've noticed but you don't when it's yourself do you ? (T.S.A..1994).

It can be suggested that in relation to some T.S.As, the deployment of deep acting is ensured by managerial selection, training, supervision and evaluation. Such managerial control, fundamentally enabled by the individualised surveillance and evaluation process at B.A., can erode clerk discretion over whether to manage feeling at all in relation to particular customers and over the depth of emotional labour deployed. The exercise of discretion in relation to the form of employee/customer interaction at B.A. (functional quality) would appear, for some T.S.As at least, to be restricted to

devising techniques for deep acting and producing, within the customer, the feeling of receiving 'genuine' customer service and interacting 'naturally' with the agent. Furthermore, it is suggested by the above T.S.As that organisational constraints to implement these particular managerial prescriptions, which involves exercising empowerment, *can* begin to transform one's private emotional system and thus very personality and self-identity. Constant immersion within deep acting when interacting with customers *could* lead to some T.S.As being unable to differentiate between such 'natural' feeling management, and their feeling management outside of interaction with customers within the workplace or even beyond the employment organisation.

At B.A., it was argued by many interviewees that deep acting is especially expected of female T.S.As:

> They expect us to put up with a lot more from customers than the blokes do...if someone is having a go at you on the phone or being slimy, and we get some real dirty bastards, you wouldn't believe what they say, especially on American calls when it's the middle of the night over there...you're just expected to put up with it, see it as normal because 'you never know, you might get a sale'. It's seen as normal behaviour, men just having a laugh...one supervisor said to me when I once complained 'just because it's not your sense of humour, it doesn't mean you have to get offended by someone else's'. This bloke was basically asking me what I looked like, what I was wearing...if the blokes get insulted, it's seen as harassment almost and they're

> allowed to respond...they tell us 'you've got to have a thick skin, you can't let it affect you, *get rid of the feeling*'... I suppose when you think about it I suppose it's bound to affect how you respond in your social life, your tolerance levels (T.S.A.,1993, my emphasis).
>
> It's only if it is really bad that you can cut people off or be rude back to customers. You can't just do it 'cos they might be listening in...people only have to swear at one of the lads and they're on to it (T.S.A.,1994).
>
> They seem to think that blokes are just less good at being expressive on the phone, chatting and putting up with things, I suppose that's why there's more women working here...I know they employ us for our personalities because we interact with people and all that but that doesn't mean we have to put up with *anything* (T.S.A.,1994).

Thus, it can be argued that managerial, patriarchal assumptions about the 'natural' abilities and 'personalities' of men and women, and the 'natural', 'incontinent' nature of male heterosexuality (Collinson and Collinson (1989)), are embedded within B.A. managerial attempts to control emotional labour *and* facilitate deep acting and 'natural' social interaction. Thus, when compared to male T.S.As, female agents are subjected to greater managerial constraint upon their discretion when interacting with customers, and are thus more susceptible to the *danger* of emotional alienation (19). This

particular aspect of apparent managerial control and employee degradation both reflects, and strengthens, patriarchal and male heterosexual structures within the B.A. Telephone Sales workplace.

Numerous examples of what could be interpreted as deep acting through the direct exhortation of feeling were found at The Co-operative Bank:

> It's quite a skill you know to know
> how to give good customer service,
> what everybody would say is easy isn't,
> when you're dealing with customer
> after customer and you're tired,
> it's Monday afternoon and you get
> the same questions again and again,
> you'd think that we'd be ready to
> ring their necks, you should try
> it...but it's amazing really, you
> just deal with things without
> really thinking too much...it
> makes you into a tolerant person
> 'cos you can be nice to anybody
> inside or outside work no matter
> what they're like
> (C.S.O.,1993).

> You really do have to rid yourself of
> any feelings of anger or frustration
> in this job otherwise you'd have a
> heart attack with all the tension...
> I wouldn't say it changes you as such
> 'cos you've got to be a particular
> type of person to work here in the
> first place (S.C.S.O.,1993).

The vast majority of branch clerks interviewed suggested that they engaged in exhorting feeling and did so almost 'intuitively'. However, the fact that their attitudes and behaviour, in relation to the form of employee-customer interaction, coincide with current managerial expectations and prescriptions, involving the exercise of empowerment, does not necessarily mean that this deep acting has been affected directly and solely by the introduction of T.Q.M. In fact, it can be argued that deep acting through exhorting feeling has *always* been intrinsic to the branch clerk labour process, i.e. also during the period *prior* to marketization and the introduction of T.Q.M. An experienced branch clerk commented:

> We've always interacted with customers genuinely, we do want to serve them and we always have done...it's part of working in a bank that you want to serve customers and you never let yourself be flustered by the ones that you don't like or the ones that are... nasty...you have to maintain that professionalism, everybody in the bank should have a professionalism really...on all these training courses they tell you that you have to be willing to serve customers and you should always let feelings of frustration go as if it's a brand new, world-shattering idea of their own...we've been serving customers properly for years. It's what the Co-operative movement has always been good at (S.C.S.O.,1993).

Similarly experienced branch clerks actually suggested that feelings of insecurity and resentment which currently

proliferate amongst Co-operative branch clerks, in the midst of marketization, radical organisational restructuring and employment reduction, could damage the provision of 'genuine' customer service through various forms of deep acting:

> In fact, we keep hearing that customer service has improved...some of us feel that it's got worse. There's a lot of disgruntlement at the moment, no-one quite knows what's going to happen next, it's bound to effect your attitude and the way that you deal with customers ...perhaps our commitment to customers is not as genuine as it should be or as genuine as we would like it to be ...but perhaps we need some commitment from the company...people are starting to feel that if redundancies can happen at The Co-op, they can happen anywhere ...it used to be such a safe job to work in, but now it's just like any other business...it's not just cutbacks and redundancies, there's more pressure on what we do, we have to do more (C.S.O.,1993).

The above argument is perhaps supported by evidence of surface acting amongst Co-operative branch clerks when interacting with customers. For example, some branch clerks, when being observed by the researcher, turned away from interaction with customers and made non-verbal gestures, such as rolling their eyes or literally biting their lips, to indicate frustration and exasperation with the customer in question. However, during face-to-face interaction with the customer, they ensured that they were polite and friendly.

Interestingly, some of the Co-operative branch clerks interviewed argued that one managerial prescription developed as part of the T.Q.M. process, for C.S.Os at least - to constantly recommend banking products to customers - was more likely to facilitate surface acting rather than deep acting:

> You just feel so false sometimes
> recommending products all the time...
> you don't have to do it all the time
> but it's expected...but there's no
> way you can be genuine, be yourself
> when you're trying to sell things,
> people know the score, they know
> what you're trying to do
> (C.S.O.,1993).

Thus, although there is much evidence of deep acting amongst Co-operative bank clerks, we can suggest that this has *not* run counterpoint to marketization and the implementation of T.Q.M. The exercise of positive discretion, from the autonomy which clerks have always possessed over the form of their social interaction with customers and expressed through deep acting, is shaped by the *desire* to give good customer service - viewed by many experienced clerks as a *tradition* within The Co-operative Bank. However Co-operative Bank managerial supervisory and evaluation mechanisms are *inadequate* in terms of *ensuring* the exercise of positive discretion through deep acting. The failure of branch management to tie supervisory and evaluation mechanisms to the *individual* financial remuneration of clerks, we can suggest, is particularly important in this respect. In fact, some of the conditions (particularly job insecurity and demands to sell products to customers) which have accompanied the implementation of T.Q.M. at branches of The Co-operative Bank may well be *eroding* the exercise of positive discretion through deep acting and encouraging the exercise of 'negative' discretion through

surface acting or the use of their private emotional system and personal 'feeling rules' (Hochschild (1983)).

This may appear to contradict some of the arguments advanced earlier, particularly the contention that material insecurity disciplined *some* branch clerks into exercising positive discretion when interacting with customers, for example through attempting to avoid the build up of long queues. Here, we are suggesting that material insecurity encourages some branch clerks (often the same clerks) to exercise negative discretion through the form of social interaction.

This apparent anomaly can firstly be explained by the greater discretion which branch clerks possess over the form of social interaction, as opposed to the content of social interaction, within their own service when compared to T.S.As. There are a number of different ways in which branch clerks can display their true feelings and personality, for example through facial expression, tone of voice, dress, hairstyle. Thus, for example, feelings of frustration are often expressed through one of these mechanisms, while clerks continue to serve the customer in a 'polite' and 'friendly' manner through other mechanisms of expression.

Secondly, some branch clerks argued that customers *preferred* them to utilise their own feeling rules, or to surface act when, for example, carrying out the managerial prescription to recommend products to customers. Customers actually viewed such attitudes and behaviour as 'genuine'. Thus, clerks were actually enacting their desire to provide genuine customer service. However, the definition of 'genuine' or 'quality' customer service did not match that of head office. This can be seen as another example of 'negative discretion' being, in reality, an instance of employees deploying 'tacit skills' within the clerical labour process. There is evidence that such behaviour was pragmatically accepted, and approved, by

branch management. Thus, it can be argued that the danger of emotional alienation amongst clerical employees is less visible within branches of The Co-operative Bank, as compared to B.A. Telephone Sales, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

Crucially, and largely due to the weakness of managerial supervision of the labour process, the dialectics of managerial constraint and worker autonomy over the form of social interaction with customers, the emotional aspects of the labour process, have not been *directly* shaped by the implementation of T.Q.M. at The Co-operative Bank.

Similar evidence to that at B.A., relating to intensified demands for the deployment of female emotional labour, are present at The Co-operative Bank. However, female branch clerks possessed greater discretion to enable resistance to such male domination and the (patriarchal) transformation of feeling, self and identity.

Exhorting feeling is only *one* way in which the emotional demands of the clerical labour process can be accomplished (20). There is also evidence within our T.Q.M. cases of deep acting through the use of a 'trained imagination' (Hochschild (1983)). As Hochschild notes, this is often achieved through the use of 'emotion memory', and can be used for alleviating 'anger at an irate':

> They train you to put the stress on yourself. If you have a rude or ignorant customer, you are supposed to pretend that something awful has just happened to them...'always feel sorry for the ignorant customer, do not hate him *(sic)*' ...this is what they tell you to do, 'put sympathy on to him and not yourself, think of a time when you

> felt sorry for someone and why, think of that person when you're dealing with someone you don't like' (T.S.A.,1993).

It must be noted that, following the implications of Hochschild's argument, the most complete form of emotional labour and deep acting would be undertaken by clerks who are unable to reflect upon and explain the development of such techniques as they would be unaware that they are managing and working on their feelings in the first place. Such clerks would see the implementation of managerial prescriptions and the exercise of empowerment, during interaction with customers, as a natural manifestation of their personality - their private emotional system and true selves. Selection and training, as well as managerial supervisory and evaluative processes previously analysed are clearly important in this respect. Apparent evidence of the existence of such 'personalities', at both B.A. and The Co-operative Bank, has already been provided in the foregoing analysis. This issue will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Hochschild (1983) also suggests that managerial pressures to alter the depth and extent of emotional labour - in short 'deskilling' (in a Bravermanian sense) clerks' deployment of emotional labour - which we have argued are particularly in evidence at B.A. Telephone Sales, poses the *danger* for T.S.A's, of alienation from one's true feelings and emotions and thus a crucial aspect of the true self. This is what is meant by a 'transmutation of the private emotional system'. The validity of this argument, for analysing the emotional experience of T.S.A's at Newcastle Telephone Sales will also be reviewed in the next chapter.

It has already been noted that there are no *managerial* attempts to control the form of social interaction (both written and verbal) between clerks and customers at the

D.C.C., National Savings. However, in line with our argument thus far, there *was* considerable evidence of deep acting as well as surface acting amongst D.C.C. clerks. In fact, when questioned about the way in which they managed feeling when dealing with claimants, many of whom have been recently bereaved, clerks suggested that they employ their private emotional system or feeling rules. In other words, there is little difference between the feeling rules in operation within the workplace and those utilised in their private life:

> I just talk to them (claimants) in the way that I would anybody, you feel really sorry for some of them and you want to give nearly all of them, a reliable and fair service in the nicest way possible... you get the odd one who is stroppy or really rude, so *I'm just as rude back*, unless of course there are extenuating circumstances (A.O.,1994).

There is also evidence of surface acting amongst D.C.C. clerks. This tends to be deployed when customers are ignorant or 'short' over the telephone, but clerks felt that an appearance of politeness and friendliness has to be maintained because of the claimant's circumstances. This again would seem to be a use of personal, rather than organisationally imposed, feeling rules. We have already noted how there *were* slightly greater constraints upon *female* clerks interaction with claimants.

The use of clerks' private emotional system, and thus the apparent lack of any transmutation and alienation, is clearly enabled by the complete lack of managerial supervision of the form of clerk/claimant interaction. The fact that the feeling rules produce the above result can, in part, be explained by the commitment to public service which we have already

identified as common amongst the majority of D.C.C. clerks researched. However, again we can point to the difference in the service produced at the D.C.C. as opposed to our marketized cases. The very fact that T.S.As and Co-operative branch clerks are required to attempt to *sell* products rather than merely provide information/services facilitates demands far more extensive emotional labour than appears to be the case at National savings. The feeling rules at B.A. and The Co-op are more definitely *commercially* imposed.

T.Q.M. and Worker Autonomy

On the basis of arguments developed in the last two chapters, it can be argued that clerical worker autonomy is more constrained within our two marketized cases than at National Savings. At B.A. and The Co-operative Bank, the erosion of worker autonomy has been a direct and indirect result of the implementation of T.Q.M. respectively. There are clearly differences in the extent of clerk autonomy *between* the two marketized cases.

Firstly, we can compare employee discretion at B.A. with that evident at National Savings. We have argued in this chapter that there *is* evidence of T.S.A. autonomy within B.A.. However, this is solely positive discretion or 'tactical responsibility' (Sewell and Wilkinson (1992)). The *choices* of employees are restricted to choices which further the interests of managerially-defined 'quality service'. It can be argued that 'empowerment' at B.A. Telephone Sales entails very little work autonomy at all (as defined by chapter one). There is very little opportunity for employees to 'choose' negative discretion, given the extent of managerial surveillance of the labour process. Further, this surveillance can be seen as particularly thoroughgoing in relation to the work of female clerks, thus strengthening patriarchal employment relations at B.A.

In contrast, D.C.C. clerks are, as anticipated, presented with considerable opportunities for discretion within the labour process. This is, however, mediated by the grade and gender of the clerk in question. Further, we have argued that D.C.C. discretion tends to be 'positive' rather than 'negative'. This is not primarily shaped by managerial supervision, or the manner in which the D.C.C. is targeted. D.C.C. positive discretion is shaped by clerks' own desire to provide an 'efficient', 'friendly' and 'fair' service to the majority of applicants. Negative discretion *is* exercised with regard to some 'rude', 'ignorant' or difficult applicants. This *self*-motivation of D.C.C. clerks to provide what can 'objectively' be seen as a 'quality' service is part of a genuine desire to 'see justice done' and provide a service to applicants, with whom many clerks expressed great empathy. The self-induced quality of D.C.C. clerks is also shaped by an enduring commitment to producing a 'public service'. Such 'commitment' on behalf of D.C.C. clerks endured alongside perceived low morale within the organisation. D.C.C. clerks also expressed extreme dissatisfaction at the policies of the organisation and central government (it can be suggested that such commitment to customers could remain alongside dissatisfaction with the organisation and society, given the *relative* security of D.C.C. clerks at National Savings).

Clearly, differences in the services provided by T.S.A's and D.C.C's are significant. D.C.C. clerks are not attempting to sell products and this reduces the requirement for management to closely supervise the labour process in an attempt to manufacture natural social relations within the workplace. However, there *is* evidence that managerial attempts at the D.C.C. to introduce initiatives similar to some of those embodied within marketization processes, such as individual work measurement, are being resisted by clerks. Consequent clerk resentment is, in some cases, being translated into negative discretion. This suggests that D.C.C. clerks' lack of

negative discretion is less to do with the nature of the service delivered and more to do with a 'public service culture' and a lack of, to date, detailed managerial supervision of the labour process. Given the experience of T.S.As, it can be argued that D.C.Cs should be encouraged to continue resisting the introduction of 'quality' initiatives.

When comparing both of our marketized cases, we have argued that more detailed managerial surveillance, supervision and control of the labour process - evaluation of quality - has facilitated less employee discretion at B.A. The *individualisation* of managerial supervisory mechanisms is particularly important in this respect. However, there is also little evidence of *extensive* employee discretion amongst branch clerks at The Co-operative Bank. This has been primarily explained by an historical commitment, amongst the experienced clerks at least, to providing 'good customer service' - a vestige from the 'old' clerical labour process. The latter motivation has been heightened, we have argued, by the fear of material insecurity experienced by many Co-operative clerks simultaneous with marketization and, only partially, T.Q.M. We are effectively arguing that constraint of clerical worker autonomy at The Co-operative Bank, has been indirectly rather than directly shaped by T.Q.M. Managerial control within the bank is not particularly effective in terms of motivating workers to exercise positive discretion, as is the case at B.A. For some branch clerks, in certain situations, job insecurity has engendered feelings of resentment and the exercise of negative discretion, where it is felt that this is possible - often where employees own perceptions of 'good customer service' are not threatened. We can certainly argue that the exercise of clerical worker discretion is more infrequent at The Co-operative Bank than at National Savings.

Overall, we can argue that the claims of those reviewed in chapter three, that T.Q.M. enhances employee autonomy, are illusory. In fact, the 'discourse of empowerment', as articulated by managements within our T.Q.M. cases and various academic authors (it is part of the discourse of enterprise), is *ideological*. Claims that T.Q.M. enhances worker autonomy, on the basis of the evidence presented here, conceals the way in which T.Q.M. within marketized 'clerical work' actually reduces worker autonomy, and thus increases both capitalist and patriarchal domination within the employment relationship.

We have not suggested in this chapter that the *discourse* of empowerment in our T.Q.M. cases has been accepted by clerical employees. The question of the 'consent' with which T.S.A's in particular exercise positive discretion has been left as an open question. It is this issue to which we shall now turn - whether clerks, under T.Q.M., can become willingly involved, through self-discipline, in eroding their own autonomy. As the B.A. case represents the greatest erosion of employee autonomy, under the direct impact of T.Q.M., empirical evidence will be drawn solely from this.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE INCOMPLETE TRANSMUTATION

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the 'self-discipline' of Telephone Sales Agents at British Airways, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne was far greater than the other two cases studied. This has been primarily created by managerial surveillance through the electronic Panopticon. Some authors, often although not always drawing upon a Foucauldian perspective, suggest that such self-discipline can transform the very identity and personality of employees (Hochschild (1983); Knights and Morgan (1991); Sewell and Wilkinson (1992); Sturdy (1992)). Following such a transformation, employees can 'willingly' create and reproduce the conditions of their own subordination. Self-discipline then is seen as a form of worker 'consent' within the employment relationship. Its existence would appear to eradicate the requirement for management to directly supervise and control the labour process - workers will engage in self-management and 'total' managerial control is effected.

According to Sewell and Wilkinson (1992), the implementation of T.Q.M. within the labour process engenders employee self-discipline, self-management and consent within the employment relationship. Such a process entails, by implication, the erosion of worker autonomy. It would appear that thoroughgoing managerial control at B.A. confirms Sewell and Wilkinson's argument.

It has been argued throughout that discretion is inherent to every employment relationship. Management cannot issue an instruction that contains purely prescriptive elements. However, managerial surveillance of the T.S.A. labour process, and the accompanying reward systems, would appear to exert a disciplinary force upon employees so that the autonomous

aspects of the labour process are enacted almost totally in the interests of management. This is precisely what Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) mean by "tactical responsibility" and "strategic control". The implementation of T.Q.M. does, according to them, entail the devolvement of responsibility down the organisational hierarchy. However, enhanced, centralised and strategic managerial control through sophisticated surveillance means that such responsibility must be exercised according to managerial expectations and demands - to enhance the delivery of technical and functional quality, as defined by B.A. management. At first sight, employees do appear to possess autonomous opportunities within the labour process. However, they are mirages. The surveillance system which accompanies T.Q.M. minimises "negative divergencies from expected behaviour and management defined norms whilst identifying positive divergencies and maximising their creative potential" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.271). Strategic control ensures that the 'empowerment' and 'responsibility' acceded to employees is, in fact, no responsibility at all. It is a 'tactic' to strengthen the delivery of quality products/services and managerial control of the (T.Q.M.) labour process. T.Q.M. "regimes attempt to put the collective ingenuity of labour to work on behalf of capital" (Sewell and Wilkinson,1992,p.281).

The aim of this chapter is to argue that the above suggestions, in relation to the T.S.A. labour process, are over-simplistic. It will also be argued, on the basis of the B.A. case-study, that the debate between on the one side the 'discourse of enterprise' which suggests that T.Q.M. leads to greater autonomy for employees, and on the other the claims of authors such as Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) that its implementation degrades clerical work and clerical workers, is over-polarised. Crucially, when discussing 'self-discipline' or 'consent' within the labour process, it must be remembered that neither can "be reduced to a single measure. The

analytical task is to explore its (self-discipline or consent) nature and constituent parts" (Edwards,1990,p.141). Our exploration will reveal that, although T.Q.M. and associated workplace surveillance at B.A. represents a significant assault upon the autonomy of T.S.A's, 'total' managerial control and employee 'consent' within the labour process is *not* facilitated. Our findings suggest that while human labour is employed within the labour process, employee autonomy, including negative autonomy, can *never* be eroded.

The Erosion of Worker Autonomy - Myth or Reality ?

As we have seen, one major way in which it could be argued that T.Q.M. has affected 'total' managerial control and the eradication of employee autonomy within the B.A. labour process studied is through the targeting system and the associated electronic surveillance of the work of *individual* T.S.As. A close analysis of our empirical analysis reveals that employee autonomy has not been eradicated.

Revenue Targets

Firstly, the monetary targets which employees must meet every month, and the further incentives for exceeding them, can exert a strong disciplinary force upon the labour process of T.S.As. It is an important consideration when employees are choosing, for example, which way a particular customer should be questioned or whether they should be questioned at all, what product information should be matched to a particular customers' requirements, whether or in what way an attempt should be made to close a sale, and how long they should spend between calls. However, it can be argued that such choice is not eliminated in total by this particular aspect of managerial control. We can illustrate this by investigating the organisational debate over the way in which monetary targets can be met or exceeded.

There was disagreement amongst agents over the extent to which targets are 'realistic'. The managerial contention that revenue targets are achievable and an important form of 'performance management', encouraging employees to exercise positive discretion, was disputed by many T.S.As:

> I don't think the targets are realistic at all, it's down to luck really. One month you can get your target from one call, another month you might go through a lean period, it's not your fault. They (management) would say that you should be able to turn calls into sales, but there's no point in trying if people don't want to buy things (T.S.A.,1993,my addition).

> The targets are hard...they end up working out about £500.00 a day which you wouldn't think is a lot but with it being actual direct ticket by mail targets, not how many people you've booked on a flight, there's is loads of different ways about getting your tickets and things, this is only tickets that go out from our ticketing department in an envelope...we don't even get the revenue for tickets that are picked up at the airport...only those that go out in an envelope to their address so there's not that many direct ticket-by-mails...you can have days when you don't do anything, not because you're not very good at selling but you just don't get the calls, you know, if people ring up for the time of a flight you can't sort of sell them a first class ticket somewhere

> but then having said that, other days you can have a booking for about £8,000.00 which bumps up your total (T.S.A.,1994).

This clearly immerses us within a related organisational debate concerning the extent to which selling B.A. products and services to customers, meeting revenue targets and winning awards for an outstanding sales performance is the result of 'luck' in receiving the appropriate calls from particular customers or whether these 'achievements' are dependent upon agents' implementing and exercising managerial prescriptions, skill and positive discretion. T.S.As were clearly divided on this issue:

> This really is a bone of contention...it is down to luck to a certain extent but it isn't as well, obviously it depends the way you handle the customer but like I said, you can't force someone to buy a ticket if they're just phoning up to ask the time of a flight or something can you ? (T.S.A.,1994).

Other agents argued that a T.S.As sales performance was purely the result of 'luck' rather than skill and discretion:

> It's all down to luck...like that last call I had, there was no way he was going to buy a ticket, that's why I didn't even try. She (the agents' supervisor) would say 'you should have offered him a service, he had dates, he wouldn't have rung up if he wasn't in the market for a flight, why let him go and buy it somewhere else ?' but I wait for them to ask me if they can book something, I'm not forcing it

> down someone's throat...people have made their mind up before they ring whether they want to buy something, whether they can afford something. They (management) seem to think that people can buy things whenever they want, that they've got endless amounts of money, have you heard some of the prices here ? You can't change peoples' minds no matter what selling skills you've got...I would say what you sell is decided by the calls that you get not by you (T.S.A.,1993).

T.S.As who believed that selling B.A. products was the result of receiving 'the right calls' explained that those who consistently achieved outstanding sales performances within the 'Going for Gold' competition were merely those who spent the most time interacting with customers. This was enabled by working large amounts of overtime. With specific reference to the agent quoted in the previous chapter (Alan), who stated that he was consistently among the 'leaders' of the 'Going for Gold' league table, one T.S.A. voiced the opinions of a number of agents in Alan's team:

> How much revenue you get depends a lot on how long you work for, it's as simple as that. There's one bloke in our team, Alan ...he's never away from the place. How do you think he's always on the 'Going for Gold' ? Mind, good luck to him I say. At the moment, we are on the 6-12 (6am-noon) shift. We're all knackered at the end but not Alan, he works through until ten 'o' clock

> every night, without fail. He works overtime every single day...he's got a wife and kids as well, and another on the way. I don't know how he found the time to manage that, they must never see him. (T.S.A.,1994,my addition).

The majority of T.S.As interviewed argued that the selling of B.A. products was largely the result of being lucky enough to receive particular calls. T.S.As who believed that the selling of B.A. products does involve the implementation of managerial prescriptions and the exercise of skill and positive discretion formed a minority within the centre. This does mean, however, that the disciplinary force exerted by the revenue targets does not constrain employee autonomy to the degree which could be expected if one follows Sewell and Wilkinson's argument. The targets did exert some constraints upon T.S.A. autonomy:

> Obviously, you can't just say anything to customers, if you were downright rude to them then that would make a difference... you could put people off who had decided they want to make a booking (T.S.A.,1993).

However, agents argued that they did *not* necessarily have to routinely follow the prescriptions of management, in the form of the call structure and the prescribed skills within it, or exercise the positive discretion which management encouraged in order to achieve and exceed the monetary targets:

> You can be exactly the same with every caller during the day, saying the same things in the same order, some will book things, others will not...it depends on them (customers) not you (T.S.A.,1993).

This brings us to the point, endorsed by many T.S.As, that the delivery of technical and functional quality as defined, prescribed and encouraged by telephone sales management (and embodied within the prescriptions of management and the expected positive discretion) does not automatically result in the 'achievement' of selling B.A. products. For example, agents suggested that customers decided to purchase products according to many different criteria. The service they received when interacting with customers was one, subordinate criterion amongst these:

> I would say that most customers decide to book or not depending upon the price of the particular service we are offering. Really, when they ring up that is what they are interested in. They will often say when we give them the price, 'oh, I can get it a lot cheaper at British Midland' or whatever...some of our prices can be very high and that puts a lot of people off (T.S.A.,1994).

Other factors, regardless of the service quality provided by themselves, which agents suggested influenced customers to book services with B.A. included: that some routes are only flown by British Airways; that a particular promotion, such as the Sainsbury offer, enables them to purchase services remarkably cheaply; that their business has an account with B.A.; the level of service and comfort they will receive throughout their *travelling* experience, rather than the booking experience, with B.A:

> The way that we act with them (customers) is often irrelevant, they have usually made their mind up to book or not to book...before they call and if not other factors, particularly

> the price are probably more important...they definitely would be to me, wouldn't it to you ? (T.S.A.,1994,my addition).

It is also important to point out that there was also division amongst *managerial* staff over the extent to which the attainment of revenue targets and outstanding sales performances is the result of agent 'luck' or skill and positive discretion. The following statement was representative of a minority of S.T.Ss:

> Some of them (agents) will say 'yeah but some people are just lucky, some people just get these lucky bookings and I say 'they can't always get the lucky bookings' ...but I don't know if I fully believe it. There is a certain amount of skill involved but I have to admit that luck does play a big part (S.T.S.,1993).

Other S.T.Ss strongly rejected such assertions, articulating the argument that was refuted strongly by the majority of T.S.As:

> If you weren't trained or skilled, I mean any idiot could pick up the phone, but if you're not trained to listen out for them, for example, some people say 'how much does it cost to go to Paris ?' Now, would you say that was an enquiry ? Now, I'd say that was a selling call because why phone you ? They must be thinking about Paris, they must have some dates. So when you say to them, 'do you have any dates ?' and they say 'no', really

> they are often being cautious, they do have some dates in mind. The thing is I say to people 'would you be in bed one night and wake up and think 'I really wonder how much it is to go to Paris, I'll phone up in the morning ?'' You don't, you must have some idea and the skill is to turn that kind of enquiry into say an option to confirm or a confirmed booking with a credit card, to get the information out of them...a lot of people turn 'round and say 'well they are all enquiries' but when you actually dissect the calls, it's probably about 75% could be, if you were really good at your job, a selling opportunity, and 25% of them are 'what time does this flight come in ?', 'I've lost my baggage', any feasible call...you can only be a sales centre if you employ people that are able to get a sale because 99% of them are only enquiries. Very, very rarely do you come through and say 'I want to make a booking' (S.T.S.,1993).

However, it is clear that there is ambivalence and ambiguity amongst managerial staff in relation to this organisational debate. Many differing views were recorded. The same S.T.S. as the one most recently quoted, when comparing the supervisory system at Newcastle with London Heathrow, stated, *within the same interview*:

> (At Newcastle), it's all touchy, feely kind of stuff that we're doing as opposed to London where it was all 'that's the

technical answer, that's the technical input, this is the answer you get', never 'if you said this to a passenger, they're going to say this to you', never anything about negative words or the types of questions you should use or if you say something how you could turn a sale off. So up here, it's all that kind of sales, lovey, lovey, touchy stuff, that is why they now say 'well, this is the new culture we have because we are now taking these people and giving them selling skills, developing them'...but I will always say, and I will stand by this, that you can either sell or you can't sell and I also think that you can bullshit your way through an interview and so there are some people on the floor, and I have a few in my team, that, as far as I am concerned, that just couldn't sell snow to an Eskimo, and I sometimes think 'how the hell did they slip through the recruitment net ?'. But, it happens, in every job, some say 'how the bloody hell did he *(sic)* get here ? I mean some hostesses, you think 'you've got a face like a back end of a bus, how did she get on ?', but there is always people who will slip through...we have to give these people coaching sessions and try to manage them but often it's like smashing your head against a brick wall (S.T.S.,1993,my addition).

As we shall see, such ambivalence is reflected in some S.T.S. evaluation of T.S.A. performance, which further imperils the 'total' managerial control which T.Q.M. supposedly engenders.

Productivity Evaluation

It has been suggested that, in comparison to the other two cases studied, further evaluation of T.S.As productivity can discipline employees and diminish their autonomy in the labour process.

Once again, it can be argued that this particular form of telephone sales management supervision does not entirely 'discipline' T.S.A. autonomy. In fact. T.S.As argued that this particular disciplinary force was largely experienced during 'exceptional' circumstances. The majority of agents argued that the majority of S.T.Ss only analysed individual productivity data when dramatic weaknesses were noticed or if T.S.As were struggling to meet their revenue targets:

> It's only if something is really bad that she (the S.T.S.) would go into your 'phone stats and then you would get an objective to work on. I have never had any because my phone stats have been generally okay, pretty average I think...as long as you hit your targets, she doesn't hardly look at them or mention them (T.S.A.,1993).

As for the influence of the productivity evaluation upon performance-related pay, the following comment was typical of the majority of T.S.As:

> There's hard and soft standards but I mean it's really whether you've actually consistently hit target, sales targets

> over the past few months. The other targets, which are not particularly official, those ones on the 'phone stats, they keep an eye on those as well...you get a certain amount of points, it's totalled up...but in the end it's really decided by whether you've hit target and what you've sold, that's what they (S.T.S's) really decide it by (T.S.A.,1994).

Thus, provided that T.S.As consistently meet revenue targets, the majority of S.T.Ss do not monitor productivity data in great detail. This does allow some employee discretion over: the amount of calls taken and thus, to some extent, autonomy over the pace of work; the length of time spent interacting with customers; the length of time spent in 'wrap up'. However, as outlined in the previous chapter, Newcastle Telephone Sales management as a whole did pay detailed attention to the extent to which the centre met the target of answering 80 per cent of calls within twenty seconds. During times of 'crisis' (when this target was not met by the centre), employee discretion over the pace of work, and the length of time spent interacting with customers and between calls was drastically reduced. The ever-present threat of a crisis situation did exert a disciplinary force upon the thoughts and actions of T.S.As. As argued in the previous chapter, such a threat was particularly experienced by female T.S.As.

It must be noted that the extent to which agents discretion was eroded by the collection of productivity statistics appears to depend upon their particular S.T.S. A minority of S.T.Ss were described "as only interested in the power which their role gives them" (T.S.A.,1993). These supervisors were accused of scrutinising productivity statistics to find fault with agents who had met, and surpassed, their revenue target.

This caused great resentment towards the S.T.Ss in question by agents both within, and outside, the particular team. In fact, many T.S.As suggested that such constant and detailed analysis was, from a managerial perspective, counter-productive:

> However good my sales figures are, or the amount of calls that I have taken, or the way I've worked with the team...you can bet your bottom dollar she (the S.T.S.) would find fault with me somewhere... pick up on one crappy little statistic, tell me to do things the way she would have done them...we are all individuals you know, not robots...I just got sick of it now I make sure I hit my revenue targets and that is it, I'm doing no more there's no point, she can go on all she likes but she knows she can't touch me if I'm getting the sales... sometimes she'll tell me to do things one month and I'll do the exact opposite, she just rubs me up the wrong way... I've tried to move teams loads of times (T.S.A.,1993).

> I would hate to be in some teams here, ours is great but it's really because of the supervisor, god love him... Some of them here are just power mad, trying to get one over on people just for the sake of it...that just doesn't motivate people at all, it causes trouble (T.S.A.,1994).

Thus, once again the nature of worker discretion would appear to depend upon the particular aspect of management with which T.S.A's come into contact.

Subjective Evaluation and the Evaluation of Subjectivity

Agents are also subjectively evaluated by their supervisors according to their teamwork, commitment and the nature of their interaction with customers.

Teamwork and Commitment

All mechanisms of subjective evaluation are designed to supervise the teamwork and commitment displayed by T.S.A's. It was suggested in the previous chapter that some agents felt a disciplinary force exerted upon them to display particular personal characteristics - to be a particular *personality*. This often involved making sure that they participated regularly within daily and weekly team meetings and social events outside of working time.

Clearly, this can involve emotional labour and deep acting - attempting to produce in the mind of another (this time the supervisor), the experience of managing a 'committed' T.S.A. The surveillance of individual T.S.As commitment and teamwork through direct observation and remote and known monitoring, and the apparent importance of such surveillance for the financial remuneration of T.S.As through performance related pay, posits the possibility of regular T.S.A. deep acting and even emotional alienation.

However, it can be argued that only *some* T.S.As experienced the disciplinary force outlined in the previous chapter which shapes their behaviour within the course of the working day, particularly at team meetings and social events. While a *minority* of T.S.As presented a 'committed' personality to

management, the *majority* of those interviewed argued that they did not undertake such emotional labour - either surface acting or deep acting. The following comments are representative of this majority:

> Some people try and get so involved...they say things in team briefings and team meetings but they are saying things just for the sake of it...it's always the same people, it sounds so corny and it's so obvious what they're doing. Everyone knows who they are, they are really just arse-lickers, we get sick of hearing them, I'm sure Debbie (the S.T.S.) does as well. Once, she asked us if anybody else had anything to say and it was just silence, I thought she would be annoyed but it looked like she was trying not to laugh...I don't really think that they (supervisors) take what you do and say in meetings and things as seriously as they say they do when you're training and that (T.S.A.,1994).

This argument, articulated within many T.S.A. interviews , was supported by observation of team meetings and social events. Team briefings largely consisted of an S.T.S. lecturing her/his team on 'matters arising' for that particular day. This could include a summary of new products or services available, a reminder of promotions currently running or 'problems' that had arisen during the previous working day. On average, one agent (and invariably the same agent time and time again) would pose questions or make suggestions to the S.T.S. During the period immediately prior to the beginning of a shift, the majority of team members engaged in 'social' chat with each other or their S.T.S.:

> The meeting before a shift starts usually turns into a chat about what we did the night before, what our family and friends are up to...anything that you would normally talk to your mates about really, we are lucky, our supervisor is just like a mate, she seems keener than us to join in...we are sometimes all bitching about other people in the building (T.S.A.,1993).

These claims were also endorsed by some supervisors:

> Our team briefing usually involves a social chat...a lot of it seems to be about my cinema going at the weekend or the night before or Donna's nightclubbing and what she got up to...it's only if something important needs saying that I will say it...they (agents) usually listen in silence (S.T.S.,1994).

Given that attendance at team briefings is voluntary, approximately 30 per cent of T.S.As pointed out that they did not regularly attend team briefings.

T.S.As must attend weekly team meetings which are held during working time. Once again, however, it was argued by T.S.As during interviews, and recognised by the author during non-participant observation, that there was very little general participation by agents within these meetings. In some ways, these meetings are often longer versions of the team briefing:

> They run down things that we need to know in the team meetings and they sometimes outline things that all the team is falling down on like talk time or offering add on

> services...they do ask for suggestions about how certain things could be improved...like the way in which we deal with customer complaints, I think that is where the idea for service recovery came from, it was an idea put and discussed in one of our meetings... but it's usually always the same people who talk and put suggestions during these meetings (T.S.A.,1994).

Many T.S.As argued that they did not contribute to such meetings because the content of their contributions had been ignored in the past. As suggested in the previous chapter, this was a particular experience of female T.S.As. It was actually suggested by many T.S.As that telephone sales management are not particularly concerned with the content of agent participation and involvement - this is rarely acted upon. They merely wish to see agents participating so they can be appraised as 'committed' employees.

Some managerial staff did recognise that these meetings often turned into lectures *to*, rather than discussions with, their sales teams. Furthermore, many agents disclosed that weekly team meetings were not held as regularly as management suggested. T.S.As argued that it was extremely common practice to suspend team meetings during 'busy' periods. Some S.T.Ss admitted that they did not hold meetings when there was not adequate staff to cover the volume of telephone calls at any point in time. At one point in the research period, T.S.As from two separate teams claimed that their sales team meeting had not been held for four months.

The regularity with which such meetings are held, and the extent to which they are seriously analysed by managerial staff, depends upon the 'sales status' of particular agents at

the point when the meeting takes place, and the priorities of the supervisor concerned. Many agents argued they felt their conduct during team briefings and meetings, their willingness to participate within team events and their commitment and teamwork during the course of the working day was surveyed at times either when they individually, or the sales team collectively, had struggled to meet revenue targets. There were some T.S.As who felt that their conduct, in terms of commitment and teamwork, was constantly scrutinised by the particular S.T.S. to whom they were responsible. This was again put down to the particular idiosyncrasies of the supervisor concerned.

The majority of T.S.As, for *most* of their time at work, did not feel constrained to present an appearance of a committed employee. It can be argued that discretion over this aspect of social interaction - whether and how to interact in the way organisationally demanded - reduces the necessity to engage in emotional labour and risk a transmutation of the private emotional system. Worker autonomy has not been totally diminished by managerial attempts at regulation and control. The suggestion that T.S.As are constantly engaged in deep acting, in relation to management, and that this could lead to emotional alienation and a transformation of the self can, in relation to this aspect of the labour process, certainly be rejected.

The majority of those T.S.As who *did* feel either constrained or motivated to display commitment and teamwork argued that their behaviour remained a *display*. During interviews and observation, they frequently distinguished between their 'true selves' and the self being presented to management. Thus, one agent who felt constrained to present a 'self' to his particular supervisor argued that:

> It's a real hassle having to constantly listen and be involved in team meetings so you can make some kind of comment... I'm always having to look really busy as well while I'm on the floor, always helping out...it does work she seems to think that I'm hard-working, committed to the company and committed to the customers...but it has to be done, I know for a fact she gets on people's back for not being like that and it can affect the points that go towards your points *(sic)*...I'm not *naturally* outgoing or talkative in other situations...I suppose I feel like I have to (be as such here) (T.S.A.,1993,my emphasis).

Furthermore, during non-participant observation of the telephone sales labour process, many examples were found of agents *displaying* commitment to the organisation and its aims in front of their supervisors, for instance by returning early from a 'tea break' or refusing to take a break during particularly busy periods. However when questioned about this the agents argued that this was mainly to earn what were labelled 'browny points' and "to make sure that you get a good appraisal because, at the end of the day, it can affect your pay...that is what we are all here for...anybody would do it" (T.S.A.,1994). The same agents strongly rejected suggestions that such actions were a reflection of their 'true' norms, values, thoughts or personalities. "We wouldn't do it if she (the S.T.S.) didn't watch things like that so closely and go on about them. She really values it if you do things like that...other teams don't do it and if I was in their team I wouldn't do it...it hasn't changed me being part of the team, I am fitting the situation I suppose" (T.S.A.,1994).

Agents who felt *motivated* to display commitment and teamwork in front of their supervisors also argued that this was a display. They further suggested that this display was financially motivated and/or career orientated:

> If you want to get on here and be successful, which I do, you've got to do certain things, get involved in everything and get yourself known...I suppose you have to be a particular type of person *or at least behave like that at work*...some people don't like you for it but that's tough, if you're ambitious it's just part of the job...*it doesn't mean you're really like that*. Anybody can get on, you've just got to have the guts to be like that I suppose (T.S.A. 1994,my emphases).

It must be noted that a small minority of agents were observed who displayed commitment and teamwork in front of their supervisors *and* argued that they did not feel either constrained or motivated to do so. In fact, this group of agents argued that they did so, in the words of one such agent because "that is the type of person I am...I want to do well. What is the point in not doing the job properly ? It is in everybody's interest that this centre, and the whole company, carries on doing well" (T.S.A.,1994). It could be argued that, in this case, management has exerted control through the selection and training process. It *has* actually selected appropriate personalities for the T.S.A. labour process.

The Employee/Customer Interface

The nature of interaction between agent and customer is largely supervised through known and remote monitoring. This, again would *seem* to enforce total managerial control over this social interaction. Given that managerial control of social interaction can involve demands for employees to engage in emotional labour, the danger of emotional self-discipline and the transmutation of the private emotional system - the use and transformation of private feeling rules for commercial purposes would appear to be particularly acute at B.A. We have also argued that managerial control of social interaction at B.A. strengthens patriarchal structures within the T.S.A. labour process. However, in line with the overarching theme of this chapter, it will be argued that this aspect of managerial control is not 'total'. There is considerable evidence of T.S.A. discretion over the content and form of social interaction and thus over the deployment of emotional labour. It can be suggested that the form of employee/customer interaction is a significant site of employee resistance at B.A., *as well as* worker 'consent'. Simultaneously, it could tentatively be seen as an important site of female T.S.A. resistance to male domination within the workplace and beyond.

Known Monitoring

The purpose of known monitoring is to supervise the content of employee/customer interaction and to observe employees' behaviour, attitude, language and tone of voice during such occurrences. The vast majority of agents interviewed stated that the entire nature of their interactions with customers were transformed during periods in which they experienced known monitoring. Interestingly, many of them argued that such supervision frequently made them feel 'uncomfortable' and 'unnatural':

> When he (the S.T.S.) is sitting behind you, or next to you or near you, listening to everything and taking notes, you have to be really careful what you say...you just feel under pressure all the time...I make sure I do everything properly. What does it involve ? It means going through the call structure, matching their requirements, offering them something whatever hopeless a case it is, offering them add on, being polite and friendly all the time...I cringe at myself, it sounds so false and unnatural ...I sometimes stutter 'cos I'm embarrassed but that seems to be what they want when they listen in...I wouldn't do it like that if I knew they weren't listening. I would just be myself (T.S.A.,1994,my addition).

Once again, it was pointed out by T.S.As, and revealed through interviews with supervisors, that S.T.Ss adopted varying approaches to the use of known monitoring. This, in turn, affected the extent to which many T.S.As felt compelled to change their 'natural' behaviour during interaction with customers:

> They sit side-by-side to you...they make notes, go away, type them up and then they'll feed them back to you, say 'this was good, this wasn't good' like that and then, you know, just work out what you need to improve and go on from that...how often they do it depends on your supervisor, some do it every month some don't...I think some do it more than that...it depends on your supervisor... it depends how into it they are, like my

> old supervisor used to do like four pages of notes on two conversations when the other supervisor you get a handout for like one page for like ten conversations and it depends how they go into it as well (T.S.A.,1994).

> A lot of it does depend on the type of supervisor you have. I've been lucky and like both the ones I've had have been easy on it, but there are some 'round the building who seem to be doing it all the time, constantly watching people and putting them under pressure... I don't think I'd work well with (them) (T.S.A.,1994,my addition).

The fact that employees *change* their behaviour during periods of known monitoring clearly suggests that they exercise considerable discretion during periods when such supervision is absent. There was actually much T.S.A. resentment at having to change one's natural behaviour. The following comment was typical of such resentment:

> They tell us to be as natural as possible all the time but it's only if you fit with what they want. If I was natural, they'd have me out that door in a flash...I hate it though, they tell us to use our personality, 'that is why you were employed' and then they do us for using it, or they would do us if they caught us (T.S.A.,1994).

Remote Monitoring

The incidence of remote monitoring at B.A. Newcastle Telephone Sales would appear to be the most effective way of (managerially) controlling *all* employee/customer telephone interactions. The technology which enables this would appear to constitute the ultimate electronic Panopticon.

There is, however, an organisational debate over the effectiveness and impact of remote monitoring upon the lives of T.S.A's. Many T.S.A's reported the fears and constraints reported in the previous chapter regarding management's use of remote monitoring. It does constrain their behaviour in many ways. However, this depends upon the approach of one's supervisor and, to some extent, the experience of the T.S.A. in question. These points will be expanded in what follows. We shall analyse the effect of remote monitoring through considering its impact upon the form of employee/customer interaction and T.S.A's deployment of emotional labour.

Emotional Labour and the Incomplete Transmutation

It has already been established that telephone sales management, in common with many other T.Q.M. initiatives within clerical work and the service sector, demand that clerks deep act rather than surface act during interaction with customers. It is apparently no longer enough that workers *disguise* boredom, frustration, anger or irritation - they are expected to banish these feelings all together, as they could impact 'negatively' upon the service experience of the customer.

However, despite increased and managerial attention to the selection of employees for the purposes of social interaction and emotional labour, and the training and control of employee emotional labour (control is fundamentally exercised through remote monitoring), at B.A., T.S.A's do exercise discretion over the mode of service delivery (functional quality).

Firstly, it can be argued that because managerial methods to control the deployment of emotional labour begin with the *selection* of employees, it is then very difficult for management to control workers personality when they have asked them to deliver precisely that. This was the very rationale for employing them in the first place - to use the personality which is seen as naturally *theirs*, is an expression of their true self:

> I've had loads of battles with my supervisor 'cos she'll say 'change the way you say this', 'change the way you offer this' and I'll say 'but that's the way I do it', 'that's me, that's my personality, I can't change myself' and she says 'well you'll have to' but I don't. They either

> want us to be natural when interacting with customers or they don't, they can't have it both ways (T.S.A.,1994).

> I just tend to interact with customers on the phone the way I would anyone else... he (the S.T.S.) has picked up on it but I just tell him that's the way I talk, that's my personality...he's not going to sack me for it is he ? I always get my target no matter how I talk to people (T.S.A.,1994).

Secondly, remote monitoring can be seen as a major way in which management attempt to ensure deep acting within the T.S.A labour process. However, many agents claimed that, with experience, they have learned to ascertain when their conversation with a customer is being directly supervised. Being situated within an open plan office, this was recognised by the actions of the supervisor and regular gazes in their direction. One agent stated that;

> When I know she (the supervisor) is listening, I can't help but change my accent, what I actually say and the words I use. She would only pull me up for not talking the way that I am supposed to in our supervision and counselling sessions. I had one really ignorant get on the phone once, I was seething, but I knew she was listening so I had to contain it. When she is not listening, I just prefer to be myself....when I am positive she is not listening, I have been really short with bad customers, it's a great feeling !

This agent seems to be suggesting that there is a difference between what he sees as his *own* personality, display and feeling and the personality, display and feeling which is demanded by the company. Thus, he engages in surface acting and *this* is only performed when he is aware of managerial supervision.

Clearly,remote and known monitoring can shape T.S.As *display* during some employee/customer interactions. Managerial control *can*, for some (although a minority of) agents, also shape the feeling behind the display as examples of deep acting within the previous chapter demonstrated. However, when other T.S.As are able to interact 'naturally' with customers, using their own feelings, personalities and selves, they seize the opportunity. One agent commented:

> I prefer just to talk to people naturally, I think they (customers) prefer it as well.. when they realise I'm from Newcastle, I often try and talk to them about the match and what a good team we have now, I have some good discussions with people from other areas.. *I talk to people as I would talk to any friendly person outside of here*...it doesn't really get any more sales but it doesn't get any less...if people are going to buy something, they are going to buy something. I hate laying it on thick, they (customers) don't like it either (T.S.A.,1993,my emphasis).

The majority of agents expressed a desire to interact with customers 'naturally', as they would do outside of the workplace. However, they argued that the very fact that the

communication is based around selling products to customers, means that they are unable to interact naturally at all. This suggests a recognition that their natural personality, their true self is distinctly separate from the self they are asked to present through social interaction with customers. Many agents appeared to yearn for 'equal emotional exchange', unfettered by commercial interest. (Hochschild (1983)).

There were numerous examples of T.S.A's expressing their true feelings and selves and operating according to the rules of equal emotional exchange through overt resistance to managerial prescription of the employee/customer interaction. For example, some agents were observed, and many stated that, they simply disconnect calls from customers that are particularly rude or ignorant. In some cases, calls are prematurely terminated because the agents take a dislike to the customer. All these practices are undertaken when T.S.A's are sure that they are not being observed by management, either physically or electronically. When questioned whether they are ever overtly rude or dismissive with a caller, the common response is summarised by the following agent:

> Oh god yeah !, of course we are, we're just like everyone else you know, that's when you turn round and make sure nobody's listening in, you *can* tell if there's anybody listening in (T.S.A.,1993).

A more common T.S.A. practice which also reveals discretion over the emotional labour process and an incomplete self-discipline or transmutation of the private emotional system, involves limiting the information given to a rude, ignorant or offensive caller. Thus, many T.S.A's revealed that they would immediately withhold relevant, sometimes important, information on services and products from customers who provoked feelings of anger, irritation or dislike within them.

A related practice involved talking to such passengers in a 'distant', 'disinterested' manner:

> If I don't like someone...it's difficult to explain but I will be efficient with them, giving them what they want and no more, but I will not be really friendly, ...I sometimes have a really monotone voice, sounding a bit cold...I will not laugh at their jokes for example, those type of peoples are crap anyway...I think they get the message actually (T.S.A.,1994).

Some T.S.A's actually suggested that these discretionary, and some might say resistant, practices are to some extent condoned by *some* S.T.S's:

> Sometimes people'll ring up and they'll be so nasty and it's great if you can be just as bad back...I'm lucky my supervisor thinks that's fair enough... I even got her coming and listening to me one day. I said 'I want you to come and listen to everything I'm gonna say to this woman', I says 'because you won't believe what she's saying to us', I mean she was 'come on bitch, get me on this flight' and all this and I don't take that. I gave her both barrells and she (the S.T.S.) agreed with us, I mean a hundred grand a year's not enough to be paid to, I mean I don't take any shit from anybody...some supervisors won't let you be like that with any

> customer, 'the customer is always right, bite your lip'...I don't think I could even if I had to (T.S.A.,1993).

Other T.S.A's, within different teams to this employee, suggested that their supervisors often agreed with their recorded responses, which didn't involve being polite and friendly, to customers who provoked feelings within them of anger or dislike. This suggests that the emotional exchange between employee and customer is perhaps more equalised than Hochschild (1983) suggests and that T.S.A's do have discretion over social interaction with customers and the deployment of emotional labour. It also means that female clerks are able to resist, to some extent, the outlined patriarchal structures within the workplace *through* such discretion. It must be pointed out that some T.S.A's argued that the S.T.S. to whom they were responsible would not tolerate *any* deviation from the managerial prescription to be polite and friendly to all customers. The consequences of this, however, were merely that "you just make sure you don't get caught giving a customer back what he *(sic)* deserves" (T.S.A.,female,1994).

Further examples of employee discretion over the deployment of emotional labour - in fact whether to deploy it or not - involve instances where the feelings provoked within the agent are not necessarily the result of the callers' attitude, vocabulary or tone of voice. Many agents displayed an intuitive knowledge of which calls are merely enquiries and which calls will result in sales or potential sales. T.S.A's are often far more dismissive towards calls which are simply requesting information as clearly, they have an intrinsic interest in pursuing as many sales as possible:

> It depends what mood you're in and where you are with your targets but when it's

> obvious that they are using you as an information service and sometimes they can come up with some bastard enquires which take ages to do, especially travel agents...it can really piss you off, there's only so much you can be so nice and polite to people when you're not getting anything in return...it's worse when you're under pressure with a target or something, I nearly lose my rag, it drives you insane when you're pissing about searching for obscure flight times to god knows where, whether there's a train which connects with that, is the airport near the train station, will it be dark, what's the weather like, how am I supposed to know ? Honestly, you wouldn't believe it (T.S.A.,1994).

In addition to remote and known monitoring, the other mechanisms for managerial supervision of agents' interaction with customers include the revenue and productivity targets. It has been suggested throughout that management assume there is a direct connection between agent performance in terms of volume of sales and productivity performance and the nature of social interaction with customers. "If someone is constantly under-achieving in terms of what they sell then we know they are not talking to people in the correct way...it's easy to sell in this business provided you do it in the right way" (S.T.S.,1993).

It can be argued that, through these mechanisms, T.S.A's emotional labour is being supervised indirectly. If workers do not meet revenue and productivity targets, management assume that they are not deploying the 'company personality' - they

are not inducing and suppressing feeling in the way that they have been trained and are expected to do. One would then expect them to be instructed in this vein.

However, as already noted, many T.S.A's disagree with management's assumption of the link between volume of sales, productivity and the manner in which the service is delivered to customers, or potential customers, over the telephone. These agents argue that an outstanding sales performance is more luck than management.

There is evidence that some managerial staff tolerated the exercise of 'negative discretion' during social interaction with customers. provided that the agent concerned was a 'good performer'. Some S.T.S's admitted, and agents revealed that, in practice, it was only agents who consistently under-achieved in terms of selling services whose style of interaction with customers was closely monitored. A number of agents expressed similar sentiments to one who stated that "as long as you always reach your monthly target and put about fifty per cent on top once in a while, which isn't actually that difficult, then he (the S.T.S.) don't really care how you talk to customers, unless of course you get caught being outwardly rude to one...if you reach your targets, your appraisal session will last about five minutes...if you don't it can last two hours" (T.S.A.,1994).

The resulting autonomy which is open to T.S.A's during interaction with customers is demonstrated by instances in which workers *chose* to exercise 'negative discretion'. It was stated above that agents developed an intuitive knowledge of calls that were definite enquiries and not sales. One agent explained how such calls were sometimes handled:

> It really annoys me when it's obvious
> people are just ringing up for information.

> Travel agents are the worst - they use us as an information service because they know we have a quick answering system. When I am sure that my supervisor is not listening in I love to fuck about with them. If it is someone from outside the area, I lay the accent on really thick. You can hear them getting embarrassed when they have to say pardon all the time. If it's a travel agent they get annoyed because they're in a hurry - that's why they've rung you. One girl got caught being rude to a travel agent but they weren't bothered because she is a 'good performer'. I'd probably get bollocked or warned or something
> and taken for a counselling session and extra training so I have to be sure she (the supervisor) is not listening.

The use of a strong accent as a strategy for confusing, annoying or embarrassing customers who have irritated the worker is a regular tactic deployed by the majority of agents interviewed. This illustrates the discretion open to workers during social interaction and particularly that dimension of social interaction which involves workers managing their own feelings and producing feeling within customers.

It can be argued, on the basis of the evidence above, that during social interaction with customers, T.S.A's can in many instances control and direct the emotion work that they accomplish, frequently negotiate the feeling rules which guide the management of feeling in the workplace, while emotional exchange is not always a one-way process. Considerable evidence of surface acting, such as two fingered salutes and the mouthing of obscenities to the telephone or a rolling of

the eyes to colleagues, amongst T.S.A's, also demonstrated this.

It can be argued that both of the forms of managerial supervision of the social interaction engaged in by the clerk at Newcastle Telephone Sales are uncomprehensive and leave room for worker discretion, in particular over the *form* of social interaction - emotional labour. The product of the labour process of many agents is more often a product of their true or core selves than Hochschild's argument would seem to allow. This is a direct result of the autonomy workers exercise through their deployment of emotional labour.

Although there is some evidence of the transformation of feeling in alignment with the display demanded by the telephone sales labour process at British Airways, the ambivalence and resistance of workers, towards the feelings organisationally demanded, described above is enough to suggest an *incomplete transmutation* of the private emotional system, and thus resistance to both capitalism and patriarchy.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has been based upon empirical research conducted into former 'clerical work' which has been marketized (at British Airways and The Co-operative Bank). These cases have been compared to, and contrasted with, paid clerical employment which has not undergone such profound transformation (National Savings).

On the basis of our findings, it can be argued that work autonomy is more *restricted* within marketized 'clerical' work. While enabling some devolvement of responsibility, thoroughgoing managerial control mechanisms, which have accompanied the marketization process as implemented through T.Q.M., clearly attempt to ensure that such responsibility is 'positive discretion' only. The force of this managerial control, and the limitations imposed upon worker autonomy, is experienced most strongly by female employees in both marketized cases - this helps to reproduce patriarchy at work.

We have contended that the restriction of T.S.A. autonomy is a direct consequence of detailed and *individualised* managerial control of the labour process at B.A. At The Co-operative Bank, the situation is more complex. Due to less detailed, thoroughgoing and sophisticated managerial control of the branch banking labour process through T.Q.M. than is the case at Newcastle Telephone Sales, correspondingly, the workplace discretion of banking staff has been less *directly* affected by the implementation of quality management. However, the wider marketization process, of which T.Q.M. is a part, alongside continual organisational restructuring and considerable employment reduction, has instilled feelings of (material) insecurity amongst many branch employees. This has had significant, although often ambiguous and contradictory,

consequences for the exercise of employee autonomy within branches of The Co-operative Bank.

Some employees (often younger and less experienced, and particularly female workers) are reluctant to exercise discretion in anything other than a 'positive' direction due to their fear of material insecurity. For other (often experienced employees who have significant experience of the 'old' banking labour process) material insecurity has in some senses increased the scope for discretion, including 'negative discretion' as it is felt that their workplace actions will have little effect upon their employment future. However, simultaneously, such workers are also imbued with an historical commitment to giving 'good customer service' - a vestige of the 'old' Co-operative banking labour process. This means that the 'negative discretion' of experienced branch employees is often exercised in ways which will not damage this commitment. Interestingly, T.Q.M., as a way of 'formalising', 'codifying' and prescribing this historical commitment may conversely be eroding it as employees resent (managerial) attempts to prescribe (often in ways which they do not deem appropriate) what they feel they have always delivered.

Certainly, the above findings demonstrate the 'slippery' and general nature of the T.Q.M. philosophy (Wilkinson and Willmott (1995)). The term is attached to a variety of (marketized) managerial techniques and systems, often with varying levels of sophistication. We can also claim to have illustrated Cressey and Scott's (1992) argument that the marketization of 'old' clerical work is being met with resistance by 'older', experienced workers. This often produces work situations where 'old' and 'new' clerical work co-exists. Clearly, given the arguments of this thesis, *B.I.F.U.* representatives should continue to resist Co-operative Bank managerial attempts to introduce individualised

supervision and evaluation of the labour process, similar to those in operation at B.A. and many other parts of financial services and marketized work. As we have argued, marketization and T.Q.M. at B.A. can be seen as a 'classic' or 'critical' case. at The Co-operative Bank, the implementation of a more sophisticated T.Q.M. process may be one managerial method aimed at eliminating the worker autonomy, resistance and conflict which is part of (although not always in direct opposition to) the marketization process (especially in relation to 'non-green' labour).

The greater, and simultaneously patriarchal, restriction of work autonomy at both B.A. and The Co-op Bank as opposed to National Savings is clearly related to marketization. It is *because* the first two have become sales-orientated that 'positive discretion' is actively encouraged, rewarded *and* very closely monitored. The *provision* of information/services, as opposed to their sale, *appears* (according to B.A. and Co-op management) to require *less* positive discretion and reduced managerial supervision (especially in relation to employee/customer interaction). However, we have argued that, in terms of achieving sales, many T.Q.M. techniques can be counter-productive. Non-managerial prescription (especially of employee/customer interaction) would, according to many workers, increase sales. We can also argue that further managerial attempts to marketize the labour process of D.C.C. clerks at National Savings should be strongly resisted.

Our arguments strongly and directly counter those from within the 'discourse of enterprise', including the 'postmodernist epoch' position, who claim that (marketizing) managerial initiatives such as T.Q.M. 'empower' employees, offering autonomy, meaning and identity. In fact, it can be argued that both 'epoch' and 'epistemological organisational postmodernism are *ideological* representations of the nature of employment relations within the marketized work studied.

By suggesting that managerial attempts to 'change' organisational cultures through T.Q.M. offer employees increasing autonomy within the labour process and opportunities for the attainment and development of meaning and self-identity, 'epoch' postmodernism *conceals* the reality outlined above - T.Q.M. is a managerial attempt to *erode* employee discretion within the labour process and autonomous culture(s) within the workplace. Corporate cultural participation may offer a sense of self-identity, however, we have argued that this is not a *meaningful* self-identity. Further, it is a cultural participation and self-identity which is dependent upon maintaining and reproducing capitalist and patriarchal structures within the workplace.

In opposition to the 'postmodernist epistemological' position, it has been argued throughout that managerial power within the marketized work studied is *not* discursively constituted. The discourse of enterprise is *enacted* through capitalist and patriarchal *structures* of control within the workplace. Corporate cultural participation, on behalf of some employees studied, is structurally rather than discursively induced. Despite rejecting the concepts of 'ideology' and 'universal truth', it can be argued that epistemological postmodernism actually engages in ideological analysis and presents a vision of the 'truth' or 'reality' (Larrain (1994)). Moreover, it is a version of reality which we have rejected for understanding organisational life within the cases studied.

It has also been argued that, despite constituting a serious managerial assault upon the autonomy of marketized employees, T.Q.M. has not necessarily led to 'total' managerial control of the labour process. Within our cases, it is suggested that this is actually impossible, given the fragmented, and often contradictory, nature of 'management' (Hyman (1987)). Management is not a coherent, all-embracing and omnipresent phenomenon. The 'dual nature of the labour process' (Cressey

and McInnes (1980)) and the 'control-engage' dilemma of management (Thompson (1989)) remains within T.Q.M. organisations. Employees seem especially resistant to managerial attempts to control their feelings, emotions and personalities (Watson (1994)). Those within the discourse of enterprise appear blissfully ignorant of the often contradictory affects that managerial attempts to emotionally control employees can have. However, for those of us immersed in 'the emancipatory interest', we can tentatively suggest that such managerial attempts could be one focus of anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal struggle within the marketized sphere.

Clearly, much clerical work has undergone profound transformations in many respects, which we have collected under the heading of 'marketization'. The impact of this is still an 'open question' (Cressey and Scott (1992)) given that it is an ongoing and emerging process. Nevertheless, we can certainly argue that this process has destroyed any semblence of a *coherent* clerical labour process which appeared to exist within pre-marketized clerical work and the sociological literature which represented it. The tasks demanded of employees and their accomplishment, under close supervision, is radically different between marketized work and non-marketized work and even marketized work within the same organisation (i.e. the sales work and routine administration *work within* The Co-operative Bank). We simply cannot envelop such diverse work under the same umbrella. Marketization has transformed much former clerical work into 'sales' work. Simultaneously, while it is claimed that this process offers autonomy to employees, in reality marketization attempts to eliminate discretion. However, even though the most sophisticated mechanisms developed to date have been utilised by management in an attempt to 'achieve' this elimination, worker autonomy remains inherent to employment relationships

within the marketized sphere. Employee resistance is still alive.

NOTES

Introduction

1. By the 'emancipatory interest', we mean the emancipation of the majority of humans from structures of domination and subordination, which limit the development of autonomous capacities. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that through such development, a meaningful human life can be experienced.

2. It will be argued, along with Smith et al. (1991), that, through the (indirect) constraints of capital upon the public sector, similar objectives dominate public sector work organisations.

Chapter One - Work Autonomy

1. As Giddens (1971) points out, many of the issues discussed within Marx's early writings "dropped out of Marx's later works because he considered them to have been satisfactorily dealt with, given his over-riding aim of providing a theoretical critique of modern capitalism". For example, "there can be no doubt at all that the notion of alienation continues to be at the root of Marx's mature works in spite of the fact that the term itself appears only rarely in his writings after 1844" (p.9).

2. Clearly, what is meaningful and satisfying for some individuals or groups may not be so for others. The surest way in which the need for meaning can be met is through enabling individuals and groups to control their own lives. The need for a meaningful and satisfying life translates into the need for autonomy.

3. It is important to point out that autonomy is not only exercised *individually*. Given that praxis is a social phenomenon, autonomy can also be experienced and exercised *collectively*, by social groups. Individual and collective autonomy "is not only central to a fulfilling identity, it is also central to improving the quality of one's life. Given the erosion of opportunities for meaningful autonomy it is hardly surprising that identity crisis and meaninglessness are growing features of contemporary experience. Many of the needs people express, or often find difficult to express, reflect a need for autonomy

...this...should be the focus of political struggle" (Lodziak,1995,p.23).

4. Again, it must be stressed that the present *assumption*, that autonomous activity will result in the satisfaction of some beyond-survival needs, will be fully discussed below.

5. There can be little doubt that such a dominant, exploitative social group still exists, despite ongoing changes in its composition and behaviour (Miliband (1987)). Further, it is also clear that there are social divisions among those who are dependent on the *sale of their* labour power, the sale of somebody else's labour power, or the state for material resources.

6. We are not necessarily suggesting full acceptance of the 'labour theory of value'. Much debate has raged over this particular issue. However, again we do not have the space to go into the detail of such controversy. 'Surplus value' refers to the difference between the wages of employees (the value of labour power - "like the value of any other commodity, its value is the quantity of labor socially necessary to produce it and reproduce it...the living costs of the worker in the wide meaning of the term" (Mandel,1970,p.24)) and the value of the goods and services produced by employees. Many options are open to employers in order to maximise this 'difference'. Many of these options involve constraining the activities of employees within the workplace. "Even without accepting all the elements in Marx's account, it is clear that in market economies subject to national and international competition there will be more or

less constant downward pressures on labour costs leading to demands for more stringent controls over the activities of employees...Commercial and other 'unproductive' organizations are subject to the same sorts of market pressures as 'productive' ones, though there may be differences of degree" (Brown,1988,p.54). Following Gorz (1989) and Lodziak (1995), it is the manipulation of employees time, activity and human nature, that arises from such an employment relationships within capitalism, which is crucial to our developing argument.

7. It will be demonstrated in what follows that Marx's concept of the 'realm of freedom' and our notion of 'leisure time' do not necessarily mean the same thing.

8. This development of Marx's work can be labelled the 'manipulation of needs thesis' (Lodziak (1995)). The starting point for this argument lies in Marx's assertion that the 'first historical act' creates new needs requiring satisfaction. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) developed this argument further, pointing out that the first historical act under capitalism generates needs for rest and relaxation. Adorno and Horkheimer use this insight to explain the popularity of popular culture within the leisure time of the majority. More recent social theorists (Sahin and Robinson (1980); Lodziak (1986); (1988)) have drawn upon it to explain the poularity (despite low levels of 'satisfaction' and 'meaning' attained from such activity) of dominant contemporary leisure activities such as television viewing. It is argued that dominant leisure time activities such as consumption generally do not significantly

expand the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs, such as engagement in autonomous activity. Rather, they pander to needs generated by the realm of necessity. The 'realm of necessity' does not only involve time given over to paid employment. As Sahin and Robinson (1980) argue, in addition to this 'pledged time', it also involves 'compulsive time' (time given over to preparing for, and recuperating from, employment) and 'personal time' (time given to vital activities, such as sleeping and eating). It can be suggested that time given over to the realm of necessity leaves little time for participation in activities, such as autonomous activities, which might enable the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs (Lodziak (1986), (1988); Gorz (1985)). As Sahin and Robinson point out, time that is left over from the realm of necessity is not only limited, it is also *fragmented* time which is not amenable to the very nature of autonomous activity. The latter tends to demand lengthy, continuous tracts of free time. However, time is not the only resource important for participation within autonomous activity.
The major resource enabling action in capitalist society is money. "Ironically, those with lengthy periods of more or less continuous free time are unable, for one reason or another, to use it to the full. Time as a resource for human activity is of little value unless it is available in conjunction with other resources" (Lodziak,1986, p.136). The unemployed, for example, have time on their hands but lack the major resources to use it. The more affluent employed may have money to spare, but limitations on their time govern the ways in which money can be used. It would seem that the leisure time use of the

majority in capitalist society effectively prohibits significant participation in autonomous activity. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) argue that humans are prevented from satisfying beyond-survival needs. They went on to argue that this can result in an underdevelopment of the very *capacity* to engage in meaningful activity and consequently the danger of human beings no longer experiencing beyond-survival needs. This is what is meant by the manipulation of needs - the manipulation of resources shapes the needs that we can satisfy. The needs we can, and can't, satisfy produce particular human beings. Thus, the manipulation of needs can lead to the manipulation of human beingness itself.

9. It is suggested by these authors that such developments as the breakdown of traditional working class communities and the growth of urbanism has seen the erosion of spaces that were once available for the satisfaction of beyond-survival needs. As we shall see, this is a debate to which this thesis aims to contribute.

10. This suggests an implicit criticism of some other forms of feminism, most notably Marxist-feminism (for e.g. Beechey (1977)), as ahistorical and simplistic.

11. It is argued (Adorno and Horkheimer (1944); Gorz (1985), (1989)) that expanding engagement in autonomous activities and the development of autonomous capacities would *inevitably* facilitate critical thought *and* action in relation to the dominant social order. The lack of meaning and non-satisfaction within heteronomous activities would be incrasingly

recognised by those expanding their autonomous activities. Further, the very expansion of autonomy would oppose key capitalistic and patriarchal structures.

12. It can be argued that this perspective has been influenced by a particular interpretation of Marx's theory of the transition from the formal subordination of labour (F.S.L.) to the real subordination of labour (R.S.L.) under capitalism. Braverman (1974) in particular argues that the development of monopoly capitalism in the twentieth century has seen a movement towards R.S.L. The R.S.L. "means that the workforce plays absolutely no part in direction or conception...if it *did* play any such part, the real subordination of labour would be seriously incomplete ...the transition from F.S.L. to R.S.L., theorised as 'deskilling', lies at the heart of much contemporary Marxist theory" (Cressey and McInnes,1980,pp.7-9). At the heart of Braverman's concept of 'deskilling' is the complete removal of employee autonomy from the labour process. We will be arguing that 'skill' and 'discretion' must be distinguished.

13. Clearly, this is an *analytical* distinction. Skill and discretion are often exercised simultaneously within the social relations of employment.

14. There is a complicated and voluminous debate over what can be labelled as 'complex' and 'non-complex'. There have been varying ways of judging this complexity, including the length of training required to undertake particular tasks and jobs (Woodward (1970); Braverman (1974)) or the 'replacability' of the workers concerned (Strangleman (1994)).

15. 'Experience' is here referred to in the very wide sense of the term, to include general life experience.

16. It can be noted that our own approach is complimented by what Thompson (1989) terms his 'core theory' of the capitalistic labour process. This draws on formative writings on the labour process.

Chapter Two - The Clerical Labour Process

1. When we employ the term 'work situation', this refers to the social relations of employment which encompasses, among other things, the detail of the labour process and the prescription and discretion embodied therein.

2. Smith et al. argue that the nature of changes in clerical work organisation are a direct result of demands for the expansion of clerical and white collar work to enable private capital accumulation. This has in turn led, according to them, to increased exploitation - through the generation of exchange value and surplus value within both private and public sectors - of clerical workers themselves.

3. A review of Hochschild's work in full reveals that she only viewed this as a possibility within private life. Thus, Hochschild (1979) argues that 'feeling rules' are the 'bottom side of ideology' - indicating that manipulation of one's 'ideological stance' or 'world view' can also lead to the manipulation of the feeling rules one obeys and thus our emotional experience. Other authors (James (1989); Wouters (1989); Duncombe and Marsden (1993)) have argued that, in particular, a 'gender asymmetry' in 'emotion work' can be identified within parts of the private sphere.

4. There is increasing recognition that emotion is is central to the 'negotiated order' of all work organisations. Fineman (1993b) argues that organisations should be seen as 'emotional

arenas'. "When we examine the way organizational order is achieved and undone, the management and mobilization of emotions are pivotal (Fineman,1993a,p.1). Emotions are within the *texture* of organising. However, we are explicitly concerned with emotional *labour*. This relates to the active *management* of feeling. It should not be conflated with the emotional *experience* per se of paid labour, which Hochschild (1993) terms 'real time emotions'.

Chapter Three - Total Quality Management and Clerical Work

1. See Muckenberger and Deakin (1989), Streeck (1989) and Green (ed) (1989) for stimulating and powerful critiques of this position.

2. This argument is especially relevant to the focus of this thesis - human autonomy. The development of the latter is seen as possible through consumer behaviour. In fact, Bauman (1992) goes as far as to argue that autonomous, creative consumer behaviour within post-modern society means that:

> reproduction of the capitalist system is therefore achieved through individual *freedom* (in the form of consumer freedom, to be precise), and *not* through its suppression...to secure its reproduction, the capitalist system in its consumer phase does not need...such traditional mechanisms as consensus-aimed political legitimation, ideological domination, uniformity of norms promoted by cultural hegemony (pp.51-52, my emphasis).

3. It must be stressed that quality initiatives have by no means been the only organisational response, and contribution, to the 'discourse of enterprise'. Others include increased organisational 'flexibility', the development of 'corporate cultures' and the demise of management-union collective bargaining over pay and conditions. However, quality programmes constitute the specific subject-matter of this thesis. It will be argued that they have perhaps been the most significant, widespread and far-reaching of organisational responses to the perceived changing environment. They also

incorporate many of the other, more fragmented responses identified above.

4. Kerfoot and Knights (1994) interestingly suggest some other explanations for the contemporary plausibility, from a managerial perspective, of quality programmes. Firstly, they argue that competition according to product and service quality is one way of refusing to compete on price and thus avoiding the self-destructive tendencies of competitive capitalism. Secondly, as the management of labour through collective bargaining methods and procedures and the 'collective identity' of workforces generally has been undermined, increasingly individualistic wage rates have "created a cultural and managerial vacuum awaiting the arrival of new co-ordinating mechanisms of collective and productive power...Quality management, or more accurately its managerial plausibility, is at least in part a reflection of the necessity for large corporations to find new and innovative ways of competing constructively, and of managing fragmented workforces" (Kerfoot and Knights,1994,p.6).

5. More specifically, within financial services upon which this thesis will later focus, McCabe et al. (1994) report that 90% of organisations have one or more quality initiatives. It must be stressed however that this "trend is...a relatively recent one compared with other sectors, having emerged since the mid-1980's" (McCabe and Knights, 1995,p.6).

6. One novel environmental aspect identified by the T.Q.M. literature (and the associated 'excellence' literature), and thus a further part of the 'discourse of enterprise',

is the recognition of Japanese corporate and economic 'success'. It is often seen as necessary to compete with Japan economically through the adoption of Japanese managerial and organisational techniques. These techniques are similar to many of those identified by the T.Q.M. literature. See Elger and Smith (1994) for a critical analysis of 'Japanisation'.

7. Once again, environmental conditions such as economic crisis, globalisation, increasingly differentiated consumer demand, nation-state deregulation, new productive and information technologies and Japanese corporate success are identified as stimulating the development of quality programmes. Thus, the prescriptive 'quality gurus' literature can clearly be seen as part of the 'culture of the customer' and the 'discourse of enterprise'.

8. Thus, Oakland (1989) stresses the importance of developing forms of T.Q.M. that make employees more responsible. Getting employees to become committed to "attaining quality in a highly motivated fashion" means that management must understand that "people do not need to be coerced to perform well, and that people want to achieve, accomplish, influence activity and challenge their abilities" (Oakland,1989,p.26).

9. It must be noted that the T.Q.M. prescriptive literature does not advocate this as the *only* strategy for firms to develop and maintain competitive advantage - it can be used in combination with other differentiating factors and other competitive strategies, such as "cost leadership" and "dominating pre-selected segments of the (particular) market" (Howcroft,1991,pp.11-12).

In fact, in relation to service work, Howcroft (1991) and Boaden and Dale (1993) suggest that T.Q.M. programmes as differentiation strategies *must* be used in combination with other competitive strategies - this is "a prerequisite for success" (Howcroft,1991,p.12). T.Q.M. programmes are vital for short-term competitive advantage, however, it is much harder to maintain competitive superiority through T.Q.M. in the long-term given that competitive advantage is achieved through enhanced customer service with the ease of competitor imitation. Even short-term competitive advantage through T.Q.M., again because of competitor replication, depends upon the rate at which improvements in customer service are introduced (Howcroft (1991)).

10. It was argued in chapter one that we must be given autonomy/discretion to develop our 'true' identity and personality.

1. The meaning of these titles and roles will be explained in chapter five.

2. A considerable amount of observation was also undertaken within other parts of the bank previously mentioned.

Chapter Five - Telephone Sales Clerks, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Telephone Sales, British Airways

1. This is formally labelled a 'machine break' because clerks are legally entitled to a break from staring at a computer screen for up to three hours. This break became known informally and organisationally as a 'tea break'.

2. It was felt by Telephone Sales U.K. management that this would enable T.S.As at Manchester to 'know' trade customers more intimately and thus gauge their needs and expectations more effectively. Newcastle management saw this re-organisation as a reward for their success in dealing with individual, personal customers. The move enabled them to concentrate upon delivering quality customer service to such prospective customers.

3. It is crucial to point out that the phrases 'telephone sales management' and 'Newcastle Telephone Sales management' are used throughout this chapter. The latter refers to a grouping including the unit manager, S.T.Ls and S.T.Ss. This group is presented as one coherent whole - management. This is how telephone sales management attempted to present themselves. All levels of management are also presented as a coherent entity within the prescriptive T.Q.M. literature. However, the weaknesses of this position are recognised. The issue will be analysed and questioned in later chapters. The generic term 'management', however, is used in the above manner within the following two chapters also.

4. Also during this day, various other speakers gave guest lectures, for example, the global partners

of B.A. who conveyed information about new and developing products which T.S.As were charged with the responsibility of selling.

5. The needs and expectations of T.S.As are particularly researched and expressed through 'The Input Survey Team' and the team representative system. Both of these are discussed in more detail later.
The major 'perk' open to T.S.As is the opportunity to purchase B.A. products and services at only ten per cent of the retail price, provided that these cannot be sold to an outside customer. T.S.As are able to search the computer system for availability and book these services through 'staff travel'. B.A. management actively encourage this 'perk'. They see experiencing as many products as possible as important for agent delivery of technical quality to prospective customers. Other important facilities include a subsidised staff canteen and a clean, new and purpose-built building.

6. Watson (1994) argues that it is not uncommon for organisations to bulk-purchase Peters and Waterman's (1982) In Search of Excellence and distribute it amongst managerial staff. "It has probably been the most widely read management book of all time" (Watson,1994,p.13).

7. The feasibility, and implementation, of 'culture change' is particularly argued by Dobson (1988). He identifies four particularly significant ways in which 'weak corporate cultures' can be transformed into 'strong corporate cultures'. 1) "by changing the people in the organisation" - i.e. through recruitment and selection processes. 2). "by communication and role models". 3) "by

training in new skills". 4) "by changing the work environment" - i.e. reorganising the labour process and supervisory and evaluation processes. The remarkable parallels between these prescriptions and the practices undertaken at B.A. telephone sales, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne must be emphasised.

8. This is clearly identified by Dobson's (1988) prescriptions above. See also Crosby (1986); Dale et al. (1990); Boaden and Dale (1993).

9. I.A.T.A. divides the world up into regions one, two and three for fare and ticketing purposes.

10. The 'variable working contract' was negotiated between agent and management. Agents were permitted a choice as to when they wished their working hours and holidays to fall. Management could then use these agents to fill teams that were short of personnel or were busy at particular times. The variable working contract was described by management as "beneficial to agents and extremely beneficial, a luxury to us...they may work 50 hours one week when we are busy and 20 hours per week when we are not so busy" (S.T.L.,1994). This contract also enabled the employment of part-time T.S.As. Management stated that they aimed to extend the variable working contract to cover all employees - old and new. This would clearly disrupt the stringent teamworking system. However, management clearly felt that the majority of T.S.A's were firmly established in. and familiar with, the whole of the centre. Further, prior to the introduction of variable working contracts, all levels of management frequently stressed the expensive nature of the stringent teamworking

system and accompanying 'fixed working contracts' in operation.

11. In light of the above, management clearly aim to change this situation.

12. T.S.As are paid a standard wage. This can be improved due to 'performance related pay'. This is calculated according to the extent to which T.S.A's meet particular targets from month to month. As will be explained, these are flexible.
Consistent failure to meet monthly revenue targets would, according to all levels of management, eventually result in dismissal. It was argued, however, that this was highly unusual.

13. T.S.As are only targeted on *direct* sales. That is, the only revenue that counts towards the target is that which is accrued totally by the centre - when payment is received and the T.S.A. can authorise the printing and dispatching of tickets through the post. This does not include bookings which are only reserved or only keyed. Interestingly, the community dealing with surplus American calls are not targeted on direct sales because the majority of these calls are queries. They are assessed according to the other criteria outlined. This demonstrates the flexible nature of the targets.

14. *One* of the monthly targets which T.S.As must surpass is the revenue target. The flexible and holistic nature of the targets means that revenue targets do not have to be surpassed every month. However, again, consistent failure to meet revenue targets would eventually result in

dismissal. There are incentives to carry on selling once monthly revenue targets have been reached. Surpassing the team's collective monthly revenue target earns the team a collective monetary award to dispense with how they wish. "We usually use it to have a slap up meal and a good drink as a team" (S.T.S.,1994). Three-monthly and annual awards (either monetary or consisting of B.A. team holidays) are also awarded to teams who surpass their revenue targets to the greatest extent. Individuals can qualify for monthly 'going for gold' awards (both monetary awards and awards in the form of B.A. travel products - i.e. holidays) depending on the extent to which they smash revenue targets. These are competed for within the whole centre. A league table is produced and an annual 'going for gold' prize is awarded.

15. Similar team and individual awards are also made, and league tables constructed, on the basis of holistic, performance-related pay points accumulated.

Chapter Six - Bank Clerks, The Co-operative Bank

1. The term 'clerks' is used throughout this chapter and beyond to refer to clerical workers within The Co-operative Bank. However, it must be recognised that management, since and as part of the restructuring and implementation of T.Q.M., argued that "clerk is a fairly old-fashioned term that we no longer use" (R.M.,1992). Organisationally, commercial 'clerks' within the branches are termed 'Commercial Advisors', personal 'clerks' are split between 'Personal Advisors' and 'Customer Service Officers' (formerly cashiers - although often management referred to these as 'operators'). This may well reflect the move from a 'clerical' to a 'sales' operation within the branches.

2. This emphasis upon appealing to customers through improving the 'quality' of the service provided is, in effect, a move towards a 'sales culture' - attempting to sell the bank's services and products. As we have seen (chapter two), this can be seen as a shift affecting banking labour as a whole. Marketization "has come to reconfigure what is accepted and defined as 'competence' in bank clerical work...the shift toward competitive sales cultures...marks a significant change in what was once held as the marker for acceptability in bank labour" (Kerfoot,1995,p.4). Kerfoot (1995) points out that 'selling' was once a 'dirty word' within the banking industry. "Traditional banks were seen as rather authoritarian, austere institutions which did not encourage people to enter branches freely in order to browse...The underlying

assumptions were that banks were respectable institutions which people would be prepared to trust with their money. Bank staff had to cultivate a sober, reliable image" (Halford and Savage,1995,p.107).

3. It needs to be highlighted that the term 'management' in this context refers to a grouping involving B.D.Ms and R.Ms within the branches, C.S.T.Ls, C.S.Ms at the A.M.C., the head of the A.M.C., the managers of the R.P.Cs and the R.S.Cs, Corporate Development Managers within the Corporate Centres and senior management based at head office in Manchester. For similar reasons to the British Airways case-study (outlined above), for the moment, this grouping is presented as one coherent entity. The problems with this stance will be discussed later.

4. Once again, within the banking sector, The Co-operative Bank is not alone in undertaking such a restructuring. Kerfoot (1995) reports from her research within another major U.K. bank that "the sales orientation of branch banks is...facilitated by relocating a large proportion of administrative work from branches into specialist centres, in order to release branch staff for "real banking" activities - the business of meeting customers in order to sell (products)" (p.6). See also Kerfoot and Knights (1995). Halford and Savage (1995) report that within 'Sellbank', "many of the activities of the branch manager have been stripped away by the development of specialist managerial roles...lending to large businesses was hived off to specialist corporate lending divisions, while small business lending became the responsibility of 'enterprise

managers'.It must be stressed, however, that Co-operative Bank management claimed they had *led* such developments within the banking industry. Nevertheless, Kerfoot and Knights (1995) suggest that, within financial services, quality programmes are "no longer an option for management but a necessary concern of the business activity" (p.233).

5. It must be pointed out that many former branch clerks were actually relocated to the administration centres, especially Regional Processing and Regional Security, along with the routine tasks from the former branch clerk labour process. This was inevitable due to the reduction in personnel within the branches as part of restructuring and the introduction of T.Q.M. Those who were relocated were, according to management, suited to this particular (routine) role within the quality improvement process. They are not, apparently, suited to the new branch clerical role, with its emphasis on *selling* services and products rather than *processing* customers.

6. Some of Co-operative bank management specified 'critical points' further by referring to the importance of specific types of clerk/customer interaction. Thus, for example, it is argued that account opening is "the shop window for everything else that happens as part of the customer relationship. A customer's experience of the account-opening process can influence his/her perception of overall service" (Dignan,1995,p.44).

7. The changing nature of employer requirements is endorsed in relation to clerical work generally within recent research by the Institute of Employment Studies (Dench

and Honey (1995)). Here it was found that clerical employers increasingly demand the ability to provide 'customer service' and they search for 'practical experience' and 'interest' within the world of work. G.C.S.E's and 'A' levels are now accorded a relatively low priority within recruitment strategies. Dench and Honey (1995) discuss this in the context of the declining demand for youth labour in the U.K.

8. Thus, in relation to the above, it is highly unlikely that 'youth' within the labour market will have developed such experience or ability. Kerfoot and Knights (1995) argue that the career system within banking has been reconstructed around an emphasis upon the ability to effectively sell banking products.

9. Once again, recent research by the Institute of Employment Studies (Dench and Honey (1995)) generalises this observation as relevant to all forms of clerical work. The 'office junior' has all but disappeared.

10. Thus, although, for example, customer service officers are often allocated to the customer enquiry or advisory desk, this is usually a temporary phenomenon or for training purposes. They are normally staffed by senior personal advisors or personal advisors. "Everybody gets a chance at going on the sales desk but for some members of staff it is a more permanent duty...it is nice to have training but you've got to have some stability for a while otherwise people feel as if they are not settled enoughto be able to just get on with the job that they want to do...we have flexibility

but you cannot change your team around *all* the time...if it was one big pot of activities, it would be chaos...we do enough training to make sure that everyone feels confident enough slotting into each others job...I'm not saying that you can over-train, I think the answer is to find the right balance between training, coaching and people feeling stable within the role they are in" (B.D.M.,1993).

11. Management would not disclose the monetary value of these revenue targets. They had clearly instructed all staff in a similar vein.

Chapter Seven - Correspondence Clerks, National Savings, Durham

1. The other centres are situated in Glasgow, Lytham St. Anne's and London.

2. The National Savings movement was not totally immune from the same competitive pressures as effected the banking industry. National Savings management perceived increased and now worldwide competition, and the development of a more discerning consumer, as the trigger for such competitive pressures. "We have always really been able to rely upon a steady and fairly solid market...the way this has changed can be seen from the fact that we are now advertising our products and stressing their advantages as opposed to competitors. This was unheard of in the past" (S.E.O,1993).

3. For reasons of clarity, the research will exclusively focus upon the tasks arising from correspondence regarding savings certificates.

4. Within this chapter, and the following analysis, 'management' is defined as the D.C.C. manager and the C.M's (H.E.Os) within the branch. The group of clerical workers within the branch are divided into E.Os, A.Os and A.As. In a similar vein to the previous two cases, the danger of conceptualising 'management' as a coherent and collective force is recognised. This issue becomes a central theme in the subsequent analysis.

5. E.Os, A.Os and A.As are all classified as clerical workers under the Manpower Services Commission (M.S.C.)

general classification of occupations. Clerical occupations form group 31 under this classification, E.Os are classified at 310.30, A.O's at 319.04 and A.A's at 319.02.

6. When purchased (traditionally from the Post Office), the original savings certificate is given to the customer and a copy is retained by National Savings. These copies are held in the holdings department. The centre at Durham was in the process of transferring all paper holdings into computerised data during the course of the research. This was a massive task which began in 1991 and was far from complete by the end of the research period.

Chapter Eight - T.Q.M.: Managerial Control or Worker Autonomy

1. Kerfoot and Knights (1995) and Tuckman (1995) are merely selected as representative of a further tranche of critical T.Q.M. literature which goes beyond the analysis of Sewell and Wilkinson (1992), but remains over-simplified. Much of this literature is contained within the edited volume by Wilkinson and Willmott (1995), Making Quality Critical. Thus, the criticisms levelled at Kerfoot and Knights and Tuckman can also be applied to McCardle et al (1995), for example.

2. It must be noted that for what we have labelled Total Quality Management (T.Q.M.), Sewell and Wilkinson use the term Total Quality Control (T.Q.C.).

3. These authors suggest the possible implausibility of representing forms of control of the labour process as, in any way, managerial 'strategies' (Hyman (1987)). The relevance of this argument will emerge again in what follows.

4. The concept of The Panopticon can be used to analyse the organisation of institutions where sections of society are "sequestrated" (Foucault (1977)) - categorically and physically separated from other sections of society. Foucault was primarily concerned with the sequestration of individuals through prisons and hospitals. However, as both Giddens (1985) and Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) point out, he was also aware of the Panoptic possibilities of the workplace. "The Panopticon

embodies...a mechanism through which power relations can be enacted - it provides a means by which direct surveillance can be undertaken for supervisory purposes to reinforce the asymmetry of power between the gaoler and the gaoled or the employer and the employee" (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992,p.274).

5. Doubts can be cast over the assumption that 'complete' bureaucratic regimes have ever existed.

6. For the moment we will be using the rather simplistic terms of 'positive discretion' - to refer to the exercise of autonomy in the interests of management and the organisation - and 'negative discretion' - to refer to the exercise of autonomy against the interests of management and the organisation. Issues arising from such a usage will be discussed later in the thesis. For the moment, it can be noted that a unity of interests between the organisation and management and within management can be questioned. The whole notion of an organisation 'having interests' is also a matter of debate. Furthermore, as will be seen from the following analysis, it is not being suggested that positive discretion and negative discretion are not two sides of the same coin. Not to exercise positive discretion does not necessarily entail exercising negative discretion. Positive discretion refers to employees' exercise of initiative to go beyond 'standard' performance and managerial prescription. Negative discretion denotes deliberate employee

attempts to diverge from managerial prescription in ways which do not enhance the profitability of the work organisation.

7. They do clearly point out though that their argument can be similarly applied to the implementation of T.Q.M. within clerical work and the service sector. In fact, they point to studies, such as Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1990), Austrin (1991) and Fuller and Smith (1991), which reveal systems of (often electronic) surveillance which discipline the behaviour and attitude of service sector employees. Interestingly, these disciplinary forces often facilitate the deployment, by service sector employees, of emotional labour.

Chapter Nine - The Discourse of Empowerment 1: Positive Discretion

1. It is not being suggested that women have some, general 'natural personality' which fits with the above descibed managerially-required attributes. Rather, it can be argued that the majority of managerial staff interviewed within the T.Q.M. cases and involved in selection processes assume that women possess these characteristics 'naturally'. Furthermore, the argument that will be developed is that, in both cases, these assumptions are also embedded within managerial prescription of, supervision of, and evaluation of both T.Q.M. labour process. In short, T.Q.M. managerial control of the clerical labour processes under focus (identified as one of the major structures of the labour process in chapter one) attempts to constrain the behaviour and attitudes of female clerks at work into producing and reproducing the aforementioned patriarchal assumptions and stereotypes. Thus, it is not *necessarily* being suggested that the female clerks studied *willingly* produce and reproduce patriarchal, gendered ideologies and identities and thus *willingly* reproduce the conditions of their own (female) subordination. Rather, the structures of managerial control of the labour process to be identified are simultaneously *structures* of patriarchal domination and subordination. Structures are both enabling and constraining (Giddens (1979); Walby (1990)). We will be examining precisely what this particular structure of our T.Q.M. labour processes enables and constrains.

2. Similar findings are reported within much empirical research into employment relationships where interaction with customers, colleagues or

management is a predominant aspect of the labour process and is highly valued by management. Examples of such research can be found in Morgan and Knights (1991), Filby (1992) and Grey (1994). Each of these pieces of ethnographic research demonstrate how 'gendered personalities' are selected (in all cases by male dominated management) as appropriate for the demands of the particular labour process in question. These selections are shaped by patriarchal and ideological assumptions concerning the 'natural' abilities and roles of men and women.

3. An in-depth analysis of how our case-studies contribute to, and reflect, gendered occupational segregation is unfortunately beyond the precise focus and spatial restrictions of this thesis. We are explicitly concerned with the impact of T.Q.M. upon clerical worker autonomy. Clearly integral to this study is an analysis and assessment of the extent to which clerical worker discretion within our three cases strengthens or challenges patriarchy at work. This will be undertaken in what follows. However, we can note here that the selection processes accompanying the introduction of T.Q.M. at B.A. and The Co-operative Bank have rather complex consequences for clerical gendered occupational segregation. In both cases, women are selected as appropriate 'personalities' for the *clerical* roles within both cases - involving interaction with customers, colleagues and management. At B.A., they are not selected as appropriate 'personalities' for the type of social interaction and other duties required of *senior* management - the

positions of S.T.L. and Unit Manager. At The Co-operative Bank, women are not considered as appropriate 'personalities' for 'commercial management' or senior positions within head office or the various quality groups. Thus, the implementation of T.Q.M. would appear to have done little to challenge occupational segregation in both cases. However, the existence of a female B.D.M. at The Co-op and many female S.T.S's at B.A. throws *some* doubt upon this argument. Halford and Savage (1995) actually suggest, on the basis of empirical research, that the type of organisational restructuring within banking which T.Q.M. involves "appear to be undermining traditional forms of managerial masculinity and allow some scope for women to move into senior jobs" (p.97). However, the claims of the female managerial staff interviewed who generally argued that they felt they had been employed because their role involved the 'softer' aspects of personnel management (i.e. 'counselling' and 'coaching') would suggest that patriarchal ideologies and assumptions appear to be continually implemented by those with organisational power within our two cases. However, we can agree with Halford and Savage (1995) that there is "a degree of indeterminancy about how gender is implicated in current restructuring processes" (p.97).

4. The dominance of male heterosexuality within various workplaces is demonstrated through empirical research by Pringle (1989), Collinson and Collinson (1989) and Parkin (1993) and also argued within Burrell and Hearn (1989) and Collinson and Hearn (1994).

The dominance of male heterosexuality is an inherent part of patriarchal domination within the workplace (Pringle (1989); Collinson and Hearn (1994)) and a form of domination in its own right (Burrell and Hearn (1989)). It can be argued that, within out T.Q.M. cases, male heterosexual discourse is dominant - it is internalised by those in positions of organisational power and is *embedded within the demands made by total quality* management through selection, training, supervisory and evaluative procedures - in short, managerial control. Thus, for example, Co-operative branch management look to employ "attractive and professional-looking women...that is who people expect to see behind the counter in a bank" (B.D.M.,1993). One S.T.L. at B.A. stated that "if you look around you, you'll see that we have a lot of attractive women here...it certainly brightens the place up, would you be bothered about working amongst women like that ?...but seriously, the feel good factor from being among attractive people can be transferred to the customer" (S.T.L.,1994). It is not being suggested that the male heterosexual discourse, which assumes that male sexual desire is normal, natural and inevitable, is internalised by everyone within our T.Q.M. organisations but, significantly, it is internalised by male dominated managements and is embedded within managerial demands made of clerks at both B.A. and The Co-op Bank.

5. This cash is usually delivered twice daily by officers from the Regional Security Centre who deposit cash for use in the branch while collecting the money that has accumulated. The latter is transferred to the Regional Processing Centre.

6. Clearly, this prescription does not apply to the usual work of Senior Personal Advisors and Personal Advisors who largely deal with customers who *apply* for products and services and actually make appointments to see them or who apply over the telephone. This particular prescription applies to those working on the banking counter (this *can* involve S.P.A's and P.A's but *usually* involves Senior Customer Service Officers and Customer Service Officers). The latter are required to offer products and services to customers who *usually* come to the bank for other purposes than the purchase of such products.

7. Once again, actual implementation of these techniques can be seen as the development and exercise of prescriptive *skill*.

8. The rigid demarcation between (wholly) male management and a (largely) female clerical workforce contributes to and reflects both types of gendered occupational segregation outlined above. Again, further discussion of this issue is beyond this thesis.

9. This raises the interesting issue that, in some instances, employees may not wish to take advantages of opportunities for discretion within the labour process as it involves *extra* thought, activity and effort without *extra reward*.

10. It was also almost universally stated by all managerial staff and clerks interviewed at The Co-operative Bank that, if any male branch clerks were to join either of the branches, they would

be promoted more rapidly into these positions than existing female employees.

11. As suggested throughout these analytical chapters, this comment can also be applied to the work of Co-operative Bank branch clerks and D.C.C. branch clerks at National Savings. It can be argued that much of this discretion and skill is unrecognised and unrewarded, both by the managements concerned and within the wider society. It can be further argued that this is due to the fact that the clerical roles being studied are female dominated. The recognition, and reward for, both 'skill' and 'discretion' is socially constructed and contested - a process which often disadvantages women (Phillips and Taylor (1980); Game and Pringle (1984)). The skill and discretion deployed by many women in *many labour* processes is often viewed as the deployment of their 'natural' skills and abilities. As we shall see, such an argument is particularly relevant for the analysis of our three cases.

12. Although we haven't got time to discuss the issue in detail, it can be noted that *clerks'* assumptions regarding the 'nature of customers', which can shape the way in which they exercise autonomy, were often stereotypical, reinforcing and strengthening social divisions. At B.A., for example, patriarchal, racist and status-based assumptions are often employed by T.S.A's when deciding whether to offer particular product information or hurridly terminate a call. These assumptions are often tacitly supported by management. Further discussion of this constitutes another paper.

This agent seems to be suggesting that there is a difference between what he sees as his *own* personality, display and feeling and the personality, display and feeling which is demanded by the company. Thus, he engages in surface acting and *this* is only performed when he is aware of managerial supervision.

Clearly,remote and known monitoring can shape T.S.As *display* during some employee/customer interactions. Managerial control *can*, for some (although a minority of) agents, also shape the feeling behind the display as examples of deep acting within the previous chapter demonstrated. However, when other T.S.As are able to interact 'naturally' with customers, using their own feelings, personalities and selves, they seize the opportunity. One agent commented:

> I prefer just to talk to people naturally, I think they (customers) prefer it as well...when they realise I'm from Newcastle, I often try and talk to them about the match and what a good team we have now, I have some good discussions with people from other areas...*I talk to people as I would talk to any friendly person outside of here*...it doesn't really get any more sales but it doesn't get any less...if people are going to buy something, they are going to buy something. I hate laying it on thick, they (customers) don't like it either (T.S.A.,1993,my emphasis).

The majority of agents expressed a desire to interact with customers 'naturally', as they would do outside of the workplace. However, they argued that the very fact that the

Chapter Ten - The Discourse of Empowerment 2: Centralised Control

1. From this point, the concepts of 'positive discretion' and 'empowerment' will be used interchangeably.

2. At the time of the research, the basic wage of T.S.As was between £8,000 and £9,000 per annum.

3. The occurance of such workplace practice, whereby apparent negative discretion when analysed is in fact positive discretion exercised by employees, is recognised by many authors, including Geer et al (1968), Batstone (1975) and Manwaring and Wood (1985).

4. It can be noted that such an occurrance is very rare.

5. We argued in chapters five and six that T.S.As are less exposed to the exigencies of the labour and product markets than clerks at The Co-operative Bank. It can be argued T.S.As feel that, provided they continually meet revenue targets, their organisational future is largely within their own hands - will be a result of their own abilities. Clerks at The Co-operative Bank, especially C.S.Os, feel that they face an organisational 'wall of darkness' (Weir (1973)). These feelings of insecurity have complex consequences for the propensity of work autonomy amongst branch clerks. Some feel constrained to act according to certain managerial prescriptions, which include the exercise of positive discretion in order to protect the comparatively tenuous material security that they currently have. Others (often the same people undertaking different acts which are perceived differently or are undertaken within a different context) are more compelled

to exercise discretion as it is felt their fate is already sealed and out of their hands. However, the crucial point is that whichever path is chosen, the exercise of clerk autonomy is not *primarily* or solely constrained by T.Q.M (as we shall see though, it can be argued that T.Q.M. *indirectly* constrains employee autonomy at The Co-op Bank).

6. By the terms 'self-discipline' and 'self-management', we mean that clerks will be constrained to, and may eventually 'willingly', implement managerial prescriptions including the exercise of empowerment. 'Self-discipline' refers to clerks' carrying out managerial objectives without direct and detailed managerial control and supervision of these tasks. As we shall see though, there is great debate over the 'willingness' or the 'consent' of employees when implementing managerial prescriptions and exercising empowerment, thus participating in the production and reproduction of their own exploitation and subordination (See Sturdy et al (1992)). Much hinges on what we actually mean by 'consent'. This will be discussed later.

7. Knights and Morgan (1991) explicitly address the way in which an individualised targeting system (this time within life insurance selling) is a mechanism of power which transforms "individual sales staff into subjects whose meaning and sense of themselves (therefore identity) is contingent on successfully achieving sales targets and winning recognition from the company" (p.219).

8. These dual aspects of self-discipline within the employment relationship can be related to Watson's

(1994) notion of 'strategic exchange'. Assuming that some form of consent and commitment, must be forthcoming from employees in order to sustain all employment relationships, Watson contends that employees 'exchange' the satisfaction of organisational needs (of success and survival) for satisfaction of their own personal needs (material and psychological needs). Watson argues that employees often 'strategically exchange' differing degrees of material and ontological security for differing degrees of motivation, consent and commitment which are, in turn, essential for organisational survival. Thus, in addition to producing and reproducing organisation, people's actions also aim to secure a sense of material security *and* a sense of self and identity.

This, according to Watson, can be achieved through actions within organisations, through organisational processes. What we are actually arguing is that, in satisfying existential needs for a sense of ontological security and self-identity, through 'internalising' the significance of revenue targets, employees are in danger of *eroding* their discretion within the labour process, and thus the very basis of their right and opportunity to be involved in the exchange process in the first place. We shall *not* be *celebrating* the attainment or maintenance of a sense of self-identity through an 'escape into work', as Knights and Morgan (1991) and Sturdy (1992) do.

On the basis of arguments articulated in chapter one, the sense of self-identity created, because of the simultaneous erosion of autonomy, is

not a *meaningful* identity (Gorz (1989); Lodziak (1995)).

9. This would appear to match Sturdy's (1992) analysis of 'shifting' within clerical work. This term refers to completing work tasks, getting them 'cleared', 'behind you', 'shifted'. Sturdy argues that within the clerical offices he studied, there was an obsession with shifting in order to attain a sense of self-respect and self-identity, within a post-modern context of an identity-threatening and ontologically insecure world. Despite involving a willing participation in clerks' own subordination, Sturdy argues that shifting *does* offer resources for a sense of self-identity and security. This is what is meant by 'an escape into work. Thus, Sturdy argues that the motivation to 'shift' was a self-motivation, or self-discipline amongst clerks. The incidence of 'shifting' was noted in the absense of managerial pressure for clerks to do so. In contrast, we are arguing that there is a motivation amongst branch clerks to 'shift' queues, however, this is not totally self-imposed, involving 'willing' participation within clerks' own subordination and thereby effectively concealing structures of domination and subordination within the workplace. Rather, 'shifting' at The Co-op Bank is linked to a desire to give good customer service which is an ethos built up within the Co-operative movement over a number of years, and is also linked to a fear of material insecurity. This fear has partly, rather indirectly, been shaped by the introduction of T.Q.M. Furthermore, even if there was evidence of the integration of clerks within *recent* corporate cultural intitatives introduced by

The Co-op Bank, this is not something that should be seen as the attainment of meaning within the employment relationship. In fact, this would entail the negation of one's true identity rather than the maintenance and expression of self-identity as suggested by Sturdy (1992).

10. It was recognised by some parts of Newcastle management that one of the weaknesses of Telephone Sales Worldwide was the perceived failure to work together as one organisation. "There is constant fighting and back-biting amongst the centres. We have felt it here particularly because we are new and because we are successful, I think. It is something which has been recognised nationally as something that needs to be worked on" (S.T.S.,1994).

11. During interviews, Co-operative Bank management continued to argue that appraisal meetings, and the setting of objectives for each employee to meet were important for ensuring the delivery of service quality.

12. This was the official, managerially-permitted duration of the machine break (the legal minimum).

13. 'Lunch' breaks were staggered throughout the day because of the busy lunchtime period.

14. There were many 'role models' on display to T.S.As - i.e. former T.S.As who had moved up to become S.T.Ss. As one such agent commented, "you really do have to be one hundred per cent committed to the job, get involved, make it

known that you're involved" (S.T.S.,1994). The notion of 'career' as a disciplinary force within the labour process, which can actually transform the identities and personalities of workers is discussed by Grey (1994).

15. Many C.M's admitted that "I don't really do the random checks upon my E.Os when it comeds round to it, there's no point, they're all very good, they've been here for nigh *(sic)* on twenty years so I think they know what they're doing...it's only really if they come to me with a problem that I'll get involved, and that is very rare...they make my life very easy for me" (C.M.,1994).

16. An increasingly discerning consumer population, in terms of their expectations when interacting with customers, and how this has moulded managerial attempts to ensure - through selection, training, supervisory and evaluation techniques - the deep acting rather than surface acting of emotional labourers, is also reported and predicted by Hochschild (1983) from her study of emotional labour. She suggests that this exerts a *further* pressure, alongside increased managerial control, upon emotional labourers to deep act. Our research suggests that the very *perception* of a more discerning consumer population, in turn part of the discourse of enterprise, is inherent to T.Q.M. and integral to the attempted, increased managerial control which *is* T.Q.M. The perception of a more discerning consumer population is one of the prime motivations

for T.Q.M., and the control of emotional labour, in the first place.

17. Our analysis within this chapter will focus upon employee-*customer* interaction. This is the predominant social interaction in which the majority of clerks studied (especially at B.A. and The Co-op) are involved. Furthermore, this is where employer constraint upon clerk discretion over social interaction is likely to be greatest.

18. Clearly, and once again, much hinges on what is actually meant by the term 'willingly'. This issue will be discussed in more detail within the following chapter.

19. It can, of course, also be argued that patriarchal structures within the private sphere and public sphere beyond paid employment mean that for many women, as compared to men, there are a multitude of social constraints upon their private emotional system and the general 'emotional discretion' they are able to exercise. The danger of transmutation will have been posed in many areas of life (see James (1989); Giddens (1992); Duncombe and Marsden (1993), (1995)).

20. There is also 'surface acting' (Hochschild (1983)) and the use of one's private emotional system and 'feeling rules' (Hochschild (1983)). However, it must be remembered that Hochschild, the T.Q.M. literature reviewed in chapter three and both managements within our T.Q.M. cases argue that, in terms of the service experience of customers, deep acting is a 'superior' way of accomplishing these demands when compared with

the use of the private emotional system *or* surface acting.

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