PART 2. BIOPOWER: THE ORGANISATIONAL PROGRAM

Through Foucault's major books, 'biopower' (also termed *bio-political* power) is a prominent, though until later in his career, implicit topic. Briefly described, biopower is the (a) isolation, (b) apprehension or production of capacities in individuals and (c) assemblage of capacities so as to facilitate some 'political'[53] or organisational goal. In particular, Foucault forwards the idea that society itself and its components are affected by and constitute biopower itself – a constant propagation and reflexive reification of Knowledge/discourse and power that produce and direct forces on individuals and populations (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, pp. 133-142; Foucault 1990a, 1995) and in so doing, instantiates an apparatus in which subjects and subjectivity in social institutions are produced – *knowledge/power that affects how we are and how we know our selves*. However, this production of subjectivity is not necessarily intentional. As indicated above, the intention of biopower is to make the subject productive in particular ways, for example, as a worker. The side effects of producing the subject's subjectivity are not necessarily intentional but are rather sometimes *caught up in* or *used* as resources in subsequent tactical decisions that produce particular subjectivities and which can be, in post hoc analyses, placed into a 'strategic' relation with those subjectivities.

In Foucault's own writing, biopower can be considered to have two main components – (a) the collection and deployment of scientific Knowledge to manipulate the microphysical actions of the body into a form that is productive for the producing organisation (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, pp. 134-135; Foucault 1995,

[53] I quote 'political' in order to signify that I am not referring particularly to affairs of the state. The principal use of bio-power in this report has to do with affairs of business organisations. That said, following Foucault and especially contemporary feminist theory, 'the personal is political' insofar as individual experiences, thoughts, feelings, etc. of people in society are disciplined and governed to produce or change thought and action in society or its components (Adams & Sydie 2002c, p. 206).

pp. 220-221) and (b) collection and deployment of scientific Knowledge to inculcate the self-management of individuals according to organisational goals so as to make governing of populations more economical. The former is commonly associated with what he called ‘discipline’, most famously detailed in his book titled ‘Discipline & Punish: Birth of the Prison’ (Foucault 1995). The latter is associated with the concept of ‘governmentality’, or the strategic application of Knowledge to ‘conduct the conduct’ of actors (Foucault 1980a, 1981, 1991a, 1993, 1997e, 2000b). Both topics will be addressed in this part of the report.

To Foucault, discipline:

> ...does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them. Instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units. It ‘trains’ the moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements – small, separate cells, organic autonomies, generic identities and continuities, combinatory segments. Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy. (Foucault 1995, p. 170)

It is this that will be the principal focus of this chapter. In particular, this chapter will include an inspection of ways that the four call centres participating in this project act to enclose and partition workers into physical and virtual ‘spaces’ such that they may be more easily observed, their actions economically separated into parts for observation, inscription and examination, and selected parts reassembled in a form that economically produces what the organisation wants. At the same time, this dividing of space and of the workers’ bodies and minds is also

implicated in the production of inscriptions that are considered to represent the 'productive' aspects of the workers' activities in space and time.[54]

In other words, while the organisation organises and disciplines space, time and activity and imposes forces upon subjects to make them productive in ways valued by the organisation, it also translates their actions into inscriptions of some sort that permit the organisation to 'see': (a) each individual according to his or her performance within particular categories of action; (b) everyone at once by aggregating the inscriptions so as to make the whole population visible according to the same categories used to make individuals visible; and (c) and 'position' each individual within the aggregates. Together, these are referred to as hierarchical observation and normalising judgement (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, esp. pp. 43-167; Findlay & Newton 1998; Foucault 1995, 1996a; Hoskin 1998; Jackson & Carter 1998; McKinlay & Taylor 1995; Townley 1998). As Townley and others describe, this process is facilitated by the application of accounting techniques through which inscriptions are manipulated so as to make individuals and entire groups representable in terms of quantities and economies of action (Bougen 1994; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, esp. pp. 43-167; Foucault 1995; Hoskin & Macve 1994; McSweeney 1994; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987; Tomlinson 1994; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996) – scientific processes that manufacture a particular type of 'truth' about their target.

In this individualisation and totalisation, actors are exposed to forces that make them all visible as members of a mass differentiated according to categories of productivity and quality as alluded to above. By so making them visible, subjects thus become susceptible to forces that are aimed at them by management to

[54] In the following chapter I will detail how the product of inscriptions is implicated in the development of practices that take advantage of these inscriptions in deepening the subject's involvement in one's own management, and subjectification.

continuously discipline their actions within these categories with rules, tools and technologies that at the same time make particular observations, inscriptions, judgements and evaluations possible. The result is the production of certain 'objective' measures of productivity and quality, which are nonetheless also affected by the way observations, etc. are performed and how the organisation displays aggregates of these data. The worker/subject begins to become visible as the product of ways of dividing the workplace and the work, rules, tools and technologies, observation, inscription and evaluation practices that eventually represent individuals as numbers on a chart or points on a graph.

I will tell the story of this process in a manner that will be familiar to readers of Foucault and research inspired by his work. Specifically, I will illustrate specific practices in TMTL and both fracture them and detail their interconnections in order to inspect and document the constellation of forces they exhibit and make possible. That is, I will show how the workplace and work is divided, organised, observed, inscribed and examined to produce relations that produce biopower and contribute to the production of a subject in TMTL.

CHAPTER 1: STRUCTURING THE CALL CENTRE & ITS SUBJECTS

1. Setting the Scene

It's 4:55AM on a cool June morning. The dry, desert air is moving just perceptively, providing a pleasant feel that I know will soon be replaced by the heat of the day. There have already been several days over 40 degrees this year and today promises to be another one. The sky is brightening over the foothills to the East. I sit in the passenger seat of an idling car, driven by my still sleepy wife, outside a gated and locked parking lot next to an innocuous looking cement block building in an industrial park on the South side of the city airport.

First one, then another compact car rolls down the road and pulls off the side of the road near the gate, headlights illuminating the desert beyond. Its eyes glowing momentarily as it pauses, a fox darts across this illuminated hardpan, between the sagebrush and into the darkness. A few moments later a white sports car careens down the same road, its headlights barely illuminating the road ahead before the car barrels past, red taillights chasing just as hard to keep up. The cars brakes are as good as its accelerator and it stops suddenly, gravel skidding under its tires, just before the gate. Its inhabitant leaps out of the car, bounds to the gate, unlocking and rolling the gate aside and then remounts the car and it lurches forward into the parking lot, turning sharply to rest under a mercury vapour lamp mounted on the warehouse adjacent – the only illumination in the lot. The other two cars follow slowly and park on either side of the white sports car, the driver of which has already exited her car and is now marching quickly to the South side of the building, out of my view.

After pecking my wife on the cheek, I hustle to catch up with them. 'We park under the lights for safety. You never know who might be out there', one of the two still anonymous women tells me later in response to what must have seemed to be the first of many silly questions to follow over the next two years.

This is the start of the first of over 300 days of fieldwork in call centres, seeking to learn about them by 'living with and like' them (Van Maanen 1988b), at least as much as I could as an outsider. We walk to a vestibule on the East side of the building. No words are exchanged as we watch through the windows as Sheila, the woman from the white sports car, stabs at buttons on a wall-mounted box near a door on the South side of the building to disarm an electronic alarm system and then struts across the building toward us, unlocking the door for our entry.

We all shuffle into the building. Sheila and the other two women queue up to an electronic punch clock, taking turns at pulling their ID cards out of a rack immediately adjacent to the clock and swiping them several times through a magnetic card reader.[55] After each swipe, the worker looks at an LCD screen on the face of the clock then presses a button on the machine before again swiping the card. The ritual finishes for Sheila when she sees the text 'OKAY' flash in orange letters in the LCD screen, replaces her ID card in the rack and turns to walk toward her assigned cubicle in the far southwest corner of the building. When I ask about the repetition of the punch-in process, I'm told the multiple swipes are necessary since the previous year when the punch clock started working erratically. At that time several workers 'got caught' by management for not clocking in – this despite the

[55] Queuing is a pervasive operation in the call centre. It is accomplished when workers queue up to use a single computer system (like the punch clock). It is also accomplished when incoming calls are queued by a computer system that distributes them – first in, first out – to agents in order to minimise the time callers wait on hold. This queue is of critical importance to the way call centres are evaluated and managed, and workers are scheduled into shifts and rated. Converting randomly arriving incoming calls into linear queues is central to these examination practices.

obvious fact they were there and working. “It doesn’t matter if you’re here or not” the supervisor was to have said, “you’ve gotta punch in to prove *when you got here*”. Workers have since learned to adapt their behaviour to the requirements of the machines that make up the landscape of their work environment. The punch clock is only one of the machines that disciplines their behaviour at the same time it observes that behaviour.

Turning to see the inside of the building, which is noticeably cooler than outside, its huge rooftop air conditioner already pumping refrigerated air into the building (now I know what the sweaters are for), my eyes pan across the building and I see five, yet uninhabited, double-sided rows of cubicles, four feet wide, three feet deep, with four foot high partitions between them. Against the north wall are doors to the lunchroom, a meeting room, a ‘quiet room’ in which workers are supposed to be able to collect themselves after encountering an abusive caller, the manager’s office, and an alcove that houses the supervisor’s and tech support person’s desks and other equipment used in the course of managing call centre work. Both of these desks face out into the building, toward the rows of cubicles. Both have large computer monitors jutting up on the desks. Later, when these personnel arrive, I see that these monitors provide a modicum of privacy for their users from the nearly 100 call centre agents who will soon be here – as if any of the agents actually has time or inclination to look in their direction. Over time, I learn that these computers also provide a unique view of the agents that is, appropriately enough, technology-mediated.

By now, Sheila and her co-workers have walked to their assigned cubicles at the far corner of the building and are settling in for the day. Only seconds have passed since they have ‘clocked in’. Sheila will be my host for this week. In this call

centre, one of eight operated by a freight carrier in the continental United States, she is a ‘team leader’, responsible for quasi-supervisory duties over 15 other workers, as well as being assigned to provide assistance to them and even to do the work of a call centre agent. I join Sheila at her cubicle and she introduces me to Peg and Janice. They both greet me in quiet voices as they start their computers, type in password after password as three, four, five separate programs automatically launch and require them to declare their presence to the machine before it will allow them access to their tools – while at the same time also opening up a channel for the computer system to ‘watch them’ as they perform their work – then putting on headsets, positioning the microphone in front of their faces, lifting the phone handset off its cradle and dropping it onto the desk next to the phone, fingering buttons on the phone to log into ‘the queue’ and then sitting back. Peg looks at her watch and sits idly, waiting for phone calls to arrive. Janice unpacks a plastic grocery bag of knitting yarn, needles and a pattern book, positioning them on her desktop to the left of her keyboard. It is quiet this morning and as I will find later, these few minutes of inactivity are a treasure in the normally incessant flow of phone call after phone call to a worker’s telephone, and from the omnipresent gaze of computers linked into the computer and telephone network they have just logged into.

As it boots, Sheila’s computer displays an error message indicating that it wasn’t properly shut down the last time it was used. She slaps the spacebar on the keyboard to dismiss the error message and allow the computer to proceed through its self-diagnostics, scoffing at the machine. As the computer does this, Sheila lifts her phone handset and fingers a sequence of numbers on its keypad, asking rhetorically, ‘did you ever notice how the keypad on a telephone is exactly opposite the keypad on

your computer keyboard?'[56] She has dialled into the call centre's voicemail system and listens to a set of messages from workers who are calling off for the day. She scribbles notes on a scratch paper pad made from obsolete documents, computer printed on one side and blank on the other. 'Corporate recycling program' someone tells me later, pointing out that one of the city's several recycling centres is just down the road.

When her computer finishes booting and she repeats the ritual password entry process, Sheila launches an E-mail program, initiates a new message, addresses it to the call centre supervisor and begins transcribing her handwritten notes to produce a list of people who have called off work for the day. As she sends the mail, she tells, "Trudy (the supervisor) wants to have this in her E-mail when she arrives, so it's the first thing I do in the morning... Hey. Do you want me to make you coffee or something?" I decline her offer. The last thing I, an ethnographic fieldworker in the first few minutes of the very first day of fieldwork, want to do is produce a relationship in which I have things done for me by those I'm here to learn from. Besides that, I think, I'm already stoked up on caffeine to get me through the early start of the day! The restroom, I'm glad to see, is only a few metres away.

I look at the clock on the wall. It's just before 5:00AM.

Sheila's first remark strikes me. She prepares an E-mail report of agents who won't be in for their shifts *first thing*. Already, in the span of less than five minutes, she's arrived, unlocked a gate, unlocked the building, disarmed an alarm, unlocked the workers' access door, clocked in, started her computer, logged into several

[56] In fact, I've never noticed this! Over the next two years of fieldwork in four different call centres, many agents made this observation to me. The lack of continuity between the tools used on a day-to-day basis is a continuous source of irritation to the worker who uses those technologies.

computer software programs that make up a large part of her tools for work *and* checked the phone and made and dispatched this E-mail report.

Sheila (and Peg and Janice, and those that will follow today, and the next day, and the next) has just accomplished something remarkable. She has disassembled several barriers, one physical (the locked doors) and the other electronic (the electronic building alarm) and willingly erected and embedded herself in several others. Of these the first, clearly enough, is coming into the enclosure, the physical boundary between non-work and work. The others, all electronic, are instantiated in the punch clock on the wall and the software of her computer and telephone. As she swipes her ID card and types each password, she registers herself as a known entity in a computer network. Unseen, a computer system linked with the phone system operates behind an always-locked door at the back of the call centre. For each worker's punch in and multiple logins, the computer system records his or her request for entry into a zone surveyed by it. As workers are identified by the computer system, it provides access to particular software tools and data with which workers can do their job.

The computer also begins another process. It collects data on particular aspects of her use of the telephone, computer and software and deposits this data in several databases – an archive of data disassembled from its context and reassembled into rows and columns, the configuration and use of which is a substantive component of the content from which the call centre as a unit and each individual call centre worker is seen, measured, rated and through these operations, *produced*. That is, in order to begin work, the worker has to submit to unseen and continuous (though, as we'll see, only partial) surveillance.

The software that does this is generically referred to as the ACD (automated call distributor), but locally known as 'the Lucent'. According to Taylor and Bain (1999, p. 101) the ACD is the defining characteristic of a call centre. It, above all else, allows the modern call centre to exist and for the worker to be 'produced' as a particular sort of object and subject. Appropriately, the ACD will be one focus of this report. However, the ACD is hardly sufficient to allow a modern call centre to exist. Many other machines, rules, policies, activities, beliefs and composites are implicated in the call centre and more generically, in what I will call 'technology-mediated tertiary labour' (TMTL). Not surprisingly, many of them involve the ACD or approximate its panoptic aspects.

In this report, the process visible above – disassembly and reassembly, or deconstruction and reconstruction – is one that I will detail. As will be illustrated and explained, TMTL is a region in which particular deconstruction and reconstruction is accomplished with the affordances immanent in computer systems – this is a unique world and one that calls for unique theoretical constructs to figure out, characterise, deconstruct and reconstruct.

In post-industrial society (Bell 1973) TMTL is increasingly prevalent. However, this research on one type of TMTL will not provide a key that unlocks all questions on labour and post-industrial society. Instead, my focus on call centres is in order to learn 'how we are, now' as Western societies increasingly engaged in tertiary labour that is mediated through technical apparatuses with several distinctive characteristics that will be exposed below.

Sheila, and Peg and Janice, are the early crew. The next set of workers will arrive shortly before their shift starts at 5:30AM. By 8:00AM there will be nearly 100 agents in this building, populating the rows of narrow cubicles, wearing

headsets, staring at the computer screen in their cubicle, talking with an unseen customer. They will all perform the same acts of penetrating the barrier between the 'outside' and the call centre, and then mechanically and electronically install themselves into the call centre by punching in and logging into the computer and telephone systems – a process through which they become cyborgs for a portion of their everyday lives. They will all consider these to be acts of getting ready for work – which they surely *also* are. For the most part they will not consider these as acts affecting a production of one's own self. The functional invisibility of these actions, what they 'do' and their implications is one of the hallmarks of TMTL and one of its strengths. If they were not, as alluded to above, hidden in plain sight, they would not 'do' what they 'do'. Identifying and detailing what and how these things 'do' and how these things are taken up by members of the field in this 'doing' will be the overall goal of this project.

As I pull a desk chair up to Sheila's cubicle, sitting off her left shoulder, fumbling with the patch cord that connects my headset into her phone system so I can hear what she hears in her headset, I pull a small word processor out of my satchel on which to write fieldnotes. She asks, "What do you want to know?" "Just do what you normally do" I respond. "I'll ask about things as we go".

I glance at the clock on the far wall. It's now 5:02AM.

Peg's phone rings and I hear her voice what will become familiar as 'the opening script' – a prescribed phrase that signals the official opening of a call: "*DeliveryWorldwide*, this is Peg, how can I assist you?", then a short pause and "A pickup? I can help you with that" followed with a series of scripted transaction

questions – requests for specific information, the address at which freight will be picked up, its approximate size, weight and service requested (overnight, 2nd day, 3rd day, etc.). The whole call lasts no more than 45 seconds and is ended when Peg tells the caller his 'transaction number' (the time, in 24 hour format), "oh five oh, two, two three nine seven" and voices the scripted ending "is there anything else I can help you with today? Okay! Thank you for calling *DeliveryWorldwide*."

Sheila's and Janice's phones have since rung and they're working calls as I type notes on what I've just seen. Peg takes an interest in what I'm doing and stands up and peers over the cubicle wall at me, hunched over my little battery-powered word processor. I ask, "Do they all go like that?" She smiles, emitting something between a chuckle and a scoff, "If the customer knows our script it goes really smooth... but if they've got questions that aren't in the script, things can go anywhere".

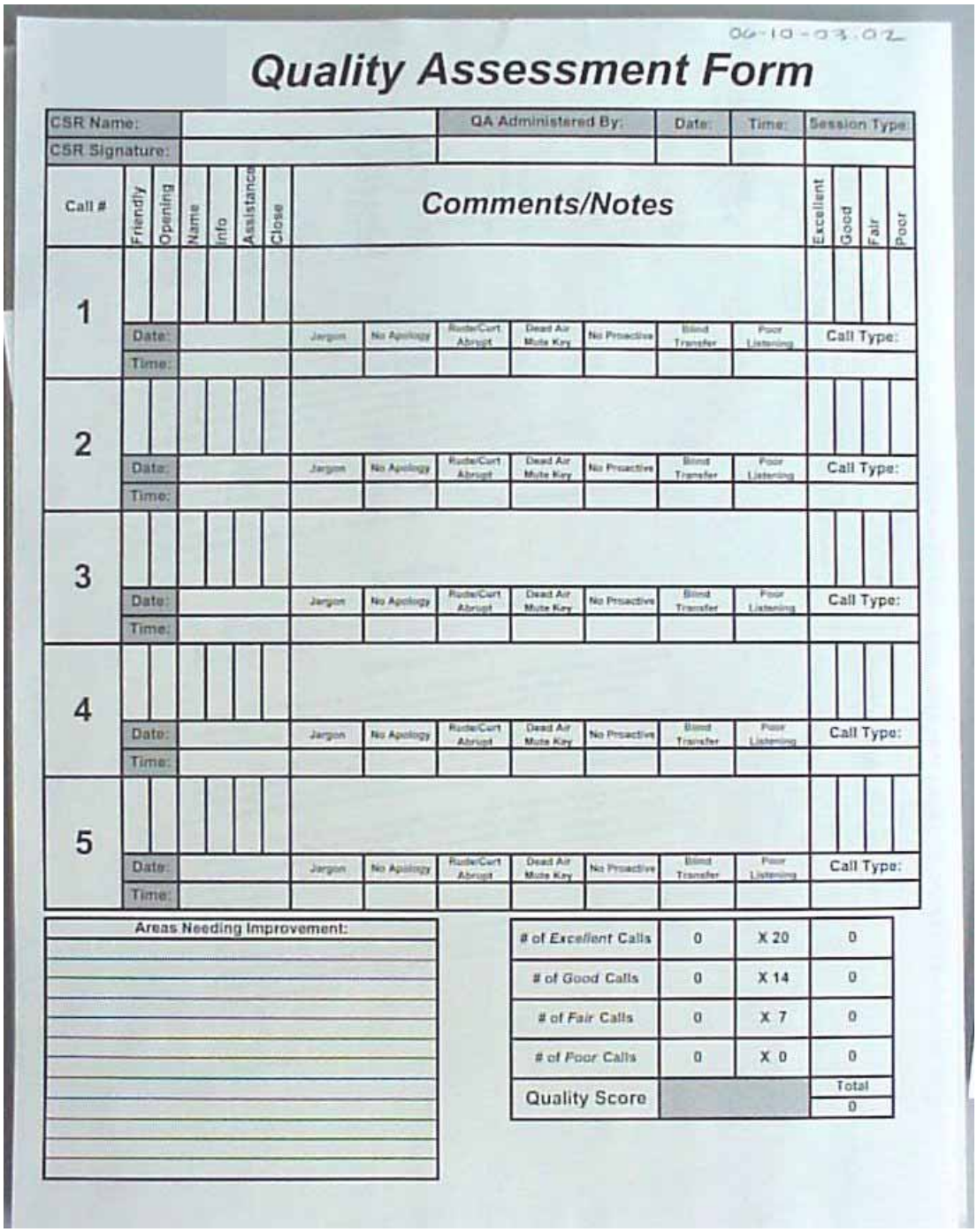
As her phone rings and she sits down to get the call, I ask, "how many (calls) will you get a day?" Scooting her desk chair forward and putting her fingers on the home row of her computer keyboard she says, "on a busy day, maybe two hundred and fifty". She begins voicing the opening script again without a pause between talking to me and then the caller.

While Sheila, Peg and Janice respond to call after call, and other workers arrive, go through the ritual at the time clock, log into computers, etc. I try to get better acquainted with my surroundings. Peering around the call centre, I see charts posted on the distant wall – what somebody later labels as the 'qualictivity' scores (a hybrid of subjective quality and objective quantity ratings for each worker). I also find a table pinned to the outside of Sheila's cubicle, identified as the day before yesterday's statistics representing the performance of workers on her team (Figure

1). Average call length, number of calls taken per hour, a statistically 'normalised' figure representing the volume of calls per hour worked by an agent (designed to permit comparison of any agent against any other agent, regardless of fluctuations in the actual volume of calls that came into the call centre) and others.

As I grow accustomed to this and the three other call centres in my fieldwork, I learn that these tables, charts and graphs are familiar sights and tools in call centres. The numbers from which productivity statistics are generated are automatically siphoned from the phone system by a computer connected to it – the ACD (automatic call distributor) – one of the computers into which an agent logs when coming on shift. The numbers from which quality ratings are generated come from the application of a scoring template (Figure 5) applied by Sheila and other team leaders who 'barge' or covertly tap into the phones of agents and record their calls for subsequent listening. While productivity statistics are generated continuously and very economically by accounting rules built into the ACD, the quality ratings are performed on, at most, 10 calls for each agent, each month.[57]

[57] It was immediately apparent which has the most importance to the company – one of a few observations from my first day that has remained salient throughout this project.



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Quality Assessment Form

CSR Name:		QA Administered By:	Date:	Time:	Session Type:
CSR Signature:					

Call #	Friendly	Opening	Name	Info	Assistance	Close	Comments/Notes	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											

		Jargon	No Apology	Rude/Curt Abrupt	Dead Air Mute Key	No Proactive	Blind Transfer	Poor Listening	
1	Date:								Call Type:
	Time:								
2	Date:								Call Type:
	Time:								
3	Date:								Call Type:
	Time:								
4	Date:								Call Type:
	Time:								
5	Date:								Call Type:
	Time:								

Areas Needing Improvement:

# of *Excellent* Calls	0	X 20	0
# of *Good* Calls	0	X 14	0
# of *Fair* Calls	0	X 7	0
# of *Poor* Calls	0	X 0	0
Quality Score			Total 0

Figure 5. Quality Evaluation Form from *DeliveryWorldwide*

I'm jostled from my independent wandering by Sheila's voice, telling me that she's going to print out yesterday's phone stats. She clicks several buttons on her computer screen, "...to tell the phone system not to send any calls to me for a few minutes" and as I peer into her computer screen she quickly opens a program, clicks

menus and buttons and then whisks past me to a room adjacent to pick up the sheet from the public printer. She pins it to the outside of her cubicle wall, on top of the stats from two days ago. I ask what the members on her team are supposed to do with it. As she returns to her cubicle and puts on her headset, she says (already, things always seem to be in a hurry here) "...they can always tell how they're doing just by looking at the numbers. Everyone on my team is experienced... I expect them to read the numbers and know what they have to do to meet the standards."

She clicks more buttons on her computer screen, "...to tell the phone system that I'm back." Another call rings in immediately. Sheila voices the opening script. I wonder how many times she'll say this today.[58]

It's now 5:25AM.

The regimentation and inscription of time, space and activity glossed here is repeated throughout the day, tomorrow and the next day, and the next, by hundreds of individuals at this call centre and the other three that made up the fieldwork venues for this study. At the same time, in the next few minutes and tomorrow and the next day, details of various magnitude and valence are not the same as what I have written above – but they are recognisably similar so as to call them the same. The observable fact that Sheila and her cohorts act so that variation is apprehended into categorically 'regular' and mundane procedures is important. While our thoughts and actions are influenced by rules, procedures, technologies, tools, experiences with these things, etc., that are part of the world in which we live – things that in many cases were put in place prior to our arrival – as will be seen below, in many and

[58] Sheila worked 92 calls that day – though because of her other team lead responsibilities she was answering calls for only about 2/3 of her workday. I observed other 'regular' agents working nearly 200 calls per day in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre.

perhaps most cases we have the ability to deploy those things in our time, our space and our activities such that we come to influence them too. That is, the tools (etc.) that are given to us both shape our behaviour and thoughts and come to be used in shaping ourselves and consequently, in shaping our world. While this is the case, it is also surely the case that the possibilities are also somewhat channelled by the organisation's shaping of time, space and activity and its shaping of the minds of workers.

2. Making Subjects Visible, Inscribable, Deconstructable & Reconstructable

> ...the art of distribution is a method of ordering a population. It knows it in a particular way, making it open to intervention or management. It is reflected in a number of personal practices. A Foucauldian analysis is concerned with how and with what effects boundaries become imposed, maintained, and breached. (Townley 1994, p. 47)

Organising the space(s) and time in which individuals and groups labour is a fundamental component of this art. By enclosing bodies in places and producing partitions that cluster bodies into segmented spaces within those enclosures and within spans of time, they can be seen in ways that foreground particular interests and obscure others. Organising space and time, and thus activity, have important effects on how workers/subjects are viewed, known by the organisation and known by themselves – subjectification, subjects and subjectivity (Rabinow 1984; Townley 1994, p. 25ff). Additionally, once workers are partitioned in space and time, their actions can be disciplined by the introduction of microphysical technologies that more or less constrain what they can conveniently do – the punch clock, the computer systems, the ACD, the cubicles in which they sit, the computer software that directs their scripted statements, etc. When actions are so constrained, those actions can be measured against an ideal that would obtain if the worker complied

fully with the rules embedded in the technologies – a manufactured ideal that is arguably 'natural' for a manufactured environment. Thus, through the organisation of space and time and the discipline of activity, workers and work are made visible, inscribable and calculable in both totalising and individualising ways – that is, the overall activity of everyone can be computed and the activity of any one individual can be computed and compared with the mathematically-derived average of the total population or against expectations or norms produced in other ways.

a. Enclosing and Partitioning

As indicated above, the organisation of space is not an end in itself. The organisation of space 'conditions' the environment – in the interest of economical use of resources, it makes certain tasks and certain observations appear as a 'natural' way of doing, seeing, measuring and valuing subjects. In other words, the organisation of space effects *what* is 'visible', *how* it is visible and *how* it can be accounted for and dealt with both by management and the workers themselves (Foucault 1991a; 1995, p. 141ff; Townley 1994, pp. 25-51). The conditioning of space is a necessary but not sufficient component of the apparatus in the production of subjectivity in TMTL.

i. *Geographic and Architectural*

Figure 6. The Cube Farm at *BigTech*

Immediately upon one's passage from the parking lot to the inside of a call centre, the first thing one notices is the organisation of space. Whether large, medium or small, the call centre is characterised by what has colloquially come to be called 'the cube farm' (Figure 6) – rows and columns of cubicles in which individual workers labour (Figure 7). This is not to say that the organisation of space in a workplace is remarkable. It isn't. It is characteristic of the modern office building (Baldry, Bain & Taylor 1998). However, as alluded to above, this organisation of space is implicated in, and facilitates all sorts of other actions, some of which

intersect in the production of Knowledge, power and subjectivity of interest to this report, and some that don't.[59]

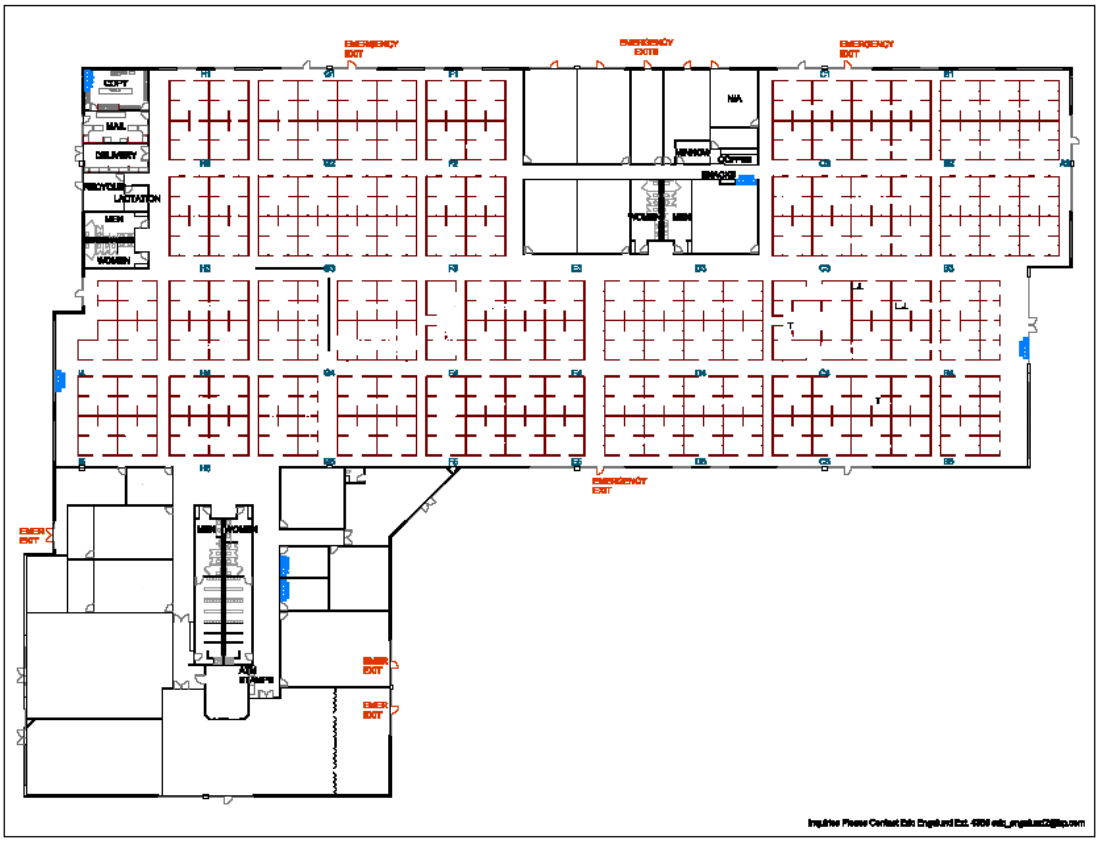

Figure 7. The Floorplan of *BigTech*

Even the visitor to a call centre can silently and unobtrusively activate one of the powers made possible by the ordering of space as shown above – physical or visual surveillance. In the cube farm, one can see into each and every cubicle simply by walking past (Figure 8, Figure 9 & Figure 10). The simple geographic arrangement of cubicles in orthogonal rows and columns (Figure 6, Figure 7) is

[59] The regimentation of space is imbricated with the production of power and subjectivity in *other discourses also*. For example, neatly organised rows of cubicles make for easier custodial work and the timing, scheduling and management of that work. As evidenced by observation of cleaning crews during the late shift at *DeliveryWorldwide*, vacuum cleaners and other custodial equipment can be moved with relative ease up and down the neatly spaced rows and into the open-faced cubicles. With that in mind, my goals in this research are only a tip of things that can be investigated in TMTL, and the call centre instantiates only one of many other possible locations for studies of TMTL.

remarkably similar to that described by Foucault and others for the prison, school, military parade ground and factory, to collect but at the same time divide individuals, making them part of a mass but also individually and minutely observable and manipulable (Foucault 1995, p. 141ff; Jones & Williamson 1979; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Taylor, F. 1947).

For example, Rabbie, an agent with about six months of experience at *MHealth*, described how this impacts one's working practice.

> ...because we're all [i.e., the agents] so new here, we really rely on each other for support, answering odd questions and keeping up with things. Being able to look around and see who's busy on a call and who might be able to help you with a question ... is really valuable. In that way, I like the way our cubicles are arranged and the fact that the walls have glass panels so you can see into the cubicles more easily. At the same time, you feel like you're living in a fishbowl – anyone who walks past can look in on you. ...because our desks are facing away from the aisle, we can't see who is looking in on us – but you *know it if someone is there*.[60] My heart beats faster when I hear people walk past – I don't know what they're looking at or what they're thinking of me – it's paranoia I know, but you can't help it!

Figure 8. Sight Surveillance of *MHealth* Agents from the Team Leader's Desk, Through Clear Portion at the Top of Cubicle Walls

[60] Some agents mount a convex mirror on their monitor or cubicle wall so they can see if anyone is behind them.

Similarly, at *MedAdvise*, Bo, an agent with only a few months experience, told:

> It's not that I wouldn't do it anyway – I mean I'm here for a reason – but [my supervisor] sits right over there [gesturing over her right shoulder]. If I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, it's really easy to see... and there's so much to do that if I'm not doing it someone else is gonna have to work more to make up for it. It gives you that extra hint that you can't really slack off too much when there's work to do.

Sandy, another agent at *MedAdvise* was very direct:

> ...I'm really nervous about [my supervisor] being here all the time. I'm a perfectionist and I know sometimes I get caught up on little details that I shouldn't worry about... Knowing that she, or anyone, can see me, keeps me on my toes.[61]

Figure 9. Live Visual Surveillance in *MedAdvise* Call Centre (my Jacket, Notebook and Word Processor Visible at the Chair & Table in the Foreground)

[61] Not long after telling me this, Sandy asked to rescind her informed consent for participation in the study. She was careful to indicate that she did not object to my presence in the call centre or to my research, rather only that she did not want to be a focus of my observation. I honoured her request.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*,[62] cubicles were arranged similarly to that shown in Figure 6. Additionally, the workers at *DeliveryWorldwide* were organised into work teams of about 12 individuals. In most cases the team occupied one aisle in the building, and team leaders usually shared a shift with most of the members of their team. Team leaders were assigned quasi-management responsibilities including providing coaching and feedback to workers, assembling daily reports of the statistical call processing performance of their team members, conducting quality evaluations, delivering monthly quizzes, sharing the task of staffing an internal 'help desk' for agents, as well as 'regular' agent work handling customer calls.

When the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre was first opened, all team leaders were assigned to end-of-row cubicles that both faced toward those used by his or her team and had desktops at a 'standing height' rather than the 'sitting height' desks installed in the cubicles occupied by regular agents. With these architectural features, team leaders could fairly easily see into those cubicles occupied by one's team members while the agents could only see the team leader if they intentionally stood up to do so.[63] The call centre manager at *DeliveryWorldwide* confirmed that the call centre was set up to facilitate visual surveillance of team members by their team leader.

Additionally, it was also not uncommon for the manager or supervisors in each of the four call centres to walk up and down the aisles in the call centre, "...just to see what's going on", and to do the same when one had reason to talk with any individual anywhere in the call centre. Of this, the manager at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre said, "[S]ometimes I'll take the long way around

[62] I was not permitted to take photographs at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre. Consequently, descriptions will have to suffice.

[63] It is not uncommon for agents to stand in their cubicles to stretch or to ask questions of agents nearby. Doing so facilitates a check on potential visual surveillance. This identifies a gap in the 'purity' of the visual panoptic potential in call centres, a topic that will be addressed below.

when I have to go (into the call centre). That way, everybody knows I'm here and I'm not just holed up in my office. You'd be surprised how people pull their chairs into their cubicles and lean toward their monitors when I come past." At *BigTech*, this was commonly known as 'MBWA' – management by walking around. That is, practices of team leaders and the manager 'activate' the potential for visual, panoptic surveillance at any time, and similarly reinfuse the agents' knowledge that random visual surveillance may occur, along with its panoptic and disciplinary effects on the behaviour of workers (Foucault 1995; McKinlay & Taylor 1998).[64]

As described and pictured above, the architectural design of the call centres participating in this study facilitates a convenient and general visual survey of workers. A general visual survey will provide management and team leaders with some information about the workers' compliance with rules, but detailed information about any given worker's activity requires a more specific, 'penetrating' sort of inspection over time.

The architectural design of cubicles and rows, and the ability to make cursory inspections of workers, facilitates a gaze over workers that <u>can</u> 'penetrate' and individualise a worker's compliance with rules of the organisation. However, doing so requires the imposition of some rule that allows the observer to identify if the rule is being obeyed or not – rules that permit one to determine compliance and deviance (Becker 1963, esp. pp. 144-163; Foucault 1995, pp. 87ff, 272ff). For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *MedAdvise*, there were organisational regulations proscribing the posting of personal items in cubicles, and only two personal items were permitted to be included by workers in their assigned cubicle, though no

[64] Supervisors at *BigTech* were generally respected by agents and it was not unusual for agents to stop and talk with their supervisor at length about work and social issues, time and incoming calls permitting. This facilitated 'counselling' and 'consulting' tactics in the call centre, a topic that will be described and developed in the next chapter.

official limit was imposed on the posting of company related materials.[65] Similarly, while there were few explicit limitations on the posting of personal materials at either *BigTech* or *MHealth*, workers generally limited the quantity of posting personal effects in their workspaces (Figure 10 displays an agent at *BigTech* who made substantial use of his ability to post company materials). A rule proscribing the posting of overtly 'insulting' materials was in force at *DeliveryWorldwide*. The definition of what counted as 'insulting' was operationally established by management based upon their judgement or the protests of co-workers. Management's decision was final. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, a statutory, but seldom conducted, 'cubicle audit' allowed management to apply an obscure company policy limiting the materials that could be contained in a cubicle and require agents to remove particular materials. This audit, and others described below, would not be economically possible without the visibility made possible by divisions and ordering of space, time or activity, and rules that activate those boundaries.

[65] That said, the supervisor, trainer and team leaders at *DeliveryWorldwide* and supervisors at *MHealth*, *MedAdvise* and *BigTech* indicated that workers were actually discouraged from maintaining paper copies of even company-related materials. This was to push workers to use the online databases and other software tools when looking up policy details or other information to guide their work and offer to customers in response to questions. The stated intention of this tactic was to have agents use materials and information that are continuously updated and had been vetted by the organisation rather than maintained by agents themselves. This use of technologies to discipline the activity of individuals (Clegg 1998, pp. 32-34; Foucault 1995, p. 304) will be addressed in more detail below.

Figure 10. The Arrangement of Space Makes the Worker Individually Visible at a Glance

This highlights important aspects of the architectural features of the call centre that are reminiscent of Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 1995). Bodies and artefacts are distributed in space such that it doesn't matter who is watching – the effect for those seen is the same; partitioning of bodies into cubicle spaces such that they are visible but cannot easily return the gaze. Foucault describes this as:

> ...a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. ... It does not matter what motive animates [the observer]: the curiosity of the indiscreet ... the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature,[66] or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing. The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power ... He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault 1995, pp. 202-203)

These effects are indeed homogeneous and independent of who might be the watcher – once the worker is aware of this gaze, even the subject oneself can deploy the effect, demonstrating the penetration of panoptic power. For example, near the end of a day observing and talking with Avy, a team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide*, she noted "...my productivity stats (statistics) should be terrific today! It's amazing

[66] For example, the ethnographer!

how aware I am of what I'm doing when someone is with me all day long!"[67] Similarly, while talking with Gray, a seven year veteran at *DeliveryWorldwide*, during a scheduled break, he continually glanced at the clock on the wall, and when his break time was nearly expired, began walking toward his assigned cubicle, remarking, "it's time to get back to my desk."

As will be shown below and in more detail in the following chapter, this arrangement of space also facilitates particular inscriptions and audits of work, making it especially useful to particular practices of management.

Of course, this is hardly a new innovation. The modern call centre's architectural design has been translated from other areas, most dramatically described in Foucault's depiction of Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 1995). However, it was not one large two hundred year leap from Bentham's 1791 plan to the modern call centre, nor was Bentham's design a totally new innovation from that practiced before. The arrangement of space has been a common feature in the factory (secondary labour) and the school (Jones & Williamson 1979) for at least as long as their modern forms have been in existence (Foucault 1995, p. 169).

It is also not an innovation particular to those other forms. Frank Lloyd Wright's[68] historically-significant design for the Johnson Wax company's corporate headquarters in the early 20th century shows how he ensured and obscured surveillance over workers in the politics of architecture (Figure 11). In the background of Figure 11, one can see that the mezzanine level in Wright's design, which was to be occupied by management, allowed surveillance of individual workers at their desks. The Greek-inspired forest of columns supporting the

[67] Ironically, while supervisors at *BigTech* were concerned that my presence would negatively impact the productivity of agents, here I am told outright that my presence contributes to performance improvement. Of course, as with Sandy's remarks above, one can also not ignore implications for ethnographic research (Clifford 1988; Crapanzano 1986; Pratt 1986).
[68] Wright was fairly well known as an elitist/managerialist.

otherwise un-walled acres inside the building allowed relatively convenient line-of-sight visibility from most points in the management mezzanine level to most points on the clerk's floor below. While architectural technology and stronger and lighter construction materials now permit less visual obstruction than Wright could accomplish in the 1930s, it is apparent that the technology of visual surveillance lauded by Bentham and deconstructed by Foucault (1995) can be implemented in many forms.

In this example, Frank Lloyd Wright demonstrates how the power immanent in the panopticon is not something arising universally in one's relation to the means of production. He, an architect known for his recalcitrance to any sort of direction from his clients, independently implements the panopticon without being caught up in their power and thus provides evidence that power is produced from a heterogeneous blend of factors, not all of which are at the command of capital.

Johnson Wax Building, by Frank Lloyd Wright, at Racine, Wisconsin, 1936 to 1939.
http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/gbi.cgi/Johnson_Wax_Building.html/cid_johnson_wax_002.gbi

Figure 11. The Johnson Wax Building, Racine, Wisconsin

It is also relevant to say that there are divisions of space within the workplace that distinguish public from relatively private space and workspace from non-work space. These divisions are unremarkable in a visual sense but clear in how workers use them to make themselves officially immune to some aspects of panoptic power while still demonstrating how they are affected by it.

At all four call centres participating in this study, there were explicit 'break rooms' separate from the work area. Presence in the break room was superficial evidence that one is 'off', at least temporarily, from the requirements of work and in my two calendar years of fieldwork, I never observed supervisory personnel trolling these spaces to check for stragglers or those trying to avoid work.

Activity in these 'back stage' spaces similarly reinforced their separation from workspace by including relatively unrestricted talk about non-work matters and verbal acts of resistance directed at the work and management (for example, see Goffman 1959, pp. 111-112; Sturdy & Fineman 2001, p. 146). Clocks are always present, however, and agents whose break times are bounded by clock time are always eyeing that device, ready to return to the work partition when their self-policing of schedules 'tells them' they should return to work. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, more than one individual remarked about the buzzing and clicking noise created by the wall clock in the break room and their use of it to keep them cognisant of time when they occupied this space. It was also not uncommon for agents to carry kitchen timers or wear a chronograph watch set to sound an alarm to announce the impending end of their break or lunch times. The occasional electronic chirping of such devices was not uncommon in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre.

Not everyone used these company-provided non-work spaces, however. At *MHealth* it was not unusual for agents to stay at their desks during break times and lunch time, specifically to make use of phone and Internet privileges for taking care of personal business and private E-mail. Doing so came with its risks, however, because visual inspection of an individual doing non-work activities in their assigned workspace occasionally brought with it work related questions from co-workers (especially novices who had not yet learned the sanctity of breaks and lunch times, nor the regular schedule for breaks and lunches) and the ire of supervisors, especially near the beginning and ending of scheduled breaks and lunch times.

Rabbie, an agent at *MHealth* told:

> I'm here from nine in the morning until after six at night and I really have to use my lunch time to take care of business that I can't do otherwise. I've gone out of my way to make sure I can pay bills online or over the phone, check in on my kids' day care over the phone and even use chat[69] to talk with [my spouse] during lunch. It's really a pain when [co-workers] or [supervisor] start asking me questions or pestering me about things when I'm at my desk but off the clock.

Agents demonstrated various practices to signify their 'on' or 'off' status when populating their workspace during breaks and lunches. Agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* commonly attached a string to their kitchen timers and wore them around their necks not only to keep them at hand but also to signify their 'on break' status. At *BigTech* agents produced signage that was attached to the outside of their cubicle to signify their 'on break' status. One agent at *DeliveryWorldwide* even set the screen saver on her computer to read "If you can read this, I'm on break."

[69] 'Chat' is an increasingly common textual (thus, like E-mail) but real-time communication channel between computer or cellphone (mobile phone) users. Modern day, multitasking computers permit the worker to have a chat program open on his or her computer at the same time other programs are running.

These various tactics demonstrate an acknowledgement of the panoptic forces present in the call centre, and far from attempting to decompose their power, actually reinforce it by self-imposing firm boundaries around when an agent submits oneself to it and explicitly signifies when one is not to be watched.

Aside from the visual surveillance and its effects noted above, the enclosing and partitioning of bodies into discrete geographic spaces has other effects that add form and clarification to the organisation's tactics and how they subjectify the worker. First, subjects are separated from those with whom the organisation and its 'police' are unconcerned.[70] When on the outside of the enclosure, no special characteristics distinguish members of the public from employees. However, the latter are instantly identifiable as soon as they pass through the dividing line of the entry door.[71] Upon entrance to the enclosure and a cubicle space, the individual cum subject is geographically converted into both a member of a special group and a specifically identifiable subject. Next, as described above, once within the enclosure individuals become susceptible to forms of observation and inscription that facilitate the deconstruction of the individual and his or her actions into parts that make them amenable to the accounting-oriented and truth producing gaze of management

[70] I use the term 'police' both in the sense indicated by Foucault – individuals who are responsible for the 'care' of subjects and their contributions to the health of an institution (Foucault 1988c) – and more contemporary Western usage – individuals who are responsible for enforcing the rules of an institution.

[71] With this, the question is raised, what am I, the ethnographer? Am I now an employee? No, I'm not. However, I, as have all the employees prior to their official employment, albeit by different means, have had to pass through bureaucratic layers to gain access to the enclosure. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, both the organisation and stewards in the Union local have had to assent to my presence and I have to sign a guest book upon arrival, and noting the time of arrival and later, of departure. At *BigTech* I have an electronic key card to unlock the doors and inscribe myself into an unseen database. I also have to wear that key card with my photo exposed, so all members can see *who* and *what* I am. At *MHealth*, 'C-level' personnel have had to authorise my presence. Throughout fieldwork I wore a 'VISITOR' badge and late in my fieldwork I had to sign a guestbook. At *MedAdvise* I had been vetted by both local staff and by the hospital's own human subject's committee. In all cases, I entered the gaze of the organisation upon my entry. I was held to many of the same rules of conduct as were employees. While not an employee, I was surely observed.

(Bougen 1994; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987, 1994; Townley 1996).

While separating the public from employees is necessary to the cause, these other forms of observation begin a new set of organisational actions that guide the deconstruction of the subject into parts – an operation fundamental to subjectification and subjectivity production. Particular technologies and rituals accompany this process and serve to pull the worker more deeply into the gaze of the organisation and subjectification.

ii. Inscribing Oneself into the Technology-Mediated Workplace

As illustrated in the episode that began this chapter, at *DeliveryWorldwide* there is a conventional 'punch clock' at the entrance door at which agents are to 'punch in' at the beginning of their shift, at the beginning and end of a scheduled lunch break and at the end of their shift. The punch clock is an artefact of secondary labour factories and the meting out of pay for time worked (most typically, pay per hour). The punch clock and the framing of work in terms of time also illuminate an important function in the production of subjectivity in TMTL. This device and this division function to facilitate the conversion of time, space and action into components, each of which can be inscribed into an archive and included in computations, the outcome of which can be compared with a statutory rule or computed norm to establish value or determine an individual's compliance with the expected time he or she is to be at work, thus part of what it is to be a 'good subject'.

Inscription is a process that purifies, freezes, flattens and compresses its observed referents in time and space, taking actions that occurred among myriad

contextual details and across spans of time, and depositing them within the three fundamental forms of writing: rosters, rules and graphs – (a) unordered and ordered lists, (b) graphs and (c) tables (Foucault 1994c; Townley 1994, pp. 25-51) – that only encode what the organisation intends and simply ignore other, contextual, factors. For the punch clock, it doesn't matter that an individual is not on time due to traffic problems, health or family issues. Not being on time is reduced to a simple bit in a database, a mark on a page stripped of its context – what Smith calls 'extra-temporality' (Smith, D. 1984, p. 60). It doesn't matter that a worker left with 20 minutes to spare and weather or traffic problems chewed up the spare time. Those contextual details are rendered invisible, even illegitimate, by the purification process that silently creeps along with inscription.

This was the case when Peg, a *DeliveryWorldwide* agent who starts at 5:00AM, encountered new fallen snow and icy roads not forecast in the previous day's weather reports.

> Cars were all over the roads and slipping into the ditch. I was lucky to get to work at all! I was docked for being late even though it wasn't something I could have foreseen – it wasn't my fault! I understand we're assigned to schedules but we get punished for things like this when it's nobody's fault.

As Peg alludes, the effect is to make the measures to which such observations are applied a local truth that is treated as a firm, immutable foundation against which facts like 'late' and 'on time' are created. The methods of measurement and accounting practices *create* reality, they do not reflect it (Hines 1988; Townley 1994, p. 139). This production of reality is implicated in the parallel production of 'truth' about their targets.

The point here is not to insist that a call centre should not expect its workers to be on time for work, or that the purification of inscriptions is essentially bad.

Instead, it is to make the observation that subjectification is assembled by things that are decontextualised and re-combined – tiny, mundane, even trivial decisions and events purified into simple inscriptions that, as will be seen, build up like sediments in the accretion of inscribed data into a record that, when reassembled in organisationally codified ways, creates the subject[72] as something that fails to account for local experience, that renders that experience illegitimate in the production of an organisation's 'truth' about a subject. However, in so doing it is not that some transcendental subject is oppressed, rather that a new subject is constructed – a subject in the organisation and one produced by its rules, technologies, strategies, etc.

As with the panoptic aspects of architecture in the call centre, this is also not a new historical innovation and goes back centuries in similar forms (Smith, D. 1974, 1984). Following Foucault, Townley, Smith and Haraway, the use of lists and tables (taxinomia and matheses) of data is essentially linked to the rise of the scientific method as an authoritative and independent authority in the production of Knowledge, and power in the application of that Knowledge (Foucault 1994c, 1995; Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1974; Townley 1993, 1995b, 1996). Modern scientific practice and technical knowledge are prototypically represented in these forms. Indeed, the activity of science has been represented as a series of events culminating in the production of inscription in these forms (Haraway 2004a; Latour 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990).

[72] Following Heidegger, as the damming of a river produces a reservoir that can be put to various uses, the rationalisation of time, labour process, etc. produces a standing reserve or archive of potential energy that can be tapped in order to make new subjects (Heidegger 1977). In this case, an apprehension of time into schedules produces the possibility to be late or on time. In itself, this is a simple, even trivial matter. As will be shown, many such simple, trivial matters can be assembled into large, unique, apparatuses of subjectification and subjection.

In addition, modern accounting practices have been implicated in the production of particular forms of Knowledge and managerial authority underpinning the modern organisation (Deetz 1992; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Townley 1994, 1995b, 2001). In particular, accounting techniques allow inscriptions to be combined in ways that make them (or more properly, their referents) seem causally or essentially related to 'bottom line' values the organisation has deemed important to its function (Hines 1988; Hopper & Macintosh 1998; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996). In so doing, inscriptions and accounting produce knowledge that can be used by management to effect change both on individuals and over administrative units of organisations (Hoskin & Macve 1994). The tabulation and mathematical processing of abstracted inscriptions are implicated in the reconstruction of these inscriptions in the creation of official truths and subjectivities – the 'good worker' or 'bad worker' (Argyris 1952; Boland 1989; Bougen 1994; Ezzy 1997; Hacking 1986a; Hines 1988; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Savage 1998; Townley 1995b, 1996) – and the production of justification for their immanent power in order to protect and retain the official forms and norms of the organisation.[73] So the architectural enclosure and partitioning of bodies in geographic space affords the observation of many at once and each individual (individualisation) in terms of rules that influenced the shaping of the enclosures and partitions themselves – power/knowledge effects power/knowledge.

Finally, the innovation of electronic observation of employees through equipment in the technology-mediated tertiary workplace and computer-processing of data according to accounting principles adds a new facet that appears unique to

[73] Manipulation of the categories so created, and the subjectivities made from their composites has also been implicated in the production of politically expedient 'truths' rendered in bureaucratically neutral form (Hughes 1964a), thus providing another piece of evidence that such 'objective' forms are in fact political and can be appropriated to obscure already-historical values, beliefs and desires on the part of those who impose them.

TMTL – the ability to continuously collect and process selected data on the activity of workers and rapidly display the products to the workers themselves – what was accomplished informally by Sheila in her quick printing and posting of her team's productivity statistics above. In so doing the workers become aware of both how they are 'seen' by the organisation and how they compare with their co-workers – but only in terms of the organisation's official means for seeing the workers and manufacturing a 'truth' about their activity in relation to the organisation's manufactured reality. Continuously displaying the organisation's truths about them back to workers has a panoptic effect on them, potentially making them hypersensitive to 'the stats' that are said by the organisation to represent them and their co-workers, and also influencing how workers police themselves and perform their duties in the future. As will be detailed more in the following chapter, this is implicated in a process that can be called 'shadowboxing with data' (Winiecki 2004b). I will elaborate on this in more detail below and in Part 4 of the report.

In the abstract, this is genealogically situated by Foucault as a process in place at least since the 18th century, but one that is shown to have extended into the present by Townley:

> ...an increasingly better invigilated process of adjustment has been sought after – more and more rational and economic – between productive activities, resources of communication, and the play of power relations. (Foucault 1983, p. 219; see also, Townley 1995b; Townley 1996)

That is, a very 'tight' imbrication of heterogeneous forces and data so as to produce particular Knowledge, particular judgements and particular subjectivities – the disciplining of time and space with punch clocks and cubicles, the disciplining of activity with the ACD and computer software, technologies of observation and inscription and aggregation of what is inscribed, rules that assume particular relations

between time, space and activity, all of which manufacture the organisation's reality and its desired 'truth' about workers. All of this begins with mechanisms through which an employee records his or her entry into the call centre and 'inserts' himself or herself into the computer and telephone systems used in the performance of work.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, punching in at the clock is accomplished by swiping a company issued electronic key card through a slot on the punch clock. Employees at *DeliveryWorldwide* are very superstitious about this machine since a time about a year prior to the commencement of fieldwork when an employee was penalised when the punch clock did not record her punch in. Since that time, employees regularly swipe their identification card multiple times through the punch clock in the belief that with multiple attempts, one will be successfully recorded and a similar penalty will be avoided.[74]

BigTech assigns electronic key cards to employees (Figure 12), who use these cards to unlock and enter the call centre building. The card is swiped through a slot in a machine adjacent to all access doors to the building and must also be used to enter certain areas inside the building. Company rules mandate that workers must pass one at a time through these doors and never use their card to open the door for anyone else – even another authorised employee. A database of who enters and what time the entrance occurred is created through the use of these key cards, but nobody in the organisation knew how these data were used. It is the case that they do not

[74] As will be elaborated in Part 3 of this report, these multiple swipes are also associated with tactical and counter-tactical resistance practices – a 'battleground' between the supervisor and workers. Briefly, when workers perform multiple swipes, multiple entries are made in the database the supervisor uses to perform payroll calculations. This requires the supervisor to sort out multiple entries – a small, but apparently annoying, task. Attempting to stem this practice, the supervisor has declared that upon multiple entries, she will consider only the last one to be the official punch in time. Occasionally, while the first of multiple punch ins may record an 'on time' arrival, the last will be made such that the punch in time is made 'late' and the employee will be penalized for a late arrival. Employees are upset at this prospect and developed practices that increase the complexity of the task of sorting out multiple punch ins. This skirmish ended only when the supervisor resigned and another one was hired.

appear on official statistics related to employee performance. For employees, these cards are simply a means to unlock and enter the workplace.

Figure 12. Key card Used to Access the *BigTech* Call Centre (Camera Permission Card Shown Underneath, Company Name & Logo Have Been Removed)

While there is no punch clock at *BigTech*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise*, each organisation, including *DeliveryWorldwide*, has other means by which each worker is inscribed into the enclosure in a manner similar to that described above. When the agent at these three companies logs into the computer in his or her cubicle, a personal identification and password must be provided. The computer system recognises these codes and inscribes the worker's time of arrival in a database. Similarly, logging out and back in at the beginning and end of one's assigned lunch break and logging out at the end of the one's shift inscribes the event time. Calculations programmed into the ACD system at these call centres compute the worker's time on shift. The ACD

system effectively doubles as a clock that records the employees' time of logins and logouts and computes each individual's total time at work per day.[75]

This is perhaps exemplified in the inscription practices used as *DeliveryWorldwide* policed its workers' adherence to assigned schedules. On a daily basis, Trudy, the supervisor, retrieves, or 'downloads' data from the punch clock to her computer. These data are sorted per employee and tick marks or tally numbers are made on an evaluation worksheet to indicate if an employee punched in late. These sheets are stored in each employee's active personnel folder (Figure 13).

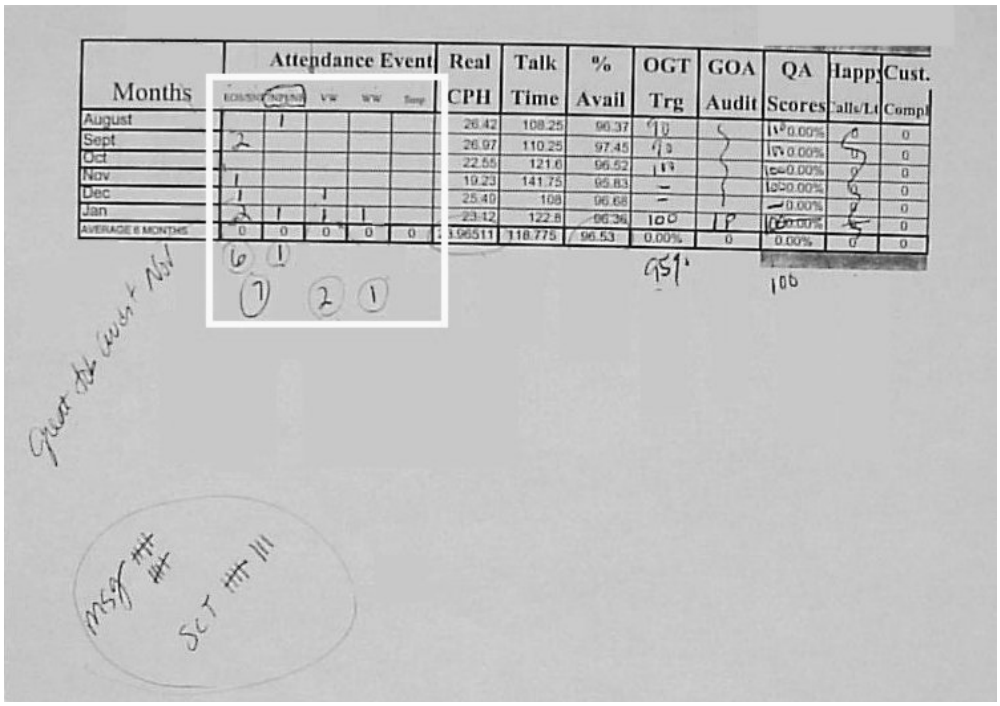

Figure 13. Inscribing Attendance onto an Evaluation Worksheet)

[75] While the assignment of shifts is common in secondary labour, one might wonder why it is so critical in the service work of call centres. The criticality of a worker's adherence to schedules follows from the rationale for assigning workers to shifts in order to have as few agents at work at any time as possible (thus reducing labour costs), while still being able to answer the number of calls that arrive. Thus, the reason is principally economic. The calculation for determining staffing level is called the 'Erlang C'.

While never perfect, the Erlang C calculation permits call centres to determine and schedule the minimum number of staff to handle the expected number of calls in the desired time duration and at the desired service level. If, however, an agent arrives for work even a few minutes late while call volume is steady, the service level of the call centre can drop dramatically, adversely impacting the organisation's principal measure of its own effectiveness. Consequently, it is not unusual for call centres to police the attendance practices of agents very closely.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, if an employee punches in no more than three minutes past his or her scheduled shift start, the tick mark is made in pencil. If greater than three minutes, the tick mark is made in ink. This is to signify that an employee has arrived within or past a three minute grace period provided for in the Union contract for this call centre.[76]

The 'pencil' tick mark, an innovation introduced by the supervisor and not explicitly prescribed in the Union contract, was used informally to manufacture evidence to support what the supervisor described as "the late personality" and "someone who abuses a privilege." With what she glossed as "a sufficient number of pencil marks" she claimed to have sufficient evidence for justifying her conversion of 'pencils' to 'inks' – an ad hoc translation of so many 'almost late' ticks into an 'actual' late punch in that would be inscribed in the employee's permanent record.[77] If, at the time of an agent's semi-annual evaluation,[78] an employee has more than a contractually allowed number of ink tick marks, that employee is assessed with a violation, or in the lexicon of the call centre, an 'occurrence'.[79, 80]

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[76] *DeliveryWorldwide* is the only one of the four call centres participating in this study that is unionized. However, not all of *DeliveryWorldwide* call centres scattered across the United States are unionised and of those that are, all are governed by different local contract amendments. Additionally, in order to gain the permission of the Union Stewards at this location for conduct of the research, I had to assure them that I would not focus on 'the Union' in my research. Consequently, only scattered data relative to the Union and unionisation at this call centre are included in the report.

[77] That said, in *DeliveryWorldwide*, it is a fact that there was never any established conversion ratio of 'pencil to ink' ticks – it was always an ad hoc determination made by the supervisor. Additionally, on every occasion where such a conversion was made and subjected an agent to progressive discipline, the labour Union intervened and forced invalidation of the supervisor's assessment and subsequent threat of discipline.

[78] These evaluations were supposed to be performed at six month intervals based on the month an employee was hired.

[79] 'Occurrences' can be assessed for violating any rule a fixed number of times – failing audit tests on company policy, receiving a complaint from a customer, taking more sick or vacation days than allotted, etc. Depending on the overall tally of occurrences at the time of the evaluation, the employee may be subjected to 'progressive discipline' – an escalating scale of warnings (verbal, written) and eventual suspension and perhaps termination from employment.

[80] It is also the case that Trudy's ad hoc production of 'pencil late' and 'pen late' instantiates an example of how individuals can take up and use the 'spaces left free' in the discourse/assemblage of

Regardless of the success of the supervisor's use of this varying tactic of inscription and assignment of shifting meanings to 'pencil' and 'ink' inscriptions, Trudy's practice demonstrates the detailed attention call centres place on schedule adherence. This example also illustrates a specific instance of the general observation that rules used to purify events into inscriptions actually facilitate production of subsequent facts. The individual(s) or technology responsible for converting what is 'seen' or otherwise detected through surveillance into durable inscriptions are afforded with a substantive authority for effecting meanings that have only a trace-relation to the lived experience of the events they are purported to represent. What is made observable and inscribable through the organisation's partitioning of time, space and activity is very influential in the production of the subject, reflecting Haraway's, Townley's and Smith's assertions that this process actively 'creates reality' and 'truth' about a subject – albeit a biased one (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1974; Townley 1994, p. 139). Latour illustrates similar practices in the manufacturing of reality and 'truth' in something arguably more scientific, but not necessarily more serious in its effects, than what we have here (Latour 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990).

This example, even at this very early point in the thesis, begins to expose the elaboration of one of the doings of TMTL – the partitioning of time, space and activity, the purification or abstraction of events into inscriptions, and use of accounting methods to reassemble inscriptions and create truths, silently and invisibly serve to contribute to the production of new subjectivities that serve the already-established interests of the organisation. In this case, the 'doing' is obscured within the 'objective' data, rules and the decision-making authority of the supervisor.

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rules in an organisation and use them for their own ends. This will be addressed in more detail in Part 3 and Part 4 of this report.

As will become increasingly evident, in TMTL the apparatuses through which this occurs are commonly obscured within and under layers of technological equipment, allowing them to 'hide in plain sight' all the while they 'do' what they 'do' (Hines 1988; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996).

This example also displays several other essential, but understated, features of the functioning of partitioning and surveillance in TMTL. In particular, this example shows how a piece of technology intended to cast a general visibility on the workers (the punch clock or computer system) facilitates the production of an individualising gaze on each specific individual. It also displays how a simple inscription process makes a record over time that facilitates the production of 'objective' norms. As indicated in Trudy's comments about her use of 'pencil late' inscriptions, inscriptions are commonly treated as both evidence and justification for the assertion of attributes of the individual (or population) from which the data were extracted (Foucault 1995, esp. 170-228; Hacking 1982, 1986a; Rose, N. 1999d, esp. pp. 135-154 & 197-233; Townley 1994, esp. pp. 83-137) – for example, 'regular patterns' of actions-in-inscription that expose a 'truth' about the subject and his or her definably irresponsible use of the company's time.

In addition to the timekeeping function of a punch clock or computer system noted above, the computer and phone system used by agents in a call centre 'observes' and inscribes many other facets of the worker's activity. In a manner similar, but subtly different from that noted above, these many small but abstracted observations and inscriptions facilitate the decomposition of the worker into parts that are then reconstructed through accounting practices to create another facet in the 'truth' about the subject in technology-mediated tertiary labour.

iii. Automatic Inscriptions

For all practical purposes, the primary tools agents use in call centres are a telephone and computer system. For the agent, the phone system is used for verbal communication with customers, and the computer system is used to accomplish data entry related to the customer and his or her service requests, and to search for and retrieve data for use in responding to the customer's requests.[81] The phone and computer in each agent's cubicle is networked with the call centre's main phone system and a computer network. The computer network is linked to the phone system through a computer called the ACD (automated call distributor) that both distributes calls to agents and records details of each agent's work. It is also the case that the data entered by agents in the course of a call can be audited in order to determine how closely the worker is complying with policies of the organisation – another facet in the automatic production of reality and truth about the subject. Poster has depicted this as 'participatory surveillance' (Poster 1990).

The ACD is the defining characteristic of the contemporary call centre (Bodin & Dawson 1999; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999, p. 101). The ACD links both phone system and computer network in the call centre. For the company, one purpose of the ACD is to 'watch' all of the agents and monitor each agent's activity relative to calls in process. As new calls arrive, the ACD will shuttle them to the agents who have either been waiting for a call (known as 'idle') longest or to whichever agent next finishes

[81] As will be elaborated below, the data entry performed by the worker becomes a resource the organisation can use both in 'back office' operations distant from the call centre and in the process of disciplining and governing the agent. For example, at *BigTech*, workers are expected to classify the customer's technical problems using a pre-established tree-type structure of known problems. When hundreds of agents incrementally input this data into their systems, a large database is produced. Engineers at the company can inspect this database and determine the frequency of particular errors in order to prioritise their efforts at fixing or re-engineering the product.

his or her current call. This function of the ACD acts so that customer 'hold times'[82] are kept to a minimum and a relatively equal number of calls may be handled per agent per day. This also has the effect of transforming what is frequently an irregular pattern of incoming calls into series that can be distributed in an orderly way. This permits the organisation to produce a queue or a magazine of 'raw materials' for processing in a customer service 'assembly line'.

This is a first step in making call centre work measurable in ways that approximate what is normally done in assembly line work. Once calls are conditioned into a queue and agents can be expected to answer a relatively equivalent number of calls per shift, the specific work of individual agents becomes comparable. This would not be possible if incoming calls were not so conditioned by the ACD.

The 'log in' process described above is one in which workers 'insert' themselves into the ACD. This is usually accomplished through a program on the agents' computers or through the telephone itself. In either case, agents insert themselves into the computer's gaze by typing in a username and/or password, after which the ACD opens a bi-directional channel between itself and each worker for sending calls to them and collecting data from them. In effect, logging in is a signal to the computer built into the ACD to start watching and collecting data from the workers.

It is also normal for the agent to have to log into more than one *queue* in the ACD. Queues are an additional means for partitioning calls that come into the call centre. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, there are four queues: (a) pickup requests, (b) package tracking requests, (c) billing inquiries and (d) general inquiries.

[82] Sometimes referred to as the 'average speed of answer' (ASA) in call centre terminology.

Customers select which of these four queues best matches their reason for calling by pressing a button on their phones when presented with a verbal menu of these options.[83] At *BigTech* there are over 40 different queues, each of which is associated with a particular piece of computer equipment serviced by different teams in the call centre. At *MHealth*, there are at least four different queues from which callers can choose, each of which is related to a particular service offered by the company (but not all of which will direct the caller to the call centre). At *MedAdvise*, there are seven different queues.[84]

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* agents are assigned to different queues depending on training they have received or call volume in that queue. In effect, queues partition agents into virtual spaces that reflect the division of products and services offered by the company or other factors related to demand for services. The division of queues is not only to distribute calls to agents prepared to address particular questions or offer particular services. It is also a means for the organisation to assess how many calls it is receiving for different products and services, and to allocate company resources or bill other companies with which the company contracts to provide services accordingly.

As indicated above, logging in is a task performed at the beginning of each agent's workday. Because logging in is the responsibility of the worker, failing to properly log into the ACD can be interpreted as an *intention* to avoid work. An

[83] This is the ubiquitous 'telephone tree' one encounters when calling a business establishment. If you called *DeliveryWorldwide*, you would hear a greeting and then "...press 1 if you want to arrange for a package pickup. Press 2 if you want to inquire on the location of your package. Press 3 if you have a billing question..." If you called *BigTech* you would be prompted similarly to press a number on your phone in response to a menu listing computer equipment and technical support options for that equipment. In the vernacular of call centres, this is also called an IVR (interactive voice response) or VRU (voice response unit). The call centre uses the IVR to partition incoming calls so they may be distributed to agents who have received training on that particular service. In doing so, the organisation also conscripts the customer to participate in the process of delivering service – an aspect of Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis (Ritzer 2000b, pp. 57-61).

[84] The number of queues at *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* varied throughout the fieldwork, depending on services offered by the organisation through that period.

information sheet distributed to agents at *MedAdvise* implies that agents are directly responsible for the way their stats may be interpreted, and explicitly states that if an agent's stats are not within or near compliance with organisationally established measures, "...it's assumed they are taking lengthy breaks or are away from their desk often."

That is, the statistics created by the ACD are treated as objective facts that, when found to not obtain, are automatically converted to the assumption of misbehaviour on the part of the agent/subject – 'reality' and a truth about them is actively created through the imbrication of particular ways of enclosing and partitioning workers, making them visible, inscribing abstracted observations and applying rules to the examination of those inscriptions (Townley 1994, p. 139). Other examples of this will be elaborated below.

In particular, while management and supervisors at each of the four call centres participating in this study acknowledge that it is an easy thing to err in doing or to forget doing when other tasks have to be performed or when returning from lunch or break, a 'regular pattern' of errors or forgetting to log in to all of the queues to which one is assigned can be construed as intentionally attempting to evade work, thus subjecting the worker to 'occurrences' (at *DeliveryWorldwide*) or other means for compiling a list of violations that, if they continue, will lead administratively to various penalties. As Townley cautions, the abstraction of lived experience to numbers that afford mathematical processing "actively create[s] reality" (Townley 1994, p. 139) and an organisationally-manufactured 'truth' about agents.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, agents do not normally make errors or forget to log in to the ACD simply because of the usually high volume of incoming calls (one would notice quickly that calls are not coming to one's phone when everyone else is

receiving calls). However, it can happen. As with the assumption of management at *MedAdvise*, noted above, if agents are found to be somehow 'out' of their assigned space or queue, it is likely the event will be treated as an intentional breach. Discovery of workers out of their assigned cubicle spaces is frequently a case of simple visual inspection facilitated by the way agents are partitioned in cubicles, though reinforced with the ACD's statistical evidence of the agent's productivity.

The supervisor at *DeliveryWorldwide* also has access to special software tools linked to the ACD that produce a minute-by-minute record of each agent's activity as visible through the ACD. The existence of this record permits the supervisor to 'troll' the data in order to locate patterns that suggest the agent is in breach of his or her assigned duties. This will be addressed in more detail when the 'auditability' of these data is described below.

At *BigTech*, agents were assigned to log into one or more queues depending on which equipment they were trained to service. Queue assignments are delivered to agents as an E-mail attachment whenever assignments are changed. The process for logging into one's assigned queues occasionally presented problems for some workers because there was no feedback from the telephone system acknowledging that the process had been successful.

Lorene, a very experienced agent at *BigTech*, unintentionally demonstrated this difficulty for me one day as she was logging in. After several attempts to log in to her assigned queues, she called her supervisor in frustration and asked him to check, using a software program only he had access to, if she was properly logged in. After confirming that she had not logged into all of the queues to which she was assigned, her supervisor came to her cubicle to help her accomplish the log in process. After the supervisor spent several minutes fumbling with the phone system

without success, Lorene remarked, “well, now you know I’m not trying to get out of doing work. Even *you* can’t get it to log in.”

Lorene later confided to me that this comment was said in order to *intentionally* indicate to her supervisor that if he notices a pattern of not logging into her assigned queues, it is *not* because she was intentionally trying to dodge work, rather it was the phone system! In so doing, Lorene was acting to mitigate his interpretation of the abstracted record of her ACD login as evidence she is a bad worker. This highlights an instance where agents are aware of the ways their organisation uses data – even informally – and tactically modify their practices in order to influence how they are *seen* in terms of space and activity, another facet of worker action that, as will be elaborated below, affects a resistance practice that effectively sets management to ‘shadowbox with data’ (Winiecki 2004b).

However, while Lorene could not see what queues she was logged into, in another team at *BigTech* that took calls from customers with different equipment than that serviced by Lorene, agents were provided with a software program that displayed all of the queues and which workers were logged in to each (Figure 14). Similarly, at *MHealth*, agents are provided with a software program that displays which workers are in which queues (Figure 15). In both cases, agents are able to see if they are properly logged in *and* can see how long they and other agents have been on a call, or how long they and other agents have been sitting idle. With this, agents have the ability to determine if they are the next in line to receive a customer’s call. As will be explained below, the agents were expected to use this software to control their activity in the call centre – another aspect of ‘shadowboxing with data’ in which agents are expected to adopt the ‘truth’ about their activity as reflected in the

abstracted observations of the ACD and modify it accordingly (Winiecki 2004b). I will elaborate on this in more detail below and in Part 4 of the report.

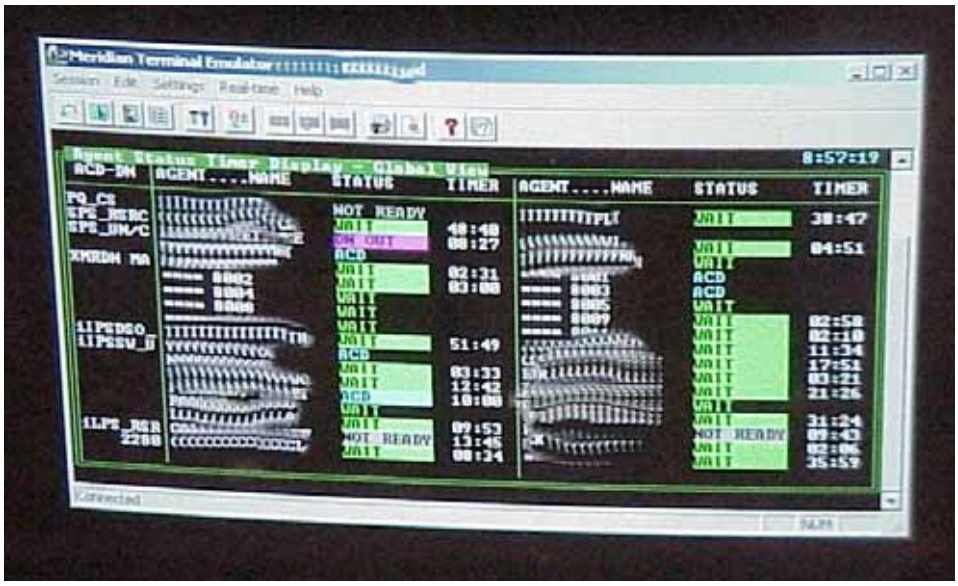


Figure 14. *BigTech* Queue Display (Agent's Names Obscured)

Figure 15. *MHealth* Queue Display

At *BigTech*, it is common for some supervisors to monitor the display shown in Figure 14 and whenever a caller is waiting on hold to speak with an agent (implying that all agents who are logged in are already working calls) he or she will literally run out into the call centre looking for agents who are currently scheduled to be working on other projects, thus not currently logged in to the queue, and implore those agents to log in and 'bust the queue' (answer the callers on hold). This exercise is accounted for by the fact that the call centre's top level management puts emphasis on high service level – the percentage of calls answered within an organisationally-defined time period.[85] Any hour in which service level is not at or near 100% was considered to be problematic. Reflecting the importance afforded to inscriptions and accounting methods, the management of this call centre takes great pride in displaying histograms that show how the average service level for each hour in the course of a day was 'under service level' – the manufactured chart appeared to be a very important form of representation in the call centre when determining 'how we are now'. That is, the statistical representations of work that arise in the manufactured reality of the call centre are held up as the 'true' functioning of the call centre.

This is an invisible feature of the technology-mediated workplace, and a way the worker's activity in time and space is converted to inscriptions such that any worker and all of the workers can be seen and manipulated in terms of the 'political arithmetic' used by the organisation to organise and produce judgements of the

[85] Service level is usually communicated as a percentage of the total incoming calls that are answered in a particular time frame. At the commencement of fieldwork at *BigTech*, desired service level was set at 90% of all calls answered within two minutes, or '90 in two minutes'. At the conclusion of fieldwork at *BigTech* I had seen service level altered dramatically in response to the fact that the call centre was gradually furloughing its workforce in order to increase its use of lower cost subcontractors in Canada and India.

Modifying service level to what 'can be done' given current staff and incoming call volume was also observed at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *MHealth.* Consequently, it appears to be more important to 'meet service level' than it is to communicate exactly what service level is.

workers/subjects and the overall call centre (or any ‘modern’ organisation) (Foucault 1981, 1988c, 2000b; Hacking 1982; Holman, Chissick & Totterdell 2002; Hoskin 1996; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987, 1994).

This duality of technology-mediation – making the workers visible to the gaze at the same time workers commence duties that are mediated by the same technology – is gotten almost for free in technology-mediated work and is a highly economical force in shaping how the work and workers are *seen* and *understood* by the organisation and its members. The enclosure of subjects through architectural features, a punch clock, electronic key cards and partitioning those subjects through logins to computer systems, are all microphysical tactics that apprehend the workers in place and time and activity, latching their activity to the manufactured reality of TMTL. As will be shown below, these simple acts of enclosing and partitioning of workers activate additional processes through which they can be disassembled into sets of abstracted numeric measurements, and reassembled into new discursive objects that are then amenable to particular tactics of management.

Technology-mediation is obscured, but hiding in plain sight. By being so overwhelmingly obvious, it is *all but invisible* because it is a part of the backdrop upon which the call centre’s reality is produced. Technology is so much a part of the TMTL landscape that its effect on how the work and workers are subjectified is an all but invisible and uncritically considered aspect of the production of reality in TMTL (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1999b; Townley 1994, p. 139).

In addition to distributing calls to agents, the ACD is programmed to automatically detect and record particular artefacts of each call centre agent’s work, either directly or by statistical operations that combine individual abstracted observations into horizontal and vertical divisions in the observed population – a

common feature of modern workplaces where tasks and components of tasks are rationalised to facilitate economic production and management (Hoskin & Macve 1994; Townley 1994, p. 26ff). In the call centres participating in this project, an array of more than 20 different statistic producing observations are made on each agent on a continuous basis by the ACD – for example, the average length of calls worked by the agent, the total time an agent was logged in but not working on calls, how many minutes are spent on other work products (the preparation of database records documenting the call, etc.), duration of breaks, etc.

This is demonstrated by the printed output of the ACD – what is colloquially known as 'the stats' by call centre agents (Figure 1). This display is printed and posted daily by team leads at *DeliveryWorldwide* and referred to under the general heading of 'worker productivity'. Figure 16, Figure 17 and Figure 18 display the ACD stats from *BigTech*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise*. Even cursory inspection of these four displays permits one to identify the highly similar set of abstracted and decontextualised observations inscribed by each organisation's ACD. The stats report is the presentation of Knowledge by the organisation that exposes an essential part of how the organisation makes the worker as the subject in technology-mediated tertiary labour.

Definitions of the column headings in the *DeliveryWorldwide* report (Figure 1) are shown in Table 1. Definitions of columns in the stats reports of the other call centres are similar.

It is a surprising fact that most agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* do not know these definitions. Their knowledge of the statistics is limited to what is emphasised by their team leaders, as described below, and the team leaders' knowledge is limited to that emphasised by management. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the

imputed ‘truth’ about agents embedded in the statistics is a resource usable by management to manipulate agents’ knowledge and practice.

Table 1. Definitions of Common Call Centre Statistics Used at DeliveryWorldwide (ref: Figure 1)

ACD Calls:	Total number of calls received by an agent.
Avg Talk Time:	Arithmetic average length of all calls received and worked by an agent.
InBd Ext Calls:	Total number of calls that came to an agent’s phone but were not directed through the ACD. Such calls are accomplished by dialling the agent’s phone extension, rather than calling the common number intercepted by the ACD.
Out Bound Calls:	Total number of calls originating from the agent’s phone. Outbound calls may be necessary in order for the agent to call an external help desk or other information source.
OutBd w/in Cntr:	Total number of calls made by an agent to another agent’s phone. Outbound calls within the call centre may be appropriate in order for the agent to call an internal help desk or other information source.
Total OutBd Time:	Total minutes:seconds spent by an agent talking with people they called.
OutBd Per-cent:	Percentage of outbound to inbound calls originating at an agent’s phone.

Table 1. Definitions of Common Call Centre Statistics Used at DeliveryWorldwide (ref: Figure 1)

Total AUX Time:	AUX (also called DND [do not disturb] and NOT READY) is a mode of telephone operation in which the worker is logged in but has pushed a button on his or her phone to signal the ACD not to send any calls to the worker's phone. It is commonly used for short ad hoc breaks, to complete data processing after the talking portion of a call has been completed, etc. Call centres commonly allow agents to be in AUX mode for a small percentage of their workday. This allows the ad hoc flexibility to address data processing demands or physical needs.
Total Train Time:	'Train(ing)' is a mode of telephone operation similar to AUX, but which is to be used explicitly when the worker is being coached or receiving planned or ad hoc training.
Total ACW Time:	ACW (average call waiting) is the amount of time a call that has been sent by the ACD goes unanswered by an agent.
Avail Time:	Avail = available. The total amount of time the agent was ready to receive calls, but during which no calls were incoming.
Staffed Time % Avail:	Total amount of time the agent was logged into his or her phone and was available to take calls.
% Avail:	Percentage of staffed time the agent was available to take calls.
Calls Per Hour:	The actual average number of calls worked by an agent per hour over the duration of his or her shift.

Table 1. Definitions of Common Call Centre Statistics Used at DeliveryWorldwide (ref: Figure 1)

NCPH:	Normalised Calls Per Hour. A computed number of calls per hour intended to account for variations in the number of calls actually incoming to the call centre. NCPH is an attempt to produce a statistical computed measure of 'productivity' that does not vary by the actual number of incoming calls. This is produced by dividing the actual calls per hour by the percentage of time per hour the agent was actually working calls.

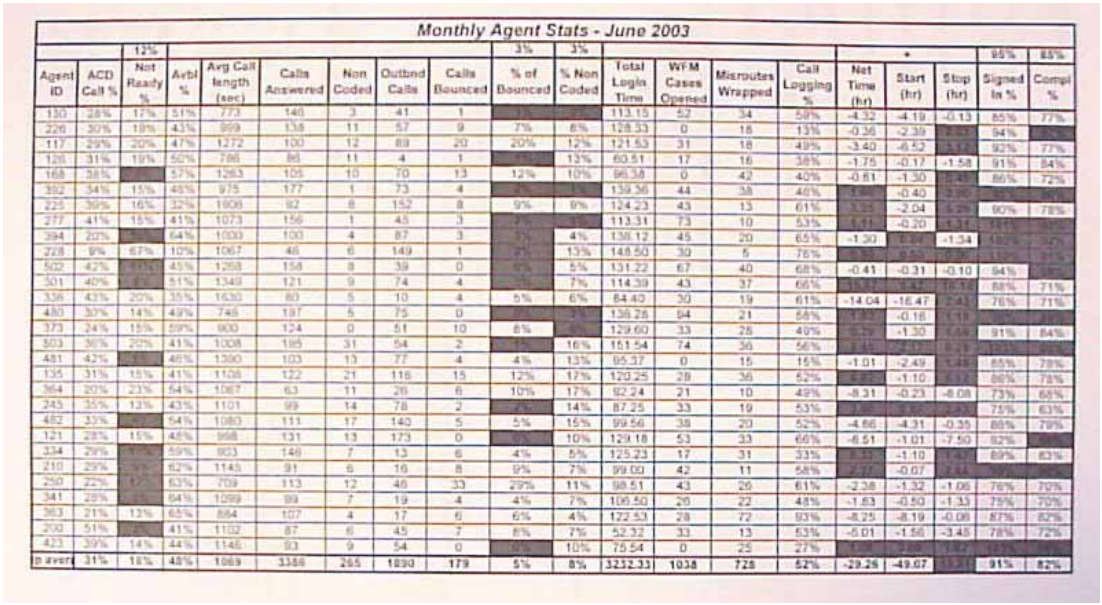
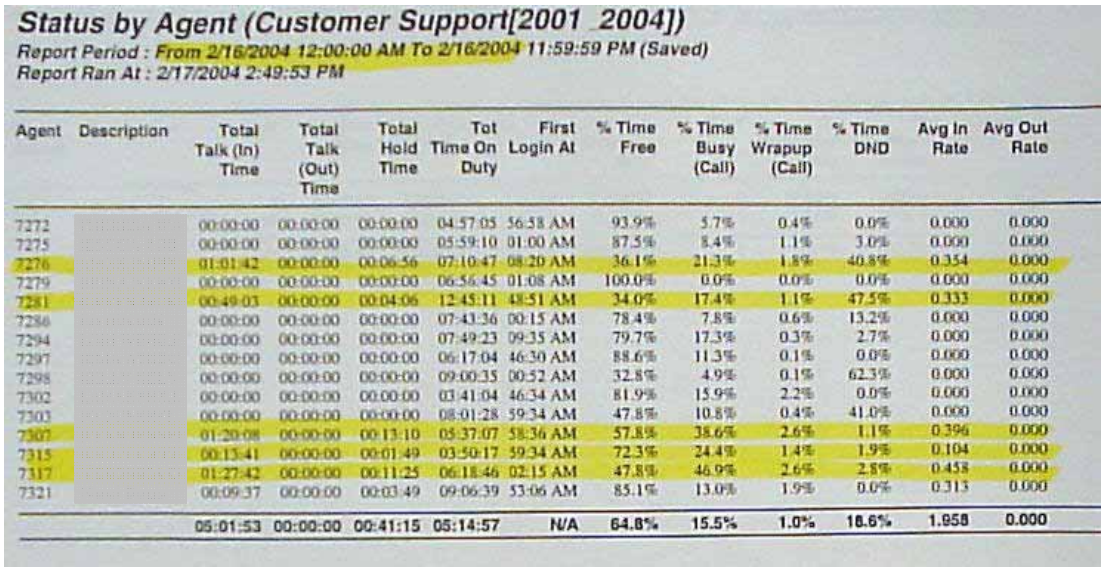


Figure 16. ACD Stats Report from *BigTech*

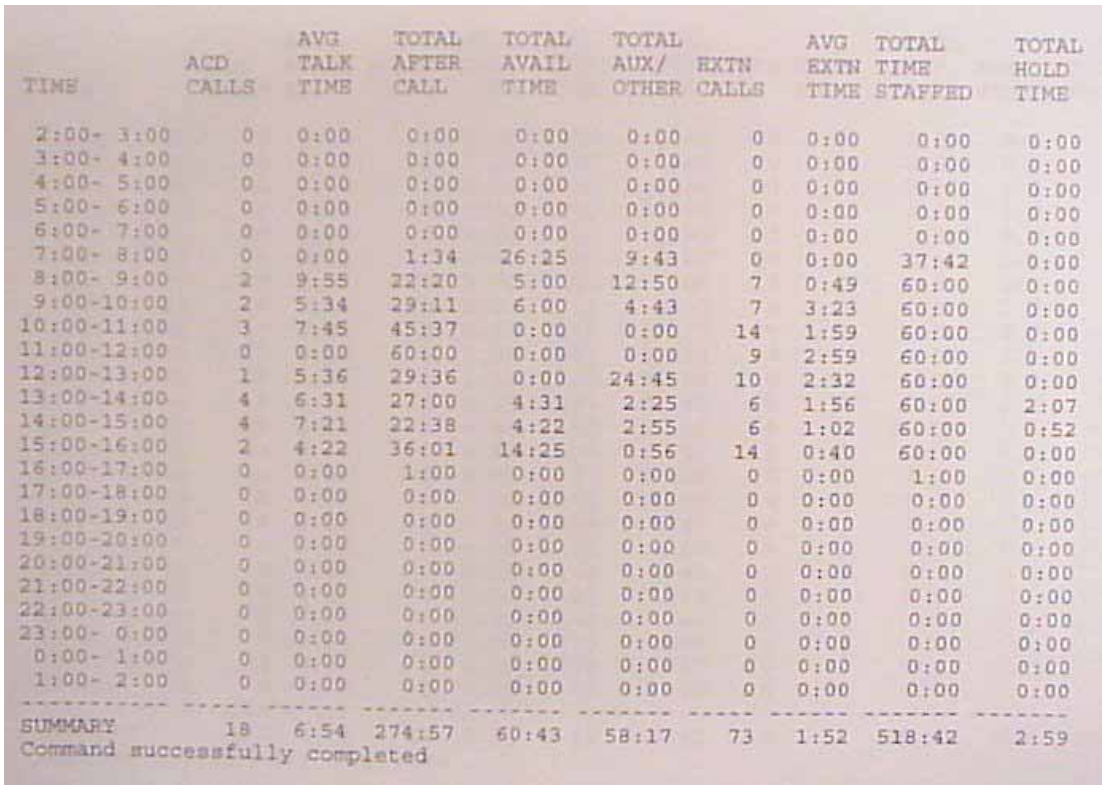


Status by Agent (Customer Support[2001_2004])

Report Period : From 2/16/2004 12:00:00 AM To 2/16/2004 11:59:59 PM (Saved)
Report Ran At : 2/17/2004 2:49:53 PM

Agent	Description	Total Talk (In) Time	Total Talk (Out) Time	Total Hold Time	Tot Time On Duty	First Login At	% Time Free	% Time Busy (Call)	% Time Wrapup (Call)	% Time DND	Avg In Rate	Avg Out Rate
7272		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	04:57:05	56:58 AM	93.9%	5.7%	0.4%	0.0%	0.000	0.000
7275		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	05:59:10	01:00 AM	87.5%	8.4%	1.1%	3.0%	0.000	0.000
7276		01:01:42	00:00:00	00:06:56	07:10:47	08:20 AM	36.1%	21.3%	1.8%	40.8%	0.354	0.000
7279		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	06:56:45	01:08 AM	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.000	0.000
7281		00:49:03	00:00:00	00:04:06	12:45:11	48:51 AM	34.0%	17.4%	1.1%	47.5%	0.333	0.000
7286		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	07:43:36	00:15 AM	78.4%	7.8%	0.6%	13.2%	0.000	0.000
7294		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	07:49:23	09:35 AM	79.7%	17.3%	0.3%	2.7%	0.000	0.000
7297		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	06:17:04	46:30 AM	88.6%	11.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.000	0.000
7298		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	09:00:35	00:52 AM	32.8%	4.9%	0.1%	62.3%	0.000	0.000
7302		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	03:41:04	46:34 AM	81.9%	15.9%	2.2%	0.0%	0.000	0.000
7303		00:00:00	00:00:00	00:00:00	08:01:28	59:34 AM	47.8%	10.8%	0.4%	41.0%	0.000	0.000
7307		01:20:08	00:00:00	00:13:10	05:37:07	58:36 AM	57.8%	38.6%	2.6%	1.1%	0.396	0.000
7315		00:13:41	00:00:00	00:01:49	03:50:17	59:34 AM	72.3%	24.4%	1.4%	1.9%	0.104	0.000
7317		01:27:42	00:00:00	00:11:25	06:18:46	02:15 AM	47.8%	46.9%	2.6%	2.8%	0.458	0.000
7321		00:09:37	00:00:00	00:03:49	09:06:39	53:06 AM	85.1%	13.0%	1.9%	0.0%	0.313	0.000
		05:01:53	00:00:00	00:41:15	05:14:57	N/A	64.8%	15.5%	1.0%	18.6%	1.958	0.000

Figure 17. ACD Stats Report from *MHealth*



TIME	ACD CALLS	AVG TALK TIME	TOTAL AFTER CALL	TOTAL AVAIL TIME	TOTAL AUX/ OTHER	EXTN CALLS	AVG EXTN TIME	TOTAL TIME STAFFED	TOTAL HOLD TIME
2:00- 3:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
3:00- 4:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
4:00- 5:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
5:00- 6:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
6:00- 7:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
7:00- 8:00	0	0:00	1:34	26:25	9:43	0	0:00	37:42	0:00
8:00- 9:00	2	9:55	22:20	5:00	12:50	7	0:49	60:00	0:00
9:00-10:00	2	5:34	29:11	6:00	4:43	7	3:23	60:00	0:00
10:00-11:00	3	7:45	45:37	0:00	0:00	14	1:59	60:00	0:00
11:00-12:00	0	0:00	60:00	0:00	0:00	9	2:59	60:00	0:00
12:00-13:00	1	5:36	29:36	0:00	24:45	10	2:32	60:00	0:00
13:00-14:00	4	6:31	27:00	4:31	2:25	6	1:56	60:00	2:07
14:00-15:00	4	7:21	22:38	4:22	2:55	6	1:02	60:00	0:52
15:00-16:00	2	4:22	36:01	14:25	0:56	14	0:40	60:00	0:00
16:00-17:00	0	0:00	1:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	1:00	0:00
17:00-18:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
18:00-19:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
19:00-20:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
20:00-21:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
21:00-22:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
22:00-23:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
23:00- 0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
0:00- 1:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
1:00- 2:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0	0:00	0:00	0:00
SUMMARY	18	6:54	274:57	60:43	58:17	73	1:52	518:42	2:59

Command successfully completed

Figure 18.[86] ACD Stats Report from *MedAdvise*

[86] ACD reports at *MedAdvise* are somewhat different from reports generated at the other call centres participating in this research. At *MedAdvise* the stats printout is specific to one individual only. Each row represents one hour and the row marked SUMMARY displays averages of the aspects of the nurse's work indicated in columns, as observed and aggregated by the ACD.

Figure 1, Figure 16 and Figure 17 also demonstrate another characteristic of the organisation's use of observations and inscriptions. The statistics displayed by the ACD reports are arranged in a way that both makes available a totalising gaze of all agents' work across columns and individualises a focus on each agent across rows in these tables. That is, everyone's statistics are visible at once (totalising) and each individual's statistics become separately visible and comparable to each other agent's set of statistics (individualising).

1. Deconstructing the Automatically Inscribed Subject

In terms of this research, one very important doing of the ACD and other technology-mediated surveillance and examination systems is the ability – made possible by the way workers must log in to the ACD and phone systems and the way the ACD is programmed to observe workers and make abstracted inscriptions of these observations – to affect a *disassembly* of the individual *qua* worker into parts that are (a) individually observable, (b) objectively measurable and, as an effect of the application of this breaking down process across the entire population of workers, (c) viewable as common components of the activity of all other workers – rendering all workers into the same 'objective' array of data. The means through which these are accomplished requires brief elaboration.

In a Foucaultian sense, the ACD is an example of a panoptic surveillance system (Foucault 1995) that facilitates an incessant and highly specific observation of the worker. The worker is well aware that the ACD is 'watching' him or her and can do little to deflect or obscure that gaze.[87] As noted above, the ACD is also

[87] That said, there *are* ways the worker can affect the gaze of the ACD. These will be detailed in Part 3 of this report.

programmed such that it instantiates not only surveillance practices, but also utilises data processing rules common to modern organisations (see, Boland 1989; Hoskin 1998; Hoskin & Macve 1994; McKinlay & Starkey 1998b; Savage 1998). In so doing the ACD is a technology that, all in one package, affords automatic, thus highly economical surveillance, inscription, normalisation, examination and reporting on workers in a call centre.

The result, shown in Figure 1 and Figure 16 – Figure 18, is scientific Knowledge of the subject. These examples share characteristics common to the production of Knowledge in social sciences in the sense of representing the product of 'objectification practices' (see, Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, pp. 143-167; Foucault 1995; Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990a; Townley 1996). They also instantiate what Foucault calls hierarchical observation and normalising judgement – ways of specifying what will be observed, and ways of organising data produced from observations so as to induce a norm and at the same time, produce an empirically measurable boundary for deviance (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, pp. 143-167; Foucault 1995, pp. 170-194; Townley 1994, pp. 83-108).

The ACD is designed and programmed to detect only certain kinds of data that pass through the telephone system and computer networks in the call centre; the only data *actually* detected by the ACD are: (a) time the agent logs into and out of the phone system and computer system, and (b) the starts and stops of incoming and outgoing phone calls. Thus, the data an ACD is programmed to detect are objective in a basic sense[88] – there is no essential meaning associated with any given piece of data and all such data can be collected using simple selection rules (for example, "record the start time and end time of every call routed to an agent's phone").

[88] That said, the fact that somebody, somewhere, following some prescribed standards or logic system in order to program the ACD to detect these data provides trace evidence attesting to the essential subjectivity immanent in the ACD.

However, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 16 – Figure 18 a substantial array of *information* can be and is produced by these data through the use of different accounting methods – a scientific 'truth' about the workers.

This is the production of discourse/Knowledge of particular behaviours, for example, the average talk time or average call length, the amount or % of time 'not ready', etc.,[89] average them and display them in a form that allows one to view both the whole population at once as well as each individual and inspect any variations across individuals in the data displayed. The details of the columns/categories of data in each figure are not as important here as is the fact that ACDs are programmed to: (a) conduct continuous surveillance on selected aspects of the worker's activity when interfacing with the phone system and computer terminal through which work is conducted; (b) perform calculations on the data extracted; and (c) present them in an imputably objective, scientific format common to hierarchical observations and normalising judgements.[90]

[89] See Table 1 for definitions of these terms.

[90] This belies several important, but un-emphasised characteristics comprising power immanent to the ACD. (a) Different ACDs are pre-programmed with the ability to detect similar things, and individual call centre organisations can select which of those data are reported. Depending on the interests or knowledge of management in a given organisation, all, or only some of these data will be reported. For example, while all four of the call centres' ACDs detected 'average talk time' (the average length of an agent's calls), and number of calls taken by each agent, only one of them detects the number of 'cases logged' by the agent (the number of calls during which the agent performed a particular type of data entry). (b) Different ACDs are pre-programmed to use different formulae when computing similar values across ACDs. For example, Cleveland and Mayben detail four different formulae that may be used to compute *service level* (1997, pp. 30-31) – a principal statistic used to assess the overall performance of the call centre. Thus, there is not only variability in the way ACDs are used to detect and report data, but different organisations also have the authority to report different data. *In other words, the organisation can choose to 'see itself and its objects' however it desires.* Since different means and rules are used to detect and collect and reduce data to statistics, the objects produced in the surveillance and examination instantiated in the ACD are not necessarily comparable.

However, because these data are all categorised similarly and are all represented in similar quantitative form (percentages, tallies, frequencies, etc.) they are essentially treated as if they are comparable. For example, across the span of fieldwork, the *MHealth* call centre utilised several different rules and formulae built into the ACD to compute particular categories of data. However, across this span of time, the product of those rules and formulae were treated as if they were comparable – 'service level' computed according to one formula during one week was treated as if it were comparable to 'service level' computed according to a different formula during the next week. (In fact, the call centre supervisor noted how one formula tended to provide 'better numbers' than another formula when similar input data were used. She eventually solicited her supervisor to decide

Through this process, the data detected by the ACD for any one worker are objectively identical in form to the data detected for any other worker. However, subjective data, such as the experience, fatigue, health, mood, motivation, affect, etc. of the worker and customer on the phone is invisible to the ACD – an aspect of the production of the subject that, as criticised by Smith, Haraway and Townley (Haraway 2004a, 2004c; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990a; Townley 1994), effectively discounts the lived experience of the subject and a topic that I will return to in Part 4 of the report below.

That is, through the way workers are enclosed and partitioned in the workplace, how the workers are made visible to the ACD and management, the worker's activity is stripped of subjective meaning and in so doing reduced to a sort of 'common denominator' status; namely, numbers. Actions of the worker are abstracted and inscribed in a numeric form considered to be objective, individual to a given worker and common in format to the data collected on any other worker's activity. Through this process, programmed into the ACD, workers are reduced to individualised yet common 'bits' of data that facilitate accounting methods, comparisons between workers and between a worker and the rules, and the application of disciplinary actions on the worker in the form of training, coaching or perhaps punishment:

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which formula would be adopted as the 'standard' for the company. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the formula that produced 'better data', in terms of the organisation's expectations, was the one adopted.)

That is, members of organisations, including both management and agents, have the ability to tinker with the data in ways that do not affect the presumed 'objectivity' of the data or results (because 'objectivity' is associated with methodology (Haraway 2004a)) – a hybrid primary/secondary adjustment (Goffman 1961) that accomplishes allowable ends by means which are neither explicitly permitted (as would be the case for a primary adjustment) nor disallowed (as would be the case for a secondary adjustment). Consequently, organisations manipulate observations, inscriptions and reconstruction of these inscriptions such that they can produce subjects so as to economically accomplish their shifting goals – local and contingent tactics of power aimed at the accomplishment of programmatic goals (see, Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, pp. 143-167; Foucault 1995). This will be elaborated in Part 3 and 4 below.

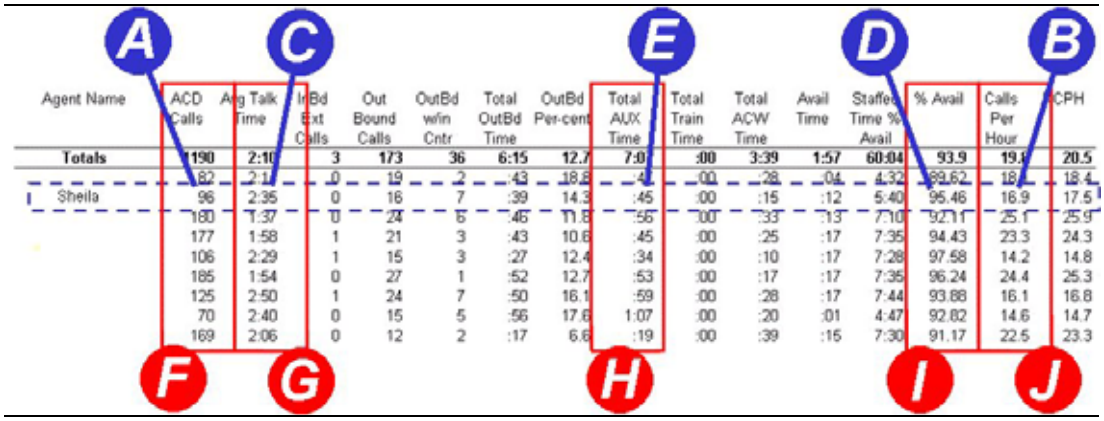
> In a sense the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity; but it individualises by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. (Foucault 1995, p. 184; see also Townley 1995b; Townley 1996)

All of these make it possible for the organisation to produce discourse/Knowledge – an operation of reconstruction after the subject is abstracted and divided by the partitioning, observing, inscribing practices of the organisation.

2. Reconstructing the Automatically Inscribed Subject

Reconstruction proceeds following rules programmed into the ACD *and* a limited selection of which rules to use for creating reports by management of the organisation – a selection that has a substantial authority for producing the subject.

After conditioning the workplace and the production of data as described above, the ACD processes these data using simple arithmetic and algebraic formulae and produces; (a) tallies (for example, how many calls were taken by Sheila today – 'A' in Figure 19); (b) frequencies (for example, how many calls did Sheila handle per hour during her shift – 'B' in Figure 19); (c) measures of central tendency (usually mean and mode, for example, how long was the average call worked by Sheila today – 'C' in Figure 19, what was the number of calls taken by each worker today, what was the modal hourly service level of the call centre today); and (d) percentages (for example, what percentage of time was Sheila working calls – 'D' in Figure 19, what percentage of her work time was spent in 'aftercall' work or 'aux' mode [data processing required to record the call just taken during which the agent is unable to take other calls] – 'E' in Figure 19).



Agent Name	ACD Calls	Avg Talk Time	InBd Ext Calls	Out Bound Calls	OutBd w/in Cntr	Total OutBd Time	OutBd Per-cent	Total AUX Time	Total Train Time	Total ACW Time	Avail Time	Staffed Time % Avail	% Avail	Calls Per Hour	CPH
Totals	**1190**	**2:10**	**3**	**173**	**36**	**6:15**	**12.7**	**7:0**	**:00**	**3:39**	**1:57**	**60:04**	**93.9**	**19.8**	**20.5**
	82	2:14	0	19	2	:43	18.8	:4	:00	:28	:04	4:32	89.62	18	18.4
Sheila	96	2:35	0	16	7	:39	14.3	:45	:00	:15	:12	5:40	95.46	16.9	17.5
	180	1:37	0	24	6	:46	11.8	:56	:00	:33	:13	7:10	92.11	25.1	25.9
	177	1:58	1	21	3	:43	10.6	:45	:00	:25	:17	7:35	94.43	23.3	24.3
	106	2:29	1	15	3	:27	12.4	:34	:00	:10	:17	7:28	97.58	14.2	14.8
	185	1:54	0	27	1	:52	12.7	:53	:00	:17	:17	7:35	96.24	24.4	25.3
	125	2:50	1	24	7	:50	16.1	:59	:00	:28	:17	7:44	93.88	16.1	16.8
	70	2:40	0	15	5	:56	17.6	1:07	:00	:20	:01	4:47	92.82	14.6	14.7
	169	2:06	0	12	2	:17	6.6	:19	:00	:39	:15	7:30	91.17	22.5	23.3

Figure 19. Illustrating the Hierarchical Observation & Normalising Judgement Produced by the Form of the Normal ACD Report

However, not only is the *individual worker reconstructed* in terms of data and calculations programmed into the ACD and selected by call centre management, but the set of individuals working in the call centre can then be rendered into a total mass, which, when organised in the ACD report allows new data to be produced and arise out of the aggregate. For example: (a) individual workers can be ranked (for example, which agent took the most, second most, etc. number of calls today – 'F' in Figure 19); (b) which agent had the shortest average, second shortest average, etc. talk time today – 'G' in Figure 19, which agent spent the shortest time in 'aftercall'/'aux' mode – 'H' in Figure 19; (c) which agent was available to take calls for the highest percentage of his or her shift – 'I' in Figure 19; (d) which agent took the most or least average calls per hour today – 'J' in Figure 19. The deconstruction and reconstruction process is thus both individualising and totalising.

This process evidences a set of relations that produce power to deconstruct individuals and reconstruct them into a form that is curiously 'objective'. What the ACD is programmed to detect and how it is programmed to 'see' and 'reassemble' these data are inherited from anonymous sources in the history of call centre

development and management, which are adapted from management and accounting methods from secondary labour (Cleveland & Mayben 1997). However, management of a call centre organisation has some authority to select what data and reassembly processes are used to produce reports. That is, the organisation can affect the appearance of ACD reports based on *its* desires for rational and economical oversight and management of individuals and the overall call centre. Together, these inscriptions do not, as described by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983c, pp. 143-167) comprise an object as normally considered in the physical sciences – that is, an object isolated from background practices and uninfluenced by the observer. Instead, it is a 'bastard object' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, p. 179) that requires a priori desires to be treated as a background on which it – the process and product of that noted above and what Foucault calls a 'ceremony' made of examinations (Foucault 1995, p. 187; see also, Hoskin & Macve 1994) – is rendered as an objective reality consistent with social science's application of 'science' (see also, Townley 1994, p. 139).

This deconstruction and reconstruction marks a region of thought and practice that can be seen as both the confluence and spawning pool for several imbricated systems of thought and action – heterogeneous elements of the *dispositif* contributing to the production of the call centre and its subjects. Several of these are historical: (a) the discourse and practice of the human sciences as it is applied to identifying, collecting, combining, separating and manipulating data in order to produce discursive objects; (b) the discourse and practice of accounting that is applied to make the product of scientific discourse manipulable in ways consistent with business practices and thought; (c) the microphysical tactics of directing

individual actor's actions (Hacking 1982, 1991; Hopper & Macintosh 1998; Hopwood 1987; Potter 1996b; Power 1994; Rose, N. 1999c).

Others of these heterogeneous elements emerge from the products of the application of these historical discourses and practices and have yet to be well-defined. At least one of these is an apparatus of thought and action arising out of the fact that ACDs and like technologies can rapidly reflect back to individuals subjected to these discourses, the product of their application (the hierarchical observation and normalising judgement noted above) – a sort of mirror that displays the individual in terms of the 'power' immanent in the relation of the data arrayed in the table, thus affecting each agent's subjectivity (Winiecki 2004b). Figure 1 demonstrates how Sheila makes this power explicit in her marginal notes to agents.

The network of forces produced by the observation, purification, inscription and rearrangement of data extracted from workers through the ACD, instantiates a power relation that literally makes the productive subject as an array of numbers in a table. This simple reconstruction and arrangement of inscribed data – data that apprehends space, time and activity all at once – is made all the more precise by the addition of 'team goals' and markings on selected statistics by the team leader to designate *good work*, *almost good work* and *work that doesn't meet* the organisation's expectations (Figure 1) – judgements about the agents that they are expected to take and use in modifying their own behaviour so as to meet the standards. In other words, an activation of power – the conduct of conduct – immanent in the Knowledge produced through the entire apparatus described above.

Because these reports are produced by the ACD – a computer system that both delivers work to agents and 'observes' the work of agents – it is accomplished incessantly, automatically and thus very economically. So long as the worker is

logged into his or her computer system – which must be done for the worker to be considered 'working' – he or she is enclosed in a panoptic apparatus in which the worker is continuously and silently observed in selective ways but in which no 'body' is actually watching. Instead, a database of simple observations is continuously updated with new data and the accretion of data is processed by the ACD. The result is a computationally-assembled totalising and individualising gaze over its inhabitants (Figure 1 and Figure 16 – Figure 18). In confluence with the organisation's use of this data to rate and/or rank the worker, and provision of advice, counselling or access to promotion opportunities and other human resources interventions based upon this data – an organisational appropriation of social science – this manufactures a discursive objectivity, a selective deconstruction and reconstruction of the subject/worker in terms of abstracted observations inscribed into a database, and lays down the potential for one to exert power upon workers to 'see themselves in the data' – another aspect of 'shadowboxing with data' (Winiecki 2004b) that I will elaborate upon below and in Parts 3 and 4 of the report.

b. Production of a Quality Subject in Service Work

The technology mediated gaze instantiated by the punch clock and ACD, and reinforced by its relation to the way the workplace is physically partitioned and the imposition of rules, permits the production of the worker in technology-mediated tertiary labour as a productive subject. Call centres also rate their workers in terms of quality. In terms of call centres, quality is a general term that encapsulates not only how one treats customers, but also one's compliance with organisational expectations for labour process that are not cast as measures of productivity.

i. *Data Entry and Data Processing*

The very fact that agents are doing data entry and data processing in a computer facilitates the storage of what that agent is doing and has done into a form amenable to audit or inspection. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide* the call centre agent's role is one that largely involves data passing from the company to the customer and from the customer to the company. Data passing from the customer to the company involves inscription of particular codes and textual messages into one or more databases so that the data can be 'picked up' and further processed by another person in another part of the company (usually distant from the agent's location) who is authorised to either invoke some service (for example dispatching a driver to deliver or pick up a package), collect more information (for example, requesting information from a delivery facility on the status of freight – when such information is returned to the agent, the agent will call the customer and relay the information provided), or make a decision (for example, if a customer has a complaint about incorrect billing the agent must compile a record of the case and send it to the accounting department of the company for resolution). This also reflects a 'deskilling' that fragments the worker from the work such that no individual can know how the whole process functions (though also, as noted in Part 1 above, the requirement for the worker to acquire and develop new knowledge and skills).

DeliveryWorldwide has produced a system by which different types of codes and messages are used in order to make different kinds of requests. Each message type/request is associated with a time frame in which that request must be answered

and if called for, the result relayed on to the customer. In effect, the code associated with different messages is associated with different degrees of urgency related to how quickly it must be answered. The organisation has developed a tracking system that produces a database record of each message type and the number of times that message was not addressed within the company's established time frame.

Each month the general office audits these records and provides a report to each call centre on the call centre's overall compliance with the use of message types and adherence to time frames for addressing messages and responding to customers. Each call centre is also provided with a report showing the compliance of all of the call centres in the organisation on these same measures. This report also reflects which agents were responsible for errors. In this way individuals are singled out, and organisations are 'individualised' in terms of the overall performance of other call centres on the 'use' of messages – another variant of the totalising and individualising gaze made possible through the panoptic system described above. That is, the technology-mediated nature of the call centre allows the organisation to observe and inscribe details of each individual agent's work and call centre-wide aggregates of work and to subject those inscriptions to audit-type evaluations, all in the process of producing scientific sorts of Knowledge about the workers and the workplace that contributes to the organisation's program of producing evidence of increased employee compliance with policy, reduction of costs and/or increase of profitability – Knowledge applied to the corporation's benefit.

It is also the case that at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre in which this research was conducted, agents are expected to perform spot checks on messages they receive from other call centres and to report any errors they find to their team leader, who, in turn, is to report it to the call centre supervisor. The supervisor is then

supposed to communicate these errors to her counterpart in the targeted call centre. These errors are reported on small forms distributed to agents (Figure 20). Thus, not only are the full database records of messages rendered visible to inspection by the general office, and used in evaluating agents and the entire call centre, but agents are involved in a sort of participatory surveillance (Poster 1990) in which they are implicated in this task of auditing their own and other agents' work. This is all made possible by the fact that the work of call centre agents is rendered in a form that makes it visible in particular ways and thus amenable to such collection, inspection and evaluation.[91] Panoptic power is both directed at workers and activated by them such that they are implicated in processes that both reify the organisation's asserted authority and that make each of them subject to the Knowledge and power arising in the process.

Figure 20. *DeliveryWorldwide* Agents are Responsible for Reporting Errors on Messages they Receive

[91] Sheila, a team leader in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre, told that she regularly exercises censorship of reports she receives from agents. In particular, if she is able to trace errors found in the work of agents at another call centre to an error committed by someone in *this* call centre, she will not feed the data up to her superior. "...why should I tattle on something that *we did wrong!*?... This, and other similar practices will be detailed in Part 3 of the report, where I address resistance and secondary adjustments.

Similarly, because the work of agents in all of the call centres participating in this study is to some extent inscribed into databases and the databases are visible to anyone with sufficient authorisation, virtually anything typed into a database by the call centre agent is open to audit against whatever policies or requirements are instantiated by the company over that data.

ii. Following Scripts & Being an Agent of the Company

Additionally, all of the call centres participating in this study had a written rubric for evaluating the 'quality' of an agent's work on the phone. This ranged from a one-page form containing an array of 13 elements at *DeliveryWorldwide* that allowed the team leader or other personnel to simply inscribe a tick to indicate if the agent satisfactorily performed an act associated with 'quality' work or not ('A' and 'B' in Figure 2), to a form at *BigTech* that indicated if the employee either met or did not meet each of 21 separate quality elements to the satisfaction of the specialist performing the evaluation (Figure 22). The *DeliveryWorldwide* form was supported with a one-page set of definitions for each of the elements included. The *BigTech* form was supported with a 12 page list of definitions and examples. Each of these different forms is an example of a disciplinary tactic intended to direct the actions of the individual performing the quality evaluation. The goal of this discipline is to regularise the performance of quality evaluations such that the organisation can treat all of the data produced across multiple evaluations as consistent – something that underpins the organisation's ability to make the quality evaluations of any one agent comparable to any other agent, such as is reflected in Figure 3 – and something

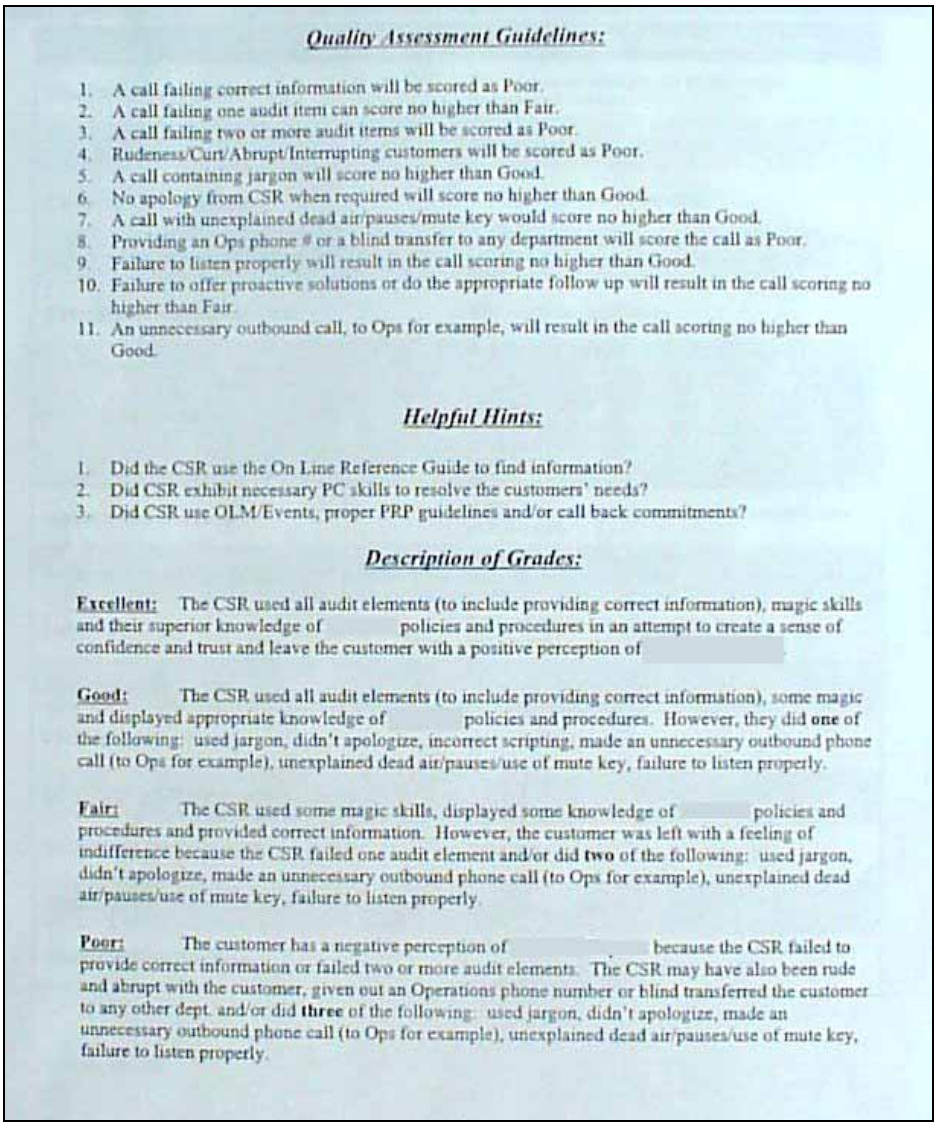
underpinning the organisation's desire to produce evidence of common processes, common evaluations and common microphysical tactics, which is something underpinning the entire social science apparatus and which, as indicated by Foucault, Smith, Haraway and Townley, among others, is implicated in the production of subjects that removes their individuality except where it facilitates the production of the appearance of homogeneity (Foucault 1988b, 1993, 1994a, 1995, 1996c, 2000b; Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990a; Townley 1993, 1994, 1996).

Here, I will focus on the practice of *DeliveryWorldwide* and explain how its quality rating form (Figure 2) was to be applied, whether through a 'barge' (live listening through a phone tap), 'recordings' (recording accomplished through a barge and listened to later) or 'side by side' (actually sitting next to an agent and listening to the agent's work).[92] Similar practice was applied at the other call centres participating in this study. Figure 21 displays the guidelines *DeliveryWorldwide* evaluators are to follow. Both the quality form and its rules instantiate disciplinary techniques intended to regulate the actions of those performing quality evaluations with the goal of making the process (a) economical, (b) reliable and (c) reducing the amount of independent authority any given individual exerts in the process of conducting a quality evaluation. In this way, the organisation exerts power through the form and into the surveillance, inscription, judgement and evaluation practice of evaluators, further reinforcing the production of a manufactured, scientific, objective reality and similarly manufactured truths about its inhabitants.

At 'A' in Figure 2, a set of seven items that *must be included* in each call are listed. The evaluator puts a tick mark in the space under each item if the agent

[92] The barge and recordings are intended to be covert to the agent and the side-by-side overtly known by the agent. However, as described by Taylor and Bain (2003), agents are frequently well aware of when barges and recordings are being accomplished. Agents' use of this knowledge and how this affects subjectivity will be detailed in Part 3 of this report.

includes it in the call being rated. At 'B' in Figure 2, what some in the call centre colloquially refer to as *the seven deadly sins* are listed. If an agent commits one of these items during a call, the evaluator marks it with a tick in the space above that item. The evaluator refers to a companion set of rules (Figure 21) that indicate how accomplishment of the items at 'A' and commission of the items at 'B' accrue to produce an overall rating of excellent, good, fair or poor for that call ('C' in Figure 2). After five calls are rated, the evaluator converts these nominal ratings to a numeric score using the formulae at 'D' in Figure 2.



Quality Assessment Guidelines:

1. A call failing correct information will be scored as Poor.
2. A call failing one audit item can score no higher than Fair.
3. A call failing two or more audit items will be scored as Poor.
4. Rudeness/Curt/Abrupt/Interrupting customers will be scored as Poor.
5. A call containing jargon will score no higher than Good.
6. No apology from CSR when required will score no higher than Good.
7. A call with unexplained dead air/pauses/mute key would score no higher than Good.
8. Providing an Ops phone # or a blind transfer to any department will score the call as Poor.
9. Failure to listen properly will result in the call scoring no higher than Good.
10. Failure to offer proactive solutions or do the appropriate follow up will result in the call scoring no higher than Fair.
11. An unnecessary outbound call, to Ops for example, will result in the call scoring no higher than Good.

Helpful Hints:

1. Did the CSR use the On Line Reference Guide to find information?
2. Did CSR exhibit necessary PC skills to resolve the customers' needs?
3. Did CSR use OLM/Events, proper PRP guidelines and/or call back commitments?

Description of Grades:

Excellent: The CSR used all audit elements (to include providing correct information), magic skills and their superior knowledge of policies and procedures in an attempt to create a sense of confidence and trust and leave the customer with a positive perception of

Good: The CSR used all audit elements (to include providing correct information), some magic and displayed appropriate knowledge of policies and procedures. However, they did **one** of the following: used jargon, didn't apologize, incorrect scripting, made an unnecessary outbound phone call (to Ops for example), unexplained dead air/pauses/use of mute key, failure to listen properly.

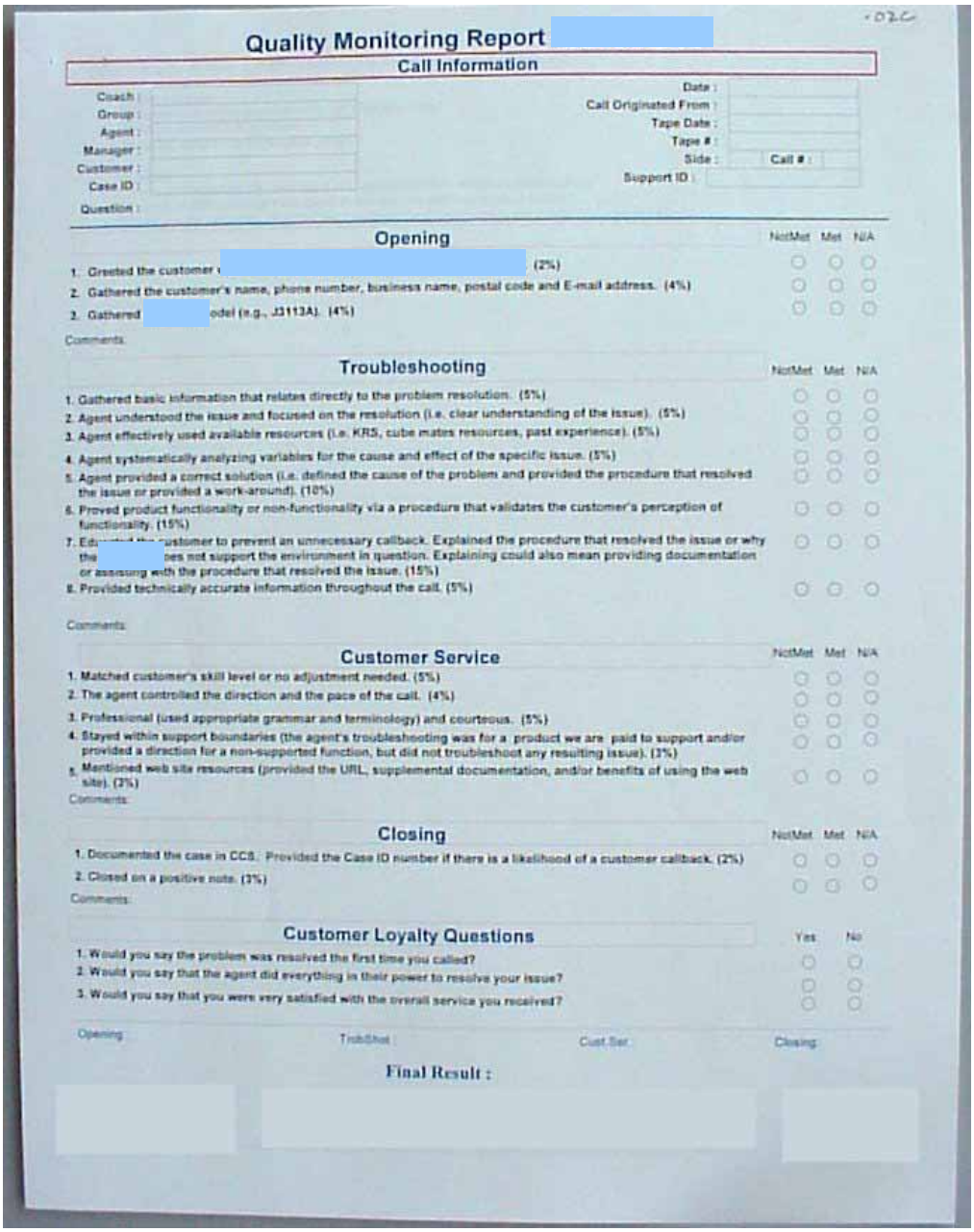
Fair: The CSR used some magic skills, displayed some knowledge of policies and procedures and provided correct information. However, the customer was left with a feeling of indifference because the CSR failed one audit element and/or did **two** of the following: used jargon, didn't apologize, made an unnecessary outbound phone call (to Ops for example), unexplained dead air/pauses/use of mute key, failure to listen properly.

Poor: The customer has a negative perception of because the CSR failed to provide correct information or failed two or more audit elements. The CSR may have also been rude and abrupt with the customer, given out an Operations phone number or blind transferred the customer to any other dept. and/or did **three** of the following: used jargon, didn't apologize, made an unnecessary outbound phone call (to Ops for example), unexplained dead air/pauses/use of mute key, failure to listen properly.

Figure 21. Guidelines for Performing a Quality Evaluation at *DeliveryWorldwide*

Based on comments from call centre supervisors at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech*, it should be noted that, because the evaluator interprets the agent's compliance with scripts and his or her friendliness – things that are relatively ill-defined regardless of the definitions and rules provided by the organisation – these ratings are officially considered to be subjective. However, following ongoing training and coaching, or 'calibration' activities for the evaluators, and because ratings are disciplined by the form shown in Figure 2 and a companion set of rules, while subjective, the resulting ratings are considered to be generally reliable and comparable across evaluators and agents – an assumption of '*disciplined subjectivity*' on the part of evaluators can be said to exist. The organisation thus manufactures a situation in which even arguably subjective data are cast as if they have objective qualities that allow them to be aggregated using mathematical operations that rely upon this presumption of reliability.[93]

[93] This presumption of reliability is something that exists in all the social sciences – any survey, or interview methodology that aggregates its results into statistical forms takes advantage of it.



Quality Monitoring Report

Call Information

Coach :
Group :
Agent :
Manager :
Customer :
Case ID :
Question :

Date :
Call Originated From :
Tape Date :
Tape # :
Side :
Call # :
Support ID :

Opening

	NotMet	Met	N/A
1. Greeted the customer (2%)			
2. Gathered the customer's name, phone number, business name, postal code and E-mail address. (4%)			
3. Gathered odel (e.g., J3113A). (4%)			

Comments:

Troubleshooting

	NotMet	Met	N/A
1. Gathered basic information that relates directly to the problem resolution. (5%)			
2. Agent understood the issue and focused on the resolution (i.e. clear understanding of the issue). (5%)			
3. Agent effectively used available resources (i.e. KRS, cube mates resources, past experience). (5%)			
4. Agent systematically analyzing variables for the cause and effect of the specific issue. (5%)			
5. Agent provided a correct solution (i.e. defined the cause of the problem and provided the procedure that resolved the issue or provided a work-around). (10%)			
6. Proved product functionality or non-functionality via a procedure that validates the customer's perception of functionality. (15%)			
7. Ed ustomer to prevent an unnecessary callback. Explained the procedure that resolved the issue or why the es not support the environment in question. Explaining could also mean providing documentation or assisting with the procedure that resolved the issue. (15%)			
8. Provided technically accurate information throughout the call. (5%)			

Comments:

Customer Service

	NotMet	Met	N/A
1. Matched customer's skill level or no adjustment needed. (5%)			
2. The agent controlled the direction and the pace of the call. (4%)			
3. Professional (used appropriate grammar and terminology) and courteous. (5%)			
4. Stayed within support boundaries (the agent's troubleshooting was for a product we are paid to support and/or provided a direction for a non-supported function, but did not troubleshoot any resulting issue). (3%)			
5. Mentioned web site resources (provided the URL, supplemental documentation, and/or benefits of using the web site). (3%)			

Comments:

Closing

	NotMet	Met	N/A
1. Documented the case in CCS. Provided the Case ID number if there is a likelihood of a customer callback. (2%)			
2. Closed on a positive note. (3%)			

Comments:

Customer Loyalty Questions

	Yes	No
1. Would you say the problem was resolved the first time you called?		
2. Would you say that the agent did everything in their power to resolve your issue?		
3. Would you say that you were very satisfied with the overall service you received?		

Opening | TrblShot | Cust Ser | Closing

Final Result :

Figure 22. Quality Evaluation Form from *BigTech*

Calibration is a setting in which several of the personnel responsible for performing evaluations are brought together to listen to and score one or more recorded calls. Following independent scoring, a supervisor or training specialist oversees a discussion among the evaluators with the goal of training everyone to achieve a common understanding (that is, the *organisation's preferred meaning*) of how to apply the rules (Figure 21) in context. In effect, it is not dissimilar to the

process research teams go through when they attempt to develop inter-rater reliability in their coding of interviews, fieldnote data, etc. (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995; LeCompte & Schensul 1999a). The calibration session will be addressed in more detail below.

As is done with the ACD data and statistics above, the numeric quality scores of agents are archived in an electronic database that is used to produce a continuous archive of agent performance over time. However, unlike the continuously collected ACD data and statistics described above, in the call centres participating in this study, quality ratings are performed on between five and ten calls per agent per month. (Agents in these same call centres answer between 200 and 3600 calls per month, and the duration of these calls can be as little as 45 seconds or as long as several hours, depending on the call centre and the issue being addressed.) Officially, quality ratings are to be used to inform feedback, coaching and ongoing training of agents in addition to providing data to be included in each agent's semi-annual or annual evaluation – additional tactics for disciplining and governing the activity of agents.

Evaluation forms exert a disciplinary force upon the evaluator to abstract the observed worker's activity to a set of binary facts – the worker was found to either meet or not meet the criteria on the evaluation form. In fact, the form used by *BigTech* was known as the 'met/not-met' evaluation form. That is, similar to that produced in the ACD-accomplished observation, inscription and processing of data, evaluation of quality required the evaluator to abstract the worker's actions, officially ignoring or glossing affective and contextual aspects of work not specified for evaluation on the form, to produce official records of what the agent did and how well it complied with the explicit expectations permitted on the form.

At the same time, the fact that an evaluator is not totally controlled in how he or she applies the 'met/not-met' form (or any quality evaluation conducted at these call centres) allows the evaluator to incorporate subtle judgements of context with regard to the agent's overall conduct, 'friendliness', ability to alter his or her vocabulary to suit the expertise of the customer, etc. In other words, to allow the evaluator to be somewhat subjective while at the same time disciplined by the organisation's structure in the form of the evaluation rubric. This is officially considered to be an appropriate amount of latitude on account of the assumption that the evaluator's judgement enables him or her to adjust the rubric in particular situations.[94]

For example, I observed more than one situation where a caller was rude and verbally abusive of the agent.[95] Agents who were consistently respectful in the face of this might be said to behave in a preferable way, but agents whose speech grew agitated and nervous and who overlapped or interrupted the speech of the caller were not judged to be bad. However, the latter would be considered undesirable and would draw comments and downgraded score from an evaluator if performed in a call where the customer was not rude or abusive. This is an example of how the practical application of rules by experts can vary across contexts while still being recognisably consistent with the intention of the general form of rules delineating the decorum of agents in customer facing work (Garfinkel 1967, pp. esp. pp. 76-103 & 186-207;

[94] That said, as will be shown in Part 3 of this report, evaluators (whether they are consciously aware of it or not) take advantage of the fact that the evaluation form results in an abstracted view of quality assumed to follow the organisation's definitions, and introduce their own knowledge and values when using these forms. This can be seen such that evaluators readily accomplish secondary adjustments (Goffman 1961, pp. 54ff, 199ff) in producing ratings of quality that are effectively rendered invisible when the rating is reduced to tick marks and tallies (Winiecki 2004b), and in so doing alter the *actual* contents of the evaluation and what is, in practice, considered satisfactory work.

[95] Indeed, open threats are not uncommon. Novice agents are very flustered by such things and I observed many individuals whose entire workday was adversely affected by one such experience. More experienced agents developed a thicker skin and seemed, at least superficially, able to dismiss such experiences and get on with things.

1986; Latour 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990; Potter 1996a). These instantiate small 'spaces left free' in the rules such that some individuals are not totally dominated and are, in fact, afforded with some authority to apply their knowledge and skill while still tethered by the subjectifying apparatus of the organisation. That said, management expected different interpretations, and exercised means to discipline the evaluators (the evaluation form and calibrations were the typical means) as well as the workers being evaluated. This will be described in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

Additionally, at all four call centres, the evaluator was expected to provide elaboration of his or her evaluation when the employee was found to not satisfactorily meet expectations on any of the quality elements. In practice this occurred only sporadically at *DeliveryWorldwide*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* where even if included on the form, it was not regularly archived as a part of the employee's record of work performance. At all four call centres, the evaluation was to be reviewed with the agents soon after it was accomplished with the idea that they would become aware of how their quality was being evaluated and adjust their practice according to the Knowledge and 'truth' about their activity so inscribed in it.[96] In so doing, a new variant of panoptic power arises in the quality evaluation, for the agent knows he or she will be the subject of this surveillance and will be provided with feedback and subsequent expectation that this is instruction for how one should perform. Sometimes, as will be described below, this is not so pleasant!

[96] In practice, the evaluator would voice elaborated descriptions of problems noted, or 'coach' the agent on how to improve upon the work just evaluated. This was considered by the evaluator to be a more fair means of addressing gaps between the organisationally-defined ideal and actual performance because (a) it gave the agent a chance to adjust and (b) it did not produce a written record that might actually reflect an aberration of the agent's practice, and that could be used against the agent in future performance reviews. This is another example of how individuals occasionally have and exercise 'spaces left free' in the apparatus and use them to tinker with the official means for producing ratings and subjectivity in the workplace. This and coaching and other practices for affecting the official subjectivity of workers and for influencing perceptions of workers will be addressed in the following chapter of this report.

That said, in an interview-based study of Australian call centre agents, Holman, Chissick and Totterdell (2002) report that many agents see the threat/promise of ongoing surveillance in a positive light – as an opportunity to prove that they are meeting the expectations of the company despite the adversities. This reflects the idea that agents begin to define themselves in terms of the manufactured reality and Knowledge encoded in the ways they are observed, inscribed and evaluated by the organisation.

Evaluations of quality are accomplished either covertly or overtly, through techniques called, 'barging', 'recording'[97] or 'side by side'[98] – all of which are variants of panoptic surveillance. Over 2000 hours of fieldwork in call centres, I rarely observed a 'side by side' evaluation and only observed several evaluations accomplished through a live 'barge', and this only when the recording equipment was not functioning. The majority of observed evaluations were accomplished through recordings of agent work.

Different from the other call centres participating in the study, evaluations at *MedAdvise* rarely addressed the actual conduct of a nurse's work with a caller/patient except for novices in the call centre (who were, nonetheless, nurses with considerable ward nursing experience). Instead, the focus of quality evaluations was on the clinical accuracy and legal defensibility of 'charts' (analogous to a medical chart/documentation produced for a patient in any medical care venue) generated in the course of a call. Charts were inspected for thorough inscription of the caller's contact information and health history, presenting symptoms, selection of guidelines/care advise and the culminating willingness of the caller to comply with

[97] 'Barge' and 'recordings' are also known by the more general term, 'silent monitoring'.
[98] These terms were common across all four call centres participating in this project. In fact, they are in common usage throughout the call centre industry (Bodin & Dawson 1999; Cleveland & Mayben 1997). It is interesting to note that the 'barge' was a function of the ACD at its invention.

the guidelines or not. As with the latitude afforded evaluators at *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was the case that fellow nurses exercised independent authority under the heading of 'nursing judgement' when performing these evaluations. The way 'nursing judgement' was invoked in producing and activating 'spaces left free' will be the subject of additional analysis in Part 3 of this report. (It should be noted that while the team leaders at *DeliveryWorldwide* were quasi-management personnel, the nurses at *MedAdvise* could be described as 'base level' agents – though with considerable other skill and training in clinical health care. That is, the responsibilities afforded to quasi-management personnel at *DeliveryWorldwide* were distributed to 'regular' agents at *MedAdvise*, demonstrating two different institutional settings that nonetheless facilitated similar outcomes.)

Team leaders at *DeliveryWorldwide* and personnel assigned to perform these evaluations at *BigTech* voiced their preference for recordings over either live barging or side by side. Recordings allow the evaluator to fast forward the tape recording through dead space on the tape and to review particularly detailed sections of a call or sections that are difficult to interpret (the quality of recordings is amazingly variable, even with direct connections to the ACD and digital recording software). At *BigTech*, where digital recordings were performed, it was normal procedure to use the capabilities of the recording software to find and delete long silences and even to digitally enhance the audio quality for easier listening. Live barges were almost universally considered to be a time-intensive process that impeded the evaluator's ability to accomplish other work. Additionally, side by side monitoring was widely considered to have so much effect on the agent that the evaluation could not be considered representative of his or her work. Thus, it was almost always reserved for extreme cases or for 'on the job training' rather than for evaluation and coaching.

The above sentiments of personnel responsible for performing evaluations reflect Foucault's observation already referenced twice above – workers in organisations are drawn to technologies that afford more rational and more economic means for accomplishing tasks. The worker (in this case, referring to the evaluator, though the general concept can be applied to any worker) overburdened by tasks chooses means that afford economical accomplishment of them. This demonstrates how workers will willingly alter their practices so as to bow to "...the play of power relations" (Foucault 1983, p. 219) that are anonymously distributed throughout the individual's context. That is, while there is not always an intentional structure of power 'there' that forces the worker to adopt particular means to perform a job (that is, not always a Taylorised labour process), the collision of many duties and limited time in which to perform them plays upon the worker such that he or she usually chooses the most expedient means to an end. While the main thrust of this report addresses 'base level' workers, it is worth pointing out that similar disciplinary outcomes occur across different organisational levels, including quasi-management and management levels.

These various sentiments exhibit a force that is similarly reflected in the means for producing 'productivity' measures above. In particular, the abstraction, deconstruction and reconstruction of workers into subjects through productivity statistics and quality evaluation forms implicitly permit the production of evaluations that are comparable both across time for the same agent and also across all agents in the call centre. The idea that both productivity and quality measures are considered to be 'universally' comparable across agents in this way is underscored by the means of displaying them in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre (Figure 3). This display, based on advice provided in a book written by a consultant to call centre companies

(Durr 1996, p. 92) was commonly used to rate all agents in each team and teams against one another.

It is worth noting that quality evaluations using these forms were accomplished on between two and ten calls a month for experienced agents and somewhat more frequently for novice agents. Considering that agents at the four call centres answered between 200 and 3600 calls a month, these evaluations account for only a fraction of the actual work the agent has done.

Compared with the continuous, automatic and technology-mediated observation, inscription and production of productivity measures for each worker, it is apparent that evaluation of quantity is much more important to the organisation than is 'quality'. Supervisors or team leaders at all four call centres participating in this study interpreted the difference in the amount of data processed for productivity evaluations vs. that processed for quality evaluations to be indicative of the cost of resources for accomplishing each. That is, it is much less expensive for the organisation to use the ACD to collect and process productivity measures than it is to manually tap into or record agent phone calls and manually apply the evaluation forms to evaluate quality. One is reminded again of Foucault's observation that, beginning in the 18th century, there is evidence that "...an increasingly better invigilated process of adjustment has been sought after – more and more rational and economic" (Foucault 1983, p. 219) in order to realise means of getting more out of workers, for less effort on the part of the organisation. In this case, the economic relation appears to be the driving force in accomplishing evaluations. The more expensive quality evaluation is performed much less frequently than is the productivity evaluation. This results in a much greater importance being afforded to the productivity evaluation and an unintentional but clearly defined dismissal of

individual experience (even as it is disciplined by the rating forms) of quality evaluators in the production of Knowledge that defines the subject. This reflects the observations of Smith and Haraway about the production of subjectivity in modern society (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990a; Townley 1994; see also, Townley 1996, 2001). At the commencement of fieldwork, these displays were updated monthly, based on mathematical averages of normalised calls per hour (NCPH, table 1, above) and quality evaluations. About midway through fieldwork, these displays were effectively discontinued when there was a dramatic increase in call volume due to the closure of several call centres in the *DeliveryWorldwide* company network. This was addressed by the company by assigning team leaders, the individuals normally responsible for performing quality evaluations, to work almost full time on incoming customer calls, and thus to discontinue the regular accomplishment of these evaluations. This, along with other factors included below, draws the call centre's concern for productivity and quality (in terms of treatment of customers) into stark contrast. When I brought this to the attention of the call centre supervisor, she replied, "[w]ell – quality doesn't matter much if you can't even answer your customer's calls." Clearly, the economic, labour and technological forces present in the call centre are drawn into relations that favour productivity over customer-facing quality.[99]

iii. Calibrating the Evaluator: Attempting to Discipline the Gaze Over Quality

As indicated above, the evaluation of quality is regulated by a set of documents – the actual rating form (Figure 2, Figure 22) and a set of guidelines

[99] Even a year following the end of fieldwork, these quality evaluations were only irregularly performed.

defining rules for applying judgement and compiling a numeric score (Figure 21). However, depending on the individual performing the evaluation, different interpretations of the contents of documents could occur. For that reason a process commonly called 'calibration' is performed. Calibration is a process defined as one aimed at:

> ...standardizing the scoring of the quality of customer interactions [that involves] a long process of hashing out the goals of calls and the expectations of agents and supervisors. The process starts with recording calls, then having a set of [evaluators] discuss the calls and argue about their various interpretations of how the call was handled. From there, [existing standards become more regularly understood and applied] (Bodin & Dawson 1999, p. 41).

My observation of calibration efforts at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech* largely confirm this definition.[100] However, nuances of the practice are worth detailing here because they help to illuminate the disciplinary focus of call centre organisations.

As indicated in the textbook definition above, all of the team leaders at *DeliveryWorldwide* were called into a meeting in which several calls were to be included in the process.[101] Rating forms were passed out (Figure 2) and a call was played. A period of about 30 seconds silence typically followed the recording during which team leaders were expected to accomplish their independent ratings on the official rating form used by the organisation. The supervisor of the call centre then

[100] Calibration was never necessary at *MHealth* because there was only one team leader doing the job.
[101] Team leaders were the only ones who accomplished quality evaluations during the term of fieldwork at *DeliveryWorldwide*. Team leaders were selected for this job based on seniority and a 'bid' for the position in a yearly process in the call centre and not in particular for their excellence in any one facet of the work. After fieldwork was concluded, a new job category was created at *DeliveryWorldwide* – the 'Quality Administrator' (QA). The QA was to receive special training in performing quality evaluations. However, because that job was instituted after fieldwork concluded, this report does not document any of their work. It is a fact, however, that ongoing contact with informants at that company has provided information that QAs have not performed any quality evaluations even more than one year after their hire.

called upon each individual to tell what he or she thought were the best and worst parts of the call and how he or she rated the call. In most cases, it was common for the correctness of information provided to the customer by the agent to be called into question. In all cases someone in attendance (but not everyone!) would know specific details from the company's policy and products database and could conclusively state if information provided by the agent was correct or not.[102] Similarly, compliance with company policy to voice the customer's name, ask if the customer had additional questions prior to closing the call and use of particular scripted phrases when appropriate[103] could be verified and objectively scored as having been accomplished or not. Similarly, commission of any of the 'seven deadly sins' of the company ('B' in Figure 2) could be identified and included in the rating for that agent/call.

Calibration sessions also frequently addressed questions over the agent's 'friendliness' or a practical determination if the agent was rude, curt, or interrupted the customer. Team leaders commonly appealed to details of the call that could be known to them as expert insiders or as competent listeners, for example, knowledge of the daily call volume or time of day the recording was made (thus admitting that stresses, like fatigue, could affect the agent's work), 'hearable' antagonism on the part of the customer, known problems with the computers, speed of network connections to databases and other tools used by agents and the like, or overt statements by the customer indicating he or she has interpreted the agent to be unfriendly, curt or rude. In the face of this, supervisory personnel leading the calibration session would, commonly, harangue to indicate that such details should

[102] In informal interviews with management and team leaders, I learned that it was the belief of management and team leaders that this process also manifested 'training' for those without a memory of these details.
[103] See the section on scripting in the call centres, below.

not be considered when doing quality evaluations, and that the only allowable details were those already included in the company provided documents (Figure 2, Figure 21). In so doing, insider knowledge of the work and its varying contexts is officially rendered illegitimate for use in determining the quality of an agent and his or her work.

In response, I observed that some evaluators would agree verbally with these determinations from the supervisor, while others would remain silent and blank-faced. The organisational meaning of these events is easy to determine – the organisation claims dominion over the determination of 'quality'. That is, 'quality' is not something that is appropriately determined by the customer or by a knowledgeable insider. While admittedly accomplishing a subjective process, however disciplined by the rules and rating rubric inscribed in forms, the evaluator is expected to defend the implied universality of quality by merely 'activating' the definitions of quality established by the company.[104]

At *BigTech*, calibration was similarly practiced. However, it is the case that the individuals at *BigTech* who were responsible for performing 'met/not-met' evaluations (the QSSs or Quality Support Specialists) were chosen for this job specifically for their prior exemplary practice as agents – thus, individuals who were already considered to be 'calibrated' to the company's expectations for quality.

Nonetheless, calibration sessions were conducted between these individuals and their counterparts at selected outsourcer call centres servicing *BigTech* products. In addition to the textbook definition of 'calibration' noted above, this was considered to be a means for *BigTech* personnel to affect the conduct of outsourcers.

[104] See also, footnote 94.

Calibration sessions among these personnel were very informal. Normally, digital recordings of several calls were stored at a computer network location commonly accessible to these personnel, and they were provided about a week to review it and accomplish their rating. A meeting was scheduled and all of the personnel met either in person or through telephone conferences to discuss their various ratings. Unlike that described for the work at *DeliveryWorldwide*, contextual details of the call, including the agent's experience, the customer's affect and known technical problems with the agent's tools, were used to account for gaps in the agent's work practice. The calibration session then, typically, evolved into a discussion of how the agent could be coached to improve or overcome these issues. In effect, the calibration session evidenced a focused opportunity for a discussion of *how to help agents produce quality work* – the definition of which they all implicitly already understood on account of their existence in this position – rather than to develop a common understanding of how it is rated.

In other words, as indicated above, the context provided evaluators with details that, while officially unimportant in terms of the evaluation rubric, could be used to account for good reasons to interpret the agent's actions not as a breach, but rather as the product of one's inexperience or one's attempt to do good work in a lousy situation. Consequently, the evaluator had the ability to deploy expert knowledge of context and the agent's current abilities in producing an official and definitive evaluation.

For example, in the course of one evaluation at *BigTech* that was also the target of a calibration session, the agent was known to be a novice with only about a month's experience in the job. Each of the evaluators voiced technical flaws about

her work but all agreed with the statement of one QSS at the conclusion of the calibration session:

> ...that's about as good as we can expect from a beginner. These are complex machines [the equipment being troubleshot and repaired] and you can't expect her to *get it all* so quickly.

The QSSs then discussed options for providing training or coaching in order to improve her technical knowledge and skill in manipulating the computer-based tools and other resources to quickly locate correct answers. This observation was validated later, when I observed a QSS conducting an authentic evaluation of an experienced agent. As the QSS scribbled critical comments on the evaluation form, the QSS remarked that the agent was making many errors "...even though he's been doing this for a couple of years. He shouldn't be doing that. I'll have to have a talk with him."

However, in most cases, the evaluations produced by these personnel at *BigTech* were such that agents were represented as being competent enough to be considered good agents, and that problems were associated with factors that agents could not always be expected to control – such as novice status, technical problems with computer tools, etc. At the same time, calibration sessions allowed the evaluators to develop tactical methods for coaching agents on an ongoing basis so that their practice continued to improve, with the idea that novices could be 'made' into experienced agents who could overcome some of the technical problems associated with the work. These provide examples of how the practical application of rules by experts can vary across contexts while still being recognisably consistent with the intention of the rules delineating the decorum of agents in customer facing work (Garfinkel 1967, pp. esp. pp. 76-103 & 186-207; 1986; Latour 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990; Potter 1996a). In addition, the QSS's critical comments about the

quality of an experienced agent underscore an implicit responsibility on the part of agents to accomplish work at the best of their ability, regardless of the circumstances. Thus, the subject is not only a product of the manufactured environment and its technical rules, but also of an implicit responsibility to be 'true' to one's own presumed ability.

Similarly, at *MedAdvise*, the review of charts produced by nurses in the course of their work was typically performed by a group of nurses, or accomplished by one and the conclusions reviewed with others, before final decisions were made. Subsequent to this process, the reviewers commonly discussed how the review could be presented to the nurse in order to effect improvement of her or his charting practice. That is, evaluation was not so much a process of determining the quality of an agent as it was of providing feedback to the organisation which it was to use in 'helping the agent to improve' with the overall goal of producing legally and medically defensible documentation of their work.[105] This, and the conduct of evaluators at *BigTech* instantiates an apprenticeship sort of process that contradicts Braverman's criticism of labour process (Braverman 1974) and Sennett's iron cage fatalism (Sennett 1998).

While each call centre had similar forms and norms for producing officially homogeneous and universal measures of quality, the process of quality evaluation varied within each call centre. This results in the production of quality ratings that are numerically combinable such that agents are comparable with their own personal historical ratings and across agents, while at the same time producing 'spaces left free' in which these numeric ratings can obscure the arguably 'real' activity of individuals responsible for rating and coaching on the quality of agent work – that is,

[105] As will be clarified in the following Part of the report, this also demonstrates how the nurses are able to use resources of the organisation to accomplish a desirable goal by illicit means – a secondary adjustment.

in which the agents in TMTL have some influence on their own subjectification and subjectivity (Foucault 1996a; Knights & McCabe 1998; Sturdy & Fineman 2001). More on this will be described in Part 3 of this report.

iv. Soliciting Data: Mystery Shopper, Customer Satisfaction Surveys

The ACD is a machine that fits into the architectural and temporal partitioning of the workplace and automatically observes, inscribes, normalises and evaluates without human intervention. In addition to this, call centre organisations practice other forms of surveillance upon workers that are intended to produce data to be used in producing an evaluation of the worker and the entire call centre (individualising and totalising). Among these are the 'mystery caller' and 'customer satisfaction surveys'.

The 'mystery shopper' (also called 'mystery caller') is a technique commonly employed in service industries (Cameron 2000; Cleveland & Mayben 1997; Fuller & Smith 1991; Sturdy & Fineman 2001) in which a person poses as a customer and questions or observes the conduct of service workers with the intent of testing a worker's compliance with organisational rules, regulations and policies. The process is intentionally interactive – the mystery shopper asks questions intended to solicit data which can then be compared with an organisationally defined ideal.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, the general office (colloquially referred to as the 'G. O.') of the corporation makes 30 'mystery shopper' calls a month to each of the call centres in the organisation's network. The mystery caller asks a set of scripted questions, at least one in each call made. All of the call centres are asked the same set of questions. The correctness of an agent's response to the question is evaluated

based on two principles: (a) matching with scripts prepared by the organisation for responses to the question; and (b) if no script is already prepared, providing a minimum amount of information while still answering the question asked.

In so doing the general office manufactures a setting in which data can be collected and combined for each call centre. Contextual details are rendered illegitimate and all agents and *DeliveryWorldwide* call centres are rendered equal under its inspection – a hierarchical observation and normalising judgement. For example, while listening to the calls of an agent at *DeliveryWorldwide*, I heard the following question asked by a mystery caller:[106]

> What time do you deliver your second day packages in Denver by?

From memory, the agent's response to this question was:

> Second day service is *generally*[107] delivered by 5 O'clock PM.

However, this answer was scored as incorrect, because the proper scripted response to this question is:

> Second business day by 5PM.

This high degree of expected compliance with the script is common in the call centre – the worker is expected to be disciplined by scripts that are either trained, available in a database accessible to the agent or built into the interface of the

[106] Subsequent to this call, the agent told me that she thought this was a 'mystery caller'. I noted this in my fieldnotes and found a match to the date, time and agent in the subsequent 'mystery caller' report from the G. O. As noted below, agents have ways of determining if they are receiving a 'mystery caller' question.
[107] Italics are mine in order to highlight what was scored incorrect.

database the agents use during the conduct of work. The organisation's rationale for this is that any additional information may allow the customer to infer a different meaning than what the organisation wishes to represent. For example, by indicating that second day service is *generally* delivered by 5:00PM, the customer may infer that delivery by 5:00PM is *not guaranteed*, which, according to the policy of the organisation, it is.[108]

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, the 'mystery shopper' is part of what is referred to as the 'General Office Audit' of each call centre. If an agent provides what is determined to be a correct response to such a call, the call centre is notified and at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre, the agent is rewarded with a hanging ornament above his or her call centre for this month. This form of display provides anyone in the call centre with the ability to identify those who have 'passed' the audit simply by glancing across the call centre. However informal, this display links together the partitioning of space into cubicles ostensibly 'owned' by particular agents with a marker identifying an agent's quality, as measured by answering one question correctly in one of the thousands of calls worked by that agent in a month.

It was the policy of the manager of this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre to exact a punishment on the entire call centre when 20% or more of these 'mystery shopper' calls were scored incorrect. The typical punishment was the proscription of any personal materials from agents' desks for one month. This included newspapers, puzzles, magazines, knitting, etc. In contrast, if greater than 80% of these calls were scored correct by the G. O., agents would be permitted to bring and keep personal materials at their desks for one month. Additionally, *DeliveryWorldwide* hosted an ongoing competition between call centres. The highest scoring call centre on the

[108] It was not unusual, though not common, for the manager of this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre to appeal such determinations on account of conflicting data in the reference materials provided to agents for answering such questions. These appeals were not always successful.

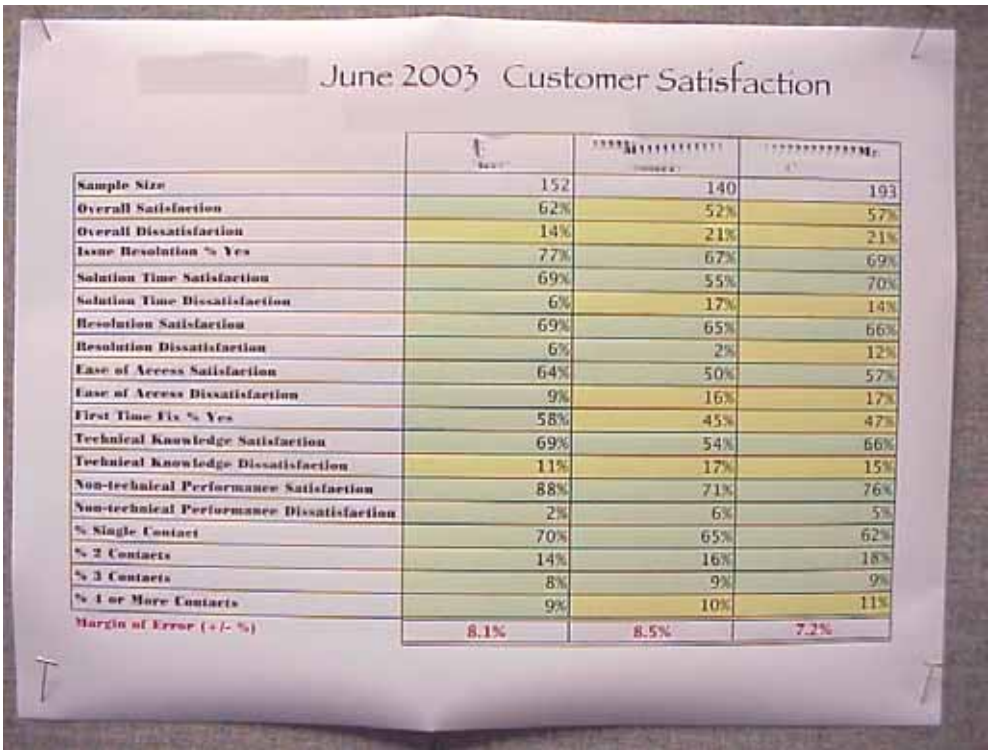
‘General Office Audit’ for two consecutive months would receive a rotating banner – a trophy of sorts – signifying its persistent overall quality. This represents a tactic on the part of local management to discipline agents according to an examination originating from the general office. The tactical application of reward or punishment by local management is independent of the discretion of the general office. The observation and examination imposed by the general office is translated by local management into unique disciplinary tactics.

Similarly, it was formerly a practice for the supervisor in this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre to hang a ribbon above each agent’s cubicle and affix a star cut out of coloured paper to the ribbon for each time an agent ‘passed’ a monthly paper-pencil test on company policy. This practice was discontinued when the supervisor determined that too many people were amassing large numbers of stars on their ribbon. She told, “it was like a maze in here – we couldn’t stand up and see across the call centre because there were so many ribbons filled with stars.” In other words, this means of providing a visually nominal form of quality ranking actually interfered with visual forms of surveillance in the call centre and was thus discontinued. Surveillance through the visual surveillance of space is thus demonstrated to be a very important part of the manufactured reality and the means of producing subjects that it facilitates.

At *BigTech*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise*, it was also common practice to conduct random surveys of customers. The process at *BigTech* was known as the ‘Customer Sat’ (satisfaction) survey. In conducting this survey, a subcontractor to the call centre selected a randomised set of customers who called for assistance in the preceding several weeks and whose issue had been recorded as solved by the last agent who worked the case. Each customer was asked a set of 29 questions and the

results tabulated and displayed in a public place in the call centre. Figure 23 shows how *BigTech* averaged the customer satisfaction scores to represent the total call centre and Figure 24 shows a larger chart that breaks up the data per individual agent. The set of papers pinned onto the bulletin board at the far right of Figure 24 contain the questions asked of each customer. Each of these displays represents the common form of a chart, the hierarchical observation over each agent's work as manufactured by the company's survey questions and a normalising judgement aggregating the data.

Agents reported that these data were rarely used in personnel evaluations and instead were intentionally posted so that agents could '...see what the customers think of you'. Independently, both Jaq and Amit, agents with over four years of experience each in the *BigTech* call centre, told that the organisation was only concerned with these data when a pattern of poor evaluations emerged. If such a pattern emerged, they told, it was considered that the agent was automatically considered to be irresponsible and not willing to read the charts and modify one's own behaviour such that higher evaluations could be accomplished – an assumption of responsibility that, as reflected above, arises from considering the abstracted stats as objective facts that, when found not to obtain, are automatically converted to the assumption of intentional misbehaviour on the part of the agent/subject. In so doing, additional information contributing to a 'true' evaluation of the agent is manufactured and used, and an agent's responsibility to the truth and reality manufactured by the organisation is actively created through the imbrication of particular ways of enclosing and partitioning workers, making them visible, performing abstracted observations and evaluating them in accounting methods (Townley 1994, p. 139).



June 2003 Customer Satisfaction

Sample Size	152	140	193
Overall Satisfaction	62%	52%	57%
Overall Dissatisfaction	14%	21%	21%
Issue Resolution % Yes	77%	67%	69%
Solution Time Satisfaction	69%	55%	70%
Solution Time Dissatisfaction	6%	17%	14%
Resolution Satisfaction	69%	65%	66%
Resolution Dissatisfaction	6%	2%	12%
Ease of Access Satisfaction	64%	50%	57%
Ease of Access Dissatisfaction	9%	16%	17%
First Time Fix % Yes	58%	45%	47%
Technical Knowledge Satisfaction	69%	54%	66%
Technical Knowledge Dissatisfaction	11%	17%	15%
Non-technical Performance Satisfaction	88%	71%	76%
Non-technical Performance Dissatisfaction	2%	6%	5%
% Single Contact	70%	65%	62%
% 2 Contacts	14%	16%	18%
% 3 Contacts	8%	9%	9%
% 4 or More Contacts	9%	10%	11%
Margin of Error (+/- %)	8.1%	8.5%	7.2%

Figure 23. Monthly Display of Customer Satisfaction Survey Scores at *BigTech*

Figure 24. Display of Customer Satisfaction Data per *BigTech* Agent

At *MHealth*, randomly selected callers[109] were asked by the agent if they would be willing to complete and return a mailed paper-pencil survey assessing what the organisation deemed to be 'Customer Service Quality'.[110] Data from these surveys was used by the marketing department to produce evaluations of the overall call centre's ability to please customers and to market new products. Over the nine months of fieldwork at *MHealth*, these data were never openly shared with the call centre agents. However, upon inspection of this 43 item survey, I discovered that only two questions related to the services offered by the call centre, and these questions did not relate to the services offered by individual agents, rather to the speed of the organisation's processing of details both during the call and in the provision of insured services. The remainder were associated with self-assessment of the respondent's psychological characteristics; that is, details that would allow *MHealth* to produce a psychological model – a hierarchical observation and normalising judgement – of its clientele.

v. *Unsolicited Data*

All of the data collection and analysis methods described above are intentional techniques for observing workers, abstracting these observations and inscribing them into forms amenable to recombination into 'productivity' or 'quality' ratings. It is not the case that call centres only collect and use data manufactured in this way. I also observed it to be the case that *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech*

[109] The database software used by *MHealth* agents was programmed to randomly select callers for this survey and prompted the agent to ask permission to send the customer this survey.
[110] In fact, as seems a robust phenomenon in social science, the response rate to these surveys was very, very low – less than 5%.

apprehended unsolicited comments from callers in the form of what are called 'happy calls' and 'unhappy calls'. In both cases, it was when customers indicated to an agent that they were especially satisfied or dissatisfied with the work of an individual agent during or after a call that these data were apprehended.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, when a customer expressed that he or she was especially satisfied with an agent's work and desired to speak to the agent's supervisor to pass on this information, the agent would, upon completion of the business of the call, forward the customer to his or her team leader, who would then document the details of the agent's work for this customer. The team leader would then compose an electronic message to be delivered to everyone in the call centre, indicating that the agent had received a verbal congratulation from the customer. This message was printed by the call centre supervisor who would then put it in the agent's personnel folder for consideration upon the agent's next semi-annual evaluation. If the customer wrote a letter to the call centre supervisor expressing satisfaction with an agent's work, the agent was additionally rewarded with a token bearing the company logo. This was typically an ink pen, stuffed toy or a 'stress toy'.[111]

If a customer was especially dissatisfied with the work of a particular agent, he or she may request to speak to the agent's supervisor. If such a request were made, the agent is to forward the call to his or her team leader. Categorically, the team leader never produced any written documentation of such an event. It was only when the customer wrote a letter to the call centre expressing dissatisfaction with the

[111] A stress toy is a foam rubber toy supposed to afford the user with release from emotional and physical stress when it is harassed. More commonly, these foam rubber toys were lobbed across cubicle walls in the occasional 'fight'.

work of an agent that documentation of an 'unhappy caller' was placed in the agent's personnel folder for consideration in his or her next semi-annual evaluation.[112]

Thus, in the enclosing and partitioning of time, space and activity in the call centre, the organisation makes it possible to observe, inscribe, normalise and examine workers in multiple ways. Some of these ways are built into the labour process itself – such as the way the ACD both distributes work to agents and 'observes' them in their work. Others are processes added into the responsibilities of the call centre agent – such as the quality evaluation and customer surveys – both of which require the organisation to produce and impose additional rules that are carried out by workers themselves. Others are also made possible by the way the work is organised, partitioned and regulated, but are more akin to a serendipitous catch in a gill net in which events come to the attention of management that were not planned for.

In addition to the tactics described above, there is another class of tactics for collecting data on the call centre agent, used for disciplinary purposes. These tactics, as are some of those noted above, are built into the very fabric of the call centre itself and apply a continuous force upon workers to discipline their moment to moment actions in the conduct of work.

c. Microphysics: Tools, Scripting, Training & Coaching

As indicated above, at all four of the call centres participating in this study, some of the principal products of agents' work are database records containing

[112] Such practices for filtering the official inscription of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not uncommon. In so doing the team leader exercises some informal authority over how the agent might be seen by the organization. Additional ways that agents influence the production of official inscriptions will be detailed in Part 3 of this report.

details of each call worked. In this section I will inspect more specifically the methods organisations use in disciplining this process and making it amenable to examination – a process that is similarly involved in the production of data purified such that it becomes susceptible to computer-mediated analysis and thus, imbricated in the production of the subject in technology-mediated tertiary labour.

The work of call centre agents is, to a large extent, a job of data entry and data processing. Every agent's cubicle is equipped with a desktop computer and while the agent might make use of paper documents and reference books, other agents' knowledge, online databases and physical devises in the accomplishment of the job, the vast majority of work 'products' accomplished by agents involves data lookup and data entry on the computer in their assigned cubicle. Specifically, agents do a lot of word processing (typing), selection of data from menus, searching for data in databases, etc. using a keyboard and mouse (Figure 25).[113] While the partitioning of space through architecture instantiates a large scale disciplining of the worker's activities, the way computer software is designed imposes a finely-grained and microphysical force that disciplines the worker's actions. Consequently, the workings and the form of the computer software used by agents have a large influence on what is done and in fact, what <u>can be done</u> on a minute by minute basis. This demonstrates that the manufactured reality, the ways it is mobilised to discipline workers and its means for observing, inscribing and evaluating the work of agents of the call centre imposes power over the agent that, while not total and not dominating,

[113] Speaking of the prevalence of computers, the vast majority of my own fieldnote writing in call centres was accomplished on small and, by contemporary standards, very primitive word processors. That said, a lot of fieldnoting and note taking during interviews was done using a raft of $2.00 composition books and ball point pens. A lot of the time, the paper and pens were much more flexible than the computers. This is to say that the practice of ethnographic fieldwork is *influenced*, but certainly not revolutionised by technology.

still manifests a very strong force over what can be done by agents, even, as will be detailed in Part 3 of this report, in secondary adjustments and resistance.

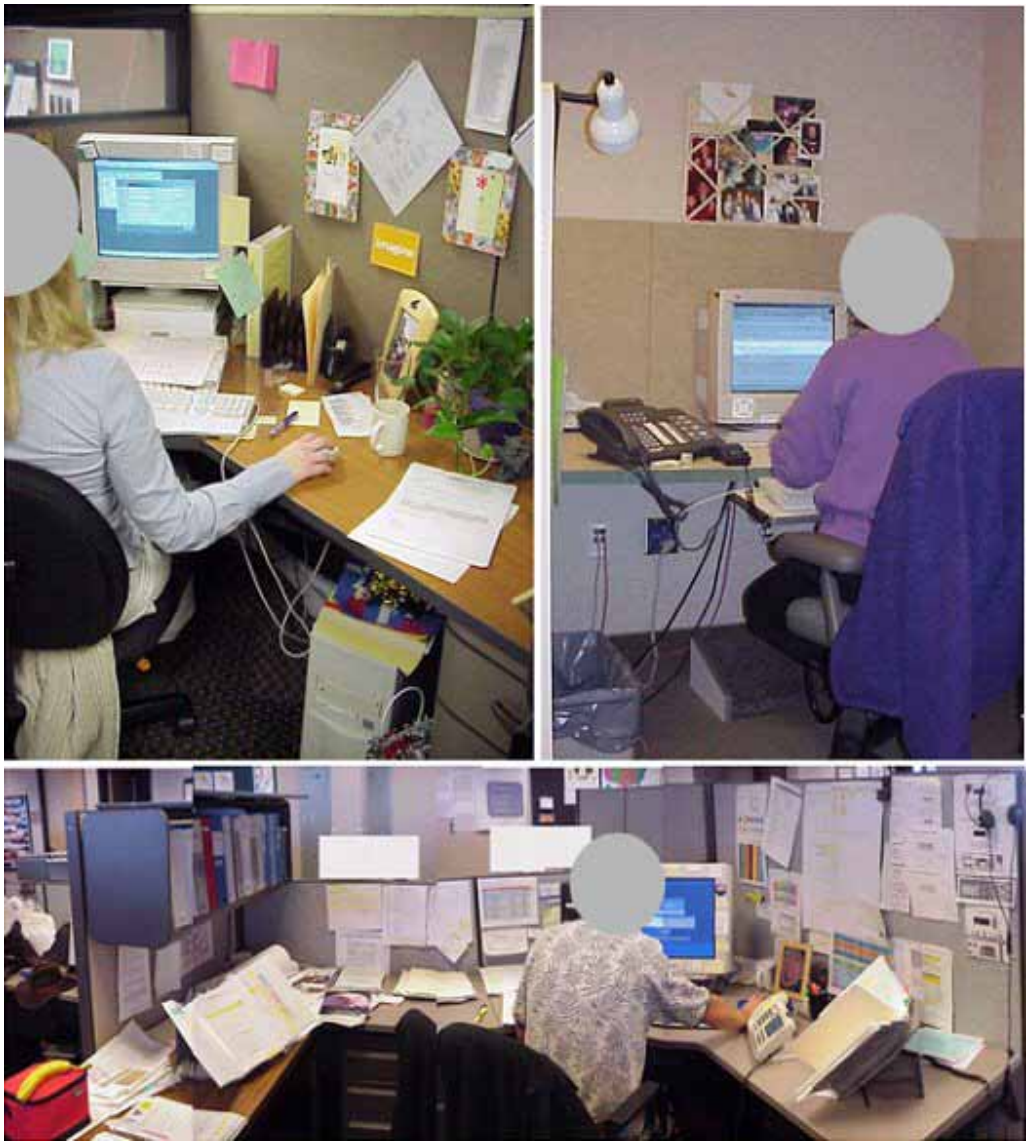


Figure 25. Call Centre Agents, their Computers & Data Archives

(clockwise from upper left, *MHealth*, *MedAdvise*, *BigTech*)

i. Software Databases & Paper-Based Tools

The software used by agents is typically designed and constructed such that it disciplines the agent as he or she performs particular tasks. Most easily seen is the way that computer software imposes a replicable order on the work of a call centre agent. The microphysical disciplining of worker action is reinforced by the 'scripting' that agents are trained to follow and which is built into the databases they use, as they proceed through the typical call to request certain information that, according to the organisation, is critical in ensuring (that is, disciplining) a regular procedure within each call. This microphysical discipline is also reinforced by the enclosing and partitioning of space and time noted above, especially as these are facilitated by the ACD and its connections to other software.

Less easily seen, but no less important to the efficient processing of work/data is the fact that databases into which agents' work is stored are shared with other parts of the organisation – something analogous to the idea of interchangeable parts in mass production. The effect is little different than that realised through development and implementation of equipment to regularise/discipline the labour process of any worker, whether it be in primary, secondary or tertiary labour – the machinery paces and regulates the actions of the human worker such that the workers are economically constrained to particular ways of doing what they do. That said, contrary to the deskilling argument of Braverman (1974) it is also arguably the case that workers must acquire skills in order to use the software – thus that new skills are necessitated rather than (only) Braverman's claim that all work is either deskilled or replaced by machinery (Wardell 1999).

For example, at *MHealth*, the database records were also used by the billing department and in providing documentation of fulfilment of services to companies to which it was a subcontractor. At *BigTech*, data was used variously by the marketing department, which used components of the records produced by agents to send promotional flyers to individuals and companies owning *BigTech* products, and the engineering departments distributed around the world in North America, Canada and Spain, which used the troubleshooting and problem resolution data when re-engineering products or designing products, among other things. At *MedAdvise*, call centre management was mobilising an effort to purchase new software that would permit the call centre to merge its database with that of the larger hospital of which it was a part. *MedAdvise* call centre management envisioned that the combined databases could be used for epidemiological purposes, tracking the use of hospital services by the community so the hospital could claim it was fulfilling particular requirements such that it could retain its not-for-profit and tax reduced status. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, customer information and package pickup requests were used in scheduling the work of delivery personnel at remote locations. Package transit information was used to inform problem solving work by delivery personnel and by the overall corporation to produce claims of on-time delivery, cost comparisons with competitors, etc.

The fact that computer software used by agents has a disciplinary effect on the labour process can be demonstrated by reviewing the software used at *MedAdvise* in the course of working one call. When a call rings to a nurse's cubicle at *MedAdvise*, the database used by clinical staff automatically opens to a screen on which the nurse must classify whether the call is inbound or outbound (Figure 26). (As described above, in terms of database records at *BigTech*, by making this

selection, the nurse produces data that allows the organisation to audit her work for compliance with regulations limiting the percentage of outbound calls per reporting period. That is, by disciplining a particular set of operations, the software is able to ensure that the organisation is able to collect data to fulfil its pre-determined 'gaze' over the worker.) In other words, through fulfilment of the labour process built into the computer software, agents are implicated in their own surveillance (Poster 1990).

Figure 26. Initial Screen on Software Used by Clinical Agents at *MedAdvise*

After the agent completes and dismisses this screen, another appears automatically, listing the scripting appropriate for the call that is arriving (Figure 27):[114]

This is the *MedAdvise* service. This is [insert name], a nurse. How can I help you?

Figure 27. Software Presents Opening Script to the Agent

[114] The computer system 'knows' the type of call coming in because before the caller was forwarded to the call centre, he or she was forced to select what service he or she desired from a recorded menu of services from which to choose – the common 'telephone tree' or IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system. This is an example of how the organisation can also discipline customers of its technology-mediated services – a feature Ritzer also names as part of the 'McDonaldized' organisation that deploys 'system-centred' services (Ritzer 2000b, pp. 20-39; Ritzer & Stillman 2001).

After voicing the opening script and dismissing this screen, a ‘patient lookup’ data entry screen appears (Figure 28). The nurse requests the caller’s name, enters it into this screen and clicks the onscreen button titled ‘OK’. The database attempts to make a match between the name typed and existing records in the database. If one or more records are found another screen will appear, listing all of those records found. The nurse attempts to match the caller with one of the records displayed. Additional questions related to address, age or other demographic details appearing on the screen are to be used to make this determination.

If the caller’s demographic data is found in the database, the nurse selects the appropriate record and the screen will then display a more elaborate database screen in which he or she is to verify phone number and address – updating the record as appropriate. If a record has been found, parts of it will also be displayed on subsequent screens, accelerating the conduct of subsequent portions of the call. These parts include details of any allergies, pre-existing medical conditions, medications prescribed, etc. provided on previous calls.

If no record was found, the nurse begins an interview type process in which the caller’s name, address, phone number, insurance information and current health care practitioner information are requested and entered into the database. During this interview the nurse is doing data entry simultaneously with dialog with the caller.

Figure 28. Look for Previous Database Records Screen.

It is (understandably) common for callers to begin describing current health issues in more detail at this point, evidence that the caller is initially not as disciplined by the data entry process as is the nurse. It is not uncommon for callers to express some puzzlement at the nurse's demographic questions. If this becomes a point of contention, the nurse is expected to voice a scripted line indicating that the person's name and other details are important parts of the production of a chart (the medical record documenting this interaction). It is also not uncommon for the nurse to account for these questions by declaring "...the database requires me to do this

data entry first. I'm sorry but we've got to get through this." Most callers accept this accounting and allow themselves to be disciplined by the script. In effect, this declaration hooks the caller into an increasingly common acceptance that computer systems 'tell us' what we can and cannot do when we interact with them – an interfacing of the discipline of TMTL with the prevalence of computers through modern society.

At *BigTech*, it is equally common for callers to remark about the frustration with having to go through a 10 minute-long process of collecting name, company name, machine serial number, etc. prior to commencing troubleshooting of one's equipment. Similar to the accounting offered by *MedAdvise* nurses, *BigTech* agents also commiserate with the caller but indicate that the software won't allow them to proceed without completing the demographic data collection.

However, if the *MedAdvise* nurse thinks the symptoms being offered at this time are important, but is not sure of their immediate relevance or how they fit into the case, or if the data cannot be entered into the database yet (because the proper place for this data may be on a future screen), he or she may write them on a pad of scratch paper ubiquitous in each cubicle of the call centre. The experienced nurse knows this freeform inscription is called for because he or she suspects that the data may be important in triaging the caller's symptoms, but the software's screen by screen discipline of the worker's actions does not currently allow the nurse to enter those details.

This displays how the call centre agent is physically constrained to a particular procedure by the tools provided, but is still able to introduce and use ad hoc means to accommodate unordered collection of data in clinical practice. In other words, the agent utilises informal and ad hoc processes to 'go outside of' the

disciplinary constraints imposed by the software in order to accomplish work. In fact, such ad hoc inscriptions are a ubiquitous feature of the work of agents at all four of the call centres participating in this project. Figure 29 displays pages of similar scratchpads produced by agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech*.

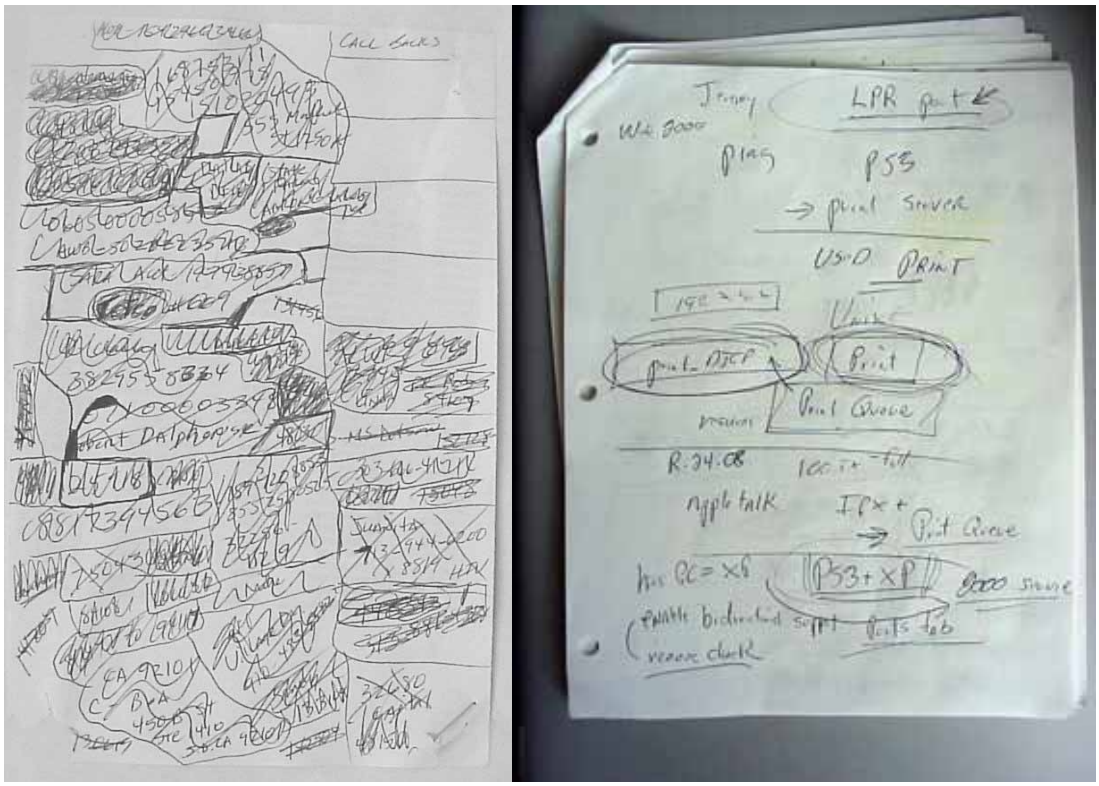


Figure 29. Scratch Pad of Details *DeliveryWorldwide* (left) and *BigTech* (right)

Agent Thinks Might be Important for Eventual Use in the Call

While this allows the agent to 'go outside' of the disciplined sequence of work imposed by the script and database, it also reflects an orientation to power immanent in the relation of agent to examination and discipline built into the manufactured reality of the call centre, in particular the statistical measures of productivity. The agent is able to decrease the length of the call by using the simple paper and pen collection of data 'as it comes'. If the data is not readily inserted into the database when it is offered, the agent inscribes it on scratch paper so it can be

used when and if it becomes relevant later. In so doing the agent avoids having to repeat questions or revisit issues that have already been described by the caller.[115]

Otherwise, the nurse may press the caller for the details required to complete data processing on the current screen. In the vernacular of call centre work, this is referred to as *controlling the call* and is considered a very valuable skill for agents to acquire. That is, the agent is expected to develop tactics for disciplining the caller to the tasks as they are sequenced by the software, and in so doing apprehending the caller into the organisationally-imposed process of work implicit in the script embedded in the series of database fields and screens that comprise the software the agent uses to accomplish work. In quality evaluations of novice agents it is common to see the evaluator marking down the agent for not controlling the call, and then coaching the agent in tactics for making the customer comply with the scripting that is intended to discipline the agent and the labour process in the goal of reducing call length and increasing the observable similarities between calls. In effect, controlling the call means that the agent has to translate into the interaction with a customer, the discipline imposed on him or her by the organisation and which he or she has an implicit responsibility to fulfil.

After collecting or verifying personal contact information and selected health history details (considered relevant in clinical practice) from the caller, the software directs the nurse to ask for details of the symptoms experienced by the caller, allowing the software expert system and the nurse to begin classifying the caller's or

[115] In fact, asking the customer for information that has already been offered can affect the agent's quality evaluation. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, the agent will be marked down for 'poor listening skills' if he or she asks for previously provided information (ref, 'B' in Figure 2, item #9 in Figure 21. Similar degradations in the agent's quality rating are also officially part of the met/not-met form at *BigTech*. Late in the fieldwork a similar stipulation was added to a quality evaluation form (similar to that used at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech*) being constructed at *MHealth*. No such downgrading of scores occurred at *MedAdvise* during fieldwork.

patient's presenting issues.[116] In this practice the nurse is required to add initials that identify her or him as the one responsible for particular inscriptions – thus permitting the organisation to trace responsibility, through future audits of data fixed into the database, even in situations where the record has been retrieved (as above) and updated by several nurses over several different calls by the same patient (Figure 30). (It is also the case that the record/chart of each call will be attributed to the work of the nurse who worked that call. In this way the entire record/chart and also components of any one record/chart are amenable to a panoptically facilitated audit anytime in the future.)

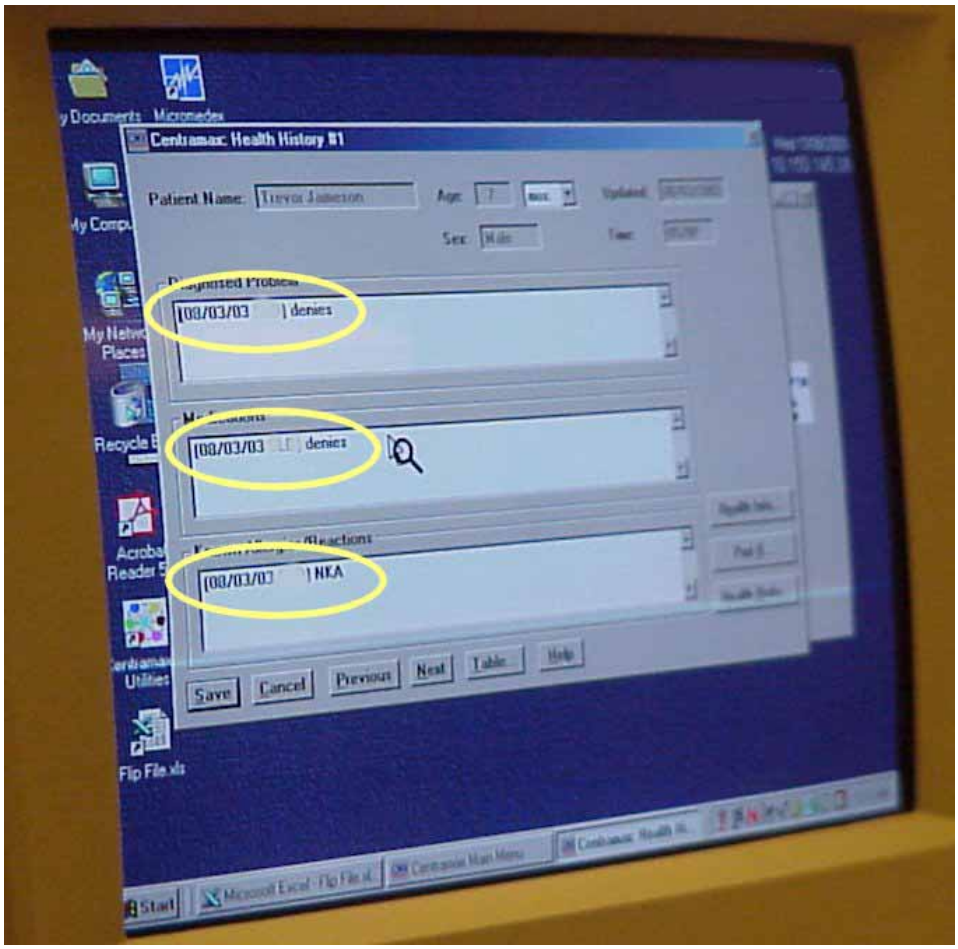


Figure 30. Identifying Oneself as the Author of Specific Data Within a Record

[116] While the caller is frequently the patient, this is not necessarily the case. For example, mothers often call for assistance with children and adults often call on behalf of their aged parents.

If the computer software prompts the nurse to inscribe the pain the patient is experiencing with the symptoms, another device is applied – a chart that abstracts the patient's pain to a 0 to 10 scale (Figure 31). This chart provides the nurse with words and pictures that can be applied to both adults and children with clinically verified efficacy – a translation of prior clinical research into the practice of telephone triage nursing. The nurses describe this chart as a pain scale that is "used everywhere in clinical practice." Thus, not only is the patient gradually inscribed into the software's database as a set of descriptions typed by a particular nurse, but he or she is now fixed by a 'universal' scale, the structure of which is actually the product of a scientific research process. Similar paper-based devices are common across the work of agents. For example, while the nurses at *MedAdvise* are not legally permitted to provide advice on most medications, they are able to advise dosage schedules for common pain relievers and cold symptom relievers. When doing so, the nurse appeals to a chart that contains dosages per bodyweight of the patient. At *BigTech*, charts, lists, troubleshooting flowcharts, etc. are posted in agents' cubicles and referred to regularly. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, job aids to direct agents through the use of new features of their software are also common.

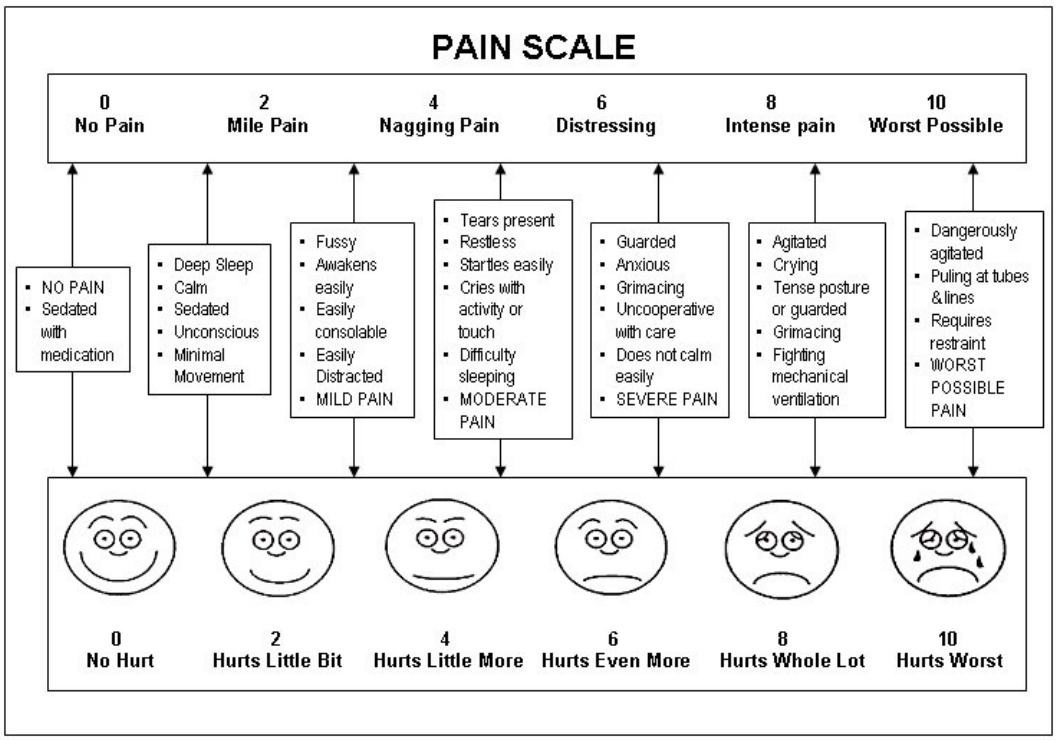


Figure 31. Scientifically-Created Translation of Physical Pain to a Numeric Scale

Similarly, at *BigTech*, agents are implored to make use of an online database (generically referred to as a 'knowledge base') of procedures and troubleshooting guidelines (Figure 32). This database is accessible through an Internet browser on the agent's computer and is searchable according to keywords prescribed by the company, which are also taught to the agents both in formal training sessions and in informal, on-the-job training sessions. The goal of this database is to increase the reliability of agents' practice both across the work of a single agent and across all workers in the call centre, and to ensure that agents are using only information that has been vetted by the organisation. That is, to discipline the agent's practice. Agents are required to include the reference number of any documents used when they write documentation of their work into the database such that their unseen actions during a call are rendered partially visible. Verifying the appropriate use of these documents is one of the components of the 'met/not-met' quality assessment described above.

Figure 32. *BigTech* Signage Imploring Agents to Use Job Aids in Their Work

Agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* were provided with a similar online database of company policies, rules and suggested scripting containing phrases that the company indicated were the preferred way of voicing a response to certain customer questions. During fieldwork, management of the call centre exerted substantial effort to encourage use of this database and posted small placards in each agent's cubicle, reading:

> Look it up in the (database) and read it back VERBATIM!

Similarly, the trainer at *DeliveryWorldwide* had a small poster in the training room which she pointed out to anyone undergoing training. The poster read:

Look it up! Don't muck it up!

The goal was similar to that indicated above for *BigTech* – to discipline the agent so as to increase the reliability of his or her practice. A database of insurance policy details was being developed and deployed for use in the *MHealth* call centre during fieldwork. In informal interviews with agents and management at all four call centres, I was told that the purpose of these devices was the same – to ensure that agents are using the most current and organisationally correct information when they perform their customer facing work and data entry.

MedAdvise had similar computer-based tools also. The hospital in which *MedAdvise* is located maintained a clinical database that could be accessed by nurses and members of the public alike. For non-clinical information, for example, the location of immediate care facilities and walk-in clinics, lists of doctors and their specialties for the purposes of physician referrals, immunization programs, and the like, the non-clinical agents at the call centre maintained what was called the 'flip file'. While named after the now-abandoned physical notebook containing similar data, this was a spreadsheet program that each agent could access from his or her computer. Each category of data was accessed by clicking a button labelled with that category (Figure 33).

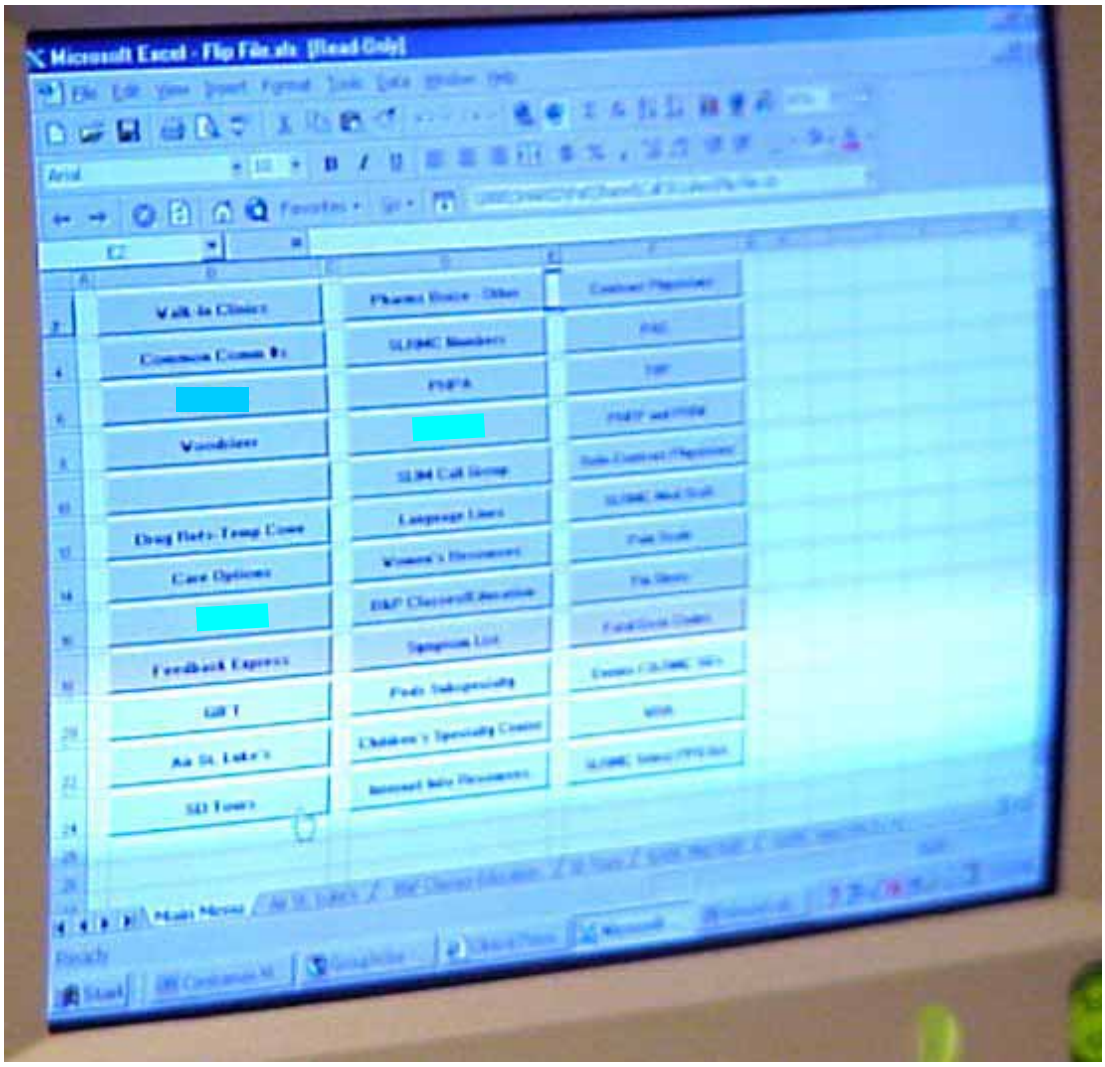


Figure 33. Categorical Buttons on the Opening Screen of the

'Flip File' Online Data Archive at *MedAdvise*

The 'flip file', like other online databases, has the organisational virtue of being very economically maintained and distributed. When data change, the online archive is updated in only one place and the change is instantly available to anyone who uses the tool. Its economy and universal access from anywhere in the call centre (if the computer is functioning properly) obscures its other organisational virtue. Like the databases described above for *BigTech*, *DeliveryWorldwide* and *MHealth*, the 'flip file' spreads a disciplinary force throughout the call centre that guides and

regularises the activity of all individuals who are required to use the tool in the course of work in the call centre.[117]

At *MedAdvise*, the call centre also maintains a library of medical reference books that the nurse can use if the database is determined to not provide enough detail to triage and/or provide health care advice to the caller (Figure 34). These medical references are coded so that the nurse can enter the code into the database as a reference to support any data entry and in so doing indicate that the reference is not included in the medical expert system built into the database. Similarly, if the nurse uses a medical reference on the Internet, including one maintained by the hospital, he or she must record a reference to that material in the database – all medical details have to be supported by traceable, auditable references, a requirement through which the worker is both disciplined in the conduct of work, but also disciplined to make one's own work consistently auditable (Poster 1990).

This reflects a recursively reinforced aspect of TMTL first identified above – features of TMTL that discipline time, space and activity of workers in the call centre also continuously observe and inscribe those observations and make them amenable to accounting-like examinations. The work and worker are not only disciplined by the ubiquitous architectural, temporal and technological apparatuses, these same apparatuses also produce continuous records of the worker's activity that allow the organisation to manufacture the discursive object – the measured and monitored subject of TMTL.

[117] As above, this is not to question the value of these databases. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to come up with acceptable reasons why clinically relevant information was not updated regularly so that the most current information could be provided to patients. Instead, this is to provide an example of how manifold, but remarkably similar, forces are imbricated throughout the call centres and thus, through the apparatus that instantiates TMTL. It is thus a common feature and a component of the creation of TMTL and a link to the use of technology in secondary labour in order to regularise and routinise the work.

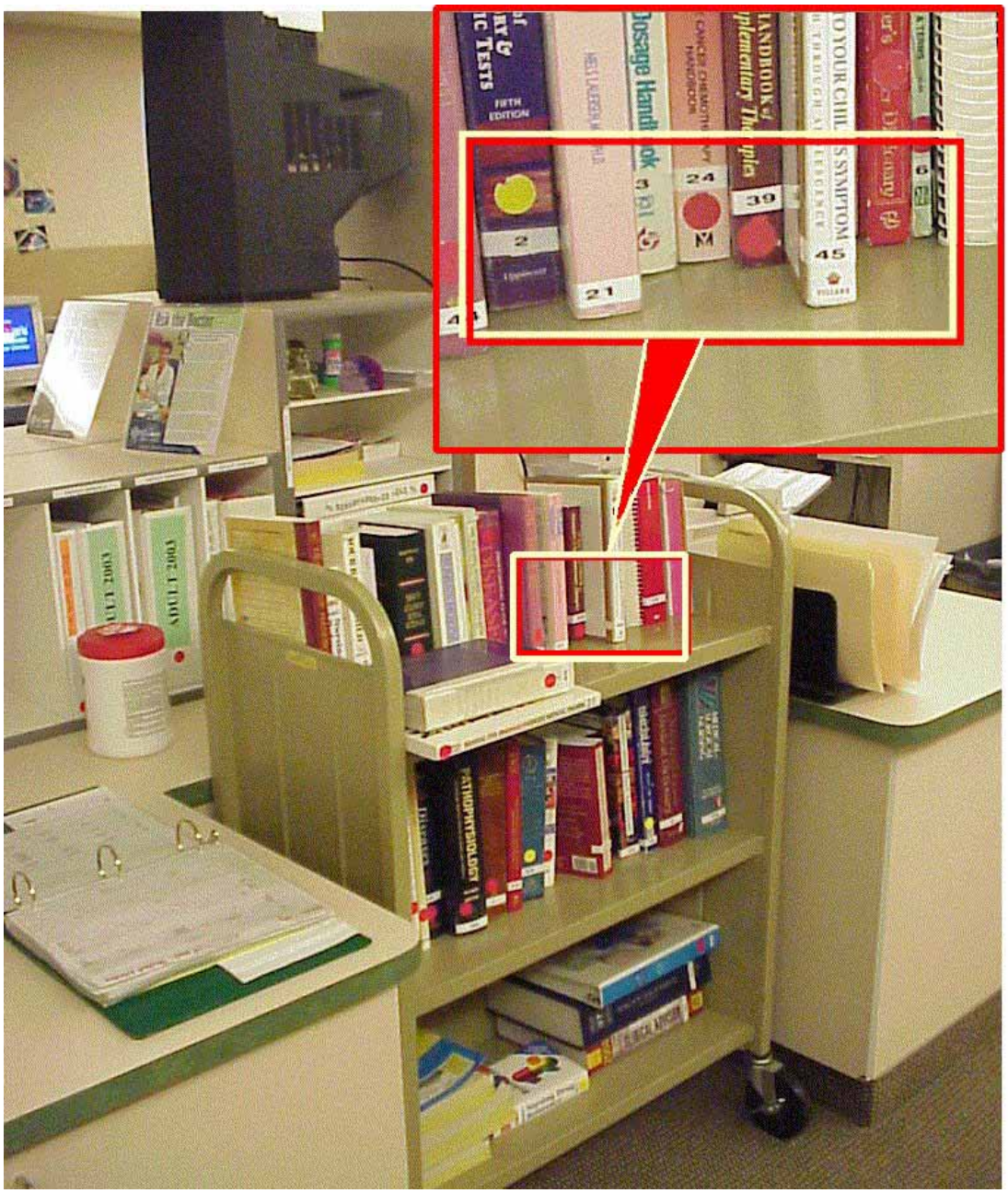


Figure 34. Reference Manuals that May be Used During a Call

Returning to a description of the primary software and other procedural tools used by nurses at *MedAdvise*, as shown above, through use of the screen-by-screen scripted triage interview and assessment process, companion software databases and paper-based references, the nurse uses her or his clinical training and experience to both narrow the range of possible problems and inscribe this into codes in database

fields (Figure 35). Thus, what the clinical staff calls ‘nursing judgement’ is blended with clinical and nosological Knowledge of health problems built into the database – thus both isolating and reifying ‘allowable’ possibilities – through the inscription of data into particular fields in the computer database. This process allows the expert system built into the database to make logical decisions based on its programmed logic – which is in turn based on decades of research and triage practice – and presents the nurse with a set of possible courses of treatment for the patient. These are presented on another screen, complete with suggested scripts for voicing the advice to the caller (Figure 36).

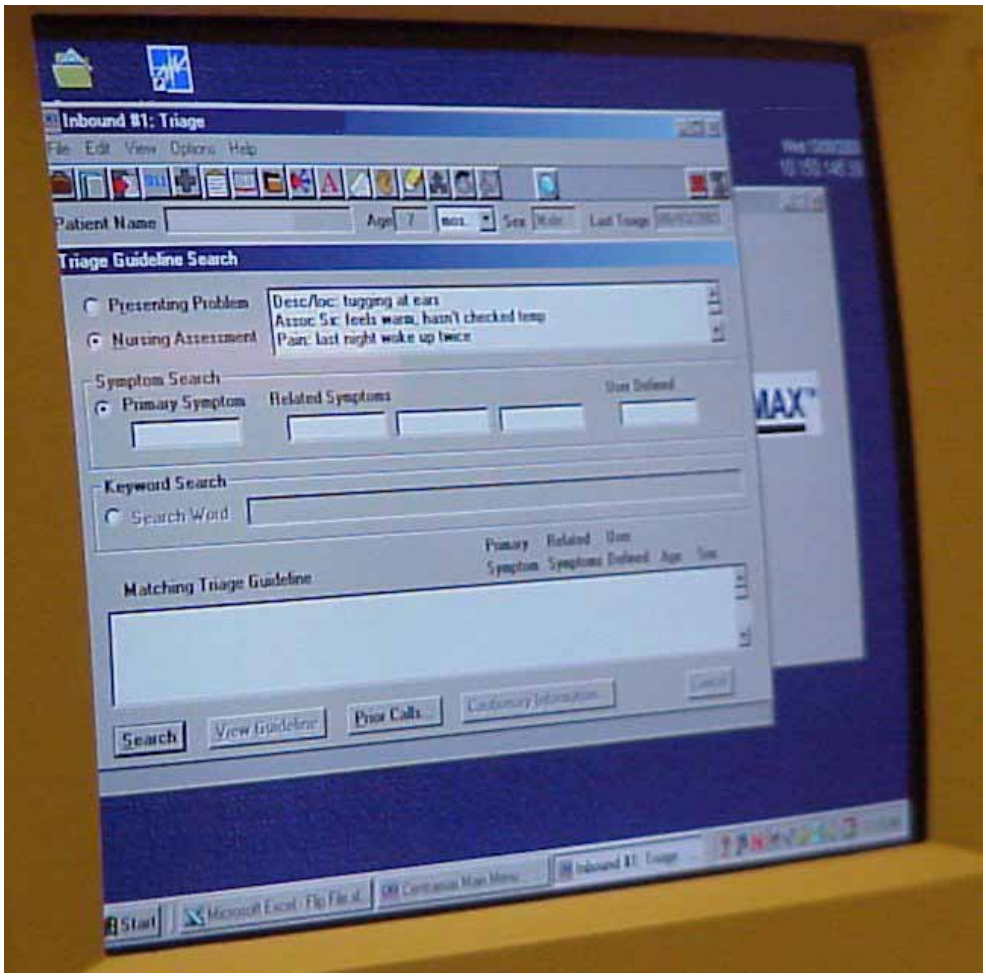


Figure 35. Translating Symptoms into Categories & Codes Incorporated Into the Database

The nurse then applies ‘nursing judgement’ again to select from the presented options those which seem most appropriate given the whole scenario, and is expected to voice those to the caller. At the same time the nurse is doing this, she or he clicks those options with the computer mouse – a process that inscribes them into the record/chart for this call, which is being constructed behind the scenes throughout the nurse’s telephone interaction with the caller and data entry interaction with the computer (Figure 36).

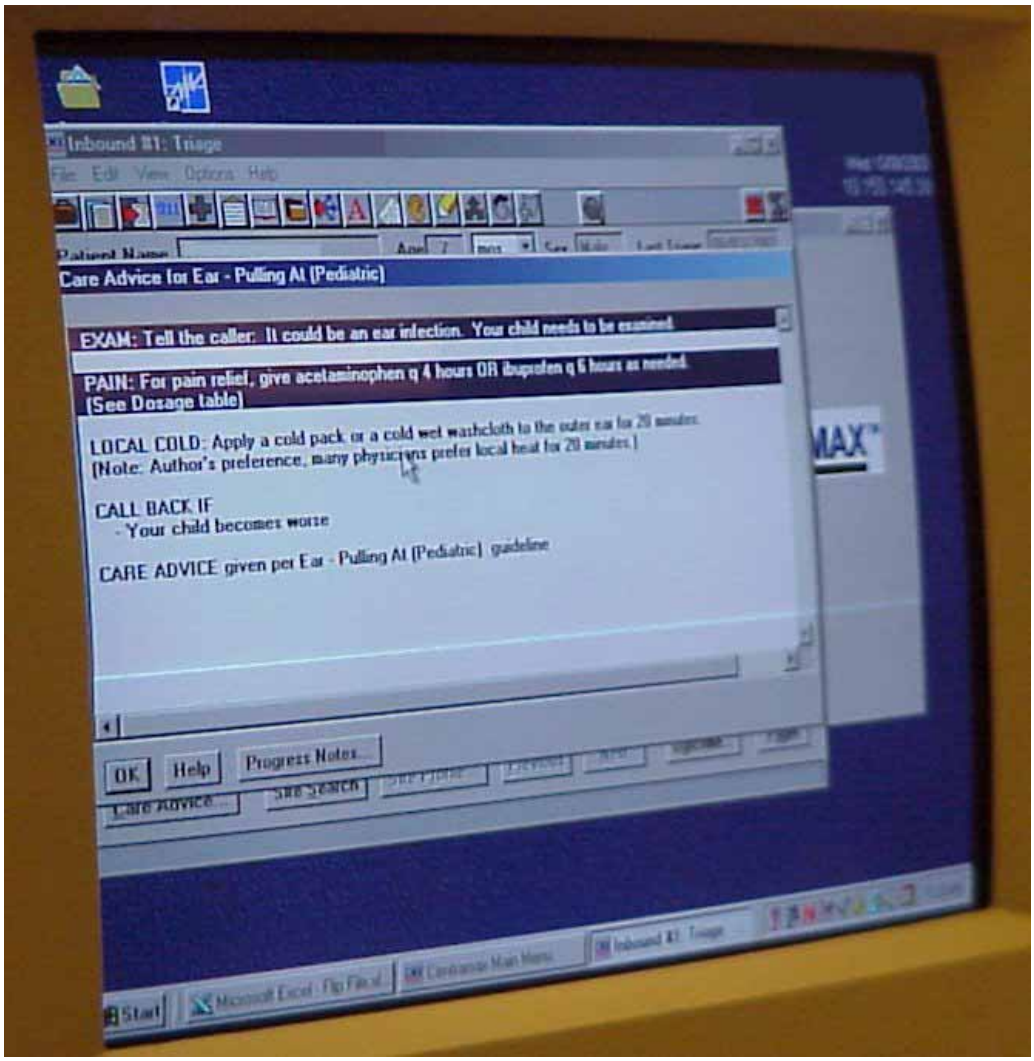


Figure 36. The Database/Expert System Presents the Nurse with Clinically-Approved Possibilities for Treatment of the Symptoms

After presenting advice to the patient, the nurse is then required to code the patient's acknowledgement and apparent understanding of the advice. This is done by clicking on an item in a list that constrains allowable data entry. Thus, as in many parts of the database used by a nurse through the process, the computer provides a disciplinary force that constrains what *can be done*, in order to ensure that what is represented in the chart is categorically defined as clinically proper and legally defensible (Figure 37).

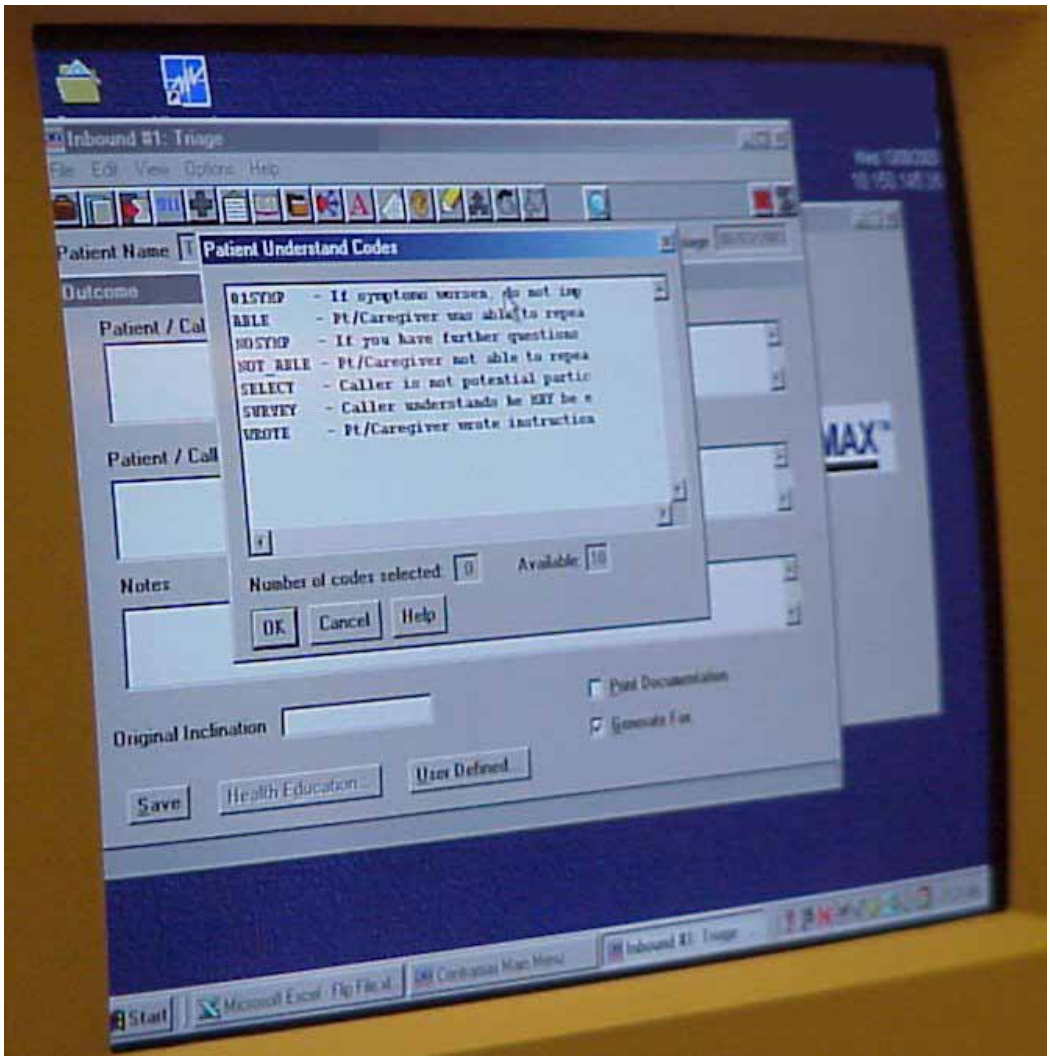


Figure 37. Inscribing a Code in the Database to Declare the Nurse's Assessment of the Caller's Understanding of Advice

The list of possibilities presented to the nurse also constrains his or her judgement based on the statements made by the patient in response to the presentation of advice (Table 2).

Table 2. Codes Disciplining Nurse's Judgement of Patient's Understanding & Response

Code	Evidence Justifying Use of Code
01SYMP	If symptoms worsen, [or] do not improve, take patient to emergency room
ABLE	Patient/Caregiver was able to repeat care advice
NOSYMP	If you have further questions please call again
NOT_ABLE	Patient/Caregiver not able to repeat care advice
SELECT	Caller is not potential participant in care of patient
SURVEY	Caller understands he MAY be held responsible for patient
WROTE	Patient/Caregiver wrote instructions/care advice

Parenthetically, this technique of presenting the agent with a menu of codes from which to choose is a feature of the software used by all of the call centres participating in this study. In Figure 37, the menu is very simple – a one-dimensional list of allowable items. Figure 38 illustrates a more complex menu commonly called a 'cascading menu'.

This is actually a multi-dimensional or branching list of options where a selection in any of the three menus from the left will prompt the computer to 'pop up' another menu to its right that contains another set of items categorically

subordinate to the item just picked. By using this list, the agent is disciplined to select from a range of categorical and predefined problems sanctioned by the organisation. This illustrates a more sophisticated method of both facilitating and constraining the actions of an agent in doing data entry into the database used during the course of a call.

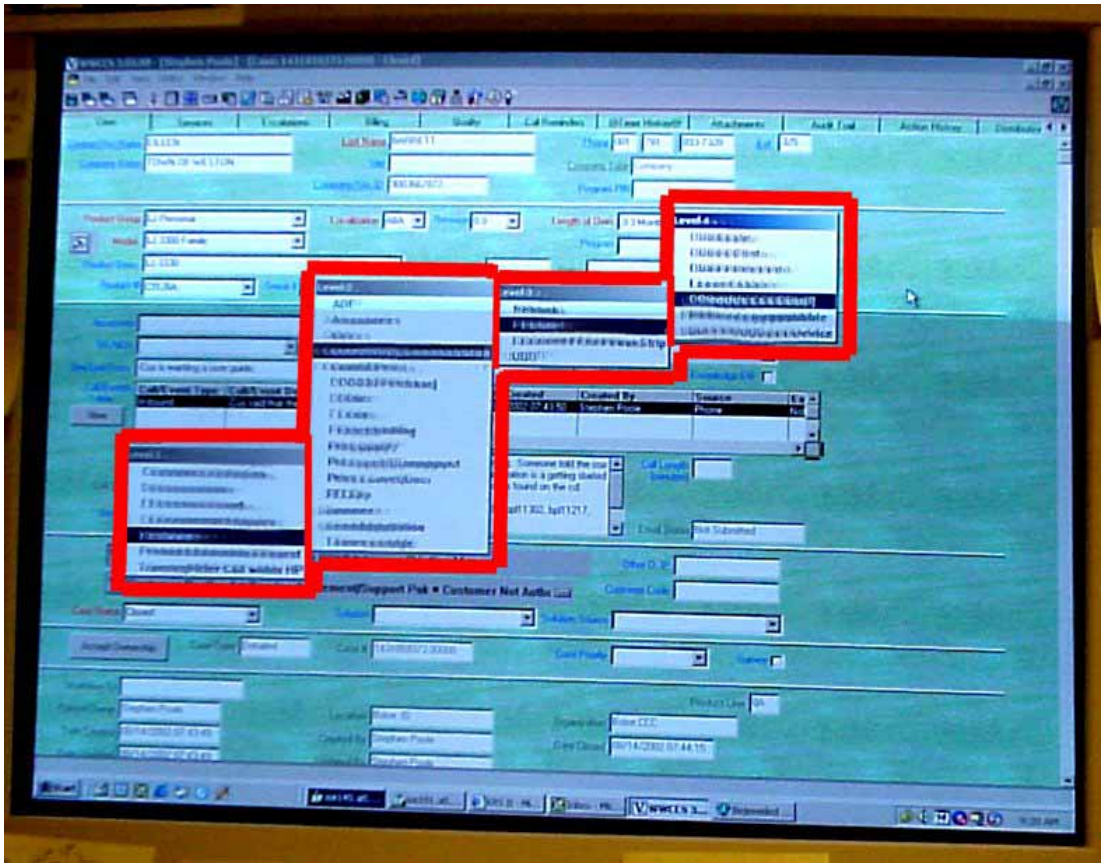


Figure 38. Cascading Menu Used by *BigTech* Agents to Classify the Type of Problem Reported by Customer. (Cascading Menu Surrounded by a Thick, Red Line)

A similar cascading menu feature was incorporated into the database used at *MHealth* shortly before the conclusion of fieldwork at that organisation. Agents were pleased that the cascading menus removed the requirement to remember the many

codes required to perform data entry, but also noted how it was a difficult task to not make an error across the several cascading menus built into the system.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, the computer tools did not contain cascading menus and only occasionally permitted workers to pick from a one-dimensional list, similar to that displayed in Figure 37. Most of the time, the agent had to recall codes from memory and type them into fields in the database. Novice agents were provided with a sheaf of papers containing the codes and their various definitions, and it was not uncommon to see a novice agent flipping through them to find the right one – though it was more common for novice agents to simply ask their more experienced neighbours and receive almost instantaneous replies. This provides an example of how the agent is literally surrounded in a sort of multi-media disciplinary system. Novices may use the paper-based charts provided to them or request answers through simple questions 'tossed' into the atmosphere of the call centre, and in so doing insert themselves into a situation where they are disciplined in their practice by individuals who are already exhibiting their disciplined status. Agents at *MHealth* also exhibited frequent use of this 'tossing' of questions into the ether of the call centre and being provided with quick responses to their questions. This reflects the depth and breadth of discipline in the call centre – reinforced by its imbrication throughout the architecture, tools, rules, technologies and the workers themselves, thus continuously activated and reified by the organisation and its members! It can be argued that it is the responsibility of fellow agents to respond to such requests unless they are too busy on a call or other work to respond. In so doing, the worker is further cast into participation in the disciplinary apparatus of the organisation.

Returning to the description of the software at *MedAdvise*, next, the computer database system presents the nurse with a screen in which he or she is to

declare/inscribe ‘outcomes’ of the call including (a) Patient/Caller Understanding, (b) Patient/Caller Intended Action and (c) any notes the nurse determines necessary to further document, define or explain portions of the call and the caller’s or patient’s actions (Figure 39). These data are also selected from lists similar to that shown in Figure 37. In so doing, the nurse is disciplined such that she or he can only produce documents that are already consistent with pre-existing categories. In this way, the organisation disciplines the worker to ensure that all documents produced through the use of this software are automatically compliant with the legal and medical requirements/rules encoded into the software. This demonstrates that, consistent with aspects of labour process theory, the equipment designed and installed by the organisation acts to constrain the worker’s action, skill and knowledge to that ‘authorised’ by the organisation.

In nearly all cases observed, nurses selected the following text from the list of options provided, even if other entries were also made:

> Guideline [care advice] chosen was the first positive response by patient/caregiver, indicating that all previous responses were negative.

This statement indicates that the nurse had provided the patient/caregiver with a list of treatment options, ordered from highest to lowest priority by the software’s expert system, and that the patient/caregiver had declined to follow one or more of these items. The guideline (medical advice) inscribed in the database is the one that the caller or patient indicated he or she would comply with, even if it was not the one the expert system (and the nurse) presented as the most important or most relevant. Thus, the nurse is allowed to indicate that the caller or patient has the final say in the matter and implicitly, if the patient’s condition worsens as a consequence of not following higher priority advice, the call centre and hospital are officially

‘covered’ because they have produced evidence that due diligence was exercised in informing the caller of higher priority options.

For example, it was not uncommon for the expert system to indicate that, based on the symptoms presented and the patient’s history, the patient should be brought to a hospital emergency room immediately. However, it was very uncommon that the patient or caregiver agreed to follow that advice. In response, the nurse would read off the advice presented by the expert system as a second priority. If the patient declined that advice also, the nurse would read the third priority advice, etc. When the patient or caregiver finally agreed to follow one of these items, it was inscribed in the database to document this case, and the above statement was included to indicate that the patient had intentionally declined to follow higher priority advice. As explained to me by several nurses, this statement was intentionally placed in the chart to serve as a hedge against any litigation from a patient whose condition may have worsened after refusing to follow the highest priority advice provided.

That is, not only does the software exercise discipline over the nurse’s practice of triage and provision of medical advice, but it also ensures that there are records that effectively assign responsibility to the patient (and not to the call centre or hospital) for following the advice provided. The software disciplines nurses’ conduct such that it not only ensures the provision of medically accurate advice, but also that they produce records that hedge against possible lawsuits for malpractice on the part of the hospital – an official production of risk-reduction built into the labour process itself produces auditable and defensible records of its conduct while also extending a governing authority (Ewald 1991; Power 1994). More on the

governance or ‘conducting of conduct’ of workers will be included in the next chapter.

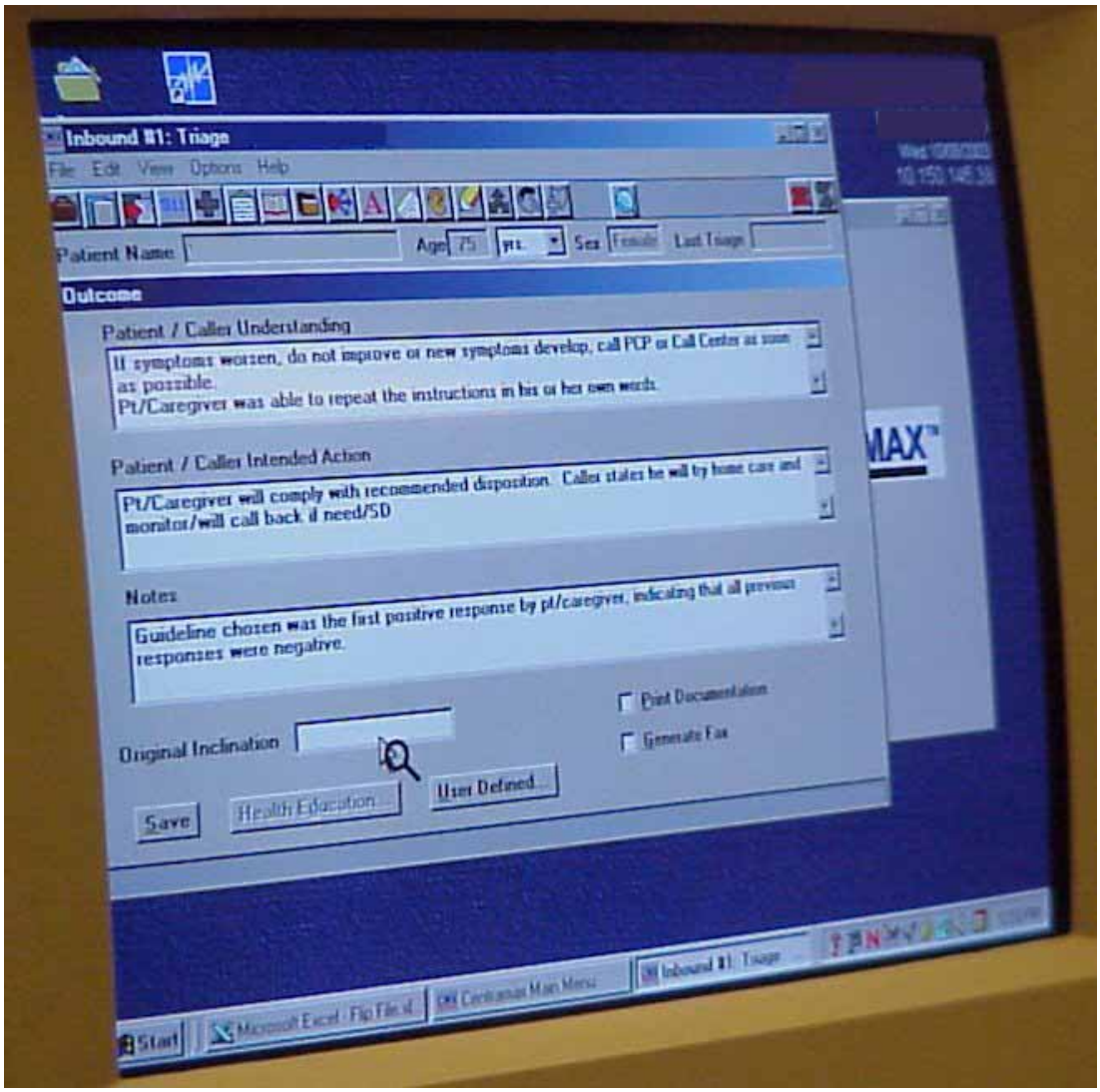


Figure 39. Declaring/Inscribing Outcome of the Call

The culminating portion of the nurse’s interaction with the patient is a mirror of one of the first events – the scripted ending to the call, presented to the nurse on a screen in the database (Figure 40).

> If your condition gets worse or any other symptoms develop, you should call your physician’s office. If you don’t have a physician and need a referral, just let us know. Our

> nurses are available 24 hours a day, so don't hesitate to call if you have questions. Thanks for calling!

As with the above, this scripting assigns responsibility to the caller and acts to remove the call centre or hospital from responsibility for any complications that might arise in the patient's condition. Nurses at *MedAdvise* indicated that since malpractice is a substantial cost in healthcare in the United States, fulfilling the discipline of this scripting is seen as an important step in protecting the hospital from lawsuits and ultimately protecting their jobs. As a result, the nurses allude to an 'extra incentive' to comply with the discipline built into the script.

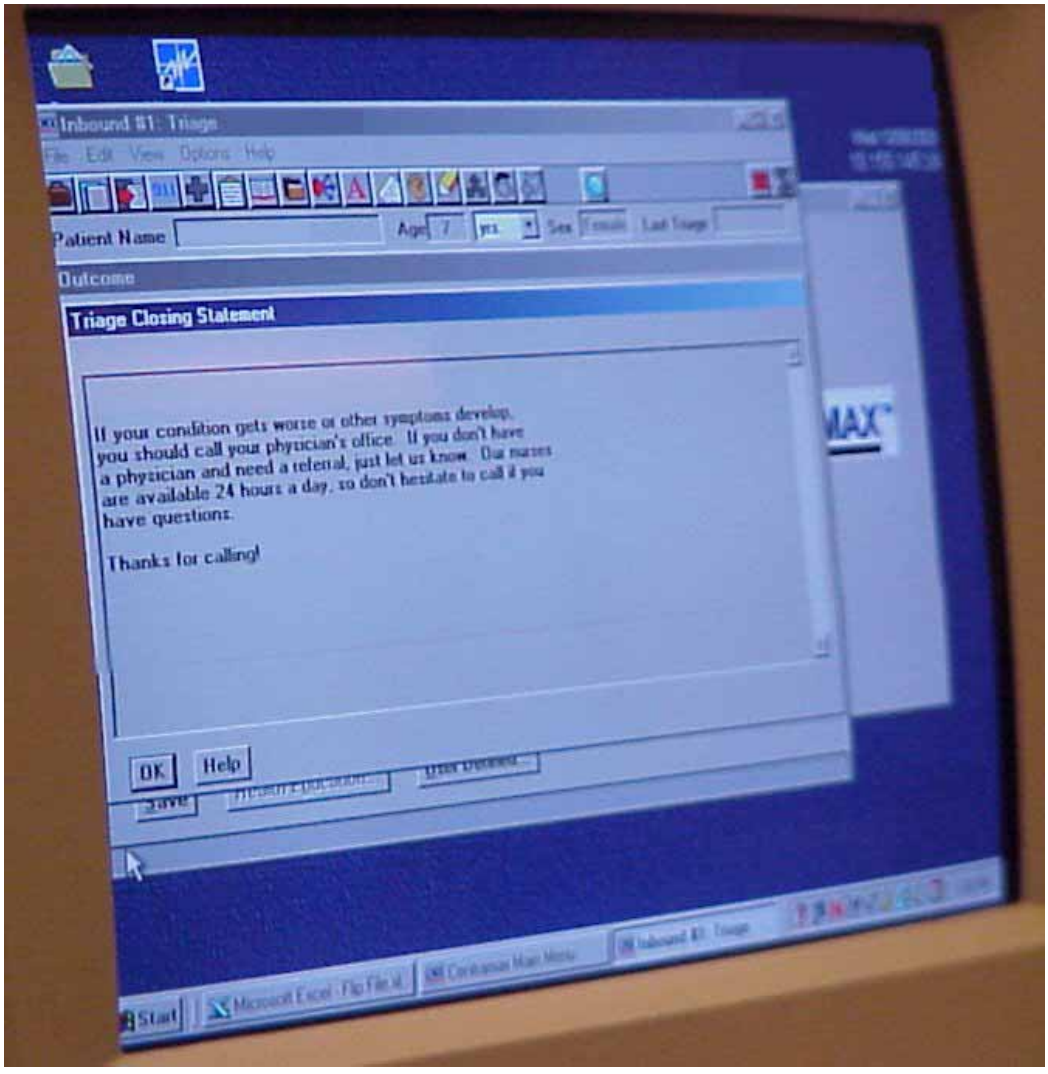


Figure 40. Closing Script

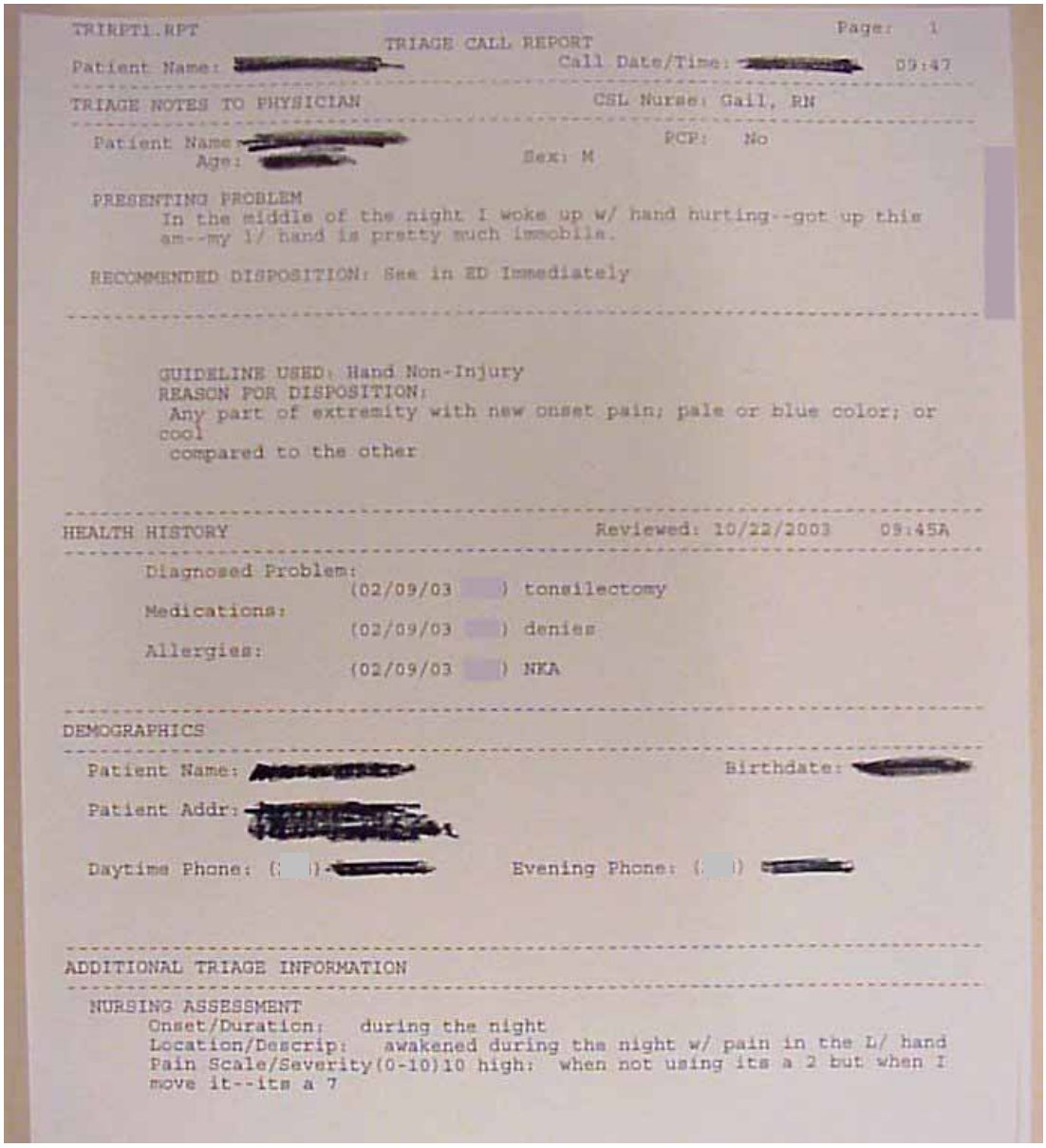
However, this does not signal the end of data entry for the nurse. After the call has ended – and sometimes even before, if the nurse is quick enough with his or her multitasking of talking with the caller and doing data entry into the computer – the database prompts for the entry of additional codes to categorise the call (Figure 41).

These codes are not clinical in nature. Instead they are added to the database record/chart documenting this call so the call may be categorised into the administrative and billing system of the call centre and hospital. In particular these codes allow the call centre to report how many of the calls it receives may be billed to doctors or clinics that use the call centre as an after hours service, to special programs and promotions run by the hospital or other units of the hospital, etc. In so doing, the nurse is involved not only in addressing and reporting on clinical issues that combine his or her training and experience with clinically and legally tenable rules and conclusions, but also with administrative and billing issues that provide evidence of the call centre's contributions to the hospital's cash flow, and its effectiveness and impact on the community's health care concerns and the hospital's 'value' to the community, doctors and patients. That is, the nurse is implicated not only in addressing clinical matters, but also in non-clinical matters such that the hospital can reduce clerical staff who might be assigned these non-clinical tasks – an aspect of the McDonaldization thesis that describes how the rationalisation, deskilling and distribution of tasks both adds duties to workers' jobs and replaces jobs, the tasks of which have been so deskilled and distributed, and ultimately effecting a reduction in cost to the employer while retaining the reliability of process (Ritzer 2000b, pp. 20-39).

Figure 41. Culminating Data Entry of ‘Call Tracking’ Codes

The product of all of these technology-mediated processes of deconstruction and reconstruction through codes, expert system logic programmed into the computer, etc. is a ‘chart’ – a combined medical and legal document that serves as the official report of the transaction that transpired between the nurse and caller (Figure 42, Figure 43). Since its production is disciplined by rules and constraints built into the software, this report, as noted above, is safely auditable in clinical and

administrative ways. Additionally, as also noted above, all marks on the report are traceable to one or more individual workers in the call centre.



TRIRPT1.RPT TRIAGE CALL REPORT Page: 1

Patient Name: [redacted] Call Date/Time: [redacted] 09:47

TRIAGE NOTES TO PHYSICIAN CSL Nurse: Gail, RN

Patient Name: [redacted] PCP: No

Age: [redacted] Sex: M

PRESENTING PROBLEM
In the middle of the night I woke up w/ hand hurting--got up this am--my l/ hand is pretty much immobile.

RECOMMENDED DISPOSITION: See in ED Immediately

GUIDELINE USED: Hand Non-Injury
REASON FOR DISPOSITION:
Any part of extremity with new onset pain; pale or blue color; or cool
compared to the other

HEALTH HISTORY Reviewed: 10/22/2003 09:45A

Diagnosed Problem:
(02/09/03) tonsilectomy

Medications:
(02/09/03) denies

Allergies:
(02/09/03) NKA

DEMOGRAPHICS

Patient Name: [redacted] Birthdate: [redacted]

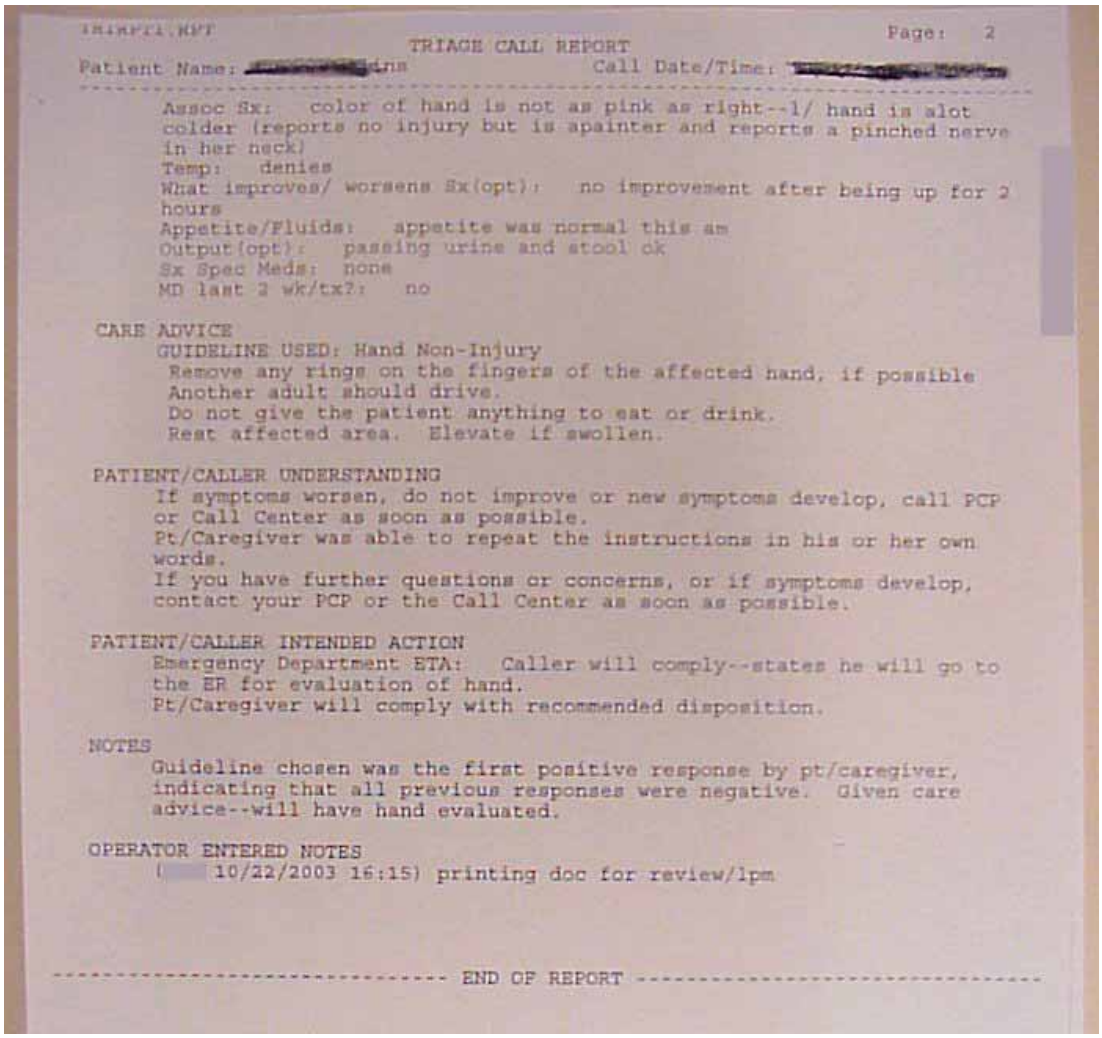
Patient Addr: [redacted]

Daytime Phone: ( )[redacted] Evening Phone: ( ) [redacted]

ADDITIONAL TRIAGE INFORMATION

NURSING ASSESSMENT
Onset/Duration: during the night
Location/Descrip: awakened during the night w/ pain in the L/ hand
Pain Scale/Severity(0-10)10 high: when not using its a 2 but when I move it--its a 7

Figure 42. The Chart



TRIAGE CALL REPORT Page: 2

Patient Name: [redacted] Call Date/Time: [redacted]

Assoc Sx: color of hand is not as pink as right--1/ hand is alot colder (reports no injury but is apainter and reports a pinched nerve in her neck)
Temp: denies
What improves/ worsens Sx(opt): no improvement after being up for 2 hours
Appetite/Fluids: appetite was normal this am
Output(opt): passing urine and stool ok
Sx Spec Meds: none
MD last 2 wk/tx?: no

CARE ADVICE
GUIDELINE USED: Hand Non-Injury
Remove any rings on the fingers of the affected hand, if possible
Another adult should drive.
Do not give the patient anything to eat or drink.
Rest affected area. Elevate if swollen.

PATIENT/CALLER UNDERSTANDING
If symptoms worsen, do not improve or new symptoms develop, call PCP or Call Center as soon as possible.
Pt/Caregiver was able to repeat the instructions in his or her own words.
If you have further questions or concerns, or if symptoms develop, contact your PCP or the Call Center as soon as possible.

PATIENT/CALLER INTENDED ACTION
Emergency Department ETA: Caller will comply--states he will go to the ER for evaluation of hand.
Pt/Caregiver will comply with recommended disposition.

NOTES
Guideline chosen was the first positive response by pt/caregiver, indicating that all previous responses were negative. Given care advice--will have hand evaluated.

OPERATOR ENTERED NOTES
(10/22/2003 16:15) printing doc for review/lpm

END OF REPORT

Figure 43. The Chart

The process of working calls in each of the other call centres participating in this project is similarly disciplined by software and other tools and rules as the above. Whether the agent works in a call centre that addresses freight delivery (*DeliveryWorldwide*), the enrolment of individuals into psychological counselling services and insurance (*MHealth*), solving technical support questions for computer equipment (*BigTech*) or telephone triage nursing (*MedAdvise*), he or she uses computer-based tools that direct and document the work in ways that both discipline the worker's actions and allow audits to determine if and when any deviance from the organisationally determined 'best way' have occurred. This *combined* discipline

of practice and continuous documentation creation involves the production of selective and abstracted data and its assemblage into forms that are amenable to computer-based analysis – both on individuals and across all workers in the call centre. This instantiates another facet of a totalising and individualising apparatus that is analysable by the very Knowledge that is invoked in terms of ordering the workplace and disciplining the work in the first place.

When used by experienced call centre agents, the databases and other software and paper-based tools seem like a straightforward application of rules of the organisation in action – an objectively observable and rate-able process. Experienced agents at each call centre referred regularly to additional archives of data – both online and on paper – on an ad hoc basis. When I queried agents about their obviously fluid use of these devices, they appealed to having been disciplined by prior training, on-the-job experience and ongoing learning from the experience of others in the call centre. That is, while there is very obvious and continuous microphysical disciplinary force exerted on agents by the software and paper-based materials used in the explicit performance of servicing customer calls, there is also a more or less organised, and arguably 'deeper' and more penetrating, network of forces acting upon agents to discipline their activity in the call centre even when they are able to go 'outside' of the microphysical discipline of the software and consult with other documents, their own experience and the experience of others.

Regardless of the network of discipline in which they are immersed, there always seems to be additional disciplinary resources 'in reserve' that appear ad hoc in order to keep the practice of the work in alignment with the institutional expectations of conduct (Garfinkel 1967, pp. esp. pp. 76-103 & 186-207; 1986; Latour 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990; Potter 1996a). For example, at *MedAdvise*

each nurse had a different clinical speciality from previous work experience. When the conditions were such that nurses were faced with a large volume of calls and not enough nurses to handle them all, and a nurse took a call on a condition that was not familiar in terms of her or his clinical specialty, it was not uncommon for that nurse to 'toss' a verbal question into the call centre or to ask a nurse who was known to be an expert in that area. In many cases a reply would be forthcoming in a shorter time than it would take to go through all of the steps in the software that normally disciplined the conduct of the call or to consult an online or print medical reference. The nurse could then work ahead in the database following the advice provided by another nurse, complete the call more quickly and move on to another call. When the call volume dropped, a nurse would then go back and 'complete' data entry on the calls that were shortcut in this way, in order to provide an official record of the call (the chart) that was legally defensible – even though the verbal advice provided by another nurse was clinically accurate. That is, when faced with unexpectedly high call volume, nurses were able to accelerate the actual conduct of calls and then complete the official charted documentation post hoc, when time permitted.[118] However, even when their labour process deviated from that disciplined by the software and demonstrated gaps in the completeness of that discipline, the nurses were still tethered to the Knowledge of the health care field through the expertise of their fellow nurses.[119]

[118] In the one case I observed, when the post hoc data entry and use of the expert system found an error in the verbal advice upon which the initial call was completed, the nurse quickly called the patient and provided the expert system's advice. The nurse, understandably nervous at potential outcomes, accounted for the 'new' advice provided to the patient as 'an updated recommendation from our database...'

[119] It is the case that such a wide and deep discipline to the Knowledge of health care is beneficial to patients. This is only to demonstrate the manifold nature of disciplinary power in the TMTL workplace; Knowledge/power is such that it exists in ways and forms that don't become readily apparent until a move is made by a worker. Only then can one actually see how Knowledge/power manifests itself or arises to affect a particular situation.

ii. *Training & Coaching*

Upon hire, each agent in each of the call centres participating in this research was assigned to a period of 'training'. This training is comprised of several components. First, the new hire, perhaps with others who have been recently hired, though sometimes independently, is provided with an introduction to company policies and human resources facilities – rules of conduct, policies, benefits, and the like. Second, the training period includes a description, demonstration and practice with the tools and procedures to be used in accomplishing the work of call centre agent for that company. It was therefore a process which conditioned the worker to be properly disciplined through both the imposition of rules of the organisation (Knowledge) and in the microphysical discipline of his or her data entry and data processing activity, as described above.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was typical for this portion of training to be accompanied by many job aids that present a composite of Knowledge and microphysical discipline in the use of the software (Figure 44) that altogether comprise a 10cm thick, 3-ring binder, which the agent is expected to either commit to memory or be able to look up quickly enough on the job so one's average call length per day is about two minutes and thirty seconds.

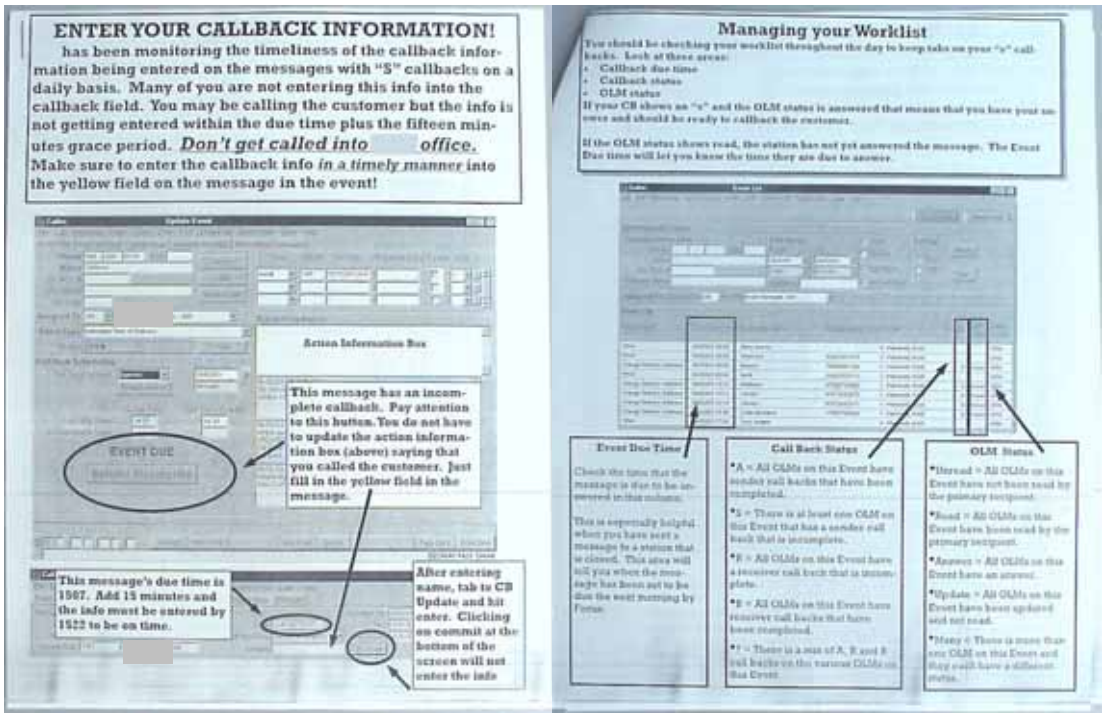


Figure 44. Job Aid/Training in *DeliveryWorldwide* (Note How Knowledge is Imbricated with Screenshots of the Software to be Used in the Work)

Third, the training period addresses a particular kind of conviviality – one that is technical and even anti-solicitous so, as the trainer in one call centre not participating in this study told me, "...you don't give away the store" or "you don't open a can of worms that we don't want you to deal with." In other words, the agent is provided with instruction (discipline) on how to represent (even defend) the company's definition of services and to offer no more.

This was frequently associated with the use of scripts that obliquely referenced the company's policies as if they were contextually-relevant answers to questions. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, when a customer asks what time he or she can expect a driver to deliver a package, the agent is expected to voice the company policy: "Packages will be delivered by noon on the second business day" (or whatever is the official policy describing the shipping option purchased by the

customer). In cases where the shipment is late, the agent is expected to voice: “That package was delayed in shipment and is now scheduled for delivery by noon tomorrow” (or 24 hours after the expected delivery option purchased by the customer) – even if the agent can find no evidence in the database that such a thing is certain or even likely. This was encapsulated in the catch phrase often repeated by management (and sarcastically banted about by workers jaded from their day to day work of hearing customer problems) “trust the system.” As one worker remarked:

> We’re not supposed to serve the customer. We’re supposed to serve the company by parroting the rules as if they’re true.

Additionally, while the organisation has a policy of refunding shipping charges when the shipment is late, the agent is not allowed to offer to file a refund request – the customer must request it independently. This provided no end of consternation among agents whose idea of ‘customer service’ includes offering to help a customer rather than to provide the minimum information possible.

Similarly, at *BigTech* a substantial emphasis was placed upon ‘proving product functionality’ prior to any other troubleshooting action on the part of the agent. That is, the agent was to determine if the symptoms described by the customer were produced by other equipment connected to the *BigTech* equipment. If the symptoms are produced by non-*BigTech* equipment, the agent is to advise the customer to contact other equipment manufacturers for assistance, and that the company only accepts responsibility for troubleshooting and servicing equipment when it is found to be related to *BigTech* equipment itself. The point here is to provide customer service only if the company deems it to be warranted. In other words, training is intended to provide the agent with a self-contained set of responses

to what the company has determined to be the most likely situations the worker will encounter, and also how to downplay or deflect requests for service that the company has determined it will not provide. As above, agents were sometimes very frustrated at the idea that 'customer service' was so clearly bounded by company rules. Other agents were more than willing to exhibit the explicit responsibility to the manufactured rationality of these rules. One *DeliveryWorldwide* agent indicated that she was paid by the company to do what it wanted:

> When I come in, I'm an employee. I just do what I'm told. I just don't understand how anyone can say that we should be expected to do things any other way.

Overhearing this comment, another agent said:

> Sure. But even if it's the company's fault that something happened, we can't do anything. We're just a flesh interface to the company's policies.

Training did nothing to defuse this discomfort for some.[120]

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, this period varied throughout the fieldwork and historically in the six years the call centre had been in operation. Upon the opening of the call centre six years prior to the commencement of fieldwork, new agents were provided with four weeks of dedicated training prior to being 'put on the phones' to take customer calls. During fieldwork, four different training classes observed during this period were assigned to two weeks of training. However, some experienced

[120] Prior to the commencement of this study, a call centre agent for a company not represented in this study told how his job was threatened by his supervisor when he spent his break time searching for solutions to a customer's problems that were not within the company's policies to solve. This individual reported that his supervisor told him, "…if we take responsibility for fixing problems for other companies, how do we make any money?" This agent seemed incredulous at the bald appearance of capitalism in a 'customer service' organisation, and unable to perceive service as a commodity.

agents who transferred to this call centre from others that were closed down, were never provided with training. Sheila, a ten year veteran in call centres with the company, told that she never received training before she relocated to this call centre and has not received any since. She credited her stability with a sense of independent responsibility and dogged persistence in seeking out answers. Over her ten years of work she has filled a set of 10cm thick, 3-ring binders with both company documents and self-prepared procedures for addressing issues that have emerged in her work. The extent of her self-discipline was unusual in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre. She attributed it to her sense of responsibility to provide the employer with a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay'.

Beny, the trainer at *DeliveryWorldwide,* described the variance in length of training as a function of the organisation's urgency to get agents 'on the phones', a decreasing amount of available resources, funding in particular, and an expectation (rationalised by pressures from the organisation and reduced resources) that agents should be trained through less costly and less isolated means (most typically, self-instructional materials and peer-coaching). Even in the shortest duration of training, agents were provided with direction specific to logging into the phones, appropriate use of the various ACD modes, logging out for lunch, (etc.) the software used to perform the work, and use of the software for performing basic operations common to the most rudimentary customer calls received by the call centre.[121]

[121] When provided with this extent of training, the novice agent would only receive these basic calls. Over time, the agent was provided with job aids that provided directions on using the software for performing more complex calls – thus, mixing 'training' with actual performance of the work. It was not uncommon for agents never to have received sit-down 'training' after the initial post-hire period, and instead to have learned how to perform more complex tasks through a combination of these job aids and asking questions of more experienced co-workers.

At *BigTech*,[122] agents were first provided with special training classes dedicated to 'soft skills' considered generically important to the success of customer-facing work. These skills were associated with maintaining a professional level of decorum in interaction with the customer, being able to extract data from what are frequently unstructured descriptions of problems by callers – including data that allows the agent to assess the caller's technical expertise – and providing data to customers in a format that matches their assessed technical expertise. Within this soft skills training was direction and practice on what all call centres refer to as 'controlling the call'.

'Controlling the call' means the agent should lead and pace all facets of the interaction with the customer. Controlling the call is considered an essential skill for agents in order to: (a) limit the type of questions the caller can ask to those that the organisation is contractually obliged or otherwise prepared to answer;[123] (b) ensure that required data are entered into the databases used to document each customer call; and (c) reduce call length to a duration that will permit the organisation to maintain its organisationally-defined service level. This portion of training also addressed and provided some drill and practice in logging into the phones, appropriate use of ACD modes; and the importance of maintaining one's logged in status through appropriate use of the ACD and phone system. This instantiates another set of disciplinary tactics upon agents and customers themselves that are

[122] No training classes were held during fieldwork at the *BigTech* location in which this research was conducted. The organization was in the process of outsourcing increased quantities of call centre work to subcontractors in Canada and India. Virtually all *new-agent* training performed during fieldwork at *BigTech* was done at these subcontractors in Canada and India. Consequently, these data are based on interviews with agents and collection of training documentation.

[123] *BigTech* agents appeal to 'service agreements', 'warranty conditions' and 'warranty periods' to assert contractual limits on what they can do as agents of the company. *DeliveryWorldwide* agents refer to 'terms and conditions' printed on company materials, *MedAdvise* asserts that its service is a triage-only service and cannot prescribe medication or provide anything within the legally-defined purview of licensed physicians. *MHealth* asserts the terms and conditions of the caller's insurance plan as a boundary on what services may be provided.

imbricated with the data collection functions of the call centre and the organisation's capacity to monitor its workers and the overall functioning of the call centre. In all of the cases noted above, training reinforced the most basic disciplinary tactics and technologies imposed by the company, and the things that comprised the very foundation of discipline and production of scientific Knowledge and 'truth' about the conduct of agents.

After this 'soft skills' training, the *BigTech* agent was assigned to training specific to the computer equipment he or she would be servicing. Troubleshooting techniques, including the use of engineering flowcharts to isolate problems and diagnose cause, techniques for assisting customers in attempting remote repairs, using additional software for ordering and dispatching replacement parts, and the like were included in this training. Typical duration was from two to five weeks, depending on the complexity of the equipment for which the agent was receiving training.

All of the technical training received was organised around the software the agent would be using to document the work. Example problems, looking up technical documents, entering data into the database, practising data collection from the customer, were all done while using this software. Consequently, while the surface goal of the training is on the 'things' being serviced, the implicit function of training is to drill the agent in the use of tools that, as described above, are instrumental in both exporting the organisation's way of doing service, and ensuring the 'proper' abstraction and inscription of data into the archives the organisation uses to document and evaluate each agent and the entire call centre.

At *MedAdvise*, few instances of formal training are called for because employment in the call centre organisation is very stable. There are few resignations

or terminations in the call centre and consequently, few new agents are hired. However, during fieldwork, one new nurse was hired and three new non-clinical agents were hired. Training for these different categories of employees varied.

Nurses hired into the call centre had already achieved the professional status of LPN (licensed practising nurse) or RN (registered nurse), and it is a fact that all of the nurses employed at the *MedAdvise* call centre had many years of clinical nursing experience in hospitals or in the private practice of a physician. Graf, one of the most senior nurses at *MedAdvise* told that it was universally agreed upon by all of the nurses that a newly licensed nurse would have tremendous difficulty succeeding in the call centre. This was because of the wide variety of conditions they would be expected to address. Graf said, "...you only get experience with those things by working in various places. You don't get that from nursing school." Consequently, all nurses hired into the call centre were already very familiar and much exercised in medical and legal regulations associated with the practice of medical work.[124]

Dale, the 'trainer' at *MedAdvise*, was one of the most experienced nurses in the call centre, and had worked at other similar facilities in the area. She was allowed to log in fewer hours on the phone in return for time spent on training or assisting other nurses. The formal training experience for nurses in the *MedAdvise* call centre included one-week of what was called 'introduction to Centramax' (Centramax is the software used in the call centre) This training included visual and functional definitions of features of the software, and drill and practice in, at first, working segments of a prototypical call in which Dale posed as the caller, and eventually

[124] During fieldwork, Lanie, the manager of the *MedAdvise* call centre began drafting a set of expectations for new hires that not only established a prerequisite period of experience for any candidates, but also established typing proficiency, computer literacy and other technical skills not commonly associated with nursing work. The purpose of this was explicitly to reduce demands on the organisation for training any new hires. Lanie was overjoyed to hire an RN with a vocational degree in computer science. Indeed, this new nurse '...set the record...' for the shortest training period of anyone in the nearly 10 year history of the *MedAdvise* call centre.

using the software through entire mock calls. It also included critical analysis of the charts produced by the trainee in these mock calls and listening and analysis of recorded calls and charts produced by nurses in the call centre. As above, this provided the trainee with experience in the use of the 'bedrock' of discipline in the call centre. Additionally, it provided the trainee with a view of how the organisation would be evaluating her or his charts. Dale indicated that she expected trainees to take from this a perspective that allowed them to alter their own practice such that they could always produce a 'proper chart' even when the conduct of the call deviated from that disciplined by its structure. That is, nurses were essentially assigned with the responsibility to ensure that the organisational forms for documenting work were always maintained.

For non-clinical staff at *MedAdvise*, on-the-job training was the norm and no dedicated period of 'training' separate from actual work was accomplished. The novice would be assigned to sit with a more experienced agent and his or her headset was 'patched' to the experienced agent's headset so the novice could listen and watch as the more experienced agent performed phone and data entry work. Between calls, the experienced agent would variously explain what had been done on preceding calls or provide guidance on the performance of typical non-computer tasks, guiding the novice through the process of performing the work. This 'buddy system', as it was called, permitted novice non-clinical staff to both participate in the accomplishment of non-computer work while receiving procedural guidance and perspectives on '...why we do things like that...' from more experienced workers. The result, as indicated above, was an informal extension to the normal disciplinary technology of the call centre such that co-workers would 'fill in' gaps in the disciplinary power imposed by tools, technologies, etc.

At *MHealth*, a very small call centre with only five agents, the training of new agents was similarly a one-on-one experience. This was mostly conducted by Krin, the team leader in the call centre. All of the materials produced by Krin and her predecessor were based on the features of the phone system and the 'eCura' software agents would use in the conduct of their day to day work with customers on the phone. This training typically included about five to seven working days where the trainee would sit with Krin. Firstly the trainee would listen through a headset 'patched' into Krin's while she worked customer calls and performed data entry. When Krin thought the trainee was ready, the trainee was assigned to perform data entry in the software while listening to Krin talk with the customer. Following this, the trainee was assigned to talk with customers while Krin performed data entry. Finally, the trainee both talked with customers and performed data entry while Krin listened to the work through a patched-in headset.

During all of these phases of training, Krin would periodically mute her headset so the caller could not hear her as she provided information or advice to the trainee on what was being done or direction on what to do next. In so doing, Krin not only provided contextual, on-the-job training to the new agent on the use of the software to do data lookup and data entry but also on how to talk with customers in extracting necessary data (controlling the call), how to exhibit appropriate degrees of empathy or affect, and perspectives on why variations in the practice exhibited were contextually relevant.

New agents were then 'circulated' to other experienced agents in the call centre to receive similar, but much shorter, on-the-job training with them, so as to get additional guided practice while at the same time freeing up the team leader for her work, and to receive specialised training on special tasks each other agent had been

assigned to perform. Sometimes these arrangements resulted in overcrowding cubicles designed for only one occupant (Figure 45).

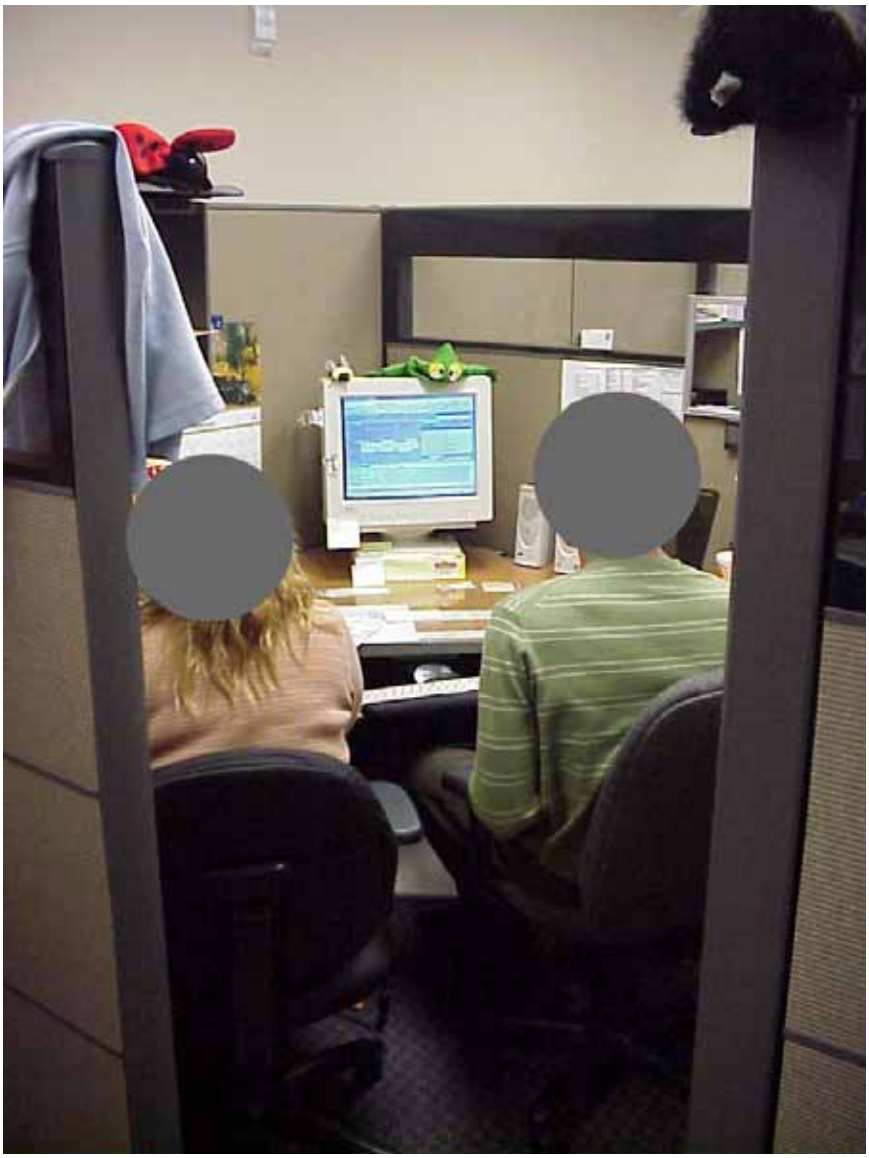


Figure 45. On the Job Training at *MHealth*

As described, in each call centre the training revolved around the technical manipulation of the software that would be used to perform data lookup and data entry tasks – disciplinary tools that all but ensure workers follow labour process and continuously make themselves visible to the ACD, submit themselves to its

constraints in order to ensure an organisationally 'proper' accomplishment of work, inscribe data, and participate in one's own inscription and examination. At *MHealth*, it was also the case that agents were occasionally brought into a meeting room for training on new features or procedures to be performed in the 'eCura' software. In one such training session, an employee who was formerly an agent in the call centre, but who had since been reassigned to the department responsible for processing insurance claims initiated by the call centre, distributed a booklet of photocopied screen shots of several database screens, on which she had handwritten steps and directions for filling in various fields in a particular order (similar in form to that shown in Figure 44).

As this ad hoc 'trainer' set up a projector and computer that would allow her to project a 'live' image of the database on a screen, thus permitting her to demonstrate its use to everyone in the room, one of the current agents reviewed the papers and remarked that the procedure inscribed on the pages was not the same "...as we already do it" in the call centre.

The 'trainer' stopped what she was doing and remarked:

> ...that's right. While the database will *allow you* to do data entry as you're currently doing it, we've found that when you do it that way it produces a bunch of data that *we* [referring to the claims processing department] can't see when we open up our section of the database. We've [had] to go back and do a lot of the data entry you've already done, thinking that you haven't done it! If you follow the rules I've written here [holding up the booklet of photocopied pages], we won't have to go back and do the data entry. We'll just be able to automatically complete our claims processing.

She went on to say,

> [We found that this is] the way this software is *supposed to work*. You do certain data processing and it dumps the data into our database format and then we can do our work without redoing the data entry. *MHealth* will be able to do things a lot [easier and cheaper] when you do it this way.

What this brief episode details is the fact that the computer system contains gaps in its disciplinary power over the microphysics of agent work. While the software *allows* the agents to do data entry in (apparently) multiple ways, only one of these is considered 'correct' by the claims processing department. It was not until the multiple methods of data entry were discovered by this worker who had experience in more than one department of the organisation, that the implicit promise of technology-mediation can be realised. While this might not overtly 'help' the call centre to do things more economically, it will do so for the claims processing department and indirectly aid the whole company's 'bottom line' – a programmatic aim of the entire operation. What the 'trainer' is doing is offering a disciplined view of the process with the idea that once the call centre understands the overall value to the company of adopting this new data entry practice, they will do so. This training is intended to 'fill in' what the software itself doesn't discipline by providing Knowledge and assigning a responsibility to the workers to perform their work in a particular way with the explicit goal of making other work performed by other departments of the organisation easier, and overall, making work across the organisation more economical.

Focusing on the conduct of calls themselves, training paired the use of the computer software with what are commonly called 'scripts'. Scripts and scripting are particular phrases that the organisation has determined to be appropriate in particular situations that arise repeatedly in the work. Scripts are thus a means for asserting a degree of regularity or labour process in the verbal interaction between call centre agents and customers. As shown above in Figure 27, Figure 36 and Figure 40, and exemplified in *DeliveryWorldwide's* requirement for workers to look up data and read it VERBATIM to the customers, and in *BigTech's* requirement for workers to

use prepared documents to discipline their troubleshooting and problem solving work, scripts and script-like discipline of worker's behaviour permeates the conduct of call centre work. Agents are told in training that these scripts are required and that scores on their quality evaluations will in part be based on the accuracy with which they apply scripting.[125] The goal is to impose a disciplinary rule in cases where the worker is able to apply his or her own discretion. In so doing, the organisation demonstrates a continuous effort to rationalise the labour process such that evaluation of each component of work can be reduced to a simple comparison with rules – a process that at once makes work more efficient, calculable, predictable and controllable – factors criticised by both labour process theory and Weberian analyses of modern labour (Braverman 1974; Ritzer 2000b; Sennett 1998). In addition, this also reflects the manufacturing of a particular organisational reality and the ability to manufacture and discipline a subject and subjectivity (Foucault 1995; Townley 1995a, 1995b, 1996).

While explicit training activities are conducted at each call centre, in fieldwork it was even more common to see informal forms of 'training' throughout the day. These include the distribution of job aids or other technical documents to agents in order to provide them with organisationally prescribed information, procedures and perspectives that are updates of previously trained data or new information altogether. This was especially common at *DeliveryWorldwide* where Beny, the call centre's full time trainer, produced them in response to cutbacks in her budget and the organisation's restriction of her ability to take agents off the phones for explicit training sessions.

[125] In some cases, all of the call centres are flexible on this requirement, and recognisably similar variations of the prepared scripts will usually be accepted as equivalent.

For example, Figure 46 displays a printout of a message delivered electronically to all agents, informing them of new scripting to be used in a particular context.

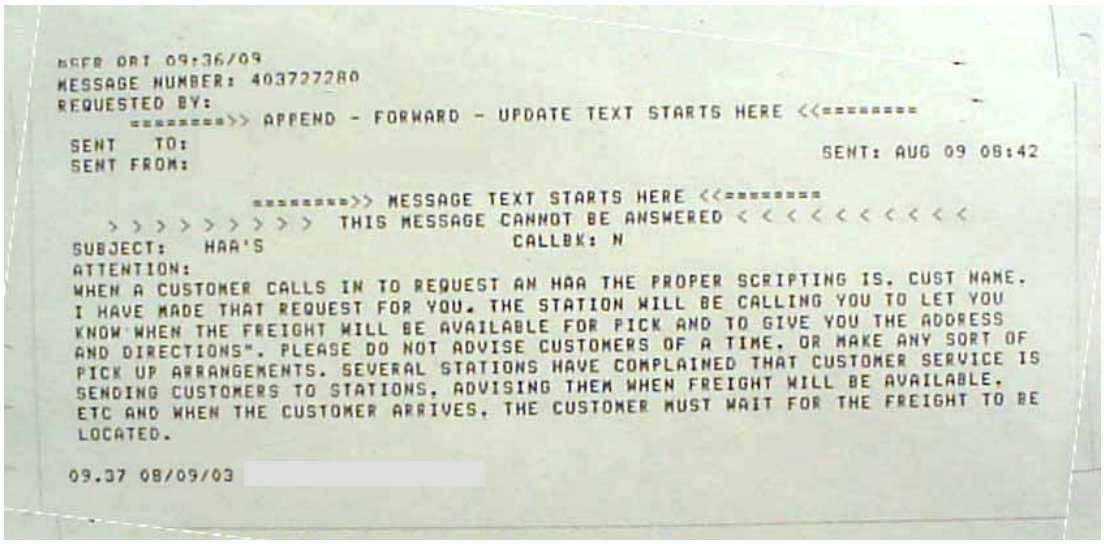


Figure 46. Electronically Delivered 'Training' on Updated Scripting

Similarly, Figure 44 displays a job aid produced by Beny to notify agents of a new policy in the call centre by which the manager will monitor particular data entered by agents (a totalising observation) and potentially levy punishment on agents who do not comply with the new organisational rule described on the job aid (an individualised penalty).

At *BigTech*, such 'training' was very commonly delivered in the form of E-mail messages, attachments to E-mail messages or URLs[126] included in E-mail messages that when clicked would take the agent to a webpage containing the data. Note that the 'training' artefacts shown in Figure 44 and Figure 46 explicitly direct the agents in the proper accomplishment of specifically auditable details found in

[126] URL = universal resource locator. This is the common form of World Wide Web addresses. For example, http://www.cqu.edu.au is the URL for the home page of Central Queensland University.

computer databases or that could be heard in phone taps of the agent's work. The result is a production and exercising of imbricated forms of disciplinary power over the worker's perceptions, knowledge and action, each of which reinforces the others. This is a characteristic of power in TMTL – multiple, small and heterogeneous but imbricated bits that provide for a stabilised network of forces to discipline the workers (Latour 1993). At the same time, workers are implicitly made responsible for the newly trained 'proper' way of performing work. Following this paired discipline and responsibilisation, any variation in practice – evidenced in the substantial array of data collected by organisations on each of its workers – by agents can be interpreted by the organisation as a failure to fulfil one's responsibility as an agent of the company.

In addition to conventional training and the distribution of electronic messages or job aids to agents, it was common to see coaching activities conducted throughout the day in each of the four call centres participating in this study. Like the empirically-defined act and delivery of 'training', coaching is a very flexible concept. It can be offered ad hoc, depending on the context of the call centre and the relative status of the participants, or it may be explicitly solicited by agents. It can also be an organisationally-prescribed activity. As will be shown however, as with the forms of discipline noted above, it orients to the way the call centre is partitioned, both physically and virtually, and is aimed at ensuring the agent is producing appropriate actions and inscriptions of actions into the organisation's gaze.

The sound of computers, the gentle clackety-clack of keyboards and computer mouse buttons, squeaking of chair casters, swivelling desk chairs and the ever present hubbub of many voices speaking to unseen others through headsets is a regular feature of call centres. As I gained experience in fieldwork and while sitting

next to an agent and listening to his or her telephone work through a parallel headset, I noticed that it was not at all difficult to pick out particular words spoken by other agents in nearby cubicles – even when I was focusing on the work of the agent next to whom I was seated. This is a phenomenon that was labelled ‘the radar’ by more than one call centre agent to whom I described it. It was something, each informant told me, every agent ‘had’, but the refinement of which was something that separated new agents from those who were more experienced. Agents considered ‘radar’ to be an invaluable skill to both serve the needs of the organisation and the individual interests of an agent.

Even more noticeable than particular words – scripted tokens that were invoked in particular situations and which, once learned, informed the savvy listener of the tasks involved in another agent’s present call – was the prosody of agents’ voices. The voicing of apologies for missed services, scripted questions to solicit particular data required by the call centre organisation, and the mundane statements made hundreds of times a day in the course of call centre work, came with a dull, methodical tone. However, even mildly exceptional requests or remarks from customers would be met with a subtly or grossly changed tone of voice from an agent. It was very easy to know, for example, when ‘Sheila’s got a live one’, even when metres away from Sheila’s cubicle.

That is, the close proximity of workers and the ‘porous’ sonic environment makes it relatively easy to overhear what is going on in neighbouring cubicles. At *MHealth*, a very small call centre staffing between three and five agents during my fieldwork, agents were assigned to cubicles with only a few metres separating the farthest agent from the team leader. Throughout fieldwork it was common for the call centre team leader to call out directions or suggestions, occasionally muting her

headset so her current caller could not hear, to an agent whom she heard exhibiting prosody or words she simply labelled “trouble sounds” or other indications of difficulty on a call, or to implore them to answer a call waiting in queue.[127]

Pat, an agent with six months experience at *MHealth*, described the team leader’s tactics like this:

> [W]hen I was [just hired] it really helped me to focus on things... Sometimes I’d get really focused on filling out the paperwork or doing data entry on the computer and [ignore] everything else and her directions – even when I didn’t ask for advice – helped, I think. When I got more familiar with the work and more confident in my own ability, it got to be really annoying – like – *‘I know what I’m doing and I know there are calls waiting but I’ve gotta get this stuff done before I can handle something else’* and it would have taken only a few more seconds before I got that call ... It makes you feel like you’re being watched all the time ... like, even when you know what to do, you still can’t please ‘em [that is, supervisors and management], y’know?

That is, Pat indicates that the audio surveillance of the call centre was, initially, a thing that facilitated coaching on the organisational expectations for a call centre worker – disciplining the perspectives of a new worker. Over time, with experience in doing work and understanding of the importance of the many tasks expected of the call centre worker and the desire and ability to exercise one’s own knowledge and skill, Pat tells that it prompted frustration and a feeling of always being watched. This reflects an ad hoc policing of labour process even when one considers he or she should be immune to such policing.

It was also common for agents to appeal to their neighbouring co-workers for assistance with a particular call or data entry puzzle. Figure 47 shows how a novice agent at *MedAdvise* is receiving coaching on a particular data entry process in the

[127] As noted above, knowledge of calls in queue was facilitated by software on each agent’s computer, that displayed data relative to each worker’s status (on a call, not on a call, on break, lunch, etc.), the number of calls currently waiting to be answered, how long the longest call in queue has been waiting, etc. The result was an expectation that workers would always be aware of the ‘needs of the organisation’ and alter their behaviour to satisfy those needs.

Centramax database. Coaching at *MedAdvise* was often solicited when a nurse was working a call on an issue that was not her or his clinical specialty.[128]

Figure 47. Coaching at *MedAdvise*

In all the call centres it was also common to hear of coaching activities directed at particular agents who were seen to be underperforming either on their productivity ratings or their quality ratings. Figure 1 shows an ACD printout for one of the teams at *DeliveryWorldwide*. The colour coded marks and 'key' at the lower left corner were added by the team leader prior to distributing this to her team members for review. This highlights a tactic that acts to embed the call centre's perception of agents in terms of the Knowledge of the organisation – an act that exposes the organisationally-defined 'truth' about each worker – a subjectification.

[128] It was the case that the call centre manager attempted to schedule nurses for the same shift who had a range of clinical specialties. This was done in order to provide a wide range of 'live expertise' and to facilitate this sort of interdependent coaching activity between nurses. That is, the organisation actively arranged staffing so as to bend this activity for the organisation's and its clients' benefit.

The agent is made aware of the product of the organisation's observations, inscriptions of abstracted facets of their activity, and reconstruction of these abstracted observations into tables and arrays that produce the 'truth' about each agent's practice and which documents them as 'discursive objects'/subjects. In so doing the agent is made aware of how the organisation sees them, evaluates them and values them, in terms of the organisation's hierarchical observation and normalising judgement, and what the organisation expects them to change or maintain. As Sheila indicates in the introduction to this chapter, agents are expected to take this Knowledge and use it to modify their own behaviour so as to continuously produce 'good stats' and to make himself or herself visible as a 'good agent' – an activity that, in part, comprises 'shadowboxing with data' (Winiecki 2004b). I will elaborate on this concept in more detail below and in Part 4 of the report.

If an agent's stats do not improve through the use of this rather distant and data-centric form of coaching, the team leader is expected to take the responsibility for more disciplinary one-on-one coaching with the agent, providing specific advice and perspectives on his or her calls with the goal of providing them with information, skills and perspectives that enable them to better control calls, make more efficient use of after call data processing time, etc. so that the agents' statistics, thus their value to the organisation, improves. For example, Sheila, a team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide*, told me that she had been working with another agent who "...had really bad stats and low quality evaluations" for several months in order to improve her productivity and quality ratings. Sheila described that it took so long to see any improvement:

> [B]ecause she had learned so many bad habits. I had to go almost all the way back to beginning to show her how to do things so that her stats and quality ratings would improve. I gave her little memory tricks to help her remember some of the codes we use all the time,

> and how to sort through data faster so her call times would improve. I also taught her how to be more aware of how she sounds to the customer (and the person performing quality ratings) so she won't get marked down for sounding unfriendly.

In other words, Sheila acted to discipline aspects of this agent's knowledge and skill so she could produce a 'good agent' in her statistical ratings of productivity and quality.

Sheila was so invested in helping this agent improve that when the agent was assigned to another team leader, Sheila worried that she would start to lose ground again unless her new team leader kept up with the coaching. That is, she began to feel responsible for propagating the Knowledge/power of the organisation through the delivery of particular disciplinary tactics – she can be seen to be modifying her own behaviour in order to effect changes in someone else's statistical ratings of productivity and quality. Sheila 'activated' a power immanent in the hierarchical observation and normalising judgement of statistical ratings of productivity and quality in her discipline of another agent's practice.

At *BigTech*, there is a similar practice that orients agents to the queue (the callers on hold waiting to speak to an agent). This involves the direct intervention of a group of workers titled 'quality support specialists' (QSSs). At *BigTech*, QSSs are responsible for performing monitoring of the quality of agents' work through barging and recording agents' calls and scoring them, as noted above. QSSs are also responsible for addressing other matters the organisation considers to relate to the quality of work at the call centre.

In one of the teams at *BigTech*, supervisors emphasised that the percentage of calls answered within three minutes of their arrival was a very important factor in determining the overall quality of service in the call centre, and they desired to produce a 100% service level. This was emphasised because a recent survey of

customers of *BigTech* and its competitors indicated that waiting on hold was a source of substantial customer dissatisfaction. The supervisors determined that if all calls could be answered within the three minute service-level window, customer satisfaction would improve and management could claim that the call centre was being more responsive to its customers. That is, these supervisors and QSSs took the data in customer satisfaction ratings, and combined it with a desire to improve statistical ratings of customer satisfaction to activate a power, which in turn was deployed to discipline agents' practice.

In response to this, QSSs were directed to ensure 100% service level. A group of three QSSs overseeing this team of agents addressed this direction by monitoring a computer system that provided a continuous display of call volume and agent activity (Figure 14). On any occasion when a caller was on hold, it would become visible in this computer system, and a QSS would (a) inspect the computer system to see which agents were currently on break or lunch and (b) literally run out into the agents' cubicle area to pull these agents off break or lunch in order to answer the calls on hold.

This activity presented a surreal and melodramatic contrast to the usual appearance of work in the call centre, where workers were quietly focused on their individual computer screens. One of the QSSs appeared to be so intent on maintaining 100% service level that she would yell while running to the agents' cubicles, "...there's a queue! There's a queue! Get on the phones!"

A similar, though much less dramatic, instance of the same disciplinary interest occurred regularly at *MHealth* where the call centre supervisor would monitor the ACD display (Figure 15) and call out to agents from her desk if they were seen not to be currently working a call when a call was in queue.

Krin, the team leader at *MHealth* also discovered a feature in the ACD that allowed her to program its display to flash when a caller was in queue for a pre-determined period of time. After this discovery, she went to each worker's computer and set its ACD display to flash when a caller was in queue for 15 seconds. As she modified the settings on each computer, she told the agent, "[s]ervice level is to answer calls in 30 seconds or less. When you see the ACD screen flashing, you've got 15 seconds to finish what you're doing and answer that call." In other words, Krin was blending coaching with a new disciplinary tactic that was intended to make agents responsible for rushing through whatever they were doing in order to maintain the company's service level goal.

Finally, coaching can take the form of what one might otherwise call haranguing! At a daily team meeting at *MHealth*, Kam, the call centre manager implored the agents:

> You have to sound like a broken record! Every call has to be exactly the same as the one before. Use the same scripting every single time, and make each time sound like it's the first time you've ever said that!'

This reflects an attempt to implicate the workers' affect into labour process and discipline workers to adopt a *surface acting* sort of emotional labour in the call centre (Hochschild 1985; Taylor, S. 1998).

Similarly, regarding agents' productivity statistics, Kam was consistent in telling agents "...you have to *see yourself* in the stats. Every day I want you to see how your stats look and think about how you could do things differently to improve 'em!" This, and other disciplinary tactics noted above, are aimed at affecting the workers' perceptions of themselves through the technology-mediated and statistically

represented gaze of the call centre, and altering their work practice so as to produce good statistical representations of their activity.

Through manifold means, training, the ACD and phone system, the screen by screen use of software, controlling the call, scripts, coaching on the accomplishment of these components of the work and on the reflexive interpretation of the data produced from them and reflected back to the worker, all instantiate ways the call centre asserts myriad forces on the agent to discipline his or her conduct as a subject in TMTL. One is again reminded of Foucault's characterisation of discipline:

> [Discipline] does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them. Instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units. It 'trains' the moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements – small, separate cells, organic autonomies, generic identities and continuities, combinatory segments. Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy. (Foucault 1995, p. 170)

In the call centre, the empirical evidence presented here strongly indicates that discipline is a heterogeneous network of forces – both computer based and experienced as human interaction – directed at agents so that their work can be divided, observed and inscribed as abstractions that the organisation's data processing and evaluation systems can weave into hierarchical observations and normalising judgements that *produce* individual agents as subjects and the entire group of them as a subject. While 'customer service' is the organisational *purpose* of TMTL, it is undeniably the case that one of the primary *products* of TMTL is a subjectification apparatus that produces workers as arrays of numbers – numbers that are produced by the disciplined actions of agents in their use of computer systems and compliance (or non compliance) with rules and policies that both strip meaning

from the contexts in which 'customer service' is performed, and produce new forms of meaning that comply with the imputed productivity and quality aims of the organisation. The result is a manufactured reality in which subjects and subjectivity are similarly produced in the way the organisation and work is divided, regulated, made visible, inscribable and examinable – a sort of template that agents and management alike use as a backdrop against which to see themselves and regulate their own activity.

The use of aphorisms was also a common feature in attempting to shape the perspectives and actions of agents when the technology could not be counted upon to do so. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was common to hear management utter the phrase, "trust the system" (agents commonly uttered those words also, but usually with an edgy, sarcastic tone belying their jaded suspicion or contempt). The phrase was used by management in cases where the database records used to track shipments from origin to delivery location somehow did not function properly.[129] The utterance of this phrase was treated as a code to abandon efforts to actually locate the package in question, and simply invoke the use of special scripting authored by the company with the assumption that a lost package will be discovered and delivered by the anonymous functioning of 'the system'.

For example, if a customer inquires about a late package and upon checking the tracking database the agent finds that there is either no record or only a partial

[129] This could be the case for various reasons. For example, the electronic bar code scanning devices used to route packages to particular postal codes may not function properly, thus introducing an unseen error in how the package was routed. Because these automatic scanning devices uploaded data to the tracking database accessed by agents, any such errors would be reflected in the database. It was also well known by agents that the automatic conveying system used by the organisation to move packages through its sorting and handling facilities was reliably able to handle packages only of certain physical dimensions. When packages were very large or small or had unusual dimensions (for example, a shipping tube for large documents such as blueprints) the package had to be moved by hand through the facility and errors were not uncommon. It was also not uncommon for the delivery drivers to make errors when dropping off packages. Nonetheless, the organisation proudly reported that over 97% of packages were delivered on time and to the proper location.

record of the package's transit through the organisation's shipping system, he or she is supposed to state the following script: "That package is scheduled for delivery by [time, date]."

This script reflects a 'trust of the system' because it appeals to the contracted transit time for the package. Management was also fond of noting that this scripting does not make a promise for delivery. Rather it only appeals to the organisation's contract for delivering packages. In not providing a promise, the agent is supposed to feel as though he or she is not lying to the customer, even in cases where, even with the aid of the organisation's sophisticated computer systems, the agent cannot verify that the package will actually be delivered per the contract – a form of 'deep acting' intended to alter the genuine affect of the agent (Hochschild 1985).

Similarly, if a customer makes an inquiry and upon checking the database the agent finds that the package was misrouted, and thus delayed, the agent is to voice the following:

> [D]ue to a routing discrepancy on our part, that package has been delayed one business day in shipment. That package will be delivered [next business day] by [time].

As above, this script exhibits a trust of the system insofar as the agent has no way of actually knowing if the package has been put on the proper path once the routing discrepancy is discovered. The script belies a trust that this has been done even though it cannot be verified.[130]

[130] While the organization claimed that over 97% of packages were delivered on time, it is a fact that the 3-odd % of packages that aren't delivered on time may be associated with an upset customer's call. Thus, agents develop the view that a large percentage of their work is spent in reflecting a trust in the system that isn't, in their experience, always warranted. In full view and earshot of the manager, one agent uttered in disgust near the end of a particularly hectic day, "...we're not a delivery company! We're a pick-it-up-and-lose-your-package-company!!" Other agents readily expressed frustration at their inability to actually help the customer in such situations by locating the package and putting it on the correct path to delivery. More details on reactions to this frustration by agents will be given in Part 3, below.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, it was also the case that mystery shopper calls from the general office were conducted to evaluate agents' use of proper scripting or reference to current company policy on calls. While it was generally understood in the call centre – by both agents and management – that scripting *could be altered without changing the meaning of the utterance*, the general office was largely intolerant of any deviation from approved scripting. Consequently, agents were told:

> Look it up in the [online database of company policies] and read it back to the customer VERBATIM!

Management went so far as to print this aphorism on small cards and ask agent to affix the card to their computer monitor – in plain view at all times while they were working calls. Agents considered this to be largely impractical because the computer systems they used were so slow that it was not unusual for it to take tens of seconds or even a minute to invoke the online database of company policies – a span that would have severe effects on the agent's average call length! However, agents were quick to echo this aphorism and encourage its propagation through the call centre whenever an agent received what they thought was a mystery shopper – all reflecting a disciplined orientation to the company's reliance on abstracted data to 'prove' they were doing their jobs. (Experienced agents indicated that it was not difficult to 'spot' a mystery shopper. These agents referred to a caller's use of company jargon, or of asking context-less questions that were noticeable by their difference from the way 'real customers talk'.)

At *MHealth*, agents were provided with an aphoristic plea common in call centre literature (Czegel 1999; Stuller 1999; Wilson, R. 1991) from Kam, the manager of the call centre:

> [U]se the scripting we're written for you – you've all got it – and don't only *use* it. On every call you've got to make it sound as if this is the first time you've ever used the script – you've got to sound like you really mean it and you're interested in helping [the caller]! You should *sound like a broken record*. If I walk by your desk I should be able to hear the same thing *every single time* you answer a call!

Note how 'sounding like you really mean it' and 'sounding like a broken record' is associated with Kam's surveillance of agents – an appeal to discipline the workers' emotions to the company's interests (Hochschild 1985). This, and other tactics noted above imply that the 'truth' about an agent and his or her work is that which is reflected in the *data* – whether it be collected and reflected in ACD stats, quality evaluations or the observations of management. Workers are made responsible for taking this truth about themselves and using it to 'know' themselves and discipline their own behaviour accordingly (Foucault 1995, 1997e; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1995a).

d. Auditing & Using Data Produced in the Conduct of Work

In the preceding sections I detail techniques for enclosing and partitioning call centre agents, for observing and inscribing them and for reconstructing the abstracted inscriptions of selected aspects of their activity into composites that produce the subject in TMTL. These are examples of tactics that serve to apprehend, deconstruct and reconstruct the subject and his or her actions with the goal of producing a productive worker and a quality worker. At the same time, in and of themselves, these tactics also evidence how the subject and subjectivity are constructed: producing a definition of what it is to be a productive subject and a subject who does quality customer-facing work.

All of the organisations participating in this study also practice another means of producing and applying a disciplinary force upon the practice of workers. In general, I will refer to these as practices aimed at *auditing* the products of a call centre agent's work. While the tactics noted above culminate in the combined totalising and individualising of agents, most compactly illustrated in the 'qualictivity' chart shown in Figure 3, the apparent goal of these auditing practices is solely to individualise and discipline the agent by binding his or her body, mind and perceptions of self in a relation with a set of rules. The product of this relation is, like any audit, a power to determine compliance, rule following and attention to accepted technical details (Mautz & Sharaf 1961, p. 1ff).[131, 132]

As described above, one of the functions of the ACD is the continuous production of records related to the agent's productivity in customer-facing work. This data is automatically inscribed into a database not only as a consequence of the agents answering and working on customer calls, but also through the agents' intentional or accidental placing of themselves in particular modes: 'ready' to take agent calls, 'not ready' to take calls, 'AUX' or 'do not disturb' when taking ad hoc breaks or making outbound calls to an internal or external help desk or other information source (for definitions of these terms, see Table 1).

As implied by the existence of statistics related to these modes or actions on the ACD report (Figure 1 and Figure 16 – Figure 18), they are part of the apparatus with which the agent is evaluated. Each call centre participating in this study

[131] In the critical investigation of science and philosophy mounted by Ford (1975a) this can be referred to as a system of belief and practice founded upon a simple compliance with accepted standards of conduct, professional or otherwise – what Ford refers to as 'truth 2'.

[132] For Power (1994), the *audit* is taken not as a particular set of technical practices. Rather it is viewed as a rationality that, he suggests, increasingly characterises normality in political practice. That is, auditing is cast as a rationality that is used to isolate factors in a field of interest and link them together in a relation that makes them amenable to a particular sort of independent and objective technical comparison against a norm, rule or policy. I will return to this framing of the audit near the conclusion of this report.

regulated the quantity of time or events related to these modes or activities. Because a switch from one mode (for example from ‘ready’ to ‘not ready’ mode) requires a manual action on the part of the agent (pushing a button on his or her phone), the agent is considered consciously responsible for doing so, and thus consciously responsible for the quantified tally of time or events observed and inscribed by the ACD.

The *MedAdvise* call centre states this explicitly in its information sheets to both clinical and non clinical staff:

> Every time you work a shift, information is tracked and printed out. These numbers help determine how you are using the phone and the amount of time you are away from the phone.

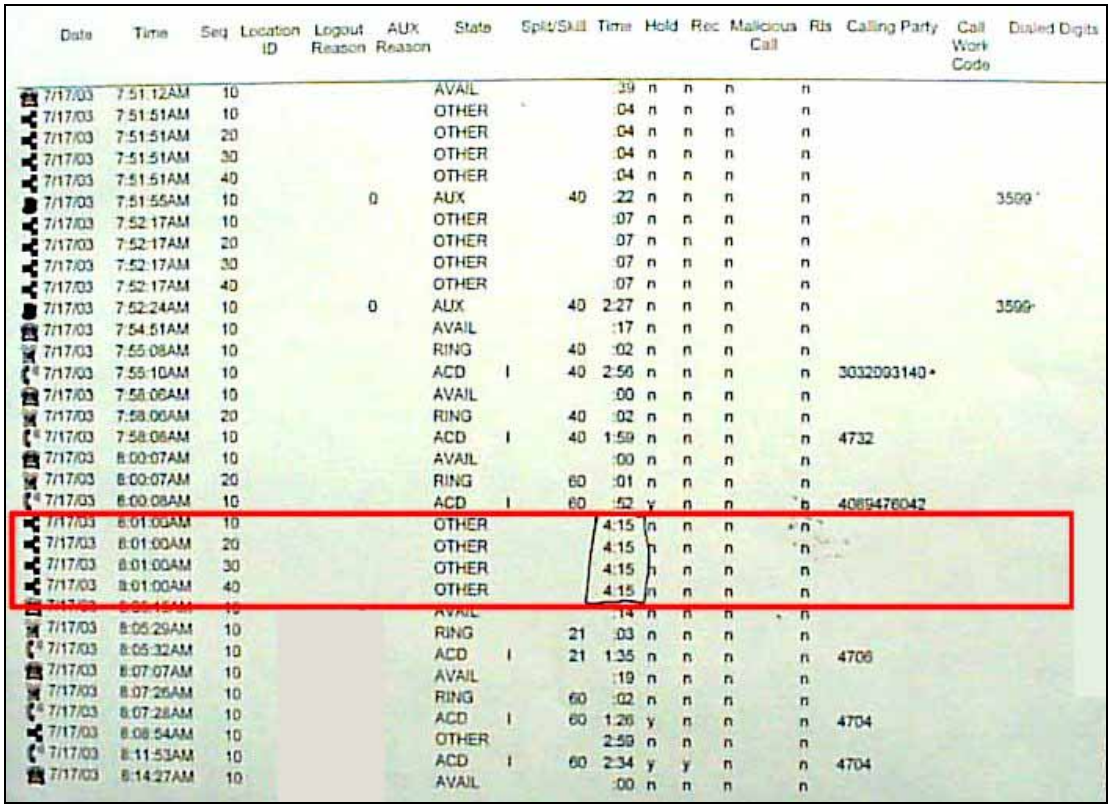
At *DeliveryWorldwide*, the supervisor kept a program open on her computer that allowed her to inspect the minute to minute status of every agent logged into the ACD. This program included a function to sound an alarm when any agent performed any action she thought was indicative of ‘abusing the phone system’. For example, agents are directed to keep the number of outbound calls below a set number per day, and each call should be less than about two minutes in length – this in order to facilitate average call lengths under two minutes and thirty seconds. If an agent was observed by the ACD to be talking on an ‘outbound call’ for more than two minutes, an alarm would sound, alerting her to inspect the ACD display and identify the ‘offending’ agent. On such occasions, if not occupied with what was contextually defined as a more pressing matter, she would inspect other data on the ACD display or walk to that agent’s desk to determine why the agent was talking on an outbound call for so long.

If the supervisor determined that the call was justified – for example, if the agent was talking with internal or external support personnel to work out a

particularly vexing problem no further action would be taken. If, however, by inspecting the ACD report on her computer screen, or by visual inspection of the agent's activity or her questioning, she determined that the agent was engaged in a disallowed activity, she would return to her desk, print a copy of the ACD report from her computer and add notations to it to 'document' what she had just witnessed. For example, if the agent was found to be talking with another agent in the call centre over social matters and neither agent was on an official break or lunch, she would use the documentation just generated to evidence an 'occurrence' of abusing the phone system so as to avoid work.

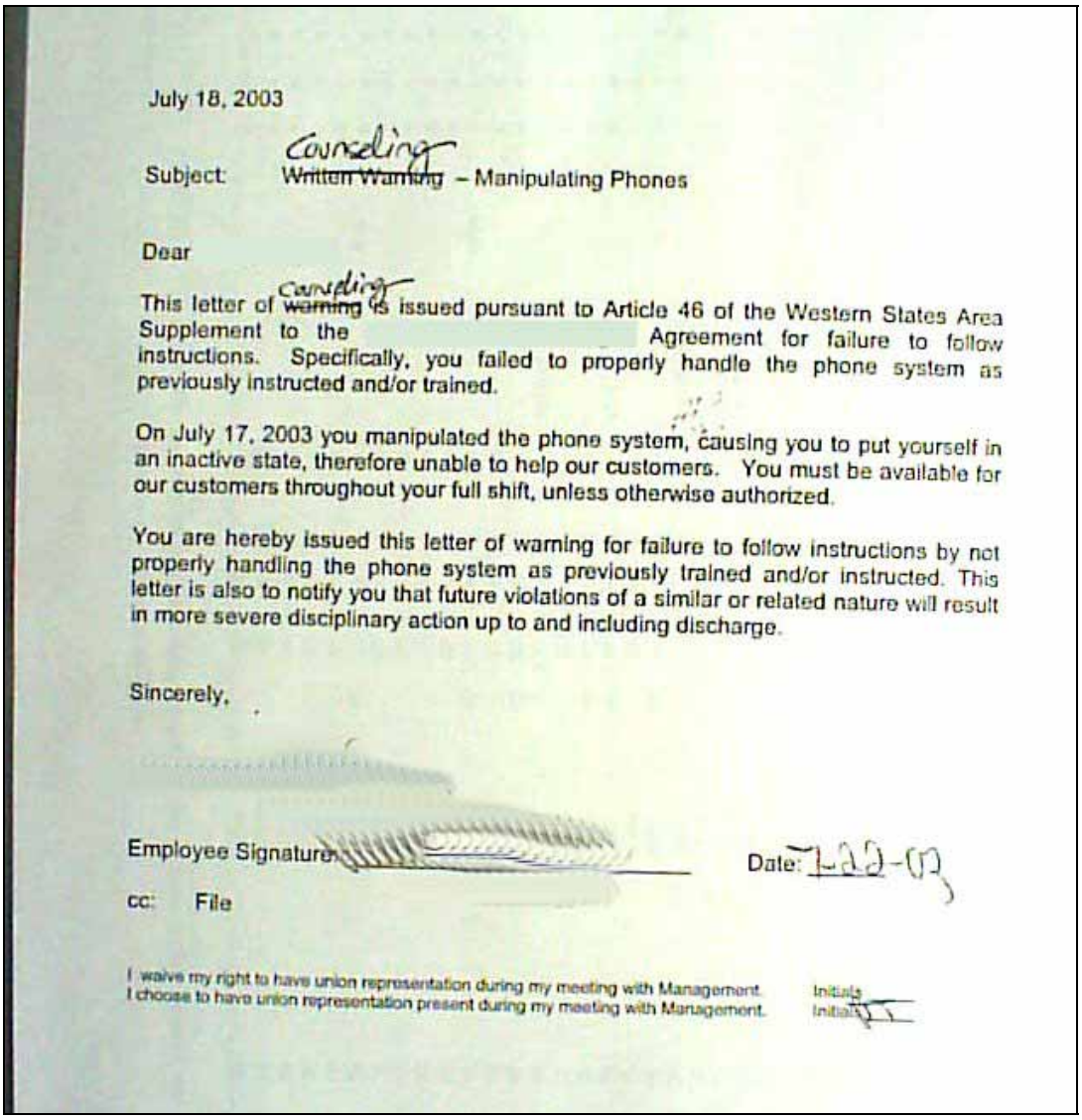
Similarly, the ACD monitors all possible modes of operation for the phone system. Agents are not allowed to use all modes made possible by the phone system. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, while the phone system technically *permitted* an agent to log into a mode named 'OTHER', agents were never supposed to actually use it because it was not programmed for any function used in the call centre. The supervisor programmed her ACD software to sound an alarm if this mode was ever used by an agent. If the supervisor's computer sounded an alarm indicating that an agent had selected 'OTHER' mode, she would document it as an 'occurrence' of intentionally manipulating the phone system so as to avoid work.

Figure 48 shows a record 'documenting' such an occurrence committed by Peg, a six year veteran of the call centre. Figure 49 shows a warning letter issued to Peg by the supervisor, referencing this occurrence such that it could be entered into her official personnel folder, and thus officially representing it as an item to be considered upon her next performance evaluation. 'Occurrences' having to do with such 'abuses' of the phone system are included in an evaluation of the employee's compliance with assigned work schedules.



Date	Time	Seq	Location ID	Logout Reason	AUX Reason	State	Split/Skill	Time	Hold	Rec	Malicious Call	Rls	Calling Party	Call Work Code	Dialed Digits
7/17/03	7:51:12AM	10				AVAIL		:39	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:51:51AM	10				OTHER		:04	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:51:51AM	20				OTHER		:04	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:51:51AM	30				OTHER		:04	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:51:51AM	40				OTHER		:04	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:51:55AM	10		0		AUX	40	:22	n	n	n	n			3599
7/17/03	7:52:17AM	10				OTHER		:07	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:52:17AM	20				OTHER		:07	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:52:17AM	30				OTHER		:07	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:52:17AM	40				OTHER		:07	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:52:24AM	10		0		AUX	40	2:27	n	n	n	n			3599
7/17/03	7:54:51AM	10				AVAIL		:17	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:55:08AM	10				RING	40	:02	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:55:10AM	10				ACD	I 40	2:56	n	n	n	n	3032093140		
7/17/03	7:58:06AM	10				AVAIL		:00	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:58:06AM	20				RING	40	:02	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	7:58:08AM	10				ACD	I 40	1:59	n	n	n	n	4732		
7/17/03	8:00:07AM	10				AVAIL		:00	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:00:07AM	20				RING	60	:01	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:00:08AM	10				ACD	I 60	:52	y	n	n	n	4089476042		
7/17/03	8:01:00AM	10				OTHER		4:15	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:01:00AM	20				OTHER		4:15	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:01:00AM	30				OTHER		4:15	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:01:00AM	40				OTHER		4:15	n	n	n	n			
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]				AVAIL		:14	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:05:29AM	10				RING	21	:03	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:05:32AM	10				ACD	I 21	1:35	n	n	n	n	4706		
7/17/03	8:07:07AM	10				AVAIL		:19	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:07:26AM	10				RING	60	:02	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:07:28AM	10				ACD	I 60	1:26	y	n	n	n	4704		
7/17/03	8:08:54AM	10				OTHER		2:59	n	n	n	n			
7/17/03	8:11:53AM	10				ACD	I 60	2:34	y	y	n	n	4704		
7/17/03	8:14:27AM	10				AVAIL		:00	n	n	n	n			

Figure 48. ACD Report Showing Peg Logged into ‘OTHER’ Mode



July 18, 2003

Subject: ~~Written Warning~~ Counseling – Manipulating Phones

Dear

This letter of ~~warning~~ counseling is issued pursuant to Article 46 of the Western States Area Supplement to the Agreement for failure to follow instructions. Specifically, you failed to properly handle the phone system as previously instructed and/or trained.

On July 17, 2003 you manipulated the phone system, causing you to put yourself in an inactive state, therefore unable to help our customers. You must be available for our customers throughout your full shift, unless otherwise authorized.

You are hereby issued this letter of warning for failure to follow instructions by not properly handling the phone system as previously trained and/or instructed. This letter is also to notify you that future violations of a similar or related nature will result in more severe disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

Sincerely,

Employee Signature: Date: 7-22-03

cc: File

I waive my right to have union representation during my meeting with Management. Initials
I choose to have union representation present during my meeting with Management. Initials

Figure 49. 'Counselling' Letter Issued to Peg for Using 'OTHER' Mode

It is relevant to note that while she did not deny that her phone was in 'OTHER' mode as evidenced in the ACD report (Figure 48), Peg told that she was not aware how this could have happened. She indicated that while the supervisor has access to information telling which mode each agent's phone is in, agents themselves don't have access to that information; thus, the practice of the call centre to audit such details puts the worker at a disadvantage. In referencing this as a disadvantage, Peg is orienting to the panoptic power immanent in the relation between worker, phone system and ACD, and highlighting how she would use such knowledge if it

was available to her to keep in compliance with the regulations of the company. In effect, Peg is admitting to her willingness to use the organisation's gaze over the worker to become her own keeper – if only she were provided with the panoptic tools to do so.[133] Instead, she said, the system as it exists only produces fear in her over the possibility that despite her diligence "if it happened once, it might happen again... and next time it might be enough to put me on suspension!" – thus evidencing the inclusion of panoptic fear in further disciplining Peg's behaviour.

In addition to the live alarm function noted above, the supervisor can invoke a search of the ACD database records for evidence of violations like this. In effect, the automatic observation and inscription function of the ACD produces an easily searchable archive of potential evidence of violations; such violations need not actually be seen by the supervisor. The supervisor need only press a few buttons to gaff-hook for any workers whose data provide such evidence. Thus, the ACD not only facilitates the creation of 'productive subjects' through its hierarchical observation and normalising judgement as described above, it also facilitates the auditing of continuously produced records in order to identify individual deviance in purified and digitally-precise terms.

However, the validity of such gaff-hooked violations depends on trusting that the abstracted inscriptions made by the panoptic equipment actually represent reality and not only an abstraction of it. From the behaviour of the supervisor, it is apparent this trust exists – instantiating Smith's, Haraway's and Townley's criticism of technical and scientific Knowledge (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1974'; 1984, 1990a;

[133] This is not intended to be a criticism of rules or of the idea that a worker should be occupied in assigned tasks when in paid employment. Rather, it is an observation of the panoptic power immanent in the relation between worker and aspects of the technology-mediated workplace, and how that power is, as Foucault observes, very economical for the organisation, while at the same time being very penetrating and anonymous.

Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996, 2001). This will be addressed in more detail in Part 3 and Part 4 of this report.

It is the case, however, that while the abstracted database inscriptions are treated as sufficient evidence to suspect, they alone are not always sufficient to 'convict' the agent of such data-focused accusations at *DeliveryWorldwide*. In the event the supervisor did not find such evidence in real time and make a visual inspection of the agent's activities, or locate such deviant records after the fact by a search process noted above, she could substantiate the ACD reports by checking a record maintained by the agent of situations during which he or she was 'justifiably' off the phone. For example, it is not uncommon for a call centre agent to experience technical problems with his or her computer system. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, these appear to be especially common owing to the age of the hardware and software used.[134] When such technical problems occurred, the agent was expected to document the situation on a form called the 'log off recorder' ('A' in Figure 50) and have his or her supervisor or other management personnel initial the form to verify that the agent was unable to work due to technical problems ('B' in Figure 50). This form was also used to officially document times when the agent was assigned to perform special projects that took him or her off the phones – though this was not a common event at *DeliveryWorldwide*.

[134] That said, using old software sometimes proves serendipitous. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide* the computers were equipped with the Windows95 operating system. At the time of fieldwork, this version of the computer operating system had already been superseded by four newer versions – it was very obsolete! However, on an occasion where an Internet computer virus was infecting and disabling newer computers used at other *DeliveryWorldwide* call centres, the Windows95 computers turned out to be immune from this particular virus. Consequently, while other *DeliveryWorldwide* call centres were variously crippled until the computer virus was eradicated, the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre at which fieldwork for this project was conducted was able to continue working – much to the pleasure of the manager responsible for delaying the installation of updated software and hardware!

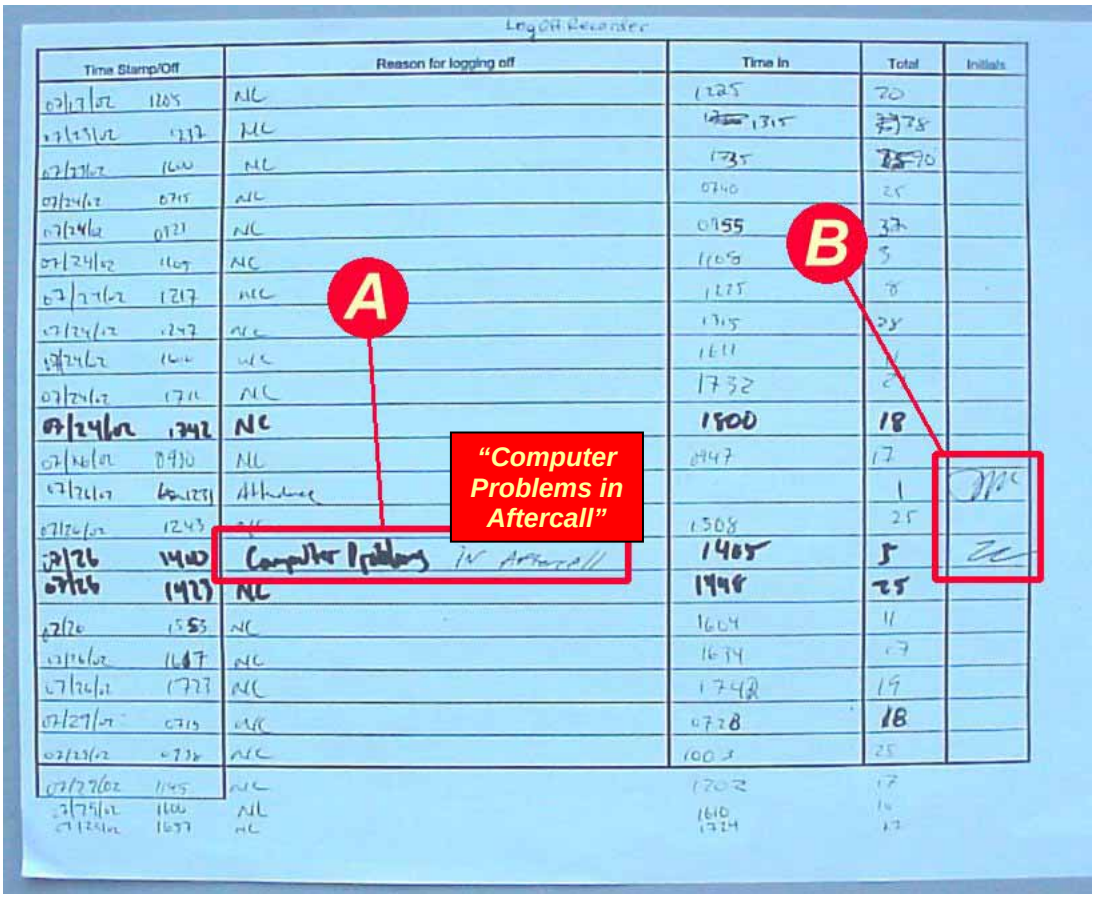


Figure 50. Log Off Recorder at *DeliveryWorldwide*

This log off recorder was also used to document any periods when the agent was receiving training, incremental evaluations or coaching from a team lead or management personnel, or any other time circumstances outside the agent's control could be determined to cause one to be temporarily offline during his or her assigned shift. As suggested by Peg's anxiety over continuous surveillance and not being able to justify or even explain how she was found to be in 'OTHER' mode above, agents were seen to be very quick to fill in a blank on the log off recorder whenever interrupted by a team lead, management or a technical problem. In effect, even though the worker could use it to document organisationally-accepted reasons for not being logged in or otherwise able to work, through the use of the log off recorder the agent is participating in another means of inscribing oneself into the organisation's

gaze – participatory surveillance (Poster 1990) – and thus disciplining one's self according to the abstracted way the organisation 'sees' the workers. In effect, when one is 'out of' the ACD's gaze, the worker is responsible for inscribing one's self into another form. The result is that agents are expected to actively maintain surveillance records of themselves at all times.

Another way this is made possible is seen in the 'online adjustment' form at *BigTech*. The 'online adjustment' form is a software program with a function similar to the 'log off recorder' at *DeliveryWorldwide*. Whenever an agent is assigned to special tasks that were not reflected on his or her planned schedule, experiences technical problems impeding work, has to take lunch later than scheduled (for example, if the agent was on a call during his or her scheduled lunch), or has to leave the building for personal reasons, the agent is expected to make an entry in the 'online adjustment' form to document the amendment to his or her schedule. Rhia, a supervisor at *BigTech* told that the database produced by the agent's entries in the 'online adjustment' database were used to audit the agent's work time in order to determine that he or she was 'putting in' the required number of hours in each assigned task. If the database reflects a habitual breach between assigned schedule and the agent's 'adjusted' schedule, it could be used to document an inability to manage one's own time, a breach of one's responsibility as an employee, and one of the categories included on the agent's yearly evaluation.

Toward the end of fieldwork at *BigTech*, when the organisation was aggressively furloughing domestic agents in favour of increasing the use of outsourced call centres in Canada and India, the 'online adjustment' form began to be used for another purpose. The number of online adjustments – regardless of the reason – made by each agent were tallied and a normalising judgement made. Agents

who were found to make a low number of online adjustments were viewed more favourably than those who made many online adjustments. This demonstrates the very 'liquid' nature of disciplinary power made possible by the abstracted form of data collected in the call centre. Because the data is decontextualised and abstracted into simple form, it is amenable to recombination using the rules of mathematics, accounting and auditing (McSweeney 1994; Miller, P. 1994; Power 1994; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996) and can be manipulated by those techniques such that unique results are produced! Abstracted data, combined with the fact that hierarchical observations and normalising judgements can be simply gestured into being along with the minute to minute whims of an organisation, allow the organisation to reorganise data to manufacture new subjectivities whenever they become relevant. In this example, the agent who makes 'more than the normal quantity' of online adjustments is rendered into a less-than-desirable employee – even though he or she is following the directions of the organisation in producing the online adjustment data in the first place!

This manifests another unique feature of TMTL – since abstracted data is so prevalent in the workplace, and since that data can be recombined into any hierarchical observation and normalising judgement, thus the production of multiple 'truths' about individuals, it is possible for organisations to produce unique and ad hoc subjectivities that literally manufacture proof and evidence of whatever they might desire to produce. They literally have the *power* to manufacture reality and truth in any configuration desired (Foucault 1983; Haraway 2004a, p. 226; Townley 1994, pp. 139-140). This draws one back to Foucault's notion of power as a *productive* force, rather than an essentially repressive force:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1995, p. 194)

...and one the subject is *obliged* to accept as true:

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault 1983, p. 212)

These possibilities occur in unique form in the disciplinary and data-saturated site of TMTL. I will revisit the implications of this in the following chapters and again in Part 4 of this report.

In addition to the ACD's operation of surveillance and inscription, and the participatory surveillance practices noted above, aspects of the call centre agents' work are made visible through the archive of records produced through his or her data entry and data processing of details specific to the accomplishment of service as it is defined by the call centre. For example, at *BigTech*, agents provide technical support to customers whose computer equipment is malfunctioning or in need of repair. While it is of obvious importance for an agent to be able to provide solutions and perhaps resolution of the customer's issues while on the phone, it is also of primary economic interest to the company. The increasingly competitive marketplace for computer technology has had the effect of forcing vendors to drop their prices such that each unit sold produces only a small amount of profit. If a customer calls and occupies a call centre agent for only a few minutes in search of a solution, the profit generated by that sale may be lost, and in fact the company may lose money on the sale. If no solution or inaccurate advice is provided by an agent on this call, and the customer calls again, the economic situation only worsens for the company. For

that reason, agents are directed to do everything possible to accomplish a ‘remote resolve’ and a ‘first time fix’.

A ‘remote resolve’ occurs when the call centre agent can direct the customer to repair problems presented by the customer, or if any problems that occur can be traced to other computer equipment to which it is connected. Confirming the latter possibility can be a very effective way of objectively declaring that there is, in fact, no technical problem with the *BigTech* equipment owned by the customer and, in turn, of keeping calls very short and inexpensive for the company. For that reason, confirming ‘product functionality’ is supposed to be the first step an agent takes. In fact, *BigTech* engineers its equipment so that the call centre agent can direct the customer to perform a relatively simple operation to test ‘product functionality’. If, through this test, an agent can determine that there is no technical problem with the equipment, he or she will tick a box on the software used to document calls in order to confirm that this caller’s issue has been resolved and in fact no problem actually existed in the first place.

If, however, the equipment does display legitimate malfunctioning, the agent begins a process of troubleshooting the equipment using prepared diagnostic tests or his or her personal experience with the equipment. At the completion of the call, if the problem was resolved, a textual description of the issue, steps taken to resolve it and an eventual tick to document the problem has been resolved is entered into a database that archives all calls worked by all agents in the call centre.

If the problem is not resolved and the customer calls back, the agent receiving the second call can retrieve the records of previous agents’ work on this customer’s technical problems, and use them in trying to solve the problem. As above, this agent

will add descriptive data to the database to further document troubleshooting steps taken, solutions offered, and if appropriate, a tick to declare the problem is resolved.

The work of all agents in the call centre thus becomes auditable through a process of reviewing the database records produced in the course of working the call. The technical accuracy of troubleshooting steps taken and solutions offered can be determined in this way. In addition, agents producing verifiable evidence that they have solved a given issue will be credited with a 'remote resolve' and those agents who did not solve the problem will not be so credited. In this way, a percentage of all 'remote resolve'/calls worked can be generated and compared with a statutory expectation for agent work. Agents failing to meet or exceed the expected percentage of 'remote resolutions' will suffer from low ratings on 'technical knowledge' and 'problem solving' components on their met/not-met ratings.

Audits of data entry and data processing done by agents at *DeliveryWorldwide*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* were also performed, and influenced agents' evaluations on analogous ratings of technical skill and knowledge. Other evaluations of the accuracy and/or quality of agent work can be similarly determined through an audit of database records. More evidence that the 'truth' about agents, as framed by the manufactured reality of the organisation, is thus produced.

As above, a substantial amount of effort by certain personnel at *BigTech* is directed at developing software tools that automatically audit the terabytes[135] of data generated by agents through their work. In fact, Rhia, a supervisor at *BigTech* told, with some frustration, that it is for all practical purposes an impossible task to evaluate agents or even assess the success of the call centre without the abstracted

[135] A unit of computer data equal to about one million megabytes.

data and means for reconstructing that data – what she saw as an undesirable detachment from the workers.

> I'd rather be able to oversee my agents [i.e., agents assigned to her supervision] personally. I think they respond better if they know I'm there and I'm interested in what they're doing and what their problems are... But I've got so much to do that the best I can do is look at these reports when I try to figure out who's doing what... But all I'm doing is looking at what amounts to production statistics – I know that's what the company cares about but it seems odd for us to consider customer service in that way. It's gotten to the point that we can't really pay attention to anything but what the computer lets the agents do and [has been programmed] to [let us see].

These cases at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech* also illustrate how the agents themselves are implicated in the self-surveillance, abstraction and inscription of data that can then be analysed by other computer software (Cameron 2000; Deetz 1998; Poster 1990). In effect, not only does the physical architecture enclose and partition, and make the subject visible to a certain gaze, so does the virtual architecture instantiated by the ACD and other computer systems and paperwork make the workers subject to a particular form of observation, abstracted inscription (thus deconstruction into bits of data) and subsequent reconstruction into new subjects that can be conveniently evaluated in terms of rules, statutes and policies.

In fact, it appears that call centres rely so heavily upon such technology-mediated deconstruction and reconstruction that the official generation of subjectivity cannot occur without it! For example, for several months during fieldwork at *MHealth*, the ACD, and in fact the entire phone system, was performing so erratically that the data it produced was effectively ignored by all parties associated with the call centre. Efforts to compile and evaluate data collected by hand – even when this work was delegated to agents themselves – produced such a mass of data that supervisors resisted 'manually' analysing it in their daily work. In effect, the discourse of subjectivity production in call centres is so imbricated with

technology that subjects and subjectivity do not occur independent of the whole apparatus of technology-mediated observation, abstracted inscription and reconstruction (Townley 1994, p. 12)![136]

i. Power/Knowledge Produced from Observations, Abstracted Inscriptions & Examinations

The use of time clocks, password logins to phone systems and computer databases, electronic intercepting of calls and ordering of them into queues for dispensing to agents, the ordering of screens within the databases agents are expected to use in the course of the work, and so on, have an obvious impact on the minute to minute actions of a call centre agent. As shown above, these various systems also have another effect – they facilitate the ongoing observation, abstraction and inscription of the actions of workers into incessantly growing databases. These databases, in turn, are reconstructed into tables, lists and charts that manifest the 'service object' or the subject in TMTL.

Similarly, the process of accomplishing a quality evaluation, met/not-met or chart review imposes a template against which an agent's work is measured. The templates used may differ across organisations but their product is similar – a number that signifies the quality of an agent's work, indeed of the agent himself or herself! Because the same template is used each time the agent is evaluated, quality scores are assumed comparable, and the 'normal' quality of an individual agent can be determined by a simple arithmetic operation using scores of several consecutive

[136] See also the work of Ian Hacking for related observations about scientific or technological discourses and the production of subjectivity (Hacking 1982; 1986a, p. 222).

evaluations, compared with other agents and against an organisational statute defining what the organisation considers to be minimally acceptable.

Other facets of the agent's work are also rendered amenable to observation, purification and inscription. 'Audits' conducted on an agent's use of the ACD make it possible for management to determine if the worker is at the right place at the right time, ready to work, at any time of the day. Similar inspections of the details of data entry and data processing become pliable to inspection and comparison to some statutory norm put in place by the company.

All of these things share a commonality. Examinations are made possible by observations, purifications and inscriptions facilitated by the placement of call centre agents within a technology-mediated apparatus – an apparatus that requires one to be connected and thus exposed in particular ways to 'observation' by computer systems, phone taps and the like, and which also requires one to expose oneself by participation in the action of inscribing data into those computer and phone systems. These systems are designed to both facilitate the work as the organisation wants it to be done and to render the worker open to examination at the same time.

In the call centre, these tables, lists are charts are ever present. Stats reports are printed and displayed daily at *DeliveryWorldwide*. At *MHealth* they are inscribed by agents onto the 'dashboard' on a daily basis. At *BigTech*, the stats are posted monthly and are commonly a subject of interest and discussion for agents – at least for a few days after they are posted. It is interesting to note that at the commencement of fieldwork at *BigTech*, these reports were posted with employee numbers instead of employee names (as shown in Figure 16). Flin, a six-year veteran in the *BigTech* call centre, told that when only employee numbers were used, agents quickly suspected the identity of particular individuals who always exhibited below

standard statistics. Feeling very frustrated by particular individuals who they thought were hurting the average statistics of their work team, agents pressured management until they began posting the stats complete with the actual names of workers. Flin said that the performance of those individuals quickly changed once their identity was visible to all.

As Foucault notes on the panopticon, it does not matter who operates the panoptic apparatus, it does not matter who is watching, for its power to effect changes in those observed is anonymous and distributed:

> The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a marvellous machine, which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power... The efficiency of power ... [has] ... passed over to the other side – to the side of its application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal, and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance. (Foucault 1995, pp. 202-203)

At *MedAdvise* the reports are updated daily but not posted publicly. Instead, they are deposited in personnel files that double as mailboxes for staff, located in a commonly accessible file cabinet. It is unusual for nurses to inspect each other's statistics reports, and the reports are rarely posted or discussed publicly. Adding more weight to Foucault's remarks above, only a few nurses at *MedAdvise* exhibit any urgency to manufacture 'good stats'. Graf, a seven year veteran in the *MedAdvise* call centre, laments the practices of some other clinical agents who she describes as being more interested in what they can extract from the job, rather than what they are expected to put into it. She readily names nurses who, she is quick to point out, are good nurses, but who "don't work well without supervision." Having experience in managing nursing staff in other venues and not interested in taking on

that role again, Graf tells that it is not her place to tell her colleagues how to do their work. That is, it appears that, in the absence of public knowledge of the productivity stats of other clinical staff, or of having one's own stats become the attention of others, 'productivity' varies. This reflects the power immanent in such a panoptic relation between individuals, an organisationally-defined 'truth' about them and their actions.

Agents and management at each organisation use these data differently. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, all agents are sensitive to the implications immanent in the stats display and the individualising commentary of their team leader (displayed in Figure 1), but exhibit their concern in different ways. For example, Helen, a novice and part time agent who is a second-income earner in her household and pregnant with her second child, tells that she asks her team leader to print out changes in the company handbook and customer service policies so that she can read them at home.

> I'd rather take them home and learn them, rather than putting myself into *not ready* [mode] to read them when I'm at my desk, or to read them on my lunch. That way, I can focus on my talk time when I'm here and show that I take a lot of calls in my shift... I need this job.

Contrast this with Gray, a six year veteran at *DeliveryWorldwide*, whose facility with the tools and rules of the job is admired by everyone, who tells:

> I don't worry about my stats that much. I'm mostly concerned with answering the customer's questions and solving their problems. Sometimes I have to take ten minutes with a customer to do that. Most of the time it goes a lot faster and when it's all averaged out on the stats, I'm usually not too far away from what [the company] wants... [Having said that,] if yesterday's stats were way off, I might put more effort into decreasing talk time for the rest of the week.

Gray exposes knowledge of the ACD's gaze that Helen appears not to have. Because many of the statistics produced by the ACD are actually *averages*, every call does not have to be worked in two minutes or less. He can vary effort depending on the context of the call and what he knows his stats were yesterday and the day

before, etc. While both react differently to the rows and columns of data on the stats reports, both Helen and Gary are sharing a common perspective – they demonstrate their orientation to *how they look* in the data, and alter different aspects of their day to day practice to produce the statistical representation of their self in the data. They are using the stats as a metaphorical screen upon which they are shadowboxing and varying their subsequent moves/work tactics in reaction to how yesterday's ACD report – their 'shadowboxing screen' – displays the organisation's construction of them, back to themselves.

This concept of 'shadowboxing with data' manifests another power immanent in the panoptic technologies in the workplace, and activated in the way workers are enclosed, partitioned, observed, inscribed and deconstructed, and then reconstructed statistically. When the worker is provided with regular feedback in a particular way, the worker is expected to be able to 'see oneself in the data' and to actively change oneself to produce the appearances the organisation wants.

This was made explicitly known in a daily staff briefing at *MHealth*, when Kam, the call centre supervisor, pointed at the printout of yesterday's statistics (which documented failure to meet any of the organisational expectations) and implored:

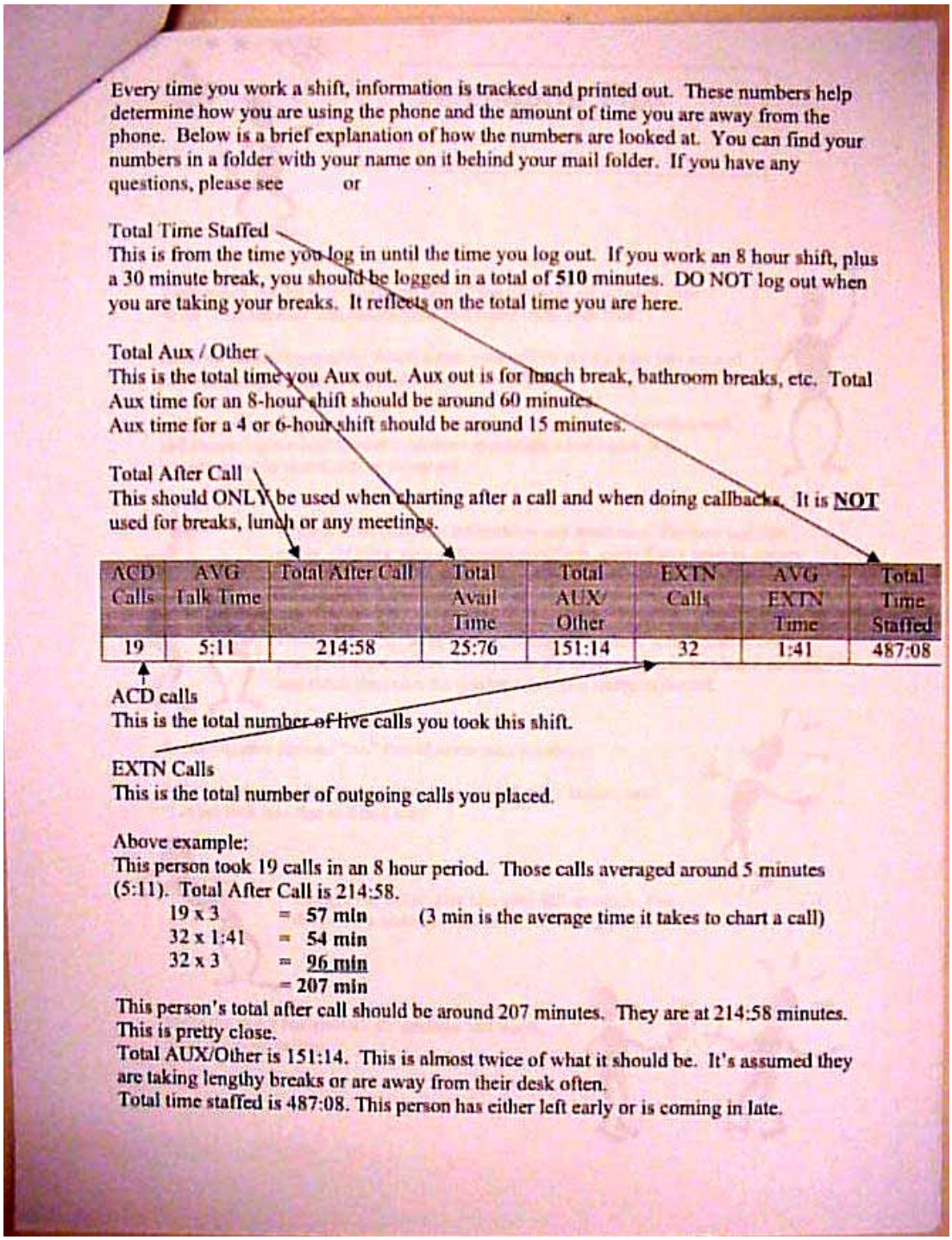
> You have to be able to *see yourself in the data*... This [stabbing the page with her finger] is how we see you and this [continuing the stabbing gesture] is how you should be seeing yourselves. Each of you know better than I do what's going on minute by minute and if you're aware of how we're seeing you, you can adapt to the current conditions in order to make sure the stats come out right!

At *MedAdvise*, Bonnie, an administrator overseeing the non-clinical staff, but who had some administrative duties linked to the clinical staff in the call centre, noted:

> [The nurses] never meet the stats [the expectations set forth by the hospital] ... The nurses are paying attention to other things as they work a call when they could *also* be improving the speed with which they do data entry and search through the [expert system] ... I mean, they *have to be* focused on the patient and on making accurate charts [the product of data entry], but there are ways to do it faster.

Both Kam and Bonnie are similarly orienting to the way the labour process is divided into components, and how each component can be 'refined' or accelerated by performing it differently, thus producing different statistical representations of the worker. Not only that, they make an allusion that the worker is responsible for ensuring this refinement is done in the accomplishment of work.

This is visible at *MedAdvise*, where a set of information sheets is provided to the clinical staff to (a) define the ACD printouts (Figure 18), (b) assist them in interpreting the printouts and (c) orient to them in day to day practice (Figure 51). This set of information sheets also orients to the statistical production of productivity in the call centre and, as Sheila's notes on her team's stats report shows (Figure 1), isolates which of the reported statistics are most important to the organisation and how stats are interpreted by the organisation. As Kam indicates above at *MHealth*, this is implicitly an instruction to workers for how they should discipline themselves to be in compliance with organisational measures of productivity.



Every time you work a shift, information is tracked and printed out. These numbers help determine how you are using the phone and the amount of time you are away from the phone. Below is a brief explanation of how the numbers are looked at. You can find your numbers in a folder with your name on it behind your mail folder. If you have any questions, please see or .

Total Time Staffed
This is from the time you log in until the time you log out. If you work an 8 hour shift, plus a 30 minute break, you should be logged in a total of **510** minutes. DO NOT log out when you are taking your breaks. It reflects on the total time you are here.

Total Aux / Other
This is the total time you Aux out. Aux out is for lunch break, bathroom breaks, etc. Total Aux time for an 8-hour shift should be around 60 minutes.
Aux time for a 4 or 6-hour shift should be around 15 minutes.

Total After Call
This should ONLY be used when charting after a call and when doing callbacks. It is **NOT** used for breaks, lunch or any meetings.

ACD Calls	AVG Talk Time	Total After Call	Total Avail Time	Total AUX/ Other	EXTN Calls	AVG EXTN Time	Total Time Staffed
19	5:11	214:58	25:76	151:14	32	1:41	487:08

ACD calls
This is the total number of live calls you took this shift.

EXTN Calls
This is the total number of outgoing calls you placed.

Above example:
This person took 19 calls in an 8 hour period. Those calls averaged around 5 minutes (5:11). Total After Call is 214:58.

19 x 3 = **57 min** (3 min is the average time it takes to chart a call)
32 x 1:41 = **54 min**
32 x 3 = **96 min**
= **207 min**

This person's total after call should be around 207 minutes. They are at 214:58 minutes. This is pretty close.
Total AUX/Other is 151:14. This is almost twice of what it should be. It's assumed they are taking lengthy breaks or are away from their desk often.
Total time staffed is 487:08. This person has either left early or is coming in late.

Figure 51. Definitions of Stats Provided to Nurses at *MedAdvise*

As with the physical link between the agent, his or her cubicle and the telephone system, the physical distribution of agents to cubicle spaces makes it possible for agents to be distributed in a virtual space both produced and overseen by

the ACD.[137] It is also apparent that the punch clock and ACD are means to automatically, continuously and very economically produce written records of each subject's attendance and specific aspects of activity in the TMTL workplace. As such, they are technologies that produce Knowledge and instantiate power and resources to produce subjectivity, and with which workers and management exert force to discipline workers' activities in space (the call centre enclosure, the worker's assigned cubicle) and time.

ii. Assembling Heterogeneous Data into the Subject

As described above, the call centres participating in this project collect a set of heterogeneous data on the activity of individual agents. This data includes that automatically stripped from the worker's activity by electronic 'observation', purification and reconstruction into the familiar tables and lists produced in examinations. Data also includes subjective evaluations of quality that are produced in combination with a pre-specified form, and audits of data entry accomplished by agents as they use computer databases that constrain the sequence and format of the data so entered. It also includes solicited and unsolicited statements of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

[137] One of the curious things about TMTL is that workers do not have to occupy a common enclosure in order for this partitioning and disciplining of bodies in space and time to occur. Internetworked computer systems allow an organisation to 'enclose' individuals in a virtual space instantiated by their common links to a main computer system. With most if not all of the information and data used by workers housed in computer databases (which are more and more frequently located on servers 'somewhere else' and accessed by the workers through Internet or intranet connections) and the work itself 'pushed' to them and accepted from them through telecommunications and computer networking links, it is increasingly possible to apprehend the workers when they are not physically enclosed in the same building. That said, all the call centres participating in this study enclose their employees in a single building where line-of-sight surveillance and 'management by walking around' can be accomplished.

These data are all abstracted through the operation of various surveillance apparatuses as described above and represented as numbers. In some cases these numbers are the product of sophisticated statistics and in other cases they are simple tallies. Nonetheless, all of these data are stripped from their original context in such a way that they are made comparable. The orientation of a call centre agent to time is represented as marks signifying on-time or late arrival at the workplace. No matter what were the events leading up to the late arrival, being late is reduced to a simple mark that can be tallied with other marks. Similarly, the agent's 'productivity' in the call centre is the result of continuous observation of the worker's interaction with a phone system and computer, and the decomposing of these observations into quantities of service work, the average time required per service work event, and the percentage of time the worker was ready to conduct service work. The agent's compliance with organisational standards of detail in the conduct of service work is similarly reduced to a score through the application of a rubric or computer software that produce an 'objective' backdrop mapping the organisation's prototype of ideal service work; the measured 'distance' between the worker's activity and the ideal represented by the manufactured reality and its rubric is what makes the score. The results are varying types of 'quality' in an agent's work. In the first case above quality is represented such that each agent becomes comparable to every other agent. In the latter, quality is represented such that it is specific to the detailed conduct of one agent alone.

These are indeed heterogeneous data. They share a common form, however. They are all numbers produced through a process of objective abstraction within a manufactured environment, a manufactured reality. While the myriad contexts and conditions and occasional technological glitches that occur in the call centre make

comparisons problematic for those concerned with such things, transmogrifying such rich varieties into numbers does away with such problems. Through the substantial amount of abstraction, inscription and reconstruction described above, lived experience of agents is converted into a form that is pliable to combination, calculation and comparison, and produces particular types of organisational subjectivities that strip the individual's experience from one's official truth as a self (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1974'; 1984, 1990a; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996, 2001).

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, the supervisor is the individual responsible for just this task – combining all of these data into an evaluation of each agent. This task is scheduled for accomplishment every six months, based on the date an agent was hired. Similar practices are performed by supervisors and management at each of the call centres participating in this project. However, to illustrate I will focus on the process at *DeliveryWorldwide* through which the many different data collected over time and in many different ways, are combined to produce an evaluation of an agent.

To begin, the supervisor retrieves the agent's personnel folder and begins to sort out all of the various evidences collected in the previous six month span through the means noted above. It is already the case that the supervisor has abstracted actual events from their context. In this folder the supervisor finds an unordered mass of hand scratched notes, stapled tallies of 'occurrences', etc. These data are inscribed again on a chart that itself exhibits the skeleton of the organisation's subjectification of a call centre agent (Figure 52).

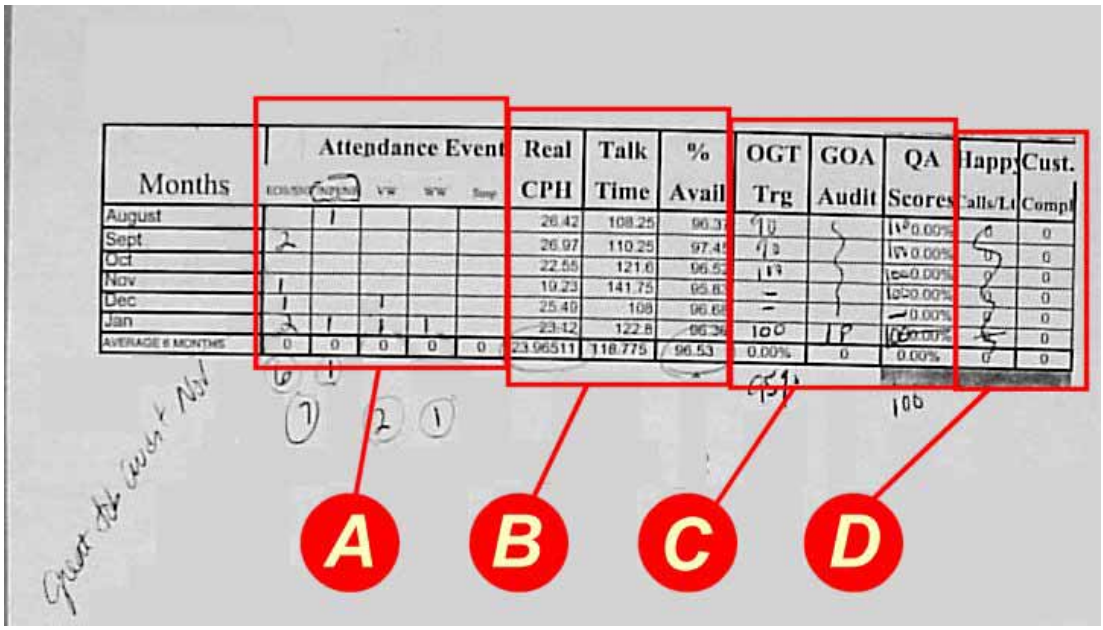


Figure 52. Making of the Subject at *DeliveryWorldwide*

As documented above, the number of times an agent punched in late is already inscribed here, at “A” in Figure 52 (see also Figure 13). The calls per hour, average talk time and percentage of time the worker was available are extracted from the ACD archive of the agent’s work for each of the last six months. This data was automatically produced by the ACD and need only be looked up on a report generated from the mass of data it collects and stores and tallied into a grand average for each value (“B” in Figure 52). Scores from any ‘General Office Audit’ questions received, and from paper-pencil tests over company policy are copied from spreadsheets filled in when these data become available through the last six months, and grand averages are computed (“C” in Figure 52). Finally, any happy caller or unhappy customer calls or letters are tallied (“D” in Figure 52). The result is a set of raw data from which the remainder of the evaluation is to be accomplished.

Additionally, the supervisor has maintained a tally of any errors the agent has made in the production or handling of ‘messages’ or other textual data in the course

of his or her work. While this tally is not included in the matrix reflected in Figure 52, it is subjectively incorporated into the supervisor's rating of the agent in the process that follows.

Using the data newly inscribed on this table and other data (as indicated above) the supervisor opens a software program called "Performance Appraiser" (Figure 53). This is a report-generation program that allows the supervisor to rate the agent on seven different categories of data: (a) time management, (b) job knowledge, (c) quantity, (d) quality, (e) communication skills, (f) professionalism and (g) responsible (sic).

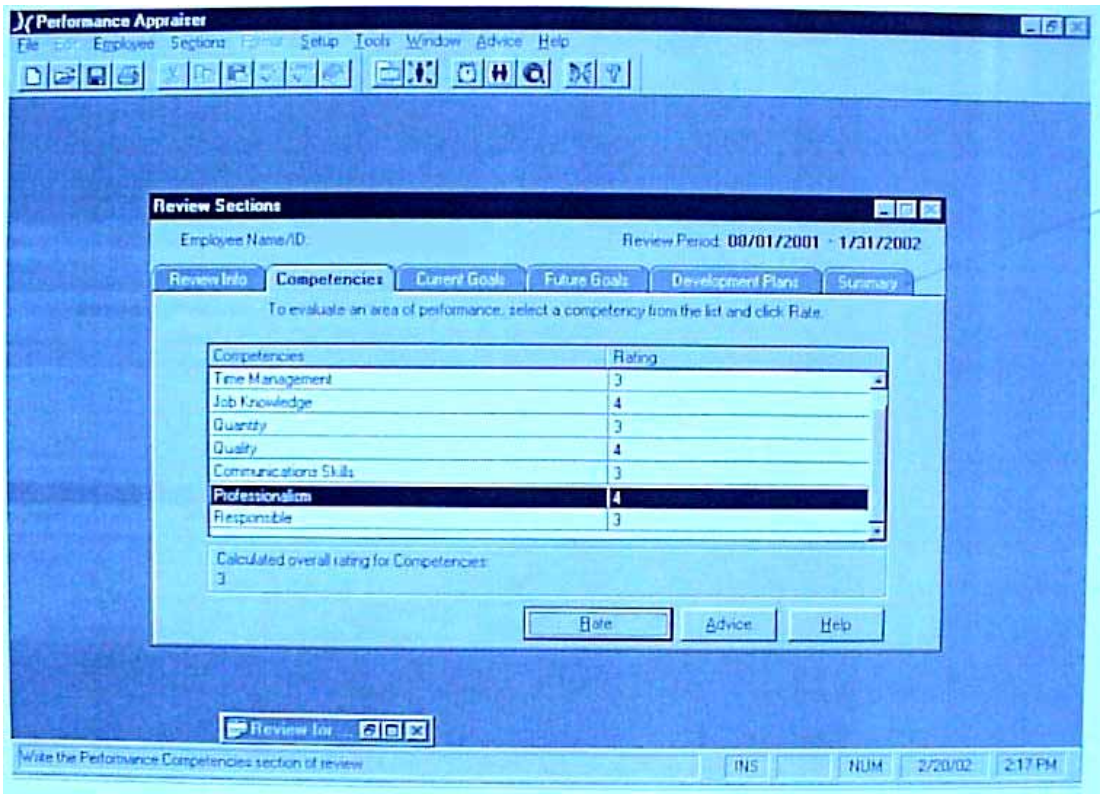


Figure 53. The 'Performance Appraiser'[138]

[138] This image is poor because it is taken from a printed and then photocopied screenshot of the software.

The supervisor then 'opens' each of these categories by double-clicking the list item in software interface. A new screen opens in which the agent can be rated on that category (Figure 54). As shown in Figure 54, the 'time management' category – nominally associated with an agent's compliance with schedules, punching in and out on time and accruing an 'acceptable' percentage of available time in the ACD – actually contains six subcategories, none of which directly relates to only the punch clock and use of the ACD. Additionally, an agent is not necessarily aware of these components of each category, and in fact they are obscured from the agent's view by the process in which they are applied.

The supervisor can produce a rating for each item shown in Figure 54 by clicking and 'dragging' the dark horizontal bar to the right of the list item ("A" in Figure 54). In so doing, the supervisor can produce a low-to-high (0 to 5) rating of the agent on that item. The supervisor's rating is based on her assessment based on the objective data provided by the ACD and time clock and her experience with that agent over the past six month period. In addition, the software is programmed to insert pre-written text to support the low-to-high ratings 'dragged' by the supervisor ("B" in Figure 54). The supervisor can edit the text automatically provided by the software as she sees fit. The software has produced an integer rating of the rating so produced ("C" in Figure 54).[139]

[139] The integer rating is a 'rounded down' average of all the ratings 'dragged' by the supervisor. In this case, sum of the ratings (4 + 4 + 4 + 3 + 0 + 4 = 19) is reduced to an average (19 / 5 = 3.8) and then rounded down to an integer (3).

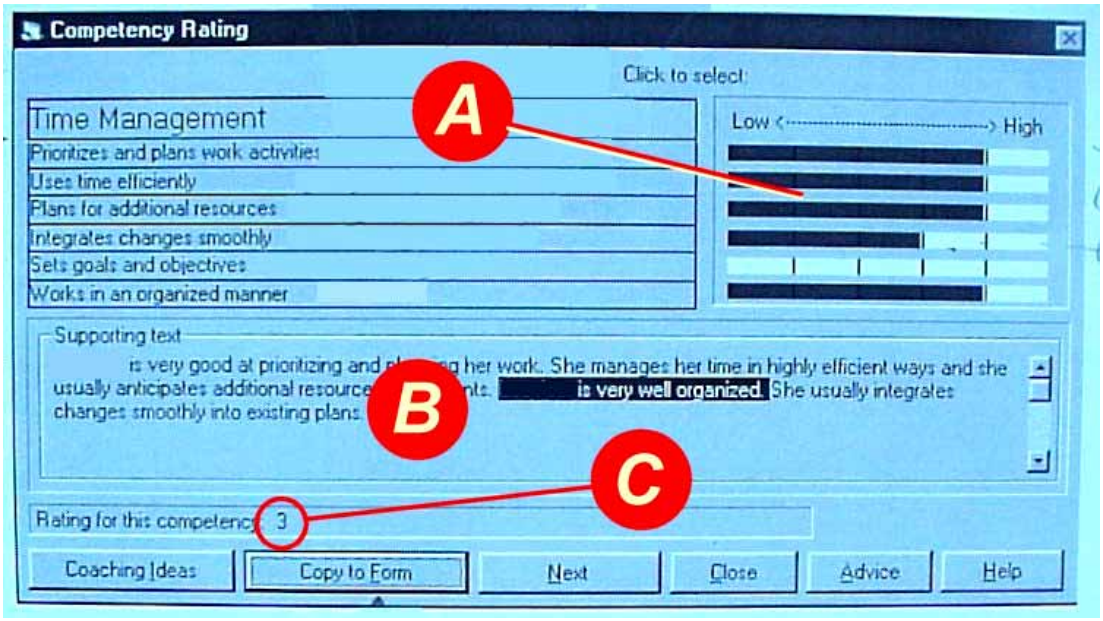
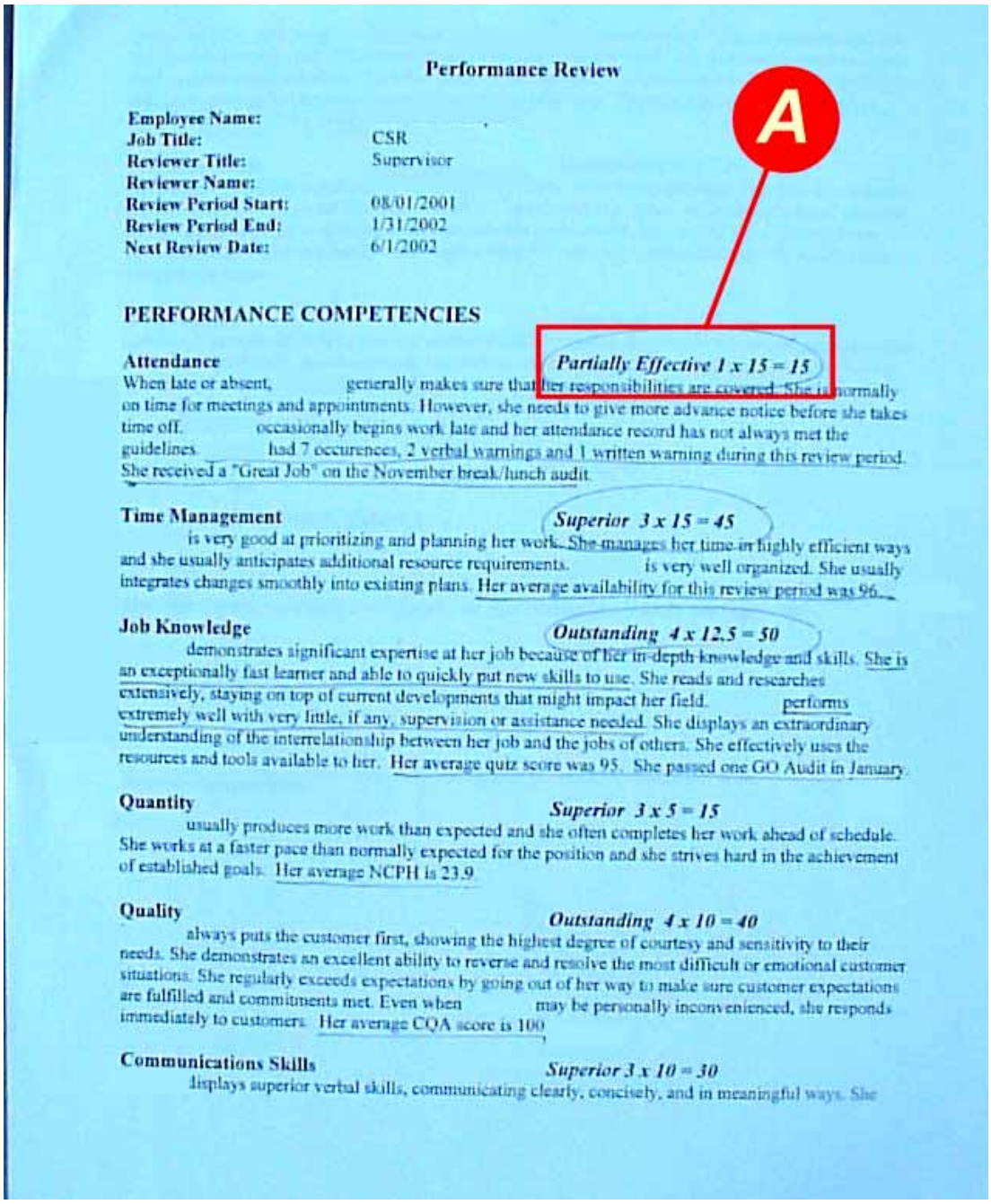


Figure 54. Making Ratings in “Performance Appraiser” Software

Each of the seven rating categories is produced similarly, with the supervisor drawing upon the data abstracted into the table shown in Figure 52 and her professional judgement. The result of this process is a report in which individual numeric ratings and supporting text are printed (Figure 55). That is, while the supervisor is disciplined by the functionality built into the software, she is also afforded with the ability to apply her judgement in several areas. Note, however, that once such judgement is rendered, it is immediately ‘covered over’ or obscured through the abstraction of that judgement into a decontextualised number – no trace of the judgement remains. Such is the sort of influence that can be rendered into the production of a discourse that, however, goes unnoticed at any other time than its moment of insertion. While space for the insertion of this force is built into the system, many other ‘illegitimate’ opportunities for them to be inserted into the discourse exist and will be a primary subject of Part 3 and revisited in Part 4 of this report.

In this agent evaluation, note also that each numeric rating has been multiplied by a ‘weighting factor’ (“A” in Figure 55). While weighting factors can be adjusted by the supervisor for each agent in order to emphasise particular strengths or weaknesses of the agent as the supervisor sees fit, it was the case that weighting factors were applied consistently across all agents in the call centre. Maintaining this consistency had the additional effect of producing scores that were comparable from agent to agent – permitting the production of another hierarchical observation and normalising judgement of agents.



Performance Review

Employee Name:
Job Title: CSR
Reviewer Title: Supervisor
Reviewer Name:
Review Period Start: 08/01/2001
Review Period End: 1/31/2002
Next Review Date: 6/1/2002

A

PERFORMANCE COMPETENCIES

Attendance *Partially Effective 1 x 15 = 15*
When late or absent, generally makes sure that her responsibilities are covered. She is normally on time for meetings and appointments. However, she needs to give more advance notice before she takes time off. occasionally begins work late and her attendance record has not always met the guidelines. had 7 occurences, 2 verbal warnings and 1 written warning during this review period. She received a "Great Job" on the November break/lunch audit.

Time Management *Superior 3 x 15 = 45*
is very good at prioritizing and planning her work. She manages her time in highly efficient ways and she usually anticipates additional resource requirements. is very well organized. She usually integrates changes smoothly into existing plans. Her average availability for this review period was 96.

Job Knowledge *Outstanding 4 x 12.5 = 50*
demonstrates significant expertise at her job because of her in-depth knowledge and skills. She is an exceptionally fast learner and able to quickly put new skills to use. She reads and researches extensively, staying on top of current developments that might impact her field. performs extremely well with very little, if any, supervision or assistance needed. She displays an extraordinary understanding of the interrelationship between her job and the jobs of others. She effectively uses the resources and tools available to her. Her average quiz score was 95. She passed one GO Audit in January.

Quantity *Superior 3 x 5 = 15*
usually produces more work than expected and she often completes her work ahead of schedule. She works at a faster pace than normally expected for the position and she strives hard in the achievement of established goals. Her average NCPH is 23.9.

Quality *Outstanding 4 x 10 = 40*
always puts the customer first, showing the highest degree of courtesy and sensitivity to their needs. She demonstrates an excellent ability to reverse and resolve the most difficult or emotional customer situations. She regularly exceeds expectations by going out of her way to make sure customer expectations are fulfilled and commitments met. Even when may be personally inconvenienced, she responds immediately to customers. Her average CQA score is 100.

Communications Skills *Superior 3 x 10 = 30*
displays superior verbal skills, communicating clearly, concisely, and in meaningful ways. She

Figure 55. The Final Agent Evaluation at *DeliveryWorldwide*

This process of producing a final evaluation of the agent is disciplined by techniques for observing, abstracting and inscribing data and interpretations as described above, but these are further dissolved in another technology-mediated process that blends these data with a substantial amount of the supervisor's personal judgement.

Additionally, while agents are shown their statistical ACD data daily and quality ratings one or more times a month, and are expected to 'see themselves in the data', the production of the final subject at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre reflects an apparatus in which the organisation reserves for its own use particular ways of deconstructing (dividing, seeing, abstracting, inscribing) and reconstructing the subject that blends technical procedure with a degree of judgemental authority reminiscent of the sovereign, who in these examples is instantiated by the power of management to interpret data as they see fit. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, it is the case that the organisation provides a focus for the use of data and for the supervisor's judgement, and in so doing blends disciplinary forms of subjectification with elements of the sovereign's/management's judgement, albeit somewhat disciplined by the rationality of business and the labour process.

At *BigTech*, it is similarly the case that agents are regularly shown their 'stats' in the form of weekly or monthly postings. These postings are not ceremoniously announced or passed from agent to agent as they are at *DeliveryWorldwide*. Instead, they are posted near the top of a cubicle wall in a common location near the cubicles of agents to whom they apply (Figure 56). Also similar to *DeliveryWorldwide*, ratings of the quality of *BigTech* agents are to occur monthly. The display of data from the ACD, as shown in Figure 56 is the most common feedback provided to agents on their work.

Figure 56. Location of Stat Sheets at *BigTech*

Their common appearance in the call centre is associated with the idea among agents that the organisation values them most highly. Sal, an agent with several years experience in the call centre, and an individual who has received several awards and promotions for his work, told that he was increasingly concerned about what he thought were poor stats on account of having been assigned extra tasks by his supervisor. This was exacerbated by learning that another agent, who had just been laid off, had relatively 'poor' stats.

That is, while ACD data are the most frequently received by agents, and from Sal's comments, the data they are most concerned about, yearly agent evaluations and the supervisor's accomplishment of these evaluations, actually involve more. Figure 57 shows the worksheet used by supervisors to rate agents at *BigTech*. The 'Work Characteristics' category includes those evaluations noted above –

productivity (ACD stats), quality (the 'met/not-met') and customer satisfaction survey ("A" in Figure 57). Two other categories, (a) Job Approach and (b) Job Skills are also to be ranked by the supervisor. Also similar to the agent evaluation at *DeliveryWorldwide*, each of the categories has a 'weighting factor' that multiplies its value to produce component scores ("B" in Figure 57). Five different ranking levels ("C" in Figure 57) are possible for each category. In the form shown in Figure 57 these levels are titled 'PRB1', 'PRB2', etc. PRB stands for 'pay ranking band' and reflects that this rating process was linked to salary increases or decreases in response to agent performance.

However, unlike *DeliveryWorldwide*, supervisors at *BigTech* can adjust these weighting factors depending upon their interpretation of higher management's emphases for the rating period. In so doing, the supervisors exhibit how the evaluation system contains 'space' in which they can encode their own personal judgements into the official parameters of evaluation, thus allowing them some authority over the evaluation itself. While, as alluded to above and below, this can be used in less pleasant ways, it is sometimes used in ways that are seen as beneficial. For example, Rhia, a supervisor at *BigTech*, told that she alters these weighting factors so that each agent's strong points are amplified. This has allowed her to produce a pool of agents who may not be independent stalwarts, but who, through Rhia's manipulation of the rating system, have statistics that document strength across the diversity of their skills. She has emphasised to her agents that this allows them the ability to appeal to team-mates when in need of that agent's particular strong points, thus instituting a tactic to facilitate team cohesion and interdependence, and also maintenance of what agents do well in the eyes of the organisation. In so doing, she has provided her agents with the ability to rely on each

other instead of having to be independent experts on every aspect of the job. As noted above, while Rhia appears to be manipulating the evaluation system (in allowable ways) to benefit the ratings of her agents, it is also the case that she is also activating power through which agents will actively seek out fellow agents to discipline their perspectives and activities.

It is a fact, however, that salary increases at *BigTech* were frozen prior to the commencement of fieldwork, and so no salary increases were awarded based upon the product of these evaluations. Toward the end of fieldwork at *BigTech*, these five 'pay bands' were replaced with four new categories (Table 3).

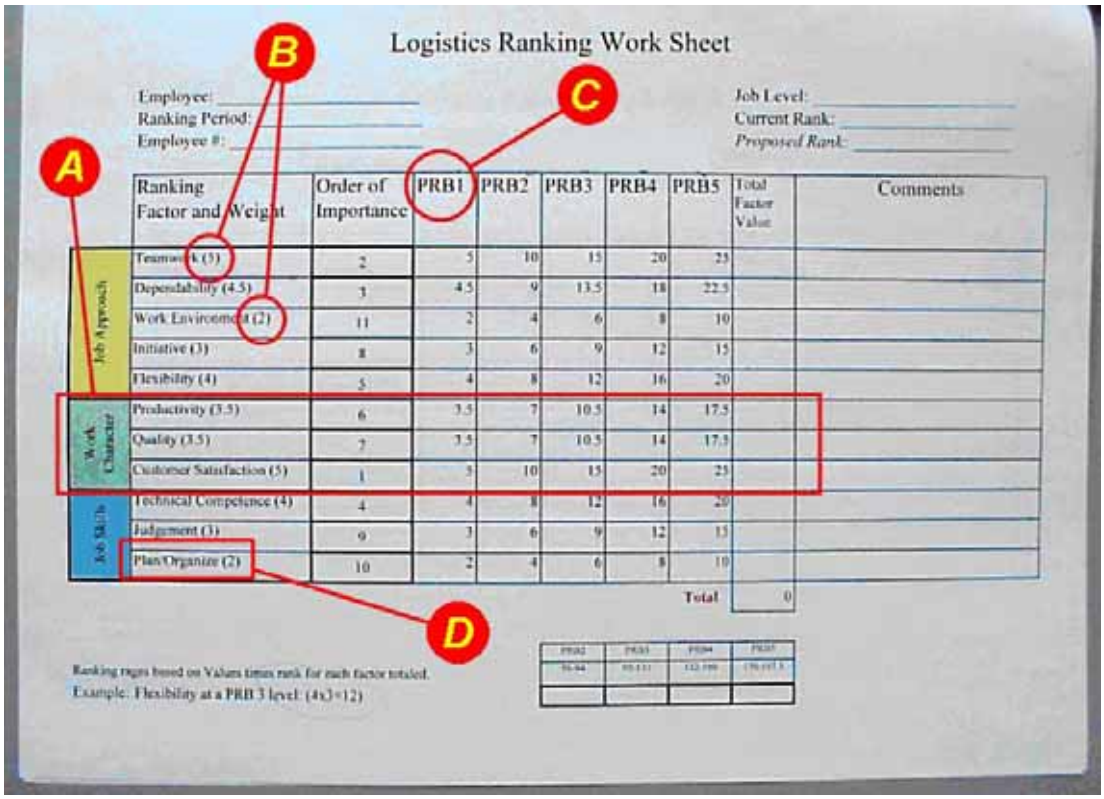


Figure 57. *BigTech* Agent Evaluation Template

Table 3. *BigTech* Agent Ranking Categories Replacing 'Pay Bands'

Ranking	Definition
I	Needs Improvement
M	Meets Expectations
E	Exceptional
S	Superior

While *BigTech* agents were aware of the 'Job Approach' and 'Job Skills' ranking factors, and of the change from 'pay bands' to nominal ranks, they received little or no explicit feedback from their supervisor on these items until a yearly evaluation was completed.

Knowledge of the general existence of these details, but with no explicit feedback on them, was associated with panoptic stress for some agents. Sal characterised it this way:

> [Through the statistics, management sees] everything you do, and you're wondering if you'll be seen as a good team member or a flexible employee or making good use of company time. Since I'm always afraid of being seen as *not* a good team member or an inflexible agent, I tend to do things so that I *will* be seen [to be a good team member and a flexible agent]. [For example], even when I take projects home I never put in for overtime pay. My supervisor tells me I should be putting in for overtime pay but I'm afraid that if I do, [the organisation] can claim that I'm not a very efficient worker.

In other words, Sal is reflecting the fear immanent in Foucault's description of the panopticon, where the inmate, not knowing if he is being watched or not always behaves as if he is activating the anonymous disciplinary force built into it (Foucault 1995). Additionally, as noted above, the definitions of various data used to inform decisions in this evaluation template had changed over time. While at one time the 'online adjustment' form (noted above) was used to audit the agent's accomplishment of the required hours in various tasks, the frequency of online

adjustments made by an agent became a factor in producing a normalising judgement of workers. Agents who documented few online adjustments were viewed more favourably than agents who documented many online adjustments. Agents who documented many online adjustments were subsequently viewed as having relatively low ‘Plan/Organization’ skills (‘D’ in Figure 57).

In using the ranking work sheet shown in Figure 57, supervisors independently rate and rank each of their agents following a table of definitions for each of the ranking categories. As described above in terms of the similar process at *DeliveryWorldwide,* the statistical measures of productivity and quality ratings are dissolved into several subcategories that contribute to the supervisor’s personal judgement of the worker. The result is an ordinal ranking of the agent. At one time, this was expressed in terms of ‘pay bands’ but now in terms of the ranking categories (Table 3).

However, this is not the final evaluation. An additional step must now be completed. This step is known as the ‘exception ranking’ process. In the exception ranking process, all supervisors in the call centre meet together in a closed door meeting and compare each agent’s rankings with those of other supervisors. The product of this meeting is to establish final agent rankings that are in compliance with an organisationally mandated distribution of agents into categories based on accepted standard deviations in the canonical normal distribution in statistics (Figure 58).

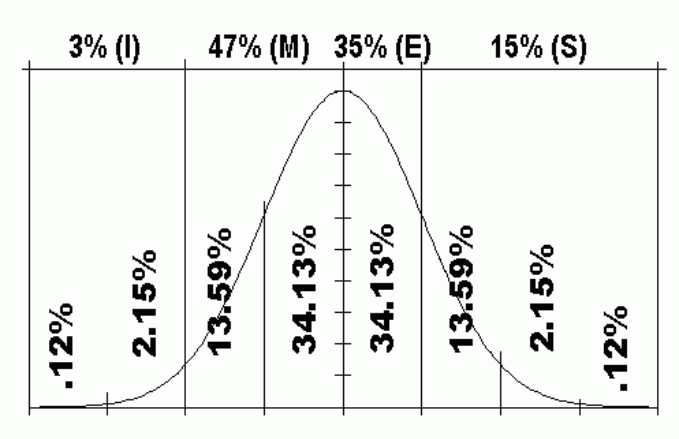


Figure 58. The Normal Distribution (Standard Deviation %ages in the Graph; *BigTech* Rating %age Expectations Above the Graph)

The supervisors are told that 3% of all agents must be assigned to the 'I' (needs improvement) rating; 47% of agents to the 'M' (meets expectations) rating; 35% of agents to the 'E' (exceptional) rating; and 15% of agents to the 'S' (superior) rating. In effect, even if a supervisor ranked an agent in the 'S' category, that agent might actually be downgraded to the 'E' ranking, depending on the outcome of a debate between supervisors in the exception ranking meeting over which agents are 'really' qualified for the limited space available in the higher ranking. Similarly, even if an agent was placed in the 'M' category by his or her supervisor, that agent might eventually be downgraded into the 'I' category through the debate between supervisors.

What is striking here is that it doesn't matter if the actual performance of all agents is very high, 3% of the workforce – even if that 3% is not statistically different from the highest performers – will be rated as 'I' (needs improvement). *That is, the normal distribution is no longer treated as a hypothetically idealized characteristic of large populations. Instead, the actual population is manipulated (perhaps something of a bizarre topiary) to reify the idealized population depicted in*

the normal distribution. This reflects the observation noted above that methods of measurement and accounting practices can be used to actively *create* reality (Hines 1988; Townley 1994, p. 139).

A supervisor in the *BigTech* call centre, concerned over my protection of the identity of informants, confided that some supervisors were very aggressive about ensuring that certain of their agents were assigned to the 'I' category, while others were very wary of allowing agents to be put in that category. The reason, this supervisor told, was because it was known among supervisors that an agent's placement in the 'I' category was tantamount to being laid off in order to facilitate what was called WFR ('work force reduction') of domestic call centre agents in favour of outsourcing the call centre's work to low cost subcontractors in Canada and India.

Like that at *DeliveryWorldwide*, the *BigTech* process of producing a final evaluation of the agent utilises techniques for observing, abstracting and inscribing data and interpretations as described above. These are dissolved in several black boxes that blend these data with a substantial amount of the supervisor's personal judgement in producing 'rankings', and then a 'force fitting' process conducted by supervisors in a private meeting is applied that injects additional subjective assessments to produce what *appears as* a statistically-defensible distribution of rankings.

As at *DeliveryWorldwide*, while agents are shown their statistical ACD data daily, and quality ratings one or more times a month, and indicate that they are very sensitive to both objective and subjective data, the production of the final agent evaluation reflects an apparatus in which the organisation reserves for its own use

particular ways of deconstructing and reconstructing the subject that blend technical procedure with a degree of judgemental authority reminiscent of the sovereign.

In both *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech*, the continuous and technology-mediated collection and fabrication of productivity data through the ACD, and the occasional fabrication of quality evaluations are what is most visible and thus, exert the most force upon the agent's self-knowledge of *how good an agent he or she is* – indeed, *how he or she is as a subject*. On the other hand, implicit knowledge of other evaluation criterion exerts force on the day to day perception and decision-making by agents – sometimes to their own disadvantage, as described above in the case of Sal. Even with the mass of 'objective' and 'subjective' data to which the agent is privy, however, the organisation retains a substantial amount of ill-defined authority to affect agent subjectivity, and in fact, at *BigTech* this is wielded in order to facilitate the gradual but mandated reduction of the workforce in favour of organisationally-prescribed outsourcing of work. In both cases, the disciplined process of defining 'productivity' and 'quality' is simply an input to culminating processes reserved for management.

While it remained obscured in *BigTech* and *DeliveryWorldwide*, the process was made visible at *MHealth* during fieldwork.

The call centre was suffering under increased demand from larger health insurance companies with which it contracted, both in terms of increased call volume and what had been sporadic problems with the accuracy of data that was passed on to those companies. The former was problematic because *MHealth's* contracts indicated that it must meet certain standards relative to call volume and the average speed with which it answered those calls. The latter was problematic because until its contractors could reconcile the data, *MHealth* would not be paid.

One morning during fieldwork, when I walked into the *MHealth* call centre and started taking off my coat, I noticed two custodians working at a wall on the other side of the call centre. One was holding a whiteboard while the other drilled and mounted molly-bolts into the wall. When the mounting hardware was installed they both wrestled with the bulk of the whiteboard to affix it to that hardware. Kam, the call centre manager, stood back a few feet, with her arms crossed and leaning slightly backward, as if checking to see that it was being mounted straight.

When the custodians finished, one looked up at Kam and she nodded, approving the work. They picked up their gear and disappeared around the corner. Kam began writing on the whiteboard, gradually producing a set of categories and blanks to be filled in with daily statistics and tallies describing the work of the call centre (Figure 59, Figure 60). When finished, Kam walked to Krin's cubicle, only a few feet away and with a clear view of the new fixture. Listening to their conversation from outside the cubicle (and within full view of both Kam and Krin) the purpose of this new fixture became apparent. It was to be filled in with data from both the previous day's ACD statistics and tallies of other work accomplished by agents in the call centre. In effect, the whiteboard is to be a public surface upon which the work of the call centre was to be written and become visible to everyone who walked past. The moniker assigned to this whiteboard amplified this purpose. It was to be known as the call centre's 'dashboard' – an array of data that, analogous to the instrument panel in an automobile, was to allow members to monitor the status of the call centre, and based upon this status and their knowledge of company expectations, to adjust their activity accordingly.[140]

[140] As noted above, this is hardly a unique innovation in call centres. The daily display of ACD stats at *DeliveryWorldwide* and monthly display of stats at *BigTech* reflect the same totalising, individualising and disciplinary forces. While at *DeliveryWorldwide* and *BigTech* the display was mostly automated and in that sense somewhat external to the workers, here, the agents themselves are to be made

Figure 59. The Initial Whiteboard at *MHealth*

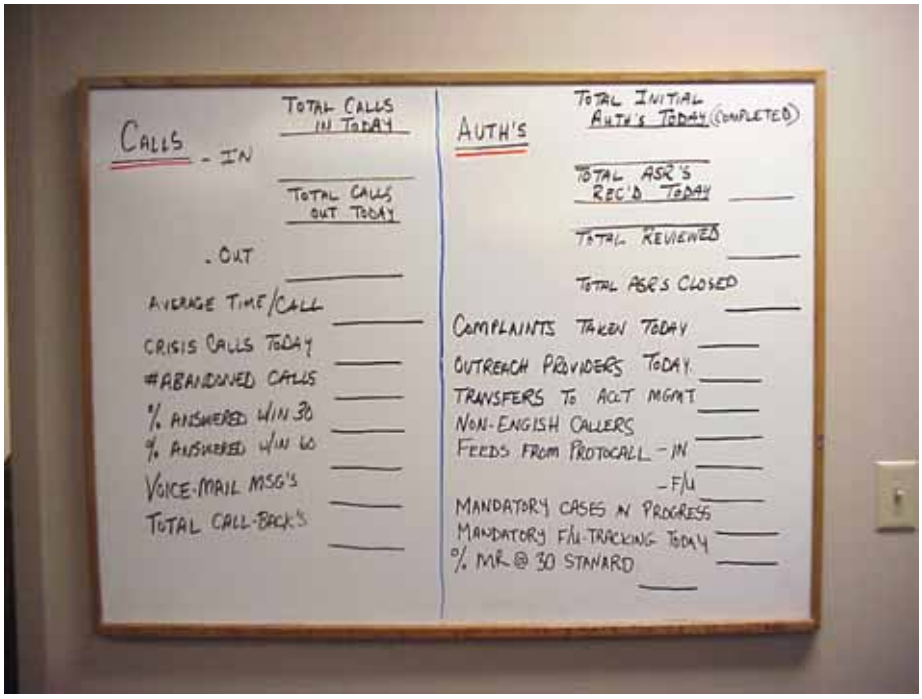


Figure 60. Close-up of Initial Whiteboard at *MHealth*

responsible not only for the activity that produced the ACD inscriptions in the first place, but also for making them public.

Over the next week, the whiteboard was changed to include not only categories of work pertaining to the entire call centre as a unit, but also to the productivity of individual agents (Figure 61). Not only was the call centre suddenly visible in a physical way, but now so were individual agents made visible through an accounting gaze on productivity. The array of tallies visible in the upper right corner of the whiteboard (Figure 61) reflects how readily this simple arrangement of rows and columns affords comparisons across each of the workers.

Figure 61. Final Configuration of Whiteboard at *MHealth*

Additionally, because the whiteboard was mounted in an aisle between most of the office and the break room, viewers of the data included not only call centre

agents, but also virtually everybody in the office including the 'C' level officers[141] of the company. Not only could anybody see the inscribed productivity of the call centre, but whoever stopped to look at the whiteboard could also be easily seen by most agents in the call centre – they not only knew abstracted tallies of their work were visible to all, but they were also well aware of who was availing themselves of that visibility and their facial expressions, and any impromptu meetings that were held near the whiteboard (Figure 62). It did not go unnoticed that the 'Chief Marketing Officer' – the individual ultimately in charge of the call centre – would stop at the dashboard each morning and stand, arms akimbo, in front of it, and over a span of a minute or so gaze up and down at each column and side to side across each row. About this, Pat, an agent with about two months experience when the dashboard was installed, remarked:

> When Oliver [the Chief Marketing Officer] walks by and stands in front of the whiteboard your heart just about stands still. If he goes over to Krin's [the call centre supervisor] cubicle after looking at it, it's like the world is about to stop! I mean, I know it's just a bunch of numbers but ... it's like when your Dad walks in the room and you know you've done something wrong! I just turn around and really start paying attention to what I'm doing – looking like I'm doing my job as carefully as I can... I *hate that* feeling when I see [Oliver] standing there – it's like he's staring [directly] at me when he's doing it.

[141] 'C-level' refers to the 'chief' officers of an organisation. For example, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), etc.

Figure 62. Informal Meeting to Discuss Stats Inscribed on Whiteboard at *MHealth*

Over the next several weeks, this whiteboard became the focus of particular activities in the course of life in the call centre. Daily ‘game planning’ meetings of agents in the call centre were intentionally mustered directly adjacent to the whiteboard, and the numbers inscribed on it became a specific feature of these meetings – reviewing who had done what on the previous day. While it was initially the case that Kam or Krin would inscribe tallies on the whiteboard from data produced by the ACD, it was not long before agents themselves were asked to write their own data on the board – making them responsible not only for inspecting their stats but also putting them in the position of ‘exposing themselves’ (or more properly, their stats) to everyone else in the office and putting them face to face with everyone else’s stats, an experience that amplified the abstracted panoptic, totalising

and individualising power immanent in the categories included and the arrangement of data in this display.

The abstracted nature of the data was problematic for some. Verity, another agent with about two months experience when the dashboard was installed, told:

> I *hate* walking up there to put my numbers on the board. They just don't [account for] what we're actually doing here... It's like [the organisation] only cares about how much you did. They don't pay any attention to how many mistakes we make because we're always in such a hurry, or what it takes to deal with a person who's upset or scared or doesn't know what [his or her] insurance number is... I mean, I'm here to help [the people who call] but all [the organisation] cares about is how fast I do things and how many calls I answer.

Verity made a point over the course of several game planning meetings that the dashboard didn't account for the things she listed in the quote above – attempts to insert her experience into the official Knowledge of the call centre in a manner reflected by the advice of Smith, Haraway and Townley (Haraway 2004a, 2004c; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990a; Townley 1994). These appeals were heard by the call centre team leader and supervisor and always marginalised as things that might be important but "...not for us, right now. We've gotta get our stats up to standards in our contracts!"

Additionally, it wasn't long before the organisation began assembling tallies of errors made in the course of doing data entry. While these error tallies were never inscribed onto the dashboard, they were trafficked among the agents themselves, and sometimes discussion of errors became heated. In one game planning meeting, Maude, the most experienced agent in the call centre with about seven months of experience, spoke out when Krin gave each agent a turn to raise issues they thought important:

> I'm sorry but I've gotta say something about this. When I get a call from a client or a provider about mistakes made on a previous call and I have to fix mistakes that somebody else has made, I'm just so *mad!* I mean, like, *pay attention to what you're doing* because *I*

> just don't have time – *none of us* has the time – to redo something that should have been done right in the first place!

These remarks drew retorts and a flurry of talk ensued, erupting into raised voices and sharp tones. While nearly drowning the other's voice with their own volume, Verity and Pat accounted for the errors by telling how much pressure was put upon them to work fast without apparent concern for correctness, thus reflecting their own orientation to the numbers on the dashboard. Krin's response was quick; errors found in data entry were to be pushed back to the individual who made them. A trail of who did what was always a part of the data entry – the database automatically inscribed each update with the worker's initials. While everyone seemed to agree that this was a reasonable solution, Verity continued to appeal for less emphasis on the quantity of work performed. Krin replied,

> [W]e can't do that. The contract says we have to maintain a certain service level and if we don't push the insurance claims out fast enough the company won't get paid for them until they're submitted correctly. We don't have a choice. We have to keep up on the stats.

That is, Verity and anyone else who thinks there is a different way to deal with things is put face to face with 'the reality of business' as it is framed by the organisation. The contract with another insurance company is treated as a firm foundation against which all of their work and indeed their own selves are to be measured, and upon which any tactics applied are justified. As suggested by Haraway's clarification of how technical and scientific knowledge is vetted by 'keepers of the faith' (2004a), Verity's appeals to insert experiential knowledge into the organisation's Knowledge were deflected by an individual propagating the validity of the organisation's Knowledge of itself and its epistemology.

As indicated above, and as will be elaborated in the next chapter, workers are implicated in a set of processes by which they are made responsible for their own

surveillance and inscription into the organisation's gaze, and the organisation's gaze is defended and reinforced such that the individual's experience in it is rendered illegitimate. The network of disciplinary forces is strengthened by assertions of the reality of its own assumptions, and when those assumptions are adopted members of the organisation are pulled into tasks that act to reify these assumptions.

However, stubborn refusal to adopt these assumptions sometimes results in serious consequences. When Verity quit the job several months later, Kam, the call centre manager, told me and others:

> I don't think she was a good fit for the job. She was never able to accept that call centre work is just *that* way. Next time we hire someone, we'll have to look for people who already accept the business. We can't afford to hire anyone else who doesn't see it that way.

She said the same thing about Pat when he resigned several weeks later, and of another agent subsequently hired who had some of the same things to say, and was subsequently asked to resign. And, in fact, that's what happened. Of the three new agents hired over the next few months, two had experience in other local call centres. The third had job experience in handling health insurance claims for *MHealth's* main contractor. As will be described in more detail below, the interview questions posed to applicants for these jobs were written to determine if applicants had already accepted such a view of work.

It should be noted that the public display of data similar to that displayed on the 'dashboard' at *MHealth* is not an uncommon feature of call centres. It is very common for 'live' data to be made readily available to many different individuals. At *BigTech*, 'reader boards' were mounted at regular intervals on the walls of the building. These reader boards displayed a regularly updated list of how many agents were logged in to each queue, how many callers were waiting to speak with an agent

and the duration the longest waiting customer had been waiting (Figure 63). This is a public version of the ACD displays provided to agents at *MHealth* and selectively at *BigTech*. While this is not as penetratingly individualising as *MHealth*'s 'dashboard', it does reflect a general interest across call centres to provide continuous updates of incoming calls and other details about work in the call centre.

Similarly, the computer databases at *DeliveryWorldwide* and phones used by agents at *DeliveryWorldwide*, *BigTech*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* could display this information if the agent pressed a combination of buttons on the phone. Figure 64 shows the phone at *BigTech* displaying this data. At *DeliveryWorldwide,* agents could also display other 'live' data on their phone, including the number of calls they have taken that day, their total accrued login time and their total accrued 'not ready' time.

Figure 63. Readerboard at *BigTech*

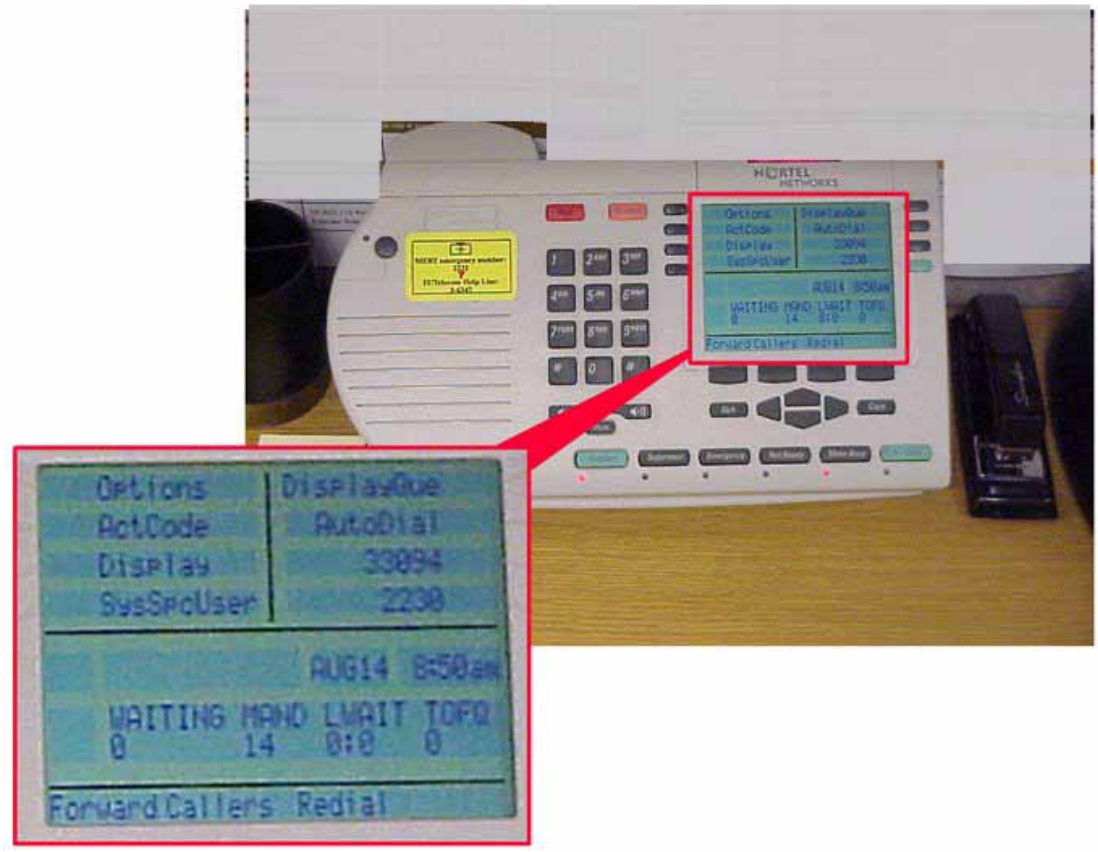


Figure 64. *BigTech* Phone Displaying Readerboard Information

Consequently, automatically inscribed data is both public and private. This allows, as described above, various personnel in the call centre, including the agents themselves, to activate a view of how the organisation is seeing them – a reflexive surveillance – and also to exert forces, for better or worse, upon agents.

3. Chapter Summary: The Disciplined Subject

I will end this chapter the same way it was begun, with a quote from Barbara Townley:

> ...the art of distribution is a method of ordering a population. It knows it in a particular way, making it open to intervention or management. It is reflected in a number of personnel practices. A Foucauldian analysis is concerned with how and with what effects boundaries

become imposed, maintained, and breached. (Townley 1994, p. 47)

From these brief examples it is apparent that practices, both small and individualised and large and encompassing, of enclosing, partitioning and ranking workers have substantial influence on what the subjects in TMTL do and are *made to be*. These practices, activated through the selection of employees, and through visual, auditory and electronic means that divide and discipline their actions into regular scripts, routines and repertoires, fracture workers and work into tiny and independently meaningless parts. These parts are then reassembled into lists and matrices that instantiate the dimensions of the subject, subjectivity and subjectification. Together, this instantiates processes of deconstructing and reconstructing, and acts to condition the environment and discipline subjects in terms of *what* can be seen and heard, *how* it can be seen and heard, and *how* it might be accounted for. The result is an organisationally manufactured 'truth' about the subjects that they are expected to accept and orient to in their work.

These practices and subjects are examples of the effects of power produced through the imbrication of particular values, logic, enclosures, technology-mediation, rule systems, evaluation rubrics, training and the like as described above. This ordering and assemblage of tasks, gestures, spoken words, data arrays, etc. also produces subjects who can be seen not only as compliant or deviant in terms of the logic immanent in this imbrication of resources, but also in terms of numeric ordination and intervals. That is, the subject and Knowledge of the subject are made to occur through the same functioning of power. In obvious ways, and different from the view that power is repressive or destructive of some essential or evolutionary end-state, power *is instrumental in producing* the subject.

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1995, p. 194)

The network of data is wide indeed. These data, drawn from the ACD, databases, scripting, quality evaluations and 'mystery caller' ratings, include some that are intentionally engineered and drawn from a manufactured reservoir of activity and also, like the 'happy call' and 'unhappy call' tallies, include some that are opportunistically netted from the outflow of this reservoir of customer service interactions. All of these data are effects of the discipline and power immanent through the workplace – power to order physical bodies in space and time, and to create knowledge of those bodies in terms of that ordering and disciplining of bodies – all of which appears consistent with values and modes of thought that are said to pervade the business: efficiency, predictability, calculability and control (Ritzer 2000b). However, this power doesn't *prevent* subjects from realising their transcendental end state, as the orthodox labour process theorist would favour; in fact, it is instrumental in *producing* those subjects in a particular *present* state, a state that, as the next Part of the report will show, is mutable at the hands of the subjects themselves.

However, this power to produce is still selective and results in abstracted, deconstructed and reconstructed forms, numbers, arrays, etc., that both obscure their method of creation and are amenable to particular means of manipulation, comparison and recombination (Foucault 1995; Haraway 2004a, 2004c; Latour 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990; Smith, D. 1987b, 1990a; Townley 1994). In so doing an organisational 'truth' about the subject is produced, a truth that he or she is expected to adopt and orient to. Indeed, subjects are shown to have, in the eyes of

the organisation, a responsibility to come to terms with its Knowledge, its truths about subjects.

As will continue to be reflected throughout this report, *what* and *how* things are seen, heard and accounted for is an effect of practices that may intentionally serve particular ends but at the same time produce the possibility that other doings and ends can be latched onto them, and when imbricated with other forces, actually come to have very important, though unintentional effects on the 'truth' about subjects and their subjectivity.

In the next chapter I continue with a discussion of biopower but turn to the instantiation of what Foucault gestured to as governmentality, though under the banner of 'management'. Biopower is treated differently by Foucault and others in various texts (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1981, 1988c, 1988d, 1990a, 1991a, 1993; Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d), though it can be generally considered a composite of two components. This chapter's discussion centred on one of those two components – practices of discipline and how they are assembled into an apparatus that directs the actions of bodies in space and time. The next chapter will focus on the second component – governmentality or management through 'psy-tactics' (Rose, N. 1999c). In particular, I will adopt Foucault's characterisation of governmentality as clarified in the interview titled "Technologies of the Self", "...contact between the technologies of domination (discipline) of others and those of the self I call governmentality" (Foucault 1988d, p. 19).

CHAPTER 2: THE MANAGED SUBJECT

1. Setting the Scene

Upon the commencement of fieldwork at *BigTech*, I was provided with a booklet of information on the potential career paths for phone agents. In this booklet, several different trajectories for promotion were displayed. One of the two major paths led into what was referred to as the 'technical side' of the business and the other led into the 'business function side' of the business. *BigTech* offered internally-taught technical courses and tuition assistance for higher education in conventional Colleges and Universities to agents seeking one or the other path, and there was no shortage of 'special projects' on which agents aspiring in one direction or the other could endeavour to 'prove' their worth to the company. When I asked, I was told that such projects were doled out to agents who had demonstrated they could accomplish their regularly assigned customer facing work with high marks in productivity and quality. However, it was not considered mandatory that individuals exhibit this self-motivation. The most senior personnel in the *BigTech* call centre were 'regular' phone agents who exhibited and stated satisfaction with their current position and indicated they had no desire to pursue the options for 'advancement' provided by the company.

That is, the aspiring individual had to show some initiative, and, in the words of one supervisor "...make things happen for yourself. You've got to make yourself noticeable – and in a way that shows how you're here to help the company."[142, 143]

[142] This is far from a normal 'career progression' for call centre agents, however. There are typically very few job categories in a call centre. Call centres are notoriously 'flat' organisations with many agents and very few management personnel, and normally very few opportunities for an agent to

The booklet I was provided was a veritable curriculum documenting avenues for pursuing promotion in the call centre and into other parts of the overall company. Each job was described in terms of its 'value' to the company and listed a set of prerequisite courses (offered by the company) and other criteria for candidacy. Individuals aspiring to the organisation's promise for 'more than a job' could use the material in this booklet like a college catalogue to plan their future with the company. Many agents were more than happy to tell stories about how they, or someone they knew, had taken advantage of the company's policies to do just this. For example, Bo, a phone agent, boasted how only 10 years before he had been without technical skills and an attendant in the cafeteria at a *BigTech* assembly plant. Taking advantage of courses offered by the company and 'showing initiative', he proudly told how he had been promoted from an unskilled food service worker to a worker in the loading dock, to an assembly line worker, to a worker in the product testing department and, when the assembly plant was closed several years earlier, to an entry level agent servicing a high volume and relatively 'low tech' piece of *BigTech* equipment, and now, what he saw as a promotion to a phone agent servicing a much more technically intricate piece of equipment. He boasted about how through his own diligence, hard work and initiative, he had brought himself from a subsistence living to an employee in what he saw as the high tech sector of the American economy and living "...life in the high tech 21st century!"

Across many jobs in the company, it was not uncommon to find that incumbents could choose from several different 'tracks' or emphases in order to

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move up in the organisation (Belt 2002; Belt, Richardson & Webster 2000; Hunt 2004; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003).

[143] However, by the end of fieldwork at *BigTech*, these avenues were almost completely blocked off. Due to a severe drop in sales that accompanied a global downturn in the technology sector, corporate debt associated with *BigTech*'s buyout of another large technology company and the fact that the company's CEO had committed to moving its call centre operations to subcontractors in Canada and India, tuition assistance programs had been discontinued, special projects were few and far between and layoffs had become a regular feature of the call centre.

fashion themselves into experts in technical or business processes the company had identified as essential to succeeding in its goal to be a global leader in computer technology equipment. From almost its inception, *BigTech* was known for this openness to employee development. For example, Ty, an individual who originally worked in his family's plumbing contractor business in the Midwestern U. S., then as a manager in a ski resort in the Rocky Mountains, had eventually been hired as an entry level agent at this *BigTech* call centre. Taking advantage of tuition assistance he had earned a Bachelor's degree in information technology, and after demonstrating his ability to achieve consistently high productivity and quality marks, had been promoted into the job of 'Quality Support Specialist' (QSS) – a job where he evaluated, coached and counselled agents to improve the quality of their support to customers. This was his favourite part of the job. In addition to this, in working to assist agents to improve their quality of service in terms of the organisation's evaluation rubrics he developed new computer tools to automate the processing of quality metrics both across time for individual agents and across all agents in his workgroup. He proudly showed me databases on his computer that he had programmed to automatically collect numbers from the quality ratings of agents and the customer satisfaction surveys – each of which were stored in separate files on the computer system – and assemble sophisticated reports complete with pie charts, bar charts and histograms that he claimed showed evidence that his work had "...added value to the overall quality of our support in this call centre."

In effect, Ty had developed tools that could take the data produced by the quality evaluations for each agent (which he and another QSS were responsible for producing) and generate histograms of their ratings so each agent could "see how he's [sic] doing." Ty alluded that these charts could be used to *show* an agent that he

or she was improving, getting worse or staying the same in their evaluations, and that he could use this when appealing to an agent to accept his coaching for improved quality. That is, Ty's charts were used to convince an agent that (a) improvement was indeed warranted and (b) he or she should accept and use his coaching to effect improvements in one's evaluations. Similarly, Ty's software could produce similar histograms of the entire team's quality ratings over time. When improvements in individual agent's scores and improvements in the overall team's evaluations were displayed on these charts, he could then make the case that these improvements were related to his coaching and active participation in working with agents. Indeed, Ty's charts showed a monotonic improvement in the quality ratings of agents since he began work as a QSS, thus demonstrating to his supervisor that he was a valuable individual for the company. His supervisor eagerly echoed this, indicating that Ty's initiative and technical savvy were boons to the team and the overall company. His supervisor told, "Ty can go just about anywhere he wants to at *BigTech.* He's got the right stuff for us. I'd hate to see him move out of my team but I'd gladly write high praise into a letter of recommendation for him."

As indicted in the previous chapter, for the call centre, 'quality' is defined in terms of the way the workplace and work are divided into components, observation of those components, abstracted inscriptions and the mathetic reconstruction of these inscriptions into new combinations so as to produce a 'representation' of the call centre. Ty's databases reflected his adoption of this representation of the call centre and its agents – he translated the organisation's arrangement of resources into new scientific forms that extended and deepened the way the organisation sees itself and sees its employees. That is, he represented 'quality' in terms of the collection and machination of data produced by the application of met/not-met evaluations and

customer satisfaction surveys. In doing so he treated the frames imposed and implied by these tools and their divisions, abstractions and reconstructions as raw materials from which he (re)constituted a stable definition of ‘quality’.

Ty told that there were actually two other parts of the QSS job: ‘business analyst’ and ‘new product introduction’. A QSS focusing on the business analyst component of the job took productivity data of the call centre and used it to make projections for hiring and staffing/scheduling, tools for agent monitoring and attempts to refine processes and tools used to order replacement parts for machine repairs and other resource-intensive processes in the call centre. As demonstrated by Ty’s development of computer software in his work, he kept his work close to this part of the job. New product introduction (NPI) was primarily a process control function in which the QSS would oversee the development of training and the minute-to-minute management of agents in the call centre to develop reliable processes for technical support of new products developed by *BigTech*. NPI was touted as this call centre’s primary output for the company. *BigTech* would take the training and processes for supporting new equipment developed in this call centre and then package it for leasing to outsourcers contracted to take over the technical support function of these products. In so doing, QSS’s involved in NPI would be accelerating the layoff of agents so the company could outsource their work to lower-cost providers.

In order to fulfil one’s role across these three parts of the job, the QSS is expected to demonstrate first allegiance to the company’s interests rather than specifically to other workers, this in fulfilment of implicit expectations of one’s status as a QSS. At the same time, because the QSS is less prone to redundancy than a regular agent, on account of his or her role in preparing materials for outsourcers, it

can actually act as a hedge against worker retrenchment. Regardless, QSSs who demonstrate allegiance to the company rather than one's co-workers are simply seen to be doing their job, a job that can only be done if they abandon a personal interest and instead accept the organisation's apparatus for generating productivity and quality ratings. Based on many conversations with Ty and other QSSs, it also seemed to be the case that they did not perceive a threat to their jobs as a result of the immanent outsourcing of many call centre functions – thus that they were not orienting to a 'despotic hegemony' on the part of the company (Burawoy, 1983:603, in Littler 1990, p. 62). Instead, they saw themselves simply as carrying out their job responsibilities – responsibilities that they insisted they had the ability to select (albeit from a very limited menu of three options).

Ty was careful to point out that both the business analyst function and quality function of the QSS were essentially related to NPI: "...you can't have good service unless you develop reliable tools for monitoring and managing the quality of agents' work or for projecting demand for personnel and component parts." In other words, there was confluence in the three responsibilities of the QSS job – each of these responsibilities ushered the worker toward the organisational accomplishment of NPI whether he or she individually intended to or not.

Taz, a young father of two, described how he had studied computer networking when he had a job as a night guard in a high-security prison in a neighbouring state, eventually earning a professional certification from Microsoft – a leading computer software company in the world. This was the primary reason he had been hired as an agent at this *BigTech* call centre. Even after his hire, he continued his studies, having maintained this and other professional technical certifications, and he had even been one of the last to be awarded tuition assistance to

study for a Bachelor's degree in business administration from a commercial college through distance education. He admitted a strategic focus reflected in these activities: "You don't get anywhere in the business side of this place unless you've got a business degree. I don't wanna be a computer jockey all my life and this is how I'm gonna move up." Even with a self-avowed love of computer networking and personal history of taking responsibility for his own education, he takes advantage of the options provided for in *BigTech*'s tuition assistance program and pursues a business degree. Like Ty, Taz accepts the obscured influence of the company's program and allows his future to be channelled by the resources made available to him by the company.

Sal, retired from a career in aircraft maintenance in the U. S. Air Force, started as a phone agent at *BigTech* and rapidly showed himself capable of guiding customers in 'first call fixes'. He was quickly promoted to the job of 'second level' support agent where he handled more difficult technical problems. He also distinguished himself in being able to manage complex projects, including the introduction of new computer tools in the call centre. In the throes of not only managing the introduction of one such tool in his division of the call centre, he also developed training materials for the tool, provided internal tech support in the use of this tool to agents and attended night school to earn a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology from a local college with tuition assistance from *BigTech*. He told, "[p]roject management is where this company is going. Most of the call centres are being moved offshore but they'll still need someone closer to home to manage things like this. I love the technical stuff, but I know that if I wanna stay here I'll have to develop management skills too. My supervisor knows that's what I want and she makes sure I'm close to the front of the line for those projects."

Regarding his job of managing and providing training and ongoing support on new computer tools to other agents, he said,

> These tools are what the company needs. It's kinda rough right now but these tools allow the company to collect and manage all the data entry and data processing done by agents. Every new revision comes out with new features that allow us to automate not only a lot of the more time consuming data entry work, but also [the production] of reports that show us more and more about what we're doing [as agents] – and statistics! You should see the stats this thing kicks out! I love statistics! In aircraft maintenance the whole job is about statistics and failure rates and how long it takes to make scheduled repairs. With that stuff you can really manage costs. This tool is starting to help the company really see deep down into the processes that go into fixing technology problems!

Sal reflects his already-established orientation to using statistically reconstructed depictions of work to manage projects, and simply translates that orientation to the work of introducing and acclimating agents in the use of tools that increasingly ensured a 'deep knowledge' of the work and workers.

Macy, a supervisor with *BigTech* and one of the individuals assigned by the company to be a relay between me and other parts of the organisation, described to me how as a high school graduate she had not had a real direction in her life. After high school she worked various entry level jobs in restaurants, retail, and light manufacturing, but never found anything she really thought interesting. At the same time she felt stuck by her lack of education. After getting a job at a now defunct *BigTech* assembly plant, she said she was really excited when she learned of the company's policy of providing tuition assistance. She said,

> I really wanted to study anthropology, and I still think you could consider the culture of this company as one of its assets. But it's a technology company and they wouldn't give me tuition assistance to study anthropology. So I chose information technology because that was a [course] they'd pay for. I can't complain. I mean just a few years ago I had a high school education and work experience in fast food restaurants and waitressing. Now I'm a supervisor in one of the biggest companies in the area! I can't complain about that!

Amit described his position after graduating from college.

> I was a fine arts major. I really wanted to do that and I'm glad I did, but *what are you gonna do with a degree in fine arts!?* I mean, *look around!* Do you see any jobs for Jackson Pollack wannabes? I worked for a few years as a graphic artist in a print shop – really boring stuff – and I was earning just enough to make a car payment and pay for an apartment in Gemini [a town in another region of the state]. Have you ever been there!? It's a dead town! I applied for this job at a job fair a few years ago and got lucky – really lucky – because I had experience with a graphics software program that [*BigTech*] was packaging with their equipment. Since then they've given me training and now I can fix *BigTech* equipment but you know what else – I can fix all sorts of stuff around the house – the training I got in troubleshooting this [equipment] can be applied to almost anything!

Amit pointed in several directions around the call centre, toward cubicles in which his friends worked, naming those who were hired at the same time as he.

> Jaq played in a band. Pat went to school to be a music teacher but got a job as a computer support tech in another company. Then he got laid off from that job. They were in the same boat as me! They had almost nothing when they came here and now we've got jobs that are reliable with some room to grow. I'll be taking some courses starting next week and I hope to make myself qualified to get into a more engineering-oriented part of the company.

Of all these agents, Ty reflects their common orientation:

> You've gotta show your value add. If you can't show how you're affecting the bottom line – or close to it – you might as well look for somewhere else to work.

At *BigTech*, the organisation provides a structure that defines in general terms what the company thinks it needs in order to achieve its strategic goals, and provides resources for workers to fill those needs. The workers do the rest. Those who see opportunity readily avail themselves of resources provided by the company and commit themselves to education, extra projects and the like, and in so doing fashion themselves into resources they think the organisation will want and perhaps need. Along the way, they submit to the way the organisation has organised itself, its jobs and the way those jobs are observed and evaluated. All of these workers demonstrate a free acceptance of *responsibility* to come to terms with the organisation's norms and forms and a *responsibility* to develop one's self in terms of those norms and forms.

At *MedAdvise,* things were different but similar. Many of the nurses were nearing the end of their working careers and had experienced illnesses or injuries that made it difficult to withstand the considerable rigours of nursing. Most of these nurses were working at the hospital of which *MedAdvise* is a part when their health or physical strength became an impediment to ward nursing. While not an official function of the call centre, the hospital could, in some cases, provide *MedAdvise* as an option in lieu of leaving work and collecting disability payments.[144] Other nurses at *MedAdvise* were principal childcare providers in their households and desired jobs that offered part-time hours. The *MedAdvise* call centre offered mostly part-time positions, and consequently these nurses were also able to find a job that leveraged their professional training and experience while affording flexibility to fulfil other roles in their lives.

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, a unionised call centre with nearly no opportunity for advancement, most of the agents who had worked there since its opening six years prior were single, single parents or second-income earners for their families. Others were college students who were taking advantage of the company's tuition assistance program to further their education.[145] Those who were employed at the call centre and predicted it to be a long term employer commonly expressed the same remark: "I'm working for my (Union) pension. Retirement will be a lot better if I can just hang on for another (number) of years." One of those admitting this perspective said,

[144] An option that saved the hospital from contributing to disability payments, thus saving the hospital from supporting a 'non-productive' employee.

[145] That said, some of these workers had actually quit school to work in the call centre, thinking the pay in the call centre was better than they would get in their eventual career, should they continue with school. At the commencement of fieldwork, hourly pay in this unionised call centre started at over $13.00 USD and rapidly escalated to nearly $17.00 USD. At the conclusion of fieldwork, two years later, the Union had just negotiated a lower starting salary in response to a severe downturn in the company's profits and impending buyout by another freight company.

> [Y]ou have good days and bad days in any job, but they pay me to deal with these customers and I just do it. Here, we've got a steady paycheck, air conditioning in the summer, heating in the winter, marginally comfortable chairs and no heavy lifting [laugh]. There might be a lot to complain about how this place runs, but there's a lot going for this job too.[146]

In all, it is clear the agents at these call centres invest themselves in the organisations to a certain extent. The organisations provide resources that the workers find more or less agreeable – "no heavy lifting", a job when other prospects for them seem low ("Do you see any jobs for Jackson Pollack wannabes?") – and in some cases with channels or 'opportunities' that both satisfy the organisation's needs and imputably offer the individual a reason to submit oneself to the organisation's governance (Burchell 1991). In so doing a population is definable, disciplinable (as shown in the previous chapter) and also economically governable – the individuals 'take' what the organisation provides and find ways to make it valuable to them, while at the same time the organisation has manufactured rationalised knowledge of the population and itself and fashioned an apparatus in which individuals more or less willingly submit for the overall good of the company.[147]

The process is not, however, one that just happens. From the observation that opportunities are made available to those who meet the statistical expectations of the company and bend into forms desired by the company, to cases indicating how individual workers have chosen a path from among options provided by the organisation, it is apparent that the organisations make the 'political arithmetic' of themselves and their workers a fundamental part of managing workers and opening and policing entry into options for the workers that are aimed at maintenance of

[146] This agent resigned her position in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre shortly after the end of fieldwork in order to move to a distant city, in order to be closer to her daughter. True to her words that call centres aren't such terrible places to work, I learned she had taken a job as a call centre agent in that city.

[147] Of course it is hardly the case that the workers are a population of docile and unswervingly disciplined subjects. Resistance and secondary adjustment practices will be described in Part 3 of this report.

discipline for the workers and growth for the companies (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1981; Gordon 1991; Hoskin 1996).

While the quotes and cases noted above suggest that agents in these call centres come with a particular perspective on the work, it is not the case that individuals always come to these decisions from within themselves – the organisation's structures and the 'opportunities' immanent in them have to be communicated to the workers in ways that present a situation such that the free subject will accept. As will be shown below, some of these are manifested in relatively passive ways, such as the 'curriculum' for *BigTech* agents, while others are much more active and involve considerable personal interaction between individuals. In combination, this chapter will address ways that these call centres are governed such that workers actually govern themselves – a 'conduct of conduct' (Donzelot 1991; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1988d, p. 19; 1991a; Gordon 1991) or 'control at a distance' (Law 1986). The genealogy of this liberal type of governance – a form that does not require the leaders to reach down and discipline the microphysics of every aspect of the worker's activity all the time, but that provides a 'channelling' of options and outcomes that will serve the rationalised needs of the organisation and at the same time provide reasons for workers to freely choose to participate – is well described elsewhere (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1988d, 1990a, 1991a, 1993; Rose, N. 1999c).

2. Selecting, Affecting & Activating the Free Subject

In the previous chapter, I identified and detailed a genre of practices in the four call centres participating in this project. Each of these practices is implicated in

the rationalisation and disciplining of space, time and activity, and instantiates a particular way of observing, abstracting those observations and inscribing them into forms that are then made available to additional practices. These additional practices take the abstracted inscriptions and manufacture them into relations that produce Knowledge of both individuals and the entire population of workers. This, in turn, instantiates a power that makes subjects who can be assessed and pressed into 'productive' and 'quality' workers, and in so doing the rationality and discipline that made this Knowledge and power possible is reified. In this way disciplinary practices are implicated in the production of a particular subjectivity – a particular way of knowing and understanding the call centre agent and call centre work.

Such disciplinary practices can easily be seen as social control mechanisms that operate to make individuals do certain things and ensnare them in a set of relations in which they have no independent authority. Such would be a system of domination. However, as will be shown in this chapter, workers are hardly dominated and instead are provided with many opportunities to make 'free' choices, albeit frequently from a list of options provided by the organisation, such that they are tethered to a relation with the organisation's manufactured rationality.

In addition, disciplinary practices are also instrumental in the production of other 'doings'. Where the practices described and illustrated in the previous chapter fracture workers and work into so many tiny movements and inscriptions, each of which contributes to the production of data to be used by the organisation for the rationalised fulfilment of 'services', these practices are also implicated in the surveillance and inscription of data used to produce definitions and dimensions of the labouring subject and the labourer's subjectivity – in other words, *Knowledge* of the work and workers and organisational 'truth' about them.

In both cases, these practices instantiate processes of deconstructing and reconstructing acts and actors by conditioning the environment and producing data and subjectivity in terms of (a) *what* can be seen and heard, (b) *how* it can be seen and heard and (c) *how* it might be accounted for against the rationalisation of work encoded into the tools, rules and processes of technology-mediated tertiary labour. From a purely technical point of view, only the first of these three can be considered objective. The latter two are, in a technical sense, subjective, but this subjectivity is obscured by the apparently stable foundation produced by the first and measurement from that apparently stable foundation. From a Foucaultian point of view, however, it is important to remember that such received 'truths' are not to be considered a firm foundation upon which to build understanding or extend knowledge of the present (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, p. 179). Instead, one has to inspect what is said and done in the field. As will continue to be reflected throughout this report, *what* and *how* things are seen, heard and accounted for is a product of rationalisation that can serve both intentional and unintentional ends.

That is, these practices and ends influence the possibility that other doings and ends can be latched onto them. In the scenarios and utterances included in the beginning section of this chapter, the organisation and its members – through the saturation of their workplace environment with disciplinary architecture, tools, rules and technologies – can take up these data and use them in ways that have broader impact on themselves. For example, workers actually come to affect the management and labour such that they rationalise, account for and police their own actions in terms of organisational knowledge while at the same time continuously reproducing it, "...the assurance of an order which it itself has created" (Gordon 1991, p. 11). In so doing, workers adopt for themselves the goals handed to them and inculcated into

them by the organisation (Rose, N. 1999c, p. 217) – the individuals 'freely choose' what they 'want', but from a menu of items that are programmatically configured to assure benefit to the organisation. This reflects the existence of a 'consumption culture' within which only particular options are made available and which orients the individual to 'free choices' that favour the organisation (Rose, N. 1999c, p. 231ff). Finally, having made a 'free choice', the worker is now responsible for fulfilment of this choice in terms of the Knowledge the organisation produces about itself and about the individual worker. That is, the worker is now responsible for 'knowing' one's self (in terms of the organisational Knowledge) and fulfilling the responsibility for having chosen one's path in the organisation in terms of that Knowledge.

Characterising this as policing draws upon Foucault's identification of a programmatic element early in the historical development of modern liberal forms of government (Foucault 1981, pp. 251-252; 2000b, pp. 318-323; Gordon 1991, p. 9ff; Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d): the development of institutional practices to collect and use data of a population in order to see to the governance of that population. This is accomplished not simply through the control of discrete acts of individuals, but rather by taking the collected observations and abstracted inscriptions from individuals, assembling them into individualising and totalising arrays displaying particular manufactured facts about individuals and the entire population, and using this Knowledge as a resource for managing, maintaining and developing the 'health' of individuals with an eye on the overall health of the organisation (see also, Burchell 1991; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1990a, p. 126; Gordon 1991; Rose, N. 1999c).[148] Thus, sovereign and control-oriented methods gave way to a form of governance that

[148] Foucault's discussion is specific to political governance and so while I refer to 'organisation', it is the case that Foucault was talking about 'the state' (Foucault 2000b, p. 319).

relied on Knowledge of both individuals and entire populations (Foucault 1981; Hacking 1982, 1986a, 1986b) and the use of this Knowledge to 'conduct the conduct' of people. The latter form is both a more economical form of governance and is considered to be more 'liberal', in the sense that individuals are no longer forced to comply with particular rules, but are given freedom to make choices, albeit from within Knowledge, social formations and options provided to them by the organisation (Cameron 2000; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1981; Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d).

In accomplishing this, Knowledge of the population and the individual produced by the organisation is presented to the individual and the individual is expected to use *it* as a basis for choices (Foucault 1997d, p. 87; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1994, 1995a, 1995b). In this way, the worker is enveloped in a distinctly *modern* form of power made up in a relation of Knowledge of the self, one's own desires and expectations of the organisation – all arising from a disciplinary apparatus similar to that described in the previous chapter. In this modern relation, the individual is made responsible for accepting and adopting the organisation's Knowledge, applying it to oneself and deploying that synthesised knowledge in a manner consistent with the organisation's or society's prevailing expectations and ethics (Cameron 2000; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1988c, 1994b, 1997a, 1997e, 2000b; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1993, 1994). In fact, doing so is considered an important element of the modern, ethical subject (Foucault 1988c, 1994b, 1997a, 1997e, 2000b; Rose, N. 1999c). This contrasts markedly with images of 'social control' and domination that act to destroy the transcendental subject and make it into a sort of slave to capital accumulation (Braverman 1974; Foucault 1995).

Thus, while the accounts given in the preceding chapter may present the appearance that the agents are controlled by a penetrating authority from above that

regulates the discrete acts of individuals, it is the case that upper management sets policy or goals and it is the duty of middle managers, supervisors and the workers themselves to act in order to 'activate' and accomplish those policies or goals (Townley 1994, pp. 67-68). This has an economising effect for organisations where 'policing' of individual's behaviour is located 'close' to those individuals in the organisational hierarchy and even in the individuals themselves. In other words, when faced with options and rewards made available by the organisation in which they work, more or less freely acting individuals deploy Knowledge produced and activated within the organisation's structural arrangement of space, time and activity to govern themselves according to the power immanent in that knowledge in order to take advantage of those options and rewards (Armstrong 1994; Burchell 1991; Clegg 1998; Deetz 1998; Donzelot 1991; Foucault 1988c, 1997e; Hacking 1982, 1986b; Hoskin 1998; Knights 1990; McKinlay & Starkey 1998c; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987, 1994; Power 1994; Townley 1995a, 1996). Individual actors are thus not 'controlled' in the sense of being dominated. Rather what they *see and know about their tasks and themselves is shaped by the organisation, and they freely take actions based upon what is made relevant to them in light of this Knowledge and appearance as 'channelled' by the organisation.*

In other words, in addition to the ongoing production and maintenance of TMTL from an organisational and administrative or accounting perspective, these practices influence individual workers to invent and invoke 'technologies of the self' in order to become what it takes to fulfil the 'truth' about one's self presented in organisational Knowledge. In fulfilling this, workers actively participate in their production as subjects by using (a) productivity and quality data produced about them, and (b) direction or counselling from administrative supervisors, as a reflection

and interpretation of the self that can be compared with the goals for productivity and quality instituted by the organisation. Faced with these various views of one's self that only come into being through an 'external' gaze (but one in which the worker is a free and active participant), he or she becomes a subject *in terms of* this external, statistical gaze, a subject faced with responsibility to continuously produce oneself on its terms (Armstrong 1994; Foucault 1997e; Knights 1990; Townley 1995a, 1996).

Following that idea, in this chapter I continue by turning to the instantiation of what Foucault, and those who use his research, call governmentality (du Gay 1996a; Foucault 1981, 1983, 1988c, 1988d, 1991a, 1993; Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d; Townley 1993, 1994). In particular, while the previous chapter centred on practices familiar as discipline, and how they are assembled into an apparatus that produces Knowledge and disciplines practice (Foucault 1995), this chapter will focus on Foucault's characterisation of governmentality in the interview titled "Technologies of the Self", in particular, "...contact between the technologies of domination (discipline) of others and those of the self I call governmentality" (Foucault 1988d, p. 19).

In this characterisation of governmentality, it the subjects themselves who, in the face of disciplinary forces, the data that arises from it, various interpersonal tactics for bringing the worker face to face with the 'truth' of these data, policies and goals established by upper level management and any options for movement within the apparatus so provided, 'freely' submit themselves to and develop practices that implicate themselves in their own discipline and governance consistent with all of these forces. In all of this, disciplinary tactics and Knowledge that arise from it, as described in the previous chapter, are implicated in the development of Knowledge

and practices that instantiate a power to conduct the conduct of actors: "The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Foucault 1983, p. 221).

In Foucault's initial discussions of governmentality – a neologism combining *government* and *rationality* – liberal forms of government are shown to involve governance of a population for the good of 'the state'[149], as opposed to governance for the sake of maintaining or collecting property and resources to bolster and defend a particular ruler's authority (Foucault 1981). In this distribution, technical experts – physicians, teachers, engineers, psychologists, business persons, and so on – are the ones who actually effect the conduct of individual subjects and themselves (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1981),[150] while, in accord with their technical function in the organisation, providing reports 'up' to higher levels of the organisation (Foucault 1995, p. 304). It is up to those in the higher levels (the politicians, or, in the case of this project, upper management), to plan and weave together the strengths immanent in the population that are regulated and made visible through the disciplinary practices noted above, for the good of the state (or the company), while it is up to a 'pastorate' of managers to actually work on individuals in order to fulfil the goals handed down from above through particular means that are imbricated with the apparatuses of discipline:

> Governmentality places an emphasis on regulatory systems, processes, and methods of thinking about or perceiving a domain, especially those which may be translated into written

[149] While a discussion of politics understandably rests on 'the state', one can imagine that an analogous construct in business and industry is 'the organisation'. Consequently, management of the organisation is made for the good of *the organisation* rather than directly for the good of its leaders or members. In that sense, knowledge of the organisation and its goals, its forms of rationalisation, its members, etc. are brought to bear in producing technologies and programs that employees will continuously utilise and fulfil of their own volition, in return for whatever gains the organisation offers and values those individuals might have.

[150] Foucault also alludes to this much earlier in his career, in his genealogy of disciplinary practices (Foucault 1995, p. 304f). While mentioned there, it was not until later in his career that governmentality became a topic unto itself in his work.

inscriptions that claim to authentically represent it. (Townley 1993, pp. 520-521)

Thus, individuals whose role involves conducting the conduct of others through an appropriation and manipulation of the 'ways of knowing' made possible through the abstracted inscription of actions and creation of knowledge exemplified in the previous chapter. This chapter will orient to the ways subjects take the plans and goals of upper management and these inscriptions and use them to affect their own and others' practices.

What this describes is not a heavy-handed, technological determinist sort of control upon the bodies and minds of individuals. Instead, it is actually a means by which individuals can be brought to see the organisation through an appropriation of Knowledge created through disciplinary tactics, strategies and technologies, and once accepting that Knowledge able to function as actors who are 'free' to choose from among options made available for them, and also to innovate practices in which they are seen to be in alignment with the goals and plans set down from 'above' (Foucault 1988d, 1990a). This also effects a marginalisation or official exclusion of an individual's way of knowing the work and one's self – the type of official exclusion described by Haraway, Smith and Townley in Part 1 of this paper (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990a; Townley 1994).

By discovering and documenting various ways that workers are not dominated and are instead actors with a certain type of 'freedom' and responsibility, this chapter provides a jumping off point to the following part of this report – resistance or secondary adjustment practices of 'free' subjects (Goffman 1961, pp. 54ff, 199ff). In addition, this chapter identifies and describes other practices through which subjects themselves deploy the same freedom that permits governmentality to occur, by inserting their own knowledge into the production of official Knowledge –

thus intentional acts of resistance in the face of both forces from the surrounding society and those more particular to TMTL (Foucault 1988a, 1990c; Haraway 1990, 2004a; Smith, D. 1990a; Townley 1994).

With this, the larger trajectory of this report begins to become visible. In the locale of TMTL it is possible to see the whole of Foucault's work not as a set of disjointed studies of various forms of power but as a set of studies aiming, albeit not in a strategically planned way, at the general target of modern practices of power and subjectivity. Each of these practices is not specific to a particular domain of social life (for example, psychiatry, medicine, penal practice, sexuality), rather, they can all be found to coexist and imbricate with one another – discourse, discipline and subjectivity all exist and imbricate but do so in discrete ways depending upon the way discipline and governmentality, and Knowledge and power come to exist in the domain and context. At the same time, Knowledge and power remain separate and non-causal of the actual 'doings' that obtain in any particular context. This is consistent with Foucault's characterisation of his own work:

> ...the goal of my work during the last twenty years ... has not been to analyse the phenomenon of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis.
>
> My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects... [This includes] the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call 'dividing practices.' The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him ... Finally, I have sought to study ... the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject... (Foucault 1983, p. 208)

In so doing, I am intentionally acting to render disciplinary, governmental and other forms of power for directing or otherwise influencing others or oneself into phenomenon that are visible as different facets of the same dispositif – how particular forms of rationality are enacted through strategies and tactics, technologies and programs (Gordon 1980). This also makes it possible to understand how strategies and tactics, technologies and programs are employed and deployed to reify

existing structures or produce ad hoc structures that allow one both to be a subject with membership status in a social network and to continuously reify or change that network and subjectivity while still being consistent with rules common to modern society and its components.

This chapter will proceed by highlighting particular practices and demonstrating how they facilitate governance of the subjects (a) in terms of 'political arithmetic' and (b) that occur at the confluence of disciplines, Knowledge, truth, responsibility and free choice (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1981; 1988d, p. 19; Gordon 1991; Hoskin 1996).

a. Hiring Agents: Strategically Selecting & Enclosing Subjects

Before call centre agents may be disciplined or governed, they must become employees of the company. Each of the organisations participating in this project exhibits various practices for making these selections. Each organisation's practices are similar.

For *MHealth,* a regional insurance company specialising in mental health care benefits, job advertisements for call centre agents are placed in the local newspapers of towns in the metropolitan area in which the business is located. On occasions when *MHealth* was advertising during fieldwork, the advertisement emphasised the implicit customer service orientation of the call centre. Over the course of fieldwork at *MHealth,* there were three separate advertisements for agents. In the first two, the call centre also highlighted the desire to attract individuals with higher education or clinical experience in psychology or mental health care and/or individuals with vocational experience in customer service venues. In one case, an individual with

experience in call centres and prior education and experience in mental health care applied for the job.

Of the four agents hired from these advertisements only the last one described above remained after six months of work. In exit interviews, those who resigned indicated they thought the job was improperly advertised and required an individual with more desire to fill a highly repetitive data entry job than one oriented to either customer service or psychology. Rabbie, one of the agents providing this feedback, told me in an interview:

> I want to really help these people [i.e., the callers]. I know I'm not a counsellor and can't do *that*, but, I mean, when they call they're really stressed out and I want to help them feel confident that *MHealth* is a place that they can be comfortable with... so they calm down and let the counsellors help them. But *I could never do that*... [Management] was always pushing us to work faster and faster. It was like they wouldn't allow me to feel like I was helping anyone but the company... and eventually I decided that I couldn't do that and feel good about myself, so I'm quitting.[151]

In fact, this criticism was consistent with the observations of another agent who had quit near the commencement of fieldwork at *MHealth* in order to pursue higher education in clinical psychology. Prior to her departure, this agent provided the company with a set of job skills and personal predilection toward those skills that she thought most important for success in the call centre. These emphasised what she perceived to be the organisation's institutional preference for individuals who are more oriented toward the provision of very fast and technical contact with customers

[151] Burchell indicates that individuals are most deeply affected by political power when it forces them into a different relation with themselves than they would prefer:

> [Individuals] ...are most profoundly affected when the way they are governed requires them to alter how they see themselves as governed subjects. It is then, as Vaclav Havel puts it, when a 'line of conflict' is found to pass not just between distinct subjects but through the individual person, that individuals may resist and even revolt (Burchell 1991, p. 119).

Of all the forms of resistance or revolt, 'exit' is considered by Foucault to be the most conclusive and authoritative, and the one available to nearly anyone, regardless of position (Foucault 1994b, 2000d). Rabbie's comments reflect the exercise of this option, albeit in a way much less dramatic than Foucault implies in the sources referenced above.

rather than empathic or clinical forms of customer care. This was highlighted by the following interview question prepared by this agent:

> Q: Do you enjoy taking your time to complete work, or do you prefer to finish quickly? (Notes to interviewer: This job requires the sacrifice of quality (e.g., thoroughly exhaustive/detailed documentation) for speed. There are only 30 seconds between calls to document what has taken place. Perfectionists may find the position frustrating.)

The goal of this question was to make it possible for the interviewee to *freely express* a preference for one or the other – indeed for the candidate to have and maintain a relationship with one's knowledge of one's self – and for the interviewer to identify candidates with an orientation to speed over any other qualities of working practice.

Another question written by this agent highlighted her observation that the work involved many interruptions and few, if any, opportunities for in-depth analysis of a client's case or other facets of the work:

> Q: If offered the position, do have a preference of working on several small responsibilities or one large project at a time? (Notes to interviewer: This job does not provide much time to work on large or ambitious projects. Employees usually have time only to work only on their daily responsibilities. A person who prefers one large project at a time may not be happy in this position.)

Together, these questions provide the interviewee with a free choice and responsibility to one's self and, if the interviewee fulfils that responsibility, provides the interviewer with details about the job applicant that could be used to assess likelihood for a 'good match' between worker and work. Despite these questions, of the job applicants in these first two rounds of hiring, the organisation opted to hire individuals with prior experience in customer facing work (hotel management, retail) and with college preparation in a psychological field (sports psychology). This was done based upon the expressed belief on the part of the call centre team leader that

‘customer service’ skills and advanced knowledge of psychology were somehow necessary but beyond the organisation’s ability to ‘train’, while skills and attitudes related to quick and repetitive processing could be ‘trained’.

As it turned out, with only one agent hired from these two rounds actually surviving at the call centre for more than several months, the organisation was faced with what Kam, the call centre supervisor, characterised as “an obvious flaw in hiring logic”. In the third round of advertisement and hiring, managers at *MHealth* explicitly advertised for individuals with experience in insurance claims processing and prior call centre work experience – emphasising answers to the two questions noted above in their hiring decisions. Focusing on individuals with experience in these two areas was in reaction to the organisation’s previous and apparently mistaken belief that one could ‘train’ individuals to accomplish and tolerate a highly repetitive job with severe time constraints.

The overall protocol of interviews followed conventions of ‘behavioural interviewing’ in which the interviewee was asked to describe a scenario from his or her previous work that illustrated the skills being asked about. Proponents of the behavioural interviewing strategy hold that this will provide the interviewer with more ability to predict how the candidate will perform and react in the job.

While I was not permitted to attend applicants’ interviews, I learned from Kam that she thought job applicants with prior call centre experience demonstrated their ability to meet the company’s values implicit in these questions. After their hire and training period, it was not uncommon for Kam to loudly congratulate these agents for their low average talk times and speed in data processing. She disclosed to me her satisfaction over hiring individuals with prior call centre experience:

> [T]hey’ve already *got* it in their heads that they have to work fast and that this job is highly

> repetitious and boring. We don't have to deal with the constant struggle to convince them that their job is not to *be friendly* with callers, rather that they have to get the data from [the caller] into the database. I'll take someone who's fast over someone who's friendly any day!

That is, over a period of several months and three rounds of hiring, Kam had discovered that it was easier to hire individuals who did not require training in the primary perspectives and skills required of call centre agents, or who had already received it from experience and training in another call centre. In following through with this strategy, she had succeeded in hiring individuals who she now believed required less managing from the organisation – already disciplined subjects who were very economically managed. Approaching one year from the date this third round of agents was hired, two thirds of them were still at *MHealth*. Those who left the organisation did so to address personal issues and not, in the first place, in response to a personal clash with the speed and repetition demands of the workplace. In hiring individuals with attitudes and values that appeared to be consistent with the call centre's bias for productivity and speed, Kam strategically excluded from employment those individuals who might resist the organisation's bias toward production, or come to require more attention from management in order to produce such attitudes and values. As a side effect, this also reinforced the organisation's Knowledge of what call centre work *is* and *how a call centre agent should behave*, if only by reducing the possibility that other viewpoints might be felt and exhibited by agents. Thus, it shows a unique means for marginalising and stifling such competing viewpoints with an effect similar to that described by Haraway in her critical historical analysis of the production of scientific discourse (Haraway 2004a), Smith's criticism of social scientific discourse (Smith, D. 1990b, esp. pp. 31-57) and Townley's criticism of HRM practices in modern businesses (Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996).

As indicated above, candidates for the clinical positions at *MedAdvise* were required to already have education, professional certification and experience in nursing, and virtually all of the nurses working at *MedAdvise* have achieved the level of RN (registered nurse). Based on the fact that there had never been any other special requirements for employment at *MedAdvise*, it was the position of the nurse manager that this was the only 'real' requirement for the job.

Just prior to the commencement of fieldwork at *MedAdvise*, two new nurses had been hired. One of them was a nurse who, like many others in the call centre, was in his 60s and nearing the end of his career. Due to his age and side effects of chemotherapy for persistent cancers, now in remission, he was no longer physically able to withstand the demands of ward nursing. The other was a relatively young nurse who was looking for part time work in order to facilitate the role of primary caregiver for her children. Where the latter became independent in her work within about six weeks time, the former, on account of very low computer literacy and keyboarding skills, had still not become independent and had never shown the ability to meet the rate at which other nurses were able to work calls.

After a six month period during which Lanie, the nurse manager of the *MedAdvise* call centre, documented his very low productivity and constant reliance on other nurses for support, eventually culminating in his termination, she decided that computer literacy and word processing competence should also be a prerequisite for the job. Lanie admitted that none of the remaining nurses had good computer literacy or word processing skills when they had commenced work at the call centre – many of them still exhibiting a hunt-and-peck typing style – but said:

> The hospital is making more demands that we do more with less. I can't afford to hire nurses that will take a lot of effort to train and who will take a long time to become independent. We need people who have more skills than we could expect to find before and they have to

become independent *fast*!

Beyond the new technical requirements, the nurse manager of the call centre felt very strongly that the professional ethics of experienced nurses would implicitly allow them to adjust their own practices to meet the productivity and quality requirements of the call centre.

It is a fact that only one new nurse was hired after this new requirement was instituted at *MedAdvise*. This nurse held an associate degree in computer science in addition to her professional and clinical training and experience as a nurse.[152] The manager of the call centre was very pleased with the computer knowledge and skills of this nurse, and enthralled at her ability to become independent so quickly after her hire. After this, Lanie made it very clear that being able to quickly learn and comply with the requirements of the software used to perform triage interviews and clinical assessments (see the previous chapter) was of paramount importance in ensuring success on the job. She did not reach this decision without trepidation because she knew and valued the ability of *MedAdvise* to provide career options for nurses who might otherwise be unable to find work. In effect, Lanie, like Kam at *MHealth*, had adopted a perspective that it was as or more important to find people with knowledge and skills that would facilitate speed and productivity – thus reducing the organisation's responsibility and cost for training – than it was to find individuals with the clinical knowledge and certification necessary for admission into the health care field. Of course, in the case of *MedAdvise*, it was the case that all candidates for the job already had substantial technical and clinical training and experience in the discipline of nursing, and were thus already inculcated into its epistemology.

[152] While tolerant of my presence in the call centre, this nurse also declined participation in the study.

The outcome of hiring only nurses – which is a necessary practice in terms of the goals of the organisation – is the assurance of having individuals already inculcated in the inscription practices of modern medical care. Nurses *already know and have* this as a component of the background knowledge of having been trained in the discipline and having succeeded in nursing work. Additionally, by mandating that new hires must meet certain requirements for computer literacy, keyboarding skills, etc., Lanie has strategically aimed to ensure that the organisation will be responsible for less training and coaching while the prospective telephone nurse is responsible for more. Only those meeting the medical/technical and computer skill requirements will be permitted entry into jobs in the call centre. It should be emphasised that I am not trying to criticise this as an unwarranted practice. Instead, I am pointing out that such mundane decisions effect the activation of a strategy that favours the technical, economic and bureaucratic orientation of the call centre, and selectively marginalises or excludes viewpoints, ideas, etc. that are not already included in the organisation's apparatus. Consequently, power is a thing that does not necessarily arise simply in the structure of an organisation or some transcendental theoretical construct. Instead, it is a thing that is polyvalent, though *activated* by the doings of members who may otherwise have a very different viewpoint on matters (Foucault 1990a, pp. 98-102).

The call centre at *BigTech* was actually undergoing substantial layoffs, and no new hiring was done during fieldwork. However, experienced agents at the call centre indicated that it was common for the company to retrain employees who had been laid off from other jobs that had been abolished. In so doing, *BigTech* practised a form of corporate welfare in which workers experienced in other jobs were provided with retraining for work in the call centre. In some cases, employees who

had worked for the company for 20 years had gone through several such layoff and retraining cycles, moving into new jobs when their prior job was made redundant.

One apparent effect of this is the creation of a durable loyalty to the company among some workers, and is willingness to accept the organisation's expectations for the new job.[153] For example, Ari, a veteran of more than 30 years at *BigTech*, told how he had started working for the company as a high school graduate when his mother got him the job to prevent him from enlisting in the Air Force (for fear he would be sent to war in Viet Nam) and has held five different jobs at the company and lived in three different states during that time. While not always excited about his job, he admitted that he owed much to the company because the jobs had permitted him to provide for a growing family during sometimes difficult economic times.

Similarly, Bos, a 15 year veteran with the company, told how he had been hired as an attendant in the cafeteria of a now-closed manufacturing facility run by *BigTech*. When that facility was closed, he applied for and was hired as a loading doc labourer. When he lost that job to a subcontractor, he applied for and got a job in the call centre. He raved about the fact that the company would provide him, an individual with virtually no experience with computer technology, with courses of training that qualified him for work as a technician who performed troubleshooting and remote repair of what he enthusiastically referred to as "high tech stuff!" over the phone. That is, in practicing this form of corporate welfare, it appears *BigTech* is strategically producing a very compliant workforce that has been inculcated into its corporate values, and willing to comply with the demands of the job in return for continued employment. In doing so, the organisation reduces the possibility it will

[153] At the same time, beneficiaries of this form of corporate welfare occasionally appear to be some of the most willing and frequent users of secondary adjustments and resistance practices in the call centre. This will be elaborated in Part 3 of this report.

hire or retain employees who have views and values that differ remarkably from the organisation, or who would activate such views in ways that could impact the organisation's ways of doing and Knowing the work and workers.

In interviews with a set of six supervisors at the *BigTech* call centre, they indicated that hiring had also been accomplished in two other ways. First, a local temporary employment agency was used to screen for individuals with pre-existing computer skills and troubleshooting skills. Those individuals on record with this agency whose skills matched those required by *BigTech* could be hired on a contract basis.[154] While I was not permitted to see the actual job application and interview questions used by *BigTech* and this temp agency, interviews with individuals employed under this arrangement indicated that they thought their skills were substantially above those of 'real' *BigTech* employees who had been trained internally. In the past, *BigTech* had also held occasional 'job fairs' in which it accepted unsolicited applications and conducted interviews and technical proficiency tests on the spot. Similar to the above, individuals were hired when they possessed skills immediately needed by the call centre, thus reducing the amount of training that would have to be provided by the organisation.[155]

At *DeliveryWorldwide,* advertisements were not only posted in the local newspapers but also on the company's World Wide Web site and on an Internet job search site (MONSTER.COM). In all cases, job applications were to be delivered

[154] This also permitted *BigTech* to release the workers on a moment's notice. During fieldwork, virtually all of the personnel hired under this arrangement were released. This accounted for a workforce reduction of nearly 200 employees.

[155] Using neo-classical economic theory, contractors can be said to belong to a secondary labour pool and those employed directly by *BigTech* to a primary labour pool. However, the situation at *BigTech* is the inverse of that normally found, where 'real' employees are more highly skilled than contractors. However, consistent with neo-classical economic theory, the organisation delves into the secondary labour market when its primary labour pool does not contain adequate expertise to satisfy its demands. (It should be noted that the terminology 'primary labour market' and 'secondary labour market' as used here describe distinctly different categories than those described by my use of the sociological categories of primary, secondary and tertiary labour, as used in this report.)

online, through the company's website, the Internet job search website or in E-mail. Beny, the trainer at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre in which this research was conducted, was the initial interviewer for candidates. She told how she thought the fact that applicants had to submit job applications through technological means was actually a very important practical skills test for job applicants:

> [I]f they can submit an application online, then they've got some basic computer literacy skills – that in itself is an important qualification for the job. If they can use a computer well enough to do that, that's one less thing I have to [train them to] do.

Upon receipt of applications, Beny demonstrated that she sorts them into piles of candidates and non-candidates. Through a concurrent interview (Ericsson & Simon 1980) including a series of questions as she was performing this sorting, it became apparent that criteria for candidacy include prior experience in 'customer facing' work (examples provided included camp counsellor, retail, phone operator, telephone help desk, etc.) and indications that suggest the individual already has a propensity to "want to help people." She emphasised, however, that this was desired only because she, as the trainer at this call centre, thought that it was substantially more difficult to train people to have a customer-oriented attitude than it was to:

> ...train them to use the [computer databases] the way we want. Even then, the software is really not all that difficult, and if they just fill in the fields on the screen in the order they're on the screen [that is, following a disciplinary script similar to that described for *MedAdvise* in the previous chapter] then they're a long way to being a good agent. The really difficult part is remembering all the rules and policies and company products – and they're changing all the time. If people already know how to work with frustrated people then my job – and their job – will be a lot easier.

In other words, Beny has a strategy to select individuals she thinks have already adopted an orientation that would be difficult or uneconomical to 'train', with the idea that she *can* succeed in training anyone to use the computer tools according to company policy.

When it came time to actually interview the candidates, she told how the company provided a list of 24 interview questions, from which she could choose as many as desired to ask in an actual face-to-face interview. Of these 24 she had chosen to focus on five she thought especially relevant for this call centre:

Table 4. Interview Questions Asked at *DeliveryWorldwide*

1	Rate your punctuality and job attendance history on a scale of 1 – 5.
2	How do you release tension?
3	What do you plan to be doing in three years?
4	What is your ideal job description?
5	What is the worst possible job you could imagine?

Beny told that the first question allowed her to assess how likely candidates would be to maintain the company's expectations for attendance and compliance with regulations related to maintaining work schedule. The importance of punctuality and attendance in call centre work has already been described in the previous chapter. Because the job is so repetitive, and her experience indicates that the job is also very stressful, she told that the second question helps her know if the person would present behavioural problems related to job-created stresses. In clarifying her reasons for using the third and fourth questions, Beny said:

> [T]his is really a dead end job. There is very little chance someone can be promoted up into the organisation. I want people who are just looking for a job, not for a career.

The fifth question was one in which Beny said she could best assess the candidate's likelihood for success as a call centre agent:

> [I]f they tell me they don't like repetitive work, or if they don't like to be left alone or don't like to deal with frustrated people all the time, then I know that this job is definitely not for them! I want to hire people who can do the same *boring* and repetitive job for hours at a time, day after day *and not complain*.

Additionally, because Beny is looking for individuals who prefer to be left alone, she is also indicating that she and the organisation would like to employ individuals who are more or less self-regulating. In so doing, Beny is providing evidence that she is especially interested in docile, easy going people who like to stick to schedules and just follow the rules:

> [T]he ideal candidate for me is a single mom or a housewife who wants to pick up some extra money and likes to stick to a schedule so she's able to manage things at home. I don't want people who want a lot of intrinsic reward in the job and I don't want people who are trying to make the system better. I want people who will just do what we want.

In contrast, the call centre manager told me separately that he wanted people with college degrees or other indications that they aspire to a job with more responsibility, independence and pay. While he also indicated that the probability of promotion was low, he wanted individuals who would try to distinguish themselves for any promotion opportunities that may arise. Beny did not know of his preference and he did not know of the criteria she used to weed out candidates.

In the descriptions of the hiring process at the four call centres participating in this study, it is apparent that the companies have and exercise different kinds of authority over the employment relation such that they strategically choose who will be let into the company. However, it is the employee's responsibility to possess attitudes or to have made commitments pursuant to the possession of skills that the organisation can then make use of for its gain. The organisation selects resources

from the population at large for use in making itself in an economical way.[156] That is, it is strategically consistent with the organisation's goals to locate and hire individuals who are most likely to comply with the discipline of schedules, technical procedures and repetition of the work desired of a call centre agent. In so doing, the organisation has already taken a large step toward having a population susceptible to disciplinary and governmental activities, and a population less likely to have and activate views and values that differ remarkably from the organisation's ways of doing and Knowing the work and workers. Remarkably, Beny's position in the organisation allows her to invisibly impede the desires and values of the call centre manager and in so doing activate a power that might not actually be sanctioned by him. She demonstrates that the organisation's policies and practices house a set of possibilities that may or may not be activated depending upon the unique views of individuals in positions of authority.

Once individuals are hired into the call centres, additional practices are employed in order to partition the workers such that they become exposed to other governmentalising management influences. In the previous chapter, partitioning of the workers in time and space made the agent visible in particular ways. This facilitated the formation of particular kinds of Knowledge. As will be shown next, the Knowledge so produced becomes a factor in subsequent management of employees.

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[156] From the epistemology of business, it is not at all unusual nor unreasonable for an organisation to attempt to hire employees who require a minimum of expense from the organisation. This is not what I wish to indicate here. Rather, I am highlighting the existence of a common strategic focus to affect who (with what attributes) is permitted to work in the call centre.

ABSTRACT

Tertiary labour is the fastest growing form of paid work in the West. Prevalence of technology-mediation of labour with computer and telecom networks is increasing. However, few inspect subjectivity in technology-mediated tertiary labour (TMTL).

Using Foucaultian theory, I analyse how a constellation of forces in TMTL influences production of knowledge and how this affects power and subjectivity. Ethnographic methods are used to discover and clarify the creation of knowledge, disciplinary and governmental power, and how programs, technologies and strategies relate to workers' action.

Disciplinary power is activated in architecture, technologies and systems that watch, inscribe and make 'scientific' evaluations of productivity and quality. Workers are inculcated in organisational values and link themselves to organisational goals through governmental power. When these are combined, workers 'see' and 'govern' themselves in a rationality of productivity and quality–a recursive production and activation of knowledge and power appropriating them as willing subjects.

This constellation of knowledge and power forwards a particular 'truth' about subjects that appears both 'objective' and 'natural', though it is as much an artefact of the organisation's apparatus as it is of the subjects' actions in it. This occurs through strategies and tactics in which subjects participate in practices of observing, inscribing and evaluating one's self, and are made responsible for the outcome.

However, there are 'spaces left free' where subjects exercise autonomous action, resistance and adjustments. Workers influence the objectified view of themselves, modifying knowledge and power in which they are produced as subjects. This occurs as 'shadowboxing with data'–affecting what is seen and inscribed. Even in the highly regulated context of TMTL, workers are not just subjects of the organisation but participants in a production of their own selves.

TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED TERTIARY LABOUR: DISCOURSES OF DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

Donald J. Winiecki, B.S., M.S., Ed.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the qualifications for Doctor of Philosophy

Central Queensland University
Rockhampton, QLD Australia

School of Psychology and Sociology

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b. Teams: Strategically Partitioning the Workers into Manageable Groups for the Deployment of Governmentalising Tactics

i. DeliveryWorldwide

Each of the four call centres participating in this project inserts workers into teams of various sizes. While work teams have become so commonplace in business and industry that they are now considered part of the natural order of organisations (Baldry, Bain & Taylor 1998; Hutchinson, Purcell & Kinnie 2000; Knights & McCabe 2003; Rose, N. 1999c, pp. 55-102), the establishment of teams, and particularly 'self-managed teams', is implicated in a management practice that acts to avoid the very expensive proposition of exerting direct disciplinary control over workers. This is done by involving team members in various processes through which they examine, evaluate and manage team mates 'for the good of the whole team' (Batt 2000; McKinlay & Taylor 1995; 1998, p. 173). That is, teams are a feature through which workers can be brought face to face with managerial Knowledge and values with the goal that they adopt a perspective similar to that of management and become more or less self-managing in the workplace (Batt 2000;

McKinlay & Taylor 1995; 1998, p. 173). However, the degree to which this occurs and how it occurs in the four call centres participating in this study varies. Formal and informal teaming of workers also has other benefits to the organisation. For example, teams facilitate informal training of new workers by more experienced cohorts and foster camaraderie in some cases that leads co-workers to be more docile in the face of organisational problems (Cartwright 2003; Frenkel et al. 1999; Knights & McCabe 1998; Sewell & Wilkinson 1992).[157]

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, seven teams are made up of groups of 10-12 individuals assigned to team leaders for day to day feedback and coaching on their productivity and quality measures. Membership in these teams is normally determined by the organisation based on an agent's assigned work schedule. That is, team members are normally assigned to a team leader who shares the same schedule or whose schedule overlaps the agent's schedule.[158] This is to facilitate face-to-face contact, and coaching and counselling of agents who are not meeting the expectations of productivity and quality. Direct contact between team leader and team members is also facilitated by the usual location of agents in the same aisle of

[157] At the same time, however, formal and informal teams make it possible for workers to pass on tactics for engaging in collective or mutually supported acts of secondary adjustments and resistance (Barnes 2004; Beirne, Riach & Wilson 2004; Frenkel et al. 1999; Goffman 1961; Knights & McCabe 1998; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; Winiecki 2004b), as will be detailed in Part 3 of this report.

[158] Team leaders are assigned evaluation and coaching responsibilities as noted in the previous chapter, and also monitor an internal help desk line in order to assist other agents in their work. They are normally individuals who have seniority in the call centre, though this is not always the case. Team leaders are installed in that position for a duration of one calendar year starting at the anniversary date of the Union contract of work in this call centre, and may continue for multiple years if they choose and if management approves of their conduct in the past. They are paid an additional $1.00 USD/hour for the added evaluation and coaching responsibilities they perform. Virtually all team leaders asked, indicated that the additional pay was not an adequate compensation for the added labour involved. Many resigned the team leader role after one year, naming the decreased burden as the sole reason for reverting to the role of 'regular' agent.

Team leaders are administratively 'under' the single supervisor in the call centre, who is assigned the day to day duty of scheduling, and the compilation of data produced by the ACD and team leaders to create employee evaluations. The supervisor reports to the manager of the call centre, whose duties involve payroll and more strategic planning and management of resources in the call centre. The manager reports to a general manager who oversees several call centres across the Western United States.

cubicles as occupied by the team leader – another use of architecture in the call centre to facilitate economical discipline and management of agents.

The team leader has even been referred to as a 'mother hen' who is expected to corral, usher and otherwise keep his or her agents 'in line' with organisational expectations. The actions of Sheila in working with another agent, as described in the previous chapter, are consistent with this expectation and responsibility of the job. Similarly, Foucault describes how members of the pastorate were expected to fulfil a role in which they 'tended to the souls' of members of their congregation, counselling and coaching them to accept certain duties, tasks, etc. in order to make them into individuals likely to go to heaven (Foucault 1979, 1997e). Findlay, Townley and Rose have applied this model of governing souls to the duty and activity of management who see to it that members of an organisation fulfil their duties as employees, and Rose provides an analysis of a range of institutions in modern society in which individuals are similarly managed or governed by experts who use special Knowledge (Findlay & Newton 1998; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1994, pp. 109-137).

However, it is not the case that team membership is always determined on the basis of shift times. Some agents who work later shifts are occasionally assigned to a team leader who may work the early shift. Similarly, sometimes an agent is located in a cubicle somewhat distant from his or her assigned team leader.[159] Consequently, on occasion, not all team members actually receive direct contact with their team leader. In cases such as this, the majority of communication between team leader and a temporally or geographically distant team member may occur through written notes or electronic messaging similar to E-mail. Occasionally, a team leader will request

[159] As noted in the previous chapter, this presents no issues for the collection and display of productivity or quality statistics. Collection of these items for a team is all but automatic when it is conducted through computer systems.

that another team leader, who works the same shift as a temporally-distant team member, serve as a liaison or actually provide one-on-one coaching as determined necessary. Much of the time, however, it is the case that, as Sheila indicates in the opening of the previous chapter, "[agents] can always tell how they're doing just by looking at the numbers [such that the team leader expects] them to read the numbers and know what they have to do to meet the standards." That is, experienced agents are expected (thus, given the responsibility) to develop or apply tricks, self-discipline and other 'technologies of the self' in order to produce 'good stats', and thus be 'good team members' and 'good subjects' in the call centre relative to the 'truth' about them encoded into the statistical measures of productivity and quality.

Additionally, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, membership on teams is relatively fluid. Agents may be reassigned for several reasons. For example, each year on the anniversary of the Union contract, agents may bid for and switch to different shifts based on their seniority. Additionally, team leaders may resign that position at the shift-bid date and return to the work of a 'regular agent'. When such vacancies in the roster of team leaders exists, the job of team leader comes open to bid and a new team leader will likely take over an already-formed team.

As noted above, team leaders share responsibility for conducting quality evaluations over agents on other teams. However, it is usual for individual team leaders to attend to the productivity statistics and coaching on productivity related matters only for their own team members. The oversight of individuals in teams is thus not performed by the overall management of the call centre or higher level management in the overall company. Instead, it is accomplished by an individual who is both 'one of them' and also *not quite* 'one of them'. These team leaders have the authority and freely accepted responsibility (as a consequence of bidding for and

accepting the position) to collect, retrieve and assess data on all members of the team from the computer databases, to use that data to interpret what an agent might 'need' to improve, and then provide individual counselling to agents on the team in order to facilitate this improvement. This role is thus somewhat of a broker between agents and management – a role in which the team leader is expected to influence individuals in ways that bring them closer to compliance with the organisation's expectations without having responsibility for the details of the organisation's expectations. However, as will be shown in the next part of the report, team leaders may also take responsibility for their own agency when activating organisational rules (Argyris 1952).

The group of team leaders was also referred to as a 'team' and participated in a 90 minute weekly meeting with the manager and supervisor. These meetings were the typical context for calibration sessions, the dispensing of new or changed policies from the general office, review of general office evaluations of the call centre (i.e., overall 'mystery shopper' outcomes, etc.) and relay of new local policies or policy changes in response to these data from the general office. On occasion, team leaders would be assigned to present the result of work on special projects in these meetings.

For example, on one occasion a team leader was assigned to assemble the result of research through company policy documents and scripting to establish a grounded definition of 'friendliness' in customer service work. This was in response to a determination from the call centre manager that the practice of several agents in the call centre was not sufficiently 'friendly', as highlighted on a recent 'mystery shopper' report sent by the general office. In this case, Stevie, the team leader assigned this task, culled the company's online database of policies and scripting for all entries containing the words 'friendly', 'polite', 'happy', and others she thought

would hit relevant documents. The result was a 34-page printed compilation of company policies she named the ‘friendly pack’. The call centre manager decreed that this was to be treated as an authoritative definition of what the organisation requires in order for a team leader to verify that an agent has conducted his or her work in a ‘friendly’ manner.[160]

Additionally, because it was produced directly from the company policy database in response to the ‘official’ assessment of the general office that particular agents were not ’friendly’, as documented and ‘proven’ by observations produced during the general office’s audit calls, it was linked to two different, and official, sources of data. Team leaders were directed by the call centre manager to use this set of documents as the basis for their ongoing conduct of call quality evaluations and agent coaching. It is thus a demonstration of how (a) policy and (b) Knowledge produced from the apparatus described in the previous chapter are invoked in practices intended to ‘conduct the conduct’ of actors in the call centre – a tactic intended to guide or influence the actions of team leaders when they rate, coach and counsel agents. In effect, the team leaders were being implored to accept policy and official forms of Knowledge about the work and workers. Once the team leaders have accepted these things, management expected that team leaders would use this as a backdrop to their development and deployment of tactics for affecting agents’ practice.

It was also the case that these meetings were a common venue for complaining about agents, the sharing of experiences gained when attempting to affect the practice of a given agent, and sharing of tactics that might be useful when attempting to affect the practice of a given agent. Thus, the organisation of

[160] As described in Part 3 of this report, while this pack of materials was to be considered a definitive guide, individual team leaders considered it to have less authority than their own experience.

individuals into teams – in this case the team leaders – and collection of those individuals into meetings produced a context in which they could, among themselves, share practices for 'conducting the conduct' of agents in the call centre.

Teams at *DeliveryWorldwide* were also given time off the phones for one 30 minute meeting each month[161] in which the team leader was expected to disseminate new or changed company policies or upcoming product changes, and to provide any ad hoc training or information-giving he or she thought relevant given recent productivity or quality statistics for members of the team. It was in such meetings that the team leader was expected to provide training or information-giving on the grounded definition of 'friendliness' that was produced by a team leader.[162] The organisation of teams and meetings among teams at *DeliveryWorldwide* thus provided management and team leaders with venues in which they could develop and/or apply tactics to 'conduct the conduct' of agents.

Invariably, these tactics appealed to the Knowledge/power produced by the statistical displays of productivity and quality. In effect, regardless of the agent's situation and whatever he or she declared as a reason for not being able to meet productivity or quality expectations, the team leaders' talk oriented to ways they could try to convince the agent to accept the facticity and 'truth' of statistical representations of work. Once an agent had accepted this, the team leader could then coach the agent to adopt and practice particular techniques for making good stats. Until the agents accepted the notion that the stats are a truthful and complete representation of themselves, counselling was considered not to have any effect.

[161] These team meetings were suspended for nearly two years on account of an increased volume of incoming calls arising from the closure of several *DeliveryWorldwide* call centres – it was more pressing for the call centre to answer incoming calls within the organisationally-specified service level than it was to maintain these meetings.

[162] In practice, these team meetings seemed to be used by agents as a 'backstage' venue (Goffman 1959) to protest or appeal recent decisions by management or actions by the Union or other agents. More detail on this will be provided below.

Coaching, counselling, etc. always operated on the presumption that the stats were an accurate and sufficient representation of 'service work' for the organisation and the activity of any given agent. Once agents freely accepted this, and a responsibility to improve themselves in the face of the organisation's observation and examination apparatuses, they could be provided with techniques that 'conducted their conduct' so they would 'shadowbox with data' in the stats and, ultimately, affect improvement in their stats/performance. By bringing agents to the point where they freely engage in this shadowboxing game, the agents are enclosed in a situation in which their personal values and desires are made to be aligned with those of the organisation – where *other* personal values and desires no longer have purchase. The only moves that matter are those that are made relevant by the constellation of data that produces official Knowledge of the work and worker (Foucault 1980c, 1983, 1988c, 1988e, 1990a, 1993, 1995; Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990b, esp. pp. 31-57; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996).

ii. *BigTech*

At *BigTech*, agents are assigned to teams based on the products they are assigned to support. Thus, the assignment into teams begins essentially from the start of training on those products. Each team of agents is administratively headed by a non-agent supervisor who reports directly to one of two upper level managers in the call centre. Depending on its size, each team also contains one or more quality support specialists (QSS) who are responsible for performing met/not-met quality evaluations of agents' work, and providing feedback and coaching or counselling to agents based on these evaluations. The QSS is also responsible for compiling and

posting monthly reports of statistics for each team. The product is a hierarchical observation and normalising judgement where responsibilities and duties are more clearly defined than at either *DeliveryWorldwide* or *MHealth*, where team leaders are also responsible for agent work. This appears to produce a separation between agents and supervisors, not only on account of the different duties that find them in different places doing different things, but also geographically since supervisors work in cubicle spaces that are usually distant from the agents.

In terms of this project, the different duties and distance between agents and supervisors, and ready access to various forms of technologically-mediated surveillance, seem also to produce a relation of forces such that supervisors 'see' their agents primarily through the ACD-produced charts and tables, and the QSS's scores on met/not-met evaluations. Rhia, a supervisor at *BigTech*, characterised it this way:

> [Supervisors] are so busy dealing with business issues, meetings, meetings and *more meetings* that we really don't have time to get to know our agents. We end up looking at them primarily though the reports that come from the ACD and our QSSs. A lot of us also *try* to get out there, but we usually end up not being able to do it very much. When I have to know something else about an agent I'll usually go talk to their QSS. They [i.e., the QSS] know the agent a lot better than I ever will. I don't always like it this way, but it's the way we have it.

Similar to *DeliveryWorldwide*, *BigTech* agents assigned to particular teams are located in contiguous cubicles in the call centre. This is said to facilitate communication between the agents such that they may support each other during the course of customer calls. QSSs are not usually located very close to the agent's cubicles, however. The vast majority of the QSSs' 'observation' of agents at *BigTech* occurs electronically through barge phone taps and the ACD system.

In this context of team, membership is established based on the products agents have been assigned to support – a partitioning based on knowledge provided

through training and ongoing peer-to-peer support. In addition to providing an organisational category for membership, team assignments also facilitate other activities in *BigTech*. For example, one-hour long, bi-weekly staff meetings are scheduled so that half of the team attends a meeting on one day of the week and the other half attends the meeting on another day of the week. This splitting of the team into two meetings per week is to make sure there are agents available to take calls at all times.

Staff meetings are used to disseminate news, policies, scheduling issues and team-wise discussion of quality or productivity statistics, although agents also have the responsibility to check the communal display of statistics on a regular basis.[163] Depending on the supervisor, staff meetings may also be a venue in which matters of scheduling, covering for workers requesting time off, etc. are to be addressed, and decisions ostensibly made the responsibility of the team. In this way, supervisors indicated, members of the team could not claim that decisions were a matter of fiat and somehow disadvantaged them. That is, team members were 'responsibilised' or inculcated into a 'high commitment' practice of implicating workers into tactical decisions that attached them to company policies relating to work schedules, etc. (Hutchinson, Purcell & Kinnie 2000; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; McKinlay & Taylor 1998).

For example, Cal, a supervisor and 20-year veteran of *BigTech*, gave an example of a staff meeting in which a new agent/team member was asking for time off prior to having actually earned any vacation time with the company. This was in

[163] In an interview with Roj and Cal, two supervisors at *BigTech*, they indicated that when incoming call volume has been intense, it was not unusual for supervisors to organise informal meetings in the call centre at times outside of all agents' work hours – thus requiring agents to come in to the workplace when they were not scheduled to be at work – in order to have all members of a team together to discuss and make decisions that impacted the team. No such meetings were observed during fieldwork.

order to attend what the agent characterised as an important family function. This necessitated one or more of the remaining agents on the team working additional days to cover his absence.

While Cal said that in other situations it would not have been difficult to get people to work overtime hours, this episode occurred during the late summer when most agents were already committed to vacation schedules and other planned activities with their families, and thus not readily willing to interrupt their plans. Cal told how his prodding and provision of examples of how other members of the group had asked for and received similar favours in the past, "*guilted* them into it" and several agents eventually agreed to cover for the other agent's missed days. Later, I learned that agents in teams actually had an informal process to be invoked in situations such as this; agents with lower seniority in the call centre were expected to compromise their schedule before senior agents. While I subsequently learned that Cal knew of this informal pecking order, he admitted that it didn't really matter to him how the agents worked out such things – only that they did so more or less independently and willingly. He indicated that it was his belief that a team that worked out such things independently was a team that was largely self-managing, and the individuals on it more willing to compromise with the knowledge that they could expect to be on the receiving end of such compromises in the future.[164] In fact, Roj, another supervisor in the *BigTech* call centre, told how he invoked similar responsibilisation in his work as supervisor:

> [I]f I come to the team and tell them that *we have an issue to deal with*, it doesn't matter if that issue is something particular to an individual on the team, or something to do with the company. I just frame the issue for them and then expect them to come up with a way to deal

[164] This is similar to what is described by Burawoy (1979, p. 61) as a tactic used by foremen to elicit cooperation from hourly workers when there was no financial or other organisationally sanctioned benefit. That is, promises of future favours were all the foreman could offer in return for cooperation in the present.

with it.

That is, Roj sees his job as supervisor to be, in part, *framing the issue* in a way that orients the workers to a particular goal and making them responsible for a decision. In doing so, he can affect the agents' perspectives in ways that 'conduct their conduct'. The fact that agents are organised into teams and that teams hold regular meetings are administrative functions that facilitate this tactic. Similarly, a bi-weekly 'tech-debrief' session is scheduled for weeks alternate to the staff meeting. These sessions are intended to provide agents with training or information on emerging technical issues on the products supported or the software tools used to accomplish this work.[165]

At *BigTech*, 'team' was also used to describe an amorphous group of individuals who were working, officially or tangentially, on intermittent or short-lived projects. Similar to the way Cal and Roj frame issues for agents on their team, it is common for the administrator in charge of such teams to frame the issues to be addressed in terms of the organisation's goals. For example, Rhia, a supervisor with over 15 years experience in various roles at *BigTech*, including that of a call centre agent, brought together a collection of agents to come up with suggestions to solve problems related to the speed with which customer calls are resolved when the first agent who works the call is unable to solve it, and 'escalates' it to 'second level' agents for resolution. Factors thought to contribute to this problem were listed in a

[165] Several agents confided that they thought the staff meetings were a waste of their time, while they actually looked forward to 'tech debriefs'. Taz, a veteran agent in the call centre, indicated "...we learn things we can actually use in the tech debriefs... But the staff meetings are just places where they read us new or changed policies and where agents are assigned to give presentations on projects they've been assigned to do... We gotta go (to staff meetings) but they're never useful..." In fact, in one particular staff meeting dedicated to the presentation of company policy on diversity and discrimination, most of those present were seen eating their lunch or talking among themselves while the presentation was being made. The presenter did not attempt to gain the attention of those individuals.

series of brainstorming meetings by agents on the team responsible for those 'escalated' calls.

Zera, an agent known for her dissatisfaction with the way agents are evaluated, was assigned as the 'lead' in this ad hoc team. When she began protesting that the evaluation metrics led agents to focus on doing things that resulted in good evaluations and not on solving customer problems, Rhia reminded her that her role (that is, the *responsibility* she had implicitly accepted when taking this ad hoc assignment) was to steer the team toward resolutions and not just to complain. In so doing, Rhia told me later, she aimed to both stifle Zera's protests and make her responsible for solving a problem that the organisation had identified and her fellow agents had brainstormed on. Rhia alluded that her reason for assigning Zera went beyond the above and was also intended to put Zera into a position where protesting the actions of management was not compatible with accomplishment of the task *as a manager* of the team. She also suggested that Zera's work on this team would produce evidence of her ability to function in such a position – evidence that might someday be included in a decision over whether to keep her employed in the call centre or not.

This final example demonstrates how teams exist not only as a strategy for facilitating and reflecting the rational organisation and administration of training and other components of the organisation, but also as a vehicle through which to (a) apprehend workers into roles that align them with company, as opposed to labour, concerns, thus making them responsible for those concerns (Hutchinson, Purcell & Kinnie 2000; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; McKinlay & Taylor 1998) and (b) produce data on the working practices of members on the team. As in the examples above, some of the workers' knowledge and values are excluded from the discourse

of official Knowledge of the work and the workers themselves. At the same time, the organisation's official Knowledge is inculcated into the workers or some of the workers' knowledge is apprehended into the discourse/Knowledge of the organisation. The result is an activation of a strategy that favours the propagation of the organisation's values, tactics and Knowledge, and defends against the inclusion of other forms of knowledge (Foucault 1980c, 1983, 1988c, 1988e, 1990a, 1993, 1995; Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990b, esp. pp. 31-57; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996). At the same time, workers are made responsible for the data produced about their conduct in the process, which has the effect of continuously (re)aligning the workers' knowledge of the work and themselves with the official Knowledge of the organisation.

iii. *MHealth*

During fieldwork, the size of the *MHealth* call centre staff was between three and five full time agents. Because the call centre staff was so small at *MHealth*, the group was not subdivided into teams and instead comprised one team in itself. As with *DeliveryWorldwide*, a team leader, who was also an agent in the call centre, was assigned direct oversight of the operation of the call centre. For about the first five months of fieldwork, the call centre team leader reported directly to the Chief Operations Officer (COO) of the organisation, and ad hoc meetings – usually about once a week – were held between the team leader and the COO. During these meetings, the team leader provided reports on problems and successes in the call centre, and strategic and tactical advice was provided by the COO. About midway through fieldwork at *MHealth*, a supervisor was hired and took strategic control of

the call centre, among other duties, from the team leader. At about the same time, administrative oversight for the call centre was transferred to the marketing department. The new supervisor also assumed the role of liaison between upper management and the call centre team leader and agents. The new supervisor and call centre team leader maintained regular contact through frequent ad hoc meetings.

'Game planning' meetings became a near-daily feature of the *MHealth* call centre about two months after the commencement of fieldwork. These meetings were usually between 15-30 minutes in length and during the early part of the workday, and were used as a venue for the team leader to report policy changes, schedule changes and other issues of general interest for the call centre agents, as handed down from upper management. The team leader also used these game planning meetings as a venue to review daily statistics when they were considered to be especially good or especially problematic, to provide feedback to the agents (including general suggestions for how to handle particular problems with callers, the database software or other technologies) and to make ad hoc changes to the daily schedule of agents in order to reassign agents to expedite essential paperwork that accumulated when call volume was high or to accommodate staffing shortages due to illness, vacations, etc.

Game planning meetings were also venues in which agents were encouraged to report particular difficulties they were experiencing with particular tasks, and to share especially helpful tactics they had developed for accomplishing or accommodating the flow of work in the call centre. This was explicitly framed by the team leader as a way for all agents to 'be aware' of how things are going in the call centre so they could alter their practices in support of the overall functioning of the whole team – implicitly assigning individual workers with responsibility for

maintaining a minute-to-minute Knowledge of the operation of the call centre and for adjusting their practices to fulfil its organisationally imposed goals. The game planning meetings evidenced a venue in which the agents were expected to acquire a wider perspective of the operation such that they would conduct themselves in ways that reflected the overall interests of the operation – a venue for 'conducting the conduct' of workers.

Additionally, approximately once a month the *MHealth* call centre staff held a 60-90 minute lunchtime meeting with clinical staff from a mental health clinic associated with the *MHealth* Company. These meetings were organised in order to provide agents with information on mental health care and how particular, 'agent identifiable' mental health conditions presented by callers could be 'handled' by agents in order to facilitate the job of the agent. The clinical staff hosting these meetings also reported on the tactics of people known as 'frequent fliers' – those who make habitual and sometimes clinically unwarranted use of health care facilities – with the expressed goal of providing call centre staff with "insight into the minds" of certain individuals so the agents could "better cope with" their repetitive calls. That is, agents were provided with ad hoc training in clinical mental health concerns with the idea that they were responsible for deploying this information in ways that eased their job and the stresses they might feel from working with these individuals.

These different team functions highlight how agents were brought into a relation with data both administratively expedient to the day to day operation of the call centre and clinically related to the type of individuals who avail the services of *MHealth*. Thus, the collecting of agents into a team and scheduling of teams into meetings serve as resources with which the organisation can bring the workers into a relation with administrative and clinical knowledge and practices, with the intent that

this knowledge and practice would affect how agents view themselves and conduct themselves as agents of the company. In so doing, the workers are expected to come to Know and conduct themselves primarily with Knowledge provided by the company.

iv. MedAdvise

Similar to *MHealth*, the *MedAdvise* call centre was relatively small and employed 17 clinical agents (nurses) and five non-clinical agents. Following the fact that each group reported to a different supervisor, the nurses could be considered one team and the non-clinical agents another. Unlike the other call centres, the majority of agents, both clinical and non-clinical, at *MedAdvise* worked part-time shifts (under 36 hours per week). Additionally, the majority of clinical agents worked in the evenings and weekends when call volume was highest but also when the nurse-manager of the call centre was not in the facility. The non-clinical agents worked mostly day hours on Monday-Friday – during the same period their supervisor was on duty.

It was the case, however, that the nurse-manager ensured that there was at least one 'senior nurse' on duty at all times. The designation of 'senior nurse' was informal and did not come with any administrative authority.[166] 'Senior nurses' were ostensibly those who had developed a rapport with the nurse-manager and had demonstrated a more or less open willingness to take on administrative and ad hoc organisational responsibilities for the call centre when the nurse-manager was not

[166] In fact, 'senior nurse' is my term. Those who exhibited this role did not appear to have any special name or designation at all. However, when I used the term in conversation with the nurse-manager she knew to whom I was referring. Through these conversations and my observation in the *MedAdvise* call centre, it also became apparent that the duties described here were representative of these individuals.

present. It was common for the nurse-manager to hold ad hoc meetings with these 'senior nurses' when they were on shift, and it was not unusual for these individuals to come to the call centre much earlier or to stay later than scheduled (or even to come in on days they were not scheduled to work) and talk with the nurse-manager. While I was not present during any of these meetings (though I saw many of them occur), the nurse-manager and 'senior nurses' did not hesitate to describe the typical topics addressed in them. Staffing and especially the accommodation of vacation schedules, 'trading shifts' between nurses, progress of relatively new personnel toward independence in the call centre, chart reviews of particular nurses' work and compliance or non-compliance with productivity statistics were said to be common topics for discussion.

It is also the case that the nurses in the *MedAdvise* call centre were all invited to regular monthly staff meetings in which the nurse-manager and her supervisor relayed information from the administration of the hospital of which the call centre was a part. This information typically had to do with new programs and new clients for the call centre to service.[167] These meetings were also used to report on budget and productivity issues that impacted the call centre as a unit in the hospital. The nurse manager also made an effort to schedule a guest speaker in these meetings. These speakers were usually physicians or other hospital personnel who provided 'training' on particular clinical conditions or new services offered by the overall hospital, although on occasion a videotape or lecture was presented by the nurse-manager herself on customer service skills, telephone-triage practices developed by other organisations, and similar call-centre-specific topics. While all nurses were

[167] While the *MedAdvise* call centre took calls mostly from community members, it also contracted with local and regional physicians and clinics to provide after-hours services to patients. When such contracts were established it was normally the case that nurses would also receive a written notice of the contract and any special scripting that was to be used.

invited to these meetings, it was not the case that all attended. In fact, it was unusual for more than four or five nurses to attend.

As described above, across the four call centres participating in this project, teams appear as a means to divide or collect members of the call centres into units that instantiate part of a bureaucratic path facilitating direct contact from relatively higher level (administratively speaking) personnel to relatively lower level personnel, and that somehow reflected the organisation of the call centre itself. Even in the case of *MedAdvise*, where there was little opportunity for the nurse-manager to directly oversee the practice of all nurses, the informal status of 'senior nurse' served to make such contact possible in an indirect way in a manner analogous to that instantiated between team leaders and agents at *DeliveryWorldwide* and between QSSs and agents at *BigTech*. Therefore, the organisation of teams in these call centres reified other divisions either manifest or latent in the structure or practice in the organisation (for example, by product type, by personnel with more or less authority over evaluation or strategy, by seniority or trustedness, etc.), but not such that they can be seen as explicitly caused by such structures. Instead, the activation of particular strategies by the members themselves is what permits those structures to appear as causal factors, simply by the fact that they come to exist within the constraints erected by the organisation and the workers' own orientation to those constraints in their actions.

Additionally, these pathways facilitated the organised flow of data and information both 'up' and 'down' through segments of the organisation, and the facilitation of influence from 'high level' and strategic forms to 'low level' and tactical forms. That is, the combination of teams and different levels of administrative status in teams strategically produces a context in which agents may

be exposed to tactics that frame their options, solicit their free adoption of one of such options, and make them explicitly or implicitly responsible for the outcomes – thus aimed at 'conducting their conduct'. In the following sections of this report I will detail how these various methods are implicated in the activation of governmentality as indicated above.

c. Teams, Team Members & Statistics: Tactics & Technologies for Conducting the Conduct of Agents by Putting Them Face to Face with the 'Statistical Self'

As indicated above, agents in the four call centres participating in this study are organised into teams. As described, each team has a particular individual officially or unofficially assigned to have more or less direct contact between agents in the team and administratively 'superior' personnel. While there is no official policy or rule proscribing a 'higher level' individual from talking with an agent, and while such a thing is not uncommon, it is the case that contact relating to an agent's official conduct (as it is reflected in 'the stats' and evaluations) is usually channelled through the individual(s) who is administratively in that pathway. For example, it is usually the team leader who talks with an agent about his or her stats and evaluations, rather than the supervisor or manager, although it is not unusual for the supervisor or manager to do so.

At each of the call centres participating in this study, the feedback most frequently provided to agents relative to their conduct is passed to them in printed format. Most commonly this appears in the familiar tabular display of statistics (Figure 1). At *DeliveryWorldwide*, this display is updated daily by a team leader and either posted on the outside wall of his or her cubicle or circulated to team members.

When posted on the team leader's cubicle wall, agents are told that they are expected to review 'their stats' every day. In the latter instance, agents are expected to review and initial the table prior to passing it to the next agent on the team. This is to provide the team leader with evidence that each agent has been made aware of how the organisation is seeing him or her. While many agents peruse the document when they receive it, it is also the case that many agents simply initial it and pass it on without reviewing its contents. Thus, whether the daily stats report is posted or passed around, these practices reflect several tactics by which an agent is made responsible for reviewing one's own productivity, thus coming face-to-face with the organisation's image of one's self and one's work. As will be described below, there are additional tactics which are aimed at conflating these two things – the organisation's image of a worker *is* treated as the same thing as the organisation's image of that worker's work as it is reflected in the statistics.[168]

As noted above, *BigTech*, *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* use similar tactics to make these data public, make agents responsible for inspecting these data regularly, and to use the Knowledge immanent in them when adjusting their practice to produce 'their data' so it meets the expectations set forward by the organisation. Those who do so usually accomplish this review when in the process of doing something else or in transit between points that takes them past the display. For example, at *DeliveryWorldwide*, one's path to the breakroom, lavatory or on the way to one's cubicle at the start of one's shift can be made to pass the display. Sometimes this is accomplished when questions must be asked of the team leader, in which case the

[168] However, as will be described in the chapters that comprise Part 3 of the report, it is not always the case that workers willingly accept this conflation. When a worker fails to accept this conflation, one opens the possibility as theorised by Smith, Haraway and Townley, that the worker's knowledge – as opposed to the organisation's Knowledge – can be voiced and included in the discourse that influences what can be known and how knowledge is used (Haraway 1990, 2004a; Smith, D. 1990b, 1990c; Townley 1994, 1995b).

agent might be looking at the display while in conversation with the team leader. Thus, agents develop and adopt practices that both protect their ability to produce good statistical evidence of productivity and quality (minimising time off the phone/maximising time on the phone) while also maintaining a focus on those statistics themselves – practices that exhibit the existence of some degree of acceptance of the relation of forces in which they are produced as subjects in the organisation.

At *BigTech*, the stats are posted in an aisle between the agents' cubicles and the QSSs' cubicles (Figure 56), or at a common internal help desk that is frequented by agents. As described above, at *MHealth*, agents are implicated in the posting of their own statistics and must come face to face with the display on a daily basis. At *MedAdvise*, each nurse's stats are inserted into his or her 'mailbox' – a file folder in a commonly accessible file cabinet – which is the usual repository for printed communication between the hospital and nurses. Nurses usually check their mailbox when entering the call centre for work.

It is also normal for the team leader to add markings to the stats display to indicate which statistics by which agents are meeting the organisation's expectations, which are nearly in compliance and which are considered substandard. This is displayed in the colour coding and 'key' at the lower left of Figure 1 and in the shading of cells in the stats display posted at *BigTech* (Figure 16).[169]

This colour coding demonstrates the activation of a power immanent to the display that strategically orients the reader of the stats to 'see oneself' in terms of the statistical targets of the organisation, and also, as noted in the previous chapter, to see each other agent on his or her team and in so doing relate oneself to each of the

[169] While Sheila, the team leader at *DeliveryWorldwide* responsible for the display in Figure 1, marks up the display to show compliance, 'near' compliance and non-compliance, the display presented at *BigTech* displays only compliance and non-compliance.

others and the averages displayed on the chart. This simple graphic addition to the already reconstructed arrangement of data is analogous to Cal's and Roj's 'framing the issue' for agents in meetings at *BigTech*. In fact, the expectation, and indeed responsibility, that agents will 'see themselves in the data' was made explicitly known by Kam, the supervisor at the *MHealth* call centre, who, in the course of one 'game planning' meeting implored the agents:

> You have to be able to *see yourself in the data*. This [*stabbing the page on which stats are printed with her finger*] is how we see you and this [*continuing the stabbing gesture*] is how you should be seeing yourselves. Each of you know better than I do what's going on minute by minute and if you're aware of how we're seeing you, you can adapt [to the current conditions] and make sure the stats come out right!

Kam makes it apparent that the agents are being made responsible not only for 'seeing oneself in the data', but also for adapting their minute to minute practices in terms of the statistics that the organisation uses to monitor not only the functioning of individual agents but also the overall functioning of the call centre.

The discipline-produced inscriptions are hereby linked with a practice intended to draw the workers into a new relation with themselves – a relation that links their 'statistical selves' with a responsibility to conduct one's own conduct so as to produce satisfactory productivity statistics – linking disciplinary power to governmental power. The agent is thus 'coached' (perhaps 'harangued' is a better word in this case) in one facet of his or her individual conduct by being brought face to face with portions of the 'political arithmetic' (Burchell 1991; Cameron 2000; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1981; Gordon 1991) of the organisation, and told of the expectation he or she will use it as a means through which not only to know oneself but also as a fulcrum against which to leverage one's behaviour (Baldry, Bain & Taylor 1998; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; Knights & Odih 2000) – Knowledge characteristic of governmentality. The individual's own knowledge of

the work and his or her values are selectively excluded from the discourse and thus rendered as illegitimate data from which to 'conduct your own conduct'. Instead, the member is expected to use the Knowledge and 'truth' about one's self provided by the statistics of the organisation – both through the disciplinary tools described in the previous chapter and in the 'softer' practices described here – when making decisions over how to conduct oneself at and in work.

Cal, a supervisor at *BigTech*, uses other tactics for getting agents to 'see yourself in the data'. In biweekly staff meetings, he told he will review new stats reports that include specifics for each member of the team and the average figures for the team as a whole. Depending on the tactics employed, this can be understood as an effort to normalise the workers using data produced through disciplinary means (particularly because the workers are both totalised and individualised in the statistics), although also through the promise of favours or withdrawal of such promises. However, because, as shown immediately below, Cal describes a relation in which he is attempting to communicate a particular way of knowing the statistics as a representation of the workers (similar to what Kam does above, at *MHealth*), he is also attempting to affect their knowledge of themselves such that they monitor and modify their practice in terms of those statistics, something also consistent with governmentalising practices as depicted in this chapter. In so doing, disciplinary and governmental forms of power are brought into alignment – the workers' knowledge of themselves is brought into alignment with the organisation's Knowledge and the workers come to 'conduct their conduct' so as to be consistent with the organisation's desires. The result is an economical governance of the workers because they have been led to adopt the viewpoints and values of the organisation,

and (ideally) require less direct supervision than would be the case if they had not adopted these viewpoints and values.

This also illustrates how various tactics and interrelations attach to both disciplinary and governmental forms of power, deepening their penetration into the workplace and the individuals employed there, and at the same time making the power so produced all the more invisible because it has anchor points in multiple 'places' through the workplace and in the minds of workers. This example provides a glimpse at how power *can be* 'everywhere, all the time' and 'hiding in plain sight', rather than arising as a necessary result of a particular structural relation to the means of production (Foucault 1983; Rose, N. 1999c). That is, when the workers have been brought to adopt the viewpoints and values of the organisation, they can be expected to 'activate' those things when encountering situations that are not explicitly disciplined by the organisation and its tactics. In so doing, the workers themselves allow power to affect them, and through their actions reify and reinforce the values and desires of the organisation. Drawing from the example above, Kam expects the agents at *MHealth* to continuously monitor the stats and independently adjust their behaviour so as to make sure that 'good statistics' are regularly produced.

Similarly, at *BigTech*, Cal told in an interview that when preparing for a team meeting he will focus on the average stats for the overall team, but will also be prepared with examples of how changes in any one agent's stats can strongly affect the overall average for the team. In particular, he will prepare several spreadsheets showing what would be the effect on the entire team's average if the agent with (for example) the highest average call length had a call length closer to that of the median length of other team members, or if the agent with the lowest average number of calls per day had worked a higher average through the entire month. He discloses

these examples in a tactic through which individual workers are seen to be responsible for the overall performance of the team. "The result", he says, "is striking":

> Agents begin to look around at each other trying to figure out who in the room has the worst stats and how that individual is *making them look bad* to [the overall manager of the call centre].

That is, agents are affected to see their own performance and their team's performance in terms of the statistical presentation made possible by the apparatus described in the previous chapter. In so doing, workers are made responsible not only to themselves but also to their team mates through the statistical displays of productivity. Workers are brought into a relation with their team, as the team is made visible in the statistics, with the goal that they regularly monitor their own productivity and that of their team mates, and act in ways that continuously reinforce 'good' productivity for both themselves and the team – including confronting their team mates when their performance isn't 'good enough' (McKinlay & Taylor 1998). As with Kam's tactics above, Cal invokes tactics that make the workers responsible such that they can be seen to be 'infected' and affected by governmental power.

Cal also indicated that he provides implicit promises of reward for such behaviour under the idea that doing so 'takes care of him', and that if workers take care of him, he is justified to 'take care of' members of his team:

> I tell them that they all know that their individual evaluations will vary based on the statistics, and if they're especially good in another area they might not hurt their evaluation at all with low stats, but that [the overall manager of the call centre] looks at team stats and gets upset if our team – or any team – isn't doing as well as the others. He especially *gets mad at me* [if our team doesn't look good on the stats]*!* So I need for you guys to take care of me, just like you know that I try to take care of you when it comes time to schedule vacations and special time off.[170]

[170] This is a brokering role, similar to that described above, in which the supervisor acts as a middleman to provide access to desired resources.

Similar to what Roj said above – that he can 'guilt' agents into accommodating others' desires for time off on account of an expectation that one can be on the receiving end of favours in the future – Cal is saying here that he attempts to put agents face to face with an orientation of themselves in terms of the overall team as it might affect them as individuals in the future. That is, through these particular tactics, the workers' perceptions can be corralled and led so as to be aligned with the organisation's Knowledge and desires. Ultimately, the workers are expected to deploy that Knowledge and desire in their minute to minute conduct (Foucault 1980c, 1983, 1988c, 1988e, 1990a, 1993, 1995; Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990b, esp. pp. 31-57; Townley 1994, 1995b, 1996).

It is also apparent that Cal is connecting heterogeneous resources in order to produce a network of relations that both produce and reinforce a governmental form of power. In particular, he appeals to the workers' responsibility to their team, links that to the way their team is viewed by the overall manager of the call centre, and then links it to promises for future privileges for 'good productivity'. The result is a network of relations that both surrounds the workers and calls upon them to continuously activate and reinforce it. In so doing, the workers are satisfying the organisation's desires and their own – where their own desires have come to be more or less aligned with those of the organisation.

While not in Cal's team, this same orientation to the overall team arose a few months later when Jany, an agent with five years of experience as an agent at *BigTech* and three years prior to that in other call centres, told me that she, and other agents on her team, were growing increasingly frustrated by the fact that one individual on their team was habitually producing very low stats and "bringing down our team's averages". This was especially troubling to members of the team because

their supervisor had informed them that their stats were beginning to be overtaken by an outsourced call centre servicing the same products. She said:

> [T]hose stats are all the company sees! If they see that [the outsourcer] is doing better than us, what's to stop 'em from laying all of us off and sending all the work [to that outsourcer]!? We've gotta get our stats better so we have a chance to show the company that we're better and deserve to keep our jobs![171]

At this time the stats displays were posted with only a number indicating each worker rather than his or her name. While individual workers knew their number and could locate their own stats on the table, these numbers were not shared. Consequently, Jany said, "the guys who have the lowest stats are safe – we don't know who they are!" She said that everyone had guessed who they were but team members still weren't sure. "They can hurt themselves if they want to, but when they start hurting us, then we're mad! We want to get those guys to improve their stats so we can keep our jobs!"

Jany told how she and other agents had pressured their supervisor to post the stats with individual agent's names instead of code numbers. While the supervisor resisted this, saying that she would 'take care of it', eventually, when the stats didn't show any change and the outsourced call centre's stats began to surpass those of the *BigTech* team, she acquiesced. Jany said the result was surprising:

> We all figured it was someone else [who had low stats] – and we'd even given that other person a nickname. We called him 'pants'; y'know, like slacks, for 'slacker'! But we found out *that wasn't* who had the lowest stats! [But] once our names were on the board we didn't have to do anything. The low guys got their acts together and now the team's stats are [improved]. We'll probably all get laid off anyway because the company is moving all call centres to India, but at least we'll have [our jobs] for a while longer now.

[171] This sentiment reflects something similar to what Burawoy describes as 'despotic hegemony' (Burawoy 1983:603, Littler 1990, p. 62), a tactic that can be seen as also influencing the perspectives of workers, albeit through amplifying fear of the economic outcomes of outsourcing.

This episode reflects an arrangement of forces centring around panoptic power as evidenced in the stats displays, and providing an example of how agents will 'conduct their conduct' differently depending on how they are made to see themselves in terms of relations made apparent by the way stats are presented and made urgent through the counselling of their supervisor. In that sense, this demonstrates how biopower is produced in an imbrication of disciplinary power and governmental forms of power. In so doing the worker is brought to connect and include the organisation's forms and norms of Knowledge with one's own values and knowledge, and to use the organisation's Knowledge in governing one's own actions.

It also demonstrates that those leveraging force upon 'pants' and others have come to a particular relation to themselves and their co-workers as mediated by their K/knowledge of themselves through the displays of productivity statistics. As Kam, Cal and Jany suggest above, when brought face to face with a networked constellation of heterogeneous data and other forces that produce a perspective of themselves not solely as anonymous and independent actors but rather *as members of a team* with particular responsibilities to the other members of that team, they will adopt new technologies of the self in order to produce and maintain a new subjectivity *as a member of that team*. In the case of Jany and 'pants', the gap in panoptic power manifested by keeping all workers anonymous on the stats sheets permitted 'pants' and others to shirk their 'team mately' responsibility to the team. However, when a new form of seeing and Knowing one's self came into being by closing that gap (posting workers' names on the stats sheets), 'pants' and others came into a new relation with themselves and this responsibility was suddenly fulfilled. Disciplinary power and governmental power are independently visible in

these examples, and it is also apparent that they can be brought into relation in ways that amplify their force and the depth with which they penetrate into the workers.

The way call centres and agents use displays of statistics – and bring disciplinary and governmental power into various combinations – can be demonstrated in other ways also. At *DeliveryWorldwide* the combined productivity and quality graphs are posted publicly so that individuals can see not only themselves in terms of their team mates, but also see the statistical graphs of each of the other teams (Figure 65).

Figure 65. Public Display of Productivity & Quality Stats for All Teams at *DeliveryWorldwide*

As long as an agent's productivity and quality ratings fall in the upper right quadrant of these graphs (see Figure 3, Figure 4), the agent is considered to be working at a satisfactory rate and quality. However, if not, the agent knows he or she is in a position where improvement is expected.

This was demonstrated by Gray, a veteran agent at *DeliveryWorldwide* who is highly respected for his quality ratings but also consistently criticised by team leaders and management for averaging much more than the desired two minutes and thirty seconds per call. On one of the days in which my fieldwork focused on him, and during an ad hoc break he took to refill a water bottle, I engaged him in conversation about a recent call. During this conversation we were near the display shown in Figure 65 and he changed the subject by gesturing to the sheet depicting his team's statistics. He tapped his data point on the chart (where his name was clearly visible) and remarked that his quality score is always very high but that his productivity score is always relatively low:

> Y'know I always try to do as much as I can for the customer, 'cause I think that's what I'm here for and that's what I like doing. But I feel kinda bad about not taking as many calls as everyone else. I've decided that I'm gonna work on that this month – try and bring my calls per hour [that is, his official productivity rating] up.

Gray thus demonstrates how he is orienting to the organisation's means for seeing the agent, and in the face of that statistical display of 'his' productivity compared with that of everyone else's, he endeavours to affect a technology of the self to alter his own practice and produce more favourable productivity statistics. As above, Gray is not necessarily or not only coming under disciplinary forms of power. Rather he is affecting changes in his own practices based on an adopted responsibility and perspective of himself that is in part produced by his coming face to face with a version of himself to which he was not previously susceptible

(Foucault 1988d; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; Power 1994), and a version with which he is now engaged in a 'shadowboxing' match.

At MHealth, the daily ritual of posting one's own statistics on the whiteboard, review of stats during game planning meetings and the occasional harangue by supervisory staff to "see yourself in the statistics" led agents to develop practices to make their productivity look better. In particular, during high volume periods, agents would attempt to perform only minimal data entry into the database and then scratch other notes on the call onto the ubiquitous pad of scrap paper. When call volume decreased the agent would then re-open incomplete database records produced previously and attempt to complete remaining data entry and data processing using their handwritten notes. I observed many times when this latter processing was completed on scheduled breaks and lunch, or even after the agent was to have clocked out for the day. Rabbie, one of the agents at *MHealth* described it this way:

> [Management] keeps telling us that we're supposed to be able to do things faster and faster. [Even if we could type fast enough] the computer system isn't fast enough to allow us to complete everything during the call and before the next call comes in – it really slows us down! And [management] says they're not going to hire more agents so we're left on our own to figure out how to get things done faster. It's easier to just take handwritten notes and finish the [data entry] later. That way you can still take lots of calls when [call volume is high] and still get data entry done by the end of the day.

When asked about the fact that this data entry is sometimes done on breaks, lunch or after hours, he replied:

> I feel guilty that I'm not able to get things done fast enough – like I'm letting everybody down, so I just do it when I can. Besides, if I'm caught up on everything else, I can usually get it done between 5 and 6PM.[172] Call volume is really low then. I don't usually have to do it on personal time. Sometimes I do, but not usually.

[172] 6:00PM is the end of his regular shift. Other agents whose shift ends earlier were observed to complete this data processing on their breaks and lunch more frequently than Rabbie. He, however, was more open to talking about it.

Rabbie also reflects a feeling of responsibility for not being able to accomplish work at the rate expected by the organisation as reflected in the statistical representations of himself, and thus relieves his 'guilt' by occasionally working on break times and after clocking out for the day. While Rabbie is speaking for himself, other agents indicated that the same applied to them. When another agent was 'caught' doing this by the team leader, and told that she wasn't expected to work on her break times, the agent replied, in what sounded an irritated and harried tone, "if I want to do it, I'll do it. Break times are for me to use however I want!" Like Rabbie, although with a different tinge, this agent is demonstrating her orientation to the stats and adoption of a particular technology of the self that allowed her to complete data entry and data processing on time and also maintain 'good stats'. She has thus accepted responsibility for fulfilling the organisation's 'strategy' – making good statistics. At the same time, by informing this agent that she is not expected to work during breaks, the team leader makes it possible for the organisation to absolve itself of responsibility for 'making' the agent do this. The agents are *freely choosing* to overwork in order to fulfil a desire immanent in the strategies of the organisation and something inculcated into the workers themselves – a strategy that frames the work and workers in a particular relation with the Knowledge encoded in the stats, makes the worker responsible for fulfilling expectations communicated in terms of that Knowledge and which, due to the disciplinary constraints imposed on their time, space and activity, leaves the worker with few choices over how to fulfil this 'responsibility' (Greenbaum 1998; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; Power 1994). The product is an organisationally limited set of choices which are made to appear rational based on one's adoption of the organisation's ways of Knowing the work and workers. Choices that use other forms of knowledge – such as those represented

by Verity in the previous chapter – are rendered as irrational because they are based upon knowledge excluded from the official Knowledge of the organisation. By focusing workers' perceptions upon particular goals and then making the workers responsible for meeting those goals, workers are 'guilted' to act in ways that favour the organisation's strategic goals, even if it means disadvantaging one's self!

As demonstrated above, completing work on personal time, while not condoned by the organisation, was not prevented either. In fact the opposite seemed the case. Over the span of several weeks, each agent had developed a paper data entry form on which they could organise their handwritten notes that would have to be entered into the computer – further demonstrating the agents' self imposed discipline to improve the speed and reliability of this particular technology of the self (a reflexive governmentality!). At one point, Kam, the call centre supervisor, having noticed Rabbie using his form, and the fact he had collected all of these papers in a 3-ring binder, called upon him to show-and-tell at one game planning meeting (Figure 66).

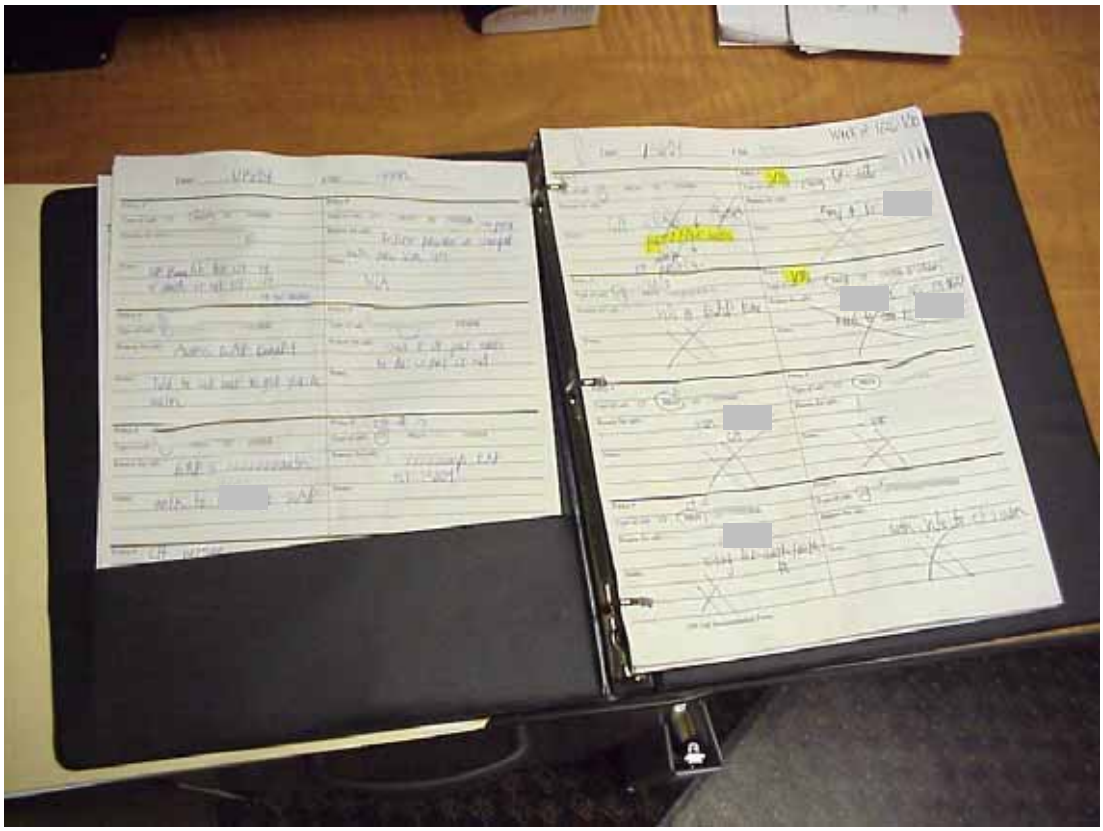


Figure 66. Rabbie's Manual Call Data Notebook

In this show-and-tell session, Rabbie indicated that the form he had generated and the method of filing them into a binder allowed him easy access to data that "I might need later... and I won't have to go to the computer to find it".

Upon finding that virtually all of the other agents had adopted a similar practice, Kam officially sanctioned it by consolidating the individual agents' forms into one and mandating its use throughout the call centre. In so doing, a technology developed by agents to accommodate disciplinary and strategic forces and problems with the computer system, was appropriated by the organisation and presented as a 'solution' to agents' difficulty with maintaining productivity statistics – a problem for which the organisation itself was largely culpable, but the solution for which the

workers themselves had freely accepted responsibility.[173] In so doing, a relation of knowledge and practices becomes consistent with that of governmental forms of power – the workers themselves come to freely conduct their own conduct in terms of what they have come to accept as their responsibility as members of the organisation (Foucault 1988d, 1990a, 1993; Greenbaum 1998; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Power 1994).

However, the organisation has authority over the relation between Knowledge, the work and worker, and authority to set expectations, to reward and to punish. While workers may be rewarded with recognition, flexibility in terms of vacation, special projects or nominal payments, depending on the organisation, the worker is involved in one's own subjection because the worker has lost authority over the deployment of his or her experience-based knowledge to do more, to overcome problems, to 'make out' in tough situations. Instead, the worker is now expected to *always* produce at the level this knowledge allowed. By handing knowledge over to the organisation for nominal and temporary gain, the worker's knowledge is, in some senses, now able to be used against him or her (Knights & McCabe 1998; Knights & Odih 2000; Manley 2001; Parker & Slaughter 1988; Sewell & Wilkinson 1992; Townley 1994). This is reflected in the continuous 'revolutionising' of work by management as described in orthodox Marxian views and labour process theory.

Gordon refers to a similar relation in a discussion of 'technologies of power' and 'strategies of power' (1980, p. 246ff), particularly where the technologies of

[173] The management concept of 'total quality management' (TQM) adopts this very focus, but in a methodical way. In TQM, workers are made responsible for developing solutions to known 'problems' that arise in the workplace, among other things. When solutions are developed they are essentially given over to the organisation, which comes to own them and then utilise them as a new tactic for affecting the knowledge and practice of workers. Similarly, TQM initiatives frequently charge workers with *identifying* local problems and coming up with solutions to them, which are also given over to the organisation for use as it sees fit (Knights & McCabe 1998; Knights & Odih 2000; Manley 2001; Parker & Slaughter 1988; Sewell & Wilkinson 1992; Townley 1994).

individual workers are given over to those of the organisation and encoded into its tactics and strategic possibilities. Gordon clarifies 'strategy' to mean "...the interplay between one or more programmes/technologies and an operational evaluation in terms of strategy: a logically hybrid (and sometimes elusive) function which integrates the production of effects with the utilisation of those effects" (Gordon 1980, p. 252). In other words, the fact that the organisation has found that it *can* appropriate workers' knowledge for its own benefit results in the development of tactics and the assembly of a relation of forces suggesting it *will* do such a thing – a strategy for continually varying and deploying tactics and techniques to increase economy and inculcate workers into the strategy itself, such that the conduct of workers is conducted to continually reinforce and translate the strategy in new ways. In so doing the workers are caught up in a 'tactical polyvalence of discourse' (Foucault 1990a, p. 98ff) that continually opens space for particular tactics, and reinforces the power of those tactics and strategies that produce Knowledge and influence action:[174] "The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Foucault 1983, p. 221).

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, novice agents are frequently very tense about meeting the statistical productivity and quality expectations of the organisation. This is, in part, amplified by a disciplinary practice – the organisation's policy to hire agents, put them through training and then submit them to a 90 day probationary period during which they may be terminated without benefit of protection from due process through the labour union. It is not totally disciplinary, however.

[174] Sawicki clarifies that the 'tactical polyvalence of discourse' is not only a tool for any one group. In fact, she indicates that resistance to the dominant strategic and tactical influence of biopower can also draw upon these same loose and flexible relations – the 'spaces left free' in a discourse – in order to affect the trajectory of a flow of power (Sawicki 1994, p. 297). This will be described and elaborated in Part 3 of the report.

For example, during one day in fieldwork, Beverly, a 10 year veteran with the company and a team leader, gestured to a new agent, indicating that she was progressing toward becoming a reliable and independent agent, but adding:

> She's really worried about her stats right now. She's afraid she's not gonna make it through her probationary period. I tell her she's doing fine but she won't believe me. She only looks at the numbers on the board [the stats displays posted by Beverley, who is also her team leader]. She wants me to print out all of the messages that get sent to agents every day – the ones that describe new policies and scripting and stuff – so she can take 'em home and read 'em. She doesn't want to spend any time *not* on the phone while she's here!

True to Beverley's assessment, this agent progressed past the probationary period and into full status as an agent. She maintained her worry, however, and continued to request that her team leader – even when reassigned to another team – print out materials for her to take home, rather than to take time off the phone to read them at work. She had adopted a responsibility for meeting the organisation's statistical targets for productivity, and had implicated her team leader into technologies of the self that enabled her to fulfil this responsibility by performing work on her own time and at home.

When my fieldwork focused on observing this agent through several shifts – nearly a year following her advancement to full status as an agent – she had retained this worry, but applied it in a slightly different technology of the self. During one of her allotted 10 minute breaks, she, a very slight and shy woman in her 20s, and very obviously pregnant with her second child, told me:

> I've gotta work on controlling my calls. I let the customers ask too many questions and my call time is more than [the company] want[s]. Every time I walk past the board [the display shown in Figure 65] I can see that I'm sometimes in the 'grey zone'[175] I keep asking to be moved so I sit next to Pat [an agent known for very good productivity stats] so I can learn how she does it.

[175] The 'grey zone' is a zone on the productivity/quality graph of agents' work just outside of the desired productivity or quality quadrant. If an agent's monthly stats occasionally fall in this zone it is usually not considered to be worrisome. It is only problematic if an agent's stats always fall in or outside this zone.

When I asked her to tell me how she came to want to learn how to 'do it' like Pat, she waved her hand, gesturing toward the display of team stats on the bulletin board, saying:

> I just see how everyone else is doing better than me[176] and I want to be safe all the time. I don't like the way I look on the board.

This agent orients to the data display in order to describe how she has come to see herself, and how she finds herself wanting in terms of an acceptance of the organisation's goals as reflected in the productivity and quality statistics. Consequently, she adopts particular techniques of working on herself – of focusing on particular facets of *her* working practice. In so doing, she uses the organisation's disciplinary gaze (made possible through the ACD and its statistics) as justification for her fashioning of technologies of the self to be used for self-modification (Foucault 1993; 1997d, p. 87; 1997e).

After asking other agents in the call centre, this agent's orientation to the stats appeared extreme in the way she talked about her own practice and about a desire to work on it. While other agents oriented to the displays, they did so in less self-diminishing ways, indicating that as long as one's productivity and quality stats are in the upper right hand quadrant, 'you're safe'. That is, even the agent apparently un-harassed by 'the stats' still oriented to them as a way to assess oneself and one's conduct. Pat, an experienced agent, said:

[176] As Beverley said earlier in this agent's relationship with the company, this was not the case, but rather was her perception of herself as somewhat less than she wanted to be in terms of the organisation's definition of productivity. At the same time, this reflects something similar to what Burawoy describes as the 'rabble hypothesis' (Burawoy 1979, pp. 140-141) – that workers can be made to see themselves as individuals rather than members of a group and in so doing to separate themselves from the interests of the group. This may also be seen as a 'strategic goal' of the *dispositif* in call centre organisations when they employ individualising and totalising methods of producing a subject through productivity and quality statistics.

> [S]ince [the company] pays attention to our stats per month, but we see the stats reports every day, we can adjust for a bad day by working harder on things on another day. If you do it right, your average stats will be okay even if you had a few bad days that month.[177]

As noted previously, this is not to question the relevance of an employer's expectation that employees will have an orientation to doing one's job as the job is defined by the employer. Rather, as Foucault indicated, in order to conduct an analysis of power relations, one has to abandon any effort to measure subjectivity or truth against the rules established by the organisation, and instead to study the relation that makes this subjectivity or truth possible (Foucault 1997c, p. 59).[178] In the present discussion, this involves an analysis of the relations immanent in the statistical display of observations (abstracted inscriptions in the form of hierarchical observations and normalising judgements) as those are coupled with organisational

[177] This is similar to the practice of 'goldbricking' as reported by Burawoy in which a worker will not put additional effort into a job when he or she cannot receive extra benefits for additional effort (also referred to as 'effort bargaining' in Marxist literature) (1979, p. 57). In doing so the worker is guaranteed base pay. In the context of these call centres, workers are not promised any additional pay for 'busting rate', so a direct connection with Burawoy's secondary labour example isn't possible. Regardless, since workers don't endeavour to do more than they're expected to do, an analogy *can be* drawn.

An interesting case that illustrates another connection between TMTL in call centres and the secondary labour site studied by Burawoy occurred at *MHealth*, where Morris, a new agent (though experienced in high volume call centre work) completed processing on a 'record number' of incoming calls on one day. He confided to me that while he was happy that he could show the company that he was a 'good hire', he was also somewhat sheepish of a sudden expectation that "...since I did it once, I'll have to keep doing it, just to be considered to be doing my job!" This characterises how the worker suddenly considered himself to be similar to a 'rate buster' who had shown the company that he could do more than previously expected, and may, in fact, influence the company to increase the expected 'rate' of work (Burawoy 1979). In this particular case, worry of expectations for higher productivity was shared by all of the agents at *MHealth*. The company soon raised its expectations – as they had announced would be done in order to fulfil the expectations of a large contract recently signed. The call centre supervisor indicated no relationship between Morris' performance and the timing of this increase.

[178] Foucault asserts that we should look for truth in the norms and forms of thought and action (see also, Foucault 1993, fn 4). The American architect Louis Sullivan (Frank Lloyd Wright's mentor) provided an aphorism connecting function and form: "Whether it be the sweeping eagle in his flight, or the open apple-blossom, the toiling work-horse, the blithe swan, the branching oak, the winding stream at its base, the drifting clouds, over all the coursing sun, *form ever follows function*, and this is the law. Where function does not change form does not change" (Sullivan 1988).

While in two different fields and addressing 'truth' in different ways and for different ends – one from an analyst aiming to discover local and contingent truth, the other from a designer aiming to fulfil an imputed 'natural law' or universal Truth – they both allude to the same thing: through the deliberate actions of people, truth is produced and realised.

regulations, coaching, counselling, etc. that are invoked to produce the official subject in work. This is a power that penetrates into the worker's self, and which can silently affect the worker's Knowledge of self, sense of responsibility and thus one's conduct and subjectivity (Rose, N. 1999c, esp. ch. 5-10).

As described here, the formation of teams serves as a convenient bureaucratic structure that sets the stage for coaching and counselling of agents in order to bring them face to face with 'the stats' (the 'political arithmetic' of call centre work), its encoded Knowledge and 'truth' about the subject, and means to implicate the subject in a responsibility to use that 'truth' to serve the organisation. This channel can be either synchronous ('live' and in real time) or asynchronous (the sender and receiver of the communication need not be co-present in space or time). By putting the agent face to face with (a) portions of the statistically represented 'political arithmetic' of the organisation, (b) directions on how to interpret it and (c) directions on what to 'do about it', TMTL instantiates tactics, strategies, technologies and power that demonstrate innovation in the creation and usage of this data to govern workers.

In a historical analysis, Foucault described how these data were envisioned to be produced and used by a hypothetical class of bureaucratic personnel (a form of police) whose job it was to both produce and structure knowledge about population through demographic data and actively manage a population based on those data (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1981; Gordon 1991). Here, however, part of this management responsibility is put upon the agents themselves, along with a perspective that the data *represents* the agent and that the agent is responsible for producing statistical evidence of work that is in compliance with the organisation's goals. As voiced by Kam, the supervisor of the *MHealth* call centre:

> You have to be able to *see yourself in the data*. This [stabbing the page on which stats are

> printed with her finger] is how we see you and this [continuing the stabbing gesture] is how you should be seeing yourselves. Each of you know better than I do what's going on minute by minute and if you're aware of how we're seeing you, you can adapt [to the current conditions] and make sure the stats come out right!

Thus, by separating this data from the sole use by 'police' (management), whose role it is to maintain the population's fitness with and through these data and the Knowledge produced by the data, and putting members of the population in a position where they themselves are responsible for seeing, interpreting and using the data to manage themselves and perhaps affect others, this innovation instantiates a form of power Foucault named 'governmentality' (Foucault 1988d, p. 19; Rose, N. 1999c).

This transfer or creation of responsibility appears to be a feature of the technology-mediated workplace, where workplace divisions, labour process segmentation, surveillance practices and examination practices that convert workers' activity to 'objective' inscriptions make it possible to conveniently and economically push those inscriptions and the 'truth' encoded in them to workers themselves with the expectation that they will use it to 'police' themselves (see also, Argyris 1952; Foucault 1981, 1988c, 2000b; Hacking 1982; Holman, Chissick & Totterdell 2002; Hoskin 1996; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Miller, P. & O'Leary 1987, 1994; Rose, N. 1999c). Additionally, because workers are continuously exposed to means through which the data is asserted, and they cajoled, counselled, harangued, etc. to see data as a reflection of their conduct, the workers are brought to a point where they are made responsible in a shadowboxing match with data. In this shadowboxing, the worker/shadowboxer is put into a position where he or she appears as the principal part of what is cast on the shadowboxing screen (i.e. the stats display). However, that display is also affected by the 'angle of light' (workplace and labour process

divisions, observations, abstracted inscription, processing rules for the data) used to produce that display.

Thus, this appears to be a blending or derivative of several of the ‘modes of objectification’ described by Foucault for transforming people into subjects (Foucault 1983, p. 208f). In particular, this reflects an emphasis on the use of dividing practices in producing the subject, and in the arrangement and deployment of tactics by management to produce responsibility which the individual uses in turning oneself into a subject (Foucault 1983, p. 208). This also reflects how dividing practices can be used by a person in authority to frame an issue and set the stage for use of Knowledge and responsibilisation, as stated by Roj, a supervisor at *BigTech*: “I just frame the issue for them and then expect them to come up with a way to deal with it.”

Thus, whether through the arrangement of data on a page or the framing of data by an individual in a position of relative authority, the agents can be brought face to face with organisational Knowledge such that it influences both working practice and how they know themselves as subjects in the call centre. In so doing the agent is put in a position where he or she develops and/or adopts particular technologies of the self to produce evidence that one is a ‘proper subject’, where this is defined as an individual who is responsible for one’s own ‘truth’, compliant and consistent with the organisation’s apparatus of Knowledge and action.

From the above, it is apparent that agents in these call centres are implicated in a relation arising from a confluence of the way an organisation encloses, partitions, observes, abstracts, inscribes and examines them, and in which they are assigned responsibility to continuously monitor their own stats and affect their selves accordingly. This relation produces a form of power that begins with the very

microphysical techniques of discipline and eventually finds its home in the agent's own subjectivity.

However, it is not always the case that an agent is put face to face with knowledge of his or her self in terms of observations, inscriptions and statistics. There are also practices through which individuals interact with others, both administratively 'above' them and their equals, such that knowledge of one's self is brought out in other ways and into new relations. In so doing, other forms of power come to exist and operate.

One of these forms is similar to 'pastoral power', described by Foucault as a means through which a subject can be brought into a new relation with knowledge and self such that the individual can 'work on' this self to improve (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1979, 1981, 1988d; Gordon 1991). Foucault spoke of this in terms of the maintenance of 'souls', and of strengths and attributes of a population for the good of the state, among other ways, and Rose, Townley, Donzelot, du Gay and Cameron make clear indications of the use of the same tactics in workplaces so as to improve the working performance of individuals (Cameron 2000; Donzelot 1991; du Gay 1996b; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1994, 1998). These have been related particularly to the development of working populations under the banners of scientific management or 'Taylorism' (Taylor, F. 1947)[179] and 'human resources management' (Findlay & Newton 1998; Rose, N. 1999c; Tomlinson 1994; Townley 1993, 1994) and involve not only training but also psychologically-oriented practices of counselling and other 'hands on' forms of influence over workers. Similar practices occur in the call centres participating in this study.

[179] Even Frederick Taylor's original description of scientific management reflects this sort of psychological tactic (Taylor, F. 1947, p. 44ff).

d. Responsibilisation & Career Development: Strategies, Tactics & Technologies for Conducting the Conduct of Agents by Making them Responsible for Their Continued Employment

At *BigTech*, supervisors are expected to hold one-on-one meetings with agents assigned to their team. These one-on-one meetings are part of an employee development program the organisation calls ‘BOB’, an acronym for ‘Bring Out your Best’. Prior to a BOB meeting, the supervisor is expected to review recent documentation and evaluations for the agent with whom the meeting will be held. It is also normal practice for the supervisor to talk with other agents on the same team, and the QSS assigned to evaluate that agent.

Rhia, a supervisor at *BigTech*, told that the reason for looking at data and talking with other personnel is to collect a wider variety of information than the supervisor would normally have ready at hand (which, as indicated above, due to the size of teams and responsibilities of supervisors at *BigTech*, is usually limited to only the statistics related to productivity and quality, and the customer satisfaction ratings), so that the BOB meeting can span across all items the agent must be evaluated on. The official categories to be included in a BOB session are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. BOB Counselling Categories at *BigTech*

Available
1. Was the support representative available to take calls and were calls responded to in a timely manner? 2. Did the support representative have the required applications and tools running and ready? 3. Did the support representative follow the team business rules? 4. Does the support representative understand the processes and requirements for the job?
Rapport
1. Did the support representative greet the customer and introduce self and role at *BigTech*? 2. Did the support representative verify customer related information (name, phone #, e-mail, system, etc.)? 3. Did the support representative paraphrase the customer's problem prior to beginning work? 4. Did the support representative ask the customer how the problem was affecting their business? (determine impact/urgency) 5. Did the support representative present and maintain a professional and courteous demeanor? 6. Did the support representative communicate at the customer's knowledge level?

Table 5. BOB Counselling Categories at *BigTech*

Analyze
1. Did the support representative verify and validate the problem working with and listening to the customer? 2. Did the support representative utilize available tools and resources to help determine troubleshooting plan and solution? 3. Did the support representative ask additional questions where appropriate and explain to the customer why he/she was performing certain troubleshooting steps as the call progressed?
Action
1. Did the support representative set clear and proper expectations with the customer and deliver to expectations made during the call? 2. Did the support representative explain, provide and verify with the customer the solutions, alternatives or options to address the problem? 3. Did the support representative get the customer's approval and commitment to implement the action plan and/or solution? 4. Did the support representative make sure the customer understood what actions were going to happen by whom and when? 5. Did the support representative document the actions taken, work performed and other pertinent information in (databases) and provide customer case #?

Table 5. BOB Counselling Categories at *BigTech*

Confirm
1. Did the support representative verify understanding of the solution or resolution with the customer?
2. Did the support representative ask the customer if they were satisfied with the solution and if there were any other product-specific related questions?
3. Did the support representative provide follow up information to the customer?
4. Did the support representative provide (extended warranty options) to the customer if applicable?

While I was not permitted to attend any BOB sessions, it is the case, based on interviews with agents who have been through them, that BOB sessions typically deviate dramatically from those topics included in Table 5. Supervisors corroborated this, indicating that the official BOB categories are addressed only when the worker's fulfilment of them is determined to be deficient. Normally, supervisors also expect that the QSS (quality support specialist) will have already caught and addressed most of these issues if they exist. The supervisor will usually emphasise them in a BOB meeting only if the QSS's efforts have been unsuccessful.

In a set of interviews with several supervisors and agents, it was uniformly agreed upon that the BOB meetings are principally intended to serve as an opportunity for employee development on *other* and *unwritten* facets of work. In particular, the supervisor solicits information related to the agent's aspirations for advancement or development, and then provides advice on how the agent can make himself or herself appear to the organisation to be eligible and 'ready' for promotions, special projects, special training opportunities, etc.

Thus, the supervisor produces a context in which he or she can counsel the worker to develop or adopt particular technologies of the self that will produce the kind of evidence of 'readiness' that the organisation is prepared to notice. These are, by the admission of both supervisors and agents, almost always related to consistent production of high ratings in terms of quality and productivity, and enrolling and succeeding in company-sponsored classes and technical training, fulfilment of special projects, etc. That is, to make oneself appear as an 'outstanding worker' on many of the different 'screens' or statistical displays of hierarchical observation and normalising judgement produced by the organisation's apparatuses of Knowledge production.

In addition to a strategic and tactical stating of advice, the supervisor also assists the agent in setting priorities, and other technologies of the self. If the supervisor considers the agent to have any shortcomings on the official BOB categories, they are usually given the highest priority in the meeting. This is, as Rhia told, because:

> ...they're what the company *requires* of agents. and none of those things should be a surprise to the agent because the QSS should be talking to the agent about those things already, and providing coaching on how to be more like the company wants.[180]

Rhia continued:

> Once the agent has those things down then we can start dealing with other things – like how the agent can get to do other things he or she wants to do, and develop with the company.

[180] It is also the case that most of the items listed in Table 5 have to do with particular data entry practices or compliance with scripting provided by the company. Consequently, even the BOB counselling session reflects upon some of the more disciplinary aspects of the work as described in the previous chapter. This also reflects how disciplinary and governmental forms of power are inherently related and condition each other (Foucault 1972, p. 64; Gordon 1980, p. 236).

In other words, workers are impeded from any form of advancement in the company until they demonstrate their adoption of the basic forms of Knowing oneself and the work, and of conducting one's self in ways that meet the organisation's expectations.

For example, Sal was advised that if he wanted to be promoted up into more of a planning and project management role – something he openly expressed a desire for – he would have to show that he was very good at managing his time on his regular tasks *and* be able to manage additional projects in the call centre. In particular, Sal would have to show that he's always able to respond to ad hoc issues that arise in addition to his regular job. To do that, he was told, he should volunteer to be a 'product champion' – an added and uncompensated responsibility to learn about a new tool to be used by agents or a new product offered by the company; to create training materials and provide internal 'help desk' type support to other agents; and to act as a liaison with the vendors or engineering team developing those tools or products in order to improve them. This, Sal said he was told,

> ...would provide me with the *opportunity* to demonstrate I can handle extra loads and be responsive to needs of the call centre while at the same time participating in the development of the product.

Sal added that his supervisor told that she would "look out for him" by allowing his productivity "...stats [on handling incoming calls] to slip a little bit, until I got the hang of things".

Sal emphasised the word 'opportunity' in the quotation noted above – a prosodic emphasis that seemed to be common in talk by other agents and supervisors. When I asked him about this emphasis he laughed, saying:

> [Y]eah. *Opportunity*. What they want is for you to show that you not only can do the work

> but that you *want it*. [The company] only makes the option available but you've gotta show them that you're better than the next guy who wants it.

He added,

> I take work home with me sometimes and I don't claim it as overtime, because I want to show [my supervisor] that I can do the work and can manage my time.

Thus, 'opportunity' is related to the worker taking responsibility for making decisions that 'take advantage' of the 'opportunity' made available to him or her. When I asked if he had been advised in a BOB session that he should take work home and work without compensation, he quickly told that he was not. In fact, he said his supervisor advised him that he should claim the extra hours.[181] However:

> [S]he *also said* that sometimes it's gonna be necessary for you to work extra [for example, when you have a project management job] – that's part of what's expected for anyone in that role.

He said he was not sure how to interpret his supervisor's apparent orientation to two contrasting things – both showing you can handle the work and manage your time and expecting to work uncompensated overtime. This uncertainty was exacerbated by a fear he would be seen as less productive than he should be, even though his supervisor had told that she would protect him in this way, at least in the short term. The fear was piqued by a recent conversation he had with an employee who was 'WFRd' (made redundant) in the previous week, in which that employee said that his productivity statistics had started to drop, and he thought it was this drop

[181] The relation between Sal and his supervisor was, as he described, very open, and he occasionally invited, even implored, me to '...check with her if you don't believe me!' I asked his supervisor about her knowledge of his surreptitious overtime, and she acknowledged his admission to her and her advice to claim this time for compensation. To his continued overtime without pay, she said, "...Sal's a big boy. I can give him advice but I'm not going to try to force him to do anything." In so doing, the supervisor underscores the company's position of providing employees with options, but not of 'holding their hands' to usher them through decisions relative to their 'career prospects' – thus of officially denying responsibility for *how* agents conduct their selves. This is reflected again below.

in statistical productivity that was 'the final straw' in the eventual decision to fire him.

Sal had thus taken both his supervisor's statements and his fear of being seen as unproductive as factors he was responsible for accommodating by himself; he made a 'free' choice and adopted tactics to demonstrate both that he could handle the extra work and maintain productivity, though his decision required him to bring project work home so he could continue to focus on productivity in handling customer calls while at work.

In other words, when Sal expressed a desire to move into more of a project management role, his supervisor counselled him in both tactics and strategies – taking on new responsibilities to make himself look eligible – but also attitudes and orientations to governing himself that would be required on his part. Sal's supervisor told him how he had to think about himself and the role he aspired to. His supervisor did not tell him how to conduct himself, however. Sal took up contingencies in his situation to decide upon particular tactics that *appeared to make him* consistent with *other BigTech managers* – technologies of the self that he formulated in response to his desires and the contingencies and context in which he found himself.

Similarly, Syd, a QSS at *BigTech* who was promoted to that position from the job of a regular phone agent, told that when he was an agent, he kept copies of the met/not-met form at his cubicle desk and rated himself after each call he worked. In these self-ratings he identified how he could change his conduct in order to meet the expectations inscribed on the form. He said that within a week after beginning these self ratings, and for five consecutive months after that, he received 100% scores on all met/not-met evaluations, telling me "in the sixth month I missed one and in the seventh month I was (promoted to) a QSS!" When asked, he confirmed that his

supervisor had told him that the quickest way to be promoted into a different position in the call centre – such as the QSS job – was to demonstrate consistent expertise on quality ratings. “The met/not-met form made it easy for me. All I had to do was show that I could do *that*”, as he pointed to a copy of the form on his desk. His supervisor did not tell him to drill and practice and review each call he performed against the met/not-met form. *He* formulated that technology of the self freely in order to produce the evidence his supervisor said would make a difference in possible promotions.

As indicated above, promoting individuals who have demonstrated compliance or alignment with the organisation’s expectations facilitates the creation of a workforce of individuals who would seem willing to continuously develop and adopt technologies of the self such as that described above in order to re-align their selves with whatever the organisation desires (Rose, N. 1999c, pp. 217, 231ff).

That said, it is the case that call centres generally have very limited opportunities for advancement (Bain 2001b; Beirne, Riach & Wilson 2004; Belt, Richardson & Webster 2000; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003). With such limited opportunities, workers frequently seem not very interested in playing this sort of game (Donzelot 1991). However, while advancement is not common there either, *BigTech* is somewhat notable in its difference from the other call centres included in this study in that it publishes an internal job placement newsletter on company intranet. Several employees regularly visited this website, including Syd, who referenced his Bachelor’s degree in business and an MBA in human resources management (the latter of which was funded by *BigTech’s* tuition assistance program), and characterised his credentials as a way to ‘get out of the call centre, so I can take better care of my family’. Additionally, sometimes certain employees are

sought out to fill such promotion slots. As shown in the next paragraphs, not all employees see this as advancement.

While the BOB meetings were commonly a venue for such advisement and counselling, they were not the only places where such things were discussed. Sometimes such things were addressed in very informal ways. For example, during a week in which I was involved in observation and interviews with Lorene, a fifteen year veteran with *BigTech* in various roles, her supervisor approached her and said that a temporary job would be opening up that was both "very high profile with the company" and a place where she could demonstrate her technical troubleshooting skills in a manner that would "look very good to management".

She hedged in her response to her supervisor, and later told me she would decline the offer, saying,

> I like where I am right now. I can do my job and feel good about it. Plus, I don't have to worry about not being able to leave on time – those special projects always require you to put in extra hours and I don't wanna put myself in a position where I can't take care of things at home.

Her supervisor returned later in the week, saying, "y'know these projects don't come up all that often. I think you're the best one for the job and it'll look *really* good to management". Lorene assured him that she'd think about it (even though already telling me she would decline) and whispered to me as he left, "I like [my supervisor] because he's always looking out for us. But I really hate it when they pressure you like that". With an edgy tone in her voice she continued, " '*it'll look <u>really good</u> to management*' – I know what I want and he's telling me to be what the company wants".

Where Sal and Syd are accepting their supervisors' advice for how to 'be' and how to think of their subjectivity as an employee, Lorene is not. However, all of

them are faced with a one-on-one tactic aimed at 'employee development' such that the employee is brought face to face with aspects of a particular subjectivity, which he or she is expected to adopt in order to become a subject consistent with particular values immanent in the company's strategic vision. Similarly, all adopt particular technologies of the self – Sal and Syd invent and adopt practices for making themselves look eligible for management responsibilities and Lorene adopts a set of practices that reinforces her current self.[182]

While different in its empirical particulars, this 'counselling' practice is not dissimilar to the statement made by Roj, another supervisor at *BigTech,* "I just frame the issue for them and then expect them to come up with a way to deal with it."

While the choice of whether to accept or not is up to the individuals, the implications of choices are already decided upon by the organisation. As Lorene's supervisor told me subsequent to being told by Lorene that she would not accept the special project:

> [T]hat's her decision. We're not about making people do things. If she doesn't want that, it's up to her and it's fine with us. She just won't be able to take advantage of what *BigTech* can offer.

Similarly, while empirically dissimilar in its details from the way *DeliveryWorldwide* agents see daily statistical displays of productivity and quality, the worker is still brought face to face with a relation between the organisation and his or her self, and expected to 'take advantage' of the advice provided – however minimally it may be encoded in the daily stats reports, counselling or experience – in order to alter what and *how* one *is* in order to take advantage of what the organisation offers (Burchell 1991; Cameron 2000; Donzelot 1991; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1979,

[182] Additionally, Lorene's practices include resistance. Resistance is always related to particular forms of power, such as the counselling practices highlighted here. This will be addressed in detail in Part 3 of the report.

1981, 1988d; Gordon 1991; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1994, 1998). While this advice always appears to be oriented to the individual agent, it is also and perhaps principally oriented to a pastoral or managerial responsibility to maintain the strength of the organisation. Most of the time, this responsibility is distributed to the workers themselves, as demonstrated by examples from *BigTech* and *DeliveryWorldwide*, where workers are brought to see themselves as responsible not only for their own productivity but also for that of the team. However, the team concept is a strategic one that permits management to divide the population of workers into smaller chunks, make workers on a team 'responsible' to each other and the team, and also implicitly place workers in a situation where they will freely seek and give advice to their team mates so as to improve both individual and team productivity – that is, to put workers into a situation where they actually participate in their own governance in terms of the organisation's goals and desires.

That said, it is perhaps relevant to contrast *BigTech's* organisationally-condoned tactics with those of *DeliveryWorldwide*. While *DeliveryWorldwide* has a similar 'employee improvement' program listed in the employee handbook, it is not utilised at the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre participating in this study. The supervisor at this call centre told that this is because this particular call centre is unionised and the contract already defines acceptable performance:

> [Management] can't coach employees to do better than what the contract stipulates because they won't get any extra pay for performance, and there are no real chances for promotion, so we don't do any coaching at all. If the agent meets the contractually-defined performance and quality, that's it.

As shown below, however, coaching still occurs at *DeliveryWorldwide*. However, it does not typically address the development of employees for other roles in the organisation.

e. Being a Good Representative of the Company: Tactics for Being Friendly, But Not Too Friendly

At *DeliveryWorldwide*, when an agent's productivity or quality is marginal in terms of the contract, it is expected that team leaders will take the initiative to coach that agent until performance improves, much the way a QSS is expected to coach an agent at *BigTech*. That was the case when Sheila, a team leader with six years of experience at this call centre and five years at another *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre, said she 'adopted' Kalie, another agent on her team whose quality evaluations and productivity scores had been dangerously low for several months, and who had been the recipient of several customer complaints for being rude in the past year.

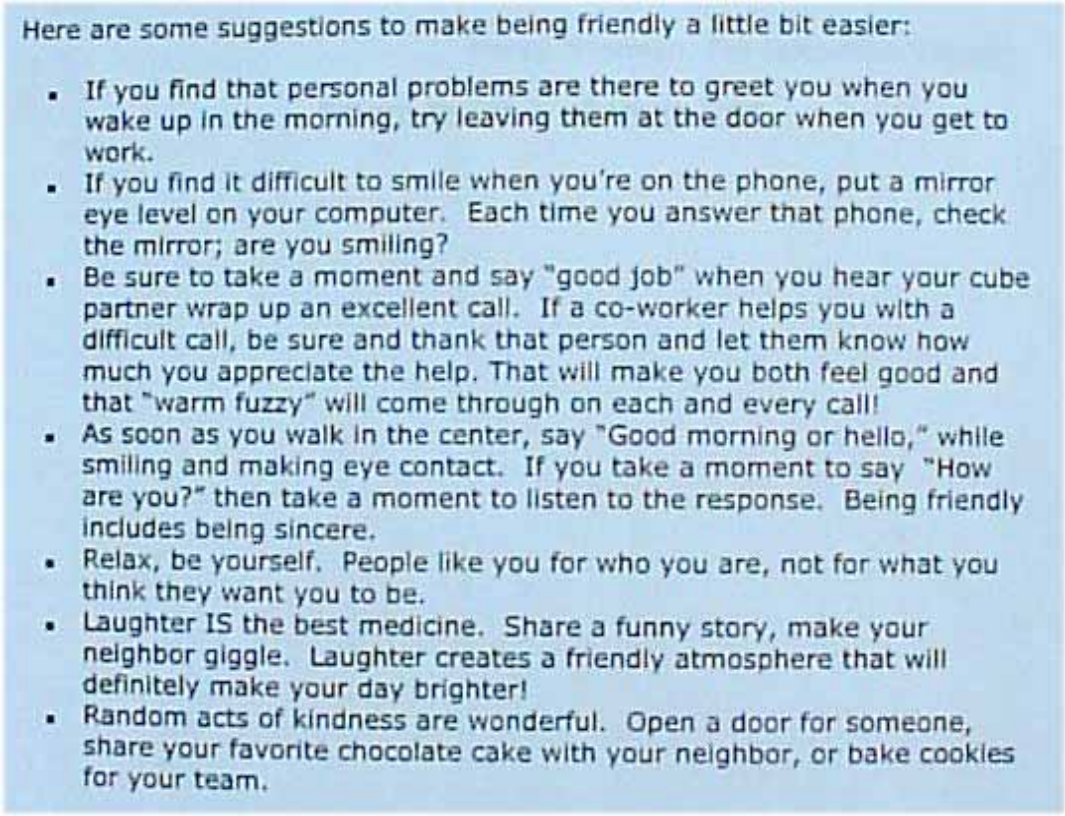
Sheila told how she had gone out of her way to record Kalie's calls and listen to them, even in weeks when she was not scheduled to perform quality evaluations on her. Sheila said:

> I'd listen to the calls and score 'em using the [quality evaluation form] and then sit with Kalie after work and review the recordings and my scores [to] show her where I was able to mark her down for things she said and did. At first she'd get really defensive and tell me that her computer was acting up or the caller was being nasty or that her car needed to be fixed and she didn't have the money and all sorts of things to make excuses about her rudeness.
>
> I'd tell her the same things were happening to me and that I just have to put it out of my mind when I come to work. I told her that I learned how to recognise when I'm getting anxious or frustrated and how I just stop myself and count to five when I start to feel that way – counting to ten would take too long! [laugh]183 I was trying to tell her that we all get frustrated and angry and we've all got to find ways to deal with it.
>
> It took awhile but she's started to turn around. She's not getting angry at callers as much anymore. I think she started to treat our meetings as kind of like a place where she could vent and I'd just listen to her – I don't think she's got anyone at home she can talk to about it.[184] But she got assigned to another team lead and now I don't know what's gonna happen if her new lead doesn't keep up with this – and I know she won't... So I'm afraid what will happen with Kalie.

[183] That is, one also has to be always aware of one's call length!
[184] As addressed in the following chapter, home venues for venting are useful for agents.

While Sheila took responsibility for coaching Kalie, and appeared to be coaching her not only on tactics but also on accepting responsibility for her demeanour on the phone, Sheila is not sure Kalie is ready to fulfil that responsibility. Additionally, Sheila said she copied the 'friendly pack' produced by Stevie and highlighted one page that listed "suggestions to make being friendly a little easier" (Figure 67). To this, Sheila said she wanted Kalie to know she could help herself by looking in the company's database of policies. In doing so, Sheila was acting to try and help Kalie learn to help herself by developing practices that would allow her to be rated as a good agent – technologies of the self that reflect and orient to the Knowledge of the organisation. As Lorene demonstrates above, agents are not forced to adopt or develop such technologies, rather they are expected to freely accept the responsibility to do so.[185]

[185] Following Hochschild, Kalie is asked to develop surface acting practices that allow her to appear as the organisation wants, while obscuring frustrations from her home life (Hochschild 1985).


Here are some suggestions to make being friendly a little bit easier:

- If you find that personal problems are there to greet you when you wake up in the morning, try leaving them at the door when you get to work.
- If you find it difficult to smile when you're on the phone, put a mirror eye level on your computer. Each time you answer that phone, check the mirror; are you smiling?
- Be sure to take a moment and say "good job" when you hear your cube partner wrap up an excellent call. If a co-worker helps you with a difficult call, be sure and thank that person and let them know how much you appreciate the help. That will make you both feel good and that "warm fuzzy" will come through on each and every call!
- As soon as you walk in the center, say "Good morning or hello," while smiling and making eye contact. If you take a moment to say "How are you?" then take a moment to listen to the response. Being friendly includes being sincere.
- Relax, be yourself. People like you for who you are, not for what you think they want you to be.
- Laughter IS the best medicine. Share a funny story, make your neighbor giggle. Laughter creates a friendly atmosphere that will definitely make your day brighter!
- Random acts of kindness are wonderful. Open a door for someone, share your favorite chocolate cake with your neighbor, or bake cookies for your team.

Figure 67. *DeliveryWorldwide*'s 'Ways to Make Being Friendly Easier'[186]

From her description, Sheila's after-hours sessions with Kalie are tantamount to counselling sessions in which Kalie is allowed to vent, but then faced with an assignment of responsibility that she still has to present herself to customers in a way that can be heard by evaluators and customers to be acceptable (Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000). While Kalie begins to show 'progress' with Sheila's counselling sessions, Sheila is not sure – indeed as any counsellor cannot be sure – that her 'patient is cured' without ongoing surveillance and coaching within contexts that reflect Kalie's own relation to the rules of the surrounding organisation (Foucault 1988b). Thus, Sheila sees herself as an important intermediary or broker – perhaps the only one willing to work with Kalie and counsel her to accept and adopt a Knowledge of herself that is consistent with the organisation's gaze, and adopt

[186] Note that these bits of advice are aimed at the employee's behaviour when not on the phone.

technologies of the self that result in 'appropriate' changes in her practice. Kalie appears to be on the way to accomplishing this, but Sheila is unsure.

At *DeliveryWorldwide* it was also regular practice for the team leader to review with the agent quality ratings he or she accomplished shortly after they were completed. While in many cases these were cursory reviews, especially when the rating was favourable, it was also not uncommon for the review to be more protracted when the team lead had critical commentary to offer. The latter usually occurred with newer agents, but not always. In one such review session, Uri, a team leader and one of the union stewards in the call centre, had conducted several covert barges on calls conducted by Panzi, a veteran of six years in the call centre and an agent both respected for her consistent sense of humour but also criticised for her habitual sarcastic humour with customers.

Normally, no special accommodations are made with agents when a team leader reviews the results of a quality evaluation, and it is conducted in a very informal manner at the agent's cubicle, with the team leader standing while talking with the seated agent (and of course, with the appropriate inscriptions on the 'Logoff Recorder' sheet). Sometimes the issues to be addressed are considered serious enough that a meeting is scheduled between the team lead, manager of the call centre and the agent in question. This was the case for one review of a quality evaluation with Panzi, who continued to exhibit sarcastic humour to callers despite previous evaluation comments and coaching.

While I was not present in this meeting, subsequent conversations with all of the parties present in that meeting allow me to suggest the following transcript of what transpired in the meeting.[187]

[187] Panzi indicated that this transcript, while very abbreviated, is accurate.

M: Panzi, you know why we're here. Uri asked me to listen to some of the recordings we make to evaluate your work. I have to agree with him that your sense of humour is sometimes too much....

U: We've told you this before. Everyone thinks you get too sarcastic with customers.

P: Yeah, well. Sometimes it's too easy and I get bored.

U: That doesn't change things. We've gotta be professional here.

P: Well... the customers are frustrated and it's how I'm able to take the edge off. Y'know, if you get them to stop thinking about their complaint you can get on with things easier – it works!

U: Sure, but there are lots of ways you can do that. You don't have to tell them kindergartener jokes and silly stories about your dog and stuff. Not only are you sounding unprofessional, but it takes time...

P: The databases are really slow. There'd be dead time if I didn't say anything.

M: Barney's working on that...[188]

U: We're not saying that you can't say something – only that your sarcasm and silly jokes are unprofessional. We're the ones that have to sound like the company wants us to sound – you know the scripts! I've heard you use them before. They pay us to do this job according to their rules, not as if you're working at the convenience store on the corner.

P: But you know that they tell us to sound like we're glad to hear from them and to let our personality come through – that's my personality!

U: Yeah. We know that and it's okay that you do it here, with us. But when you're on with a customer you've gotta be more straight with 'em. That's what the scripts are for.

P: Nobody follows the scripts exactly – unless we know we've got an audit call.

U: Yeah. I know. But most everyone else is also not joking with customers. Like I said, we've gotta be professional here. ...and you know it's not just me. All the other 'leads tell you the same thing. Your [quality evaluations] suffer for it and your evaluations are lower than they could be – even though you're still passable. You used to sit next to Gray (another agent). He always gets high scores on these things (the quality evaluation). Try to be more like him.

P: Yeah, he's great! Everybody likes Gray!

U: Okay. Just try to be more like him.

P: Sure thing boss.[189]

In this review of Panzi's work, Uri appealed to common knowledge of another worker's practice – a practice that is uniformly considered to be very good and which, as Uri says, '*always* gets high scores'. The tactic involved here was an attempt to alter Panzi's perception of herself by producing a different relation between the way she felt about her own practice as a 'good agent' and what Uri presented as a more acceptable example of 'good agent'.[190] Uri and the manager are

[188] Barney is the call centre's computer technician.

[189] The word 'boss' is used frequently in this call centre. I was told by Panzi that it refers to the (apparent) fact that prison inmates refer to the guards as 'boss'. Its use in the above conversation is an indirect reference to Panzi's idea that the call centre is something of a prison and Uri is acting somewhat as a guard in this context. As will be clarified in Part 3 of this report, the characterization of the call centre as a prison is very inaccurate (Bain & Taylor 2000; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003; Winiecki 2004b)!

[190] There is no mention of sarcasm or joking in the 'friendly pack'. There is, however, reference to keeping to the script.

attempting to appeal to an image of 'professionalism' such that Panzi freely takes it upon herself to alter her own customer-facing practices. In the face of Panzi's responses, they appeal to her to adopt surface acting practices so as to be more like Gray. Panzi is left to develop her own technologies of the self to produce 'Gray-like' appearances on the phone. That is, in this session Panzi is left to decide how to proceed, with the only proviso being that she alters her customer-facing affect to emulate an agent considered to have very good 'quality'. That is, it doesn't matter if she adopts a *surface acting* or a *deep acting* orientation (Hochschild 1985), only that she produces the appearances desired.

At *MHealth*, Kam, the call centre supervisor, was also active in attempting to influence the agent's affect on calls – not unlike Hochschild's description of 'training' that was aimed at influencing the 'surface acting' out of emotions by airline flight attendants (Hochschild 1985). However, where Panzi was considered to be so casual and droll as to be unprofessional, at *MHealth*, Kam was more concerned about the opposite – agents sounding tired and bored in the admittedly monotonous work. For several consecutive days she periodically loitered around the call centre, casually inspecting papers and documents, and fiddling with the holiday ornaments that agents had hung about their cubicles, apparently not paying attention to anything in particular. Then, during one 'game planning' meeting late in the week, Kam asked Krin, the call centre team leader, for an opportunity to 'do some coaching'. Krin obliged, and Kam entered a monologue describing her work as a call centre agent several years prior in a much larger call centre in another state:

> I started to get really bored with the job. It was just the same thing day after day after day. The scripts were really monotonous and my supervisor told me that I was starting to sound that way to customers. He suggested that I try to make a game of it and try to make every single call sound like the first call I'd ever worked – and I did. I started to pay attention to how I sounded and got so it could be 4:59 on Friday afternoon and still sound fresh and friendly and energetic! It was like I'd become an actress and I could play the role of a really

> friendly call centre agent no matter how I felt![191]
>
> I know this job isn't exciting! But I want you guys to sound like that so our clients think you're really into working with them! You should make every call sound like the very first call you've ever taken![192]

Krin, the team leader, subsequently adopted Kam's statement, and began echoing that agents should "sound like an actor /actress; make it sound like the first call you've ever taken!" in occasional comments to the agents or when an agent was having a particularly bad day – a combined assignment of responsibility and criticism of their current practice aimed at producing self-adopted change in affect.

All of the examples in this section demonstrate, in different ways, technologies of the self in which the workers' 'onstage' affect is made into a product of the workplace (Cameron 2000; Goffman 1959; Hochschild 1985). Like the flight attendants in Hochschild's trenchant study of emotional labour (Hochschild 1985), these call centre agents are expected to manufacture an affect that is friendly, even if this means altering their own feelings by adopting an orientation to the work as if it is a game in which the winner is one who sounds convincingly enthusiastic. This makes the worker responsible for deciding how to go about it – whether to *surface act* or *deep act* (Hochschild 1985).[193] These examples also demonstrate how power is activated by the independent actions of actors who are not altogether disciplined by the organisation. Freely acting individuals who accept and adopt the organisation's *external* way of Knowing and acting from that Knowledge thus assent

[191] Not long after this episode, one of the newer agents in the call centre told me in a hushed voice, after looking around the call centre to see if anyone was in earshot, "...I wonder if Kam has learned to sound like she cares about how hard this job is... maybe she's just acting for us too."

[192] I learned later, in an interview with Kam, that this 'coaching' followed a casual remark by Oliver, the marketing director of *MHealth* , that he thought the agents weren't representing the company's '...concern for the clients...' in their on-phone affect.

[193] While I invoke Hochschild's (1985) principal concept of emotional labour, it is not the case that all of its details apply here. Most call centre agents in this study did not appear to experience the same separation from their own emotions as described by Hochschild (1985). This could be a result of the more 'technical' and scripted sort of conduct expected of call centre agents in these companies, as opposed to the 'caring' affect expected of Hochschild's informants. A notable exception is included below. More on the ways 'emotional labour' can be applied to the work of these agents will be included in Part 3 of the report.

to having their conduct, conducted. The free subject is an essential component of power in Western societies,[194] and power is implicated in the production of subjectivity. It is not a destructive force. It is a productive force. It is just that through the strategic action described above, individuals freely assent and participate in ways that serve the interests of the organisation (Foucault 1990a; 1995, p. 194).

f. The Service-Worker's Guild: Learning Tactics to Reinforce & Protect the Organisation & Self

One-on-one contact also occurs in other ways that do not involve management or supervisory personnel. At *BigTech*, *DeliveryWorldwide* and *MedAdvise*, new agents are regularly seated next to experienced agents, with the expectation that the experienced agent will take some initiative to assist the novice in various ways. Beny, the trainer at *DeliveryWorldwide*, also indicated that she directs new agents to listen to the practice of experienced agents because they'll "learn how to do things more efficiently". There is thus an expectation that ongoing learning will happen in the call centres, whether officially sponsored and monitored by the organisation or not.

This was also the case at *MedAdvise*, where nurses were hired for their clinical experience and expertise – a set of characteristics that came with a thing they referred to as 'nursing judgement'. At *MedAdvise*, nursing judgement can be characterised as the ability to reconcile and deploy clinical knowledge and

[194] I am not speaking in philosophical terms, nor in terms of a general theory of power, freedom or subjectivity, but rather in terms of the functioning and production of Knowledge and power in Western society. Gordon (1980) describes the 'program' of 'man' in Western society as a simultaneous production of a discursive field and various forms of scientific Knowledge production and application in order to continuously 'improve' and 'advance' 'man'. Individualism, entrepreneurialism, laissez faire economics, responsibilisation, the labour contract, are all various forms of Knowledge and power that serve this program.

experience in light of confounding issues or symptoms that are not officially part of the expert system database used to triage callers' symptoms, and incorporation of nursing judgement into the advice provided to the caller and the official record of care in a way that does not contradict the expert system. In effect, nursing judgement is *bricolage* (Levi-Strauss 1972) based on years of experience in similar clinical situations with similar expectations for accountability and professional and clinical adequacy. In so doing, the nurses (bricoleurs) demonstrate the context-shaped and context-shaping nature of their work, and the ability to engage in a bricolage that results in documentably accurate and defensible records of work (Coulon 1995; Garfinkel 1967, esp. pp. 186-207; Latour 1986, 1999a; Latour & Woolgar 1990; Potter 1996b, esp. pp. 42-67; Zimmerman 1969, 1970).

In other words, nursing judgement is deployed in order to accommodate what the expert system does not account for, into decisions made about immediate care, but in a way that does not override or conflict with the expert system. In so doing, the nurses orient to the legal, administrative, clinical and professional forces immanent in nursing practice and govern their behaviour so as to accommodate all of these forces.

Dale, the most experienced nurse in the call centre, told that this was especially tricky on account of litigation hazards arising from any decisions not legally vetted and installed into the database used in the conduct of working patients' calls:

> [W]e can't afford to get sued – [the hospital would] probably shut us down if that happened. So we have to make sure that whatever we do, we have to cover ourselves and the hospital.

However, such 'covering' requires a detailed knowledge of particular clinical conditions, and drugs or treatments. There is also the fact that, as Dale said, patients

"usually come with more problems than just the one they're calling about", thus unknown conditions that might confound any advice. Because most nurses in the call centre have long careers behind them, frequently in the same clinical specialty, each might be especially good at deploying nursing judgement in one area but not others. Consequently, nurses regularly practice what one called 'the third ear' – the ability to monitor other nurses' calls while at the same time working a call themselves.

When a nurse's 'third ear' catches something in another nurse's call that sounds unusual or especially tricky, the first nurse may mute the phone on her or his own caller or put the caller on hold, and provide advice to the other nurse such that proper nursing judgement is demonstrated, before returning to her or his own call. When the opportunity presents itself, the advising nurse will debrief in more detail about the issue, and in so doing effect a coaching of each other's nursing judgement. It is also required that nurses regularly review each other's 'charts' (the database records produced as a result of performing a triage on a caller). If any chart is found to be questionable, it is normal practice to edit it post hoc so as to produce a record that accommodates the nursing judgements made while at the same time maintaining clinical correctness.[195]

Such technologies of the self – the post hoc discussions and editing of charts – can draw the attention of several nurses, especially when call volume is low. It is not unusual to see several nurses standing over one cubicle discussing the details of a particular call, and how it can be inscribed so as to accommodate clinical and legal facts with nursing judgement as it was deployed. Thus, in almost the manner of a guild, nurse's practise, pass on and protect a component of the subjectivity of nursing that they value as an essential part of their position and status. In so doing, they also

[195] Reinforcing the importance of nursing judgement and nurses' ability to rely on each other for specific knowledge, the call centre's manager will organise staffing schedules so that the call centre is always staffed with individuals with varying clinical specialties and experience.

demonstrate an orientation to themselves as subjects of particular technical processes, experience and clinical Knowledge.[196] In practising this sort of communication, nurses affect the way each of them deploys particular Knowledge and techniques as they conduct their work as telephone triage nurses. They also demonstrate a responsibility to careful nursing practice and adherence to the legal and technical expectations of the organisation.

While it may appear that nursing judgement is somehow outside of the clinical expectations of nursing or medical care, it is not. Through casual conversation with physicians in other venues, I learned that nursing judgement is a respected and relied upon capability – even if it is sometimes in excess of the conventional professional and legal constraints in medical practice. Physicians and nurses alike indicated that it is a capability that is not totally unconstrained, however. Other nurses and physicians reserve the privilege to question such judgement, and nurses admit they regularly have to defend and support decisions that rely on nursing judgement. Consequently, the sort of debriefing, consulting and editing of charts described here appears to be an extension of such defence and supporting tactics.

A similar sort of guild practice goes on at *DeliveryWorldwide*. Lonnie, a new team leader but an individual who has been working at the call centre for over five years, had three new agents on her team. She asked that all of them be assigned to cubicles within earshot of her cubicle, so, as she joked, "I can *bring 'em up right*". In many cases, the advice provided by Lonnie to these agents had to do with more efficient uses of the databases for looking up and performing data entry tasks. However, in many other cases, her advice oriented to more affective matters.

[196] The fact that nurses have and openly use an ability to 'tinker' with the organisation's Knowledge of the operation of the call centre will be addressed in more detail in Part 3 of this report.

On one day, Bambi, the newest of these agents and one who said she took the job because of its part time hours, higher pay than other part time jobs, and ability for her to be at home when her kids returned from school, but who admittedly did not like to "be on the phone all day talking to *those people*", was especially exasperated after a long call with an angry customer. When this call ended she let out a loud and anguished sigh. Lonnie, working on performing a quality evaluation of recorded calls, shut off the tape recorder and motioned to Bambi to come to her desk.

As Bambi approached, Lonnie said, without looking up from the form she was writing on, "you care too much".[197] Bambi asked, "what do you mean, I *care* too much?"

L: Just what I said. You care too much.[198]
B: Yeah. I heard you but what do you mean? Aren't we supposed to help them – I get frustrated when I can't – and especially when they're mad at me for not being able to do anything!
L: Yeah, sure. But you're getting frustrated because you can't help them the way you want to or the way they want you to. You're here to help them the way the company wants you to [help them].
B: But that doesn't work most of the time! They wanna know why their package is late or when it'll arrive. I know what they're asking for but I can't give it to 'em. The rules won't let me tell 'em what I know – I can only tell 'em what the policy is.
L: Right. And who's paying you?
B: DeliveryWorldwide
L: Right, so why are you worrying about working for the customer?
B: Because I wanna help them. That's what I'm here for, aren't I – to do customer service?
L: No. You're here to do company service. You gotta stop caring.

Just then, Fiona, another agent on Lonnie's team who sits adjacent to Lonnie's cubicle, finished a call and started to collect her belongings to go on her lunch break. As she stood up she entered the conversation:

> Yeah. You can't care about 'em [the customers]. The easiest thing to do is just punch in and punch out. Turn off your emotions when you come in. Just do the job. Bring in your trashy

[197] Perhaps tactically, Lonnie also exhibits 'not caring too much' in her conduct!
[198] This conversation is reconstructed from fieldnotes. While it is not word-for-word exactly what was said between Lonnie, Bambi and Fiona, the general topical and semantic contours reflect the actual conversation.

> novels to read during lunch and breaks and don't care. They're [that is, the customers] not worth it... Look at Toni, Blaise and Pat [three other agents, all known for doing their job reliably and not getting upset]. They just check in and check out. When they punch in, they leave themselves at the door [experienced workers 'leave behind' their emotions when they come to work]. When you're here for the long haul that's how you survive.

Bambi displayed what I took to be an agitated look on her face, and Fiona added:

> I *do know* how you feel Bambi. Y'wanna help 'em, but *DeliveryWorldwide* and [the databases] give y'only so much. Besides, sometimes they [the customers] don't deserve to be cared for. Just go talk to Sonia!

Sonia's story is legend in this call centre. She is a six year veteran of the call centre. One day in the distant past, she received a call from a customer in a remote location in Alaska, angry and protesting that a package he expected – indeed *needed* in order to prepare for the upcoming winter – had not yet arrived. It just so happened the customer's package was being ferried to the caller's location by a private delivery service using bush airplanes. The plane had encountered foul weather in the mountains and crashed, killing the pilot. Upon relaying this information to the caller, he is said to have responded, angrily, "I don't care about the damned pilot. I want my fuckin' package!" Sonia and others recite this story in order to justify the learned callousness reflected by Lonnie and Fiona. The story was corroborated by virtually everyone whom I asked.

Lonnie's and Fiona's advice was echoed by Toni, Blaise and Pat – agents whom I made a point to interview and observe in more detail after hearing Fiona's comment. However, Bambi continued to struggle, apparently not catching or being unwilling to adopt the relation between herself and the work that was being suggested, and consequently continuing to feel a 'line of conflict' passing through herself, as a subject both responding to her desire to help customers and one now advised to abandon that and adopt doing *company* service (see, Burchell 1991, p. 119).

Bambi's experience is indicative of emotional labour conflicts described by Hochschild, especially where women find themselves in a bind over the social pressure to channel their emotions into an altruistic concern for others (1985, p. 194ff). Lonnie's and Fiona's advice implores Bambi to distance herself from this altruism so as to retain her ability to persist in the job – that is, advice to adopt only a surface acting. Regardless, in a curious way, Bambi is being advised to take responsibility for fulfilling the company's expectations and to abandon any responsibility to think she's there to service customers.

g. Confessions, 'Discovery' of a Deep Self & Formation of a New Subject

As described above, coaching, advising and employee development can occur following official and institutional norms and forms and also informally. In the call centre at *MHealth*, official and informal venues were merged when the company organised a 'weekend retreat' (that was nonetheless held at the office) for workers not only in the call centre but in all departments.

In this 'retreat', one of the primary activities was a session in which a team of individuals (the staff of the call centre was one such team) was sat at a round table with a deck of commercially available 'visioning cards' spread before them. These cards included phrases such as:

> QUALITY: A standard of excellence.
>
> PASSION: Intense emotional excitement, boundless enthusiasm.
>
> INTEGRITY: Words and deeds match up. I am who I am, no matter where I am or who I am with.

Each individual in the team was to search through the deck of cards and choose, in turn, one of the cards that they thought best represented their self and their desired orientation when working. After everyone had chosen 'their' card, each individual took a turn to show their chosen card to the group and describe how they thought their chosen card and the inscribed words and definitions on the cards represented his or her self and his or her orientation to work. Additionally, each individual was to tell how they found any behaviour from co-workers that deviated from the definition and their 'personalisation' of it to be de-motivating, frustrating or otherwise disruptive to their ability to follow through on their assigned duties – even offering concrete examples from recent memory to illustrate the points being made.

Following this, the individuals were asked to privately write answers to the following questions (Table 6) which went by the same name as that given to the whole 'retreat': "*MHealth:* Guided by Vision".

Table 6. Visioning Questions Asked at *MHealth* 'Retreat'

1. Ideas: How will we fulfil the goals you are associated with and win in the marketplace?
2. Values: What behaviours are required to put our business ideas into practice?
3. Emotional Energy: How do you keep yourself motivated and working with high energy?
4. Edge: What hard decisions must you make? What bold moves must you take?

These 'exercises' were led by Oliver, the company's marketing director and an individual who indicated he had considerable clinical experience in mental health

care. Oliver also told that answers to the ‘visioning questions’ were to relate to the ‘visioning cards’ selected by each individual. Discussions, both within each team and at the end of the day in a meeting which was to be attended by all employees, were guided such that the hyperbolic motivational business discourse encoded into the cards was passed through into individual responses to visioning questions and then into the active talk by members of the teams. The result was a latching of the workers’ relation to themselves, first to the ‘visions’ in the cards, and then into the visioning questions, which as written appear to serve as an attempt to latch the individual’s apprehended ‘card vision’ of self to the company’s vision of its own goals – of accepting responsibility for maintaining the ‘truth’ about one’s self inscribed on ‘their card’, and responsibility manufactured by the visioning questions (Table 6) for translating this ‘truth’ about one’s self into the goals of the organisation (Rose, N. 1999c, p. 217). Through small team discussions and the end-of-day meeting, both of which were hosted – and, as characterised by some, dominated – by Oliver, each individual was implored to see his or her vision as a call for them as individuals to be responsible for maintaining and helping the company achieve its vision. Rather than forcing them into this relation, through the ‘visioning questions’ (Table 6) individuals are implored to declare and thus ‘freely choose’ how they will latch themselves to the organisation (Rose, N. 1999c, p. 217).

In the weeks following this ‘retreat’, its effects could be heard sporadically in conversation, especially in the call centre’s ‘game planning’ meetings. Just prior to one game planning meeting, I heard Verity and Rabbie, two agents with only a few months experience prior to the ‘retreat’, talking about how the team-based activity with ‘visioning cards’ had affected their perceptions and way of interacting with other agents, as well as how they thought of themselves as members of the call

centre. Verity accounted for recent changes in the way she approached Maude, an agent with seven months experience at *MHealth* – the most seniority in the call centre:

> [B]ecause [Maude] chose 'integrity' as her most important attribute, when I have to ask her a question or to get something I'm really careful now to make sure that what I say is consistent with what I need from her.[199] Otherwise I'm afraid that I'm gonna make her think that I don't care about what I'm doing.

Rabbie added,

> Yeah. It's like, those cards and *those simple words* provided some real insight into what each of us is like. I feel like I know everybody better after [the 'visioning card' activity] – *even myself!* All of a sudden I think I've gotta be more careful about what I do and how I come off when I'm here.

Both Verity and Rabbie indicate that the 'visioning' activity has put them face to face with *new truths* about themselves and others – truths which are a product of the phrases on the cards, the framing of the activity and the relation of the activity to the imputed purpose of the 'retreat' – and that these 'truths' are freely used upon themselves as a force with which to govern their own thoughts and behaviour at work.

This wasn't the full extent of it, however. By making their interpretations of the visioning activity identifiable in terms of day-to-day practice, they also subjected these interpretations to scrutiny and reinforcement. In particular, Krin, the team leader of the call centre, upon overhearing their comments, reflected further about activities in the retreat:

> Wasn't that amazing!? When Oliver took everyone's cards and our answers to the visioning questions and showed us how it all fit together into the company's vision and goals it really made you think about how important each of us is to this place... It was like, no matter what

[199] Note that the definition of 'integrity' on the visioning cards asserts an essential correlation between 'words and deeds' – what is said and what is done.

> were your most important cards, you could build upon those things to contribute to the team and the whole company... And it's not just us. It's how we relate to every other department to make the place successful!

In so doing, Krin reflected this acceptance of 'truth' and responsibility, and in so doing reinforced the way the organisational strategy and tactics produced relations between Knowledge about personal motivation inscribed in the cards and 'activated' by the card selection activity, and Oliver's 'pastoral' interpretations of this new knowledge about self and its tutored imbrication with company values as written into the follow-up visioning questions (Table 6). That is, Krin reified the fabricated relations between subjects, individual motivations and company values, and reinforced their power to affect subjects in the *MHealth* call centre and indeed, it appears, the whole company.

This was not the first attempt at mining and co-opting the 'deep self' in the *MHealth* call centre. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, all of the personnel at the company were assigned to attend a 'brain dominance workshop' in which they were tested and provided with an assessment of their preferred ways of orienting to data, interpersonal relationships, etc. Each of the agents in the call centre had posted a small chart documenting their 'style' that was generated during the workshop. While I never heard anyone orienting to those charts or individual 'styles', I was told by the call centre team leader that the workshop and these charts were intended to provide workers with insight into their own and others' psychological preferences so that all could utilise this new knowledge of self and others in interpersonal conduct – a similar, though apparently 'unsuccessful' attempt to bring workers face-to-face with 'truth' about themselves that was presumably to be used in linking their selves to the overall team in order to improve its productivity or value to the organisation..

That is, as indicated above, the programs and technologies of these organisations are wrapped up in strategies that – while not easily characterised as planned by anyone or anything – are seen to arise, and be employed and deployed ad hoc in the service of reifying existing structures that allow one both to be a subject with membership status in a social network, and to continuously reinforce or change that network and subjectivity while still being consistent with rules of the organisation.

In all cases, there is a network of factors which ensures asymmetries of power in favour of the prevailing goals. This network of factors is not applied from the top-down, nor is it applied only from the bottom-up. Power is fixed in the rituals, laws, rules, practices, etc. in a setting – it pervades the society's ideas, ideals and activities. Because power is 'in' the apparatus, exerting power is usually not conscious or planned – one activates power simply by doing what one normally does in a society. As shown here, sometimes asymmetries exist such that individuals can be perceived to be 'controlled', or moved to make decisions that favour something outside of themselves – but no one is inventing or masterminding them:

> There is a logic to the practices. There is a push towards a strategic objective, but no one is pushing. The objective emerged historically, taking particular forms and encountering specific obstacles, conditions and resistances... The overall effect, however, escaped the actors' intentions. (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c, p. 187)

Overall, these strategies appear as means for producing different 'truths' and bringing workers into a freely adopted relation with those truths that favours the interests of the organisation.

3. Chapter Summary: The Knowing, Responsible, Manageable & Self-Managing Subject

In contrast with what is described in the previous chapter, this chapter shows how workers are not only subject to disciplinary forces that apprehend them in a stabilised network of power relations which direct the anatomical actions of their bodies such that political or organisational ends are achieved. The worker is implicated in various ways of representing or producing and then interpreting Knowledge, and using it to affect one's own self in order to affect the organisation's goals. Given this knowledge, the subject is expected to be a 'free agent' and adopt and utilise the technical and strategic knowledge provided or produced, in order to alter and attach one's self to the way the workplace is organised – co-opting the subject in the relations that produce and reify and reinforce power in the workplace (Foucault 1995, pp. 26-27). Several ways, several technologies of the self (Foucault 1988c, 1997e; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Starkey & McKinlay 1998) in which these forces are taken up by subjects and used by and upon their selves, are described above.

In all cases, the worker is put into a relation with data, perspectives and/or values produced either through examinations, or through the representations of a supervisor or manager – individuals charged with managing workers in terms of the organisation's goals. The worker is always guided to see himself or herself in a relation of factors and forces within the institution – in terms of what the institution has made visible, and what options are presented as rational within the network of rules, Knowledge and the context into which the worker is situated. The subject's view of self is thus always mediated, disciplined and governed, but through the

tactics of the organisation the worker freely accepts this Knowledge and responsibility for its use, both in terms of his or her goals and in terms of the worker's relation to the 'truth' immanent in the organisation's measures of the subject as compared with the organisation's goals. The fact that the organisation more or less has say in these relations and in this mediation provides it with the appearance of objective Knowledge and objective authority. The conventional programmatic arrangement of this relation of forces instantiates power through which the 'good worker' in TMTL is produced both from the outside in and the inside out.

Of the relations described, what was termed above as 'shadowboxing with data' may be the most unique to the realm of TMTL. In 'shadowboxing with data', the worker is put face to face with data encoded and presented as an authoritative and truthful *Knowledge of the self* that is a product of his or her activity, as that activity is affected by the methods of observation, abstracted inscription and examination instituted by the particular disciplinary and governmental forces in place. At the same time one is put face to face with this data, one is also made responsible for 'its'[200] relation to the desires of the organisation, and for 'correcting' that relation if it is considered deviant. Whenever the subject alters his or her activity, the relation of the data (thus the subject) to what the organisation desires is also altered, because that data is a product of the organisation's gaze and examination apparatus, and the worker is expected to use it as the basis for any modifications *now* seen as relevant – and the process continues indefinitely. As with a boxer who shadowboxes against a screen, the shadow projected is a product not only of the boxer's movements, but

[200] I quote 'its' in this case, because the data are presented as if they were a sufficient representation of the subject. Thus the relation of the data to the organisation is presented as if it was a relation of the subject to what the organisation desires – data and subject are equated as a result of the various forces at play.

also of the angle of light shone from behind him or her. In the case of TMTL, the boxer is the worker, the shadow on the screen is the statistical or otherwise presented 'measurement' of work (which includes induced 'deep knowledge' of the self), and the light is the apparatus for observing, purifying observations and rendering them into imputably empirical form. In so doing the worker is always put in a relation with an 'appearance' (albeit very abstracted appearance) of one's self, and advised, coached or counselled to alter one's appearance in terms of this imputably authoritative and 'truthful' Knowledge of the self. In this way, putting the worker into a 'shadowboxing match with data' is a way the organisation acts to conduct the conduct of workers and put the worker into "...relations that ought to obtain between work and worker, employer and employee, between leader and led, between manager and worker..." (Rose, N. 1999c, p. 83).

As indicated, all of the examples in this chapter display a set of practices in each organisation in which representatives of the organisations and the agents themselves produce and are brought into relations with varying kinds of knowledge. This knowledge includes official examination data produced through surveillance, abstracted inscriptions and techniques for massing the data so produced into hierarchical observations and normalising judgements (the stats), knowledge grounded in the local experience of the work, and knowledge produced through tactics such as confession and 'pastoral' forms of guidance that imply responsibility (Deetz 1998; Findlay & Newton 1998; Foucault 1979, 1988d, 1990a; Savage 1998). In these relations of worker to knowledge, the subject comes face to face not only with external or buried 'truths', but also with self-aspirations as they may be realised through the characterisation of 'opportunities' in the company (Ezzy 1997; McKinlay & Starkey 1998c; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; Savage 1998). As depicted

above, each of these relations also implicates the worker as responsible for maintaining and/or developing the imposed relation between one's self and these truths, newfound knowledge, or personal aspirations(Ezzy 1997; Hoskin & Macve 1994; Kinnie, Hutchinson & Purcell 2000; McKinlay & Taylor 1998; McSweeney 1994; Power 1994; Taylor, P. & Bain 1999; Townley 1998).

In so doing the organisations have both extended and deepened forms of power used to govern individuals, and decreased the expense of manufacturing and managing productive subjects. Rather than relying solely on manipulation of the microphysics of a worker's activity in time and space, as described in the previous chapter, the practices in this chapter demonstrate how workers are put into situations where they are influenced to perceive a particular relation between themselves and data of various kinds, and, when that relation is made apparent or coached or counselled into being, the workers can and do activate and reify that relation by altering their own perceptions and behaviours in unique tactics and technologies of the self. However, because the organisation takes the lead in producing these relations in order to promote its own survival and growth – a central tenet of liberal forms of governance (Burchell 1991; Foucault 1979, 1988d; Gordon 1991) – the workers are left a position that involves primarily responding to, fulfilling and/or 'filling in' the openings and opportunities provided for in consummating this relation – freely making themselves responsible for the means for activating the relation that makes them subjects and produces their subjectivity.

However, these latter practices cannot be seen as totally independent of the microphysical manipulation of actors through the imposition of layers of technologies as described in the previous chapter. Instead, these practices build upon disciplinary tactics and the knowledge and power they produce to effect workers'

behaviours. This is done not solely by a more or less direct attachment of the worker's motions and actions to the mechanical workings of technologies, as was shown in the previous chapter. Rather this is accomplished by apprehending the worker in a network that includes not only Knowledge produced through microphysics, but also knowledge that is created by enlisting the worker into tactics through which he or she is brought to confess particular details about one's self, details which are brought into a configuration such that the subject can be seen in particular ways.

Because such technologies necessarily involve an 'expert' of some kind in soliciting the confession and interpreting it – in terms of the organisational and other types of knowledge (Rose, N. 1999c) – the organisation retains a channel through which it can 'conduct the conduct' of its members. This expert can be a local individual who uses devices like the 'visioning cards' described above to bring these hidden factors into the light of analysis. The expert can also be a member who has prolonged experience with the environment, and can identify within others attributes and values that non-intuitively impede those others from success in the manufactured environment of the workplace, and counsel them to, at the very least, survive and cope.

In all cases, the expert acts as a sort of guru who both aids in the production of details and actively weaves those details into figures of thought and action that model how the worker 'should *be*' – a sort of compact judge (Foucault 1995, p. 304). In the face of this intertwining of guided discoveries about one's 'deep' and perhaps previously unknown self with the organisation's goals and values, or one's own aspirations, workers, when properly inculcated into these figures of thought, can reinforce and reify them both individually and socially, and in so doing anchor these

ways of thinking and doing more deeply into their intentions and ways of making sense of their workplace surroundings. The result is, as demonstrated by the examples provided above, a subject who is now a composite of discipline and self-management, and who actively participates in one's own subjection to the Knowledge with which he or she is brought face to face through careful inclusion and exclusion, disciplinary and confessional technologies, and goals that are activated and channelled by the individual vis-à-vis the organisation's goals for productivity, quality and efficiency in management effort (Townley 1994, esp. pp. 109-37). The latter continues to be a strategic goal of these modes of power in TMTL – economical production, routinisation and management of workers. Through all this, it is also the case that the workers actively develop technologies of the self to accommodate what the organisation 'wants'. For example, as noted above, experienced workers separate or 'turn off' their personal knowledge and feelings related to their everyday/everynight experience when they enter the workplace (Haraway 2004a; Smith, D. 1990b, 1990c; Townley 1994, 1995b) – actually participating in the activation and reinforcement of power that favours the organisation's goals. The only Knowledge and experience that counts is that which the organisation provides for the workers.

4. Summary of Part 2: Biopower & the Organisational Program

The chapters in this part of the report document biopower and the organisational program to produce subjects. Biopower is a general term for organised efforts to bring "...life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculation and [make] knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" (Hacking 1982,

p. 279). In other words, by making the actions and motives of individuals susceptible to a calculus – as demonstrated in the surveillance, purified inscriptions, normalising judgements, confessions, counselling, coaching, etc. described above – the actions and motives of individuals can be converted to Knowledge and that Knowledge deployed in ways that transform subjects and their actions.

As shown in the first chapter of this part of the report, in TMTL this is accomplished by disciplining bodies in time, space and activity, and blending the ways bodies are so enclosed and partitioned with ways of observing them, abstracting and inscribing those observations, and combining the observations in ways that make certain components visible and separately rate-able – examinations. The way individuals are distributed in space and time, installing them into a cyborg-like relation with computer systems and telephone networks (Haraway 1990; West, C. 2001) facilitates minute microphysical discipline of their actions, such that workers appear to have little choice but to reproduce the organisation's rationalised model of service and continuously submit their actions to inspection.

In so doing the subject is rendered as a statistical object of productivity and quality, conveniently reducible to nothing more than points and lines on a graph. While matters of observing, inscribing and tabulating productivity are encoded into the computer and telephone network that shuttles work to the agents, the evaluation of quality is disciplined through the use of paper-based forms that focus and direct the orientation of personnel responsible for evaluation. This evaluation can include surveys asking customers for ratings of their satisfaction with services offered, and the supervisor's assessment of conduct in less explicitly defined ways. The resulting data on productivity and quality not only reifies the norms and forms of the organisation's rational model of service, it instantiates a form of power to see, power

to Know, power to direct, power to evaluate, and collectively, the power to *produce* the actor in terms of the discursive object comprised by statistical evidence of individual and collective activity.

In the second chapter in this part of the report, a different perspective was presented. Rather than just fitting the subject into a physical, temporal and technology-mediated microphysical network of rules for directing, observing, rating, and producing the subject, the subject is rendered into a set of strategies such that he or she is an actor with freedom to choose from the options made available. However, the subject, having been chosen for inclusion in the workplace based on his or her possession of particular knowledge, skills and attitudes considered to be important for the success of the organisation, is not 'totally' free in some metaphysical sense. Rather the subject is free to choose from options made available by the organisation – within the manufactured reality of TMTL – and to act in ways that will show oneself to be a 'good subject', and one worth, should the organisation see fit to make it possible, continuous employment or promotion. While Knowledge arising from more disciplinary forms of regulation is closely involved in some of these free choices, other choices require the worker to have access to and employ different forms of Knowledge.

Coaching and counselling activities appropriate, separate and fit the experience and practice of the work itself by putting workers face to face with disciplinary forces, and deploying that Knowledge as a way to highlight how a subject's conduct is evaluate-able in terms of the organisation – how to feel and what to do about it so as to maintain one's status as a 'good worker'. Coaching and counselling activities also employ knowledge derived from confessional activities in which the subject is asked to disclose information, or is put in a situation where

'deep knowledge' of the self can be extracted/produced. Once extracted/produced, this 'deep knowledge' is open to the interpretation of an 'expert', and can be set into a relation with organisational Knowledge and presented back to the subject such that he or she comes to know one's self in new ways. The subject is then expected to conduct oneself in *terms of this new Knowledge of the self* – to be transformed from a near-feral subject to one disciplined and governed by the organisation, to be manufactured as a subject of the structure exhibited by the organisation.

That is, in all cases, heterogeneous K/knowledge of the subject, whether produced through the partitioning and disciplining of activity in space and time, through an appropriation of the individual and making him or her a responsible actor for making decisions that will aid accomplishment of company goals, or through techniques for coming to know the deep self, is combined into a multi-part subjectivity both linked to and independent of the organisation's goals. In so doing, the subject is produced in a relief that allows measurements of one part (the subject's productivity, quality, desires and/or deep self) against the other part (the organisation's definitions of and desire for productivity and quality), and the creation or activation of power to conduct the conduct of the subject in *terms of the organisation*.

As a result, both chapters in this section tell a similar story, albeit in different ways. In the first, knowledge/power arises in a manufactured set of disciplinary and microphysical relations – direct manipulation of the subjects' bodies in time, space and activity. In the second, knowledge/power arises in a manufactured or manipulated set of values. This involves the appropriation and blending of, on the one hand, the subjects' feelings of adequacy, confidence, comportment, conviviality, etc. together with their personal aspirations, with, on the other hand, the feelings,

values and motivations desired by the organisation. When the subject is put in a particular relation with Knowledge as shaped by the organisation, the subject is made susceptible to power to, as Hacking portrays (1982, p. 279), transform the subject and conduct his or her conduct (Beirne, Riach & Wilson 2004; Burchell 1991; Cameron 2000; du Gay 1996b; Foucault 1981, 1988c, 1988d, 1990a; Gordon 1991; Rose, N. 1999c; Townley 1993, 1994).

Through the empirical examples provided in this part of the report, I have shown how disciplinary and governmental forms of power (Foucault 1991a) coexist and mutually reinforce one another in this form of labour, and are coordinated at particular points to activate an increased economy and regularity of workers' behaviour and thought. However, the above examples, while demonstrating how workers can be positioned in networks of disciplinary power and brought to hold themselves responsible for their own successes or survival (through counselling and confessional techniques that are channelled into a particular Knowledge of self as a subject in the organisation), also suggest ways that workers are not simply dopes who are docile to these forces.

Instead, when workers are made responsible for independent action within the knowledge and power framed and activated in the organisation's norms and forms, they are also given freedom to act in ways that are inconsistent with those forms of knowledge and power, or to introduce innovations in thought and practice that alter the trajectory of those already-existing forces – ways that permit the individual to bring his or her personal knowledge and values to the fore, such that the authority of the organisation's Knowledge is potentially made subject to change (Foucault 1981, 1983, 1988a, 1994b, 1997c, 1997d, 2000b, 2000d; Haraway 1990, 2004b, 2004c;

Smith, D. 1990b, 1990c, 1992; Townley 1994). In the following part of this report I inspect and describe how workers do so.

In some cases, these practices can be labelled ‘contained secondary adjustments’ (Goffman 1961, pp. 54ff, 199ff, 315ff) because while their performance may deviate from the implicit or explicit rules or decorum in some ways, the product of these practices is either consistent with the goals of the organisation or does not overtly disrupt them. In other cases, these practices can be called resistance (Bain & Taylor 2000; Barnes 2004; Jermier, Knights & Nord 1994; Knights & McCabe 1998; Taylor, P. & Bain 2003) or ‘disruptive secondary adjustments’. The latter is fitting on account that they are seen to deviate from the implicit or explicit rules or decorum of the organisation and the culminating products of the organisational program, “...leading to a rupture in the smooth operation of the organization...” (Goffman 1961, p. 199). In so doing I will specifically show how workers in TMTL are not dominated, and can and do act independently to produce themselves as subjects *within the relations* that exist in these call centres. That is, how workers produce themselves as subjects within both the organisation and within their own knowledge and practice.