CLERICAL WORKERS: ACQUIRING THE SKILLS TO MEET TACIT PROCESS EXPECTATIONS

within a context of work undervaluation and job fragility

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for Doctor of Philosophy
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Doctor of Philosophy - 2010
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Abstract

Since the late nineteenth century, clerical work has transformed from a small cluster of respected occupations dominated by men to a rapidly changing group of occupations 90 percent of which are held by women. Due to bureaucratization and the feminization of clerical work, clerical jobs are assumed to be routinized and simple, and clerical workers deemed easily replaceable. With further changes to the occupation caused by technology and globalization, clerical workers today have become increasingly vulnerable to unemployment, precarious employment and underemployment. In this research, an Ontario-wide survey with approximately 1200 respondents (including 120 clerical workers) and in-depth interviews with 23 Toronto clerical workers were combined to explore the employment situation of Ontario clerical workers. It is apparent that clerical workers are underemployed along all measured conventional dimensions of underemployment, including credential, performance and subjective as well as work permanence, salary levels and job opportunities. Relational practice is a largely unexamined aspect of clerical work that is often essentialized as a female trait and seldom recognized as skilled practice. In this dissertation, I argue that relational practice is
critical to the successful performance of clerical roles and that relational practices are not innate but rather learned skills. I explore some ways in which clerical workers acquire these skills. I conclude by noting that recognizing and valuing relational skills will make the value of clerical workers more apparent to their employers, potentially reducing for clerical workers both their subjective sense of underemployment and their vulnerability to job loss.
Acknowledgements

The development of this dissertation has been a long-drawn-out process for me – entirely due to my own dilatory perversity, I grant you. Certainly I had support whenever I needed it and assistance whenever I asked – often before I even knew I needed help or asked for it.

Many people deserve my gratitude and acknowledgement for the work presented in this document.

To my dissertation supervisor Dr David Livingstone, I owe thanks for so many things – frequent and attentive re-readings of the text being but one. As part of his SSHRC\textsuperscript{1} - funded research team for the Education-Job Requirements Matching (EJRM) project, I was able to obtain a broader and deeper set of data to ground my discussion than might otherwise have been possible. Dr Livingstone’s continuing and consistent support has been instrumental in bringing this dissertation to its current state.

The other members of my dissertation committee Drs Kiran Mirchandani and Peter Sawchuk managed to monitor my work despite their own work loads and through sabbaticals when they were fully engaged in their own research projects. I am very grateful that they stayed with me to the end.

I owe appreciation to the entire EJRM team, but in particular to two of my colleagues. Dr Sandria Officer helped me find potential interview candidates when my efforts dropped in effectiveness. I relied on Dr Milosh Raykov throughout both the EJRM and dissertation projects for assistance with the statistical data that underpins the research I present. Whenever I asked, Milosh made himself available to do yet another statistical run or analysis for me.

The support and commentary of my fellow members in the monthly Thesis Group have also been hugely helpful. Despite the pressures of their own research, they read and critiqued several drafts to the great benefit of the work.

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Finally, to the clerical workers, the managers and the retraining centre director who so generously gave me their time and their candor, you have my ongoing gratitude. This project would not have happened without you.

To everyone who helped this dissertation take shape, thank you. Any errors or oversights that remain despite all your efforts are my responsibility.

---

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1998, after I had been downsized from a permanent position, I was briefly part of the Ontario civil service as a temporary contract worker engaged to develop orientation support for new leaders. During those few months, the department director was recruiting for a new chief Information Technology (IT) executive. She had two versions of a prospective job advertisement. She canvassed the department for our opinion as to which would be the more effective. When the director had completed her rounds, I asked the receptionist which of the two mock-ups she had preferred. She commented that she had not been asked. Despite many years of experience working in offices of various sorts, I was nonetheless somewhat taken aback to learn that the director had combed the office to obtain opinions from everyone EXCEPT the receptionist.

Freelance writer Susan Bourette who went undercover as a temp in Toronto during 2005 filed the following in her Globe and Mail report:

\begin{quote}
In my recent temp work...I was using my own name. When I temped for the research department of a brokerage, no one seemed to notice it was my mug shot and byline in the magazine lying at reception. Dozens of times a day, I walked past the door of an analyst I’d lunched with a few years back ... It took two swipes of my just-issued security card to walk deep inside the brokerage’s inner sanctum ... without so much as a background check. It wasn’t that I was above suspicion. I was beneath it.
\end{quote}

The pertinent question here is: why? Ms. Bourette, for example, noted that she holds three degrees. In most other work contexts, it is probable that her presence would be
noticed and her opinions solicited. But the moment she donned the guise of a clerical worker, she lost, in the eyes of her organizational seniors, capability for both intelligence and intention.

Her experience as a clerical worker is not unique, although employers generally require administrative support workers\(^2\) to hold relatively high educational credentials, exhibit technical competence in desktop computer applications and demonstrate strong interpersonal skills. Furthermore, even though most administrative support workers have little formal authority, they sometimes bear considerable responsibility for the overall productivity of their workplace environment. As a vice-president of Human Resources (HR) told me:

*They have lots of accountability to deliver ... they have to do this and get that and they have to meet that deadline but they have little responsibility and authority in getting other people to help them so it’s a lot of responsibility on their head.*

To manage their duties effectively, office workers need a diverse and delicate balance of skill and aptitude. Yet, as I will describe in this enquiry, their pay is generally low and their skills often inadequately valued and utilized. Office workers are increasingly unemployed or underemployed in temporary and contract work; according to the director of a Toronto centre for displaced office workers,\(^3\) 30 percent of Toronto area clerical jobs have been lost over the past decade — a statistic which translates into thousands of jobs.

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\(^2\) Throughout this discussion, the terms “clerical worker,” “administrative support worker,” and “office worker” will be used interchangeably. Although clerical worker and office worker are terms common in academic writing, the term “administrative support” work and worker (such workers are often referred to as “admins”) are common in business environments.

\(^3\) In conversation, 2005
but, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed later in this study, barely registers on
the employment Geiger counter.⁴

It is in this context that the research interest of this dissertation is proposed. To provide a
framework for the main discussion, I will start by summarizing the history of clerical
work over the past century and a quarter, describing how this occupational cluster
evolved from the relatively high status it enjoyed in the nineteenth century into the
beleaguered occupational cluster apparent today. I will then review the functional
requirements of clerical work and introduce relational aspects of the work – aspects that,
though critical to the effective performance of these roles, are largely absent from the
ways in which these types of roles are evaluated and rewarded.

Relational practices, particularly when exercised from positions of low status and power,
are easily essentialized as personal traits and often present as deference rather than skills.
When job incumbents are predominantly women, these relational practices are often
further essentialized as characteristics that typify the sex – they are associated with the
condition of being female. I will dispute this by illustrating how clerical workers go about
acquiring some of these relational skills. Note that only a small subset of possible
relational skills and practices are considered in this study.

The discussion of relational practices and skills will be exploratory rather than definitive.
I will consider the following questions:

⁴ In contra-distinction, for example, to the media consternation when a few hundred workers are laid off
from a car manufacturing plant or a few dozen from a large IT shop
1. What are relational practices and why are they important?

2. Are relational skills intrinsic to the practitioner or are they learned?

3. If relational skills are learned, how are they learned?

Numerous previous writers have already written about clerical workers (inter alia, Kusterer, 1978; Burris, 1983; Crompton and Jones, 1984; Lowe, 1987; Wilson, 1996; de Wolff & Bird, 1997). So why is it important to raise this topic once again?

There are a number of ways in which this study is a useful addition to the literature already available on clerical workers and their situation.

First, and most basically, the world continues to change – it is important to continue to monitor changes in the work environment, and clerical workers are in many ways the bellwethers\(^5\) of economic change. To use an industrial age metaphor, clerical workers can be described as disempowered canaries testing the quality of the economic air for workers with greater visibility and authority. As an occupational group, clerical workers tend to be seen by employers as a relatively unskilled and interchangeable corporate adjunct. Because their work objectives often underpin the objectives of those they support, their own contribution is easy to miss, hidden in the accomplishments for which their supervisors get credit. Although their immediate supervisors may recognize the

---

\(^5\) If it were not for a bell around the neck, the bellwether in a sheep flock leads in ways almost imperceptible to the casual observer. Connie Willis (pb1997 [1996]) used the example of sheep (in relation to fashion trends and chaos theory) in a most interesting novel titled *Bellwether.*
value of the clerical support they receive, the clerical contribution is largely invisible to
the organization as a whole.

More critically, it is important to go beyond the functional requirements – the letters
written, the documents filed, the spreadsheets maintained – of the job, because clerical
workers often also perform the subtle function of facilitating the connections between the
work and workers in non-clerical roles. They welcome visitors, interact with customers,
monitor the flow of information, balance the requirements of one demand with another,
and influence internal and external people without the advantage of authority or position.
They need strong emotional intelligence (EQ, as described by Goleman, 1997 [1995])
and complex relational skills (as described Fletcher, 1999) to accomplish work not
defined clearly – or at all – in the official outlines of their roles as described (sometimes)\(^6\)
in job descriptions. They perform valuable but unvalued amounts and types of emotional
labour (Hochschild, 1983) embedded in many of the relational elements of their jobs.

While references to relational practice are appearing with more frequency in the
literature, only limited work has been done on this aspect of the job for clerical workers.
And the discussion seems largely focused on how these practices are embraced or
resisted (e.g., Mirchandani, 2000); on reasons for their adoption (e.g., Kennelly, 2006);
on whether competence in these practices is due to skill or character (e.g., Kerfoot &
Korczynski, 2005). Perhaps because relational labour is often essentialized when it comes
to the work behaviour of women, the literature is remarkably reticent on how emotional

\(^6\) I discovered in the course of my investigation that the job descriptions of clerical workers are often either
obsolete or non-existent.
and relational skills might be learned. Ultimately, then, this is the area in which I want to focus attention. If these behaviours and skills are learned – and it is my contention that they are – then how do people, specifically the mostly female clerical work force, go about learning them?

It is this exploration of the learning of relational skills that distinguishes my exploration of the presence and practice of relational skills from the work of others who have written on this subject and constitutes my original contribution to the discourse on relational skills and relational practice.

The subject is of some significance. Clerical workers form a large cadre of workers faced with the challenges of simultaneous functional work simplification and complexification, of increased work intensification at the same time as less work availability. With the relational skills and emotional labour they contribute submerged, this group’s contributions to the organizations they work for is undervalued, contributing to job vulnerability.

However, in identifying what will be included in the discussion of this dissertation, I should also make clear what is excluded – and that includes everything not specifically identified above. For example, it has been argued that expectations for emotional labour and relational practice are ethnically defined (Mirchandani, 2003). This is indeed an important subject and deserving of detailed analysis; however, apart from a few brief paragraphs to summarize how the case study respondents reacted to the question of
discrimination, such differentiation of expectation lies outside the scope of this research. Nor, for practical purposes, can all types of relational practice be explored since these practices are most accurately described as infinitely variable and varied. Consequently, I will focus on only a few types of relational practices described by the interviewed clerical workers and how they told me they learned them.

The constraints expressed in the paragraph above have implications for the breadth of discussion possible. A number of dimensions relevant to the practice of relational skills will be largely absent from the pages that follow. For example, the focus of this dissertation is on traditional clerical occupations rather than the emerging challenges of call centre workers (although their conditions of work are touched on in several places) and these traditional roles are occupied 90 percent by females. The types and norms for relational practice in male clerical workers and women engaged in non-clerical occupations lie at or outside the external perimeter of the research focus. In addition, many may feel that insufficient attention is paid to differences due to ethnic origin or to practices and expectations in other countries. I agree that these are important aspects. I can only reply that there is not room within the limitations of this study to address these important dimensions of relational practice in clerical work.

This study is based on a unique blend of statistical background and detailed personal interviews. While the breadth of statistics is critically important in providing a situational snapshot and tracking the employment changes occurring in the Canadian workplace, it is difficult for us humans to personalize numbers without relating them to specific personal
stories. The interviews, therefore, add considerable dimension to the meaning of the statistics which are common in the literature. The stories help us translate the implications of the numbers for individual lives. They are taken from a wide cross-section of experienced clerical workers who have observed work and workplace changes over the years. In my review of the literature, I have found no research that combines this level of detail in both quantitative and qualitative description for this occupational group.

Note that the discussion revolves around clerical workers in Canada. The statistical backdrop is provided by Ontario workers while the interviewed group was drawn entirely from clerical workers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The findings apply most specifically to this group of people who inhabit a culture that derives mainly from British tradition (and to a lesser extent other western European nations) and remains hegemonically white and western in its organization and outlook.
Chapter 2: Discussion Framework

Clerical workers, approximately nine tenths of whom are women, have educational levels equivalent to or higher than workers in many other occupations; despite this, their earnings generally do not keep pace with the earnings of people in fields less dominated by women.

There are a number of reasons for this, summarized here in this introductory chapter but explored in more detail throughout the pages of this dissertation. First, the nature of the work itself tends to be self-effacing; it is the role of clerical workers to make their supervisors look good while they themselves remain invisible in the background. Secondly, the feminization of the occupation has tended to reduce the respect in which the occupation has in the past been held and devalued the capabilities and contributions of those doing such work. Consequent to the second point, the type of skills required to smoothly function in an office environment are conflated with the type of interpersonal and interactional capabilities deemed inherent in women (therefore not really skills at all, merely aspects of femininity). Finally, the organizational language to describe the relational types of competence required for many clerical roles does not exist, therefore relational skills are not readily recognizable as skills.
Figure 2.1 quickly summarizes the concatenating circumstances that have continuously combined to create and recreate the work environment of people in administrative support roles since the Industrial Revolution transformed the economic landscape of the western world.

New technology increased literacy requirements while simultaneously dividing and simplifying job requirements. The resulting shortage in qualified labour, when coupled with other circumstances (e.g., the loss of men to war), created a need for a new source of labour, conveniently available through the recruitment of women. In addition, clerical roles functioned in the background and people in these roles needed to demonstrate a willingness to subsume personal goals into management goals, making the roles and their incumbents less visible.
These factors have contributed to the feminization of clerical occupations and their alignment with management interests. They have also created the conditions that made unionization difficult. Simultaneously, they have conspired to diminish the perceived level of skill and competence clerical job-holders bring to their work.

It should be pointed out that clerical work was a self-effacing type of occupation, closely aligned to the employer’s interests, long before the limited number of pre-Industrial Age clerical roles replicated into an assortment of divergent specialized roles and evolved into a “pink ghetto” directly identified with “women’s work.” However, as women became more and more associated with clerical work, the status of the occupation declined.  

A focus of modern organizations appears to be the development of organizational values. These are largely shaped by management theories targeted to improving performance and productivity, often by the creation of “core values” to which the workers are expected to subscribe. For many corporations, espoused values (e.g., “teamwork,” “collaboration”) emphasize the importance of the very abilities and capabilities clerical workers contribute

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7 Lowe (1987, 144) noted that: “Available evidence portrays clerks of [the nineteenth century] as a small group of males who came from middle class backgrounds, possessed considerable skills and had good advancement opportunities.” Note that women who were absorbed into clerical support roles had little or no opportunity for career growth in the early through mid-twentieth century although men in administrative support roles continued to have excellent advancement opportunities into management jobs (Lowe, 1987).

8 I do not imply that a corporate code of ethics is a bad thing. Sometimes such codes and corporate creeds even seem to run counter to the fundamental drive of capitalist economics. Indeed, these publicly advertised values have helped to improve many work environments, although it must be said that organizational discourse often associates ethical practice with sound business practice and greater profit. Many statements of corporate values seem to come with a coda implying (or even stating outright) that equitable practices and ethical behaviours are a matter of enlightened self-interest – if the workplace is fair and workers happy, the outcomes will be greater productivity, lower staff turnover, happier customers and greater profit for the organization.
to their workplaces. Organizational action, however, at least with respect to their clerical support staff, may send a different message.

But there is more to be said. Corporations look for performance results. However, although corporate messages may state that the “how” of the achievements is as important as the “what,” they do not typically reward performance process. The language, as Joyce Fletcher (2000) has pointed out in relation to female engineers, does not exist in organizational discourse to recognize support work in terms of deliberately exercised skills, especially in women; instead, supportive, teamwork-promoting efforts are seen as subservient and weak rather than deliberate and strong. For clerical workers (although not only clerical workers) the relational is not seen as labour and can therefore, using Fletcher’s terminology, be “disappeared.” As a result, neither emotional labour nor relational practice is recognized nor rewarded.

For clerical workers, unlike workers in many other occupations, emotional labour and relational practice are embedded in the role. When relational skills are not recognized as skills, it becomes easier for employers to limit the value of clerical workers to the (functional) work assignments they are given.

Although I will be addressing issues related specifically to relational practice and labour in this dissertation, some reference needs to be made here to “emotional labour,” a concept allied with that of relational labour. It may be useful to provide a preliminary definition of the two terms “emotional labour” and “relational practice” here. If emotion
consists of feelings and sentiments, emotional work consists of providing support to emotional well-being of others and using emotional expression(s) to moderate the work and behaviours of others. In the paid work environment, emotional work becomes emotional labour. Hochschild (1983), who first labelled the concept of emotional labour, defined it primarily in terms of the difference between the emotion a worker might feel vis-à-vis the emotional expression an employer might want displayed. Hochschild took as her main example the situation of (female) airline stewardesses who were always expected to portray attitudes of pleasant deference regardless of any contrary emotions that might be conditioned by difficulties in their personal lives or frustrations stemming from difficult passenger interactions. She contrasted this with the very different behaviour expected of the (mostly male) bill collectors who were required to be hostile and aggressive with delinquent payers, regardless of their natural temperaments and dispositions.

Relational practice is process labour correlated with emotional labour to facilitate the smooth performance of work tasks and projects. In the case of office workers, the facilitation is the supportive process and task work that flows through and around them. Almost invariably this work is attributed to the completion of performance objectives by those senior to them, leaving their contribution largely invisible within the corporate environment.

In this dissertation, I will focus primarily on relational practice as described by Fletcher (1999) rather than on levels of emotional dissonance caused by the need to sustain
emotional expressions at odds with felt emotions as discussed by Hochschild (1983). The acquisition and utilization of relational skills by clerical workers are important to consider in any analysis of the value of clerical work and clerical workers because ongoing job changes due to technological innovation and global outsourcing have turned what previously seemed a stable cluster of occupations into precarious ways to earn a livelihood, as illustrated in the points listed below.

With the continuing expansion of technological solutions to office work, some clerical tasks have in recent years been uploaded to the management levels. For example voice mail has replaced secretarial call screening for all but the most senior executives; emails have largely supplanted dictated written letters; computer-based calendaring services have replaced manual diarizing by administrative assistants; and the capability of field agents to enter information directly into laptops and hand-held devices has reduced the need for data entry clerks to transcribe data from paper to electronic form.

It has become possible for various other tasks, such as data entry and call centre work, to be deployed to offshore locations where the work can be done more cheaply.

Work environment changes such as these have created additional downward pressure on the perceived value of administrative support workers. All of these factors contribute to the vulnerability of jobs in clerical occupations and to the loss of sustainable employment opportunities for clerical workers in Ontario.
It becomes increasingly important to recognize that the work composition of clerical roles comprises more than straight technical aspects of the Microsoft Office (and equivalent) programs and filing duties as may be outlined in their job descriptions.

This dissertation will essentially cover three topic areas. I will begin by describing the historical patterns and social belief systems that have influenced the growth and positioning of women in office support occupations and how technology simultaneously made it possible for women to enter the public domain of office work and diminished the political importance of clerical roles.

Secondly, I will explore various dimensions of functional underemployment as experienced by clerical workers.

It would be easy to simplify the discussion of functional underemployment by equating all of the status and power loss to the mere fact of ‘femininity’ since such a large proportion of clerical workers are women. Certainly, this would not necessarily be wrong – systemic social attitudes that disproportionately deprecate the logical abilities and business acumen of women persist.

And my third concern in this dissertation is linked to the feminization of clerical work but separate. As the conceptual framework illustrates, there are other issues at play. I will argue that, in the modern era, the social skills acquired by clerical workers have been conflated with innate female attributes – skills deliberately exercised to ensure the
smooth functioning of office functions, have been redefined as compliance rather than competence and identified with the mere fact of femaleness.\(^9\)

The enhanced capacities of office technology combined with dismissive attitudes towards process skills used by clerical workers have resulted in a diminished recognition of their value to their workplaces. This has made office workers tempting targets for organizational down-sizing.

A wide range of clerical occupations are affected. For the discussion in this study, I am focusing on 19 of the occupations listed as clerical in Canada’s National Occupational Code (NOC) book.

### Table 2.1: NOC Occupational Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1241  Secretaries (Except Legal and Medical)</td>
<td>1434  Banking, Insurance and Other Financial Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1242  Secretaries (Except Legal and Medical)</td>
<td>1435  Collectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1243  Legal Secretaries</td>
<td>1441  Administrative Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1411  Medical Secretaries</td>
<td>1442  Personnel Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1411  General Office Clerks</td>
<td>1452  Correspondence, Publications and Related Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1413  Records and File Clerks</td>
<td>1453  Customer Service, Information and Related Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1414  Receptionists and Switchboard Operators</td>
<td>1454  Survey Interviewers and Statistical Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1422  Data Entry Clerks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1423  Typesetters and Related Occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1431  Accounting and Related Clerks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1432  Payroll Clerks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1433  Tellers, Financial Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^9\) The expectations for male clerical workers appear to be somewhat different than for women. Henson and Rogers (2001, 220) in a study of male clerical temp workers commented that male temps were expected to do less deference work than women in similar roles (although they did do some): “men in clerical temporary work do masculinity through renaming and reframing the work, distancing themselves from the work with a cover story, and resisting the demands to perform deference. Paradoxically, rather than disrupting the gender order, the gender strategies adopted help reproduce and naturalize the gendered organization of work.”
Within the job categories posted here, there are a range of roles that encompass great variation in terms of seniority, types of job responsibilities and the types and complexity of relational skills required. These differences will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3 and later in the dissertation.

There has long been recognition of the compromised position of clerical support workers given the rapid replacement of humans in the office with computerized systems. A quarter of a century ago in the United States, Beverly Burris (1983) discussed office workers in the context of over-education; blocked mobility; and the ambiguity of their class position. In Canada, Graham Lowe (1987) discussed the history of clerical workers in the context of feminization. More recently de Wolff & Bird (1997) and Eyerman (2000) have explored the situation of clerical workers in the Toronto area, providing statistics (de Wolff & Bird) and stories (Eyerman) that together illustrate how the work situations of clerical workers have fragmented due to the ongoing escalation of technological capabilities and up-delegation of aspects of administrative work to managers. What still needs to be “appeared” in this portrait of clerical work and clerical workers is the systemic issue of organizational language that co-opts the skills of clerical workers without recognition that these are skills.

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10 The data collected specifically for this dissertation are limited to the greater Toronto area for individual stories and to the province of Ontario for the statistical backdrop; however, the results embedded in these data are similar to those found elsewhere, indicating that these conditions for clerical workers prevail in many parts of the western world.
Chapter 3: Context

Similar to every other large city in North America, Toronto has long employed a large cadre of office workers to support the administrative needs of the many enterprises – private sector, not-for-profit and public sector – that operate here. In the current business environment, new technologies are allowing employers to outsource some clerical work to external suppliers such as temp agencies and external call centres while dispensing entirely with human intervention in clerical work for other tasks (such as data transcription from paper-based order forms), consequently downgrading or eliminating many clerical positions. The changes also have implications for the remaining clerical positions which may be subject to changes in the work quantity (intensification) or quality (different or more complex tasks and expectations). The impact of such changes in the conditions and the availability of work potentially have an enormous impact on the social and economic landscape of the city, especially when one considers the large number of (mostly female) individuals employed in clerical occupations.

The situation today results from more than a century of interplay between technological innovation and social mores. That makes a description of the current state and its origins an important starting point for this discussion.
The Historical Backdrop

As Karl Marx (Marx and Engels, 1978 [1845-1867]) pointed out in the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century, technological and political changes in Western Europe and Britain had altered productive relationships from a feudal master-serf pattern to a market-exchange employer-labourer association. For various reasons (documented by Mumford, 1970, among others), farm labourers were being exiled from their rural situations and being absorbed by the manufactories of the Industrial Revolution. Marx saw that these changes had caused seismic rearrangement of the social and economic structure of the western world.

In theory, these labourers, liberated at last from servitude and obligation to feudal lieges, were free to negotiate their services with multiple employers and settle with the highest bidder. In practice, given the much larger core of available workers than work, employers paid the lowest wages they could and constantly looked for new technologies to reduce workforces and operating costs.

The new technologies and methodologies often entailed separating and simplifying work tasks so workers could be made more interchangeable and factory production less dependent on skill and craftliness (Marx and Engels, 1978 [1867]; Braverman, 1998 [1974]); however, the more the work could be simplified, the more easily the worker could be separated from the tasks of the work and be reduced to “hands” (or, as current vernacular has it, “warm bodies” or human “resources”).
The Entry of Women into the Clerical Work Force

That the focus was placed on work simplification and rationalization from the nascence of the modern enterprise is apparent from the earliest intimations of technologization. Lowe (1987, 119) quotes Charles Babbage (1791-1871), the forefather of modern computerization:

*The capitalist can utilize machine technology to simplify, standardize, cheapen and regulate the productive process. With respect to clerical work, mechanization strengthens managerial control by providing more and better information on which to base decisions, thereby reducing uncertainty, and, through the closer regulation of clerical work, is an attempt to cut office overhead.*

This is the work world that women were finally allowed to enter under highly circumscribed conditions.

In other words, from the beginning of women’s involvement in the capitalist enterprise, their position has been influenced by technological innovations, deskilling trends and a general attitude that depreciated the value and contribution female clerical workers made to the success of the enterprise. The growth of bureaucracy documented by Weber (1958 [1905]) in 1904 and 1905 required an ample source of clerical workers to support the growing division of labour. Middle-class women comprised a heretofore unexploited source of literate, occupationally naïve and powerless workers, a “green field” source of labour.
Women’s first foray into the business world came as a result of new office equipment, notably the typewriter. The new office machines, coupled with escalating industrialization, led to a huge growth in bureaucracy which, in turn, led to rationalization of work processes and the division of labour. This coincided, barely into the 20th century, with the outbreak of war, leading to a shortage of men. Although some organizations resisted the entry of women at first, the desperate shortage of workers eventually forced even the most reluctant of offices to utilize the skills and availability of women (Lowe, 1987; White, 1993; Wilson 1996).

Poor and working-class women had always worked but the opportunities previously open to them were almost invariably menial, private sphere jobs; patriarchal attitudes deemed women’s ‘sensibilities’ to be too delicate, their natures too ‘gentle’ for working life in the public sphere. So this new inclusion in a white-collar office seemed a win-win situation – women were happy with ‘genteel’ work that allowed them to maintain the dress and attitudes of a middle-class mind-set (and was acceptable to parents and potential mates) and a level of independence previously inaccessible to them; their industrialist employers appreciated the quality of the work and comparatively low salary expectations of their new employees.

Women proved adept at the new technology and, since most came from middle-class families, had the educational levels required for them to perform clerical work; education being less than universal, working class men and women did not have the same opportunities to develop literacy skills as middle class people. Moreover, middle class
women were seen as appropriately decorous and well-spoken for the business environment. In fact, once women started to become widely accepted as office support personnel, office managers preferred to hire respectable middle-class women rather than educated working-class men (Lowe, 1987). Moreover, since women would work for much less money than men, more women could be hired to accomplish the increasing amounts of paperwork. For women, the work was considered respectable, and paid more than most other jobs open to them at the time.

Although the presence of women became increasingly significant to the office work force, clerical work was an opportunity available primarily to single women. Married women of the middle classes were expected to stay home to take care of their families – society frowned on married women who appeared to reject their domestic responsibilities by retaining jobs outside the home. This led to a gendered division of administrative support labour early on; since it was assumed that women would work only until marriage and were not on any kind of career path – the original clerical temp workers! – the clerical tasks assigned to them were often the least meaningful and interesting aspects of the work to be done. It was also acceptable to pay them low wages – after all, they did not have families to support.

**Office Work Simplification and Supervision**

Early in the twentieth century Max Weber (1958 [1904-1905]; Gerth and Mills, 1958) wrote about the growth of an ethic focused on the acquisition of wealth as a moral good
in itself without a concomitant spending of the acquired wealth. For growing Industrial Age businesses, there was only one place for business profits to go, that is, back into the business to further feed the enterprise. Burgeoning growth in organizational structures resulted in further separation of function which led to increasing professionalization and bureaucratization of office work (i.e., the birth of management and its supporting staff as occupational classes). This, in turn, fed the growth of bureaucratic hierarchies and the growth in competition for ‘good’ jobs and promotions within the hierarchy.

As technology caught up with Babbage’s vision, as the proliferation of task differentiation and modularization grew, the continual internal impetus for efficiency and cost-saving gained momentum. Frederick Taylor’s ideas regarding “scientific management” (that is, to reduce work effort by looking for ways to minimize the time and movements required to execute a task) found rich loam for growth. Henry Braverman (1998 [1974], 81) observed:

*The purpose of work study was never, in [Taylor’s] mind, to enhance the ability of the worker, to concentrate in the worker a greater share of scientific knowledge, to ensure that as technique rose, the worker would rise with it. Rather, the purpose was to cheapen the worker by decreasing his training and enlarging his output.*

Clerical workers were certainly not immune from this impulse towards work efficiency. Braverman (1998 [1974], 225) observed that despite being routinized, clerical work continued to need the application of the clerical worker’s intelligence – but so it was for all forms of manual labour. In his argument that clerical work was being deskilled, he added that the mental processes associated with clerical work were made so repetitious or
so minor an aspect of the clerical role, that the speed and dexterity associated with clerical labour had become so dominant in clerical roles that the traditional distinction between clerical “white collar” and manual “blue collar” work had virtually disappeared in the modern business environment.

Taylor’s focus on efficiency is illustrated in the photo below; an efficiency clerk goes about, clipboard in hand, monitoring and documenting a typist’s key strokes:

![Figure 3.1: Image of an Efficiency Expert](http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk)

The organization of women into ranks of clerical workers with largely interchangeable skill requirements probably reached its apex in the third quartile of the twentieth century with the development of the “typing pool” and the creation of entire company departments devoted to filing and typing. (During my own high school career in the
1960s, the head of the ‘business department’\textsuperscript{11} stressed the importance of developing typing skills for job security to female students whenever she met us in the school hallways, regardless of our academic stream or workload.)

Work efficiency remains a tenet of organization discourse, as Joyce Fletcher (1999; 27-28) has pointed out:

\begin{quote}
The ‘truth rules’ that determine the definition of work are derived from assumptions (i.e., a certain ideology) about the demands and goals of organizations. The clearest expression of this ideology can be found in the structural elements of organizing, articulated by Frederick Taylor as the tenets of scientific management and reinforced by Max Weber as the tenets of bureaucracy.
\end{quote}

She listed these as including, first, a rational division of labor in which different people are assigned different jobs, their specific, prescribed duties based on their expertise, skill, and experience. Secondly, it entrenches a hierarchy of control and a chain of command. It also requires workers to adhere to a generalized set of abstract rules and procedures to ensure uniform practice and performance standards across the organization. The bureaucratic ideology also embeds hiring and promotion practices based on technical competence. Finally, it incorporates a standard method of record keeping and communication.

One aspect of power in the modern enterprise is supervision. Early in the century Frederick Taylor used a stop-watch to time factory workers. The effort to extend this to

\textsuperscript{11} In fact, unlike business classes in some schools today, the business classes in high school when I attended were populated almost entirely by women and consisted of typing, shorthand and other courses that primed young women for jobs/careers as clerks and secretaries.
the office was not entirely successful because office work is not nearly as routine and repetitive as assembly line work – the day to day activities of assembly line workers are similar from one day to the next but the work of office staff can vary by the time of the year (e.g. mid-year versus year-end accounting and bookkeeping requirements) and is often reactive to the number and type of requests, mail and information that comes in each day. However, that has not prevented ongoing attempts to monitor the behaviour of clerical workers, especially those in the more junior ranks.

Modern organizations have recognized that the most effective (and cost-effective) form of supervision is the supervision people apply to themselves – internalized self-policing. French sociologist Michel Foucault (1980) utilized the concept of the Panopticon first imagined by British jurist and economist Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth century. Bentham’s Panopticon was a prison design incorporating a central tower from which a limited number of guards could invisibly monitor all around the prison yard with little effort. Never certain whether or not they were being monitored at any particular time, Bentham believed prisoners would adapt their behaviour as though they were being supervised non-stop. Using this analogy, Foucault pointed out how insidiously control can infiltrate – and has infiltrated – social structures, first through central supervision mechanisms, then even more effectively through internalization of the controls.

In the middle of the twentieth century, self-monitoring was effectively done by taking clerical workers such as typists and congregating them into typing ‘pools.’ The clerical workers were measured on the speed and accuracy of their work. Even if they were not
explicitly encouraged to do so, the typists learned to compete with each other for quality and quantity of output, thus internalizing the controls that had initially been external.

As mainframe computers started to prevail in organizations, generating the need for large amounts of data entry, the typing pool became a key-punching data entry pool, but the same conditions of centralized observation and control applied. As these controls became internalized, data entry clerks competed with each other on speed and accuracy to great benefit for the employer. As word-processing equipment became more powerful, secretarial staff were moved into word-processing paths.

Typing-pool jobs have effectively disappeared from the Canadian market place but panopticonic vigilance remains as workers continue to integrate self-controls into their work behaviour. The Panopticon is continually being re-invented in line with modern technology and needs. In the case of administrative support workers, this is most clearly seen in call centres where electronic call monitoring has actually intensified supervision while requiring less active intervention from the supervisor.

However, electronic surveillance permeates even in more traditional office work. For example, clerical workers (as do most other workers in administrative roles) store their work online on networked group servers. Although beneficial in terms of enhanced security and information accessibility, this centralized repository facilitates the observation and surveillance of the work completed by each worker. The prevalence of email presents another instance. Email has become a key tool for office communication
– every online dialogue, whether distributed within the organization or sent out to
external correspondents, is captured by corporate network software and can be retrieved
and read by authorized supervisors at will.

Although only a random sampling of telephones calls is usually reviewed, and internet
retrievals and transmissions are seldom checked without some external suspicion of
misuse, the awareness that their behaviour can be tracked online is understood by most
office workers. Everyone who has ever telephoned a call centre is familiar with the
message that runs along the lines of: “This call is being recorded and may be
monitored…” Workers in traditional offices are subject to similar monitoring, as those
who have lost their jobs for inappropriate email transmissions from their work address
can attest.

**Power and Unionization**

In the early years of office bureaucratization, because office jobs required literacy, the
women eligible for roles in the business office were primarily those who had grown up in
middle class homes and aspired to middle class marriages. Socially, there was a clear
demarcation between the factory “hands” who did what the management “brain” decided
was appropriate – and the clerical workers, who worked with words and numbers, who
didn’t get their hands dirty on the factory floor and who felt they had much more in
common with the office managers than the less-literate working classes. Although their
managers and scientific management advocates such as Frederick Taylor and his
followers tried to push clerical work down to its most simplified and task-defined form, this did not affect the fundamental social allegiances. As Lowe (1987, 135) has pointed out:

*There remain significant differences in the minds of the clerical workers, who perceive their cleaner jobs, more fashionable work attire and scope (albeit limited) for making work-related decisions as the basis of higher social status.*

Despite their allegiance to management, women in the office were not themselves in a position to develop significant power. As noted previously, women in the early twentieth century, especially the purportedly middle-class women from ”good” families, were assumed by their employers and social peers to be working to pass the time between school and marriage, a view generally shared by those in the union movement. Although this was certainly the reality for many, no allowance was made for those who either did not marry or became their family’s income source through loss of their spouses. Socio-cultural attitudes privileged men’s incomes, endorsing gendered pay differentials that enabled men to better support wives and children.

The unions cooperated in emphasizing the split between female clerical workers and the predominantly male factory worker. Unions were reluctant to add women to their membership rosters, reinforcing the notion that women were not part of the working class. This was partly self-serving; unions were afraid that the lower wages paid to women would undercut their own efforts to agitate for increased pay rates. And union members were no less patriarchal than their middle class counterparts (White, 1993): they
agreed that it would be more effective to focus on the achievement of a fair “family wage,” than on parity for all workers regardless of their sex or work situations.

Employers and unions both disparaged the validity of women as valuable members of their work strata. Women office workers were considered to be transient, casual labour; their male supervisors did not think of them as permanent, career-oriented staff with good heads for business, while the unions felt they were not a legitimate part of their social class.

Despite the general rejection of women clerical workers by unions, there were occasional union drives to recruit this group. However, when such efforts were made, the women themselves became the obstacle to effective union inclusion due to the transience of the role most women clerical workers played. It was difficult to sustain union drives when individual women participated in the workforce for so few years before leaving for marriage (White, 1993). Every time they entered a work environment to initiate or sustain a union drive, they were faced with trying to educate a new group of job entrants to the value of unionization. The women they tried to enlist regarded their own jobs as temporary, making it less attractive to them to endorse unionization, especially at the cost of alienating supervisors.

Social coercion into a matrimonial home and the begetting of children was not the only force for the transience of the role. Culturally, women were seen as ‘less’ than the men with whom they worked. The interesting jobs, the career path opportunities, the
promotions were reserved for male clerical workers. In banks, for example, managers slowly came to depend on women to fill the lowest levels of clerical work, while they put the male clerical hires into career path positions. This created a two-tier organizational labour market in which women’s opportunities were severely restricted while the men who may have started in similar entry-level roles were being groomed for management positions (Lowe, 1987).12

He went on to quote (Lowe, 1987, 69) Jean Thomson Scott who in 1889 wrote:

Woman has manifestly been designed by nature as a complement, not as a substitute for man ... Even independently of the curse of Eve, the average woman can not calculate on her ability to work with as well-grounded confidence as the average man ...

Falling ’twixt and ’tween, as it were, women were blocked from any momentum towards the acquisition of power, either as members of the management classes or in solidarity with the struggle of the working classes.

It was not until the 1960s during the third13 wave of unionization that office workers, as part of a massive unionization effort in the public sector, became union members. During this time, civil service staff associations converted to unions in a wave of dissatisfaction with a status quo that allowed them no legislated rights to bargain (White, 1993, 51) and this affected a large number of women office workers. By 1982, a third of the Canadian

12 I observed this during my own career. I watched a female colleague mentor and train at least two young men who were then promoted into supervisory and managerial roles while her responsibilities and seniority remained the same.
13 During the first wave, skilled craftsmen unionized in the face of unskilled labour; the second wave saw the growth of unions for factory workers and other so-called “unskilled” labour.
labour force was unionized (compared to about 20 percent in the United States) due largely to the unionization of the public sector. By 1989, about 39 percent of union members in Canada were women (Wilson, 1996, 126). Note, however, that the majority of office workers were not in the Public Service and thus remained without union support. Unionization of office workers is today still largely confined to the Public Sector.

**Influences on Modern Clerical Work**

Over the last century, women office workers have moved from reluctant admission to grudging acceptance to occupational dominance. In 1921 clerical work was recorded as the leading occupation for women for the first time and by 1981 36 percent of employed women worked in clerical occupations. This percentage has remained consistent over the years. Today more than a third of Canadian working women are employed in clerical occupations (White, 1993).

In 2001, almost one and a half million women were employed in clerical occupations (de Wolff, 2005). Changes in their work opportunities potentially have a profound effect on Canadian society since many of the women who hold such jobs are the primary earners for their families.

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14 NOCs 1231, 1411, 1411-1454
15 According to data gathered by Statistics Canada, there were 1,444,150 lone parent families with a total of 2,312,950 children in Canada in 2004. According to 2001 census data, more than 80% of lone parent families in Canada are headed by a woman. Although I have no empirical data specifically linking clerical families to lone parent, heads-of family status, there is no reason to suppose a different demographic trend in the family situation of clerical workers. In fact, since such a large proportion of clerical workers are
In the modern western world, the “speed and dexterity” cited by Braverman have largely been superseded by new technology that reduces the need for speed and accuracy – but also the need for people to run the office machines. With the varied and sophisticated support of word processing; presentation; spreadsheet; chart-making and other electronic applications, much work previously done by dedicated clerical staff has been uploaded to their erstwhile managers in public sphere enterprises (including public, private and not-for-profit sectors). Weber (1958 [1922], 214) once wrote bureaucratic work organization gained workplace popularity and dominance because it was a superior form of work organization due to what it offered in the way of work control:

*Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration ... And as far as complicated tasks are concerned, paid bureaucratic work is not only more precise but... often cheaper than even formally unremunerated honorific service.*

It would be a mistake to argue that Weber’s contention has less relevance today than when he wrote this paragraph. Although the environmental trappings may have changed, whether there are positive changes in the relative material conditions of clerical workers is more problematic. The issues related to social re-organization (that Marx described in 1874) and to work organization (that Weber identified), continue to inform and define the enterprises of today.

* women, I feel quite comfortable speculating that many female clerical workers are heads of single parent households.*
According to Braverman, machinery is just another tool of the capitalist owner group which uses machinery to control the labour process and the labourers who work in the labour process. The productive potential of workers, therefore, is controlled by the machines and the owners who in turn control the machines. The point for Braverman (1998 [1974], 133) is that machinery is used to further alienate the worker from his/her labour efforts:

Thus, in addition to its technical function of increasing the productivity of labor - which would be a mark of machinery under any social system - machinery also has in the capitalist system the function of divesting the mass of workers of their control over their own labor.

This new generation of office mechanization (perhaps more accurately, electronification) has allowed organizations to flatten their bureaucratic hierarchies, obviating the need for human intervention in many of the tasks that once defined clerical roles. Seemingly this contradicts Braverman’s notion and has led business writers such as Peter Drucker (1995, 85) to argue that capitalism is in the process of being superseded by a knowledge-based division of work. Drucker turns Braverman around, stating that today in knowledge work and in most service work, the machine serves the worker, not the other way around. The nature of work, specifically knowledge and service work, has changed in character – instead of being framed as tasks that are given, the work is framed as results and outcomes that must be produced.16

16 This change in approach is clearly reflected in modern resumé-writing strategies. Thirty years ago, résumés documented the worker’s education and work history. Today job applicants are urged to tell prospective employers how effective they were in their previous roles. In the case of a clerical worker, for example, this might entail outlining not only the new filing system she designed, but also how much this system saved her organization in terms of time and/or money.
If this is true, that the worker has control over the machine, he/she should have enhanced opportunity to define his/her own work and work parameters.

In similar vein, the Harvard economist Lester Thurow (1997, 280) implied that the worker has control over the workplace as well as the machines he or she uses:

_The firm’s only significant asset goes home every night, is an independent decision maker as to where his skills will be employed, controls the effort that she will or will not put into the firm’s activities and cannot be owned in a world without slavery._

Interestingly, this is the same argument that was used 150 years ago at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. Note that Thurow calls the worker an organizational “asset,” continuing the reduction of the worker to the status of resource. The title of Thomas Stewart’s book (1997) _Intellectual Capital_ equally clearly conveys the belief that workers are a form of capital, “human capital.” It can be argued that in this incarnation of corporate Canada, more than the workers’ hands are for hire – minds and, for clerical workers at least, relational abilities and capabilities are also being co-opted in service to the enterprise (Hochshild, 1983).

It is apparent that although this may be called a “post-capitalist society” (Drucker, 1993), the language used to describe workers has not changed, nor do continuing waves of large-scale worker dismissals demonstrate that the world has indeed moved beyond the dominance of capital and of capital increase (i.e., profit). Capital is usually considered to be at the disposal of the organization that owns it to be spent or saved at corporate discretion, and human capital is treated no differently from any other type of disposable
corporate resource. Corporate behaviour suggests that workers are considered ongoing operational expenses to be restrained and reduced to the maximum extent possible.

This attitude continues to dominate organizational behaviour, despite the contrary theories posited by human capital theorists like Drucker, Stewart and Thurow, as Graham Lowe (2000, 24) observed when he cited the results of a survey of CEOs done in the mid-1990s. According to this survey, employees fell outside the top nine priorities for corporate heads. Customers were at the head of the priority list. The second top concern for CEOs was cost competitiveness which Lowe noted could be re-interpreted as a form of Taylorism and another indication of the low value attributed to employees.

Clerical workers are but one group discovering their disposability, but they form a useful starting point to explore changes in the current business office as they are heavy consumers of desk-top knowledge products and support the distribution of corporate knowledge but are not themselves considered knowledge workers. By virtue of their job roles, they require high literacy skills (and often high computer literacy skills) but may not be paid or valued accordingly. To use Eyerman’s phrasing (2000, 22), they are invisible and yet essential to the effective functioning of the departments and organizations they support. In addition, as subsequent discussion will briefly explore, they often have little control over their work or the arrangement of their work day.
Job Loss

As Chart 3.1 shows, there are fewer administrative support jobs than there used to be. The number of jobs in this occupational sector has been declining for the past two decades or more. Ten years ago, Alice de Wolff (1997), followed by Eyerman (2000), reported that Canadian census figures indicated that more than a third – 35 percent - of clerical jobs had been lost in the years from 1989 to 1997.

Chart 3.1: Changes in the Number of Clerical Jobs, 1987 – 2006

Because the office place is under increasing threat from competition and technology is an attractive source of reduction in labour costs, more and more people are being laid off from what were once stable, sustainable jobs. This has led to an enormous growth in contingent work. The data shown in Chart 3.1, which are based on “jobs,” typically considered to be permanent positions, show the levels of decline in various industry sectors. Between the economies provided by technology and the drive of many
organizations to ‘outsource’ and ‘offshore’ (Freeman, 2000) support tasks not part of their core business, temporary work has become an involuntary but inescapable condition of life for many clerical workers. The director of one agency devoted to assisting displaced clerical workers in Metropolitan Toronto noted that her agency has in recent years started seeing workers being laid off after decades of loyal service to their employer. Contingent clerical workers inhabit a workplace in which jobs are short-term and fragile; consequently, income is uncertain; pay is usually lower than in full-time positions; certainly, the benefits are non-existent; and they themselves, on their own time and dime, are responsible to keep their skills up to date – in an environment of escalating technology changes.

With electronic filing systems stretching across global networks and internet-based voice and data telecommunications becoming cheaper, faster and clearer/more accurate every month, employers find it increasingly easy and cost-effective to distribute clerical functions and call center operations to third party suppliers in developing countries. In some cases, as the story below illustrates, machinery may be used to replace a clerical worker entire!

According to McKeown (2004), the theatre department at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh has inaugurated the use of a robot to act as receptionist. Valerie, as the robot is

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17 In a monograph titled “Employment in clerical occupations potentially affected by service offshoring, by industry, 1987-2006,” Morisette and Johnson (2007, 15) noted that the effect of offshoring may be limited. Their analysis indicated that about 86,000 of the 138,000-position decline in clerical jobs falling between 1987 and 2006 actually occurred before 1994, a period they claim service offshoring was minimal. Furthermore, of the clerical job losses between 1994 and 2006, 67,000 stemmed from restructuring initiatives in the public service, a sector unlikely to resort to offshoring.

18 In private conversation, 2005
known, consists of a flat screen monitor – her head – mounted on a cylindrical body the size and shape of a trash can and is fashionably dressed in attire designed by the school’s costume design students. Lasers sensors enable ‘her’ to detect movement. She is equipped with a keyboard on which visitors can type their questions. She is capable of giving directions, answering the phone and chatting. She is helped in the last of these by the back story created for her by the school’s drama students – Valerie is in therapy and dreams of becoming a singer.

The encompassing presence of “Valerie” is still a novelty use of technology. However, are the automated voice instructions used to direct telephone callers not similar in character if not in scope?

Outsourcing has been cited as beneficial by some analysts. Why not share some of the work available in our economically rich nation and provide work to developing economies whose citizens need work? And this is true – for the moment.

For such an argument misses the point, that is, the dispensability of workers. The motivation for the deployment of clerical work to cheaper sources is not to promote better living standards for third-world workers but to defray costs by sending the work to places where the cost of people is cheap; as labour force costs rise in such locations, the likelihood increases that the work will be re-assigned to an even less-expensive supplier/location.
Clerical work is also increasingly outsourced to temp agencies within the city, province and country. Companies argue that clerical work lies outside of their core business mandate; therefore, it makes sense to let another organization handle the screening, payment and quality assurance for them. With work availability volatile, fluctuating as contracts are won or lost, temp agencies are reluctant to put clerical workers on staff. Instead, clerical workers become their “product,” rented out at rates that keep agency prices aligned with those of their competition. When workers are idle due to lack of work, the agency is not obligated to pay their workers as the clerical workers on their books are sub-contracted, “independent agents” – a situation highly reminiscent of the nascent working class situation during Karl Marx’s time.

The dispensability of contingent clerical workers and the brevity of their work contracts have implications for the type and complexity of relational skills they (a) are permitted to exercise by their temporary employers and (b) have the time and creative space to develop. This in turn has ramifications for the smooth and efficacious work flow within the business office, since responsibility for these tacit processes often devolves upon ‘Workflow Central,’ that is, the administrative support person(s) as will be discussed further later in this dissertation.

According to Morissette and Johnson (2007) the bulk of the changes occurred before 1994. More recently, the job picture for clerical workers appears to have stabilized somewhat. While the number of jobs has continued to decline, the rate of decline seems to have slowed except for public service clerical workers who are predominantly
unionized; this group has continued to experience heavy job losses as successive waves of government money-saving efforts have cut broad strips from the clerical support staff. Statistics Canada analysts Morissette and Johnson (2007, 15) point out that:

While some clerical jobs disappeared in manufacturing during the 1994-to-2006 period, fully 67,000 jobs were lost in these occupations in public services ... employment in these clerical occupations actually rose (although moderately) in the service sector during the 1994-to-2006 period. (emphasis mine)

Note that Morissette and Johnson separate clerical jobs by sector but do not define the job categories (as described in the NOC catalogue) included in their in their analysis. If (as is likely) call centre agents are included in the numbers, the employment pattern for workers in traditional clerical occupations are skewed even more negatively.

De Wolff (2005) has continued to track changes in the Toronto clerical work situation. Her analysis, shown in Table 3.1 below, corroborates the trend of job decline noted by Morissette and Johnson above. According to De Wolff’s analysis, between 1991 and 2001 the number of clerical positions dropped almost ten percent although the economy as a whole generated a similar percentage of new jobs. If the category of customer service clerks (a category comprised primarily of call centre agents) is eliminated from the calculation, the change is even more dramatic – clerical work positions were reduced by 17 percent and clerical workers, as a proportion of the Canadian workforce, dropped three percent from 11 to 8 percent over the decade.
Table 3.1: Changes in Clerical Work Categories, 1991-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1231</td>
<td>Bookkeepers</td>
<td>106,625</td>
<td>103,400</td>
<td>100,810</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1241</td>
<td>Secretaries</td>
<td>271,110</td>
<td>317,275</td>
<td>418,405</td>
<td>-35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1411</td>
<td>General Office Workers</td>
<td>267,465</td>
<td>224,630</td>
<td>250,055</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1413</td>
<td>Records and File clerks</td>
<td>27,035</td>
<td>14,965</td>
<td>31,220</td>
<td>-13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1414</td>
<td>Receptionists and Switchboard Operators</td>
<td>123,315</td>
<td>124,965</td>
<td>131,015</td>
<td>-13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1423</td>
<td>Typesetters &amp; Related Occupations</td>
<td>5,725</td>
<td>7,725</td>
<td>8,635</td>
<td>-33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1431</td>
<td>Accounting &amp; Related Clerks</td>
<td>178,200</td>
<td>264,910</td>
<td>257,610</td>
<td>-30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1432</td>
<td>Data Entry Clerks</td>
<td>55,865</td>
<td>89,325</td>
<td>85,950</td>
<td>-34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1433</td>
<td>CSR – Financial Services</td>
<td>92,100</td>
<td>98,935</td>
<td>101,915</td>
<td>-9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1434</td>
<td>Banking, Insurance &amp; Finance Clerks</td>
<td>38,425</td>
<td>56,350</td>
<td>60,715</td>
<td>-36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1435</td>
<td>Collectors</td>
<td>16,650</td>
<td>17,415</td>
<td>15,990</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1441</td>
<td>Administrative Clerks</td>
<td>69,065</td>
<td>67,975</td>
<td>52,555</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1452</td>
<td>Correspondence, Publication &amp; Related</td>
<td>7,005</td>
<td>7,340</td>
<td>7,680</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1453</td>
<td>Customer Service, Information &amp; Related</td>
<td>164,775</td>
<td>114,955</td>
<td>63,305</td>
<td>160.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1454</td>
<td>Survey Interviewers &amp; Statistical Clerks</td>
<td>27,035</td>
<td>28,535</td>
<td>22,960</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total, 1231, 1411, 1411-1454</td>
<td>1,450,695</td>
<td>1,548,600</td>
<td>1,608,840</td>
<td>-9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of workforce</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Changes in the composition of the clerical workforce are more fully described in the next section.

Work Changes

Changes in Types of Jobs/Job Expectations

In addition to job losses, Table 3.1 also shows how work categories have changed over the decade. Continuing a slide that started in the 1980s or (perhaps) earlier, some traditional clerical roles are eroding. Some types of clerical work listed in the Canadian
National Occupational Codes (NOC) directory have been in serious decline for a number of years – the “telephone operator” is a case in point; although four occupations are listed under this category in the 2001 NOC codebook, technology, including automated caller services and Voice-over-Internet-Protocols, have significantly reduced the relevance of this job classification. (Although these have been documented in Table 3.1 as part of the statistical overview of clerical changes, these jobs are not part of the ongoing discussion in this study at least partly – but more likely primarily – because these jobs simply don’t exist in any kind of meaningful way today.)

For example, on reviewing the numbers in Table 3.1, the following specific job changes seem quite illustrative.

Secretaries, whose bosses rely on their abilities to manage organizational and interpersonal priorities and conflicts, have seen a decline of more than a third of jobs. Simultaneously, the Administrative Clerk category shows an almost equivalent increase. Although this is generally a more junior role with a more amorphous range of accountabilities, the role often retains the need for incumbents to display a broad spectrum of relational abilities to balance the work deadlines and personalities of those they work for. DeWolff (2005) noted in a presentation at the OWCC annual general meeting that this may be an example of jobs being downgraded, adding that Statistics Canada seemed to be paying closer attention to job titles than to the work content of jobs. She suggested that some jobs were more complex than their ostensible job titles (and, by extension, pay scales) implied.
Typesetters and accounting clerk jobs have also seen drops exceeding 33 percent. Digital typesetting has eliminated the need for manual typesetting creativity and precision while electronic spreadsheets and databases have supplanted the clerks who could formerly take pride in their skills of arithmetic precision and attention to detail.

Bank tellers and customer service clerk jobs have declined by almost 37 percent, victim to the technological capabilities of Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) and personal computer banking. Those left in these roles have found the role changed from ones transactionally based (Kusterer, 1978) to ones that today require more strongly pro-active customer service skills, including sales skills (Aneesh, 2001).

Relational skills are important for all clerical workers (indeed for all workers). However, the type of relational skill and relative importance vis à vis their functional tasks will vary depending on a number of factors. The variance is not just a difference between “then” (e.g., the bank teller documented by Kusterer in 1978) and “now” (for instance, the bank CSR responsible for pre-qualifying walk-in customers and cross-promoting financial products and services) but also, as may seem evident, between roles and titles today.

For example, employers who have clerical workers with similar / identical job titles but disparate responsibilities and/or status within the administrative hierarchy may need to have or exhibit different levels or types of relational skills. As a case in point, a clerical worker with the title of executive secretary might in one situation have multiple bosses to
support as well as miscellaneous responsibilities. In another case, someone called an executive secretary might be expected to support a single senior executive such as a vice-president or corporate director. Although they have the same title, the relative power inherent in the two roles may vary significantly.

Workers at different seniority levels may require different kinds or extents of relational skills: it may seem obvious, but students, recent school leavers/graduates and people generally in junior or entry-level clerical roles are more likely to be asked to focus on the functional rather than relational aspects of their roles. Because they typically have not had the opportunity to develop organizational memory or relationships of trust, contingent workers, regardless of actual experience or seniority, tend to be grouped at the junior end of the work spectrum in terms of their breadth and depth of relational responsibility.

Workers with different job titles – secretaries, group administrative support workers and others who support people in the office – have different relational responsibilities than those who enter data or file (hard copy or computer) documentation.

As already discussed, job status, that is, whether the worker is a permanent or contingent employee, will also have an effect on the opportunity and expectation for clerical workers to exhibit relational skills.
It should also be pointed out that different jobs may have considerable functional overlap (as Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 shows). However, these may not always translate to relational overlaps especially in jobs which have been downgraded – that is, the functional responsibilities for a more senior clerical role become embedded in a more junior role without additional pay or status.

Not only are some of the types of jobs clerical workers formerly relied on disappearing, but other types of roles, frequently with heavier and more sophisticated surveillance and control mechanisms embedded in the work technology are becoming more dominant, roles for which workers in traditional clerical roles are not necessarily prepared. The relatively new support roles available in call centres (occupational code 1453: Customer Service, Information & Related) display triple digit gains.

Although this study does not focus primarily on call centre occupations, a few things are worth pointing out about this occupational category.

Call centre work in North America is not as endemically identified as “women’s” work and attracts a stronger balance of men and women. Freeman (2000, 15) for example, commented that although a call centre offshored to Barbados was composed entirely of women, another call centre doing the same work for the same company within the U.S.A. was staffed 40 percent by men. In further (if anecdotal) corroboration, I can point to the several local call centres (in various industries including financial services and laser eye
surgery centres) I have visited / worked with which all included a substantial number of men.

Often call centre agents are required to have specialized knowledge, including mandated licences (e.g., financial services call centre representatives who need to complete the rigorous Canadian Securities Course exam).\(^{19}\)

The technology that has made call centres possible has also turned them into workplace Panopticons and made them more constricted and unvarying than occupations more typically considered administrative support; in scenes reminiscent of Taylorist efficiency programs, agents sit at telephone stations addressing customer queries, needs and problems. The number and length of the calls they handle is monitored and commonly posted on an electronic display board; their telephone interactions are usually recorded and may be reviewed by their supervisors; they need to sign off their stations whenever they need to leave their desks. During busy times when call volumes exceed the availability of agents, they may have few opportunities for needed breaks.

Call centre environments are structured to provide agents with equivalent knowledge and skills so that customers can receive appropriate service no matter who answers the phone;

\(^{19}\)“Remember that big group of people that are customer services representatives, CSRs – is that that’s not a uniform group of people, they’re not all doing the same thing by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, they’re actually doing a really wide range of things. There are people who have medical degrees who are called customer service reps. There are people who have MBAs who are called customer service reps. There are people who are nurses, who are social workers, who are financial advisors, just a whole range of people who are working on the phone in call centres doing the work that they do over the phone.” (deWolff, presentation to the Office Workers Career Centre membership at the 2005 AGM). Her comments echo my own experience with call centres in the Canadian financial services sector and a laser eye surgery telephone service centre.
although their work is often critical, the interchangeability of their skills makes individual agents less so. This is illustrated, for example, by outsourcing of some Canadian call centres to countries such as Barbados (Freeman, 2000) which have cheaper labour forces as long as prospective agents in these countries can demonstrate general computer, telephone and English-speaking skills. Mirchandani (2004, 360), for example, in her discussion of the Americanization of the accents of agents in Indian call centres noted that such a practice is predicated on organizational discourses that construct Indian labour as a flexible commodity to be trained to meet client needs without reference to the individuality and culture of the workers themselves.

From personal experience I know that when one walks into a call centre, or customer support centre, large electronic boards, visible across the open area, flash to indicate which lines are free and how long individual calls are taking. The number of calls handled by an individual operator is tallied automatically and reports are printed off for management. Calls are recorded to provide an audit trail for call quality, and mystery callers, perhaps from an independent measurement company, call randomly to ensure uniform quality and consistency of message. Operators never know when or if they are being monitored and they must always be on their best, most professional behaviour. With staffing geared to anticipated volumes depending on time of day and day of the week, the pace never slackens. Indeed, during busy periods, food may be brought in so workers can stay at their stations for long periods without an extensive break.20

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20 During the 1996-1997 RRSP season, the agents in a large mutual funds call centre (of which I was managing the training function) were fed various portable lunches (Swiss Chalet chicken, sub sandwiches, etc.) daily for the several months of RRSP season to keep them at their desks for long hours.
Role Polarization: saturated spaces

More than a decade ago, de Wolff & Bird (1995, 25) observed that clerical work was diverging into two distinct streams, with the overall range of tasks defined as properly clerical tasks widening. They described clerical work as polarizing into two streams, one of these consisting of routine, low responsibility, specialist roles, the other one of interesting, high responsibility and generalist activities. Sometimes the difference in the variety inherent in clerical jobs has to do with the size of the employing company. Clerical roles in small offices tend to be more diversified and responsible. Although some clerical jobs in large offices carry with them a level of responsibility and task variety, more of these roles are routinized and automated.

Graham Lowe (2000, 37) noted that this is consistent with changing conditions across Canadian society and the Canadian work experience, that ongoing cycles of economic and corporate restructuring have widened existing class cleavages in Canadian society. He added that:

*We are becoming a more polarized nation. This issue is closely related to work, because whether people consider themselves rich, middle class, or poor depends on their position in the labour market. Social and economic inequality reflects trends in employment income ...*

Clerical workers occupy a vulnerable position within their respective workplaces, a vulnerability exponentially increased when multiplied across the labour market. Their social and economic well-being is thus at continual risk.
Lowe’s comments emphasize a point made earlier: that is, the experience of clerical workers as members of an occupational group fractured and fragmented by current organizational practice is not one that is or will remain unique to their particular situation.

A significant aspect of this has been explored in discussions of ‘saturated’ and ‘unsaturated’ work (Aneesh, 2001); saturated work tends to be highly routinized with little opportunity for exploration, play or learning. The more unsaturated the work space is, the more opportunity for experimental activity, creativity, and decision-making opportunity it provides. Although highly unsaturated work is most closely identified with roles of power and authority, not all work even in the most constrictive roles is completely devoid of opportunity for individuation nor is all work in highly creative roles absent of rote and routine (Sawchuk, 2006c). Sawchuk tied the universality of unsaturation/saturation into the inherent contradiction between what workers do to achieve use in addition to exchange value from their work. He has further explored the dichotomy between use and value (2006b, 13) in a discussion of how clerical workers can subvert processes altered by technology implementations:

*Labour processes designed to meet capital’s needs – wittingly or unwittingly, under all but specific niche conditions that various contingency, post-Fordist and flexible specialization theories fixate on – tend to reduce creativity, autonomy and the chance to develop and apply skill and knowledge. Against this, within the underlife of the organization, there is an opposing tendency ... clerical workers ... create their own systems of information flow, knowledge and skill, and across a changing technical terrain, re-skill themselves specifically in relation to use-value, not exchange-value, production.*
Administrative support workers at both ends of the clerical occupational spectrum engage with the challenges of their work and find ways and means of learning and deriving personal value from their jobs.

**Concluding comments**

To summarize the discussion in this chapter, the conditions under which women were first permitted entry into business environments and the subsequent feminization of the clerical roles they were allowed to fill reverberates with consequences that reach into the present. Straddling an ambiguous and ambivalent position between management levels (with which they have traditionally identified or to which they aspire) and the working classes (which their status and incomes most closely match), the majority of private sector clerical workers continue to lack the consolidated support a union might provide them. Traditional clerical work remains dominated by women although that seems to be moderating in Canadian call centre environments to a more balanced mix of male and female in some call centres.

There has been a significant drop in the number of traditional clerical roles since the mid 1990s but a rise the number of call centre workers (despite off-shoring initiatives). Call centre jobs are much more overtly subject to technological surveillance than traditional clerical jobs as well as more constricted and saturated work environments. A modern workplace trend seems to be the outsourcing of non-core business activities to other, specialized firms. In the case of clerical workers, this has resulted in the loss of
thousands of full-time stable positions to temp agencies and call centres inside and outside Canada. Displaced Canadian clerical workers in growing numbers must now increasingly compete for diminishing numbers of short-term, precarious work situations.

In general, although relational skills are embedded to a greater or lesser extent in all clerical roles, the level and complexity of the required relational skills depend on the type of role and the seniority of the clerical worker. Workers in contingent roles, regardless of the level of seniority they may have had in the past, tend to be grouped with the most junior of clerical workers in terms of functional and relational responsibilities, contributing to increased levels of underemployment along all metric dimensions.

Increased competition for permanent traditional clerical “office” jobs may have resulted in the downgrading of higher status clerical work into lower classifications. For example, administrative clerks may be accomplishing the same types of tasks that secretaries did but with lower status and pay rates.

The conditions described above have led to increased pressure for viable work situations which has led to increased emphasis on academic credentials, both by the employer who uses credentials to screen applicants and by workers who seek to maximize their employability levels. This will be discussed further later in this dissertation. Before continuing with that discussion, however, I’d like to comment a little more about the importance of work in the development of personal and social identity among workers.
On the Ontological Importance of Work

Stanley Aronowitz (2003, 172) wrote:

*We are biologically constituted beings and ... labor, the process by which we negotiate with nature and thereby transform human nature as well, is the condition of what we take as specifically human. Thus the labor question is not only socially but ontologically significant; it goes to who we are and have become.*

The intentional effort implicit in labour directed to the creation of value for use or exchange makes it uniquely human. Labour has a strongly social aspect; it is not solely the result of individual effort, but also, both in input and outcome, embedded in others; that is, the worker uses both concepts and tools created by others; works in conjunction with others; and creates products and services that usually affect others. “Human labor,” said Braverman (1998 [1974], 35):

*Whether directly exercised or stored in such products as tools, machinery, or domesticated animals, represents the sole resource of humanity in confronting nature. Thus for humans in society, labor power is a special category, separate and inexchangeable with any other, simply because it is human. Only one who is the master of the labor of others will confuse labor power with any other agency for performing a task, because to him, steam, horse, water, or human muscle which turns his mill are viewed as equivalents, as "factors of production."*
The use and creation of tools and concepts lead to the concept of skill,\textsuperscript{21} that is, the development of personal capability and expertise that allows labourers to use tools and leverage concepts with precision and proficiency. Definitions of skill are certainly constructed socially (Rigby and Sanchez, 2006; Sawchuk, 2006b, 2006c), often along gendered lines (Steinberg & Figart, 1999; Fenwick 2004). While all types of labour require skill and knowledge, not all are deemed to be skilled or equivalently skilled. Sawchuk (2006c, 595), for example, has pointed out that when social practices associated with skilled and knowledgeable practice are analyzed, it becomes apparent that skill is actually quite difficult to quantify, especially in relation to individual behaviour, and he further noted the importance of maintaining a critical economic perspective on issues related to skill definition. He pertinently added:

\textit{Why do we need to quantify it[skill] exactly, but also what does this widely held need implicitly say about what we see as relevant and legitimate? Answers to these types of questions reveal many of the crucial but frequently unarticulated presumptions that frame both past and current analysis of skill.}

As I know from my own experience in large Canadian organizations and as others have documented (Gunda & van Maanen, 1999), there is an expectation, particularly in large organizations, that employees identify a personal niche inside the corporate environment and market themselves and their skills accordingly (this is sometimes referred to as “intrapreneurship”). This increasingly popular approach to the careers and successes of workers fails to take into consideration the importance of social and economic factors in determining how, when and where workers work. As Crompton and Jones (1984, 145)

\textsuperscript{21} According to Webster, \textit{skill is” 1: “expertness that comes from training, practice, etc.” 2: a) “an art, craft, or science, esp. one involving the use of the hands or body or b) ability in such an art, craft, or science.”}
point out, the labour market is socially constructed, and work changes due to market changes are critical to the types of opportunities available to clerical workers both in and outside the employing organization. It is important to recognize that both the individual and the socio-economic environment within which individuals act have roles to play in maintaining sustainable work relationships; of the two, the socio-economic environment has the greater impact, especially given the tendency within Canada’s capitalist organization of labour markets for employers to reduce operating and labour costs as much as possible (in the current environment often by automation and global outsourcing initiatives). Clerical workers, in order to survive qua clerical workers must adapt themselves to changing conditions and expectations as the national and international labour eco-system they inhabit will not to noticeable extent change itself to suit theirs – although as they engage with their work, they may change the parameters of individual jobs and incrementally effect job changes more generally.

Full-time workers spend almost half – sometimes more – of their waking lives at their paid jobs. This makes their relationship with their jobs extraordinarily important in terms of their sense of self and self-value; most workers, as a number of business theorists have admitted, want to do a good job: “We are trained to be loyal to our jobs – so much so that we confuse them with our own identities” (Senge, 1990, 18). People invest themselves in the work they do.22 Clerical workers are no different in this regard than their counterparts in other occupations.

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22 For workers compelled by circumstance into part-time and/or short-term work, the desire to actualize themselves through labour is frustrated by the ephemeral nature of their roles – however, this does not necessarily eliminate the need to build or do as the anecdotal tales one hears of unemployed workers falling into depression and despair indicate.
Kusterer (1983) points out that the work and organizational structure instituted by managers is internalized by workers into the social environment through which they realize themselves. Humans – sometimes described as “homo faber” – develop their images of themselves through their work, a self-identification that simultaneously causes and abrogates alienation: causes because workers have little control and no ownership over the product of their labour, abrogates because they have insinuated themselves – intelligence, methodology, emotions – into the work effort they give to and invested themselves in the products[^23] they produce for their employers.

The institutors of organizational structure and the workers in the structure have vastly different outlooks. For workers, the work is concrete and personal – and they learn to cope with challenges by finding their own shortcuts and work-arounds. For their managers, it is impersonal and abstract – the work, however efficiently or effectively performed, of individual workers must be subsumed within a larger strategic organizational frame. The disparity in perspective between managers and workers is a constant source of conflict (Kusterer, 1983). Within the bureaucratic hierarchy, specific types of concrete jobs and tasks are initiated in response to a specific organizational need and in service to the organization’s interest in profit maximization. These jobs exist only as long as they continue to enhance profit. If market conditions change, if the availability of particular technologies changes, if methodologies or corporate strategies change, then management must reorganize itself and its mandated tasks, either by producing the old

[^23]: I include services in the term “products” as service as often as not in today’s marketplace is the product on offer.
use-values by new more efficient methods or by establishing and producing new use-values. As Kusterer (Kusterer, 1983, 158) noted:

*These changes are not problematic for management, because managers have been abstracting from concrete labor all along, and their communal network has not transformed any of these organizational arrangements into ends in themselves. Such changes are extremely significant to workers, however. Without even thinking in these terms or realizing what it is doing, management can render whole subjects of working knowledge obsolete, disrupt communal networks, and thus undermine or eliminate entirely the resources that the workers have used to render their jobs meaningful and to turn their work activity into life activity.*

In Engeström’s words (2006, 194), “*values at work are embedded in the object of the activity.*” When the objects of the activity are unilaterally changed or discarded by management, the impact on workers, therefore, is often severe.

A number of writers starting from Marx in 1867 up to and including present-day sociologists (e.g., Sawchuk, 2006c) explain this using the twinned concepts of use-value (that is, the worth of something in terms of its utility and importance for personal survival and thrival) and exchange-value (that is, the price for which that something can be traded/bartered in the marketplace). The intrinsic use-value of work itself is the satisfaction workers derive from the activities and fruits of their labours, a value dependent on the extent they invest their sense of self and well-being in it. For most workers that is a great deal. Workers take ownership of their labour and its outcomes. As humans, all need to feel a sense of contribution which is most easily accomplished through work and its products.
Problematically, however, workers own neither their labour nor its outcomes; those belong to the hiring organization which can change the work parameters at any time. The potential problem is immediately apparent. As Sawchuk (2006c, 601) notes:

*Workers do find joy and engagement as well as conflict, stress, frustration and alienation ... this fragility has systematic roots in the contradiction between use-value and exchange value dimensions of organizational life, specific in its form to capitalism.*

Work, which helps individuals define their sense of self and is an essential form of their self-expression, is alienable because it does not belong to them but to their employers. When employers abruptly alter the conditions of our labour or jerk it away entirely, workers’ vulnerability is emotional as well as economic. Through a unilateral decision made by employers to invest in new technology or outsource the work to third-party suppliers, the personal investments (time, emotion, creativity, intelligence, etc.) workers have made in their work processes and products are devalued and destroyed – sometimes even recast in terms of Luddite counterproductivity. Not only are workers’ (mis)apprehensions of personal control stripped away and they confronted with the reality of their lack of power, but their self-image as valuable contributors to organizational success are completely invalidated. Kusterer (1978) commented most tellingly on this phenomenon when he wrote that although the workers he interviewed were all alienated workers, they expressed their alienation in very subtle ways, because they needed to learn ways to perceptionally de-alienate themselves in order to learn their jobs and develop control over their work and work day. In his words Kusterer (1978, 161):
They have invested a lot of energy in de-alienating themselves, in learning the working knowledge and building the work relationships that add to their own control over work processes, decreases their social isolation, and make their work meaningful. Through this de-alienating effort, they deny and affirm their own alienation at the same time. They struggle against it, but at least in the context of capitalist work organizations embedded in a capitalist society they cannot overcome it. In the final analysis, then, the alienation is not the powerlessness, meaningfulness, etc. but the lack of an institutional framework that would recognize and legitimize the knowledge and communal relations which can so effectively combat these things.

In today’s shifting economies, large numbers of clerical workers feel at risk. For unionized workers, the solidarity they formerly relied on for protection from arbitrary employer decisions about their livelihoods also appears to be evaporating.

To summarize and integrate the foregoing discussion, I conclude the following. First, workers are invested in their work, whether that work be cleaning the floors in a hospital24 or managing the workflow in an office or plotting the strategic direction of a major multi-national. That investment is necessary for workers to achieve a sense of accomplishment. However, as Kusterer (1978) has pointed out, there is a vast gulf between the strategic and operational arms of organizations, especially profit-motivated corporations. Because of the divide, work conditions and expectations can undergo significant material changes for workers, as many workers – clerical workers in large numbers among them – are discovering. Through these changes, workers find their productive self-investment in their jobs rendered valueless or even obstructive.

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24 When I was in high school, I had a part-time job as a housekeeper in one of my local hospitals. I still remember the great pride one of my co-workers expressed in the work effort she put in to ensure a clean and hygienic hospital.
Although workers in these transitioning roles have created products for exchange value, these products have also contributed use value for themselves to the extent that the generation of these products has also contributed to their personal growth and sense of self-esteem. Exchange value is not enough. To derive ontological satisfaction, workers need to feel their work has use value as well as exchange value. The veil that previously masked the employer’s desire for maximum exchange value at the expense of the workers’ needs for validation of labour in which they have invested emotion and capability has been ruthlessly rent asunder in today’s marketplace.

As I discuss in the next chapter, there is another layer of ontological significance in the basic work expectations for most clerical workers and these are the process and relational components embedded in the very nature of many of their roles. These add yet another layer of personal investment for the worker. As Fineman (2008) has pointed out, emotional investment – often implied in the execution of relational and process duties, has implications for social identity that should be taken into consideration. When the relational duties of clerical workers, often invisible or dismissed as female nurturing tendencies, are not recognized as real labour requiring complex skills, the result is a two-fold problem for clerical workers. First, because their skills are not recognized as deliberate or as contributing a necessary function to the office routine and organizational performance, clerical workers are more vulnerable to lay-off and job loss. Secondly, the lack of visibility of these skills causes devaluation of the work clerical workers do while they are doing it. This has ontological repercussions for the way in which they see themselves and their value.
Skills: what are they?

According to my big Webster’s dictionary, the word “skill” derives from the Middle English word for discernment or reason and list three possible definitions. The most apropos is the first: skill is “great ability or proficiency, expertness that comes from training, practice, etc.” My small Scribner-Bantam dictionary provides similar definitions. In both cases, the words “training” and “practice” appear.

- social construction of skill
- gendered definitions of skill
- tacit vs explicit acquisition of skill

The Skilling Debate

In 1974 Harry Braverman’s Labor and Monopoly Capital (1998 re-issue) was first published, starting a vigorous debate about whether jobs are becoming more or less skilled. Braverman theorized that the combined effects of capitalism (constantly being driven to cut costs and improve efficiency) and technology (continually being upgraded to make work tasks both more efficient and more cost efficient) combined to reduce the level of work skills workers needed and the number of workers necessary to accomplish

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25 Other definitions are: an art, craft or science esp. one involving the use of the hands or body or an ability in such an art craft or science. The third meaning is labeled obsolete: knowledge, understanding or judgement.
the work. A number of subsequent writers (Burris, 1983; Huws, 2003) have written strongly supportive arguments.

In response, human capital theorists contend that the contrary is true – workers need more skills to cope with the increasing complexities of technological advances. They suggest that the power of new technologies releases workers from tedious, routinized tasks they previously did manually, thereby allowing them the time and space to perform more interesting work (Drucker, 1993; Thurow, 1997).

A third group supports Braverman’s theory with qualifications, reminding readers that reality is more complex than simple up and de-skilling, that work changes vary. Crompton and Jones (1984, 210), for example, pointed out that “the 'office proletariat' is not a mass, but stratified by age, qualification and, most particularly, by gender.”

More recently Sawchuk (2006c, 607) added that deskilling and up-skilling often occur simultaneously:

*De-skilling undoubtedly occurs as pockets of skills become ‘saturated,’ even in professional settings where we might not conventionally expect it, and up-skilling occurs, even within routine work where sometimes the only spaces for creativity, play and ‘unsaturated’ knowledge ... are found in forms of resistance.*

Others (Crompton and Jones, 1984; Eyerman, 2000; Huws, 2003) have noted that in addition to or instead of choosing between up-skilling and deskilling, it might be appropriate to talk about re-skilling; when technology changes, the duties and responsibilities of the original job change.
It is probably most accurate to say that every side of the argument has some merit. Certainly for a lot of people work has become simplified, sometimes stultifyingly so. For a second group, the work has become more interesting and complex; with spreadsheets taking over manual calculations, for example, clerical workers can potentially spend more time analysing what the resultant figures mean – and some do. Still others find themselves in radically different jobs than the ones they originally applied for. Bank tellers are a case in point; not too many years ago, as Kusterer (1978) pointed out, tellers developed competence in a limited number of transaction types, such as savings or loans or money orders, which types of transactions have been largely routinized, reducing the need for such specialization and the requirement for tellers.

Since Kusterer wrote, ATM machines have taken over most of these functions altogether, and bank tellers, rechristened ‘Customer Service Representatives,’ are expected to market bank services to the institution’s clients in addition to resolving customer problems and handling such customer transactions as come their way. The routinization of old specialized tasks and the new focus on sales has created very different expectations for front line bank support staff from the original job parameters they were recruited to do. Many CSRs remain uncomfortable with their new job accountabilities – occasionally even resentful of something they say they did not sign on for (Aneesh, 2001).26

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26 Some of this information derives from focus groups conducted in multiple private sector organizations. The findings are outside the scope of this research as I do not own the proprietary data.
Accountabilities have changed, in some cases becoming more routinized and simplified and in others more diverse and complex. In another example, legal support staff described by Eyerman (2000, 64) described the equivalently altered situation of legal support staff:

No longer [are clerical workers] the "Take a letter, Miss Smith" secretaries of the past. The demands now are more like, 'Create this database. Send this e-mail on the Internet. Look on the Internet for this. Pull up case law on Lawnet.' There are all kinds of different skills that you never would have dreamed of having in the past. And they're very technical; the expertise in law is very significant.

In the case of clerical workers, the skilling debate seems largely focused on the formal, overtly described tasks of their jobs. However, relational practice and emotional labour are also an intrinsic aspect of the role – these aspects are largely invisible or discounted (Steinberg & Figart, 1999; Fenwick, 2004; Guy & Meredith, 2004; Kennelly, 2006). As I explore later in this dissertation, while relational expertise may be promoted in corporate mission and value statements, these skills are not always attached to specific compensable accountabilities. In addition (and very importantly), relational skills present differently whether one is a senior “leader” or junior clerical worker or if one is male or female (Hochschild, 1983; Henson & Rogers, 2001).

In the next chapter, I will start exploring in more detail the explicit and implicit expectations of typical clerical worker roles.

27 Livingstone’s (1999) comment, although not related specifically to relational knowledge and skill, is also relevant in this context: "Forms of knowledge and types of skills that are grounded in the subordinated group experiences other than class-based ones, particularly those of race, gender, generation and disability, may be systemically discounted in many negotiations between employers and workers over the value of labour.”
The Politicization of Skill

That some types of skill are accorded less value than others is a politically charged issue (Grugulis, 2003; Rigby and Sanchez, 2006) to a significant extent correspondent with power. As the discussion of the history and feminization of the clerical workforce (in Chapter 3) has shown, very little power has devolved to people in clerical occupations.

The skills predominant in low-power groups tend to be minimized and are often invisible to organizational practice. The challenge is a systemic one. Dorothy Smith (1987, 162) wrote:

*The accountability procedures of institutions make some things visible, while others as much a part of the overall work organization that performs the institution do not come into view at all or as other than themselves. Local practices glossed by the categories of discourse are provided with boundaries of observability beneath which subterranean life continues. What is observable does not appear as the work of individuals, and not all the work and practices of individuals become observable.*

More recently Fletcher (1999, 2-3) asked:

*Why is it that there is an espoused organizational belief in collaboration and supportive teamwork but people who exhibit such behaviour seem to get disappeared from the organizational screen?*

During my own tenure in the large Information Technology division of a multi-national financial institution (when I was charged with analysing the critical factors underlying successful performance in various types of jobs), I remember one of the division’s vice-presidents emphasizing to me how important teamwork was, how fundamental an element of every job; however, in echo of Fletcher’s bemused query, I was unsurprised
that “teamwork” was nowhere to be found when annual performance reviews were written up or bonuses handed out. To the contrary, those who worked to build consensus and generate team-based solutions tended to be financially penalized compared to those who had disregarded others to bulldoze assignments and projects through to completion.

Office work needs to be seen in the light of these comments. A key element of clerical support work is implied by the word ‘support.’ For offices to run smoothly and effectively, the office/clerical worker must perform varying levels of relational work, that is, work which finds its success through the success of the supported parties and, in many cases, other workers to whom the clerical worker is not directly responsible. They are often and largely expected to carry the relational burden for their office areas. In other words, a large part of their job description is implicit, credited to others and not always visible as work that they themselves have achieved.

Fletcher (1999, 32) cited Jean Baker Miller as suggesting that men are socialized to deny the relational skills they have and need to survive psychologically, so they depend on women to supply these social skills. As a result relational work has become identified with women and women’s work. It further implies that when a relational model of workplace behaviour is acted out, the workplace becomes a location for the social construction of gender, because relationally effective behaviour is equated with feminine behaviour.
Furthermore, because they are identified as feminine, the skills associated with emotional labour and relational practice are conflated with innate female traits as Hochschild has pointed out in her discussion of emotional labour.

**Relational Skills and the Learning Organization**

An emergent literature over the last couple of decades ascribes much importance to work organizations as learning communities. Organizational theorists such as Argyris (1992) Senge (1990, 1994), Stewart (1997) and the theorists who follow them are early promoters of the concept of the learning organization.

The concept of the learning organization implies that organizations are organic communities which rely on the willing sharing of capabilities for the common weal. It assumes the problematical belief that there is such a thing as “common weal,” that what is good for one is good for all – a situation that is not at all probable given the competitive nature of employee interaction for jobs, good jobs and promotions.

Embedded in the notion of the learning organization is a need for the kinds of interpersonal and relational skills that can coordinate disparate knowledges and capabilities into cohesive team efforts that benefit the well-being and profitability of the organization. The implication for workers is that the relational skills they have acquired must be exercised visibly in service to the employer but because the relational skills are
being co-opted as part of the collective experience, they remain hidden in terms of reward and recognition for skilled practice.

It should also be pointed out that the visibility of relational practice depends to some extent upon one’s status within the learning organization. It has certainly been my observation during consulting roles with some of these organizations that seek to develop and promote themselves as learning organizations that senior managers and executives who consciously exercise relational skills by listening to their reports and encouraging team work are more likely to be ascribed leadership characteristics than low status workers, especially low status female clerical workers, who, by virtue of their “gopher” roles (Fletcher 1999, 95) are expected to have and use such skills without formal recognition of their value or complexity. As Sawchuk noted (2006a, 242):

*Today subordinate social groups have fewer ‘legitimate’ spaces in the world of knowledge production – save for the places they can make themselves. In other words, their knowledge, as a feature of advanced capitalism, is more systematically and effectively denied, denigrated, or ignored.*

And that includes relational skills. In short, organizational cultures differentially recognize and value relational skills depending on the worker’s status within the organization. However, whether one is senior or junior, the philosophy underlying the learning organization demands that workers provide these as part of the collective experience without further acknowledging their complexity or exchange-value.
Considerations with regard to emotional labour

Although the concept of emotional labour as discussed by Hochschild (1983) is peripheral to the main thesis of this discussion, it should briefly be highlighted as it has significant influence on the conditions in which clerical workers labour. Hochschild (1983, 7) defines emotional labour as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value.”

For office workers (although not only office workers as many kinds of service workers – retail sales clerks, restaurant wait staff, for example – are in a similar situation), it is not just answering the telephone or creating Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations, it is doing these things pleasantly and helpfully; they are required to be “nice” at all times, regardless of the reasonableness of the demand or the plethora of work with simultaneous deadlines or the personal circumstances that might make such emotional equilibrium difficult to sustain. The emotional dissonance (i.e., the difference between the emotion they are required to display and the emotion they are actually experiencing) is generally not visible as an important work skill or challenge of the work, although it is often a skill the clerical worker must acquire and is a potentially a source of significant unrecognized stress for the worker.
As Hochschild (1983, 169) commented: "The more she seems a natural at it, the more her labour is disguised as the absence of other, more prized qualities." Emotional labour and relational practice are not understood to require skills at all.

More recently, Haman and Putnam (2008) found the same attitude among recreation centre workers. Of the thirteen workers they interviewed, seven constructed emotional labour as a natural ability. These workers who were predisposed to interacting well with people, displaying emotions appropriately, and communicating emotions effectively viewed their colleagues who had to work harder to enact behaviours indicative of fun and friendliness as being disingenuous and dishonest.

Others (Himmelweit, 1999; Steinberg & Figart, 1999; Kennelly, 2006) have also contributed to an expanded definition of emotional labour to include behaviours and their rationales. These enhanced conceptualizations of the meaning of emotional labour are more consonant with the types of practices described by Fletcher (1999) as relational.

Therefore, both the terms ‘emotional labour’ and ‘relational practice’ can be used to describe similar types of labour. For the perspectives discussed in this dissertation, I regard relational practice as separate from, although oftentimes incorporating elements of, emotional labour. I see relational practice as the enactment of skill rather than the expression of personality, although personality predispositions may make the relational practices easier to exercise for some than others. Since the use of ‘emotional labour’ might generate unnecessary confusion among the various usages, I will use the terms
‘relational practices’ and ‘relational skills’ for my own discussion of the learning and practice of relational labour rather than relying on the mixed and multifarious meanings implicit in the “emotional labour” label.

**Challenges in observing relational practice**

Writing specifically about office workers, Ann Eyerman (2000, 22) commented that they were like glue – and glue, to be effective, is invisible. This is because much of the work of office workers exists in relational practice, which lies outside the pages of their formal job descriptions but is essential if they are to execute their formally defined tasks.

Part of the challenge facing clerical workers in the apportionment of value in the organizational discourse is that by definition much of their work is embedded in the success of others. Organizational language does not have room for the kinds of capabilities routinely exercised by office workers who support the work of managers and work groups.

Fletcher (1999) calls this *disappearing* the work. In many cases, office workers collaborate in the disappearing of their work. As Kusterer (1978, 188) noted:

*Workers themselves fail to recognize the valuable extent of their own contributions to social production. Workers themselves believe that they really are just an easily replaceable piece of the organization their employers manage.*
A reason for workers’ dismissal of what they contribute may be due to the lack of organizational language to accommodate the types of relational practices they bring to their workplaces.

Relational work is sometimes hard to see. Even Fletcher (2000, 94) whose study with female engineers specifically focused on the enactment of relational skills, found herself overlooking or misascribing the practice of relational skills in her subject sample as the following example indicates:

> When I observed ... an engineer who took a back seat in a meeting and let her boss talk about her data, I first coded this as evidence of her fear of power and success ... It was not until later, when she spoke of the incident with pride and explained it was an intentional strategy on her part to give the problem increased visibility and make sure it was taken seriously, did I realize her behavior at that meeting could be understood differently. Only then did I realize that I had "disappeared" her work by labelling the behavior as inappropriate and as evidence of her personal inadequacy.

If Fletcher, whose work specifically focused on understanding relational practice as performed by female professionals, could misinterpret and disappear such labour, how much easier it is for clerical workers and their superiors to not see such behaviour as anything other than placatory, the efforts of persons with little power to accommodate those with more – although it should not be ignored that this need to accommodate others is also part of the work dynamic.²⁸ Indeed, as Fletcher (1999, 95) herself noted, “*those who get paid to do it, such as secretaries and other support staff, are considered no more than ‘gophers.’*”

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²⁸ Emotional labor affects the various social classes differently. It is women, members of the less advantaged gender, who specialize in emotional labor, it is the middle and upper reaches of the class system that seem to call most for it. (Hochshild, 1983, 20)
Mirchandani (1998, 180) conducted research with a group of female professional, administrative, managerial and sales teleworkers. She noted that these women worked from home partly so they could avoid some of the relational work they would be required to do if they worked at the company office. They argued that relational work, although important, was not part of their jobs. In Mirchandani’s words, “these women clearly identify interaction and emotion work as important but do not broaden definitions of work to include these activities.”

In organizational discourse, performance objectives in formalized performance management systems invariably contain at least two critical characteristics. They must be measurable and 138,000-person and under the control of the employee.

For many types of work in organizational environments that reward individual performance, this seems fair; certainly workers should not be held accountable for delays and errors caused by other people or departments; however, for many employees in support roles, their work is neither under their own control nor easy to quantify and measure.

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29 Mirchandani pointed out these workers resisted the “appearing” of relational practice skills, partly because they were concerned management might then cite the need for such skills as a reason to challenge their freedom to work from home.

30 Performance goals are often summed up using the popular SMART acronym, that is, goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-focused.

31 Systemic performance reward and recognition systems in Canadian workplaces that reward individual performance are the norm – performance appraisals focus on the individual’s tasks and targets; this assessment is based on work I have seen or been part of in several private and public sector organizations.
It is an odd fact about human nature that the people who heroically step in during situations of emergency are applauded while those who quietly work in the background to prevent disasters from happening in the first place go unnoticed. In Canadian work organizations, too, the corporate heroes who successfully fight organizational fires tend to be valorized and rewarded even as the behaviours that keep the fires from starting remain invisible.

In the case of clerical workers, they have the added disadvantage of operating from positions of very little power, which results in their relational attributes being even less valued. In fact, their very willingness to engage in relational practice is articulated as a negative, rather than a positive attribute.

For contingent clerical workers exercising relational skills may seem even more to be deferential and placatory behaviours than for workers in permanent roles. Such workers are less likely to have complex functional accountabilities as they are brought in to handle overload – often the tasks other, permanent, employees want to offload. Their roles tend to be highly circumscribed and constrained. Because they are present only for short-term assignments, they have limited opportunity to build effective relationships and relationships of trust which increase the perceived presence and value of their relational practice. Their temporary, vulnerable work situations potentially have an effect on the type and complexity of relational skills they are able to practice. The effect of contingent work on the practice of relational skills must be taken into account in the ongoing consideration of relational skills learning and practice.
When clerical workers, regardless of job permanence, successfully demonstrate relational skills, they are easily categorized as ‘helpful,’ ‘good workers,’ ‘nice’ and similar descriptors. When clerical workers engage in relational practice, they are not seen as exercising leadership characteristics but as behaving weakly – even though relational practices are the very qualities many organizations identify as being the types of leadership behaviours they wish to encourage.

32 If you put effort into achieving outcomes that are embedded in others, you are likely to be seen not as someone working in a way that enhances organizational learning and effectiveness, but rather as someone who is weak, naïve, or exploitable. (Fletcher, 1999)
Chapter 5: Function & Process in Office Work

Explicit Function: Job Duties and Job Descriptions

Job descriptions typically list the types of activities and duties that characterize the formal job tasks and obligations. The National Occupational Codes codebook (2003) has distilled these into generic outlines of duties by job titles. Table 5.1 below outlines the major duties comprising three general office worker roles at different levels of seniority: Secretary, a senior clerical role (NOC1241) which generally works in support of one or more executives; general office clerk/administrative assistant (NOC1411), a more junior role in which occupants may provide either general office support or secretarial services for member(s) of the management team; and administrative clerk (NOC1441), a role of equivalent seniority to secretary but with more general office support duties.

There are several things to be noted. First, there is considerable overlap of duties among the three different occupations summarized here. Similar overlaps extend across other types of office support work as de Wolff (2005) has pointed out. For example, call centre customer service agents comprise a newer, rapidly growing segment in office work but they too are expected to document, photocopy and file in addition to answering the telephone.
Table 5.1: Range of Duties for Selected Office Work Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/duty</th>
<th>1241: Secretaries</th>
<th>1411: General Office Clerks/ Administrative Assistants</th>
<th>1441: Administrative Clerks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type reports, correspondence, etc.</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare presentation materials</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer telephone</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give general information to public</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopy &amp; collate documents</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File documents (electronic and paper)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up and maintain filing systems (electronic and paper)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute &amp; mail documents (electronic and paper)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process mail (electronic and paper)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort, process, verify applications, receipts, expenditures, forms, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order office supplies</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain office equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic bookkeeping, e.g., preparing invoices and bank deposits</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule and confirm meetings and appointments for employer</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish office procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record and prepare minutes of meetings</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange travel schedules and make reservations</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compile data and other information</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct research</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize conferences</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervise and train other staff in procedures and office software</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorize and issue licences, permits, registrations, etc. upon processing &amp; approval of required documentation</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help co-ordinate administrative procedures such as budget submissions, contracts administration &amp; work schedules</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize /co-ordinate flow of work for general office and data entry clerks</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in office support jobs are further blurred by some employers who expect lower-level office workers to absorb some of the duties of more senior office workers.

33 Alice de Wolff (2005, 7) retitles NOC 1411 General Office Clerk as Administrative Assistant
Furthermore, when one looks at the functions outlined in the table above, the tasks seem simple, many of them semi-skilled at best. However, as Kusterer (1978) has pointed out, even a seemingly basic role like that of the bank teller may contain about 75 different sets of procedures for the teller to perform, each once containing subsets of actions in order to complete the full procedure in compliance with policy and/or regulation.

In the years since Kusterer wrote, some of these manual procedures have been automated. However, although automation may have resulted in the reduced need for some of their traditional formally-delineated duties, it has also engendered an expanded need for a new set of skills. Bank tellers (now usually called customer service representatives or CSRs) must these days have considerable knowledge of an increasingly broad range of financial products in order to promote and market these to the clients at their wickets. In another example of changing rather than eroding skill requirements, Sawchuk (2006b), cited the case of Gwen who, when confronted with technology that made it more difficult for her to sequence her work effectively, incorporated her existing knowledge of the work tasks with new learning about the automated system to create workarounds that would help her do her job.

34 More recent writers have acknowledged that even jobs considered the most “unskilled” in fact require considerable skill. Ehrenreich (2001, 193-194) took on a variety of “unskilled” jobs and concluded: “You might think that unskilled jobs would be a snap for someone who holds a Ph.D. and whose normal line of work requires learning entirely new things every couple of weeks. Not so. The thing I discovered is that no job, no matter how lowly, is truly "unskilled." Every one of the six jobs that I entered into in the course of this project required concentration, and most demanded that I master new terms, new tools, and new skills...None of these things came as easily to me is I would have liked; no one ever said, "Wow, you're fast!" or "Can you believe she just started?"”
It is worth repeating that clerical roles exhibit great variety in both types and complexity of work expectations. Administrative office support roles have not been a single occupational stream almost since women first entered these roles after the invention of the typewriter and the bureaucratization of the business enterprise. In fact, the Canadian National Occupational Codebook (NOC) documents a broad list of clerical occupations, some of which (for example, telephone operators) are almost completely extinct as significant worker categories while others show a rapidly growing importance (e.g., call centre agents).

Even jobs carrying the same title might be different in responsibility levels and assigned responsibilities. Table 8.1 (Chapter 8) lists the clerical occupations included in this dissertation. Both the functional and relational requirements of people in different types of clerical roles can vary significantly. This will be further explored later in this dissertation. In the next section I will limit myself to a few general comments about the importance and value of relational skills in clerical roles.
Implicit Expectations: Relational Requirements of Office Support Roles

In addition to the fundamental functional components of office work, an invisible layer of complexity is added by the relational skills office workers need to practise to perform their duties. Invisibly embedded in functionalist office worker job descriptions are requirements for the adroit use of influencing, organizational and general interpersonal skills.

Kusterer (1978) pointed out that for bank tellers (or, in modern vernacular, CSRs), relational skills are necessary to perform the work, but these skills are predicated on competence in the job’s functional tasks. Tellers, he said, learned to handle and satisfy customers partly because customer service was an important part of their job description but also because their abilities to manage the expectations and behaviours of their customers made their jobs easier by establishing the terms of the teller-customer interaction. However, in order to fulfil the customer service aspects of their role, they first needed to be able to fulfil the transactional and process tasks which customers expected them to perform. To be most effective, tellers had to be able to perform the functional aspects of their role automatically so their active attention – pleasant conversation, eye contact, etc. – could be focused on the customer.

Employers tend to focus simplistically on the functional skills outlined in workers’ job descriptions, those needed to perform the tasks of the job – the facility in MS Office
products, the ability to change the ink cartridge in the photocopier, etc. However, clerical workers work for and through others. Performance outcomes are embedded in the work and authority of others.

There is much talk these days of ‘matrix’ management,\textsuperscript{35} of influencing without authority. Office workers have been exercising this skill for decades. They need to obtain information from a variety of people hierarchically senior to them, balance work priorities for multiple people not all of whom they report to, and develop congenial relationships with superiors, peers and others (for example, clients, repair persons and supply deliverers). In some roles, such as customer service representatives, organizations rely on the ability of their clerical support staff to initiate and sustain profitable relationships with the organization’s clients. The skill to develop and maintain relationships with a diverse mix of people is essential to the successful performance of most clerical roles – lacking these, it may become difficult or even impossible for office workers to adequately perform their duties.

One aspect of relational performance is often emotional labour as described by Hochschild (1983, 6-7) who defined emotional labour as “\textit{the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value.}” She further noted that the role of emotional labour was to produce “\textit{the proper state of mind in others.”} Guy and Meredith (2004, 295) added:

\textsuperscript{35} (August 26, 2008) A Google search for “matrix management” netted more than five million hits in just a blink of the eye.
To be successful, workers who engage in emotional labor must be aware of their own emotions and manage them, motivate themselves, recognize emotions in others, and respond to them in such a way that the relationship achieves the intended goal.

In her description of emotional labour, Steinberg & Figart (1999) listed several characteristic dimensions along which jobs with emotional labor can be analyzed. First, such jobs require the worker to interact with other people external or internal to the organization, usually either in person, by telephone or through computer communication. Emotional labor also requires a worker to manage his/her own emotions while producing a particular emotional state in another. The expression of emotional labor may be genuine but does not have to be. Emotional labour may be expressed to subordinates, peer co-workers and supervisors as well as clients. Emotional labour can be pro-active or re-active. Employers are able to develop a level of control over the emotional labour of their employees through their hiring, training and coaching/supervisory practices, using these practices to affect corporate productivity and profit.

Fletcher (1999) added a new layer of complexity to Hochschild’s work by talking about the work of furthering organizational and work goals through interpersonal effort, specifically in gendered differences of work behaviours exhibited by a group of engineers. Fletcher’s analysis of hidden relational work done by women forms the basis for much of the argument in this dissertation. The female engineers in Fletcher’s study consistently allowed others to dominate discussions and sometimes intentionally allowed their contributions to be credited to colleagues in order to further the project goals of their teams. They regularly and deliberately subsumed their own goals and credibility in order
to achieve work and organizational aims. Fletcher observed that the relational practice enacted by the engineers of her study was (in her words) “disappeared.” that these relational behaviours, invisible as deliberate work strategies, were instead dismissed as cases of self-sabotage and the worker’s inability to stand up for herself.

In the case of office workers, the twinned concepts of emotional labour and relational practice have added weight, because they are embedded in roles in which the work outcomes are incorporated into the work outcomes of others. This contributes to an even greater lack of visibility of these skills – Fletcher’s engineers had functional work goals, that is, they could take ownership of specific project outcomes. Clerical workers are successful if their supervisors are successful or if the groups and departments they support are successful, but if their contribution to the final result is recognized, it is usually only unofficially, perhaps as an informal expression of appreciation. When clerical workers have valid (and current) job descriptions, these tend to be couched in terms of functional administrative support accountabilities. Leidner (1999, 83), talking about service work in general commented on the difficulty of distinguishing the worker from the work process from the end product or service in these types of roles because, she said, “the quality of the interaction is frequently part of the service being delivered.”

Office workers can be described as lubricating the machinery of office process. In another, apparently opposite, metaphorical description, Eyerman (2000) noted that
clerical workers act as “glue.” The relational practice of clerical workers, largely undocumented, cements together the administrative edifice of work organizations and smoothes the work processes. With very little formal authority (Wharton, 1999; Steinberg & Figart, 1999), the work they do to develop and sustain effective work processes and practices with and among internal and external peers, suppliers, clients and supervisors requires strong, if subtle, influencing skills.

Between the blurring of function and process as noted by Leidner (1999) and the general absence of relational practice requirements from job descriptions, relational skills are easy to overlook and ignore. When they are made visible, they are often essentialized as female qualities as Fenwick (2004, 174-175) has noted:

Complex interpersonal clerical work, for example, demands skills and intellectual competencies that must be learned over time; yet these are often considered to be personality factors, or simply part of femininity.

The conclusion implicitly to be drawn from organizational discourse, therefore, seems to be that organizations don’t need these skills, but women must provide them. Why women? Because these are not really skills but rather inherent, essentially female qualities. If this is deemed to be an accurate imaging of female engineers as Fletcher’s (1999) work implies, then it is even more applicable to clerical workers as the foregoing paragraphs suggest.

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36 Glue and oil may seem incompatible constituents but in fact both words describe aspects of the clerical work experience. As in any reliably operating physical machine, workplace functionality depends on the cohesion of stable parts and the smooth interaction of moving parts.
Clerical work is dominated by women. The nature of the work entails ensuring the success of others, implying ‘caring’ and ‘nurturing,’ work traditionally assigned to women in their home-maker roles. It is no accident that secretaries have been called the “office wives” of their bosses. For clerical workers in secretarial and other administrative support roles, the skilled exercise of private-sphere caring done with family and friends in the private sphere has been transformed into emotional and relational practice done for exchange value in the public sphere of work. As the location of the relational practice changed, its visibility disappeared – because emotion has been perceived as a private behaviour, it has been banished from legitimacy in the work environment. Consequently, any behaviours related to emotion or relationship management are perceived as inappropriate to the work environment. As a result, organizational discourse has little ability to recognize and acknowledge the practice of these skills.

It should be pointed out that not all female workers accept a description of their role responsibilities to include relational practice. Mirchandani (1998, 180) conducted a study of female office workers (primarily of managerial level) who typically worked some or all of their regular work shifts at home. These teleworkers deliberately resisted an expansive definition of work to include relational expectations, to avoid any confusion about or conflation of their relational work (within the family) with their relational labour (for their employers). Mirchandani’s (1998, 184) study participants cited various reasons for this resistance, including the potential danger of intrusion by the work organization into family life if paid and family work were to be more closely linked; the fear that drawing attention to the relational aspects of what they did might diminish the legitimacy
of their paid jobs which they had typically had to struggle to attain; the recognition that such work might degenerate into forms of time-wasting office politics and harassment; the concern that if their relational work in their paid roles were given more prominence, their work might be brought under greater organizational control with a consequent loss of freedom to determine their work settings.

Recognizing the devalued coin ascribed to relational practice,37 these workers felt that admitting to relational labour would cheapen the value of their paid work in the eyes of colleagues, family and friends. The refusal of these workers to acknowledge the relational skills they used, even while engaged in paid employment at home, has contributed further to the invisibility of the relational aspects of their work.

These forms of interaction in the office environment were largely conceptualized as hindering women’s ability to do their “real jobs” although Mirchandani (1998) noted that these women acknowledged the relational practices to be real expectations that were unrecognized and unrewarded.

**Relational Capability: Essential or Acquired?**

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37 Hochschild (1990, 232) commented on the decline of motherhood as a “private enterprise” and the handover of family “work” (e.g., child care) to nannies and other home helpers who do this as family “labour” (especially in families where the mothers have higher status work outside the home). Many relational skill requirements are associated with the nurture of children. As domestic labour, nannies and other home care workers generally have very low status and commensurately poor pay. By extension (certainly in the perception of Mirchandani’s (1998) teleworkers), the cheap value ascribed to the relational practice in the private sphere is associated with relational practice among women in low echelon jobs to the public sphere.
For various reasons, therefore, the notion of relational practice is problematic as applied to office work. First, the activities embedded in this type of work are often not perceptible as work. Furthermore, when they are recognized as valid work behaviours that office workers engage in, they are often shrugged off as traits inherent in the worker rather than as acquired skills intentionally exercised. Lying outside the descriptive categories of most job descriptions, relational practices are not visible as skilled practices. Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that the workers in Mirchandani’s (1998) study refused to accept responsibility for these relational tasks.

Since relational skills and the emotional work of “caring” and “nurturing” in the private sphere have traditionally devolved upon women, relational practice has largely been allowed to devolve upon women in the public sphere of the workplace as well. It has seemed an automatic and logical extension of women’s traditional roles in the home. But the automatic apportioning of this type of labour has created a two-pronged challenge for the women charged with the performance of this kind of work.

First, in the home, this kind of work is done for use-value – in the work environment, this work should be recognized for its exchange value, but, because the work is not visible as legitimate work worthy of recompense, it is not – the clerical workers performing relational labour are still expected to do this for use-value. As Steinberg & Figart (1999, 22), talking about emotional labour, have commented that as this type of work has moved from private sphere work in the home to public sphere labour in the labour market, the
distinction between public and private sectors, one of the characteristic aspects of the process of the capitalist mode of industrialization, has become blurred.

Secondly, because the relational aspect of the work is submerged, the perceived value of the role is limited to the execution of the overt functional tasks. The lack of recognition for the complex and skilled relational labour that underpins successful administrative support work has contributed to both lower job status and increased job vulnerability for clerical workers.

Immediately the question of essentialism arises: are the relational practices and emotional labour performed by clerical workers innate (i.e., part of women’s ‘essence’)? Are these skills the workers have developed or traits with which they were born?

The essentialist description of relational skills as female qualities has been described by various people. Steinberg & Figart (1999), for example, noted that the type of emotional labour performed for pay tended to be equated with the nurturing work done in the home. Kennelly (2006) and Himmelweit (1999) are others who have commented on this conflation of relational skills with innate traits. Himmelweit, 1999, 28) pointed out that caring for others is more commonly considered a female “proclivity” because it is women’s nature to do such work irrespective of external reward while men labour because it is their nature to do so, but generally only if the labour incorporates an extrinsic reward.
It is a challenge for clerical workers that the relational skills they have developed over the course of their work lives have largely been learned tacitly. The acquisition of relational skills may often go unrecognized as learning even by the workers themselves. In the words of Livingstone and Sawchuk (2003, 253): "... a lot of "learning" that working-class people do is not recognized as "learning" – sometimes not even by working-class people themselves."

Many organizations do send their employees on courses specifically targeted to the development of relational skills – typically dismissed as “soft skills.”38 Performance management and leadership development courses invariably include significant components on communications skills but these are not courses for which clerical workers are normally eligible. However, there are other courses to which some – primarily workers employed in civil service departments and large private sector corporations – are granted entry. Usually such courses are devoted to single topics, such as communications or conflict management or time management.

While the development of relational skills may be components of employer-sponsored training, they are not usually present in university programs although they may to some extent be part of college curricula which, in the Canadian educational system, are more focused on occupational skills development than universities. In the case study, it was workers who had taken clerical/secretarial courses in foreign countries (notably the

38 As opposed to “hard” technical skills which are easier to observe and measure.
Caribbean) who were most likely to say they had studied subjects such as psychology and professionalism as part of their program.

In other words, relational skills are not usually skills which are visibly embedded in earned credentials or for which credentials can be earned.

Generally, the “soft” relational skills are learned tacitly. And, in a world that increasingly seems to value the attainment of credentials to determine whether job candidates are qualified (Stiglitz, 1974; Livingstone 1999), knowledge and skills learned outside the classroom through informal and self-directed ways are often not recognized as such.

With neither the relational practices fully recognized as skill nor the informal ways much of such skill is developed acknowledged as skill development, it becomes impossible for the purveyors of such skills – especially absent any organizational status or power – to be adequately recognized for their contribution to the success of the organization. Ultimately for the clerical worker, this results in increased vulnerability to layoff and job-loss.

**Conclusion**

To summarize the foregoing pages, clerical work consists of two aspects – the acknowledged functional tasks of the worker’s job and the (formally, at least) unrecognized relational facets of the role.
The functional requirements of clerical roles can vary widely, depending on both seniority and type of role. As a result, the type and level of relational skills required to fulfill the job requirements also vary from worker to worker and role to role.

However, there tend to be overlaps in the requirements for both the functional (as illustrated in Table 5.1) and the relational aspects of the work. Relational requirements will be explored later in this dissertation.

First I will briefly look at the educational background, noting that the explicit educational focus revolves primarily around the acquisition of functional work skills.
Chapter 6: Learning and the Clerical

As the discussion in Chapter 5 has made clear, clerical worker capability must be explored along two primary dimensions – the functional skills and the relational abilities, although the complexity and range of relational skills required will vary depending on the type and seniority of clerical role.

Literacy, general knowledge and fundamental administrative support functional skills (filing, typing, office computer software programs, telephone systems, etc.) are often learned first through formal education, supplemented by employer sponsored training and informal learning. However, learning through educational programs is only one type of development clerical workers undertake, even for functional competence. Informal learning, often embedded in tasks related to extra-occupational responsibilities and interests, occurs in various ways.

For the development of relational skills, formal learning activities are less obvious. The learning of relational skills that enable the effective exercise of relational labour often seems quite nebulous. In fact, while the practice of these behaviours and the requirement for such labour is sometimes discussed, little has been documented about the learning of these skills and behaviours. This may, at least in part, be due to the continuing tendency to essentialize relational skills as characteristic of female workers, a topic discussed in Chapter 5. To the extent that relational skills are emphasized, it is usually under the
rubric of “professionalism,” although this term encompasses only a limited number of applicable relational skills and is easily re-read as deference and propriety.\textsuperscript{39}

In this chapter, therefore, I will discuss the functional capability of people in this occupational cluster and how their education and their work are related to each other. It will become apparent that clerical workers, even without reference to the relational skills that form such an intrinsic part of the value they contribute to their employers, experience serious levels of underemployment.

As this section will describe, office workers are by and large a literate, well-educated group compared to workers in many other occupational sectors. Yet, as the opening paragraphs of this dissertation indicated, their educational achievements may not be appropriately recognized as deserving of respect or reward. It will become apparent that clerical workers are themselves also conscious of being underemployed.

\textit{Clerical Worker Education and Clerical Work}

Formal education is often perceived as a panacea for unemployment and underemployment. Livingstone has provided a detailed discussion of this situation in his 1999 study of work and education discrepancies. He elaborated that, while further education may be helpful in specific instances, it is a naïve perspective to overemphasize

\textsuperscript{39} Professionalization through the International Association of Administrative Professionals was cited as important by both of the interviewed subjects who were familiar with this organization. Another interviewee commented on the professionalism she learned at school in the Caribbean. See also Carla Freeman (2000) who discusses this topic in her treatment of data entry workers in Barbados.
the value of more and more education when looked at in the aggregate. In fact, he argued (1999, 5):  

*The oversupply of educationally qualified people on the job market has been disguised by employers’ inflation of credential requirements, as well as by scantily based imputations of persistent specific skill shortages and general expressions of dissatisfaction with the quality of job entrants ... the need for narrow new technical skills, which can often easily be acquired on the job by those who have an adequate general knowledge base or job experience, should not be confounded with a lack of general knowledge and skill to do the work.*

The situation is even more telling for women than for men as Sweet (2003, 183-184) pointed out when he commented that steadily increasing numbers of women, believing that obtaining more education would pay them back by ensuring them better pay and greater job stability, have enrolled in post-secondary education since the early 1970s.

Despite the efforts, however, Lowe (2000, 101) observed that their skills have not been commensurately rewarded, commenting that women, especially highly educated women, were more likely to be underemployed than men, engaged in work unable to utilize their formally acquired knowledge and skills. He noted that fully 55 percent of women with 17 or more years of educational participation (typically university undergraduate degrees) are in the literacy surplus cluster compared to just 15 percent of men with equivalent educational attainment.

Lowe’s finding clearly supports the discussion of Chapter 3 and points to the challenges for the primarily female clerical work force in gaining and retaining jobs that appropriately utilize their educational attainments.
Yet the ongoing efforts of clerical workers – as will be discussed in subsequent chapters – to continually enhance their general and specific knowledge bases illustrates how the perception persists that education is THE path to better and more stable jobs. Burris (1983, 9) commented on this belief a quarter of a century ago. Human capitalist theorists, she said, believe that for individual members of society superior educational attainment will lead to superior job market role and superior economic returns while increased investment and participation in education will benefit society as a whole by enhancing macro-economic growth and reducing economic and social inequalities.

She continued by expressing a fundamental concern about this approach to social equalization and renewal:

*The burden of responsibility for individual lack of occupational success, however, falls on the individual; he or she either has insufficient innate ability or is guilty of underutilizing human capital resources and educational opportunities.*

Certainly today’s You-Inc. philosophy emphasizing individual responsibility for personal success reinforces Burris’s contention. And despite limited supporting evidence, worker belief in the value of education as a critical success determinant remains strong today, as Livingstone (1999, 125) explains:

*In spite of their common experience of a superficial connection between their formal educational attainments and the requirements of their current or recent jobs, both*

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40 The New Jersey based Blessing-White company has for a number of years promoted training based on a You-Inc. philosophy, that is, individual workers should take an entrepreneurial approach to their careers, treating and marketing themselves as their own corporation. The You-Inc. philosophy, under a variety of names, is widely embraced in many corporate environments.
underqualified school dropouts and underemployed university graduates continue [to] believe and act as if more education is the personal solution to living in the education-jobs gap.

To some extent the faith that workers have in education as the path to a successful future derives from their job-hunting experience. The work they and other candidates apply for may not necessarily require the increased knowledge embedded (in theory, at least) in increased educational qualifications, but because a rising tide of educational qualification has caused credential creep, such knowledge may be expected. Employers use the credential level as a screening standard for applicants to new jobs and career upgrading opportunities (Stiglitz, 1975). Therefore, potential job entrants are pushed to prepare themselves for work by participating in additional years of schooling; the jobs they obtain afterwards may not require high knowledge/skill or provide high status or income, but will be more easily available to them. As Stiglitz commented in his Nobel speech (2001, 496):

If I choose to go to school longer, it may lead others to believe that I am more able, and I will therefore decide to stay in school longer, not because I value what is being taught, but because I value how it changes others’ beliefs concerning my abilities.

Faith in the curative value of education as a solution to society’s ills continues to be fashionable. Our politicians today express the same faith highlighted in Burris’s work a quarter century ago. Dalton McGuinty the Ontario premier, for example, has repeatedly advocated more education as the impetus necessary to propel Ontario’s workforce into better jobs and give the province an economic edge in the new century. In one of many such news releases, he (September 7, 2006) touted his multi-year investment in post-secondary education using the rationale:
By investing in the knowledge and skills of our greatest asset -- our people -- we're building a highly skilled workforce that will attract high-value jobs and build prosperity for all Ontarians.

To summarize, although formal education appears to be of variable usefulness (Livingstone & Sawchuk, 2003) in attaining work competence, many workers continue to sign up for education in the hope that it will help them attain work.

The value of education relative to work opportunities and work roles can be explored along a number of dimensions. Three of these metrics are summarized below: credential, job role and subjective.

**Credential Match**

Following Stiglitz’s (1975) analysis of credentials as employment screening tools, Burris (1983, 109) noted that credentialist screening mechanisms which seem to be as strong – or stronger – today than they were then, lead to a core contradiction in clerical work because the increasing levels of educational attainment among clerical workers is conjoined to deskilling within the context of their work roles.

More recently, Livingstone (1999, 109) made a similar point. He argued that the frenzied competition for jobs in today’s labour market has resulted in serious problems for young people without post-secondary educational credentials in their hunt for work that will enable them to earn a decent living wage. He argued that the distribution of work rewards
has become more polarized, with considerable disparity between good and bad jobs. While interesting, stable “good” jobs are available to some, others, typically those with lower educational credentials, have access only to the routinized, saturated and/or unstable “bad” jobs.

Given this situation of credentialism plus polarized work situations, which clerical workers recognize, it is understandable that they continue to pursue the dream of a good job – or even just a job – through the pursuit of more education. I should also note that this focus on obtaining credentials is not limited to those with low (relative to some of their peers) levels of educational attainment. On the contrary as Burris pointed out (1983, 252):

*Most noteworthy is the fact that the most educated group was more likely to mention a new type of job as a goal, as well as the fact that this group was also more likely to cite more schooling as desirable. Indeed, it is striking and significant that for the most "overeducated" group, more education is seen as the solution to their mobility and as the key to unlocking the door to either a promotion... or a different type of career.*

Lowe (2000, 88) has commented that official degrees, diplomas and educational designations are the easiest and most apparent ways to measure and illustrate the capabilities and potential of a country’s work force. These are the simplest and most obvious metrics employers can use to determine a job candidate’s suitability for and capacity to perform particular job roles and therefore provide a screening method employers are like to use to weed out job applicants, even for jobs that do not require the level of educational achievement being screened for.
Collins (1979, 93) explained that, as a result of the artificial prolongation of schooling, specific educational content has diminished in importance. What educational level has been attained has increasingly come to take precedence over what has actually been learned.

As Collins (1979, 177) further pointed out that the resulting expansion of the educational progression has led to an erosion of clear demarcations between elite and non-elite credentials in the modern American (and, by extension, Canadian) socio-economy. Instead we see a tendency for people to continuously upgrade their capabilities and credentials relative to those held by those in occupations below them and those aspiring to their own levels (with professions attaching themselves to the top end of this credentialized cascade.

In other words, the formal education may have little specific relevance to an office position; however, well-educated workers are available in broad supply, enabling employers to use educational attainment as a preliminary screening device (Stiglitz, 1975) to winnow out a subset of candidates, regardless of their actual suitability for the work. When even entry-level job postings may generate dozens, even hundreds, of applicants, this is seen as a valuable technique to limit the number of candidates to be considered more seriously.
Performance match

As the paragraphs above illustrate, frequently office workers are credentially more qualified than their jobs require and their salaries might suggest to be commensurate. In terms of the match between their educational attainments and what they are expected to do, there are strong indications that workers are overqualified. Livingstone and Sawchuk (2003, 50) commented that educational underemployment is due mainly to the focus of human capital theorists on the “aspects of knowledge that are easily expressed in commodity exchange relationships” – and noted that even with that delimitation, the perpetuating underemployment of workers should be recognized as a chronic and serious social issue.

Clerical workers – as do other workers – bring a variety of skill and knowledge, not to mention aptitudes, motivations and interests\(^{41}\) to their roles; some of these capabilities are not called into use during the execution of clerical workers’ day-to-day activities; other capabilities are called into use, but are invisible to the employers’ eyes because they are embedded in the way the work is done.

Some of these capacities can best be expressed in terms of the use-value/exchange value dichotomy (Marx, 1978; Sawchuk, 2005, 2006a, 2006c) and the theories about saturated and unsaturated spaces in the work role (Aneesh, 2001) outlined previously in Chapter 3. It is highly unlikely that any individual’s complete catalogue of knowledge and skill can

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\(^{41}\) McClelland’s classic definition of competence; see Spencer, McClelland and Spencer, 1990; Spencer and Spencer, 1993.
be incorporated into one work position or that all of a worker’s needs for creative space can be addressed by a single job.

Nonetheless, to the extent that the capability for multi-skill utilization and self-expression are removed by routinization of work tasks and role expectations – and this is sometimes considerable – work truly does become a form of activity that gets in the way of living. In the case of clerical workers, the polarizing of work situations between unsaturated, self-expressive ones and reactive, highly-directed ones seems, given the rapid move to call centre environments (de Wolff, 2005) to be skewing heavily towards work with limited scope for individuation. In call centres, responses are at least partly scripted and work pace is dictated by external sources (i.e., call volumes).

**Subjective Match**

A third facet of education-job matching concerns itself specifically with whether workers feel themselves to be appositely qualified for their work, whether they believe their education prepared them adequately for their roles, whether they think their employers set appropriate expectations for their work. According to Burris (1983, 219-220) feelings of subjective underemployment are often identified by workers as a comparative issue, with workers comparing themselves to their friends, their colleagues, people who have equivalent credentials, those who are engaged in similar roles or even their abstract ideas of what their educational accomplishments “should” entitle them to (e.g., the intrinsic
worth they attribute to having a university degree, however anachronistic such attribution might be in today’s marketplace):

*The credential effect, the sudden increase in expectations associated with the awarding of a degree, is a particular case of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation and relative evaluation seem to be significant factors affecting subjective feelings of overeducation, although the utility of the concept is complicated by the plurality of possible reference groups.*

Eyerman (2000, 87) linked feelings of subjective underemployment to the contradictory effects of use and exchange values of clerical work for individual clerical employees:

*If employees have become as interchangeable and disposable as old machinery, then so too are the individual and unique skills that each of us carries into the workplace. We're caught in this transitory period in our work where all the skills that we value the most are the least recognized and rewarded. Additionally, we are caught in the vicious circle where we don't have the time to do our work to the level that we respect ... And if there's is no time for that, there is little or no time for socializing and creating and maintaining an office culture where we can survive and grow.*

The feelings that one’s skills are not being utilized fully are not limited to the experience of clerical workers nor are they necessarily fully correlated with either credential or performance gaps as Livingstone (1999) has documented. He noted that many people, even those apparently well matched to the educational and performance requirements of their jobs may feel that their full range of abilities and capabilities are not fully utilized.

However, because the socialization of and expectations for women are different from those of and for men, as various writers (Hochshild, 1990; Schwarz & Zimmerman, 1992; Wilson, 1996) have noted, they may not fully express feelings of underemployment or dissatisfaction to the extent their male counterparts do. As Burris (1983, 225) wrote:
Differing socialization patterns for women, especially the fact that women are often discouraged from expressing anger or discontent, probably accounts to some extent for the higher levels of expressed satisfaction among women. Indeed, in some cases..., female respondents expressed general satisfaction, although they cited many grievances and seemed to harbor significant levels of resentment.

Since clerical work remains a predominantly female occupation, these socialization outcomes affect the kind and amount of work dissatisfaction expressed by clerical workers.

**In sum**

It is important to recognize that clerical workers need strong literacy and, often, numeracy skills in order to be able to function competently in their roles. In order to use the sophisticated, constantly-changing equipment and computers which are so seamlessly integrated into their work lives, they also need to continuously learn and adapt to new skill and knowledge requirements. Nonetheless, as Livingstone (1999) observed, additional years of formal schooling are unlikely to add significant value to either employers’ expectations or employees’ satisfaction with the quality of the jobs available to them.

Note that this discussion has been limited to the discussion of qualification matches between work and learning for the functional components of the job. As stated earlier in this chapter, the learning of the emotional and relational requirements for clerical work has largely been invisible from the discourse about the development of competence for clerical roles. Indeed, to use the description provided by Livingstone and Sawchuk (2003)
a few pages ago, commodity exchange relationships capture inadequately or not all the (usually) tacitly learned and embedded practice of relational skills in the workdays of most clerical workers.

This leads to the new territory I wish to cover in this discussion, that is, the non-valuation – even invalidation – of the relational aspect of the roles clerical workers fill. Moving forward into the presentation of the data collected for this dissertation, I will discuss the levels and types of underemployment expressed by a specific group of clerical workers drawn from Toronto and the larger environment of the province of Ontario with respect to both functional and relational process skills.

To restate the questions I listed in Chapter 1, I will:

1. Address the assumption that relational skills are inborn traits of the (mostly female) clerical workforce and some the attendant implications of such essentialization of relational skills
2. Explore the notion that relational practices are not essential but acquired
3. Illustrate how relational practices are learned, by listing some of the learning strategies which clerical workers told me they used.

I should point out that this dissertation is exploratory rather than definitive, because little research to date has focused on the ‘how’ of the relational skill development particularly with low status workers. Rather, the tendency has been either to ascribe them to personal or gender traits or to simply admit they are learned and leave it at that.
Chapter 7: Data Gathering: Sources and Methods

The discussion in this second half of this dissertation derives primarily from two sources: a case-study of in-depth personal interviews with a small set of clerical workers and telephone interviews conducted with a large Ontario-wide sample of workers as part of the Education-Job Matching Project (EJRM).

Clerical Worker Case Study Sample

Sourcing clerical worker interview participants

It can come as no surprise, given the foregoing discussion, that it was very difficult to find an appropriate site in which to conduct case-study interviews. The original plan called for research to be conducted at a single site within the Public Service. The initial request to a large Public Service union was extended in March of 2004. It soon became apparent that, due to repeated downsizing and elimination of clerical jobs, it would not be possible to draw a full sample of interview candidates from a single government department or ministry. In the end, the first public service union contacted was unable to participate at all due to ongoing turmoil within the union and its employing government, which was affected by frequent civil service reorganizations. After several months of negotiation, a second public service union, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) was approached in October, 2004.
Although this union immediately endorsed the project, that did not mean instant access to the twenty people I had determined was the minimum number I would need to interview – and no single ministry or department had a large enough population of clerical workers from whom a suitable sample of sufficient size could be drawn. Although the union’s central communication department sent an email to its full complement of 40,000 or more members in the Greater Toronto Area, I received only a few responses. Of those, I was able to garner a total of three interviews. One of the others (an immigrant male I would have particularly liked to talk to) reneged on his initial willingness for fear his manager would find out. Another was downsized and became unavailable. A third claimed to be too busy. Several others indicated interest, then went completely incommunicado, despite repeated emails and/or telephone calls from me.

Some weeks later at a summer meeting, I explained the project to a group of local union executives, generating strong signals of interest from them. As a result, several said they would promote the project with their local membership. From an electronic newsletter promoting this project, one of these contacts was able to generate two new interview subjects, but the others were silent: the ‘site,’ generic and broad as it was, seemed stalled at five. After a few weeks waiting vainly for more candidates to present themselves, I met with a union vice-president and an education coordinator to review additional recommendations for subject recruitment.

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42 The number dates from December 2003; according to the union, the number of employees is at its lowest during this period and may increase by up to 10,000 during the summer months.
As an outcome of this meeting, I left with the names of fifteen active union members whom I could call. I was able to set up interviews with six more people; others on the list were unavailable or did not respond to my request. Disconcertingly, when I met with one of these candidates who had agreed to talk with me, she refused not only to be recorded (which I could accommodate by taking hand-written notes) but also to sign the release form – which I could not accommodate. Her rationale for her refusal was that she felt this would be a form of disloyalty to her employer. Since she apparently did not feel disloyal talking ‘off the record,’ her reason seemed somewhat disingenuous. It seemed more likely – although this cannot be confirmed – that her reluctance stemmed from the same sort of fear that motivated the immigrant male to back down from contributing.

Speculating that the disappointing numbers of candidates might well be an illustration of the fragmented and fragile state of the clerical occupations in the civil service and the countless waves of downsizing several governments had imposed, it seemed appropriate to extend the research ‘site’ to the private sector. This seemed all the more reasonable since the research was already scattered across multiple work sites within the public service sector.

The search was therefore expanded to include non-unionized private sector and temporary clerical workers. In the end, nine clerical workers from the targeted union, one from another union and 13 non-unionized workers were interviewed. Of the private sector, non-unionized clerical support workers, five occupied temporary/contract jobs. Selected characteristics of the case study sample are summarized in Appendix A.
I conducted in-depth private interviews that typically lasted between two and three hours with each of the case study respondents; the respondents held jobs requiring widely different mandates and levels of seniority.

**Permissions and ethical review**

All interviewees were asked to sign a release form authorizing the use of the information they shared with me. The form allowed for participants to withdraw from the study at any time they felt uncomfortable about continuing with their contribution. No one withdrew after once starting the process, although the inclusion of one potential interview (as noted in the section above) was aborted when she refused to sign the release form.

Other interviewees lost their sense of distrust and discomfort as they proceeded with the interview and realized the non-threatening nature of the questions. By this I mean that a few were initially concerned that they might be asked to talk about their employers in ways that their employers might construe as disloyal thus putting their job security at risk. Once this fear was removed – and this was by no means a fear universally felt among the interview sample – the interviewees responded freely and trustingly.

Ethical permissions were obtained in accordance with the rigorous standards the Ethics Committee of the University of Toronto.
Conducting the interviews

All but one of the interviews were conducted during 2005. A first interview was conducted with a non-unionized private sector clerical worker in May of 2004 as a test case. When the sample was enlarged to include union and non-union, public and private sector workers, this interview was included with the others.

Interview length ranged from a little over 1½ to approximately 3 hours. Most typically, the interviews lasted between 2 and 2½ hours. In one case, I revisited the interview subject twice, so the interview was conducted in three stages. In another case, I met with the respondent twice to complete the discussion. All other interviews were conducted in single sessions.

I did not want to unduly use the respondents’ personal time when this was avoidable, so I scheduled interviews during the work day as much as possible. Most of the candidates who felt comfortable enough to be interviewed also felt comfortable enough that they found private meeting rooms or empty offices for us to talk in. This was not always the case, however, so there were multiple other interview sites, including respondents’ homes (for both full-time and temporary clerical workers). A few interviews were held in empty offices on the twelfth floor of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Several times I interviewed people in their homes. In one case (the triple visit interview), I interviewed the worker in the ground-level food court of her office building. In another
case, I interviewed a worker in a nearby restaurant over the lunch period. This latter interview was especially challenging because of noise levels and the interruptions of wait staff.

Obtaining an extra-workplace location was especially important for temporary workers, since many of them did not have a regular workplace or access to a private workspace in which to hold our discussion. These interviews were held at the homes of the workers or at OISE.

The interview schedule given in Appendix B formed the basic outline for the interview. This was used so that it would follow closely the structure and questions of the survey sample and thus provide continuity and comparability. Although the questions often started with a closed-ended query, these were invariably enlarged upon through the use of probing open-ended questions, questions that varied with the interview and the direction either the interviewee or I moved in. While the tangential information gathered this way was not always directly relevant to the immediate discussion – although often it was – it was important to the creation of trust and openness between the interviewee and me. Sometimes, too, these marginally related comments and discussions (e.g., current family challenges and joys in several cases) led to deeper insights into the respondents and their work situations.
Recording, transcribing and analysing interview feedback

All interviewees were asked for permission before I turned on the digital device (the Olympus DM-20 voice and Music Recorder) I used to record the interviews. Using the recorder was beneficial for a couple of reasons. First, and most simply, it allowed me to capture accurately both the full responses and the tone in which they were told to me. This gave me a much richer store of information from which to work during the analysis and reflection stages. It also allowed me to see important throw-away lines that may have been lost otherwise. Secondly – and of great significance – it allowed me to focus entirely on the conversation, to be engaged in listening rather than the distracting work of writing.

(It is one of my limitations that when I write as I listen, I am effectively engaged in pre-analyzing what seems important at the moment and may miss critical input or feedback that will inform later discussion and even subsequent analysis.) The recorder was of great assistance in ensuring comprehensive and complete accounts of the important stories the clerical workers were telling me.

In one case, the interviewee did not at first grant me her permission. This was the respondent with whom I met thrice. On our third meeting she volunteered to be recorded, so her responses were recorded for the remainder of the interview. Since the first two interviews were relatively short and impeded by my need to take long-hand notes (in the first interview, for example, we talked mostly about her demographic background), this ultimately had some limited effect on the quality of the data I was able to solicit from her.
The third interview, during which the bulk of the pivotal qualitative feedback was obtained, was recorded and our discussion was candid and responsive.

Even as interviews proceeded, interviews were given over for transcription. I transcribed the first three interviews myself to give myself a feel for the material and remind myself of the interview content. This review was helpful in informing my interview style and question content during subsequent interviews as I saw places I could probe further, questions I could have pursued more deeply or in alternative directions.

Because the transcriptions of these lengthy interviews was very time-consuming (and I am not a very good typist), I turned the remaining interview audio files over to a professional typist who provided clear and structured (i.e., she included the questions as well as the responses, improving readability by using different ink colours to differentiate the two) transcripts of the interviews.

The transcribed interviews were then saved as text files and analyzed using the N6 qualitative analysis software program. Responses from interviewees were sorted into the following overarching categories: demographic profile; spousal/parental profile; general economic profile; general employment profile; job changes; unpaid work; education profile; job-related informal learning; volunteer-related informal learning; housework-related informal learning; general interest learning; usefulness of learning; learning and work relations; general attitudes; and other comments. Each of these information groupings was further exploded into sub-categories of connected information.
Final comments on data collection through interviews

This sample of clerical support workers can in no way be considered random. First, only clerical workers with two or more years in the labour force were eligible to participate in the study to ensure that respondents had enough experience to share a meaningful perspective. More significantly, given the difficulty of finding interview subjects, I talked with anyone and everyone who was willing. Only people who felt comfortable talking met with me; if I could have included those who would not – whether from fear, time constraints, lack of interest or other reason – the generalized profile of the office worker might well have looked very different from the one I present in this dissertation (specific brief summaries of the jobs held by interviewed clerical workers follow in Chapter 8).

On the other hand, since there really is no ‘typical’ office worker, this should not affect the value or validity of the discussion. The interviews were never meant to be representative, but rather illustrative. In addition, to garner a broader perspective of the occupation and alleviate some of the bias inherent in the interview sample, the discussion of the interviews is supported by a larger scale telephone survey conducted with labour force participants across Ontario.
EJRM Telephone Survey

As part of the Education-Job Requirements Match\textsuperscript{43} project, a survey of Ontario wage and salary employees was conducted using lengthy telephone interviews. The questionnaire used by the survey interviewers was very similar to the interview schedule documented in Appendix B. Indeed, the case study interview question schedule was modeled on the telephone survey schedule.

The survey was conducted with 1709 Ontario workers. Respondents with managerial or supervisory responsibility were then excluded, leaving a total of 1301 non-managerial wage and salary workers. Within that number, 364 fell into the professional category, 555 were service workers and 382 were industrial employees.

The data were also broken down into specific occupational groups using the National Occupational Classifications (NOC) codebook (2001). Of the 555 service workers, 121 were clerical workers (office workers) using the NOC categories. Table 8.1 in the next chapter shows the NOC composition of the surveyed clerical worker sample in more detail.

\textsuperscript{43} This project, initiated in 2003 under the direction of principle investigator Dr. D. W. Livingstone, was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Human Resources Council. Its purpose was the detailed investigation of the match between workers’ knowledge and skills and the requirements of their jobs.
Supporting Interviews

It seemed potentially valuable to listen to some firsthand accounts by managers and understand how they viewed the value and contribution of their clerical staff. Therefore, to round out the interview discussions, provide a more comprehensive account and gain a counter perspective, four management representatives were interviewed. Since I had gathered clerical respondents from a wide range of workplaces, I wanted my management interviews to reflect this diversity. Therefore I looked for managers in the private and public sectors as well as managers who worked with full-time staff and precariously-employed part-time and contract workers. I asked two managers with whom I had previously interacted in a professional setting if they would be willing to talk with me. Both of these managers agreed. Another manager I had initially contacted in the belief she was a clerical worker rather than the manager of clerical workers. She was willing to speak to me using the revised managerial interview questions. The fourth manager I called directly as this individual was responsible for the deployment of many temporary clerical workers through a large widely-present agency. As a result, I met with Finiola who was vice-president at a large financial institution; Gwenevra who was a manager in the Public Service; the team of Quiana and Rini who ran an independent transcription agency and provided their services through contingent workers; and Margriet who managed a temp services agency; her agency was part of a much larger human resources consulting firm.

The management interviews were considerably shorter than the worker interviews, lasting between 20 minutes and half an hour.
In keeping with the general methodology in this study, each of these respondents was covered under the ethical review requirements of the University of Toronto Ethics Committee and signed a release form both for the interview itself and the transcription/use thereof.

For a final take on the situation of clerical workers in the Toronto and area market, I met for coffee in an outdoor café on a pleasant Toronto day with Glynnis the executive director of a non-profit agency mandated to support and retrain clerical workers who, for whatever reason – job loss, job re-entry, recent immigration – needed to learn job search skills and upgrade their computer skills. This hour-long interview, although less formally conducted than the other management interviews, also met the requirements of the U of T Ethical Review Committee.

All of the manager interviews were transcribed and imported to N6 for analysis in a separate exercise from that of clerical workers. Analysis headers were linked to the topic areas of the interviews, that is: social/technical relations (between management and clerical workers); decision making/input (of clerical workers); industry changes (relative to clerical work); downsizing (of clerical workers and in the general employee population); education expected (in new clerical hires); training provided (to incumbent clerical workers); and other, miscellaneous comments.

These interviews, too, were transcribed and then analyzed using the N6 software.
Chapter 8: Clerical workforce composition, Ontario & Toronto

As Chapter 7 has described, information for the discussion in this and subsequent chapters will rely on feedback from an Ontario-wide telephone survey and detailed interviews with clerical workers from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Because the surveyed group is so much larger than the interviewed group, this group is likely to be more representative in terms of the broader picture of clerical work and clerical workers. In this chapter, therefore, I will profile the group of interviewed respondents against the statistical summary provided through the telephone survey.

Overview of Ontario clerical worker population

Although it is impossible to be specific, given the range of sites from which our interview sample was taken, I can identify some characteristics of the industry generally and some of workers in the public sector.

Public Service Clerical Workers

According to an analysis done by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (2004), the Office Administration Group (OAD) formed 38 percent of the collective membership in 2004. This group consisted of clerical services, court reporters, data processing
technicians, office administration staff and equivalent positions. Women comprised 85 percent of the bargaining unit – the largest unit in the union.

Of these employees, 28 percent were unclassified, a civil service euphemism for contract people without permanent job status. This percentage was exceeded only by the relative numbers of unclassified workers in the health care services – another area notorious for low pay and high female participation rates. Furthermore, the erosion of stable situations for clerical workers was also apparent in the dramatic increase in the ratio of unclassified to classified workers. Within the union as a whole, unclassified work assignments had increased from fifteen percent to twenty-five percent between 1993 and 2003, a massive increase of 67 percent. The job declassification statistics were not broken down by type of work; however, since this invariably seems to apply to the more “expendable” junior and entry-level positions, I can speculate with some confidence that the bulk of this increase lay in the clerical and health work/maintenance areas.

Overall, the number of employees in the union dropped by 40 percent between 1995 and 2003, a number credited to the cost-saving initiatives of the elected Ontario government. Once again, I can hypothesize that a majority of the cuts came at the more junior levels, where the work is seen to require fewer, lesser skills, and workers with such skill sets to be more dispensable and interchangeable.
General Composition of Ontario Clerical Work Occupations

Unionized clerical workers represent approximately 24 percent of the overall clerical work force (WALL Survey, 2004). That leaves more than three-quarters battling for work and recognition on their own, without the solidarity of the union to support their efforts.

Table 8.1: Secretarial and Clerical Worker Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Category</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 45 - 64</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or undergraduate degree</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training taken in past year for credit</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other formal training taken</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training planned</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income under $30,000</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Member</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating job loss</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2004 WALL survey (conducted through telephone interviews with approximately 6700 Canadians) provides a number of relevant statistics as Table 8.1 shows.

The first thing noticeable in this chart is the relative age difference between secretaries and clerical workers. While the percentage of clerical workers above 45 years old was comparable to their counterparts in other occupations, almost double the number of secretaries fell into that age category. Secretaries were also almost overwhelmingly
female – almost 95 percent – compared to 83 percent of clerical workers, a difference of more than eleven percent. These two figures together may be an indication that men are starting to re-enter the clerical field.

Secretaries also received significantly less training than their more junior counterparts. Since older workers generally take less training than younger workers, the discrepancy can readily be interpreted as being age-related. Further supporting such a hypothesis, greater numbers of clerical workers said they planned to take training than secretaries.

Nonetheless, despite their educational efforts, this group of clerical workers earned significantly less than people in other occupations. Approximately 56 percent of secretaries and clerical workers earned less than $30,000 per year while only 41 percent of workers in other fields fell below this income threshold. Perhaps this had to do with their fear of losing their jobs; at 26 percent, the number of clerical workers who thought they were somewhat or very likely to lose their job over the next year was almost double that of people in other fields of work.

Their low relative salaries and job instability have implications for Canada’s social infrastructure as a number of these workers head up their households and some of them have children to feed, clothe and educate. General statistics are cited in Chapter 3. While I have no data for the EJRM survey group as a whole, I can provide anecdotal evidence
based on the interviewed sample. Of the 21 women\textsuperscript{44} interviewed, two thirds were unpartnered and most of these women had children. Of the married women, at least one was the primary breadwinner for her family – a fact which led this unionized clerical worker to ask me during our meeting if I could help her find a part-time job to help bolster the family exchequer.

\textbf{Overview of EJRM Survey Results}

For the rest of this dissertation, all survey results quoted will be those taken from the EJRM survey, with illustrative comparisons and comments obtained through the case study interviews.

A few characteristics are immediately apparent when one looks at the demographic composition of the clerical occupations compared to the general Ontario labour force.\textsuperscript{45} Workforce composition as indicated by the results of the EJRM survey is summarized in Table 8.2.

\textsuperscript{44} Both of the men interviewed were heads of their households. One was single without children, the other was partnered with two children.

\textsuperscript{45} Note that the case study sample is not included here because of the non-random way the sample was selected.
Table 8.2: Demographic profile of office workers: EJRM Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Workers</th>
<th>All Workers excluding Service &amp; Office Workers</th>
<th>Service Workers excluding Office Workers</th>
<th>Office (clerical) Workers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>14 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>31 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53 %</td>
<td>65 %</td>
<td>43 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47 %</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>57 %</td>
<td>90 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $20G</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>32 %</td>
<td>31 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20G to 40G</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>38 %</td>
<td>56 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40G to $60 G</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>13 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60G and over</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visible Minority</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>77 %</td>
<td>79 %</td>
<td>75 %</td>
<td>76 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>54 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>24 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-ascribed class ID</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>34 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Middle</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>31 %</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Middle”</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of Birth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>76 %</td>
<td>76 %</td>
<td>77 %</td>
<td>79 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>21 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of these statistics have already been discussed in terms of general trends and profiles earlier in this study. To recapitulate, clerical work is dominated by women. Although less than half of the general workforce was female, more than 90 percent of office workers (i.e., clerical workers) were women.
Secondly, clerical work continues to attract new job entrants. Although 34 percent of the general workforce was under 35, 42 percent of clerical workers fell into the under-35 age group.

With respect to work derived income, less than a fifth (19 percent) of the general workforce (including students) earned less than $20,000 per year while almost a third (31 percent) of office workers earned less $20,000 per annum. At the other end of the income scale, 31 percent of the workforce earned more than $50,000 per year compared to less than one percent of clericals who reached this level of compensation.

It is interesting to note that in the general Ontario sample, clerical workers were disproportionately represented in the two youngest age categories compared to other occupations.

**A continued influx of women into clerical roles**

When one notes that more than 90 percent of office workers are women, it appears that clerical work remains an occupation to which women are attracted or streamed, despite the low wage levels and competition for diminishing numbers of positions. There are various reasons that may account for this ongoing entry of women into clerical occupations as the comments below illustrate.
Popular media have long portrayed clerical work as suitably feminine work. Emily was attracted by this image: “I was about 10 ... all the women in the books were secretaries so I always wanted to be a secretary ...”

Traditional family expectations also factor into the career choice. For Maggie’s parents, “Since we were all girls, it was just find a good job as a secretary, find a husband and get married. That was the kind of mindset they had.” Shelley’s family encouraged her to develop office work skills: “When I was in high school ... both my mother and my grandmother said to me that you have to take typing ...”

Schools have had a history of streaming of girls into ‘feminine’ clerical roles, especially those girls who may not be considered candidates for university enrolment because of financial constraints, social class or perceived ability. This was the type of guidance extended to Helena, ultimately affecting the choices she felt open to her: “... the big thing to take for girls was typing, being a secretary ... we had a high school counsellor ... I remember taking all the tests ... and again I was told to go into the business sector, typing ...” She furthermore pointed out: “The only option available, really, was to become a secretary. That’s the message I got. I was not encouraged to pursue anything in the sciences which is what I was very interested in.”
Perceptions of Racism and Discrimination

Almost half of the interviewed sample, including five of the nine public service workers, identified themselves as being part of a visible minority. This proportion is significantly higher than the general office worker population (21 percent). In the case of public service workers, this may be because the employer actively promoted the hiring of visible minority applicants in the latter two decades of the twentieth century leading to a proportionately higher percentage of visible minority clerical workers than in other workplaces. Alternatively, it may be due to the entry into clerical jobs, particularly call centre jobs, of foreign workers who have been excluded from the professions for which they formally studied in their countries of origin. It is also possible that this responsiveness is because these foreign-born workers had grown up in less reticent cultures than Canada’s. Ultimately, however, the reason for the anomaly is not at all clear.

Some of the clerical workers I interviewed noted that while they did not experience ethnic or racial discrimination, they did notice a difference in treatment. They attributed this to a variety of causes, few of them specifically race-related.46

46 The one person who talked at length about discrimination discussed it in terms of preferential treatment for a colleague of colour: “Why am I cleaning up after them for just taking one day off? ... she’s paid the same salary as me to do the same job ... so she should be able to slide into the job, do what is necessary, make sure it’s done correctly the first time.”
Helena, for example, commented on discrimination stemming from sexism:

*Women are a visible minority simply by the fact that we’re women… I’ve always kept this in the back of my mind that as a woman you’re treated differently.*

Some, Danielle among them, felt stigmatized by their union involvement: “*It’s my union involvement. It’s a continued attack on myself.*”

Some felt harassed by management because of their competence. Emily said: “*I have been doing the job for so long, I think that people think I have too much power.*” Maggie felt discriminated against by her manager because of her: “*level of education. I don’t know if it’s just that or if she knows what I’m capable of doing so I’m not sure.*”

A couple of respondents also commented on discrimination due to their workplace status. Shelley, a white Canadian-born female who had previously occupied a much more senior clerical role, noted that it was because she was: “*female, also by being in a junior position. So I’m considered low on the totem pole.*” Naomi added: “*It’s hard for me to explain, for example, maybe my opinions not being taken into account ... my opinion has not much value.*” For Naomi, an immigrant from Central America, racism may well have been an unstated contributing factor. Although her manager was very supportive of her and her work, at least one other manager in her department (to my personal knowledge) was actively discriminatory.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ This manager worked in a different group from Naomi and bore no responsibility to her or for her work. When this manager left the organization for personal reasons, Naomi’s immediate manager expressed to me how much she had detested her colleague’s racist behaviour remarking that she had had to intervene actively to halt and to mitigate its effects.
Racism can be a subtle and insidious pervasion, so these comments are not to be taken to mean that these workers did not experience racial discrimination; however, it does indicate that for this group other forms of discrimination were more apparent to them.

**Unionization**

In Chapter 3, I pointed out that massive unionization in the public service sector during the 1960s resulted in the unionization of most of its clerical staff. The government and its associated agencies (represented by public service unions) remain the primary sector in which clerical workers have union representation. Their union affiliation has not noticeably forestalled job loss or job fragility.

According to Canadian census figures, between 1991 and 2001 the number of traditional clerical positions\(^{48}\) declined by twenty percent (adapted from de Wolff, 2005; see also Morissette & Johnson, 2007). With the disappearance of these positions, power is shifting even more strongly from the employee to the employer, a situation that appears to be as true for unionized staff as it is for the non-unionized.

In the national Canadian Public Service, for example, one manager commented that of the eleven clerical workers supporting her a few years ago, only one remained. In the

\(^{48}\) Included in this metric are: secretaries; general office workers; records and file clerks; receptionists and switchboard operators; accounting and related clerks; data entry clerks; banking, insurance and financial clerks; administrative clerks; correspondence, publication and related clerks. Note that when the occupation of customer service clerk, (a category which includes the rapidly growing field of call centre agent) is added, the decline falls to 11.5 percent. See Table 1 for specific details.
provincial Ontario Public Service, clerical workers have been experiencing massive job cuts. At the time of the case study interviews, these workers were bracing themselves for yet another onslaught of job slashing. When I asked Beatrice about her job security, she responded:

*I would have answered this question differently last week but after last week I would say it’s very likely that I will lose it because of what’s happening with the government right now … there is a lot of outsourcing going on … and that’s where my job is a little threatened at this point.*

Corrie, another interviewee, told me:

*Most likely most people will lose their job because they have to restructure and then they have to lay off people, there are so many people. You know, six branches will all be coming to one so they won’t need all these people … at my age, I’m very worried …*

For many clerical workers, their incomes are vital to the financial viability of their families; they feel they cannot take chances by openly and actively supporting their union and its aims. Case study respondent and local executive Isolde commented on this:

*I can understand their point, because we went on strike last year, we lost about $6,000. And we didn’t get anything back. And, you know, people like myself and many others who did stay out, guess what, when promotions occurred in the office, they were given to people who crossed … We did get increases, but then we have to pay extra for the dental. Yes … so whatever we got, we paid it back.*

Union activism becomes dangerous when the number of jobs is declining and competition for jobs is increasing. In these circumstances, workers feel that openly campaigning for more from the employer places their own employment at risk.
Class Identification

Despite their low status and poor earnings relative to other occupations (see Appendix B), 35 percent of the survey sample clerical workers assessed themselves to be of upper or upper middle class, a proportion statistically similar to the 40 percent of professional workers, somewhat higher than the 27 percent of service workers and much higher than the 21 percent of industrial workers who identified themselves in these two class categories. Possible reasons for the way the predominantly female clerical workers class-identify as they do might include tendencies to either align themselves with their bosses or take their class-identification from their partners and spouses.

It is also possible that an aspiration to have or appear to have middle-class status is another contributor to the class identification of these workers especially for workers who grew up in social strata deemed to be lesser than middle class.\footnote{Freeman (2000), for example, documented the situation of informatics workers in Barbados. Although their work environments were quite stringently constrained and their hourly wages no greater – and often lower – than workers in field or factory work, they preferred the clean and orderly environment of the office and invariably dressed and behaved “professionally” to seem middle-class.}

Other reasons have been discussed earlier in this dissertation.

Case study clerical workers self-identified at a much lower class level than their clerical counterparts in the Ontario sample – only seventeen percent, half of the Ontario rate, saw themselves as upper or upper middle class; this difference is likely attributable to the union alignment of the Public Service workers interviewed. Many of these OPSEU members were actively involved in union activities and aligned themselves with the...
union’s mission, rather than with their managers. Their close affinity with their union’s aims and activities may account for their stronger class identification with the lower middle and working classes.  

Types of clerical jobs held

Job titles of surveyed clerical workers

The composition of the EJRM sample group, against which the detailed comments from the interview case study are described, is shown in Table 8.3 below:

Table 8.3: Composition of Ontario Clerical Workforce (EJRM Survey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOC Code</th>
<th>NOC Job Title</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1241</td>
<td>Secretaries (Except Legal and Medical)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1242</td>
<td>Legal Secretaries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1243</td>
<td>Medical Secretaries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1411</td>
<td>General Office Clerks</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1413</td>
<td>Records and File Clerks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1414</td>
<td>Receptionists and Switchboard Operators</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1422</td>
<td>Data Entry Clerks</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1423</td>
<td>Typesetters and Related Occupations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1431</td>
<td>Accounting and Related Clerks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1432</td>
<td>Payroll Clerks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1433</td>
<td>Tellers, Financial Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1434</td>
<td>Banking, Insurance and Other Financial Clerks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1435</td>
<td>Collectors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1441</td>
<td>Administrative Clerks</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1442</td>
<td>Personnel Clerks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1452</td>
<td>Correspondence, Publications and Related Clerks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1453</td>
<td>Customer Service, Information and Related Clerks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1454</td>
<td>Survey Interviewers and Statistical Clerks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>119</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(M. Raykov: EJRM NOC codes included in Office Case Study, by e-mail, Oct. 5, 2006)

Note that the alignment with the working classes was somewhat ambivalent for a few of the unionized clerical workers. Three of them indicated aspirations to management roles either in or outside the union.

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Note that all categories of clerical work (as described in earlier tables) are not represented by the survey sample; however, a sufficient range of typical clerical occupations are included to form a useful backdrop to the discussion that ensues in the remainder of this dissertation.

**Interviewed clerical workers: job summaries**

The 23 interviewed clerical workers displayed a wide divergence of responsibility and activity, even when the job titles were similar. This is an important point; although the information for the EJRM survey is limited to the job titles and occupational categories listed in Table 8.3, disparity of job responsibility is also likely to be present among holders of similar job titles in this group.

Their respective job roles of the case study interviewees are summarized below. Note that respondents self-identified themselves to be part of the clerical (i.e., administrative support) work force. The respondents are identified by pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

**Aubrey** was a Research Coordinator for a large retailer; in addition to helping his manager prepare presentations and locating Canadian retail statistics (mostly from Statistics Canada) for his department’s clients, he maintained his department’s small
research library and monitored work submitted by external suppliers for timeliness, accuracy and completeness.

**Naomi** was a Research Assistant who spent most of her time compiling data and filled in at the Reception Desk when necessary.

**Corrie** was an Outreach Customer Service Clerk who visited hospitals, community centres, shelters and various other locations to issue health cards and register births and deaths; in her role she had intimate contact with a wide variety of people and often provided a listening ear to people in pain or mourning.

**Paulina** was a Call Centre Specialist who spent her days answering telephone calls in a mutual fund call centre.

**Danielle** was a sometime Customer Service Representative, sometime Administrative Assistant at a government office. As part of her responsibilities, she answered the phone as “voice of the office to the public;” in addition, she said: you’re actually support for the entire branch…on a daily basis you support the particular supervisors. So they will come to you and ask you to type letters, filing, making travel arrangements, ordering food” – besides that, she was expected to perform “other duties as assigned,” which, she pointed out, allowed her employer to pay her a lower rate while providing higher rated work.
**Isolde** was an Administrative Assistant who supported two ministry consultants; she answered the telephone, opened the mail and responded to email information requests; she also created regular reports on ministry activity.

**Renata** was an Administrative Assistant at a consultancy firm; she spent a lot of her time cross-checking the billing submissions of the firm’s consultants; she also made the travel arrangements, set up meetings, took care of timesheets and expense documentation.

**Shelley** was a contract Administrative Assistant but, she said,

*Titles mean nothing … I do a lot of tracking of information and recording of certain pieces of information, like contracts, getting things signed, I do follow ups on that. I prepare contracts. I take problem calls … I do I-charts … in Excel and they compare how many parts have been inspected to how many parts have been rejected … Stuff like that and basically I am a babysitter. I make sure that people have filled out their paperwork properly, to make sure that they have included all the information that I need to have for tracking. I do a lot of repetitive unnecessary stuff to be honest; they have not fine-tuned that at all.*

**Helena** was a Real Estate Officer whose role entailed visiting people to inform them of the government’s intention and right to expropriate part of their property. Just as Corrie did, she spent a lot of time on the road interacting with a diverse group of people. Her job required her to interpret right-of-way legislation in ways sensitive to the reactions of those subject to expropriation.

**Kara** was the Administrative Assistant to an Associate Dean who provided general administrative assistance and managed the Dean’s calendar and also coordinated the
department’s teaching assistants, including posting the openings, pre-screening the applications and completing all on-boarding requirements for the new TA (teaching assistant) hires; she also managed faculty letters and cross-appointments.

Franca was a Requisition Administrator for a shared services bureau; much of her work was online, distributing ministry requisitions, reporting on workflow, approving potential suppliers under some carefully structured conditions.

Gabrielle was an Administrative Coordinator for a records office She said she, “Helps with the files, let them know which files go to the Destinations, which files are to be sent to the records files and which files they can keep” for a government ministry.

George was an Information Retrieval Assistant whose day consisted of ordering stored information on behalf of archival investigators, filing documentary materials, ensuring the accuracy of filing information against the actual location of archived files. He found and stored boxes of information, coordinated transport of materials from one site to another and filled in for other members of the team (e.g., circulation desk) as needed.

Laura was an Office Legal Assistant in a small firm; she said, “I do whatever they tell me.” In fact, that turned out to be general administrative duties such as telephone call answering and letter-writing, but also the type of legal research at the Federal Court normally allocated to law clerks and, after that, “if they have motions to prepare, or faxes,
personal letters, general correspondence then I have, depending on what office, I have bills to get to, accounts payable, do the receivables, invoices.”

Jennifer was Executive Assistant to a VP of HR in a large retailing organization who screened her boss’s mail, telephone messages and callers; she helped him prepare reports and generally supported him in his daily activity.

Ophelia was an Executive Assistant whose primary responsibility was to manage the president’s schedule and set up meetings but who also supported the finance director and everyone else who showed up at her desk with a request. In addition, she was expected to prepare reports, look after the arrangements for various meetings and help the Human Resources Department with special events.

Vanessa was an Executive Assistant working in temporary jobs; not currently in an assignment, she said, “I’d be doing just about anything to work with my boss and make his life easier...”

Beatrice was a Medical Records Clerk at a local hospital, currently on secondment to the Union as an organizer; in her hospital job, she spent all day on the computer checking patient records against a variety of compliance standards; she sometimes communicated with doctors to confirm their records and notes, but this was only via electronic interaction.
Maggie was a Medical Research Assistant who logged in data forms and transcribed booklets (mostly for surveys and questionnaires) and did the art and layout for the department newsletter and flyers.

Theresa was a part-time Medical Receptionist at a long term care facility; it was her job to open and close the shifts, to ensure a secure and safe environment (not an easy task since patients sometimes wandered), and to do the typing, filing, record retentions, data entry, mail distribution.

Uma was part-time Constituency Assistant to a Trustee; as such, she helped the trustee prepare speeches and attended the meetings, handling the sign-in sheets and listening for information the trustee might miss.

Wilma had been an Investigations Clerk with a mandate to monitor and help police the gaming industry until she was released as part of a restructuring initiative; when interviewed, she was a temporary clerical worker who took on whatever jobs she could find to support her family.

As Shelley noted, job titles were not necessarily illustrative of the functions that employers asked their clerical support staff to perform. When the expectations on Isolde, Renata, Shelley and Kara are compared, it is apparent that their roles were quite different,
although their job titles were very similar. Customer Service Representatives formed another case on point – while Paulina spent all day wearing a telephone head set, Corrie was out and about actively engaging with the people she supported and Danielle fell somewhere in between in terms of the flexibility of her day.

Paulina, Corrie and Danielle show polarization in the very different levels of discretion they had in their customer service roles. Similarly, the administrative assistant role Isolde filled allowed her little discretion (“the layout of the report, the way to word the document ...”) while Shelley – despite the temporary nature of her position – was required to exercise considerable discretion to ensure the smooth functioning of her office.

For many clerical workers, even on the level of their job tasks (exclusive of the invisible relational attributes of their jobs), their performance requirements seemed to far exceed the terms of their administrative support mandates. Laura, for example, for a salary below $30,000, did the work of a law clerk and also acted as the de facto in-house bookkeeper. Shelley, a temp with less than a year’s experience, had become her firm’s go-to person and held large amounts of the organization’s informal memory. Ophelia’s days were crammed with responsibilities that caused her to regularly work into the evenings (although not for extra pay).
Clerical workers in Ontario: summary

From the worker vignettes documented in this chapter, I note a number of characteristics that describe both the work and the workers.

First, it is obvious that clerical work is not easily constrained to one set of work expectations. Clerical roles range from financial analysis (Franca) to de facto law clerking (Laura), from data entry (Maggie) to data compilation (Naomi), from information and physical records retrieval (George) to executive support (Jennifer). What they have in common is their focus on administratively serving people above them in the organization hierarchy. Despite the variety of their roles and levels of responsibility of the interview subjects, from an organizational perspective these roles were almost invisible, their outcomes almost always embedded the achievements of others. (The work of call centre agents such as Paulina and outreach clerks such as Corrie and Helena was somewhat exceptional in this regard as they were more clearly in charge of the outcomes of their work efforts.)

Despite the constraints on the work content, job opportunities, status, and salary, clerical work has continued to see new entrants. One reason is the continued streaming of women into clerical work by families and schools. The growth of the call centre industry, with a concomitant increase in the entry of men into electronically supported customer service roles, is likely another contributing factor.
For the case study respondents, all of whom had been working in a clerical occupation for a number of years, there was a clear demarcation between two groups of workers. The clerical workers of the first group, the smaller of the two, had found both interest and opportunity in growing their careers within the clerical occupational cluster. This group included people such as Jennifer who had professionalized her administrative skills through active engagement in a professional association, George who had taken a recognized archiving program for his role in information retrieval, Aubrey who said he had an open mandate to create his job and Corrie whose desire to serve the public was clearly satisfied by her role as outreach clerk.

The second, larger, group lacked either interest, opportunity or both. While some members of this group continued to struggle – Uma and Paulina, for example, who were both looking for employment stability – many were retraining themselves to make it possible for them to leave clerical work entirely. Shelley, for instance, planned to use her ECE knowledge to open a daycare and Uma was studying to obtain her licence as an immigration consultant. Among this group were also those who had resigned themselves to unsatisfactory careers and were counting down on their work calendars until the day they would be liberated by retirement.

In the next chapter I will look at some of measured characteristics of clerical work that influence the level of satisfaction clerical incumbents have with their roles.
Chapter 9: Of learning, work and worker satisfaction

In previous chapters, I have written about the disparity between the general educational requirements employers expect candidates for clerical jobs to have and the amount of value and respect ascribed to those doing clerical work. In this context, it will be instructive to measure the educational attainments of clerical workers against those in select other occupational categories as identified in the Ontario EJRM survey: professional, industrial and non-clerical service workers.

Chart 9.1: Educational Attainment (EJRM Survey)

Not surprisingly, professionals have the highest overall level of educational attainment but, as Chart 9.1 illustrates, clerical workers have overall higher qualifications than non-clerical service workers and industrial workers. More specifically, 53 percent of clerical workers have a college or university level diploma, certificate or degree, while one percent is qualified at the post-graduate level. Of the remainder, 17 percent have completed some post-high school studies. This compares to 42 percent of workers in service occupations generally who have college or university degrees 3 percent with post-
graduate designations. Only 37 percent of industrial workers have post-secondary qualification.

A number of the interviewed clerical workers obtained their certifications and diplomas outside Canada. They all felt their education was at least to Canadian standards and several considered their background to have been more educationally demanding. As one told me:

*I've got a good story to tell you... when I came to Canada, I did a psychology test for a company I worked with and was actually rated higher than a Canadian university graduate... but I never finished school... I hated exams so I never finished. And then I went to a commercial school to study key-punching and typing.*

**Appropriateness of Education to Job**

Approximately 41 percent of the surveyed office workers said that their work was unrelated to their education. Just over half said their education was somewhat related. Only 16 percent said their education was closely related to their work. Although the perceived mismatch is moderate compared to workers in other (non-professional) occupations, it is surprising in that many women have been streamed into the so-called “feminine” occupations; those women not planning to attend university, nursing schools or teacher’s college were almost invariably directed into clerical occupations.  

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51 I’m still astonished at the high number of women in my own high school who identified ‘secretary’ as their chosen career direction. According to my 1967 high school yearbook, 31 – almost half! – of the 64 non-university stream female grade twelve graduates who identified a career ambition (including marriage) planned to go into clerical work of some kind.
Part of the perceived irrelevance of their educational attainments may be due to the changes in work methods over the past decades. Some clerical workers in the case study sample, for example, took shorthand which has since become an obsolete skill in the North American office environment.

For others in the interview group, their educational path was interrupted and/or abbreviated by personal issues and choices. Some interviewees told me they wanted or planned to attend university and followed an academic preparatory program, but lacked funds or found that personal concerns (notably romantic liaisons and/or pregnancy) forced them to default into clerical roles.

**Credential match**

**Chart 9.2: Education-credential match**

Similar to their counterparts working in professional, industrial and non-clerical service occupations, the surveyed clerical workers were much more likely to feel their credentials were higher than the employer asked for, at least officially. As Chart 9.2 indicates, just
under half of service and clerical workers felt educationally well-matched to their roles while almost forty percent said they had more credentials than their employers required.

Although several of the interviewed clerical workers specifically commented that their employers did not require credentials, they ultimately came to conclusions similar to those expressed by the survey respondents. Corrie, for example, denied that her employer required a college degree or diploma but then added that “most people are from college... if I wasn’t in the government years ago, for me now to get there it would be a slim chance because you couldn’t beat the college students.” Emily told me that only high school was required, but then commented that: “Most people will have bachelor degrees that apply for this position.” George represented an extreme instance – he did not have a college degree and quite legitimately felt, as he seemed to be treated as a very effective performer, it to be unnecessary. However, he noted that a Masters degree was a required minimum for any new aspirants to his role.

Maggie expressed her frustration with the demand for educational credentials that vastly exceeded the requirements of a job she wanted:

*Most of what I do now is clerical admin work. To be honest with you, I think it’s pretty basic... for someone to ask for education over experience and knowledge... The one job that was available was spotting errors and such for questionnaires so you would need more of a clinical background but it’s something that can easily be learned. Somebody with a master’s degree, how would they have clinical background and I have been working on the study and would know it better. It’s a little bit frustrating. I would like to have an education but I don’t want to do it for this job... I think in this position when you’ve been there for a long time they should make some allowances and I think they should have more opportunities for people to move up without the education.*
Paulina said her employers wanted someone who “would take the job seriously,” without reference to college credentials. However, it should be pointed out that she had both a degree in alternative medicine (graduating from a three-year, university accredited program in British Columbia) and had attended college for 2½ years to learn financial planning.

Managers, too, disavowed the need for clerical workers to have extensive educational credentials. However, although the vice-president of human resources I interviewed said that hiring overqualified people was not desirable because they would lead to “a bad fit,” the three women she had successively hired to staff the reception desk and greet visitors were all college graduates. In another example, a director of an office worker re-training centre told me that she had seen an executive assistant posting requiring the completion of a Master’s degree.

**Performance match**

Clerical workers were slightly more likely than workers in other occupational sectors to consider themselves underemployed with respect to the actual responsibilities and performance expectations of their roles. (Not surprisingly, given the likelihood of specialized training, professional workers were least likely to feel mismatched to their work roles.) Almost half (48 percent) of clerical workers said they needed lower educational levels than they had attained.
This compares to 39 percent of industrial and service workers who felt underemployed in relation on this dimension\textsuperscript{52} and supports Burris’s prediction (1983, 109) of a quarter century ago that overeducation and underemployment would remain an ongoing problem for clerical workers, forcing them to confront the continuing challenge of needing to keep building their knowledge and skill bases while coping with routinization and deskilling in the roles that they actually are asked to fill.

The relatively high proportion of clerical workers who assessed themselves to be underemployed in terms of job performance requirements – despite countervailing trends of re-skilling and up-skilling discussed previously – reaffirms broad disparity between credential and performance standards demanded by employers.

Chart 9.3: Education-Performance Match

Clerical workers themselves seemed to agree that the performance expectations for their roles did not closely match the credential levels their employers demanded. Looking at the trend shown in Chart 9.3, it is apparent that clerical works were least likely of the

\textsuperscript{52} As with credential requirements, people in professional occupations showed the greatest synchronicity between job and education. Only 23 percent described themselves as underemployed while 59 percent felt well matched.
surveyed groups to feel well matched to their jobs and most likely to feel the job did not well utilize their capabilities.

Of the clerical workers I interviewed, for example, only one said he needed a university degree to perform his job; the others said their jobs needed no more than high school diplomas or some (but not full) college completion or had no special requirements.

Educational levels were well matched to job performance expectations for only 38 percent of clerical workers, a proportion considerably lower than that observed in other occupational groups. For industrial and non-clerical service workers, good performance matches were found in 51 percent and 48 percent of cases.

Fewer than 14 percent of clerical workers – a similar percentage to industrial and non-clerical service workers, but slightly lower than professional workers – deemed themselves to be underqualified when comparing their own educational levels to those required by their jobs.

Subjective Underemployment

Subjectively, too, office workers were more likely to feel underemployed than counterparts in other occupational sectors; 44 percent of clerical workers felt underemployed compared to 34 percent of industrial workers and 38 percent of non-

53 Of the 23 interviewees, 18 provided information related to credential levels required by their employers and only sixteen related the level they required for successful job performance.
clerical service workers. Only 54 percent of clerical workers felt well-matched to their jobs compared to 62 percent of non-clerical service workers.

Chart 9.4: Subjective job-education match

In other occupational groups, 66 percent of industrial workers and 69 percent of professional workers felt their education matched their job level.

Very few workers in any occupation felt themselves to be underqualified. Of the workers in the case study, only Ophelia, whose role had expanded as her experience within the company grew, felt she was underqualified for her job; “I feel that I am in over my head. For the position that I am occupying I am not really qualified and I am not able to do what they want me to do.” When I probed further, however, her feelings of inadequacy were due largely to her workload: “I work too many hours for the requirements of my job. I am working about a 70-hour week to meet the requirements of a 35-hour per week job.” She doubted her professional capabilities rather than attributing her difficulties to her onerous work load.
Clerical workers and underemployment

Leaving aside the professional group of workers who, because of their increased levels of specialized training and associated social status, had lower levels of mismatch on all dimensions of employment mismatch explored here (their self-assessed levels of underemployment hovered around the 25 percent mark for each metric), a couple of interesting points become apparent.

In terms of qualification, approximately equal proportions industrial (38 percent), service (38 percent) and clerical (36 percent) workers said they were underemployed. However, the picture changes when performance expectations and feelings of underemployment are examined.

In terms of performance, there was a 9 percent gap between clerical workers and their counterparts in industrial and non-clerical service occupations. Although the gap shrinks slightly when the subjective underemployment of clerical workers is compared to the level perceived by their closest comparative group, non-clerical service workers, the 6 percent gap remains a noticeable one. Chart 9.5 illustrates the discrepancies.
Chart 9.5: Self-Assessed Underemployment by Type & Occupation

It should also be pointed out that the non-clerical service workers expressed similar levels of underemployment for all three metrics related to education-job matching. The pattern for clerical workers is much more jagged. While 36 percent stated they were underemployed credentially, the mismatch shot up to 48 percent who said they experienced performance underemployment and dropped again to 44 percent who expressed feeling subjective underemployment. Although this difference of 4 percent is not significant statistically, it calls for more research.

According to Burris (1983), women are discouraged from expressing dissatisfaction and anger by socialization practices, practices that result to some extent at least, in women expressing higher levels of satisfaction with their lot than they may actually feel. It is possible that the disparity in expressed feelings of performance and subjective education/job match is a statistical glitch in this study. However, it may well be that the findings of my study are a natural consequence of the socialization effects Burris contended to exist. The reason for the over-expression of subjective match relative to performance match lies outside the scope of this discussion, but is a point worth considering in future studies.
In summary, the trend seems clear: while clerical workers, in particular permanently engaged employees, are no more likely to be underemployed credentially than workers in other non-professional occupational categories, they are more likely to experience underemployment on both performance and subjective dimensions than workers in other occupations. Because contingent workers are only fleetingly part of the corporate machine, the work they are assigned and the hourly rates they are paid are even more likely to discount their capabilities and their contributions.

Furthermore, the categorization of underemployment among clerical workers described above does not take into account the additional performance expectations engendered by the undiscerned skills embedded in the relational components of their jobs. The implicit expectation of skilled relational practice suggests itself as an additional source for feelings of underemployment and undervaluation expressed as subjective underemployment by clerical workers. Because they have less opportunity to develop organizational networks or build complex relationships of trust (partly because of their abbreviated work terms, sometimes also because permanent employees may resent their presence\(^{54}\)), contingent clerical workers are even more likely than permanent clerical workers to find both functional and relational capabilities to be underutilized and under-recognized.

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\(^{54}\) Isolde, an administrative assistant told me: “I see that they bring in a lot of new people who are not qualified, who have no skills, no working experience, and they’re brought in because they know someone and they are provided all the training, while permanent employees who have been here a long time and would like to be promoted or are interested in learning new skills... get nowhere...[they have brought in new people... contract, an agency. Contract and agency].”
A Sense of Value

Just as their roles varied widely, so did the feelings clerical workers had about how they were valued by their employers. The value their employers attributed can be viewed along several metrics: salary; career opportunities; job control/work saturation.

The areas were often linked, but not necessarily so. Laura, for example, did law clerk work for a low annual salary. Her work expanded with her willingness to take on new responsibilities:

Each year I take on two new jobs it seems like. When I first started, I rarely did their legal; just the odd thing here and there. I did their correspondence, their invoices, their accounts payable and receivables. The following year I thought I was just going to be diligent and I started to do more of their accounting, more bank recs\textsuperscript{55}, more of their office supplies, just everything; I just took that on. The following year I had to learn a new accounting system and I got fed up and said I wanted more legal work, so they started giving me more, but only they went from legal assistant to law clerk.

She managed calendars for each lawyer she supported as well as her own completely separate calendar. Despite her freedom and job discretion (and although in our interaction she seemed to flourish in the demands on her competence), she felt more that work was dumped on her than provided as an opportunity for growth.

Salary

Salary level is one yardstick by which clerical workers measure their worth to their employers. Burris (1983, 219) used the term “relative deprivation.” Clerical workers,

\textsuperscript{55} Reconciliations
especially those in the public sector who can quite easily compare their salaries with their colleagues’ because they are based on job titles, were very conscious of what they felt should be their own entitlement and expressed feelings of unfairness. George, Corrie and Danielle all described different reasons for what they perceived to be wage discrimination. Of the three, only George discussed his salary limitations in terms of the duties associated with his work. Both Corrie and Danielle described feelings of relative deprivation.

George commented that a job design expert: “...did an evaluation of my job and apparently I’m being paid $10,000 less than I should be.”

Corrie compared her Toronto salary and status to income and job levels of colleagues in Kingston: “They should create jobs higher for us. If I was in Kingston, I would be in a higher job at this time ... They get to go up to higher money, higher classifications.”

Danielle said:

My position is an administrative representative ... they call it an administrative assistant or administrative representative ... we have different job titles so different salary scales ... at the bottom of all our specs it says ‘and other duties as assigned’ ... if the administrative assistants are not there you are picking up... but you are not getting paid at the same salary.

Danielle also felt very strongly that her employer was using secondments and developmental assignments as ways to keep salaries low. Where it is possible in the
private sector (most commonly among workers in large corporations), the same types of comparisons⁴⁶ are conducted. Paulina, for example, told me:

There are people that do less than we do two corridors away from us and they are level seven and we are level four. It makes me crazy when I think about it.

According to www.jobfutures.ca, clerical workers generally tend to earn less than workers of similar educational attainment in other occupational fields. For example, it is documented in the Job Futures site that people with a two-year community college or CEGEP diploma leading to a general secretary occupation can expect to earn approximately a quarter less per annum than equivalently qualified people in other occupations average – and be more than 20 percent more vulnerable to unemployment.⁵⁷

These projections are born out by the statistics. While only 30 percent of industrial workers earned less than $30,000 per year, 59 percent of clerical workers in the survey sample were in this income bracket despite their generally higher educational levels. The numbers were reversed at the other end of the spectrum; while 36 percent of industrial workers earned in excess of $50,000 per year, less than one percent of clerical workers did. Extending this further, a fifth of industrial workers claimed income levels at $60K or higher but none of the clerical workers did.

⁴⁶ Comparison is not always possible; in many small companies, there are simply no others in an equivalent role to compare to; in larger companies without clearly disseminated pay guidelines/ranges, comparison may be discouraged. In my own (early) work experience, I clearly remember my boss telling me not to share a pay increase he had authorized for me; managers (i.e., men) at his level, he said, never did so, only admin staff (i.e., women) and others of that job status, implying it was vulgar. In retrospect, it was an interesting small exercise in power politics…

⁵⁷ According to this website, as of 2004 clerical work graduates could expect average annual earnings of $21,800 with an average unemployment rate of eleven percent after completing this type of two-year program. Graduates of equivalent programs in other specialties averaged $27,500 annual earnings and a nine percent unemployment rate.
A closer comparison might be made between clerical workers and non-clerical service workers. Once again, clerical workers suffer significantly in terms of their income levels. While 49 percent of service workers earn less than $30,000, 59 percent of clerical workers do. Moving up one decade of income (to a maximum income level of $39,999), 66 percent of service workers are accounted for but fully 87 percent of clerical workers. Among service workers, 22 percent said they earned $60,000 or more but, as noted above, no clerical workers earned in this upper range.

Chart 9.6: Income Comparison – Clerical and Other Occupational Groups

As Chart 9.6 shows, therefore, clerical worker pay scales start at very low levels and appear to have a very low salary cap compared to any other occupational group.

The income pattern for office workers points distinctly downward. Danielle was on the Board of Directors for her union and spent fifty percent of her time fighting for the
workers she represented. She told me that in Toronto, government-employed clerical workers:

*Are living in poverty if they are living in the city of Toronto ... Poverty in the way that you would be able to pay your rent but not be keep your bills up, your groceries and what not ... in the OA6 category, take home pay would be about $1040.00. Every 2 weeks, now that’s your take home. Now the average rent here ... for a one bedroom is $800.00 - $900.00 a month, that’s one of your pay cheques gone. Then you’ve got your utilities, your gas, your mileage, whatever else, phone cable, whatever else you’ve got ... It leaves you nothing; it leaves you in the minus in the city of Toronto.*

Given that unionized office workers tend to receive higher salaries than their non-unionized private sector counterparts,58 Danielle’s assessment clearly outlines how significant an issue salary is for clerical workers, many of whom support families on their income. In the case of our small interview sample, none of the nine unionized clerical workers in the case study had a salary below $30,000, although one of the six non-unionized workers in permanent and all of the temp/contract workers – including those in full-time contract roles – did.

As Chart 9.7 indicates, the wages for non-unionized workers are considerably lower than those of their unionized counterparts.

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58 A Statistics Canada analysis (Fang and Verna, 2002) identified a union wage differential of two percent for financial, administrative and clerical staff based on the Workplace and Employee Survey of 1999. They noted that the union wage gap appears to be shrinking and speculate that this may partially be due to technology advances, globalization and deregulation, which have put dampening pressure on union demands. However, both the interview sample and the case study group show greater union/non-union income disparities than Fang and Verna found. What can be stated with some certainty is that, whether large or small, a disparity exists.
Chart 9.7: Salary Comparison, Unionized and Non-Unionized Workers
(Based on sample of 22 union members and 78 clerical workers without any worker group affiliation)

It should be pointed out that the findings of this metric are based on quite a small sample. However, the case study group, although too small to be valid or reliable, showed a similar pattern. For the full-time workers in the case study, nine unionized and seven non-unionized workers shared their gross income for 2003. Average income for the unionized workers ranged between $38,889 and $48,888; average income for non-unionized workers ranged between $31,111 and $39,999. (Part-time workers, none of whom belonged to a union, were excluded from this calculation.)

Through the low salaries they pay, employers send a message which their clerical workers can easily interpret to mean that administrative support roles have low value to the organization.

Poor pay also indicates quite clearly that employers see clerical workers as easily replaceable. Clerical workers, however, dispute their employers’ assessment. They do not

59 The sample of clerical workers included seven workers who belonged to non-union professional organizations. This group also had overall higher income levels than non-affiliated workers (68 percent had annual incomes of between $30,000 and $59,999 compared to 29 percent of non-affiliated clerical workers. However, while potentially indicative, the sample size was too small to be included in the chart.
believe themselves easily replaceable. Beatrice said her role requires six to eight weeks of training plus a year of experience to become competent. Emily commented that her role required her to perform a layered and complex set of skills:

> For you to work in a position to be an administrative secretary, and working with senior people you have to have the basic knowledge and skills, the functions of management, you have to have that knowledge to do your work. Managing meaning even how you manage yourself and your work and your time...You need to know how to do it. You have to have some type of skill.

A number of the interviewed subjects said that if a person were experienced, he or she could pick up the job basics fairly quickly – but only if the person were already knowledgeable and skilled. Vanessa thought her temp role could be learned in a week to a month, but “It depends on the person though. I’m going on thirty years of experience, too.”

Even temporary worker Shelley, at the end of her contract, did not feel her employer had properly appreciated the value she had brought to the organization and would recognize her contribution only after she had left the company:

> My workload has tripled since I started there ... it fills a day and then some ... And then you get someone calling you and there is a disaster – everything gets dropped and put to the backburner and as I said lots of what I do is deadline driven and I’m only one person. I was told that I can’t do overtime ... I have already given her my terms ... My salary would have to be increased ... and she said I don’t think that we are in a position and I told her well I don’t think that I’m in a position to provide all of my experience, knowledge and expertise at a bargain basement price.
Career Opportunities

A few decades ago, workplaces offered career paths within the administrative support job stream – because there was a stream. Young people could join an organization as junior clerks and progress up the ranks to supervisory and even managerial roles, although it should be noted that these paths were often quite shallow, that is, they did not necessarily lead to senior or executive positions and they were open more easily to men than women.\(^{60}\)

Although all workers are experiencing employment upheavals, Chart 9.8 below seems to show that clerical workers experience higher levels of volatility than people in other occupations. Clerical workers rank as high or higher than the other occupational groups on all measured dimensions of job change.

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\(^{60}\) Crompton & Jones (1984,147) noted: “While nearly a quarter of men in jobs requiring only minimal skills had been promoted, this was true of only a tiny minority of women. We are led to the inescapable conclusion, therefore, that a substantial minority of clerical jobs exist where the grade level – even in large, formal bureaucracies – reflects not so much the characteristics of the job as those of the occupant.”
The dominant statistic that stands out is the number of clerical workers – 53 percent in the EJRM survey sample – who said they had started a new job with a new employer within the previous five years. While there may be many reasons to move from one employer to another, and it is certainly probable that some clerical workers are pulled to new companies by more interesting and/or lucrative work, the chart also indicates a “push” phenomenon at work. In other words, clerical workers are pushed towards jobs with new companies because their previous jobs have disappeared or become untenable.

Two clues to the “push” phenomenon may be indicated by the unemployment and part-time / full-time movement shown in Chart 9.8. In fact, 22 percent of the ERJM survey sample said they had been unemployed at least once in the previous five years, about 8 percent more than non-clerical service workers. Even industrial workers, whose job losses have been more visible in the news, claimed a lower incidence of unemployment\(^6\) than clerical workers.

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\(^6\) 17 percent of industrial workers said they had been unemployed at least once during the previous five years. This may not be statistically significant, but taken in conjunction with the 13 and 12 percent unemployment incidence cited by professional and service workers respectively, is highly indicative of the heightened vulnerability to unemployment faced by clerical workers.
Clerical and other service workers also exhibit slightly higher rates of movement between part-time and full-time jobs;\textsuperscript{62} this may be due to natural lifestyle changes (e.g., the birth or maturation of children) but is equally likely to be due to a lack of available full-time jobs.\textsuperscript{63} None of the temporary or part-time workers interviewed for the case study worked part-time by choice: “\emph{I probably would have stayed there longer but I left it because I thought this was a better job. I thought it would have given me more hours and more pay. But unfortunately it didn’t happen.}”

That clerical workers find themselves in new jobs much more often than workers in other occupational clusters probably reflects the increased likelihood that clerical workers have lost their jobs, forcing them to look for employment elsewhere. The director of a support/retraining centre for clerical workers told me that clerical workers were being laid off after increasingly long job tenure with their employers: “\emph{Because of the downsizing, we have received more people that have been in the field for a long time. Again in our group we have a woman who had worked 33 years in her company and didn’t know computers … whatever she was doing in her company she didn’t need it … now here she goes … 25 years [seniority with her employer] was one. We’ve had some at 20 [years of employment with a single employer]…”}

It is interesting to note that despite the limited prospects and occupational volatility for clerical workers in Ontario, both the surveyed (see Table 9.8) and the interviewed samples show that clerical work continues to attract first-time job holders in numbers

\textsuperscript{62} 26 percent, compared to their closest runner-up, the service worker category (which includes clerical workers) at 18 percent, professionals at 16 percent and industrial workers at eleven percent.

\textsuperscript{63} Non-clerical service work includes, for example, such jobs as retail clerks and restaurant waiters.
comparable to or higher than other occupations, including the fluid non-clerical service sector.

**Job Control/Work Saturation**

Clerical workers experience wide degrees of variation in the level to which their jobs are saturated, that is, their work days structured and activities prescribed. The saturation can be described in more than one way. For the purposes of this discussion, I will confine my argument to two aspects, the amount of learning that the job offers and the ability to exercise control over the job and/or the work environment (i.e., levels of technical and social control).

To some extent, the amount of saturation can be linked to work polarization. Some workers, for example Paulina in the Call Centre and Beatrice in her medical records role, find themselves in increasingly circumscribed roles, while others, notably Helena in expropriations and Laura in a small law office, find they have considerable freedom and discretion. Glynnis summarized the situation this way:

> You really have to divide it up into who you are talking about. There are admins that are working in smaller organizations ... where they are the be-all-to-end-all, so they do everything. They do reception, office equipment, maybe the website maintenance but they have been given more skills. They have more tasks to do at a higher level ... Then you have the other places where admin work has gone. For example these outsource companies that are, say, doing HR and if you are a payroll clerk you are a payroll clerk and all you are doing is punching in numbers. It's like call center work. There has been a huge increase in call centres. It's in Alice's report, it's jumped

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64 Alice de Wolff, 2005
160 percent and that work is very flat lined and very repetitive and there is no opportunity to move and grow.

**Technical and Social Control**

Clerical workers expressed divergent levels of freedom to perform their jobs but their assessments are laden with ambiguity. What does it mean for a clerical worker to have choice? In the case study group, for example, Helena said she had only a moderate amount of creativity in doing her job, but her role required her to be quite independent as she assessed property and interacted with property owners (citizens potentially subject to right-of-way decisions and expropriations). Isolde felt she had a lot of choice in how she did her work, but when she was probed, this consisted of: “The layout of the report, the way to word the document, the effectiveness of the document, guidelines.” Similarly, Aubrey who said he had an open mandate to change his job said he could exercise a moderate amount of control while Beatrice, who said she had a great deal of choice elsewhere in the interview told me her choice consisted of the freedom to prioritize her work.

Within a larger view of job control, only a third of office workers in the province-wide study (ten percent fewer than other occupations) said they had any role in decision-making at their organizations. Of that 33 percent, just over half said they had the freedom to provide their opinions with a further quarter able to decide subject to approval. None had the ability to decide anything on their own. Shelley offered a particularly apposite comment:
We have ample opportunity to provide information but they don’t take it into consideration. They welcome the input but they don’t do anything with it.

Similar to workers in other categories, clerical workers had slightly greater opportunities to contribute ideas and conclusions in project settings than in larger groups. This was probably because project groups are usually smaller and hierarchically more homogeneous in composition than teams involved in higher-level and strategic decision-making.

![Chart 9.9: Aspects of Job Control](chart)

*Percentage of respondents who said they had a fair amount or great deal of choice and creativity.*

Although the percentages recorded in chart 9.9 are not statistically significant for all metric categories when clerical workers are compared to other occupations, the overall tendency is consistent – clerical workers have less supervisory responsibility, less choice in how they do their jobs and less creative freedom than workers in any of the other occupational categories.

Only 23 percent of clerical workers said they had managerial or supervisory responsibilities compared to 30 percent of industrial and 37 percent of non-clerical
service workers. And, while 53 and 57 percent respectively of industrial and non-clerical service workers agreed they had at least a fair amount of creative leeway in their work, only 38 percent of clerical workers said they did.

Chart 9.10 illustrates the varying degrees of performance discretion cited by workers in several occupational clusters. For clerical workers, the number of workers with performance discretion peaks at “a fair amount,” after which their assessed work control drops steeply to just under 17 percent for “a great deal.” For other worker categories, the decline from the percentage claiming a fair amount of control to those claiming a great deal of control is much shallower.

Chart 9.10: Amount of Choice in Performing Job Tasks

It is particularly interesting to note the 15 percent gap between clerical and industrial workers in this regard. It is difficult to interpret this anomalous result as one might expect workers subject to the exigencies of the production line to feel more constrained in their creative impulses than clerical workers who are not – at first glance – as obviously bound to their desks (although I posit some possible reasons later in this section).
Although the percentage of industrial (66 percent) and clerical workers (61 percent) who said they had a (combined) fair amount or great deal of choice in how they performed their jobs was statistically identical, the similarity did not hold for job creativity. On this dimension, as Chart 9.11 shows, clerical workers appear to have significantly less freedom than any of the other occupational categories.

Chart 9.11: Amount of Job Creativity

A lack of job creativity is an element of job saturation. Reasons for the different responses industrial and clerical workers had to performance discretion and job creativity lie outside the scope of this study but should be explored further. However, some interim and speculative ideas may be ventured. That clerical jobs seem / are more saturated than industrial jobs may be attributable to a variety of causes, for example, that the industrial worker job category includes skilled trades people who have the freedom to exercise their specialty in accordance with their own best practices. It might also be because the factory floor in late years has been subject to reorganization in line with the principles of “quality circles” or Kaizen teams (Rifkin, 1995) which give workers some voice in how to change
their ways of working. Without going into the merits/demerits of such a system, workers may *perceive* that their opportunities to be creative have increased which would influence their responses about job creativity.

More importantly from the perspective of this dissertation, the creativity responses highlight how saturated and intellectually confining the job roles of many clerical workers are. Many possible reasons have already been discussed. Clerical workers are subject to Taylorist monitoring of their work, output quotas for their work and, increasingly, standardization of work deliverables (e.g., reports, spreadsheets) to meet organizational and technological requirements.

For some of the case study workers, their opportunities to make decisions were directly related to matters peripheral to their actual work or workplace. Isolde told me, “*I am really often involved in charity campaigns where I do quite a bit of decision making, for example, the United Way campaign and the Federated Health campaign.*”

A number of the unionized case study participants had been seconded\(^\text{65}\) to union assignments.\(^\text{66}\) With the authorization of their primary employers (government departments and ministries), these clerical workers worked full-time at union jobs. According to these workers, it was their union work that provided the most job discretion and greatest input to decision-making. For example, Danielle explained how amazing she

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\(^{65}\) The term secondment is used in government services to describe the transfer of an employee from his/her regular service/job into a special assignment (in this case, a full time role within the union). Most such assignments are contracted for specific time periods but are renewable.

\(^{66}\) This was due mainly to the way access to unionized clerical workers was obtained, that is, through their union. The respondents were disproportionately active compared to the general membership.
found it to take a train-the-trainer course through the union and now to have the freedom and responsibility to facilitate courses on mobilization, promoting the union, leadership development, etc. at various workplaces on behalf of the union. Beatrice told me she participated in decision-making specifically “from my union perspective... because both the union and the employer work together to make certain policies, for example, attendance policies.”

**Ongoing learning**

A preponderance of workers in all surveyed occupational groups agreed that their jobs required them to continually upgrade their skills. In similar proportion to their counterparts in the industrial and service sectors, 64 percent of office workers felt the need to continually upgrade their skills.

Part of the need they cited for skills upgrading was related to changes in the work equipment and techniques they used. Two thirds of clerical workers said they had experienced a moderate or great deal of change in equipment and techniques. This statistic is similar to the proportion cited by workers in other occupational streams.

Perversely, although they noted that their equipment had changed and their jobs required them to constantly learn new skills, more than half did not perceive any great change in the level of skill they needed to perform their jobs – 55 percent said the skill they needed had either stayed the same or decreased. Except for professionals, 63 percent of whom
said their skill requirements had increased, other occupations expressed a similar ambivalence about the need to learn new skills.

To some extent for clerical workers, their conflicted attitudes regarding their learning and job skill needs may derive from the nature of the equipment and techniques they use: new releases of Microsoft Office products or upgraded photocopiers and computers are seldom hugely different from the foregoing versions they have become accustomed to. Shelley was one of several who commented that: “They are fairly the same; they just come out with new versions and stuff like that but I would say they are basically the same.” Changes in technology and equipment tend to be incremental, making such changes in work methods and tools less visible than if they were more dramatic and radical.

Most interviewees said they were taking training courses so they would be qualified for other and/or upgraded roles. Apart from computer upgrades, these experienced administrative support workers knew how to do their work and felt they had exhausted most of the learning potential of their jobs. Isolde, for example, commented that her work was monotonous and that she knew it well: “My motivation is not for my current job ... although occasionally I get something new to do and I really enjoy it.”

For some, most often clerical workers in unionized jobs, learning was tied to their opportunities for developmental work projects and assignments. Danielle, for example, expressed unhappiness at the overall situation of clerical workers and herself as a clerical
worker but commented that she had benefited from a number of temporary assignments that helped her build her skills:

> I’ve taken a lot of development opportunities … I’ve gone from being an acting supervisor, to being a coordinator, to being a team leader to a group leader, so my career has moved … frequently through development assignments … they’ll put you in there for a year or two and then they will put you back to your permanent position and they’ll bring somebody else in …

It is revealing to look more closely at the situation of the unionized clerical workers in the interviewed sample. Danielle was a prime example. In her role on the union’s Board of Directors, she spent half her time promoting workers’ rights to workers in her union. Beatrice thrived in her secondment to the union as an organizer in which role she researched work place issues and acted as a one-person help desk to the group seeking unionization:

> I go and find out what the issues are and the main reason that they would like to have a union in and … then you start to do some research on the facilities background itself. The last one I did has been predominantly non-union for 30 some odd years. Right then and there it prompted us to think that it was going to be hard for us … So we had a lot of work to do with the staff and we also had a lot of work to do with the Human Resource people … we try to set up an inside committee to work and we have meetings. We try to set up an office close to the location so that people can come and talk to us about any issues.

All the interviewed workers who had been seconded into union roles expressed passion and enthusiasm for their union-related responsibilities and contrasted these more accountable and independent roles with the circumscription of their home positions in government ministries and departments.
Job Satisfaction

Approximately 87 percent of the surveyed clerical workers said they were happy with their jobs, with half of these workers saying they were somewhat satisfied and 37 percent claiming to be very satisfied. The case study workers echoed the responses of the larger survey group. A surprising ten of 23 clerical workers said they were very satisfied while another five said they were somewhat satisfied. Two people did not respond to this question but from subsequent conversation, it can be inferred that neither person was happy in her position.

A number of factors affected the satisfaction clerical workers expressed with their jobs. As discussed above, saturation and mobility were two important factors.

Aubrey had the opportunity to play with the parameters of his job and found his work very satisfying: “I have an open mandate to change it. I’ve been changing it; as the department and myself grow the job changes. So it’s really good.” Wilma was extremely unhappy with the work constraints she experienced as a temp data entry clerk: “It’s very boring stuff but you do what you need to do to live.”

Maggie said she was somewhat dissatisfied, not because of her work but because of her opportunity for advancement, her job satisfaction tempered by her inability to move up permanently: “I have it pretty good here, it’s pretty flexible … in terms of what I can do there … but in terms of my actual job and my opportunity to move up the ladder I’m...
dissatisfied.” Isolde sounded desperate to move: “I would like to move, but it’s so hard.

Those who have the power control how people work ... I kept on applying, applying, applying ... now I just keep quiet and get along.”

- These were not the only influences on job satisfaction, however: also significant were the match of the job to the incumbents’ aptitudes and interests and the opportunities the worker was given to learn and grow within or through the job.

**Job/Interest Match**

Workers expressed most job satisfaction when they felt their role suited their abilities and interests. Beatrice commented that her union secondment:

> Gears around a lot of things that I have experience in ... experience in talking to people, mobilizing in the work place and counselling and that type of thing ... And I get to exercise those things. I felt stagnated at my old job.

The elements of unsaturation in her job clearly also contributed to Beatrice’s enjoyment of it. Helena thrived on the variety in her job, telling me:

> It actually has all the elements I’ve been looking for while I was in the private sector. The hours are great, the pay is good – it could be better, but we always want more money ... There’s great flexibility and it’s a combination of both desk work and being on the road as well, which I enjoy.

Although George did not openly admit to great job satisfaction, he clearly relished a role that mirrored his interests:
If I’m down on the circulation desk, and I have a researcher asking me a question about vital stats, I did three stints in my 14 years as a reference archivist which was a higher education. And, of course, with my interest in and knowledge of genealogy, I was able to help the researchers get what information they want instead of speaking to the reference archivist because sometimes there’s only two archivists and there’s five people waiting to be served.

For George, part of the satisfaction lay in the control he had over his environment due to this good match, however, it worked detrimentally to his job satisfaction when he compared himself to archivists. A hint of discontent appeared in his voice when he commented on the relative wages he – who knew what he was about – earned and the salary earned by the archivists for whom he did not express whole-hearted admiration:

> If I can look at a request and transfer sheet, I can spot the problem automatically whereas an archivist, who is being paid more than me and is supposed to know, doesn’t know.

Not all clerical workers had jobs matched to their interests and abilities as the statistics on the subjective match/mismatch to their jobs of clerical workers showed (see Chart 8.4 above). For these people, work could be a frustrating experience. Beatrice, currently happy in her secondment to the union, felt stagnated in her regular government job where she held a computer-focused role ensuring that legal requirements were met in the maintenance of medical records. Paulina, bound to her call centre telephone, said she was “fed up with the call centre” and stayed because she “can’t really flip-flop any more …;” adding that security was one of the few good things – that and seniority – that her company offered.

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67 George told me: People can trust me because they know that George will deal with the problem. I have the archivists so trained that when they see me on the floor, they’re all thinking, ‘Ok, who is he coming to see, because there’s got to be a problem somewhere.’ Because I’ve taken the initiative to learn how the government Record Centre works, how the private Record Centre works.
For temporary and contract workers, the situation was more difficult; certainly the three Canadian-schooled workers expressed extreme unhappiness with their inability to find roles suitable to their considerable experience and seniority. A defeated note entered Wilma’s voice as she told me she was subsisting on minimum hourly rates in temporary, routinized jobs. She had previously earned $55,000 per year in a senior unionized clerical role, but was now registered with several temp agencies in hopes of getting at least some kind of paid work some of the time: “They told me they had a data entry position and it paid $10.00 an hour and what are you going to do?”

For the two recent immigrants interviewed, the circumscription of their part-time roles was outweighed by their workplace environments. Theresa who worked in a geriatric care facility said, “I really like to help people. I feel so happy if they are satisfied.” Uma, on the other hand, had considerable flexibility which compensated somewhat for her very limited hours, and enjoyed working with her trustee. Nonetheless, since both of these women were actively continuing to take work-related training courses at an office worker retraining centre and searching hard and unremittingly for other work, their expressed satisfaction should be heard with some skepticism.

**Learning Opportunities**

As indicated few pages ago, the opportunity and need to grow in their jobs were important for workers to be engaged in their jobs. This interest was not always articulated
in their assessment of their job satisfaction but was evident in their embrace of learning opportunities. Although this was partly due to what appears to be enhanced work satisfaction, it was often coupled with the hope and possibility of promotions and new jobs. For instance, Laura, despite feeling “dumped on” took on every new opportunity she received in order to learn and was thinking of gaining accreditation as a law clerk. Danielle, quoted previously, quite obviously derived great satisfaction from her opportunities to take on developmental opportunities, and expressed disappointment that she was always removed from these challenging roles to revert to her original one. Franca was another interviewee who continued to take job-related training on her own time – she was completing an employer-paid certificate course on Right-of-Ways through an independent institute at the time of our interview to acquire official accreditation and a platform on which to plan her future career path.

Others embraced learning for the enrichment it provided them in their roles and lives. Aubrey was one interviewee who continued to develop his job to further his personal growth. Jennifer and Ophelia, who did not necessarily have access to the amount or type of personal development they wanted, belonged to a professional association (IAAP\textsuperscript{68}) which provided them the opportunities to develop competence in ‘soft’ areas like time management, event organization, public speaking and networking. These were very important to them. Ophelia was very impressed by the kind of support she could find there: “There are speakers at meetings and workshops and things like that ... It’s educational from every aspect – just exchanging stories about what’s going on at the office.” For Jennifer, the growth opportunities were even more significant:

\textsuperscript{68} International Association of Administrative Professionals
I was painfully shy and self conscious as I child ... I tracked down the association [after being brought the first time by a friend]... each chairperson talked about what they did and somehow there was an appeal to it. ... I asked where they met and it turned out it was just up the street from me ... So I walked into the first meeting ... and they all struck me as very polished and professional. They all were very confident and struck up conversation with each other. There was a head table and to address the chair you waited until you were recognized then they would call on you ... I remember thinking that these women are so much better than me. They were professional, they were articulate, they look better, they speak better, they know what they are talking about and, I thought, I don’t belong here [but] I haven’t missed 10 meetings in 20 years.

At the time of the interview, Jennifer was an accomplished public speaker and heavily involved in Association activities as the international secretary; she credited her professional accomplishments and current seniority to participation in increasingly complex volunteer roles and constant learning at the Association. She had completed two certificate programs that culminated in “Certified Professional Secretary” and “Certified Administrative Professional” designations.

Jennifer and Ophelia were the only two workers interviewed who belonged to a non-union professional association for clerical support workers. Both of these women had more or less accidentally stumbled across the IAAP, suggesting that clerical workers do not necessarily know about this organization. However, even if they do, they would need either to pay the annual membership fees themselves – sometimes difficult on the tight budgets of clerical workers – or prevail upon their employers to support them – employers who do not necessarily ascribe key value to providing learning opportunities for clerical workers as VP Finiola implied when she admitted: “If you were going to go back to the clerical or supportive population... we probably don’t invest a lot into that
population... they wouldn’t be seen as a priority population” and a little later, “You are one of thousands and there are more senior people and executives who see you as a part of that group and not an individual.”

While both Jennifer and Ophelia said they derived great personal benefit from their active involvement in IAAP activities, the effect of their membership on their careers is difficult to quantify. For Jennifer, the Association helped her make material changes in how authoritatively she learned to behave in the workplace. Ophelia, however, took on her current role before joining the Association and seemed to value the Association as a place where she could gain new skills as part of personal development – despite the effort, she did not feel confident that she was competent in her role.

Their need to learn and grow is also expressed in workers’ descriptions of how consistently their roles require them to learn informally on the job:

Aubrey stated, “It takes a certain amount of being able to learn and ... you have to be able to comprehend certain things here that you might not somewhere else ... I think [my manager’s] plan all along was to have a position that could grow and do what the person could see.”

Emily relished her good learning skills because “There are changes every day so you have to have the ability to grasp things quickly.”
Corrie, a very satisfied worker, put it most bluntly. When I asked her how much of her time she spent on informal learning, she told me, “About the same amount of hours I work a week, about 36 and a quarter, same as work.” Her awareness of continual learning may have been affected by the frequent updating of government policy guiding welfare activities and the nature of her work which required her to handle different people and situations every day.

**The importance of adding value**

A sense that their work matters is extremely important to the amount of satisfaction clerical workers (and other workers, of course) obtain from their work. This is one of the characteristics that most moved Corrie, for example, who dealt with people to determine health care eligibility, interviewed clients, advised and directed clients, often during times of crisis:

*We have to go to shelters, to hospitals, community centers; for people who can’t come into the office we issue the health card ... sometimes we register the babies who are going into the orphanage. We have to register the deaths. Last week we got a letter from a mother that said her son had died after 36 years with her she sent us the whole story ... and there are tears coming out of your eyes because it’s so emotional and it’s challenging ... It makes you hunch your back because you feel it ... then you have to go and see a newborn. Some days it is very difficult and some days it is so calm.*

Corrie’s work was significant irrespective of the valuation placed on it by her employer. She knew her work made a difference to her clients. Most clerical workers did not have this kind of connection to their work outcomes.
Careers and Aspirations

Despite their expressed levels of job satisfaction and with shrunken opportunities for career growth, a number of the clerical workers I interviewed had become quite disillusioned with their career choice – Isolde, who at barely fifty was resignedly marking time until she could retire, was a case on point. Others, however, were quite happy with their work.

To some extent, the difference lay between those who were able to parlay their career entry points into new roles that displayed some combination of stability, personal interest, and specialized skills that allowed the worker to feel valued and/or respect-worthy.

The more satisfied office workers had found specialized administrative support roles:

Helena exemplified this strategy; she had utilized her clerical role in the relocation industry, enhancing her work experience with specialized training (Real Estate, expropriation law) to develop specialized skills in land acquisition:

This was a relocation industry ... I just continued on with all their different mergers and acquisitions, and constantly taking more courses ... I was doing corporate relocations and when the company obtained the government relocation account, I was placed in it ... and I started getting to understand how the government worked ... and a position was actually offered to me ... six months only, but I grabbed that opportunity, quit my full-time job and took that contract position. It was very risky ... because it was also a major cut in pay for me. It was 10,000 less than what I was earning. But that job led to this job. And this job ended up paying almost 20,000 more than the permanent position I had left.
George took an early interest in genealogy: “I moved to [a new city] to start the business course and of course the Archives was just up the street from where I lived. I started going there to do research, I had sent in a letter and resume.” When he lost his contract job and moved he was able to turn his experience into a new role as an Information Retrieval Assistant in Toronto. Ongoing learning about his industry (formally through the Archives course) and his workplace had enabled him to declare that it was unlikely he would lose his job: “Considering I am the only one who knows how the Record Centre operates and I also have it all up in my head!”

Jennifer had trained for a food services career she did not enjoy:

_The only thing I could think of to fall back on was I could type ... I was applying at food related companies ... I started working as a secretary to the controller. I went to night school to improve my typing and I got a clerk secretary diploma and then my secretarial diploma. That gave me a bit more confidence ... I got away from accounting but into more senior clerical roles._

From that point she developed continued interpersonal, management and public presentation skills through her professional association.

Franca’s father had owned a soft drink manufactory in Jamaica so she had absorbed a lot about business and accounting from her father as she was growing up. She described her affinity for software packages: “For instance, the software, I don’t take a crash course thing, I just take it and I learn it myself ... I usually end up training people.” With her manager’s support she edited the newsletter for her union Local and was about to attend a (union-sponsored) editor’s course.
For these clerical workers, work had become a happy merge of interest and opportunity. But it took effort on their part to ensure they developed specialized knowledge and skills that would be hard to replace. George, for example, commented that his employer would look for someone with a Masters degree in hiring for his position today.

For others, these strategies had not worked very effectively. Although the skills were there, the opportunity was not.

Uma held a chartered accountancy degree from her home country. When she could not find work in her field in Canada, she obtained eight Microsoft and multiple CISCO and Unix designations – yet when I interviewed her, she was working less than 23 hours per week despite ongoing efforts to obtain full-time employment. She had immigrated to Canada with great optimism: “I was told that people got great jobs ... since I came to Canada I have always looked for one job ... I don’t want to keep studying and studying; I just want to do one thing.” Much of that optimism has dissipated: “I would like to work for a job that is stable. It’s hard for me to be stable. The stability of the job is no more there. The job security in Canada is not there. That gives a lot of stress.”

Paulina had two years of university plus three years studying an alternative form of psychology (core belief engineering) and had completed a 2½ year program to study financial planning; despite her efforts she felt unhappy in a rigid call centre environment but was having a difficult time transferring out of it into a more congenial role.
Nonetheless, although they were clearly not happy with their work or their opportunities, these clerical workers were staying in the occupation and with their employers, hoping that matters would improve.

For some, the only answer was to move out of clerical work entirely and into other roles. It is perhaps not surprising that only the temp/contract workers were actively pursuing entirely different types of careers, since they had low incomes and no security within the clerical work sector.

With a diploma in graphic arts and a partially completed program in Early Childhood Education, Shelley was shaking the metaphorical dust from her temporary clerical assignment and opening a daycare centre. Because she was the primary earner in her household, she planned to augment her earnings from that endeavour with small paid graphics arts projects.

Wilma said she would love to train as a nurse (and might yet do so), but like so many of the interviewed sample, she was unable to swing the cost of such training herself. Nonetheless, she had taken and passed the Post Office exam and was eagerly waiting for word that would give her a completely different set of work accountabilities than she had had in her former career.
Uma had also decided to change her focus and (with EI\textsuperscript{69} support) was studying to obtain her licence as an Immigration Consultant: “I am hoping to make it my own self-employment ... It’s been 18 years that I have been in Canada. I am wondering why I didn’t think of it sooner.”

Financial issues were at the core of the challenges facing a number of clerical workers who wanted to upgrade their skills and move into a new career path. Danielle articulated the dilemma:

\begin{quote}
My heart’s somewhere else and my skills and abilities are somewhere else. It’s not challenging enough for me; however, I don’t take for granted that I’ve had a secure position ... it’s very frustrating ... it’s time for a career change... It’s financial, I would love to be able to walk in and say I need a 2-year leave of absence to improve my education. That’s just not about to happen ... I’m in a cycle in my life where I must do a career change to enhance my future retirement ... but it’s not just the pay I am looking for, it’s the challenge ... [I’m] seriously looking at trying to come up with a plan of how will I meet that financial barrier to get myself to where I want to go.
\end{quote}

For some workers who identified alternate careers, these seemed more to be day dreams than career goals. While Naomi, for example, mentioned that she would like to open her own restaurant, there appeared to be few if any specific plans to turn the dream into reality, and she dreamed with equal strength of winning a lottery.

One of the issues for Naomi and many of the other clerical workers interviewed was the need for security. The need for ‘stability’ came up repeatedly. For example, Paulina said she could not continue to “flip-flop,” hence her persistence in the call centre. Beatrice likewise had applied for her job because she said she needed stability. Danielle said “I

\textsuperscript{69} Federally sponsored/monitored Employment Insurance
was a temp worker and I wanted to secure a full time job with benefits ... I had to go through testing and interviews and I was successful in the competition to become permanent.”

For older workers, promotions and/or new jobs remained an enticing prospect, even as they looked to retirement as a goal.

Corrie was still hopeful:

I will retire in the next 10 years so I’d like to get 2 levels up from where I am now ... within the government. At my age now there’s nobody who’d going to hire me in the private sector. No, I don’t want to stay where I’m at.

Isolde was both applying for new positions and looking forward to retirement:

I’m interested in Accommodations, HR – everything is on hold because of the re-organization ...I should keep an eye open because positions will be coming up.

But a few sentences later a defeated note entered her voice:

You know, my dear, I really don’t know. My future plans are to retire. And maybe to continue what I’m doing now, maybe on a part time basis ...next year I qualify for it, early retirement. With age and service, because I won’t be 55 yet ...I really don’t know what to do ... if I should still continue on another five years and then quit... Because if I retire next year, my pension is not that big and I cannot survive on that pension...

Franca expressed the same sort of combined wish:

I would like to retire, I have another five years to go and in that five years I would like to find something that I want to retire on ... a new job.
Both Corrie and Isolde were also interested in taking on jobs in the union, but although both were actively applying, neither had been successful yet. Corrie remained positive:

“I’ve also applied to the OPSEU head office and my application is still in.” Isolde, on the other hand, sounded a little surprised at her lack of success:

> You know where I would like a job, to be honest with you? In the union office. I have applied ... I’ve got some good skills and some good qualities, especially people skills ... And I thought with my expertise in some areas it would be easier for me to get a job in the union office. A lot of members tell me, Isolde, you would be perfect working in the union office but ...

Although it might be tempting to do so, one cannot assume that immigrants are more at risk of unsatisfactory work and hours than other clerical workers. From the case study examples, and the managers interviewed, the challenges of obtaining suitable full-time work seems to cross all national, sectoral and racial boundaries. As retraining agency director Glynnis commented, the percentage of new immigrants (about 30 percent) to long-time laid-off clerical workers (about 70 percent) had not changed:

> We work with people on EI, people who have been on EI, people who are on welfare or people that have no income source... Even if you are not receiving unemployment you can still get an assessment. And then they would send you here ... That’s how we end up with newcomers ... it’s about 30 percent. The rest are people that have been around for a long time. It’s always been like that ... Our mandate is to work with office workers that are in transition; because of the downsizing we have received more people that have been in the field for a long time.

The change most apparent to Glynnis was the service length claimed by newly downsized clerical workers – some had been with the same company for twenty or thirty years when they were let go.
As Vanessa, Shelley and Wilma – all of whom had many years of well-paid and relatively senior Canadian experience – exemplify, obtaining good sustainable clerical jobs is difficult for everyone in this occupational cluster. The attempts by clerical workers to mitigate their circumstances through additional education and training; job transfers or promotions; and even complete career redirection were met with varying levels of success.

**Learning, work and job satisfaction: summary**

Clerical workers achieve levels of education higher than workers in industrial and non-clerical service jobs, but their education is often not closely related to the work they do. Despite their educational achievements, clerical workers earn lower salaries, have less chance of intra-organizational promotion, experience higher levels of unemployment and enter new jobs in new organizations more often than workers in other occupations.

Although many clerical workers said that educational credentials did not affect their access to work, they sometimes immediately contradicted this contention by saying that if they were candidates for their positions today, the hiring decision would favour college educated workers.

Furthermore, although just over a third said they were credentialedly underemployed, almost half said their job responsibilities required less education than they had. This disparity between credential and performance underemployment was much greater for
clerical workers than for any of the other occupational sectors. Part of observed performance underemployment levels may be attributed to the technical and social control clerical workers could exercise. As Chart 9.9 shows, their task discretion was significantly less than other groups said they had (clerical workers cited 13 percent less than non-clerical service workers) and their creative freedom was also much less (there was a 19 percent gap between clerical workers and non-clerical service workers).

Subjectively, too, clerical workers were more likely to feel underemployed than workers in other types of occupations. This finding, when added to the salary, employment and control constraints, is especially interesting when it is looked at in conjunction with job satisfaction. Fully 87 percent of the clerical worker survey sample said they were somewhat or very satisfied with their work.

The expressed levels of satisfaction may be due partly to the socialization described by Burris (1983) that discourages women from expressing dissatisfaction. Certainly, the behaviours of the interviewed clerical workers contradicted the high levels of satisfaction they expressed. Two thirds of them had taken formal training over the previous year and 83 percent had participated in informal learning. Rather than undergoing this learning to become better at their current jobs, many clerical workers said they undertook the learning to position themselves for promotions, job transfers or even new careers outside the clerical work stream.
Clerical workers, by their own admission, are underemployed educationally in terms of: first, the credentials they must have to access employment; secondly, their capability to meet the performance expectations of the job once they acquire it; and, thirdly, their subjective feelings of being undervalued. A large subset of clerical workers in the survey sample, even though they may have said they were satisfied with their jobs, expressed feelings of subjective underemployment. And this is before any of the complex relational skills they must utilize in their administrative support roles have been described or incorporated into a valuation of the skill and competence they must bring to their roles.

I will review the exercise of relational skills and their effect on clerical roles in the next chapter.
Chapter 10: Emotional labour and relational practice in clerical work

In this chapter, I will look first at how relational skills are articulated by clerical workers in their descriptions of how their duties unfold over the course of their work days. I will then talk briefly about the breadth of relational skills and select a few for further discussion. Finally, I will review how the selected relational competencies were learned.

Note that Chapter 10 relies entirely on the testimony of the 23 clerical workers interviewed in the case study as the EJRM survey did not provide for any data collection on this subject.

Exercising relational skills

As has been made abundantly clear earlier in this dissertation, organizational discourse does not include the language to describe the characteristics and benefits of relational practice as described by Fletcher (1999), especially with regard to low-rank workers such as clericals. This has had the unfortunate collateral effect of blinding clerical workers to the value of emotional labour they must perform and the relational skills they must practice. While they may recognize the amount of relational labour, they tend to assess

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70 It should be pointed out that when it comes to leaders and executives, an emerging literature advocates the practice of relational skills as aspects of good leadership. The popularity of Goleman's work (1995) on emotional intelligence in corporate corridors exemplifies this trend. However, while they are seen as leadership qualities in senior people, they are not seen as leadership characteristics or a legitimate public service orientation among low-status female workers but rather as an inherently female trait and/or as evidence of weakness demonstrated in the desire to please and the willingness to subordinate personal needs to the needs of others (Kennelly, 2006).
the labour in ways similar to their employer. The relational work they do is invisible to most clerical workers as labour and skilled practice just as it is to their supervisors. However, when temp executive secretary Vanessa asked, “Does it make more sense for me to make the coffee or for [my boss] to make the coffee?” was she not, in fact, demonstrating relational practice? It is apparent from her rhetorical question that she saw her willingness to support her boss by making his coffee not as an act of subservience or a menial ‘gopher’ task but rather as an activity she mindfully performed to promote the smooth and efficient functioning of the office (even though her boss may well have accepted the coffee in a spirit of entitlement). Implicit in her comments was the realization that her conscious act might be misinterpreted: “It’s not below me.”

In fact, relational practice concepts were embedded in most descriptions that respondents gave of their jobs, although their accounts of the types and complexities of the required relational practice varied.

Ophelia explained:

"I am responsible for my boss’s schedule. That involves setting up meetings and making hotel arrangements and such and talking to different people who are involved in that ... I report to ... two people, the president and the financial director ... as well I work for any of the other people, if they need assistance preparing documents and things like that ... [I also do things] such as preparing reports and looking after arrangements for various meetings, assisting the HR department when they have special events ... so I am basically the help centre ... If a meeting is coming up I will make all the arrangements for it and chase everyone down, I get all the reports in. If it’s the end of the month then I gather everything up for the expense reports, if it’s the end of the quarter I’ll get everything ready for that and different things like that."
Clearly, Ophelia needed to juggle the needs of various people and groups to ensure that they functioned well and productively. Implicit in her description are the skills of listening, prioritizing, communicating and reconciling the needs and demands of several people.

Shelley had a classic administrative support role:

*What I do more or less is I do a lot of tracking of information and recording of certain pieces of information, like contracts, getting things signed, I do follow ups on that, I prepare contracts. I take problem calls ... people that I work with often encounter problems and they come to me ... because I have acquired all of this knowledge ... I was hired because they started a pilot project and they have gotten rid of the person who was overseeing things, they've gone through three people since I started, and I know the program because I track all the data that's collected.*

Even though she, a temporary contract worker, had not been with the firm very long, she was the mediator who soothed difficult callers and the listening ear that heard problems, funnelled questions and identified alternatives and solutions – all under the guise of ‘clerical support.’

Uma’s employer was clear that relational skills were important, but they were couched in terms that made clerical tasks paramount:

*Mainly they wanted a person who could do the filing and prepare the documents and the presentations; talk, communications skills because they wanted somebody to talk to the parents and try to make connections ... You want somebody who can talk to everybody.*
Uma attended constituency meetings with her trustee so she could listen for constituency concerns, a skill that requires strong relational skills: “If I see something in a meeting, if something was said, I will come to her and I tell her that, ‘look, this issue was raised.”

Aubrey’s job required him to work with internal people and external suppliers:

There is a catalogue study that we do all the time. I just finished one, making sure that all the changes are correct for the surveys, making sure that the suppliers are all doing their work on time. Giving the suppliers dates and times and all the revisions doing all the back and forth and then just kind of overseeing it all as they do it so you can make sure that they did their job.

His description implied a lot of unrecognized relational work. Aubrey determined when to prod people to best effect, when he needed to back off to ensure his research projects were completed on time without alienating the people he would no doubt need to help him with his next project.

Corrie’s work was unabashedly relational as she extended her professional expertise in conjunction with large doses of empathy: “I like to go out and connect with people out there, especially the elders. I like to make sure that they are okay.”

For Paulina and Danielle, much of their relational work was in the form of being unfailingly pleasant and professional in telephone based customer service roles; Paulina said of her recruitment:

I really think that the emphasis is on personality here. In this call centre the emphasis is personality and attitude. I think they want someone that will take the job seriously and someone who cares about the information that they are giving,
caring about the institution that they are working for and the people that they are working for.

Furthermore, Paulina took pride in the fact her manager was utilizing her relational skills: “My manager is really pushing me, she uses me as a contact because I can get the right kind of input from the team whereas she can’t,” a clear example of someone informally mandated to practice relational skill without formal authority or acknowledgement in status or salary, especially when seen in conjunction with her later comment that she felt she had “no voice.” In effect, Paulina had the traditional clerical task of making her boss ‘look good’ but the manager accepted the credit for the efficient work flow of her department (Paulina commented that part of her boss’s bonus was tied to the aggregate employee satisfaction scores her boss achieved on the annual employee satisfaction survey). Paulina hoped for a promotion, but commented that “Some of the veterans are telling me that I am too optimistic but we’ll see.”

Disparate roles require disparate skills. Clearly, the type and level of relational skills that must be exercised in the fulfillment of workers’ functional duties are different depending on where in the hierarchy they sit and what their official accountabilities are. Secretaries, especially today, may support two or more people and need strong interpersonal skills, prioritization skills and organizational know-how while junior data entry clerks who are much more bound by the tasks of their jobs will need less complex arrays and levels of relational skill. However, even junior clerical workers need to be able to prioritize and often need to develop organizational know-how. For example, Maggie, whose primary responsibility involved entering data for medical studies, felt very over-qualified for her
role, but nonetheless commented that “they should teach you things like how to mul-
task.” Another case is provided by Requisition Administrator Franca who monitored the
ministry req pool, sorting about 70 requisitions per day. Although desk and computer-
bound, she still had considerable interpersonal demands: “There are always questions
and people calling. They can’t find something in the system or they have a problem or we
get phone calls from clients.”

There is a reason the word ‘support’ is an integral component in the job titles of many of
the primarily female administrative support personnel; the work of managers and/or
departments depends on the administrative infrastructure supplied by their clerical
employees. Unfortunately, certainly for the workers, much of the deliberateness of the
support is hidden, masked by assumptions that these are inherent traits of clerical workers
and therefore easily dismissible. It is not surprising in a public sphere discourse in which,
as Fletcher (2000, 137) noted, “gender-linked expectations of supportive behavior allow
organizations to absorb the work generated by these expectations (such as relational
practice) without rewarding it or even naming it as competence,” that workers
themselves do not recognize the value of the support work they do.

Emily was one of the very few interviewed subjects who expressed in some way the
importance of her support role:

*I have to organize my boss ... if he’s not running this department effectively, then
that means that I am not doing my job effectively ...if we want to have an
environment where workers are satisfied, it’s my obligation to make sure that it
runs smoothly.*
She did not, however, continue her thought to articulate that this was a learned skill which she put at service to her boss and the organization.

Many of the relational skills are invisible as skills partly because the exercise of them is seamless, partly because they are assumed to be an inherent trait issued automatically with the double-x gene pairing. One might compare relational work to housework, another task associated with womanliness. As I was told growing up, no one notices when the furniture has been properly polished but when it isn’t the resultant layers of dust are obvious to even the most casual observer.

To repeat Hochschild’s (1983, 169) acerbic words, quoted earlier:

*The more she seems natural at it, the more labor does not show as labor, the more successfully it is disguised as the absence of other, more prized qualities.*

However, recognizing that relational practice takes skill is only the first issue to be considered. If, as I contend, relational practice is learned not inherent, then how do people, in this case clerical workers, learn these skills? It is true that there has been increasing recognition that relational practice is learned (see Chapter 5) but the “how” of this learning is not addressed. The learning is stated as a fact rather than described or demonstrated.

**Relational skills: what are they?**

I had a difficult time arriving at a title for this sub-section. Human beings exist in a state of relationship, and relational behaviours, whether effectively managed or not, underlie
life in society. Consequently, relational practices have a certain amorphous quality. They elude attempts to capture them in discretely bounded definitions but seem readily recognizable when they are practiced.

It is possible to conflate relational practice with emotion and emotional labour. This is not a conflation I wish to make here but it is certainly true that they are connected. Emotion can be defined as feelings and sentiments, while relational practice can in some cases be described as the articulation of the emotion. For example, sympathy and empathy are emotions – individuals may feel them in certain situations, they may not. Listening sympathetically and other supportive behaviours might be the practical relational expression of the felt sympathy and empathy. When the relational practice is performed in the support of personal situations (e.g., friends and family experiencing sorrow or trouble), this should be considered relational work. When the relational practice is performed in the course of work responsibilities (for example, listening to client stories as Corrie had to do), this is relational labour.71

For the purposes of this discussion, relational practice is associated with process skills. Metaphorically, I see relational skills as the lubricating oil that keeps the machinery of the organization and its component cogs in coordinated balance to smoothly and effectively manufacture the goods and/or services it has been designed to produce. In exploring relational practice within the boundaries of this definition, it becomes apparent that different kinds of relational practice involve different levels of emotional labour.

71 Following Hochschild’s (1983) differentiation between of emotional work and emotional labour which was described in Chapter 4.
Although relational practice may often have emotional undertones, this is not necessarily so. For example, an important set of skills for clerical work is composed of organizational competence. Secretaries and other administrative assistants are among the clerical workers who are required to organize themselves and others: they must be able to prioritize and manage their own, often diverse, work obligations while simultaneously managing the time and priorities of one or more people senior to them. In addition, as Ophelia’s work life exemplifies, they may have a broad range of other duties as well: “[I also do things] such as preparing reports and looking after arrangements for various meetings, assisting the HR department when they have special events ... so I am basically the help centre.” Balancing the needs and meeting the expectations of such varied groups and responsibilities requires extensive organizational skills – not to mention expertise in negotiation and setting limits. Ophelia was working seventy hours a week to meet the demands on her but still felt inadequate to the multi-layered dimensions of her job.

In the discussion that follows, I will confine the discussion of relational skills to a small subset set of the relational behaviours that enable clerical workers to satisfy the demands of multiple people and work goals in the accomplishment of an often complex and sometimes contradictory array of tasks and responsibilities. Fletcher (1999, 54) has described this as organization preserving activity, predicated on an expectation of integration and interdependence, commenting:

*Doing one’s job effectively means not only attending to specific job duties but also connecting across functions, even doing things that are beneath you in the hierarchy of job duties. This implies, of course, that good workers will have the skills needed to see things holistically and be able to operate in a context of*
implications and consequences rather than an atmosphere of separation and specialization.

Depending on the type of role filled by the clerical worker, the type, number and level of relational skills that dominate the expectations on the worker will vary. Although mail room and filing clerks, for example, need communication skills that allow them to interpret customer requests as well as the ability to deal with difficult people who upset their workdays with unreasonable demands, the communication and interpersonal skills they demonstrate are not likely to be required at the same level of complexity or expertise as they are in secretarial roles that balance competing demands of organizational workflows, a greater variety of interpersonal interaction and a more senior group of supervisors to satisfy. The implications for failed relational work are also likely to be more severe for senior clerical workers than for junior clerks who have less responsibility for maintaining office workflows and influencing/managing the interactions of other, more senior co-workers.

To some extent, though, all clerical roles have embedded relational components.

**Learning Relational Skills**

It is apparent that relational practices are developed in skill sets that interlace in tightly woven traceries and intertwine in complex patterns. While it is possible to identify individual strands, it is never possible to separate them completely. For example, the challenge of communication embodied in the skills of reading, writing, speaking and
listening, may be found in the conundrum: “If a tree falls in the forest with no one to hear, does it make a sound?” While the different elements of communication can be unwound into separate strands, they lose strength and meaning if isolated from each other. Effective writing demands not only an effective writer but also a competent and willing reader. Efficacious speaking requires at least one active and engaged listener.

It would be impossible to analyze and discuss the complete gamut of relational skills, so I will concentrate on three that, based on my own workplace observations over the course of my career and on the comments of the case study group, have relevance for the work of clerical workers: organization; communication and interpersonal skills (dealing with other people).

Note, however, that while these relational strands may be imaginatively abstracted from the full skein of relational practice, in reality – as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate – they can never be fully isolated from each other or the full complex of relational skills and practices.

Organizational skills

Description of organizational skills

A number of clerical workers talked about the importance of being organized. Organization skills can be looked at in more than one way. For the clerical workers in the case study, they were composed of their own personal organization skills and /or of their
ability to understand and negotiate the organization of their employers. Emily is an example of the second facet of organization:

*You have to know every aspect of it. You have to know [how] the finance department works, what they have to do what they need, Accounts Receivable. They all call me. I have to make their hotel reservations. I have to get their pay. I know what exactly what they all are looking for so they come to me. Even with the payroll system I know how to do it… Doing orders at Grand and Toy and setting up new accounts. I do all of that so I think that the skills that I have learned through the years will be transferable easily in running an office…*

George commented that people trusted him because he would deal with “the problem:”

*I’ve taken the initiative to learn how the government Record Centre works, how the private Record Centre works. I need to know how they work and, of course, how the archivists work and what type of information they’re dealing with so I can do my job giving them the information they need.*

Emily and George were not the only workers who cited the need to understand organizational dynamics. It was a theme that ran implicitly if not explicitly through the explanations of many of the interviewees.

For most of the group (including Emily), organization skills also had to do with being able to structure their own time and work, which then made it possible for them to organize the work of their office and the people they supported. Beatrice, for example, talked about the importance of prioritizing:

*It’s creative in terms of the organizational skills because you have a quota to meet and if you are not organized… because sometimes you have to make decisions to let certain things go or try to justify something and you have to be creative in that respect.”*
Emily noted that:

*I have to be a leader here too. In regards to how I do my work, if I don’t, other people are not able to do their job... whatever is required by my boss has to get done. I have to organize my boss so that everything can run effectively ... if we want to have an environment where workers are satisfied it’s my obligation to make sure that it runs smoothly.*

**Learning organizational skills**

In all cases, both aspects of organizational skill, that is, the skill to navigate the structure / culture of their work organization and their ability to organize their own work and time, were learned informally and tacitly.

Learning organizational dynamics was learned primarily on the job, often just by being in the work environment. For example, Ophelia said she learned by observation: “I learned a lot on the job. I learned how the company works and you know I learned a lot from my boss just watching him work.” Jennifer said she learned by doing: “The personalities of people in the department, the dynamic and how I fit in, and that type of things…”

By contrast, learning to organize their time and prioritize their work was often learned through activities outside the work situation. George and Gabrielle talked about learning organizational skills as part of their volunteer activities. Gabrielle commented that her volunteer work was useful because: “You are organizing what you are doing. You have to have all those skills and you are keeping up with them.” George said he developed
organizational skills through doing by helping to pull together a retirement party for someone.

Others developed organization skills through housework. Paulina learned by observing and copying her husband:

"I'm not quite as organized as my husband, he's a neat freak. I was never at the total other end but if you look at my room you can tell his side of the room and my side of the room. But I think that being in such an insanely organized house has helped me with my work. It helps us not to fight at home; we can come to a compromise easier."

Uma commented that she, too, learned by doing at home, when she decided to organize her jumble of personal documents and records:

"The first thing was all the papers, they were scattered everywhere. So one day I decided that I would put everything in one box and then I would sort it out otherwise it was all going to stay everywhere. It's learning because at first I had my papers everywhere and I had to find a systematic way and I couldn't find the time before... so now I can concentrate on the organizing of my home."

She noted that this was having a positive effect on her office work: "Now that I am trying to organize at home I think I am more observant at the office too."

These workers agreed that these tacitly learned skills were critical to their effective functioning in the office. Paulina commented that "organizing yourself at home helps you to organize your mind at work." Beatrice, who spoke about the importance of organization at the start of this section and learned to prioritize at home by delegating to her children, said, "If I am organized at home it gives me more time to do my paid job"
It is apparent that for these clerical workers, the learning of job-related skills cannot be conveniently confined within the boundaries of the workday – much of the skill they applied to their work had been learned off the job. Their relational work at home had been transformed into relational labour at the office (Hochschild, 1983).

However, even though these clerical workers learned their skills in private sphere settings and could not always articulate specific steps to learn organizational skills and priority setting, it was clear that they deliberately set out to learn these skills through observation and action.

**Communication skills**

**Description of communication**

Communication is a complex set of skills that includes reading, writing, listening and speaking in both one-on-one and group situations. All of these skills are relevant to the work of clerical workers – they must interpret the written materials given them by their peers and bosses, whether these are computer spreadsheets or paper documents for filing. And, although they may have templates in some cases, they must also be able to write letters and emails that maintain the professional image of their departments and yet express their points in terms relevant and understandable to their audiences. Many clerical workers are also the department’s voice to the external world, for example, other corporate departments, company clients and suppliers.
The skill set essential to all of the other communications competencies is competence in interpersonal communication, composed of the twinned abilities to listen effectively and respond appropriately. Not only does this skill underlie the other facets of interpersonal communication but it has strong undertones of empathetic expectations in many instances. Although an extreme case, Corrie must listen with great intelligence and sensitivity to the stories of heartbreak and joy related by the people she is inscribing into the official rolls and registrations of Canadian society. Her ability to respond to the varied feelings added emotional complexity to what on the surface may seem a straightforward documentation role. Helena dealt with emotions of a different kind, and her abilities to cope with difficult emotions in a professional but sympathetic way were qualities that contributed to her successful candidacy for the job:

They are looking for the ability to deal one on one with the homeowners... because a lot of the job involves negotiations, sitting, for example with a homeowner – who’s not thrilled – and how to deal with that in a professional manner and still work in the best interests of the homeowner but yet balance that out with our own role as the expropriating officer. So I think they were looking more for... the communication skills as opposed to just having a degree, because having a degree doesn’t guarantee that you’re going to be able to sit in front of a home owner and tell them what’s happening and still maintain control of the situation.

Even the clerical workers without roles overtly focused on emotionally complex interactions identified communication skills as highly relevant to their job performance. Naomi, for example, commented that “maybe communication was the most important [of the job entry requirements] because if you can’t communicate…” and Paulina, who spent her days on a financial services call centre phone line, noted:
Putting, speaking, taking the knowledge and integrating it into a way that makes sense when you’re spitting it out. You know what you’re talking about but you have to take this piece of paper and summarize it into 3 sentences that they will understand the first time you say it…

Learning to communicate

The development of communication skills occurs in many ways. Like many other relational skills, learning often starts in childhood. Although none of the case study workers specifically mentioned learning communications skills as children, a couple of workers commented on the far-reaching effects of childhood experiences. Uma, for example, commented: “I think to a great extent what you learn in your early years is always going to be instilled in your mind.” But that learning is supplemented and enhanced through often unconscious effort in adulthood.

For some of the clerical workers in the study, their educational preparation included attention to the development of communication skills. Emily found the business school she attended very helpful in developing her general professionalism:

I went to a business college in Jamaica and it helps me in the work force today... I can see that I am still using... it had everything, and the business aspect but also we had psychology and... social skills.

Communication is one area in which employers are sometimes willing to provide training. In a typical call centre culture, for example, telephone skills are routinely taught in formal training courses. In one instance, when I asked call centre agents about the little mirrors they all had at their stations, I was told that these were a giveaway from a course
to remind them to smile when they talked to clients because that would make a difference in their tone of voice. Learners are taught how to address callers, how to listen and how to respond to their questions and concerns. This may involve the use of scripts and online prompts to make sure the conversation goes in directions desired by the corporation. In addition, the success of these prescriptive training structures is monitored and enforced by call recording. As Mirchandani (2004) has pointed out, in call centres out-sourced from North America to India, telephone representatives are even taught to Americanize their accents.

One topic taught in communication courses sometimes offered by employers is “active listening.” Active listening involves the use of a variety of strategies to ensure the listener engages with the speaker and understands accurately: asking open-ended questions, asking closed-ended questions, paraphrasing the speaker’s comments, etc. These skills were sometimes covered in telephone skills training.

Apart from telephone skills training, few of the clerical workers interviewed said they had had the opportunity to take formal communication courses through their employer’s training provisions. However, unionized clerical workers had training available through their union involvement, especially if they were actively engaged in union activities. Union steward Isolde told me her union had sent her to both organizational and communications training workshops. Corrie said her union had sent her on a lot of courses to learn a variety of relational skills:
The union sent me on a lot of courses... we have president courses, health and safety, mobilization, human resources courses, organization courses, payroll, that type of stuff. They educate you.

Beatrice and Danielle also cited a number of related courses sponsored by their union. In similar vein, Jennifer and Ophelia used their IAAP meetings which usually incorporated short training presentations as sources of learning about all manner of communication and interpersonal knowledge.

In general, clerical workers said they learned communications skills informally, mostly by observing and doing. Naomi said she learned communication skills by attending meetings and by talking with her peers but: “Mostly I communicate with [my manager]. She has been very, very valuable to me; she has spent time with me helping me with my job tasks.” It is unclear how unusual Naomi’s situation is – not all managers have the inclination to coach their clerical staff as Naomi’s manager has clearly spent time doing.

George, too, combined observation with practice:

I’m meeting people all the time, I form opinions about whether I’m going to like this person, I’m not going to like this person... If a person wants to talk, I just let them talk, get it out of their system. [I’m learning] because I’m listening to what they have to say, maybe they’ll say something that may tweak something that’s in my life.

The most popular way to learn to communicate, at least in this group of clerical workers, was by doing. Corrie, despite and in addition to all the union training programs she had attended, said: “[I learn communications skill by] meeting with clients every day. Everyday you get stronger.” Gabrielle talked about learning through her volunteer
activities at her church: “Because you interact with people and for communication
...because you’re always working with people, you are communicating with people.”

**Interpersonal skills: dealing with other people**

**Description of dealing with other people**

Clerical workers work for and through other people, typically without any authority of their own to bolster their efforts. Organization and communication skills are very important factors in managing interpersonal relationships with bosses, peers and clients and successfully prioritizing the needs and expectations of each (as well as their own). Shelley noted that although she did not really deal with clients, co-workers from across the organization would often come to her for help with their issues, partly because they could count on her to know the answer, partly because she made herself available and approachable.

As part of their role, they may sometimes be expected to interact with difficult people and situations. As in other relational situations, they must usually approach these situations from a position of little authority and power. Take call center customer service agents: they must learn to cope with difficult, sometimes abusive, customers without alienating them and driving them to a competitor organization. Theresa commented that in her role as medical receptionist:
You have to handle human nature and people who are under heavy drugs. If you are not patient and very understandable you can’t handle it.

Laura said:

I think I have done too much, thinking and structurizing and learning how to cope with other people. It has just been a changing year... you have to learn to adapt and change with the other person.

To deal with difficult people and situations of conflict, clerical workers must have strong listening skills, patience and empathy for the other person’s viewpoint without compromising their own needs and perspective.

Learning to deal with other people

The clerical workers discussed a number of ways in which they had learned interpersonal skills. Some harked back to the psychology classes they had taken during their formative years. Emily took psychology in her business college. Aubrey studied psychology and sociology in university.

Some clerical workers received training through their union or association. Jennifer noted that coursework on behavioural science in business was included in the two IAAP certification programs she had completed. In addition, she and Ophelia used the

72 She completed the requirements for Certified Professional Secretary in 1986 and the requirements for Certified Administrative Professional in 2002.
monthly association meetings to develop a range of relational skills. Jennifer described a recent month:

*I’ve been to 3 chapter meetings this month. My own chapter was event planning, in the Cambridge chapter, power point presentations... The meeting in Scarborough was a membership drive but there was a gentleman there from Centennial College who talked about e-learning. Saturday there was a motivational session on being your best and in the afternoon the session was in conflict management – and that’s just what I’ve done this month. (Note: some topics particularly apposite to relational skill building have been bolded in this quote.)*

Beatrice combined her union-sponsored formal learning with informal learning-by-doing as her ways of developing communication skills:

*I have experience ... in talking to people, mobilizing in the work place and counseling and that type of thing... And I also take some courses at night, the last one I did was conflict mediation.*

Union mobilizer and activist Danielle commented not on the training she had already taken but on the type of conflict mediation she wanted to learn:

*I met a wonderful mediator who came in and actually she was with U of T and she came in to do some conflict resolution and she inspired me. I got her business card and she said you need to click onto U of T and take some courses, I think you really need to invest some time in yourself.*

For many, especially those who worked for private sector employers, informal and tacit learning was the only option they had to learn interpersonal skills. Theresa learned by doing:

*I learned how to deal with a difficult situation with a difficult kind of people. How to calm them down and how to help. I learned a lot of my people skills.*
Some workers discussed studying interpersonal skills through internet exploration or through reading. Aubrey said he would read Psychology Today if he saw articles that seemed relevant. Shelley tried to develop cultural sensitivity by surfing the Web:

    I like to look at different cultures and things like that. I’ll even go on the internet and look at stuff. Even with graphic design, colours mean a lot to different cultures so you always have to be aware of it.

The learning approach of Uma, who learned to deal with difficult people by reading about coping strategies, reflected not only that she was left alone to learn but also the lack of power inherent in her situation:

    When I was working last year, oh, what was that book, I forgot the name of it, it was just coping with difficult situations and hot buttons. I read those simply because I have to learn to improve myself because sometimes somebody might say something and inside I am sick about it I have to find ways of dealing with it.

Often these clerical workers learned how to deal with other people at least partly outside the work environment. Kara learned teamwork skills by coaching seven/eight year olds and eleven/twelve year olds in baseball, commenting that she already had teamwork problem-solving and communication skills but it was “just about how you relate to people and the sports can get physical!”
Summary: Learning relational skills

Relational work is not easily demarcated into series of discrete skills. For the purposes of this study, three types of relational skills – organization, communication, interpersonal skills – were isolated, but in fact a range of skills is embedded in the discussion of any single relational practice.

In terms of organizational skills, clerical workers emphasized the need to juggle personal as well as department workflows, a skill they initially said they learned outside the office environment, sometimes through observation of others, sometimes by teaching themselves to balance household demands with other needs. They also noted how important it was to understand organizational dynamics, which they invariably learned by observation. The interviewed workers agreed that organizational skills were important in the successful performance of their job duties.

Communication is a complex set of interpersonal skills that includes reading, writing, speaking and listening. These skills underlie much of the work of clerical workers, especially since they must understand the documents they must deal with, the instructions they are given and the outcomes that are expected. They must be able to balance the needs of multiple people (which include the ability to deny or delay work requests) over whom they can exercise little control. They must maintain their own equilibrium in the face of conflicting requests. Some of the clerical workers had the opportunity to learn and practice communication in classroom settings, either as part of their schooling or through
employer-sponsored training courses. (Call centre telephone training is an example of this. Unions also made communication skills training available to its clerical members.) Most clerical workers, however, said they learned these skills informally, mostly by observation and practice.

Critical to the success of almost all clerical workers is the ability to deal with others without the strength of position or authority – a relational practice also intrinsic to the communication skills discussed in the previous paragraph. Dealing with others is neither simple nor easy and they must also accommodate the demands of difficult people. This is certainly a condition of work for call centre agents who are expected to manage difficult customers but it is a worklife factor for many other clerical workers, too, since they support (mostly) more senior people, not all of whom are pleasant or willing to moderate their demands to suit the availability of the clerical workers’ time. Some clerical workers learned to deal with others through employer or union sponsored training, but many of them learned informally by observation, reading, web-surfing and practicing the skills.

For most clerical workers to learn organization, communication and interpersonal skills, observation and practice was necessary, even when they had been given opportunities to participate in formal learning activities.

Nonetheless, even though the interviewed clerical workers spoke of ways in which they had learned these selected relational skills, they sometimes did not make a conscious connection between these learned skills and the formal expectations of their work roles.
Clerical workers and those who utilize their skills continue to experience difficulty in extracting the relational skills as separate skill sets from the functional skills required in clerical roles because they are so thoroughly embedded in the execution of technical skills. As Leidner (1999, quoted earlier) pointed out, the service is sometimes part of the deliverable. This is certainly true for clerical workers whose work outcomes are already obscured because they are enmeshed in the work outcomes of those they report to and support. Even the interviewed clerical workers themselves, although they, by identifying ways they had learned the skills to perform this role expectation implicitly recognized relational practice as skilled practice, yet did not clearly articulate the relational labour they performed as a compensable requirement of their jobs.

Because so many clerical workers are women and they occupy a low rung on the corporate ladder, the relational practices they engage in are sometimes read as deference rather than organization preserving (Fletcher, 1999). Alternatively (or additionally), as was discussed in Chapter 5, they are seen as intrinsically female traits rather than learned and deliberately exercised behaviours. Unable as they were to identify the relational work as skilled and compensable practice, the clerical interview subjects did clearly describe how the relational practices they performed were not essential (female) traits but rather learned skills they exercised in the fulfillment of their job duties. Their tacit learning of many of these skills, often outside the workplace, contributed yet further to corporate invisibility of their relational labour.
The discussion above is a preliminary one; neither the relational skills described nor the learning methods outlined are exhaustive. Indeed, it would be difficult to provide exhaustive and clearly delineated lists. As a number of the worker quotes illustrate, neither the relational practices nor the learning approaches lend themselves to easy demarcation and separation.

However, even in this small sample of clerical workers, it is clear that relational practice is a critical component of clerical work. In this discussion I have not discussed the tacit and overt-but-informal ways in which relational skills are differentially learned by boys and girls during childhood, although different ways of behaving and interacting are certainly learned by boys and girls in their families and among their peers (Maccoby, 1967; Martin and Halverson, 1981; Rose and Rudolph, 2006) during childhood. Instead I have focused on the ways clerical workers have learned these skills as adults in the public sphere of paid work.

Within the work context, it is clear that clerical workers learn relational skills which they then apply to their work responsibilities to ensure the smooth and efficient performance of individual and group tasks. This is both interesting and significant. Previous studies that recognize that relational skills are acquired rather than innate have typically not then moved forward to indicate how clerical workers learn these skills.

In the next chapter, I will identify some tentative ideas to move forward with the recognition of relational practice as relational skill.
Chapter 11: Discussion and Concluding Comments

Previously in this dissertation, I have provided a discussion of clerical work, clerical workers and relational skill practice as described both in the literature and by the clerical workers who told me about their experiences by responding to very similar sets of questions in lengthy personal interviews or detailed telephone interviews.

In this chapter, I want to review and reflect on what I learned from this research and outline some conclusions and suggestions. Note that these reflections are neither definitive nor exhaustive as the study itself is very much an exploratory exercise which is more has raised questions than answers to them. I will start by re-summarizing what I see to be some of the issues surrounding clerical workers and the environment in which they work, proceed by refining my earlier descriptions of relational skills and then propose some directions for future work and research.

The functional work of clerical workers: exploring the work environment

In the last quarter century, traditional clerical occupations have seen an overall decline in the number of jobs (de Wolff, 1997; Eyerman, 2000; Morissette & Johnson, 2007) especially traditional administrative support positions. Clerical positions grew in only one category, that of the customer service agent in call centres – and in this group of jobs, growth was exponential (de Wolff, 2005). At the same time, the occupational sector
experienced a surge in temporary and part-time jobs as companies re-engineered their workforces and outsourced many clerical jobs, particularly jobs deemed low-skill and/or their incumbents easily interchangeable, to temporary help agencies or cheaper labour forces in other countries (Freeman, 2000).

Both the growth in call centres and the increasing precariousness of traditional roles are linked to the escalating capacities of telecommunication and other computer-based technologies which have made globalization possible. This has led to three possibilities for clerical workers’ skills and skilling in the work environment: deskilling, reskilling and skill polarization of job content. All of these lie within the general ambit of Labour Process Theory (LPT), an approach to labour analysis first described by Braverman (1974). In brief, Braverman theorized that capitalist interests/owners continually strive to find ways – typically through technology or new ways of organizing work – to simplify and deskill work with the goal of reducing labour force costs and increasing the interchangeability of individual workers. Braverman, and those who have followed in his path, provide a useful theoretical base from which to describe my own findings and explain my conclusions.

First, some general comments. Deskilling, polarization and reskilling are not notions new to the 21st century. With the advent of technology in the nineteenth century, new machines, specifically typewriters in the case of office workers, caused polarization from the first. Initially, the polarization happened between roles assigned to men and roles assigned to women, with women being accorded the most routine and repetitive types of
jobs and men the jobs with most scope for career development and promotion. Later, as women became the dominant sex working clerical occupations, the differences lay between senior administrative support roles such as executive secretaries and junior clericals such as filing and photo-copying clerks. For a time in the third quartile of the twentieth century, indeed, women clerical workers had a career path, however attenuated, available to them. With the flattened organizational structures stemming from recent information technologies, it appears that any hope of a career path within the clerical field has today largely disappeared, at least in Toronto – except, perhaps, within the hierarchies of agencies that source contract clerical workers on behalf of other companies.

Furthermore, outsourcing is also not a new concept within the field of administrative office support. In the early twentieth century, work was outsourced from men to women who were at that time the cheapest available source of labour. Today, a hundred years later, the work is being outsourced from women to specialized offices located in cheaper labour markets out of the city, the province and/or the country. In both cases, although the results may look different to our modern eyes, technology and changing markets were the driving forces behind the change and, from the perspective of the workers affected, probably equally devastating.

This suggests that there are strong similarities between the situation of clerical workers then (the end of the nineteenth century) and clerical workers now. By implication, it suggests that the “post-capitalist” world (Drucker, 1993) is not really ‘post’ – rather, any
revisions to the organization of work are reflective of the exigencies and imperatives of profit generation made possible and necessary by new technologies, rather than any fundamental philosophical change in the corporate outlook.

To summarize, for almost the entire modern history of clerical work since the invention of the typewriter in the late nineteenth century, there has been a significant disparity in the level of job complexity and the type and level of worker talent required to perform these roles. As I have documented early in this dissertation, complex roles were initially reserved primarily for male clerical workers but this situation changed as women held an ever-larger number of clerical positions. As an increasing proportion of clerical jobs were filled by women through the course of the twentieth century, some women were offered more complex roles while others were relegated to simplified roles which provided less scope for the incumbent to exercise either technical functional or process skills, regardless of her actual capabilities.

Thus, while both deskilling and polarization have been factors in the changes happening within clerical occupations, the concept of re-skilling may be more useful in discussing alterations in the work content of clerical roles, because, as discussed in previous chapters, the clerical job sector has continued to be subject to technological and organizational change. Often organizational change is inaugurated in response to technological change such as the sophistication of various electronic communications methods (e-mail, texting, social media sites, internet research, etc.) which has reduced the need for administrative support staff to make photocopies or type correspondence. For
another example, the ability for individuals in offices around the world to communicate
directly with each other and/or supporting software systems (such as client lists, stock
and inventory information, etc.) by means of their computers or mobile phones (which
can now send messages, images, videos and access corporate databases) has reduced the
need for clerical workers who may formerly have been involved in the transmission/input
of such information. These changes are invariably been introduced by managers
(Kusterer, 1978), that is, the people who control the corporate capital and design the
strategies to promote the corporate gain. However, other duties and responsibilities have
arisen as a consequence of the new work organization stemming from technological
change.

New technologies and new forms of work organization have always had effects on the
type and content of the clerical roles available. However, while it may be attractive to
think that the increased capabilities of technology have inevitably and invariably resulted
in a decreased need for complexity in clerical worker skills, I would dispute that notion
based on both the literature (Eyerson, 2000) and on the comments of workers who shared
their stories with me. Although not true of all the interviewed subjects, several either
expressed or demonstrated that the skills they required had increased. Aubrey, for
example, commented, “My job responsibilities have gone up,” although his company was
trying to automate as many processes as it could. As a result, he spent much more time on
project management and vendor relationships – from my experience generally considered
relatively senior organizational responsibilities – than any of his predecessors in the role
did. Renata, who indicated that equipment had changed a moderate amount, said: “I had
the skills, but the company is asking for more skills.” Her role at her consulting company included doing some of the work that typically:

The associates would do. When it comes to actually putting the documents together, usually associates do that type of thing and I’ve done that for a couple of surveys. The last couple of years I’ve done a lot.

Smith and Thompson (2005) have suggested that the flattening of organizational structures has led more to work intensification than to work “complexification.” Intensification is certainly a concern to some of the workers. Helena said that changes in her workplace were all about “doing more with less people.” However, intensification per se did not seem to be a major concern of the workers I interviewed – a couple of the full-timers even said they would like to work more (always with the condition, however, that this would result in more money for them). Renata, quoted above, despite her increased responsibility, said that if she occasionally felt unsatisfied, “it’s because I don’t have enough work to do… I like the work I do, there’s enough variety… enough responsibility and enough challenge.”

When the intensification was accompanied by additional responsibilities, the case was different. As the situation of some of my interview subjects demonstrated, intensity and complexity are not mutually exclusive job characteristics. Laura, who had started her job as a secretarial support, was now secretary, bookkeeper and de facto law clerk. To repeat her complaint:

Each year I take on two new jobs it seems like. When I first started, I rarely did their legal, just the odd thing here and there. I did their correspondence, their
invoices, their accounts payable and receivables. The following year I thought I was just going to be diligent and I started to do more of their accounting, more bank recs, more of their office supplies, just everything – I just took that on. The following year I had to learn a new accounting system and I got fed up and said I wanted more legal work, so they started giving me more, but only they went from legal assistant to law clerk.

Although she thrived on the challenge, the intensity of the work effort required removed some of the satisfaction: “I do too much work. It is one of those one-person-does-everything. You can’t enjoy your job because you have too much work to do.” Similarly, Ophelia worked many long extra hours to accommodate her employer’s need for someone who could act as executive secretary for multiple bosses, human resources coordinator and event planner – the latter two activities more commonly assigned to specialists. Even over the course of a few months in a temporary role, work intensification for contract worker Shelley was caused by work demands that insidiously resulted in her taking on roles of additional complexity (such as mediating between the company and some of its workers and vendors) as well as a wider array of functional tasks. Both Ophelia and Shelley expressed frustration with their situations and both spoke of their intentions to leave their positions.

Although my findings, detailed in Chapter 9, indicate that many clerical workers are indeed underemployed on credential, performance and subjective levels as well as on measures of income, status and power, it may be more appropriate to view this as an effect of increasing educational requirements for workers in traditional types of clerical roles rather than an across-the-board “dumbing down” of clerical jobs. Increasingly clerical workers are expected to have at least college degrees to obtain clerical jobs, even
entry level jobs, and sometimes they must have even more education – as George said, his employer would today not look for anyone with less than a Masters degree to fulfill his role of finding and filing archival records. Another such worker was Maggie who, similarly to George and other colleagues quoted on previous pages, expressed pessimism about getting a promotion at her place of work because: “I don’t have the education to get into other roles. It’s not that I’m not capable of doing it but where I work they want you to have the [educational] background.” Thus, while the functional skill demands of their roles may have stayed at the same level or even increased somewhat, the demands have not increased commensurately with the expectations engendered by the higher levels of educational attainment employers stipulate for entry to clerical jobs.

Overall, therefore, my research indicates little empirical foundation for the idea that the meat has been taken off the menu of clerical work to a greater degree than in the past. To recapitulate the commentary of the last few pages, while intensification is a real challenge for many Toronto clerical workers, this may well be accompanied by a variety of accountabilities of varying complexity. This lends credence to my contention that, even in terms of functional job requirements, reskilling to cope with changed responsibilities due to technological advances and organizational changes is more of a factor than deskilling.73

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73 Burris (1999) made an interesting point. Whether work is being up-skilled or deskilled, she wrote, depends on one’s starting point. For clerical workers in insurance companies, using computer software to do underwriting is upskilling while for trained underwriters, the new approach has de-skilled the work. From the perspective of clerical workers, many previously more senior tasks have devolved on them. However, they typically have not received commensurate compensation for the additional job duties.
Furthermore, as I will revisit in the next sections of this chapter, an increased need for relational skills, often at advanced levels, has become ever more necessary for effective performance of clerical workers in Canadian organizations to do their jobs as their employing companies continue to flatten hierarchically and globalize technologically. While clerical workers, interpolated between those they support and the work environment – an environment consisting of people inside and outside the immediate work team and their work demands – have always needed strong organizational, communications and interpersonal skills (for instance) the need for relational skills such as these has expanded with the removal of bureaucratic and management layers. The matrix they must deal with is less and less of one (manager/group) -to-many (internal and external people and demands). Rather, they straddle and buffer a many-to-many set of relationships and these relationships are more likely to be geographically dispersed than in the past.

However, that being said, it is also true that clerical work encompasses a broad variety of organizational support roles. There is certainly support for the belief that jobs are polarized with clerical workers at one pole having interesting, if intense and undervalued, jobs and other clerical workers pooling in saturated and routinized roles at the opposite pole. However, I question the extent to which this is a new phenomenon or one with greater and more general dispersion in recent years than previously, at least among permanently employed workers. While I see evidence of polarization – among my case study members, for example, Beatrice, spent her day entering patient medical data on a computer, while Maggie who transcribed questionnaire booklets also had the more
interesting task of creating the artwork and designing the layout of the booklets. As another example, Danielle had limited flexibility in her customer service role while Corrie, whose job title was similar, was out among her clientele in the community. Consequently, although significant polarization of work roles certainly exists, I am not sure how much I see is evidence of significantly more polarization within full-time clerical work per se. Polarization has long been a factor among the clerical occupations – the women in the undifferentiated typing pools of the 1950s and the data entry clerks who sat in rows keying punch cards with great rapidity and accuracy in the 1960s and 1970s, had repetitive work in highly controlled environments while secretaries had much more control over their work day and even other people in some cases. There has always been room for more people at the bottom of the organizational pyramid than at the top.

However, I must also point out that advances in technology and telecommunications have led to two new factors that influence clerical work in today’s environment. First, they have resulted in the uploading many of what were formerly secretarial duties (correspondence, telephone caller screening) to the supervisors they once worked for. Secondly, these advances have also resulted in the move from heavily layered hierarchical organizations to flatter organizations with fewer rungs on the promotional ladder. With less need for personal and group administrative support personnel, and fewer levels for them to grow into, there is less opportunity for people in entry level jobs to move into more senior clerical roles as well as an overall condition of fewer jobs available in general. This has led to a different form of polarization of clerical work, that
is, the polarization between those who still have stable permanent jobs and those who
trek from one precarious short-term position to the next.

A situation of fewer jobs, as cited in the literature (deWolff, 1997; Morissette and
Johnson, 2007) has meant increased competition for full-time, permanent positions, a
precipitating factor for employer insistence on advanced educational credentials for job
candidates. Moreover, information and communication technologies have supported
employers in bids to outsource clerical functions to temporary agencies. Outsourcing has
further increased the fragility of clerical job situations (Chart 9.8) and resulted in growth
in involuntary temporary and part-time jobs. For these precariously employed workers,
the situation is different than for their fully-employed contemporaries. In terms of salary
and status, temporary workers certainly fall into a cold polar region at the extreme low
end of the job spectrum. Because these workers have even less status and power than the
permanent clerical employees, they may also be given the least appealing and interesting
tasks while the full-time staff reserve the better work for themselves. Of the five temp
workers I interviewed, Wilma and Vanessa shunted from one entry-level type role to
another despite their many years of senior level clerical experience in former full-time
roles. Both Theresa, who dealt with wandering and disoriented patients, and Uma, who
acted as a school trustee constituency clerk (with few and irregular hours), were in
individualized roles without co-workers. Shelley ran another one-person show – she had
by default pretty much taken over the office management. Temporary workers may also
be resented by their full-time colleagues. Government employee Isolde, for example,
complained that temporary workers were given preference over long-time employees like her for interesting opportunities:

They bring in a lot of new people who are not qualified... they are provided all the training, while permanent employees who have been here a long time and would like to be promoted or are interested in learning new skills ... you don’t get nowhere.

Agents in call centres seem to be exceptions to the general situation of reduced clerical job opportunity since this field is a growing one. Call centre agents may be order takers with little requirement for specialized knowledge or have advanced knowledge and/or mandated certifications (e.g., agents in financial or medical call centres who need to provide expert information or advice to callers). However, whether or not the functional underlying knowledge these agents need is heavy or light, their work situation is typically constrained. Scheduling is done according to call volume analyses so that on-duty agents are always busy and calls are monitored for length and quality. Although agents may occasionally field unusual, interesting questions, most of their interactions will be characterized by routine questions and requests. Like their counterparts in traditional clerical roles, there is little room for advancement as call centres are very flat organizations staffed with large groups of agents under the immediate supervision of a few team leaders (sometimes senior agents with additional responsibility) and even fewer managers. With calls directed automatically to the next available agent and agent productivity reported in system-generated statistics, much of the management of call centre staff is achieved by means of systems rather than people. While requiring many of the traditional clerical skills – telephone answering, order filling, etc. – this growing
source of clerical roles constrains workers with more pervasive technological monitoring and less opportunity for career advancement than clerical roles of the past.

To summarize, polarization can be looked at along a couple of dimensions. First, for clerical workers in permanent positions, polarization seems more of a factor when measured against income potential and job stability for temporary workers than when polarization is measured against the level of variety and responsibility in the work they have. On the other hand, when workers in the emerging field of call centre work are compared to clerical workers in traditional administrative support roles, polarization can be seen in terms of increased constraints, heavier surveillance and a more limited range of duties compared to clerical workers in more traditional (i.e., administrative support) roles.

However, one thing stays constant for all groups, that is, the need for workers in clerical occupations to effectively deploy relational skills. The type, the level, the variety and complexity of relational skills may differ from one to another job, but to some extent all clerical workers require some part of this constellation of skills.
Defining Relational Skills: revisiting and revising

To re-set the context for this discussion, it is relevant to restate my definition of relational skills, a definition built on the notion of emotional labour as originally explored by Hochschild (1983) and of relational practice as defined by Fletcher (1999).

So what are relational skills? Relational skills encompass the skills required to work for, through and with other people to ensure that work is accomplished effectively and efficiently. The use of relational skill implies recognition and validation of the needs and expectations of the people for, through and with whom the relational practitioner works. Echoing Fletcher (1999), relational practice is purposeful behaviour to promote mutual satisfaction and growth; establish a cooperative work environment for the furtherance of the mutual work project; and further the mutual (work) project(s). For clerical workers who buffer the interactions of people senior to them and mediate the workflow of the office without official authority, the purposeful use of organizational, communication and interpersonal skills is a critical component of their role.

Traditional models of success seem to see achievement as an individual activity, one that realizes success at the expense – or at least the exclusion - of others. If I win, you can’t. Relational practice starts from the understanding that success is most possible when activity is inclusive of the needs and expectations of others, so it will seek to create win-win situations. Fletcher (1999), who summarized relational practices as those of preserving (through task accomplishment); mutual empowering; self-achieving; and
creating team, that is, sustaining group life in the service of project goals, has provided
the primary basis upon which I have constructed my argument.

Because relational practice almost invariably incorporates some level of emotional
labour, Hochschild’s work also comes into play. Emotional labour is a tangled skein of
intentions, attitudes and practices that has been subject to a variety of interpretations and
reinterpretations since Hochschild (1983) first elaborated the concept as a disparity
between the sentiments felt relative to the sentiments expressed. Female airline
stewardesses, for example, were expected to exhibit unvarying courtesy and friendliness
no matter how provocative the flight passengers were while male bill collectors were
required to intimidate delinquent debtors with aggressive and hostile speech and action
regardless of the circumstances surrounding payment defaults. The workers in her study
practiced specific forms of emotional labour in order to generate specific emotional
responses and behaviours on the part of the passengers (goodwill) and debtors (debtor
repayment).

Since Hochschild’s seminal work (1983), others have added new and/or modified
meanings for the term ‘emotional labour.’ For example, Steinberg and Figart (1999) have
written that emotional labour may lead to authentic caring relationships but will not
necessarily do so. Kennelly (2006) has discussed emotional labour as a way in which
secretarial workers perform public service which implies a form of caring that goes well
beyond presenting prescribed emotional responses. Some writers have described
emotional labour as nurturing activities (Steinberg & Figart, 1999; Kennelly 2006), expectations of which are sometimes resisted (Mirchandani, 1998).

It is apparent that the term ‘emotional labour,’ therefore, has accrued a number of related meanings subsequent to Hochschild’s publication of *The Managed Heart* in 1983.

*Relational practice*, too, is a somewhat messy concept. However, relational practice is easier to connect to skill development than emotional labour and so it has been *relational skill*, its development and deployment in practice that I have wished to concentrate on in this dissertation.

Although emotional labour (as Hochschild defined it) may often be implicit in the exercise of relational practice, the two need to be considered separately in order to analyze the skill components inherent in their successful performance. In this dissertation (and bearing in mind that clerical roles vary in the level and breadth of both the functional and relational skills they require), I have imagined relational skills as the lubricating oil that keeps the machinery of the organization in coordinated balance so I have closely associated them with process skills.

In line with the preceding paragraph and because relationship practice can seem a somewhat ambiguous term, I have focused in this dissertation on three broad relational sets of skill that seem particularly apposite to the duties of and expectations on clerical workers: organizational, communication and interpersonal skills.
Relational skills and clerical workers: further comments

All clerical workers perform relational labour to some extent, although they do not necessarily have all the same relational demands placed on them. With the flattening of organizational structures, clerical workers have a broader span of exposure although this does not positively affect the status and authority they have within the work place. They must use these skills to influence others, network and obtain the cooperation and support of the more senior people around them. In the case of receptionists and call centre agents, they must use effective relational practices to represent their organizations by being knowledgeable and client-friendly and by demonstrating a general ability to be helpful.

With flattened organizations and technological ways of bypassing intermediate hierarchical levels globally, clerical workers must now reach out and connect with information sources/resources and other people (internal and external to the organization, within the organizational hierarchy and outside it) in ways that would seem incomprehensible to clerical workers only fifty years ago. Their need for organizational, communication and interpersonal skills extends far beyond the local area of their physical location and they may have to do these things with less contextual information than previous generations of workers.

This adds considerable complexity to the practice. Developing smooth relationships to enhance workflow is more difficult when the relationship must be built without direct personal contact – as is now more frequently the case. For workers in call centres, positive relationships must be built with clients exclusively by phone and internet
communication – and under stringently controlled conditions. This is not easy.

Understanding organization beyond the immediate boundaries of the worker’s local office and building networks across them is challenging – while the internet and other virtual networking options make these possible and possibly easier on the surface, the assumption that expansive information and interpersonal networks will be built and maintained has not until recent years been a general expectation of almost everyone in the organization, certainly not clerical workers.

Relational skills are sometimes denigrated, especially in our technophilia culture, as “soft” skills, implying that they are not “hard” technical skills. However, relational skills require technique (which word derives from the same root as technology), which makes it hard to argue that there is no rigour to the practice of these skills. In Chapter 10 I have shown through the words of the clerical workers themselves that the relational labour they do requires skill, which they acquired through formal and informal learning. While other writers (Steinberg and Figart, 1999; Fenwick, 2004) have named emotional labour as requiring skilled effort, I have renamed the skilling aspects as relational labour. Furthermore, I also identified several specific sets of relational skills (organizational, communication and interpersonal), described how the clerical workers said they had learned them and illustrated how the clerical workers used them.

There are several challenges for practitioners of relational skill in the workplace, especially those who are female in a low-status, female-dominated occupation such as clerical work. First, as Fletcher (1999) has commented, these skills are not visible to
organizational language and therefore difficult to formally recognize as skill. Secondly, because they have often been associated with the nurturing work done by women in the home, they have been essentialized as female traits. Furthermore, because they are associated with the warmth and comfort of home, they are dissociated from the artificially separated cold and dispassionate world of the office. A peculiar situation has resulted – workplaces accept the relational support of women clericals while not acknowledging that the relational labour is necessary or recognizing that the relational labour requires skilled effort.

Women workers themselves sometimes resist efforts to acknowledge the relational work they do. For some this is because they conflate the emotional work of caring at home with the exercise of relational practice in the office and they feel it would be wrong to ‘care’ for pay. Others resist because they feel formally accepting a responsibility for relational practice would devalue their ‘real’ jobs – a not unlikely scenario since caring work can be bought for a discounted price (nannies, responsible for emotional security and growth of children – as what could be more important to society – are paid minimum wage rates).

In other words, clerical workers (as do other workers) engage in deliberate relational work, including but not limited to organizational skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills. These are not formally recognized nor officially and systemically (through compensation systems and other textually mediated practices) rewarded
although they are key to successful work experiences. As a result, I think clerical workers have been undervalued by both themselves and by their employers.

**Toward the Future**

With limited career options and disappearing jobs, it is not surprising that a number of clerical workers in this study were looking for work alternatives. If sustainable clerical roles are becoming fewer in number, this may be an appropriate strategy. However, clerical jobs are unlikely to vanish entirely – indeed, as chapter 2 (Context / Job loss) documented, the erosion of clerical jobs seems to have slowed somewhat over the last few years. Furthermore, as I have discussed in the preceding chapters, part of the issue lies in the lack of proper appreciation for the relational skills and practices woven into the fabric of clerical roles. If employers more fully recognized the value of clerical work and clerical workers, they might become more reluctant to let them fall victim to the latest down-sizing initiative. For employers to become more overtly cognizant of the value of the relational labour their clerical workers perform, however, also requires clerical workers themselves to develop more than a peripheral awareness of their performance of these implicit duties.

There needs to be a more concerted effort to connect the dots between realizing that relational skills are necessary, recognizing that these are not inherent worker traits and clarifying methods in which relational skills pertinent to the clerical function (e.g., organizational, communication and interpersonal skills) are learned. It seems to me that
researching and surfacing relational skill issues is a role a clerical workers’ union such as OPSEU or PSAC could most productively and pertinently perform. Under contemporary labour conditions of continual workplace re-engineering and outsourcing initiatives, the unions’ bargaining position with the employers of their clerical worker memberships has weakened (it has also been undermined from the perspective of some members as shop steward Isolde made plain: “We don’t have a strong union. Members are not strong and they feel, they don’t have faith in the union”). Exploring and endorsing the value of the relational skills embedded in clerical contributions to the workplace will be a way to rally union interest among the members and would re-establish union leadership in the promotion of clerical worker interests.

In this short conclusion, I will look at some recommendations for the future and conclude this dissertation with some final notes and comments.

**Recommendations**

Discussed throughout this dissertation is my contention that the consistent and effective exercise of relational skills such as organizational, communication and interpersonal skills is an important facilitator of office work and work flow which is a prime function of clerical work. However, relational practice is on the whole not well understood in work organizations. To the extent that relational practice is seen at all, it tends to be seen as an inherent quality of the person demonstrating the practice rather than as a deliberately acquired and consciously deployed skill.
Proper valuation of relational practice and relational skills is not something that can be mandated through policy or legislation. What is required is a growing awareness that these practices are important to our communities and organizations – an awareness that clerical worker unions could profitably stimulate through discussion and further investigation. As this awareness grows, a groundswell of discussion will also develop – what is relational practice? How can it be recognized as practice? And, continuing forward from recognition as *practice*, how can specific relational practices such as effective organizational, communications and interpersonal practices be demonstrated to be *skilled* practices? (And as a corollary: how can we help people develop or further develop their relational skills?) In minor ways, this seems to be happening, if corporate mission and value statements are any indication, 74 but relational practice needs to be articulated more clearly and specifically as both practice and skill.

In consideration of the above, I suggest that specific dimensions of relational skill, starting with organizational, communication and interpersonal skills be analyzed within organizational contexts to clarify what these relational skills entail beyond the

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74 From a brief internet search for corporate mission and value statements, I present the following as samples.
- CIBC claims its business culture is driven by the shared values of trust, **teamwork** and accountability. ([www.cibc.com](http://www.cibc.com))
- Purolator describes its values as: Customer focus, quality, integrity, respect (including open **communication**), **teamwork**, social responsibility and personal accountability. ([www.purolator.com](http://www.purolator.com))
- Nikon makes the commitment to: be proactive; seek new knowledge and **communicate well** (harmonizing diverse skills by thinking out of the box and communicating effectively with others); display integrity ([www.nikon.com](http://www.nikon.com)).
- Among its values, pharmaceutical giant Merck cites: “*We strive to create an environment of mutual respect, encouragement and teamwork -- an environment that rewards commitment and performance and is responsive to the needs of our employees and their families.*” ([www.merck.com](http://www.merck.com)).
exploration in this dissertation and the phrases and words embedded in organizational mission and value statements. Even if the complexity of practices that can take multiple shapes and densities at different times cannot be fully encompassed, attempts should continue to be made.

I should point out that this is impossible to do exhaustively. What is apparent to our view is limited by our standpoint in this society in this year in this community with our peculiar personal biases and unique individual perspectives. Secondly, even if people and organizations have a broad and embracing purview, it will never encompass everything to know about the practice or the skill. Therefore, since organizational, communication and interpersonal skills cannot be definitively described and circumscribed, since these skills are locally and temporally bound, I suggest that initial analysis be grounded in the exposition of the generally accepted relational dimensions of organizational, communication and interpersonal skills, being cautious in all such attempts that particular labels and descriptions do not become reified.

However, that being said, preliminary definitions of the types of behaviours and practices that describe the use of the relational skill can and should be made. This is an activity that should involve as wide a community (including workers and thought leaders in various disciplines) as possible. It is possible that different communities of practice (social and work) may interpret and define organizational, communication and interpersonal practices in different ways. For example, the ways in which men and women can communicate, deal with conflict, etc. are likely to be different for members of
conservative collectivist communities than for members of aggressive individualistic cultures. The ways in which the corporate citizens of large bureaucratic Canadian banks can exercise relational skills will be constrained by different social norms than those affecting workers in egalitarian dotcom start-ups. This is to be expected and should be accepted as the start of an ongoing dialogue about relational skills and their practice.

Tied in with such descriptions should be suggestions for learning or improving the individual’s facility with particular relational skills, whether these are formal training initiatives or informal learning activities-in-place. Formal acknowledgement of relational skills, their description and their use are pre-requisite to the second point.

With a limited, preliminary description of relational skills in hand, our organizations need to be analyzed to learn what and how relational skills are deployed throughout the organization and how these are mediated/not mediated through organizational texts and practices through an institutional ethnographical analysis such as the methodology advocated by Dorothy Smith (1987). As an example of what such an analysis might consider, I will use CIBC. I looked at three recent (January, 2010) job postings available on the CIBC website (www.cibc.com). A variety of relational requirements and skills were listed for each position as shown in Table 11.1 below:
Table 11.1: Relational Expectations in 3 CIBC Clerical Job Postings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR, Vancouver, British Columbia</th>
<th>Executive Assistant, Toronto, Ontario</th>
<th>Casual Day Shift Supply Clerk, Winnipeg, Manitoba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Among Requirements:</td>
<td>Among Requirements:</td>
<td>Among Requirements:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Service oriented</td>
<td>▪ Working knowledge of CIBC’s organizational structure</td>
<td>▪ Organizational skills sufficient to prioritize routine daily workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Thorough</td>
<td>▪ Demonstrated tact, diplomacy, professionalism and discretion</td>
<td>▪ Ability to communicate both verbal and written sufficiently to express an idea or thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Strong interpersonal understanding</td>
<td>▪ Well developed organization/time management skills</td>
<td>▪ Excellent interpersonal and communication (verbal and written) skills to interact with a wide range of individuals at all levels in situations that often require eliciting or sustaining cooperation and participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Initiative</td>
<td>▪ Agile/Adaptable</td>
<td>▪ Accuracy/Attention to Detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Results orientation</td>
<td>▪ Communication</td>
<td>▪ Balancing/ Handling Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teamwork and partnering</td>
<td>▪ Initiative</td>
<td>▪ Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Thorough</td>
<td>▪ Results Orientation</td>
<td>▪ Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Service Orientation</td>
<td>▪ Analytic/Systematic Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Teamwork &amp; Partnering</td>
<td>▪ Building Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Thorough</td>
<td>▪ Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Service Orientation</td>
<td>▪ Service Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Teamwork &amp; Partnering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Thorough</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Skills

- Initiative
- Interpersonal Understanding
- Results Orientation
- Service Orientation
- Teamwork & Partnering
- Thorough

- Agile/Adaptable
- Communication
- Initiative
- Results Orientation
- Service Orientation
- Teamwork & Partnering

- Accuracy/Attention to Detail
- Balancing/ Handling Cash
- Processing
- Accountability
- Analytic/Systematic Thinking
- Building Trust
- Communication
- Service Orientation
- Teamwork & Partnering
- Thorough

Implicit in each of these lists are the three relational skills discussed in this dissertation: organizational, communication and interpersonal. In addition to its posting system, CIBC also has a comprehensive performance management system that encompasses both an outline of annual performance objectives determined at the beginning of the employee’s performance year and documentation of the employee’s accomplishments relative to the objectives at the end of the performance year. These are typically defined in ways that can be measured and have direct impact on the employee’s compensation. It would be instructive to review how the relational skills demanded in the posting are followed
through in the documentation presented through the performance management system. With a textual and contextual understanding of the organization such an institutional ethnography would provide, dissonances and discrepancies between the expressed organizational requirements for relational skills such as organizational, communication and interpersonal skills – all of which are listed as pre-requisite to even the most junior of the clerical postings listed in Table 11.1 – and expressed acknowledgement of relational skills usage could be reviewed, analyzed and potentially remediated. At the very least, unacknowledged expressions of relational skills and implicit requirements for the practice of relational skills would be made explicit by such an analysis.

Relational practice expectations should be written into the job descriptions of these workers to the extent these are understood. In large companies with formal performance management systems, they should also be listed among the clerical worker’s work goals so that they are explicit and their utilization be recognized at the end of the performance year. By making some relational skills visible, the complexities and broad exercise of cohering and facilitating practices will demonstrate the importance and intricacies of the role.

Initial efforts will no doubt be limited and inadequate, but they must be made in order to progress to better and more comprehensive awareness and recognition of these critical skill sets. It may be necessary, at least until the nature of specific relational skills is better understood and organizationally accepted, that the exercise of the skills be described rather than measured, at least at first.
I should point out that there is a serious danger in specifying and measuring relational skills, because the tendency will always be to reduce relational practice to the skills and behaviours as defined, to reify and harden them into static expressions – and, as I have noted above, taxonomies, descriptions, definitions can never be complete or temporally fixed as definite. However, if the attempt to identify and describe what some of these practices are is not made, they will never be recognized or valued as skilled worker contributions to their work and work environment.

**Directions for Future Research**

Essentially, I see three areas that warrant future research. The first two have been described in the previous section. Relational practice, not excluding the emotional labour/work embedded in relational practice, is a messy and complex subject. It would be impossible to clarify unequivocally, but certainly more clarity and depth could be brought to what is meant by the concept and specific practices/complexes of practice within this category of skills, in particular the organizational, communication and interpersonal skills I have explored through this dissertation.

Secondly, it would be very interesting to trace the practice of organizational, communication and interpersonal skills from the request for them in job postings through the performance management systems instituted by various organizations to understand how these practices are either buried or exposed as part of the work expectations as
illustrated by the CIBC example earlier in this chapter. This would indicate how the practice of these skills is mediated through the official and documented organizational processes/procedures to become either articulate or remain hidden and unrewarded in formal organizational discourse. To support the textual analysis of corporate practice, interviews and focus groups should be conducted with targeted groups of clerical workers to understand their perceptions of the utilization and practice of relational skills in their roles. As part of the first-hand accounts of these interviewed clerical workers, especially those who have been in the workforce for several or more years, it would be useful to understand to what extent the quality, quantity and nature of organizational, communication and interpersonal skills has changed over the years of their workforce participation.

There is a third aspect of what I have discussed that would also be very interesting and useful to investigate, that is, an organizational cross-analysis to see how relational skill, which presents itself largely as deference at the level of clerical workers, becomes transmuted into leadership skill as one approaches the executive suite. As part of this exploration, it would also be interesting to look at the gender differences in the interpretation of relational practice for men and women at different status and power levels within the organizational hierarchy.
**Concluding Remarks**

In this dissertation, I have provided a general overview of the state of clerical work and implications for clerical workers early in the twenty-first century as they face increased competition for a reduced number of jobs and changes in how they do their jobs due to organizational and work changes resulting from technological advances while retaining the need for organizational, communication and interpersonal skills sometimes in altered and/or more complex forms. I have also provided a provisional look at the importance of relational practice to the performance of workers in most clerical roles. More importantly, I have been able to show that skills such as organizational, communication and interpersonal skills are learned, not innate.

These determinations are applicable to and important for more than clerical workers. In fact, all jobs, specifically those which are filled primarily by women and those roles not considered “professional” because of low entry requirements should be analyzed and evaluated to determine the relational skills tacitly incorporated into them.

Much more research needs to be done on the presence of relational practice and, in particular, the learning of relational skills. This has been a preliminary exploration of the subject but it shows clearly that some of the accepted wisdom about relational practice – for example, that these are inherent female traits that require little training – needs to be re-evaluated and redefined so that these become visible as skills and behaviours requiring intentional learning efforts and mentoring. Furthermore, when done as labour in the workplace, the effective practice of relational skills such as organizational,
communication and interpersonal skills are deserving of acknowledgement and recompense.
Appendix A: Clerical Worker Case Study

Clerical Worker Interviewee Profiles (Basic Characteristics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Years in Labour Force</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aubrey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>Research Co-ordinator</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Medical Records Clerk (on union secondment as organizer)</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Outreach Customer Service Clerk</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Customer Service Representative</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Information Retrieval Assistant</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Real Estate Officer</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolde</td>
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<td>50-54</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Executive Assistant</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>Office Legal Administrator</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>Medical Research Assistant</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
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<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>26-30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ophelia</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Executive Secretary</td>
<td>16-20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>Call Centre Representative</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renata</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
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<td>Theresa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Medical Receptionist</td>
<td>31+</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Constituency Assistant</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Professional Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Executive Assistant</td>
<td>31+</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Investigations Clerk</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Administrative Coordinator</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Requisition Administrator</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>College or Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MANAGERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwenevra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talma &amp; Wilma</td>
<td>F &amp; F</td>
<td>Principal, Temporary Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margriet</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Manager, Temporary Agency branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finiola</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Vice-President, Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glynnis</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Director, Office Worker Retraining Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Statistical Tables, EJRM Survey Sample

All statistics are drawn from the EJRM survey unless otherwise specified.

Demographic Information

Sex

(Table 8.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>45 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>85 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>43 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age

(Table 8.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8 %</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-Assessed Class Identification

(Table 8.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Upper /Upper Middle</th>
<th>Middle/Lower Middle</th>
<th>Working / Lower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>39 %</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20 %</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Visible Minority

(Table 8.2)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
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<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Birth Country

*(Table 8.2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>77 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>74 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>77 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>79 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Disability

*(unreferenced background information)*

<table>
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<th>No</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>99 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>99 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>94 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>94 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>97 %</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>97 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>98 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>98 %</td>
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</table>

### Demographic information: summary table

*(Table 8.2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55+</th>
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<th>Yes</th>
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<td>384</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>554</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
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<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>248</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>12</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>#</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
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<td>152</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-ascribed class ID</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Upper Middle</th>
<th>Lower Middle</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>“Middle”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
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<td>205</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<td>#</td>
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<td>109</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Abroad</th>
</tr>
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<td>980</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>554</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work and Education

Educational Attainment

(Table 9.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>No Diploma</th>
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<th>Non U diploma</th>
<th>University Degree</th>
<th>Grad/Prof Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3 %</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>31 %</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>32 %</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>33 %</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- “High school” category includes 17 percent who completed some post-highschool training but did not finish.

Relation of learning to job

(Chapter 9, subsection: “ Appropriateness of Education to Job”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Closely Related</th>
<th>Somewhat Related</th>
<th>Not at all Related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>58 %</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Credential Gap (Credential Required minus Credential Attained)

(Tables 9.2 & 9.5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Underqualified</th>
<th>Matched</th>
<th>Underemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9 %</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Job-Education Performance Matches (Education Used on Job minus Education Attained)

(Tables 9.3 & 9.5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Underqualified</th>
<th>Matched</th>
<th>Underemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19 %</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Job-Education Subjective Matches (Self-assessed feelings of match/mismatch) & 9.5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Underqualified</th>
<th>Matched</th>
<th>Underemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in Decision-Making (policies, products & services, budgets, hiring, etc.)
(Tables 9.9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Managerial Role
(Tables 9.9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial role</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level of managerial responsibility
(Unreferenced background information)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial role</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Foreperson</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Lower Mgmt</th>
<th>Middle Mgmt</th>
<th>Upper/Top Mgmt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Type of Decision-Making
(Unreferenced background information)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Provide Advice</th>
<th>Decide subject to approval</th>
<th>Decide as part of group</th>
<th>Decide alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td># 51%</td>
<td># 49%</td>
<td># 44%</td>
<td># 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>28 9%</td>
<td>30 9%</td>
<td>50 13%</td>
<td>51 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>29 7%</td>
<td>5 5%</td>
<td>77 15%</td>
<td>55 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers*</td>
<td>23 5%</td>
<td>6 6%</td>
<td>28 15%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 2 clerical workers (5%) said they did not know their role in decision making. These are included in the calculations, but not shown in the table.

Task Discretion (Amount of Choice in Performing Job Tasks)
(Tables 9.9 & 9.10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Great Deal</th>
<th>A Fair Amount</th>
<th>A Little</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>133 40%</td>
<td>142 37%</td>
<td>50 15%</td>
<td>8 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>173 44%</td>
<td>138 35%</td>
<td>50 13%</td>
<td>30 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>153 35%</td>
<td>175 40%</td>
<td>72 17%</td>
<td>34 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>21 18%</td>
<td>53 44%</td>
<td>35 29%</td>
<td>11 9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Great deal/fair: Professional: 83%; Industrial: 79%; Service: 75%; Clerical 62%
A little/None Professional: 17%; Industrial: 21%; Service: 25%; Clerical 38%

Amount of Creativity in Job
(Tables 9.9 & 9.11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Great Deal</th>
<th>A Fair Amount</th>
<th>A Little</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>164 45%</td>
<td>132 37%</td>
<td>47 13%</td>
<td>18 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>65 17%</td>
<td>134 35%</td>
<td>118 31%</td>
<td>62 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers</td>
<td>88 20%</td>
<td>161 37%</td>
<td>129 30%</td>
<td>54 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>5 4%</td>
<td>41 34%</td>
<td>49 40%</td>
<td>27 22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much/Fair Amount: Professional: 82%; Industrial: 53%; Service: 57%; Clerical 38%
A little/None: Professional: 18%; Industrial: 47%; Service: 43%; Clerical 62%

Job Satisfaction
(Chapter 9, subsection: “Job Satisfaction”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
<th>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>43 37%</td>
<td>170 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>59 50%</td>
<td>198 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied</td>
<td>8 7%</td>
<td>20 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>7 6%</td>
<td>30 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>14 3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Employment Income

### Average annual income

(Table 9.6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
<th>Service Workers (excluding office workers)</th>
<th>All Workers (excluding office workers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31 %</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 – 39,999</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>56 %</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 – 59,999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 and over</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Average annual income

(Table 9.6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>All Workers excl office workers</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
<th>Service Workers excl office workers</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $30,000</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>22 %</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 – 39,999</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 – 59,999</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>35 %</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 and over</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1048</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>101 %</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Income comparison: union vs non-union clerical workers

(Table 9.7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Workers with Union</th>
<th>Workers with Union + other professional memberships</th>
<th>Workers with no union or other professional membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 – 29,999</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 – 39,999</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29 %</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 – 59,999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 and over</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>101 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Job Changes in Previous Five Years
(Table 9.8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>First Job</th>
<th>Promotion/Transfer</th>
<th>New Job/New Org</th>
<th>Become Unemployed</th>
<th>PT -&gt; FT or FT -&gt; PT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers*</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* WALL survey, 2004

Ongoing Learning
(Selected general background statistics)

Change in work techniques & equipment over past five years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Great Deal</th>
<th>Moderate Amount</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Need to learn new skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Training in previous year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Informal learning in previous year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>93 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>87 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>83 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>81 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Skill changes over previous five years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>63 %</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Workers</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>51 %</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers (excl clerical workers)</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Workers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45 %</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Type of training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training mentioned by respondents</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in job-related informal learning</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New general occupational knowledge</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New job tasks</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computers</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New equipment</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational / managerial skills</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting / financial management</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork / problem solving / communications</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment conditions / workers’ rights</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace politics</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<td>Health and safety</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
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Appendix C: Case Study Interview Questions

A. Employment Profile: Filtering Question(s)

Screen to confirm selection of employed labour force, including declared self-employed/contract workers at this workplace for more than a few months.

A1. What is your current employment status?
(Working for wage/salary or self-employed/contract worker here for at least a few months?)

A2. For how many WEEKS/MONTHS during the last 12 months were you employed?
Interviewer: paid absence from work, for example, paid vacation, paid sick leave, etc. count as being employed.

If person:
- Has worked less than A FEW MONTHS,
- Is self-employed or
- Has other employment arrangement
The respondent is not eligible for the interview,
- Thank respondent and end interview

A3. Respondent Gender ____

A4. In what year were you born? ___________

B. Paid Work

B2. How many hours do you usually work FOR PAY in a normal week? _________
(The main job is the one that earns you the most money, offers the most security, or the most hours.)

B3. How would you describe the hours you usually work?
(Regular daytime schedule or shift, a regular evening shift, a regular night shift, a rotating shift, a split shift, on call or casual, irregular schedule, regular schedule plus on call?)

Interviewer: 'On call' means no prearranged schedule but called as need arises (e.g., a substitute teacher). 'Irregular schedule' is usually prearranged one week or more in advance.

B4. How long have you been in the labour force? ______________

B5. For how many years have you been employed by the organization where you now work?
____________

B6. And for how many years have you been employed at the job you hold now? __________.
Interviewer: If there have been small changes or minor ongoing changes in the job R currently has, ask them to think about this as the job they now hold.

B7. How satisfied are you with your job? (Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied) Probe: Note main reasons.

B8. Is your job permanent, that is, it has no specified end date, or is it temporary?

Permanent/Temp Job]

B9. If temporary job
Are you working on a temporary basis by your own choice? ____________________

B10. Given the choice, would you like to work more, less, or the same number of hours you now work? ______________

Interviewer: If required, the amount of salary earned would go up or go down as hours go up or down.

B11. How likely is it that you will lose your main job in the next year? (Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?)

B12. In the last five years did any of the following things happen to you?

- ___ get your first job.
- ___ get a promotion or new job in same organization.
- ___ move to a new job in a new organization for you.
- ___ become unemployed.
- ___ move from part-time to full-time or vice versa.
- ___ take time off for maternity or parental leave?

Record any changes and probe.

C. Unpaid Work

Interviewer: We would like to know how you spend the rest of your time in a typical week beyond paid employment, sleep, personal hygiene and leisure activities.

C1. In a TYPICAL week, how much time do you spend doing UNPAID housework activities including cooking, cleaning, shopping, home budgeting, yard work or home maintenance? ___.

INTERVIEWER: Includes any housework outside R’s home for others that is unpaid.

C2. In a typical week, how much time do you spend looking after children WITHOUT pay? _____

INTERVIEWER: This includes R’s own children as well as any other children.

C3. How much time do you spend caring for an elderly or disabled family member? ____.

INTERVIEWER: If required, we are still thinking about a typical week.

C4. In the past year did you do any unpaid volunteer work in any organization or group? ___
C5. (If yes on C4) What types of organizations did you volunteer for?

- ___ political organization (inc political parties, social or environment issue, organization, etc.)
- ___ cultural educational or hobby group (theatre group, book club, bridge club, etc.)
- ___ religious organization
- ___ sports organization (baseball league, tennis club, etc.)
- ___ service club (Kiwanis, Knight Columbus, Shiners)
- ___ school or neighbourhood association (PTA, neighbourhood watch, rate payers, etc.)
- ___ other groups or organizations (specify) _______________________
- ___ don't know
- ___ r refused

C6. (If yes on C4) On average, how much time per week did you spend in these volunteer activities over the past year? ___.

D. Education

D1. What is the highest level of education you have obtained (Attainment in degree or diploma program. NOT short-term certificates, upgrading courses)

- ___ elementary school
- ___ some high school
- ___ completed high school
- ___ high school equivalency
- ___ some community college/cegep
- ___ diploma community college / cegep
- ___ no school
- ___ some university
- ___ completed undergraduate degree
- ___ some professional studies
- ___ completed professional degree
- ___ some graduate university
- ___ completed graduate degree
- ___ d don't know
- ___ r refused

D1A. If level incomplete, specify reason:

___________________________________________________________________________.

D2. What was the last year you were in this educational program? _________________

D3. What high school program or stream were you in (specify university / community college / vocational / general)? What did you study and why? How well did you do, in terms of grades (general percentage or letter grade level), and were your grades above average, average or below average for your class?

D3A When you were in high school, were you thinking about preparing for the later job market? Preparing for any particular type of work?

D3B If R has formal education greater than 5 (more than high school) Please tell me more about your formal schooling after high school. What did you study? Why? Were you preparing for job market or any particular type of work? How well did you do (above/average/below for class)?

D4. What is your general assessment of how well designed your formal education was in terms of the content and number of courses? How do you now feel about its adequacy in preparing you for employment?
D5. Where was your highest level of formal education obtained: Canada, other country?

D6. (If other country) How comparable do you think this education is to Canadian education?

___ the same
___ very similar
___ somewhat different
___ significantly different
___ d don't know
___ r refused

D7. At any time during the past year did you receive ANY FORMAL training or education including courses, private lessons, correspondence courses (written or electronic), workshops, apprenticeship training, arts, crafts, recreation courses, or any other training or education no matter how long or short?

Interviewer: This includes any organized instruction by a designated instructor but does not include informal on-the-job training.

___ 1 yes
___ 5 no
___ d don't know
___ r refused

D7a. [If yes] Specify credit program (1-5) or course type (Get details of any courses.)

___ high school diploma
___ community or private college certificate
___ private arts school, business college or technical school
___ university degree
___ trades certificate or license
___ professional license
___ job entry training
___ job or career upgrading
___ occupational health and safety/environmental protection
___ d don't know
___ r refused

___ computer training
___ English as a second language
___ French as a second language
___ basic reading, writing and numeric skills
___ human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism
___ general interest, hobby, etc.
___ other (specify)

D8. What motivated you to take this course/program? Please specify. (job-related; general interest; other (specify)________

D9. Who contributed towards the direct expenses for this course(s)? Was it you personally or your family, an employer, a government agency, a union or professional association, or someone else?

D10. During the past year were there any FORMAL training or education programs, or courses that you WANTED TO TAKE for any reason including for your career or job, hobby, recreation, or personal interest and so on, BUT DID NOT?

D12. [If yes] What were your reasons for not taking it?

___ do not need any more formal organized courses
___ there are no relevant courses available
___ courses are at inconvenient times and places
___ lack of employer support
___ family responsibilities such as taking care of __ children or other dependents
___ do not have affordable child care
___ poor grades or do not have the qualifications
___ have a language barrier
___ do not have the time
___ health reasons
___ physical or mental disability, whether long or short term
___ courses are too expensive or you do not have money for courses
___ d don't know
___ r refused

D13. Are you planning to take any FORMAL organized courses in the next few years?
___ 1 yes (whether or not specific courses yet identified)
___ 3 maybe (include "hope so", "if it works out", etc.)
___ 5 no
___ d don't know
___ r refused

D14. If yes, why?
___ 1 Job related motivation
___ 2 General interests
___ 3 Other
___ d don't know
___ r refused

D15-D19. (Ask all who took any courses or programs in past year) Have the courses you took in the past year been
___ very helpful,
___ fairly helpful or
___ not helpful for the following

D15. ...increasing your income
D16. ...keeping your job
D17. ...get a promotion
D18. ...do your job better
D19. ...find or change jobs

D21. How would you rate your general ability to learn new things? 
(excellent, good, average, somewhat below average, or fairly poor) 
Interviewer: if asked, ‘new things’ include new things at home, at work, of general interest and so on.

D22. Are your computer skills much higher, higher, the same, lower, or much lower than the requirements of your (main) job?

D23. Thinking back earlier than the past year and excluding full-time attendance in schooling toward your highest degree or diploma, about how many courses, private lessons, correspondence courses (written or electronic), workshops, apprenticeship training, arts, crafts, recreation courses, or any other formal training or education no matter how long or short have you taken in the last four years, 1998 through 2002?
Interviewer: This includes any organized instruction by a designated instructor but does not include informal ___ on-the-job training
____ two or more each year _______ no courses
____ at least one each year _______ d don't know
____ a few courses during this period ___ r refused
____ one course

D24 (If yes to earlier courses) What type(s) of course(s)?

Interviewer: Get details of any courses and enter code(s)
____ professional license or certificate course __ basic reading, writing and numeric
____ job entry training _______ skills
____ job or career upgrading _______ human rights, anti-discrimination, anti-racism
____ occupational health and safety/environmental protection _______ general interest, hobby, etc.
____ computer training _______ other (specify)____________
____ English as a second language _______ d don't know
____ French as a second language _______ r refused

Informal Learning

Now, please think about ANY INFORMAL LEARNING you have done during the last year OUTSIDE of formal or organized courses. You may spend a little time or a lot of time on it. This includes anything you do either by yourself or with other people to gain knowledge, skill or understanding. We are going to talk about employment-related informal learning first, followed by informal learning related to volunteer work, housework and general interests.

(Interviewer: Ask about each informal learning item and give respondent time to give substantive response as well as “yes/no”. Do not lead the respondent into superficial answers. But ensure that subject-related informal learning (e.g. computer skills) that occurs in non-employment spheres can be identified.

E. Employment Related Informal Learning

First, let's talk about any INFORMAL learning activities OUTSIDE OF COURSES that have some connection with your PAID EMPLOYMENT. This includes any INFORMAL learning you did by yourself or with others in the last year.

Interviewer: If required, remind R this does not include formal learning such as going to college or school or formal learning at work, school etc. and only refers to informal learning related to their employment.

E1. Have you done any informal learning to keep up with new general knowledge in your occupation during the last year? [Yes/No]

E2. Informal learning of new job tasks? [Yes/No]

E3. Learning about computers? [Yes/No]
E4. Learning about new equipment? [Yes/No]
E5. Organizational or managerial skills? [Yes/No]
E6. Budgeting or financial management? [Yes/No]
E7. Teamwork, problem solving, or communications skills [Yes/No]
E8. Learning about employment conditions or workers’ rights? [Yes/No]
E9. Politics in the workplace? [Yes/No]
E10. Language and literacy? [Yes/No]
E11. Health and safety? [Yes/No]

E12. Thinking about all the informal learning you have been doing in the last year that is related to your employment; about how many hours did this amount to IN A TYPICAL WEEK? (Just give us your best guess in hours spent.)

For each of the following please tell me if your informal learning has been very helpful, fairly helpful, or not helpful?

E13. First, how helpful has your informal learning been in helping you to increase your income? Probe.
E14. How helpful has your informal learning been to keep your job?
E15. How helpful has your informal learning been to get a promotion?
E16. How helpful has your informal learning been to do your job better?
E17. How helpful has your informal learning been to find or to change jobs?

**F. Volunteer Work Related Informal Learning**

[Skip if Respondent did no volunteering last year]
Now, please think about ANY INFORMAL LEARNING you have done during the last year OUTSIDE of formal or organized courses that is related to volunteering activities.

Did you learn anything informally by yourself or with others about any of the following related to your volunteer activities in the last year?

Interviewer: if required, remind R this does not include formal learning and only refers to informal learning related to their volunteer activities in the last year.

F1. First, learning about computers? [Yes/No]
F2. Organizational or managerial skills? [Yes/No]
F3. Budgeting or financial management? [Yes/No]
F4. Teamwork, problem solving, or communications skills? [Yes/No]
F5. Interpersonal skills? [Yes/No]
F6. Health and well being? [Yes/No]
F7. Learning about new equipment? [Yes/No]
F8. Language skills? [Yes/No]
F9. Increased knowledge about social, political or environmental issues? [Yes/No]
F10. Thinking about all the informal learning you did in the last year that is related to all your volunteer activities, about how many hours did this amount to IN A TYPICAL WEEK? Just give us your best guess.
F11. How helpful has your volunteer-related informal learning been in helping you to do your paid job better? Would you say very helpful, fairly helpful, or not helpful? [Interviewer; Probe especially important here]

G. Housework Related Informal Learning

Think of any informal learning you have done on your own or with others in relation to household related work in the last year. For each of the following please tell us if you have learned anything outside a formal class in the last year about household related work.

G1. First, is there anything you learned about home repair and maintenance in the last year? (Y/N)
G2. What about cooking? [Yes/No]
G3. Parenting and childcare? [Yes/No]
G4. Caring for the elderly? [Yes/No]
G5. Intimate[or friendship] relationships? [Yes/No]
G6. Health and well being? [Yes/No]
G7. Learning about new equipment or appliances? [Yes/No]
G8. Renovation, landscaping or gardening skills? [Yes/No]
G9. Learning about computers? [Yes/No]
G10. Budgeting or financial management? [Yes/No]
G11. Organizational or management skills?
G12. Team work, problem solving or communication skills?
G13. Interpersonal [social] skills?
G14. Thinking about all the informal learning you did in the last year that is related to your household related work, how many hours did this amount to IN A TYPICAL WEEK? Just give us your best guess.

G15. Has your informal learning been very helpful, fairly helpful, or not helpful in helping you do your paid job better? [1 very helpful / 3 fairly helpful / 5 not helpful]

H. Informal Learning about General Interests

Here is a list of other things that people learn outside of formal classes. These things are not directly related to employment, household work, or volunteer activities but related to your general interests. For each of the following please tell me if you learned anything about these areas of general interest by yourself or with others outside of a formal class in the last year.

H1. First, what about sports or recreation? [Yes/No]

H2. What about cultural traditions or customs [Yes/No]

H3. And leisure or hobby skills? [Yes/No]

H4. Social skills/ personal development? [e.g. self-help books] [Yes/No]

H5. Health and well being? [Yes/No]

H6. Finances? [Yes/No]

H7. Learning about computers? [Yes/No]

H8. Language skills? [Yes/No]

H9. Science and technology? [Yes/No]

H10. (Intimate or )Friendship relations? [Yes/No]

H11. Religion or spirituality? [Yes/No]

H12. Social, political or environmental issues? [Yes/No]

H13. Have you done any other general interest learning in the last year? [Yes/No]

H14. Thinking about all the informal general interest learning you did in the last year that was NOT related to employment, community volunteer activities or housework, about how many hours did this amount to IN A TYPICAL WEEK? Just give us your best guess.

H15. Has your general interest informal learning been very helpful, fairly helpful, or not helpful in helping you do your paid job better? (Probe)
Conclude this section by asking for general reflection on relevance of any unpaid work, and informal learning, respectively, to do their job well. [Probe re most helpful learning]

**I. Occupational Information**

I1. What is your occupation* and your specific job title? Do you have a written job description? If so, what does it specify? Give a detailed description of your actual activities on a typical day, including tasks not specified in your job description. [PROBE FOR personal account of main activities and work techniques used and give respondent ample time to give full account.]

I1A How much of your job is creative rather than routine and following established rules? (a great deal is creative; moderate amount; a little; none at all).

I2. How would you describe the basic work of your organization? [Compare to national survey question: What kind of business, industry or service is this? Please be specific, for example: road maintenance, secondary school, municipal police, wheat farm, retail shoe store, temporary help agency, full-service garage, trapping. How about the work of your work unit/group/department?]

I3. Interviewer: Register type of organization or company.

private company /
non-profit organization (if asked Red Cross, Credit Union, Co-operatives, etc.) /
public sector /
government owned company /
federal provincial or municipal ministry or agency

[If occupation indicates managerial or supervisory role – REGISTER AND SKIP I4]

I4. Do you have a managerial or supervisory role at your place of work? [Yes/No]

I5. [If yes to I4 or managerial job title] Which of the following best describes the supervisory role you have at your place of work? Would you say you are a top manager of a plant, branch or division of an organization, upper level manager, middle level manager, lower managerial position, supervisor, or foreperson?

I6. [Interviewer: IF YOU KNOW, DO NOT ASK, REGISTER NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES] How many people are employed by the entire organization you work in?

1 or 2
3 to 10
11 to 49
50 - 99
100 - 249
250 - 499
500 - 999
1,000 or more employees

We would like to know about your employment history in some more detail.

I7. At what stage in your life and how did you first become interested in taking up your current line of employment or career? What were your very first work experiences and what was your basic career/job path from then to now?
I8. How did you originally get a job in this organization (applied to advert, recruited, referred by friends, applied on chance, ...)? If current job different, how did you get it?

I9. What are your future career plans? (Stay in current job, promotion, seek job elsewhere, not sure…) Why?

I10. Have you actively sought another job recently? Yes/No

I15. [If union member] Which of the following BEST describes your involvement in your union or association: not involved, attend meetings, active on issues or committees, have held appointed position, or have run for elected position?

Interviewer: if R gives more than one answer code the highest number, i.e. if R say 2 and 4 code 4.

I16. [If union member] Have you ever attended a union or association education course? [Yes/No]

I17. [If yes] What courses?

1 equity issues, anti-discrimination
2 health and safety
3 apprenticeships
4 computer training
5 reading and learning skills
6 other skills upgrading
7 economic and political education
8 steward training
9 other (specify)

Interviewer: DO NOT READ LIST, but get respondent to say something about each type of course taken.

I18. [If yes] How has this course(s) affected your activity in the union or association?

1 increased greatly
2 increased
3 stayed the same
4 decreased
5 decreased greatly

J. Learning and Work Relations

J1. To what extent do you think you have been able to use (a) your school knowledge (b) formal on-the-job training and (c) information from other learning activities in doing this job?

[Probe for examples and distinction between basic generic knowledge and narrower specific knowledge]

J2. What certification or license, if any, was required to qualify for your job? [Yes/No]

Interviewer: receiving a degree or diploma does not count as certification or license.

J3. [If certified] About how long did it take you to get this license or certification? ____years / ____ months
J4. Beyond formal schooling, how long did it take for you to learn to perform your job adequately?

- few days or less
- a week to a month
- 1 to 3 months
- more than 3 months up to 6 months
- more than 6 months up to 1 year
- 1 to 3 years / more than 3 years
- depends on the person

Interviewer: If R provides a non-time related answer say, "well in terms of days, months, or years, how much?" If required, read the list. If respondent says something like "continually learning new job tasks", register this and probe to get time to master basic job.

J5. How did you learn to do this job (any initial instruction, further training, self-study)?

J6. What have you learned by doing the job that you did not or could not learn during formal instruction?

(Probe for job-specific and more general abilities acquired. Any surprises?)

J7. What formal qualifications were required by the employer for you to be hired by this organization and, if different, to get current job (formal education, experience, skill demonstration, other things)?

J8. What general formal education is required for new applicants or for people who want to do the type of job you do?

- no special education requirements
- elementary school only
- some high school
- completion of high school
- equivalent of high school completion
- some community college
- certificate/diploma community college/CEGEP/etc.
- some university
- completion of an undergraduate university degree
- some professional studies
- completion of professional degree
- some graduate university
- completion of graduate university degree

J9. In your own experience, what general level of education is really needed to perform the tasks of your job?

- no special education requirements
- elementary school only
- some high school
- completion of high school
- equivalent of high school completion
- some community college
- certificate/diploma community college/CEGEP/etc.
- some university
- completion of an undergraduate university degree
- some professional studies
- completion of professional degree
- some graduate university
- completion of graduate university degree

J10. How closely is your job related to your formal education? Is it closely related, somewhat related, or not at all related?
1 closely related  2 somewhat related  3 not at all related

J11. In terms of your schooling, do you feel you are very overqualified, somewhat overqualified, adequately qualified, somewhat underqualified or very underqualified for your current job?

1 very overqualified  2 somewhat overqualified  3 adequately qualified  4 somewhat underqualified  5 very underqualified

**Vital to probe on this question. If respondent perceives mismatch, ask how they deal with this situation; for example, if underqualified, do they try to close the gap?**

J12. Do you have more, about the same, or less knowledge about your job compared to the knowledge your job actually requires?

1 much more  4 less  2 more  5 much less  3 about the same

J13. Do you have more, about the same, or fewer skills for your job compared to the skills your job actually requires?

1 much more  4 less  2 more  5 much less  3 about the same

J14. Beyond formal schooling, how much on-the-job training, apprenticeship training or job experience is now normally required for people to perform your type of job?

1 few days or less  6 1 to 3 years  2 a week to a month  7 more than 3 years  3 1 to 3 months  8 continual  4 more than 3 months up to 6 months  9 depends on the person}  5 more than 6 months up to 1 year

Interviewer, if R provides a non-time related answer say, "in terms of days, months, or years, how much?" If respondent says something like “continually learning new job tasks”, again probe to get time to master basic job.

J14. Which of the following have been important sources of specific knowledge to do your job? READ LIST:

on-the-job training or informal advice from co-workers
on-the-job training or informal advice from supervisors
own independent efforts
employer-sponsored training program
union/association education program
pre-employment training program
other (specify)? __________________
J15. What sorts …of programs for career development opportunities for workers like you are provided, by your employer? by your union/other association? [Probe for examples].

K. Labour Process Control

K1. Think of policy-making at your main workplace; that is, making decisions about such things as the products or services delivered, the total number of people employed, budgets, and so forth. Do you participate in making these kinds of decisions, or provide advice about them? Participation in Decision-making] [Yes/No]

K2. If Yes, do you make decisions

- yourself, make decisions subject to approval, or
- make decisions as a member of a group, only provide advice

Probe re who supervises you and how? Who do you supervise and how? Where do you fit in the authority structure of the organization? [Authority role]

K3. How much choice do you have in the way you perform the tasks of your job? READ LIST [Technical control]

- 1 design and plan all my own projects/tasks
- 2 plan many of my projects/ tasks
- 3 some choice in how to perform tasks
- 4 just follow instructions

[Note: Give ample time for respondent to give general response with any immediate comments. Then probe on following specific points:]

- To what extent do you control the design/planning, performance and modification of your actual job tasks?
- What kinds of problems do you have to deal with? Give examples of usual and unusual ones.
- Are there things that you do not tell your supervisor? If so, why not?

K4. When a project is completed in your workplace, to what extent do employees get to provide input on what worked, what didn’t and lessons for the future?

- 1 great deal
- 2 moderate amount
- 3 a little
- 4 not at all

K5. Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following: Your job often requires you to learn new skills?

- 1 strongly agree
- 2 somewhat agree
- 3 neither agree nor disagree
- 4 somewhat disagree
- 5 strongly disagree

K6. Management regularly encourages workers in my job to acquire more skills and knowledge.

- 1 strongly agree
- 2 somewhat agree
- 3 neither agree nor disagree
- 4 somewhat disagree
5 strongly disagree

K7. How often do you find your job too stressful: would you say:
1 all of the time
2 most of the time
3 about half the time
4 seldom
5 never

K8. In the last year, at work, have you been discriminated against, in any way by anyone you've had contact with? [Yes/No]

Interviewer, if asked, by discrimination we mean: being treated differently or unfairly because of a personal characteristic or distinction such as race, ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, or disability.

K9. (If yes) Specify grounds of discrimination.

K10. Do you feel there are any barriers (disability, race, gender, age, occupational class) faced by other employees in terms of recognition or encouragement by the employer? If yes, specify.

K11. Is there anything distinctive about the social composition (sex, race, ethnicity, age, social class, disability, religions, etc.) of your workplace? If yes, any accommodation for this differences?

L. Job Changes

L1. In the last five years, has the level of skill required to perform your job:
1 increased
3 stayed the same
5 decreased?

Key probe here

L2. In the last five years, to what extent have the work techniques and equipment (e.g. computers and software programs) you use on a regular basis in your job changed? Would you say:

a great deal
a moderate amount
a little
not at all

L3. What sorts of work reforms or major changes have occurred in the organization of your workplace in the past five years or so? Which have been introduced by management and which by workers?

L4. Has your workplace experienced any of the following forms of organizational change in the last five years? Interviewer: If mentioned in L3, just check off

a) A reduction in the number of employees
d) An increase in overtime hours
b) A reduction in the number of managers/ supervisors
e) Greater reliance on job rotation and/or multi-skilling
c) Greater reliance on part-time or temporary workers
L5. Compared to others in the same type of job, how well do you think you do your current job: above average, average or below average

1 above average 3 average 5 below average

L6. How does your current job relate to your career aspirations?

1 job much too low 5 job much exceeds my aspirations
2 job somewhat too low d don't know
3 job about right r refused
4 job somewhat exceeds my aspirations

M. Attitudes

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following general statements about the economy and employment relations

M1. During a strike, management should be prohibited by law from hiring workers to take the place of strikers. Do you:

1 strongly agree 4 disagree
2 agree 5 strongly disagree
3 neither agree nor disagree

M2. Corporations benefit owners at the expense of workers and consumers. Do you:

1 strongly agree 4 disagree
2 agree 5 strongly disagree
3 neither agree nor disagree

N. Health

N1. In general, would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

1 excellent 3 good 5 poor
2 very good 4 fair

Interviewer: This question refers to long-term health, i.e., a condition lasting or expected to last more than 6 months. If the respondent suffers from a temporary injury, ask about his/her usual condition.

N2. In the last five years, have there been any significant personal health changes in your life? If yes, what was this? [Interviewer: code and note specific health change(s)]

major illness, major workplace-related injury,
serious disability, close family member serious illness (that affected you), health improvement

N3. Do you have what you consider to be a disability? Yes/No

N4. If so, what is it?

1 physical 3 learning 5 combination
2 mental 4 health

O. Demographics/Personal Background

O1. In what country were you born?

O2. [If not Canada,] In what year did you immigrate to Canada?

O3. How would you BEST describe your ethnic or cultural heritage and colour?

Ask for self description and code literally. Match response yourself to closest of following: White-Caucasian of various nationalities including “white Canadian”, etc., Chinese, South Asian, Black, Aboriginal, Arab or West Asian, Filipino, South East Asian, Latin American, Japanese, Korean, various mixed categories (e.g. “black Canadian”)

O4. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority? [yes/no]

O5 What is your mother tongue?

P. Household Status

P1. Are you currently:

1 married 3 separated 5 widowed
2 living with a partner 4 divorced 6 never been married

P2 How many other people are in the household?

__ none __ post-school children d don't know
__ pre-school children __ other relatives r refused
__ children in school __ others

Q. Social Class, Income and Benefits
Q1. IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE one of the following names for your social class, which one would you say you belong to: upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, working class, or lower class?

upper class
upper middle class
lower middle class
working class
lower class

R volunteers do not think of themselves as part of any class, or denies classes exist (specify)

R volunteers "middle" class don’t know or can’t say.

[Note: Do NOT provide examples here. Just request class identity in respondent’s own terms].

[IF MARRIED OR LIVING WITH PARTNER]

Q2. Is your spouse or partner currently:

1 employed full-time  3 yes, employed part-time  5 not employed at all

Q3. What is your spouse’s occupation? Please be as specific as possible.

Q4. What is the highest level of formal education your mother obtained?

1 did not go to school
2 elementary school only
3 some high school
4 completed high school
5 high school equivalency
6 some community college/ CEGEP
7 certificate/diploma commercial college /
CEGEP
8 some university
9 completed undergraduate degree
10 some professional studies
11 completed professional degree
12 some graduate university
13 completed graduate degree

Q5. What was your mother’s main occupation while you were growing up? Please be as specific as possible.

Q6. And what about your father? What is the highest level of formal education he obtained?

1 did not go to school
2 elementary school only
3 some high school
4 completed high school
5 high school equivalency
6 some community college/ CEGEP
7 certificate/diploma commercial college /
CEGEP
8 some university
9 completed undergraduate degree
10 some professional studies
11 completed professional degree
12 some graduate university
13 completed graduate degree

Q7. What was your father’s main occupation while you were growing up? Please be as specific as possible.

Q8. Could you please tell me how much your gross personal income was from your employment only, for the year ending December 31, 2003 [ before taxes and other deductions]?

1 Less than $20,000  2 $20,000-$29,999  3 $30,000-$39,999
Q9. Could you please tell me how much your gross family income was for the year ending December 31, 2003 (before taxes and other deductions)?

1 Less than $20,000
2 $20,000-$29,999
3 $30,000-$39,999
4 $40,000-$49,999
5 $50,000-$59,999
6 $60,000-$69,999
7 $70,000-$79,999
8 $80,000-$89,999
9 $90,000-$99,999
10 $100,000 or more

Q10. Compared to a few years ago, are your income and benefits now much better, better, about the same, worse, or much worse?

1 much better
2 better
3 about the same
4 worse
5 much worse
7 R volunteers (s)he does not receive benefits

Q11. I receive a fair wage/salary for the job I do.

1 strongly agree
2 somewhat agree
3 neither agree nor disagree
4 somewhat disagree
5 strongly disagree

R. General Education-Jobs Match Reforms

I'd like to finish the interview with a few questions about your general views on relations between learning and paid employment.

R1. What sorts of workplace changes would you like to see implemented in your workplace and organization? ... What are your reasons for saying this?

R2. What do you think about the following specific proposals? [If not cited above] (Check agree... disagree and note any thematic comments on each item)

A. Give more workers greater decision making control over their jobs.

B. Shorter normal workweek with full-time secure jobs for more people. [with wages unchanged? with somewhat reduced wages?]

R3. [Final open-ended discussion on respondent’s other learning-work suggestions for change based on own experience:]
Do you have any additional ideas for better ways of organizing the paid workplace?

Do you have any additional ideas for better ways of organizing and offering learning opportunities in schools, workplaces and in society generally?

Do you have any additional ideas on union culture or professional association-based learning and courses?

Do you have any additional ideas on employer support for workers' education (both specific job training and general education)?

R4. Is there anything I missed or anything else you'd like to say about the things we've been talking about today?

[Comments] __________________________________________________________
References & Background Sources


Job Futures Website. www.jobfutures.ca.


