APPENDIX A. DESCRIPTIONS OF CALL CENTRES PARTICIPATING IN THE

RESEARCH[302]

1.   BigTech

The *BigTech* call centre is a tech-support 'help desk' for computers, corporate

and personal computer printers and peripheral products manufactured by the parent

organisation. It is one of five domestic call centres and an increasing number of

international call centres operated by the parent organisation. The organisationally-

specified role of this call centre is to (a) handle customer issues related to 'new

products' introduced by the organisation that do not have highly developed technical

support procedures already established and (b) to develop reliable technical support

procedures for these new products. After such procedures are stable, the parent

company takes these procedures and hires out subcontractor call centres (also called

'outsourcers') to handle the ongoing support. In theory, this puts the workers in this

call centre in a role of generating knowledge that the company can then teach or sell

to other companies as a sort of commodity.

Over the two year span of fieldwork for this project, staffing at this call centre

has been reduced from nearly 900 agents to approximately 300 and many of the calls

serviced domestically have been pushed to an increasing number of international

locations.[303] Also during the span of this fieldwork, this company purchased another

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[302] All company names are pseudonyms.

[303] The rationale for decreasing the size of domestic call centres and increasing the size of and even
opening new international call centres is economic. At one point in the fieldwork, the company told its
agents that the average call handled by a call centre in the U.S. cost the company $3.00 (US) while the
average call handled by a call centre in India cost about 30¢ (US). Many agents in this location were
not against this outsourcing in principle, admitting that the company had the privilege to seek the
lowest cost supplier for customer support. However, many agents experienced angry backlash from
customers who told them of difficulties experienced when reaching an agent in India. These included
difficulty decoding the accent of agents, inaccurate technical advice, frequent transfers from agent to

large computer equipment manufacturer and began consolidating their tech support organisations. As in any corporate takeover, job redundancies occur and it is not unreasonable to say that some of the workforce reduction noted above is traceable to this also.

Agents in this call centre have varying levels of prior experience with technical equipment. Some agents are beneficiaries of a corporate welfare policy in which workers whose jobs had been made redundant or destroyed by plant closures or other reasons were provided with opportunity to apply for and receive training for other jobs being created in the company. A large proportion of the agents in this location had previously worked with the company in a light-assembly facility that was closed the same year this call centre was expanded to service a wider array of products.

This company also has a history of hiring employees through a temporary employment service. These employees are categorised as 'ETWs' (extended temporary workers) and receive the same training as 'real' employees of the company. ETWs are restricted from certain company functions (as was I) in which the financial status and strategic directions of the company were reported to 'real' employees.

The company pays employees not on the basis of technical skill but rather on the basis of longevity with the company. However, in theory, demonstration of competency on regular performance reviews improves the possibility an employee will remain with the company and may even put a worker in a position to receive

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agent while they attempt to locate an individual qualified to handle the customer's issue, and perhaps most of all, long wait times and unreliable functioning of the phone systems. The last of these was not a problem only for international call centres and has been a consistent complaint by customers in regularly solicited feedback to the company.

specialised training and promotions. Agents in *BigTech*'s call centre (though not ETWs) earn as much as $25/hour and as little as $12/hour, depending on seniority.[304]

Officially, there is a very low attrition rate for employees in the *BigTech* call centre. This is said by employees with several years of experience in this call centre to be because the pay and fringe benefits are substantially higher than could be expected in other types of service work in this region. Employees in the call centre also indicate that *BigTech*'s historical openness to allowing employees to advance through the company is a substantial motivation to stay in employ with the company, even if in a series of different roles.

As of the conclusion of fieldwork for this project in June 2004 there were approximately 300 call centre agents working full time shifts at this location. Shifts started between 6-8AM and the latest shift officially ended at 6PM, though it was not uncommon for workers to remain after that time for scheduled or unscheduled overtime. Workers of particular status were allowed to work different schedules. It was not uncommon for workers 'above' the status of phone agent to work four, 10 hour days to accumulate their required 40 hour work week.

Agents in *BigTech* have lunches of 30 minutes to one hour, depending on available 'slots' and personal preference. Agents in *BigTech* are assigned to handle incoming customer calls for five hours out of a typical eight hour day. The remaining hours are assigned variously to training or 'project time' when they are expected to accomplish ad hoc projects as assigned by their supervisor or other management personnel.[305] This project work was also frequently used as a reward for good work,

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[304] This is substantially over the regional average starting salary for customer service jobs ($9.50/hour, http://www.jobservice.us/lmi/wage-survey/PAGE0060.HTM) and the national average salary ($13.58/hr, http://www.bls.gov/oes/2002/oes434051.htm#nat).
[305] The blending of ACD-regulated call centre work, clerical and other work in this and other call centres included in this project is a fundamental component of the existence of technology-mediated tertiary labour as a unique and generalised form of labour. In other papers I will attempt to elaborate

and as a means for supervisory personnel to groom workers for new jobs or promotions. 'Projects' are almost exclusively allocated to 'real' employees and not ETWs. Officially, this was said to be necessary because project work occasionally required access to data that ETWs were officially proscribed from viewing.[306]

Employees are allocated a set number of 'flexible time off' days (FTO) per year. FTO is a pool of sick time, vacation time and personal time. Requests to take days from this pool are submitted electronically through a computer 'intranet' accessible to all employees on any computer attached to the company's computer network. Employees can check the status of FTO requests, remaining FTO resources, pay schedule, fringe benefits, company investments, etc. through this intranet.[307]

The agents in *BigTech* are trained and assigned to support a limited number of specific products manufactured by the organisation. The daily volume of calls worked by agents in *BigTech* ranges from less than seven to about 20. Duration of these calls ranges from less than five minutes to longer than an hour, depending on the complexity of the caller's questions or requests, context at the customer's location, customer's expertise in working on computer hardware and software, agent's expertise, and current operating condition of the software used to look up information and perform data entry.[308] While training is provided on 'customer

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on the growth of tertiary labour that is both regulated by technical apparatuses like the ACD and also by more common bureaucratic processes.

[306] In practice, however, this was also a means to ensure the company had maximal flexibility to terminate the employment of an ETW.

[307] While this company intranet is said to provide employees with 'empowerment' to manage resources particular to their employment (which it does), it also reduces the cost of processing requests made through the system because a large proportion of the services offered in this system are automated. Additionally, as is a well-documented feature of informating technologies (Zuboff 1988), the actions and resource usage of all employees are conveniently visible to management personnel through this system. That is, the intranet is another facet of the panopticism immanent in the workplace.

[308] It is not uncommon for the networked databases used by agents in all of the call centres included in this project, to go 'down', or become non-functional. Because the agent's work is so reliant on data collection and data entry with these computer databases, timely accomplishment of work in such a situation is severely impaired. It was not unusual, however, for agents in this call centre to be able to accomplish such calls using paper documentation maintained at their desks, or from memory. Paper

service skills' and technical knowledge and skill related to the products serviced, no explicit scripts are employed. Agents and management alike indicate that agents are allowed to develop their own way of conducting calls.[309] In practice, however, the computer software used by agents in the conduct of work provides a more or less explicit ordering of questions asked and information provided.

At *BigTech* there is no official 'talk time' expectation – agents are expected to accomplish 'first call resolution' of customer questions and issues, regardless of how long it might take. That said, there is a constant, though understated effort by quality control staff and management to reduce the average talk time. This is in the interest of reducing the cost per call. This is increasingly important to the management of this call centre because corporate management is said to be making decisions about the future of this call centre based on the overall cost of doing business as compared with the cost of subcontracting outsourcers to do the work.

Call centre agents in *BigTech* are mostly male, although females make up approximately 15% of the technical support workforce. Agents range in age from low 20s to retirement age, though the majority of phone agents were younger than 40 years old.

Despite the technical nature of the work at this call centre, workers are not expected to have a highly technical background prior to their hire, and undergo as

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documentation was maintained fastidiously by some agents and justified as a backup for the computer system. The ability to handle tech support issues without computer access was possible on account of the high degree of repetition in the topic of calls handled by agents. Agents reported that they could detail a particular process '...in my sleep!...' due to that repetition.

Documentation of these calls was sometimes unproblematic but required the agent to make handwritten notes of the caller's demographic details, machine type and serial number and a short description of the problem and steps taken to solve it. These data were entered into the computer database when it was again operational. In other cases, agents would have to apologise to the customer and tell that they would have to call back 'later' because the computer systems were down.

[309] In practice, while there is no explicit scripting, quality evaluations of agents' work include a focus on politeness, matching one's vocabulary to the customer's skill and knowledge level and 'controlling' pace and direction of questioning and responses to match the implicit service contract of the company. That is, while there is no explicit script to follow, there is a template describing general practices expected of agents.

many as six weeks of corporate-designed training (depending on the product they will be assigned to support) prior to their introduction to independent work in the call centre.[310] Initial training is accomplished in traditional style lectures and drill and practice activities on company policies, procedures, 'customer service skills' and technical details and troubleshooting skills developed by product engineers for the products an agent will be expected to support when he or she commences independent work in the call centre. Ongoing training is officially accomplished in weekly 'tech debrief' meetings and staff meetings, and unofficially accomplished in peer-to-peer coaching and ad hoc questions initiated by the novice agent to more experienced agents or an internal help desk.

Similarly, management personnel are usually individuals who have been promoted internally after having distinguished themselves in some way to be an exceptional employee in a subordinate job category. However, despite past experience as technical support workers, supervisory personnel are almost never expected to be or relied upon to have current technical knowledge.[311] Instead, they are considered to have become specialised in management skills and knowledge.

In addition to phone agents and management personnel, there are various other statuses in *BigTech*'s call centre. These include individuals specialising in quality monitoring and coaching, high level tech support personnel who function as an internal help desk, 'second level tech support' personnel responsible for handling issues that are both technically and organisationally more complex than typically handled by a phone agent – for example, issues that require the coordination of field

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[310] In my fieldwork I met one individual who started with the company as a coffee-cart vendor, then worked as custodian, dock worker and assembly line production worker before entering the call centre. As of the ending of my fieldwork, he reported increasing stress with the prospect of being made redundant in what were increasingly deep layoffs in response to the economic forces above. Another worker's prior job was as a prison guard and another's was as a 'grease monkey' in a specialty automotive services shop.
[311] As described above, these practices of corporate welfare, hiring and internal training of 'green' workers and internal promotions appears to be an important force on the maintenance of employees.

technicians and dispatching of replacement parts – and contract support – and project management personnel who service relationships with outsourcer call centres.

BigTech has historically offered reimbursement of education expenses for employees studying for degrees related to needs of the company. Near the end of fieldwork, this benefit was rescinded 'until further notice'. This was due to financial pressures on the company arising from the global downturn in technology markets, costs of the buyout of another large company, and a general change in corporate management ideology from one where employees are relatively 'trusted', independent and responsible to one characterised by accounting control systems (Hopper & Macintosh 1998; Hoskin & Macve 1994) and employee accountability fed by data provided through the informating systems that are common in call centre environments.

2.   DeliveryWorldwide

DeliveryWorldwide is a customer support centre for a nationwide express freight and consumer package delivery company. At the start of fieldwork for this research, it was one of 12 domestic call centres run by the parent company. By the time fieldwork ended in June 2004, three domestic call centres had been closed or consolidated and *DeliveryWorldwide* had been bought by an international express freight delivery company. As of the end of fieldwork, the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre participating in this research had not experienced workforce reductions as had *BigTech*'s call centre after a similar corporate merger.

Agents in this call centre handle five different types of calls: (a) pickup requests, in which a customer arranges for a delivery truck driver of the organisation

to come to his or her location to pick up a package; (b) tracking requests, in which a customer asks about the transit or delivery status of a package; (c) billing requests, in which a customer asks questions about or requests reconciliation of errors on bills for shipments, and (d) general requests, which may involve directing a customer to a delivery station, location of a 'drop box' (much like a post-box), answering questions related to employment, answering questions related to products or limits of service and the like. Most calls are handled in three minutes or less, with the exception of billing calls, which may take much longer. There is no official 'talk time' limit for calls, but in practice, management and supervisory personnel exert pressure for agents to average less than two minutes per call. Pickup, tracking and general request type calls are highly scripted, and the specific wording of scripts is accessible to the agent through onscreen 'buttons' on the computer software used by agents.[312]

There are 98 agents working full and part time shifts ranging from a start time of 5:00AM, ending at 1:15PM to a start time of 12:30PM, ending at 9:00PM. The majority of workers are scheduled into full time shifts, though as of the end of fieldwork, all new hires are placed on part time shifts until their seniority permits them to 'bid' for a full time slot. Such shift 'bidding' occurs only in the month of April, in accordance with the contract negotiated with the Union.

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[312] In practice, agents tend to deviate from rigid compliance with scripting. Similar to that noted above with *BigTech*, quality evaluations include a focus on politeness, not using company jargon and 'controlling' pace and direction of questioning and responses to match the service contract of the company. However, during the course of fieldwork, management employed various practices to try and get agents to read scripted remarks verbatim. This was in reaction to covert audits conducted by the general corporate office in which a representative of the general office would call each *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre 30 times a month posing as a customer with specific questions. The purpose of these audit calls is to check on agents' use of an internet accessible archive of policies and products. The results of these audits were used as a means to rate each of *DeliveryWorldwide*'s call centres on 'equal footing'. In effect, while the audits checked on the use of official company scripting, management's pressure on agents was aimed at producing good evaluations for the overall call centre.

All full-time workers are allotted a 10 minute break in their morning and afternoon and a 30 minute lunch period.[313] Shift start times, break times, lunch times and shift end times are scheduled by the company throughout the day so that the call centre has, in theory, enough agents on the phones to handle predicted call volume without requiring callers to wait longer than 30-60 seconds before speaking to an agent.

This particular call centre is unionised, though not all call centres operated by the parent organisation are. Union membership is not mandatory and not total[314] in the workforce, and varies depending on the time of year[315] and desire for a non-member employee to solicit Union protection from disciplinary action from the parent organisation. There are two full-time shop stewards and one alternate shop steward in this call centre.

Prior work experiences vary widely from agent to agent. Some have prior call centre supervisory experience or experience as call centre agents in other call centres, others have worked as clerical personnel, light assembly factory workers, retail clerks and restaurant staff. Current agents range in their formal education from high-school educated persons to individuals with Master level degrees in business.[316] Among the management staff (manager, supervisor, trainer, data analyst), only the trainer had completed a higher education degree – a Master of Science.

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[313] Part time workers – usually 20 hours per week – were allowed one 10 minute break during a four hour shift.

[314] The state in which this call centre is located has a law known as 'Right to Work'. This law stipulates that workers in a unionized workplace shall not be required to join the union. This law, and its implications, is a constant topic of debate for some members of the workforce – including one worker whose father was one of the authors of that law. Oddly, this worker is a member of the Union and admits that the Union provides valuable protection and has negotiated pay and benefits far exceeding those of similar non-Unionised workplaces in the area.

[315] Membership peaks around the beginning of each contract year, so that voting rights are ensured.

[316] The trainer in this organisation is assigned the job of screening applicants for new positions. She indicated a preference for individuals without a college degree based on her belief that such persons would tend to be less dissatisfied with the work. In contrast and apparently unknown to her, the manager of this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre told of a preference for individuals *with* a college degree.

The manager had a high school education and had worked previously as an agent with this company. The supervisor and data analyst were both studying part time for undergraduate degrees, in business management and information technology, respectively. As with *BigTech*, there is no assumption that management staff are knowledgeable in the use or functioning of the technology used by agents. However, three of the management personnel (manager, supervisor and customer service trainer) in this call centre have been promoted to their current positions from within the company. All management personnel have been promoted to their present jobs from other call centres operated by the parent organisation.

Employees in this call centre start at $16.70 (USD) per hour[317] and acquire an annual increase as per the contract negotiated between the Union and the company. Agents high on the seniority list earn over $25/hour (USD). Agents in non-unionised call centres run by this company earn as little as $8/hour (USD). In this call centre, there is no pay scale difference between pay for male and female workers.

Officially, there is a very low attrition rate for employees in the *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre. This can be accounted for in two ways. First, employees with several years of experience in this call centre indicate that the pay and fringe benefits are substantially higher than could be expected in other types of service work in this region. Thus, despite whatever dissatisfaction might exist in the work, employees are willing to persevere to collect this reward. Second, *DeliveryWorldwide* does not count employees who quit or are terminated within a 90 day probationary period in attrition statistics. During the probationary period employees are prohibited from joining the Union. Management and agent personnel

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[317] This is substantially over the regional average starting salary for customer service jobs ($9.50/hour, http://www.jobservice.us/lmi/wage-survey/PAGE0060.HTM) and the national average salary ($13.58/hr, http://www.bls.gov/oes/2002/oes434051.htm#nat).

indicted that the vast majority of attrition in this call centre occurs in the first 90 days.

About 85% of workers in *DeliveryWorldwide* are female. Those who are married usually consider themselves to be second-wage earners for their families. Most of the agents in this call centre were hired upon the opening of this call centre six years ago. A few of the agents in *DeliveryWorldwide* have transferred to this location following closure of other call centres in other regions of the country. The age range of employees spans from 21 to early 60s.

During fieldwork, new agents in *DeliveryWorldwide* were provided with two weeks of corporate-designed training prior to being introduced to independent work in the call centre. Previously, agents were provided with up to five weeks of training. Agents with high seniority indicated that the duration and quality of corporate training had decreased steadily, and roughly in relation to the decreasing financial stability of the company. Ongoing 'training' was stated as an official policy of the company – *prior to being bought out by another express delivery company*. In practice, such 'training' amounted to job aids documenting new procedures, technologies, products and policies of the company.

Initially, new agents are hired as part-time workers and trained to answer what are considered to be relatively simple, quick and frequent 'pickup' request calls and general questions from customers. As the employee gains skill, he or she is provided with additional training in package tracking requests and billing questions from customers. Initial training is accomplished in a conventional sit-down training room where the new employee experiences lecture-type delivery of content on policies and procedures, and drill and practice on 'customer service skills' and the use of the computer databases and phone system to be used when they begin work.

Ongoing 'training' is officially accomplished through the use of mass distribution of data in E-mail type systems, online databases and paper-based handouts/job aids of policy and procedures. Among the call centre agents themselves, the official training is considered to be inadequate to produce a competent call centre agent, and an active but informal peer-to-peer network of coaching and question-answering is a constant undercurrent in the activity of the call centre. Some of this informal network has been appropriated into officially-sanctioned 'team meetings' in which a designated 'team leader' is expected to deliver his or her expertise, and negotiate the distribution of both company-sponsored 'training' materials and developing knowledge and skills between the members of the team.

The daily volume of calls worked by agents in *DeliveryWorldwide* ranges from about 70 to over 200, depending on the day and conditions that might affect the delivery of packages by couriers in the organisation. Duration of these calls range from less than 2 minutes to about 15 minutes, depending on the complexity of the caller's questions or requests, the agent's expertise and repair of the software used to look up information and perform data entry.

Designated 'team leader' agents are assigned to supervise the work of 8-12 agents, and provide coaching, feedback and perform some evaluation tasks of agents both on their teams and those on other teams. 'Team leaders' are installed into this position when such positions come open by prior team leaders deciding to step down to agent work. 'Bidding' for this job is accomplished according to Union contract timetables and procedures. Employees can similarly 'bid' for other shift times depending upon their seniority with the company.

3.   MHealth

The *MHealth* call centre is a subset of a small, regional health insurance and EAP services[318] company, employing five agents. This call centre could only recently be defined as such, following the installation of an ACD in the year prior to my entry into this fieldwork venue. Prior to that, the call centre team leader indicated there were 'just us girls on the phones', answering requests to authorise EAP insurance benefits, answering clerical and process questions from mental health care providers and clients, and performing clerical processing that is part of the legal/mental health care/bureaucratic apparatus through which EAP benefits are administered. Over the span of fieldwork, agents in the *MHealth* call centre began processing paperwork required by the EAP function of the company in addition to working the phones. Agents were expected to complete paperwork during times they were not occupied on the phones with direct customer service activities.

At the commencement of fieldwork in the *MHealth* call centre, there were four agents in this call centre, all female. The 'team leader' in the call centre was female and has been promoted to this position from within the company. Ages of the four call centre personnel ranged from 23 to 36 years. Within the first three months of fieldwork, all four of these personnel left the company, all for reasons unrelated to the work itself. One left to attend graduate school in another state, one left to follow her husband's job to another state, one left for a job in a larger insurance company

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[318] EAP stands for 'employee assistance program'. EAP is a relatively recent innovation in which employees of participating companies can access a limited number of free mental health counselling sessions with licensed mental health counsellors. EAP is an apparatus that, per the owner of this company, is intended to provide workers with access to mental healthcare resources that will '...allow him or her to cope with stresses of life that impede one from being a productive employee...' Potential connections between this and the Foucaultian concepts of *the repressive hypothesis* and *bio-power*, and the scientistic production of the client's subjectivity, among others, are apparent (Foucault 1988b, 1990a, 1994a, 1995). However, because EAP and its embedding within mental health care are not the focus of this project I will not attempt to elaborate on this matter here.

and one resigned following a dispute over ethically insensitive remarks. During these three months, two new agents were hired, both female and aged 26 and 37 years, and an employee in another part of the company was assigned as team leader. All three received on-the-job training from the previous outgoing team leader.

Over the span of fieldwork, attrition remained a problem and four agents were hired and replaced at least once. At the conclusion of fieldwork, three new agents were working in the call centre. These, along with the team lead and one female agent, comprised the full staff of agents working full time shifts staggered between 8AM and 6PM. All workers in this call centre have a floating 15 minute break and a 1 hour lunch break. Agents in *MHealth* are expected to manage their time such that they can accomplish all of their clerical assignments in-between incoming calls.[319]

Early in the fieldwork, agents were selected based on (a) experience with the company, (b) college level credentials in psychology or social work fields or (c) experience in customer service roles. At the end of fieldwork, new agents were hired based solely on call centre experience. Education of agents hired by *MHealth* included a range of credentials from a high school diploma to an earned doctorate in English literature; job experience included retail customer service roles, financial services and other call centre work. The age of call centre agents working at *MHealth* during the term of fieldwork spanned from 21 to 48 years. At the end of fieldwork, three female and two male agents were employed at *MHealth*.

Salary of new agents at *MHealth* was set at the regional average of $9.50/hour (USD). The highest paid agent in the call centre earned $12/hour (USD).

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[319] The organisationally formalised 'packing' of clerical and other work in between calls is similar to what Parker and Slaughter (1988; 1995) have referred to as 'management by stress' and others have referred to as 'job intensification' (Baldry, Bain & Taylor 1998; Knights & Odih 2000; Ritzer 2000a; Rose, N. 1999a; Townley 1994; van den Broek 2002). While some features of this practice will be detailed below, a more thorough analysis will be the topic of a future paper.

Agents in the *MHealth* call centre handled between 15 – 40 calls per day. The daily volume of calls worked by agents in *MHealth* ranges from about 10 to over 50, depending on the day and contract year schedule of health insurance plans (for example, call volume is abnormally heavy in December and April – the typical year-end for most health insurance plans serviced by the parent organisation). Duration of these calls ranges from less than 2 minutes to about 30 minutes, depending on the complexity of the caller's questions or requests, the agent's expertise and repair of the software used to look up information and perform data entry. Occasionally, the agent was called upon to support what is known as a 'crisis call'. A crisis call occurs when a caller/client is deemed in immediate need of speaking with a licensed mental health counsellor. The agent acted in support of the on-staff counsellor during such crisis calls.

Agents in *MHealth* are provided with 10-15 days of on-the-job-training and coaching by the team leader. The early part of this training is accomplished either in an empty office or in the worker's or team leader's assigned cubicle, and entails a page by page review of policies and procedures defined by the organisation. Following this review, the trainee is alternately paired with the team leader or other accomplished agents, and allowed to listen in to actual calls with customers. This is accomplished by hooking the trainee up to the team leader's telephone headset with an apparatus called a 'Y-cord'. The 'Y-cord' allow both persons to hear the caller's voice, and depending on the setting of a switch in the 'Y-cord', to both speak to the caller or only one person can speak to the caller. Between calls, the trainee is given a description of 'what I did and why I did that' by the 'trainer'. As the trainee is judged to gain in knowledge and skill, he or she is expected to incrementally accomplish (a) manipulation of the phone and its array of buttons, (b) manipulation of computer and

software to accomplish data lookup and data entry as coached by the 'trainer' and (c)
talking with the customer. Finally, the trainee is observed and coached by the
'trainer' in his or her accomplishment of all three tasks. Additionally, the trainee is
coached in the accomplishment of clerical and other duties that are performed by the
'trainer' as a normal part of his or her daily activity, whenever those tasks 'come up'.
In addition to initial classroom type and on the job training, peer-to-peer coaching
and helping of co-workers is accomplished. In terms of the organisation, this is an
informal part of the work of agents in *MHealth* but one that is so prevalent that it is
'required', called for actively; when an agent does not volunteer or 'jump in' to help,
he or she may be admonished in various ways by his or her co-workers.

4.   MedAdvise

MedAdvise is a telephone triage nurse call centre, colloquially known as 'dial
a nurse'. It is affiliated with one of the two hospitals in the region and located in the
basement of one of the hospital's buildings. There are 17 Registered Nurses (RNs)
and 5 'community resource specialists' (CRSs) working in this call centre. RNs
answer calls related to medical health care concerns of citizens – who may or may
not be patients of the hospital or affiliated physicians – and CRSs answer calls
related to non-clinical calls into the call centre (for example, taking enrolments into
health care 'courses' and workshops, registering requests for hospital literature and
health care promotional materials, events sponsored by the hospital and generally
supporting the clerical processing needs of RNs). Of the 17 RNs working in this call
centre, only two are scheduled for full time shifts.[320] The remaining members are

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[320] At *MedAdvise*, the full time shift is actually .9FTE (full time equivalent). The .9FTE nurse works
72 hours during a fortnight.

scheduled for fractions of full time shifts and 'floating' shifts, depending on the staffing needs of the call centre. Nurses and CRSs are scheduled to work so that calls can be answered within five minutes. Since relatively few calls arrive during the 7:30AM – 4PM period and the majority of calls into the call centre occur between 4PM and midnight during normal workdays and from 8AM-midnight on Saturday and Sunday, only two nurses are scheduled to work during the 7:30AM-4PM shift. All other shifts are scheduled between 4PM-midnight.

Many of the RNs working in this call centre are over age 50 and have taken positions here when the considerable physical demands of ward nursing became too great. Several nurses have suffered physical injuries that rendered them unable to meet the physical demands of ward nursing in the hospital. Nurses whose age is well below 50 report taking this job after becoming 'burned out' from the demands of ward nursing in the hospital or to increase the flexibility of their schedule so they could accomplish childcare or other family responsibilities. While all RNs have legal medical credentials authorising their practice in the health care profession, the clinical specialities of nurses vary from neonatal intensive care, to oncology to emergency room nursing. Several nurses working at *MedAdvise* have experience in other similar dial-a-nurse settings. All but two of the RNs working in this call centre are female.

The 'trainer' in this call centre is an RN with over 15 years of experience in similar call centre work. She also works as a part-time nurse in this call centre and performs the role of trainer in an unofficial but universally recognised role. New RNs in the call centre are provided with two days of 'training' in the hospital's computer lab, to review the functions in the software used by RNs to perform data entry and data processing in support of the work. Following these two days of computer

training, new nurses are introduced to the call centre work in an on-the-job training format similar to that described for new workers in *MHealth*, above. The 'trainer' indicates that new nurses are expected to become independently functioning in the call centre within three weeks, although this can vary considerably depending on the experience and aptitude of the nurse.

Peer-to-peer coaching and learning is actively promoted and performed in *MedAdvise*, though no formal administrative apparatus exists to ensure this. As described for *MHealth*, above, failure to actively participate in this sort of informal training and mutual-support activity regularly results in the 'offender' being coached to do so.

Attrition in the *MedAdvise* call centre is very low. During the span of fieldwork only one nurse was terminated and replaced. The nurse who was terminated had been employed in the call centre for over 6 months but had still not reached independence in his work. He had been offered the job as nurse in the *MedAdvise* call centre following a debilitating physical illness that rendered him unable to handle the strain of ward nursing in his specialty of oncology.

Nurses in the *MedAdvise* call centre are paid based on their credentials and experience. Nurses earn between $20/hour up to about $28/hour.

CRSs in the call centre all work 'half time' – approximately 20 hours a week. Scheduled shifts range from a start of 8AM to 11:30AM and the ending time of the last CRS shift is 8PM. CRSs have non-clinical credentials ranging from pre-school teaching to a BS in business management to status as nursing students at a local University. Ages of CRS range from 26 to over 60 years. All CRSs are female.

The manager of nurses in this call centre is also an RN and over 50 years old. The coordinator of CRS activities is a 26 year old female with a B.S. degree in

business management. Evaluation of RNs is accomplished partly by the nurse manager of the call centre and partly by the CRS Coordinator. This shared responsibility in the evaluation of nurses in the call centre is a point of contention among some of the RNs, who object to a non-clinical person having administrative oversight over their job performance related to clinical work.

Nurses and CRSs are allotted 15 minute break during the course of shifts that extend longer than four hours and a 30 minute lunch period in shifts up to eight hours. (Nurses and CRSs who work less than .9FTE may still have shifts that extend up to eight hours.) Depending on the volume of calls, nurses and CRSs are permitted to take informal breaks.

In addition to handling medical questions from citizens in the community, the *MedAdvise* call centre also contracts to handle after-hours calls to physicians' offices and affiliated medical centres in other parts of the state. Nurses also take turns evaluating the work of other nurses through what is called a 'chart inspection'. In the chart inspection, the evaluator checks the paperwork documentation produced by nurses through their use of an expert-system computer program to triage and advise the caller on the probable import of symptoms and how to address those symptoms, either with home care or seeking official medical care.

The daily volume of calls into this call centre varies considerably depending on epidemiological matters related to 'bugs going around', automobile, industrial or farming accidents in the region, and health care promotional programs sponsored by the hospital. Nurses working the day shift answer 10-20 calls between 7:30AM-4PM, and 50 or more on a busy evening shift. Calls last from a few minutes to tens of minutes, depending on the severity and complexity of the medical issues presented

by a caller. There is no explicit 'talk time' limit but nurses are expected to average about 10-12 minutes per call over the course of a month.

In addition to handling calls from the community, nurses who work the day shifts make outbound calls to new or at-risk mothers in support of a 'mother and baby' care program sponsored by the hospital.

APPENDIX B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.   Fieldwork: Constitution of the Field

The region in which this research was conducted is located in the

Intermountain region of the Northern United States. The city in which all four call

centres are located was, at the commencement of this project, the home of over 40

discrete call centres. Research sponsored by the local Economic Development

Council found that the call centres in this region contributed over $9 million (USD)

per week to the local economy in the form of salaries to employees and contracts

with ancillary companies in the region, such as vending machine companies, catering

companies, janitorial services, utility payments, etc. (Treasure Valley Customer Care

Center Industry Work-Force-Development-Team 2001) At the end of the fieldwork

portion of this research, that number had decreased to less than 30, with many call

centres moving to locations in other states, Canada or overseas that promised lower

operating (principally labour) costs.[321] No follow up study of the economic

contributions of the remaining call centres has been performed.

a.   Selection of Fieldwork Sites

This Economic Development Council provided a list of all known call centres

on its website (though, as indicated above, this was not an exhaustive list). It was a

simple, if labour intensive, process of contacting and attempting to schedule

meetings with management level persons at each call centre on the list, to solicit for

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[321] The 'outsourcing' of jobs has been of considerable interest in the United States over the time this research was conducted. It is a very interesting phenomenon and worthy of substantial investigative effort. However, this project was not concerned with it in any direct way.

participation in the project. More unreturned phone calls and declined invitations to meet were experienced than otherwise. Eventually, eight meetings were scheduled and attended, from which three agreements were reached to conduct fieldwork. Contact with the fourth call centre participating in this study was made *at the request of* one of the members of that organisation.

I had been attempting for four years to gain access to *BigTech* for research purposes. It was not until some of my present students were employed by that company and I was able to take advantage of their status in the organisation to help me navigate its bureaucracy, that I was able to meet individuals interested in my project. Similarly, access to *DeliveryWorldwide* was facilitated through a student who currently worked for that company. Access to *MedAdvise* was made possible through contacts with other faculty at Boise State University, my current employer. Access to *MHealth* was made possible by a student employed by that company who attended a lecture I presented to the 'Friends of Anthropology' at Boise State University, on the topic of the ethnographic research of which this report is a product. In other words, access was as much a result of accident, serendipity and 'who I knew' as it was a result of formal contacts and meetings with the organisations.[322]

Consequently, it was not so much a process of 'selecting' fieldwork sites as it was a search for organisations that were tolerant of the goals of an ethnographic study. In retrospect, the four call centres represent a cross section of industry, size of

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[322] While I have many notes on the failed attempts at gaining access to businesses as fieldwork sites, at this point I can only offer that it appears businesses are generally suspicious and operationally intolerant of academic research.

labour force, status of the labour force, etc. (see the description of fieldwork sites). This was serendipity, however, not planned.[323]

Additionally, my status as a faculty member in the Instructional & Performance Technology department at Boise State University was instrumental in facilitating access to these call centres. Current or past students in this department were employed in three of the four call centres participating in the study. From my standpoint, this simply provided a 'known' point of contact in each workplace. Informal questions to those individuals indicated this was accurate. One individual indicated that she acted as an advocate for me, an otherwise unknown entity. "I told them you were alright. I think they wouldn't have gone for it if I hadn't vouched for you." Oddly enough, the individual who vouched for me left the company not long after fieldwork began.

b.   Getting in to Fieldwork Sites[324]

Access to *BigTech*, the largest corporation participating in this study, was the most protracted even with the assistance of my students to find the 'right people'. Over five months transpired between meeting the 'right people' and successful conclusion of access privileges. Layers of bureaucratic consent and face to face meetings with various stakeholders of the organisation, culminating in the drafting of a legal document with one of the corporation's lawyers, closed the deal. This legal document was a 'non-disclosure' form which proscribed me from publishing photographs or descriptions of prototype equipment in use at the *BigTech* call centres in which I conducted fieldwork. The agreement went into force in November 2001

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[323] While this might be undesirable in a hypothetico-deductive study, it is not so given the exploratory and descriptive nature of this project.
[324] Please see also, the description of fieldwork sites, Appendix A.

and extended to 1 January 2006. Because the submission of this thesis falls within the period covered by this document, photographs, facsimiles of documents and descriptions from *BigTech* are altered to omit or obscure features covered by the non-disclosure agreement.[325] *BigTech* permitted me to sit and talk with workers and listen to their call centre interactions with customers, make copies of official documents in the workplace and schedule and conduct interviews. Additional permissions were required for me to take photographs inside the call centre and it was necessary for security personnel to accompany me when photographs were taken.

Similar to *BigTech*, contact with *DeliveryWorldwide* was facilitated through a student both employed at the corporation and also enrolled in the Master of Science degree offered by the department in which I teach.[326] Several very informal face to face meetings with the manager of this call centre and what seemed to be a perfunctory telephone call to the regional manager were all that was required to gain permission of the organisation for my fieldwork.

Since the workforce at this *DeliveryWorldwide* call centre is organised by a large labour union, it was also necessary for me to secure permission from the Union prior to commencing fieldwork. Upon meeting with the two Union Stewards of the call centre, I learned their primary concern was that I would be using what I learned in order to compare this call centre to other similar facilities – particularly on what they called 'productivity measures'. A simple reference to my research prospectus and verbal assurance that this was not a part of my project and I would not allow the

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[325] It is a fact that most of the individuals who were instrumental in accessing *BigTech*, and those who signed the approvals and legal documents that secured this access, are no longer working for the company or have moved to other locations and jobs within the company. This produces some uncertainty as to whom I might be able to direct reports of my research!

[326] Similar to that noted above, this individual is no longer employed at this workplace and has moved to another call centre in the region.

organisation to press me into this sort of activity, was all that was required to gain their official agreement for me to conduct the research.[327] *DeliveryWorldwide* and the labour union permitted me to sit and talk with workers and listen to their call centre interactions with customers, make copies of official documents in the workplace, attend meetings and schedule and conduct interviews. *DeliveryWorldwide* prohibited me from taking photographs inside the call centre.

Access to *MedAdvise* was made possible through faculty at Boise State University already conducting fieldwork in other units of the hospital in which the call centre was located. These faculty members introduced me to the Head of Nursing, who connected me with the administrative head of the *MedAdvise* call centre. The nurse managers of this call centre were more than happy to host my fieldwork and readily signed the agreements with the understanding that I would also have to gain informed consent from the hospital's Committee for Research with Human Subjects. The non-clinical nature of my research expedited the acquisition of this consent. *MedAdvise* permitted me to sit and talk with workers and listen to their call centre interactions with customers, take photographs and make copies of official documents in the workplace and schedule and conduct interviews. I could not collect unredacted copies of documents or take photographs that contained personal information of callers. This was proscribed under recently passed legislation in the United States under the auspice of the so-called HIPAA law (Health Insurance Privacy and Accountability act). Additionally, because I would be in direct contact with patient's personal health information (PHI), prior to the commencement of fieldwork at *MedAdvise*, I was required to complete a training session on the

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[327] It is worth noting that personnel at *DeliveryWorldwide* never attempted to exert such pressure. However, agents in all four call centres regularly asked "...are we like the other call centres?..." Responses were always offered in a polite but noncommittal manner. I usually answered with the enigmatic phrase "...call centres are call centres..." and this seemed to satisfy most queries.

recently-instituted HIPAA law. This training addressed how individuals who work with patients' personal health information (PHI) were responsible for protecting that information from accidental or intentional distribution to individuals who are not authorised to view it or do not require this information to accomplish their work. This training consisted of a solo viewing of a 20 minute videotape covering several portions of the HIPAA law in the media centre. Following this viewing I was required to sign a form attesting that I had received this 'training'.

Access to the *MHealth* call centre was a happenstance. The call centre at this regional company was not even known of by the Boise Metropolitan Economic Development Council and consequently was not even on my list of organisations to approach for access. I learned about this call centre following a lecture I presented to the 'Friends of Anthropology' at Boise State University, on the topic of findings and meandering ideas from my early fieldwork at *BigTech* and *DeliveryWorldwide*, when a student attending the lecture approached me several days later, indicating that she worked "...in a place with a call centre" and had spoken with 'C-level'[328] officers at *MHealth* about my work. She said they expressed an interest in allowing me access to the organisation. Two face to face meetings with management personnel in the organisation were conducted and in the second of these, organisational permission forms were signed.[329] *MHealth* permitted me to sit and talk with workers and listen to their call centre interactions with customers, take photographs and make copies of official documents in the workplace[330] and schedule and conduct interviews. Initially, management at *MHealth* explicitly proscribed me from requesting

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[328] Business jargon refers to 'Chief' level persons (CEO, CIO, etc.) as 'C-level' officers in an organization.
[329] Like *BigTech* and *DeliveryWorldwide*, one of the individuals signing the agreement to permit me to conduct fieldwork at *MHealth* is no longer with that organisation.
[330] I could not collect unredacted copies of documents or take photographs that contained personal information of clients. This was proscribed under recently passed legislation in the United States under the auspice of the so-called HIPAA laws (health information privacy and accountability act).

interviews with employees when they were not at work. This was subsequently waived when I became 'better known' by management and personnel.

While access to these four call centres was secured, it was not the case that the process was either smooth or easy. Prior to securing permissions to conduct fieldwork at these four sites, I was denied permission at four other call centres in the region. The simple lesson from this effort is clear: it is not *what I knew*, but rather *who I knew* that made fieldwork possible. Additionally, regardless of the high tech nature of the products and services provided by *BigTech* and the generally technological nature of call centre work, my experience was that 'letting them have a look at me' through face to face meetings was an essential component of the process of 'getting in'.

Similar to the requirement for training on provisions of the HIPAA law at *MedAdvise*, I was expected to attend a live training session addressing employees' responsibility for protecting PHI from accidental or intentional distribution to individuals not authorised to view it or who don't require it to accomplish their work. Unlike the training at *MedAdvise*, the HIPAA training at *MHealth* was a live session held in the main meeting room of the company and presented by one of the managers of the company. Contents of this session were almost identical to those included in the videotaped 'training' I received at *MedAdvise*. I subsequently learned that the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (the branch of the U. S. Federal Government responsible for the HIPAA law) had prepared instructional outlines for such training in order to improve its consistency across the many sites where PHI was handled by employees. 14 other individuals were present at the training session I attended, only one of which was currently an employee in the call centre that was the focus of my fieldwork at *MHealth*.

c.   *Past Official Permissions: Cultivating & Maintaining Connections With*

Informants

It is not only necessary to gain official access to sites for ethnographic research. It is also necessary to gain – and maintain – the trust of potential informants in order to ensure continued access to the fieldwork venue and a worthwhile project. Ethnographic research in organisations presents unique problems and issues that must be addressed by the researcher.

Principally, it is readily apparent that individuals in workplaces are there to *perform work* and in many cases there is considerable organisational and interpersonal pressure upon them to do just that to the exclusion of anything else.[331] At any rate, it is safe to say that workers are not there to provide information to outsiders (or sometimes, even insiders!) to illuminate what they are doing, why they think they are doing it, how they go about doing what they do, what they feel about it, what are its affects and effects at a personal, interpersonal and social level, etc. That is, the researcher is in a position where just about anything he or she does to collect fieldwork data will somehow impact the worker and may even impede his or her ability to fulfil the explicit or implicit contract of employment. Whatever fieldwork methods are adopted, as little disruption as possible to the goings on of the organisation and its members is desirable. While this seems to apply to virtually any ethnographic research and as a consequence, does not seem to be a special consideration for the ethnographic researcher in organisations, upon closer inspection there are good reasons to consider it so.

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[331] It's difficult to say this without sounding as if I'm criticizing the fact that employees are expected to be working while at work. As is shown in this report, however, it is not a matter of this pressure in fact, but rather *how* workers are subjected, that is of critical interest.

For example, the sort of disruption described by Rabinow (1977) and Van Maanen (1988b) in their various fieldwork experiences indicates that disruptions are frequently similar to those described by Garfinkel (1967, p. 41ff) who tells that persistent questions in the interest of uncovering the 'technology' of conduct can lead to substantive frustration and even anger from the informant. While this can (and does!) occur in organisational ethnography, nearly any sort of ethnographic information gathering in the workplace can also impede the worker from fulfilling the explicit or implicit contract of employment – something that can get the worker in trouble, upset the employer and perhaps endanger the study!

The tactic of participant observation is a common way for ethnographers to approach an insider's understanding of these things, and one that might alleviate pressure on any given informant (however, see Rabinow 1977, for how even a classic kind of ethnography can put substantial pressure on particular informants). However, while to a considerable extent my work involved direct contact with agents, the aim of this project is not aimed at the actual doing of the work of a call centre agent. Instead, it is aimed at the *doings of doings* across and conceptually 'above' (or 'below') the manifold tasks, personnel and processes involved in technology mediated tertiary labour. This presented a problem insofar as it would be extremely difficult to become a fully functioning participant observer across the scope of tasks, personnel and processes required to address the questions framed by this project.

Consequently, the most prevalent method of data collection utilised in the conduct of fieldwork was of a non-participant sort during which I sat with members of the workplaces as they conducted their work, asked questions when the pace of their work and deadlines permitted, and scheduled and conducted interviews when conditions permitted. In other words, in order to both collect ethnographic data <u>and</u>

attempt to interfere as little as possible in the ongoing conduct of paid labour, I attempted to passively collect data when anything else would intrude, and only actively solicit information when there appeared to be no pressing demands on the informant/employee. In addition to facilitating the production of fieldnotes, this also permitted me to take photographs and make copies of official documents as they were used by workers in the conduct of work.

However, as is perhaps the case in any new endeavour, learning when I could impose upon workers took time, experience and, unfortunately, some mistakes. Early in fieldwork at two of the call centres participating in this study, some of my informants considered this practice an impediment to their conduct of work, and they, in whatever tact they could muster, asked that I 'move on' to other parts of the organisation or other informants. Fortunately, no ill will or standing problems arose from these circumstances. On the contrary, it seemed that having annoyed certain members of the workplaces actually earned the respect of others in the workplace!

The opposite also occurred. At *DeliveryWorldwide*, my regular, but not continuous, presence in the call centre over nearly two calendar years allowed me to develop what I might describe as trusting relationships with agents across the call centre. These individuals proved to be ongoing informants and regular advocates when I solicited other individuals for participation in the study. I can credit these individuals with much of the success of fieldwork at *DeliveryWorldwide*.

Additionally, the timing of my fieldwork at the *BigTech* call centre coincided with a global economic recession and a downturn in the market for computer technology products. The organisation had already gone through several major layoffs, the workers were under increased pressure to 'produce or get packing' (suffer a layoff), and workers exhibited increased reticence to participate in my

research to the point that supervisors thought it would be in their best interest to terminate my access earlier than initially agreed to. It was only when several supervisors in another part of the call centre learned of my research and agreed to permit me to conduct fieldwork in their workgroups that I was able to continue at *BigTech*.

However, this should not be considered normal, because many workers at *BigTech* – even those who worked under the supervisors who nearly ended my fieldwork at that location – continued to act as informants even after I had moved to other groups, and even actively engaged in E-mail conversations that spanned days, and consented to telephone interviews throughout and even after the principal data collection phase of the research. This was also the case at each of the other three call centres participating in this research.

All of this is to say that maintaining my access as a fieldworker seemed to be accomplished principally by connecting with individuals who were intrinsically interested in *being informants* and showing and telling what they knew, how they knew it and how they made out given the many things that arose during any given work day, all the while they were *doing it*. One doesn't read it often in ethnographic accounts, but the success of this research rested heavily upon their good will, patience and continued interest.

At the *MedAdvise* call centre, however, I encountered an unforeseen situation. Registered nurses working in the call centre provided consent to my presence in the workplace, but in most cases did not consent to my non-participant observation tactic of sitting side-by-side with them as they worked, and listening through a 'training cord' and headset to the calls they were working. The rationale provided for this was straightforward. Some nurses considered they had a responsibility to protect the

confidentiality of callers and did not want to present a potential breach to that confidentiality. This was asserted even though I had received 'training' (a 20 minute videotape review of applicable laws) on recently passed legislation regarding the privacy of patient information in the American health care system – the so called HIPAA law (Health Information Privacy and Accountability Act). While several nurses did permit me to conduct my 'normal' non-participant observation with them as they worked calls, it was not always the case that one of these nurses was on duty when I was in the field. Consequently, most of my fieldwork data collection at *MedAdvise* was conducted while sitting in a common area of the call centre and watching the goings on 'from a distance'. (Perhaps serendipitously, due to what I initially thought would be a limitation in my fieldwork at *MedAdvise*, and as described in Part 3, Chapter 1 above, I became familiar with the surprising amount of activity centring around the production of work schedules and 'black market' activity to trade scheduled hours – thus a site of considerable, but obscured authority in a workplace where things frequently appear to be well controlled by management.)

The clear lessons in this case are; (a) organisational permission only provides access and substantial work – sometimes hit or miss – is required to gain and maintain the trust and willing participation of informants; and (b) there is always data of interest in whatever venue one is studying – even where one wouldn't expect to find it. These two lessons – finding individuals who are willing and interested in *being* informants and *being open* to alternatives – are principal methodological outcomes of this project that seem to be ignored or downplayed in existing accounts of ethnographic research; becoming an ethnographer is as much a product of doing it as it is of studying it.

2.   Fieldwork

As indicated above, data collection was conducted across the four call centres participating in this study using; (a) non-participant observation; (b) informal and formal interviews; (c) taking photographs of actions and artefacts; and (d) collecting official documents. While, in practice, all four of the activities overlapped each other, the primary activity undertaken throughout fieldwork was non-participant observation. The other three activities were conducted 'within' my observation.

Fieldwork was conducted in the *BigTech* and *DeliveryWorldwide* call centres during June-August 2002 and 2003,[332] with interviews scheduled during, between and after these periods. I alternated one week at each fieldwork site during this period. The one week period was selected because each site observed weekly schedules for meetings, worker performance reviews, regular deadlines, etc. and my own schedule permitted me to experience these events in the normal rhythm of the workplaces. Fieldwork was conducted at the *MHealth* and *MedAdvise* call centres during August 2003-May 2004.[333] A similar schedule of alternating weeks at each of these sites was adopted for similar reasons as that noted above. During this time I essentially 'went to work' on the schedule of informants who had agreed to participate in the project and who had signed informed consent documents. I shadowed the work hours of these individuals as closely as possible, working full shifts, with a start time as early as 4:45AM and an ending time of 9:00PM, and work weeks ranging from 35 hours to over 45 hours.

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[332] These periods coincided with the normal summer break (Northern Hemisphere) from my faculty appointment.

[333] This schedule was facilitated by the awarding of a one-course load reduction from my faculty appointment.

Informants in this study numbered well over 100, even though only 70 of these are directly included in this report.[334] The status of these individuals was most commonly 'agents', but also included team leaders, supervisors, managers and 'C-level' personnel.

As of the ending of intensive fieldwork at the four fieldwork sites, I had accumulated 248 days in full-time observation comprising nearly 2000 hours. This accounts for nearly one person-year of on-site fieldwork.[335]

Data collected in this project[336, 337] includes:

- Over 6000 pages of word processed fieldnotes.

- 131 interviews spanning 30-90 minutes each.

- 721 photographs.

- 1763 pages of official documents.

a.   Following Process

Fieldwork activity could perhaps best be glossed by saying I 'followed the processes' through the organisations and in so doing learned about technology-mediated tertiary labour through its workings. However, since processes just don't

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[334] It is difficult to precisely specify this number. While 46 individuals signed informed consent forms, many more individuals entertained casual conversations, provided ad hoc permission to photograph their work areas (frequently without their presence), made passing comments, passed on gossip, etc.

[335] Workers in all of the call centres worked 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year, less four holidays (New Years, Independence day/4th of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas), totalling roughly 2000 hours per calendar year.

[336] All data is archived digitally: Fieldnotes are word processed, interviews are recorded on microcassette tapes and dubbed to .DSS or .MP3 format, photographs were taken with a digital camera and saved in .JPG format, official documents were photographed with a digital camera and saved in .JPG format. The digital storage formats facilitated the use of a computer program to aid in the analysis of these data, as described below.

[337] I make no claims that all of this data was analysed and contributes to this report. As a colleague told me, this is a 'career's worth' of data.

activate themselves and instead require human subjects to activate them, the majority of my time in fieldwork was spent working with and around those individuals.

d.   Selecting Informants

Upon the provision of official organisational approval at each call centre, I asked my primary contact who would be good persons for me to talk with. Invariably, across all four call centres, I was provided with one or more names and the added information that the individuals named were "...probably the best people here." Implicitly, it was apparent that I was being shown individuals who would best represent the company's ways and practices as preferred by local management. I suspected this would not present any limitations to my research, because I had good reason to believe that with prolonged engagement in each fieldwork venue, I would have a chance to learn from a wide variety of personnel (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte 1999; Van Maanen 1988b).

In fact, this turned out to be the case. Through the actions of fieldwork, other workers sometimes became curious about my activity and invited me to 'sit with them' – thus act as informants – or I asked my current informant for the names of others who, "given the kinds of questions I'm asking, would be good for me to talk with". In all cases, an individual was required to sign an informed consent form prior to any official participation in the project. In practice, this turned out to be a very fruitful means for 'working my way through' multiple levels of the organisations participating in this project.

The only exceptions to the above occurred when supervisory or management level personnel became the focus of my fieldwork. In these cases, observation-

oriented fieldwork was not used. Instead, informal and formal interviews were the primary data collection tools used. All interviews were recorded digitally.[338]

e.   Data Collection: Observation

When informed consent was established with an informant, I 'simply' went to work with that person and shadowed him or her through the workday. This included sitting with them at their workstation, taking breaks and lunch on their schedule and attending whatever other responsibilities they had in the organisation. When permitted by an informant, I used an audio headset and a device called a 'training cord' to connect with his or her headset. This permitted me to listen to on-phone interaction between the informant and his or her callers. During this activity I took fieldnotes – usually on a small word processor,[339] but sometimes using a conventional notebook and pen (Figure 77).

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[338] Midway through the project my principal audio recorder broke and was replaced with a conventional microcassette recorder. I transferred these recordings to digital formats for more convenient access through a computer system.

[339] Evil things! I went through three word processors of the type shown in Figure 77 during the course of fieldwork. Perhaps amazingly, after typing nearly 6000 pages of fieldnotes and this dissertation, I am mostly without symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome.
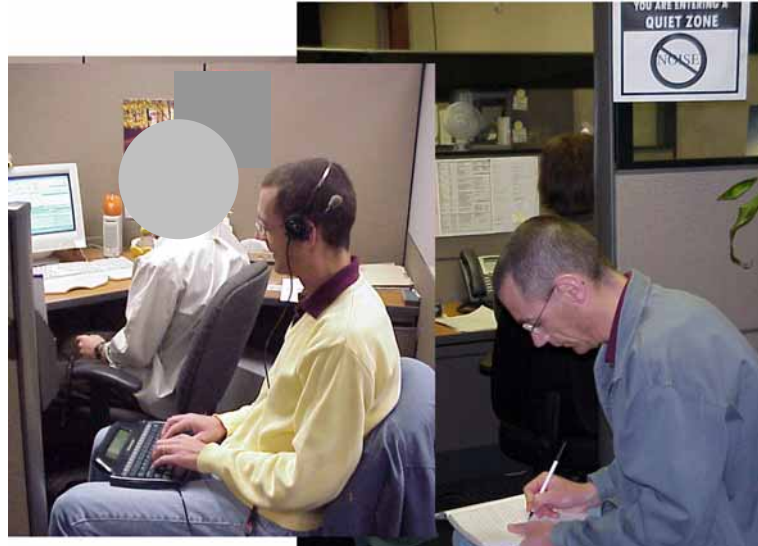
Figure 77. Primary Data Collection Stances

All fieldnotes were word processed and stored in electronic format. This facilitated the production of a single archive that could be coded, searched and retrieved for analysis, as described below.

There were also periods in fieldwork where, through unplanned absences, events or 'crossed signals', observation was not possible. These provided opportunities for wandering about the workplaces, observing and field noting more general goings-on, and following up on the acquisition of official documents, taking of photographs, etc.[340]

f.   Data Collection: Photos & Official Documents

In addition to the above, and consistent with the idea that I was interested in 'following processes' during observation and informal questioning of informants, particular processes, artefacts (paperwork, devices, reference materials, etc.), etc.

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[340] I must admit that these 'free' days proved some of the most rewarding, allowing time to ponder rather than to just write descriptions of what I was seeing and hearing.

became a focal point for my observation of the informant's activity. Photographs were frequently taken to document those processes or materials, documents were copied, etc. and coded with a time-date code and a reference to that code written into my fieldnotes so I could later reconstruct the events with multiple media. All photographs were taken with a digital camera.[341] All official documents where photographed with a digital camera. This facilitated the production of a single archive that could be coded, searched and retrieved for analysis, as described below.

g.   *Data Collection: Interviews*

When it became impossible to ask or ascertain through observation, the details of a process, implications of an event, etc. I asked to schedule an interview with the individual(s) who seemed to be most knowledgeable about it. Sometimes, several such interviews were scheduled with more than one individual so as to collect multiple viewpoints on the topic. When interviews were aimed at understanding the details of a process, procedure or event, the interview followed an elicitation or 'talk along' type (Ericsson & Simon 1980). Most of the time these interviews involved the combination of handwritten notes on copies of the documents used (or screenshots of computer software used), photographs, audio recordings and eventual transcriptions of the recordings that encoded references to the documents and photographs so that the process could later be reconstructed with multiple media (Figure 78).

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[341] This digital camera, an 'ancient' SONY Mavica, was the only piece of electronic data collection equipment that survived the entire duration of fieldwork.
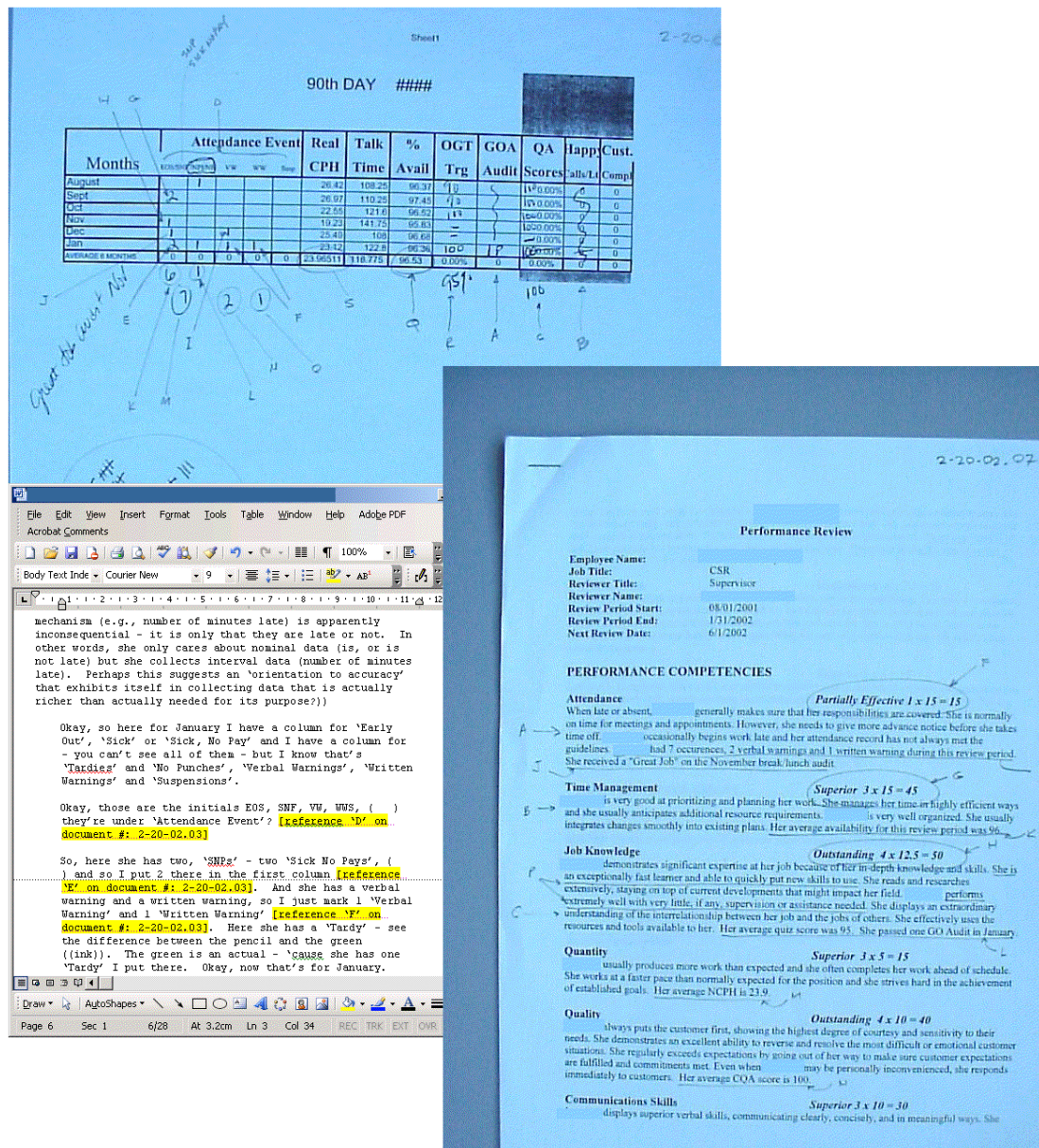
Figure 78. Multiple Media in Procedural Interviews

When subjective knowledge and understanding of the workplace was an important part of the activity or conduct of workers, less structured interviews were conducted. In these interviews, open ended questions were prepared that referenced particular artefacts, previously observed occurrences, etc. in order to nudge the interviewee into remembering the details of interest. Conventional card sorting activities were conducted when interview questions were to elicit both content and

contextual structure of the informant's practice (Schensul, J. et al. 1999; Schensul, S. et al. 1999; Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte 1999).

All interviews were recorded on microcassette and dubbed into electronic format. Additionally, handwritten fieldnotes where taken during interviews and subsequently word processed and stored in electronic format. Most interviews were transcribed to facilitate analysis. This facilitated the production of a single archive that could be coded, searched and retrieved for analysis, as described below.

<p style="text-align:center">3.   Data Analysis</p>

Data analysis activity commenced with fieldwork. Ongoing analysis facilitated the production of interim questions that were pursued in subsequent observation, interview, photographic and document collection activities. The process of data analysis was highly inductive and roughly followed the process of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

<p style="text-align:center">a.   Software Assistance</p>

As alluded to above, the process of data analysis was also aided through the use of a qualitative data analysis software package – Atlas.ti r5 (Muhr 2004). A bit of trepidation was felt and much analysis of the software's implications was performed prior to adopting it for this project, to guard against the possibility that the software would force a particular model of analysis onto the project. While the software's capabilities appear to be very broad indeed, in the application of it to this project, it was treated as a means to accomplish inductive coding, categorising and memoing

over the substantial quantity of textual, graphic and audio data collected in fieldwork. Functions in the software permitted me to track through the codes, categories and memos in the process of studying the range of contexts, etc. that appeared across and within them (Figure 79).
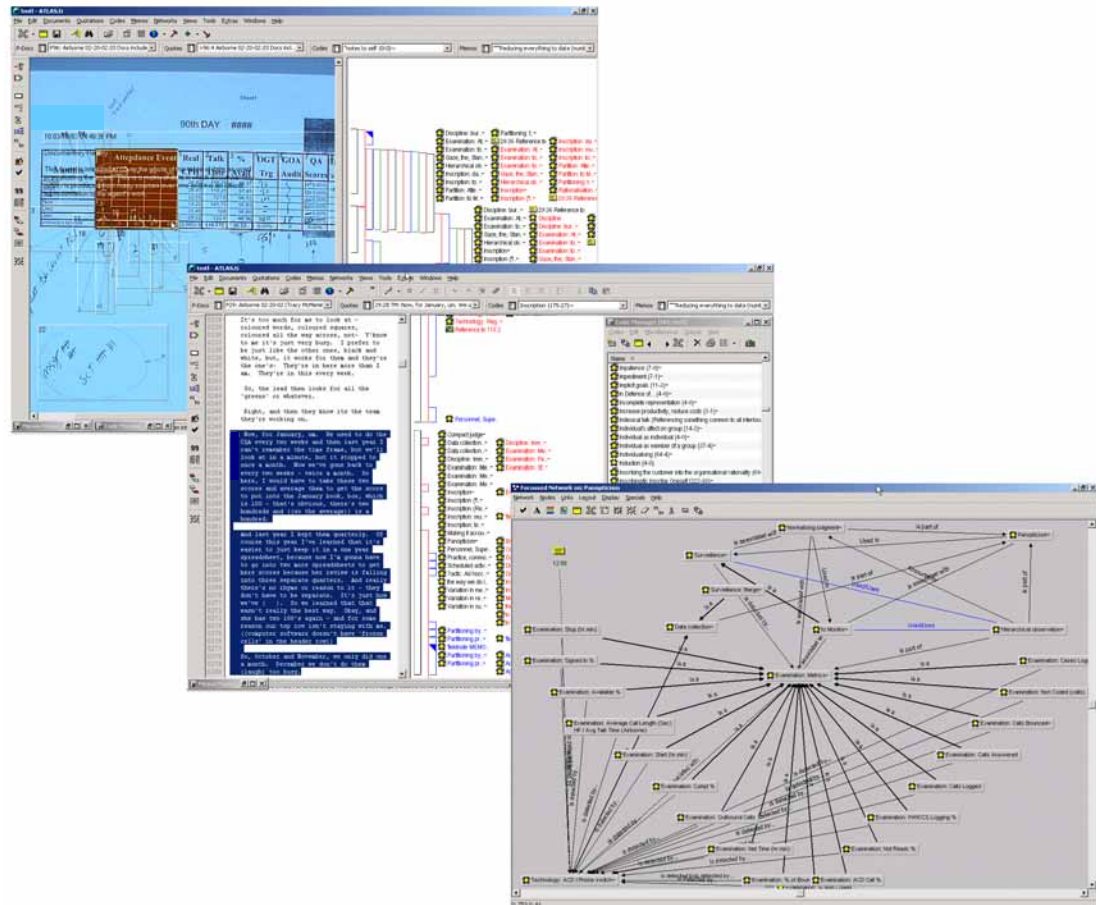

Figure 79. Coding Across Fieldnotes/Transcripts & Documents, Producing Analytic Networks with Codes

Codes were both specific to the philosophical and theoretical foundations for this project, and were also inductively produced to describe events that were not conveniently inserted into already existing categories. The result is a fairly wide

array of codes that will (hopefully) permit me to utilise this dataset for additional publications following this thesis.

It is honest to report that the entire mass of data was not exhaustively analysed and coded. I estimate that about 1/3 of the data was so coded over the term of this project. This is not to say that the remaining 2/3 of the data was ignored, however. The software also permitted me to search for instances of phrases that I adopted to mark particular passages in the fieldwork. I was thus able to generate collections of episodes that facilitated ethnographic description and ongoing analysis through the writing process.

Far from doing the work for you, Atlas.ti (as will, undoubtedly, the competing software packages) makes the grunt work of coding and retrieving data simpler such that more complex (and cranial!) analytic processes are easier to 'get around to'. Perhaps one of the least touted, but nonetheless very valuable, elements of adopting such a software system (assuming the researcher has the technological knowledge and hardware to create and convert data into digital format) is that an entire archive of data can be carried around in a notebook computer rather than in stacks of boxes, and retrieved and reviewed with relative ease, rather than having to maintain a separate index system and storage system for finding and using one's data.

In effect, what the software permitted me to do was read and review data, attach inductive codes to particular strings of text or segments of photographs (including photographs of documents) and build categorical relationships in the data based on the codes. Graphic relationships can be produced from links produced between codes and categories of codes. This is not to say, however, that the deskwork of research was only conducted on a computer! When I either couldn't or

didn't want to be troubled with learning the nuances of the software, I simply printed my memos and analytic notes written while 'rummaging through' networks produced in the software, scissored them into logical chunks when necessary, and physically sorted and piled them in ways that facilitated the construction of the final text.

In combination, the tools and techniques involved facilitated initial contact with the inscribed, photographed and recorded data, abstraction into codes, categories (collections of conceptually related codes), etc. in a way that permitted relatively convenient and relatively quick movement 'up' from raw data to the development of successive abstractions and back 'down' to check, review, verify, and 'deepen' my understanding and development of the analysis. This is consistent with the concept and methodological aims of (though not identical to) grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998).[342]

4.   Glossing the Analytic Process

This study is grounded in the philosophy of Michel Foucault, and initial coding and concept-building in the data followed those elucidated by him in his various texts, articles, interviews and selected secondary references applying his methods both generally and in similar fields of analysis (Bain 2001b; Bain & Taylor 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; de Certeau 1985; Deleuze 1991, 1995; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c; Gutting 1994; Hacking 1982, 1986a, 1986b; Kendall & Wickham 1999; McKinlay & Starkey 1998a; Prado 1995; Rose, N. 1999c, 1999d; Taylor, P. &

---

[342] One, nearly ineluctable, problem associated with the use of qualitative data analysis software is that with an increased ease of coding, categorizing, network generation, etc., one can find oneself 'drilling' so deeply into the details of the data that the sort of genealogical analysis sought after in this project may be unintentionally put off. My early coding activities were marked by this problem and it wasn't until I forced myself to start thinking about the linkages between codes and categories that I was able to find a more appropriate level of analysis.

Bain 1999, 2001, 2003; Taylor, P. et al. 2002). Coding also proceeded more inductively and contextually within the inscribed data.

Across the coding process, it became apparent that certain codes and categories (conceptually related collections of codes) were interrelated. Network diagrams (see Figure 79) were created to depict these interrelations, and analytic memos were drafted to elaborate how I understood these interrelations. Frequently, memos were produced before network diagrams and a process of analytic bricolage was initiated in which both were developed, adapted, etc. over time. As suggested above, the relatively convenient access to data, coding, categories, etc. made possible through the use of qualitative data analysis software permitted memos and networks to 'cross pollinate' other memos and networks and lead to the empirical 'deepening' and strengthening of the produced findings and conclusions.

5.   Writing

As the project commenced, it became astonishingly clear (again) that ethnographic research is done as much in the process of writing up findings as it is in more intentional data analysis activities. Analytic memos (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995; Strauss & Corbin 1998) written to elaborate on the data and findings were the crucial link between analysis and writing of the report in its various stages and forms. In fact, it became difficult to determine where analysis and memoing ended and more intentionally 'final' writing began. The process is all very rhizomatic. It is only with the work of reducing a mass of empirical ethnographic data into reports that one comes to understand the somewhat vague, oblique and sometimes dismissive feel of intentionally and implicitly methodological texts addressing the process (Clifford &

Marcus 1986; Ellis & Bochner 1996; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995; Foucault 1972, 1990b, 1991b; 1993, esp. endnote #4; 1998; LeCompte & Schensul 1999c; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Marcus 1998; Patton 1990; Rabinow 1977; Rose, D. 1990; Schwartzman 1993; Strauss & Corbin 1998; Thomas 1993; Van Maanen 1988b; Winiecki 2004a; Wolcott 2001).[343]

Perhaps following the difficulties experienced with methodological texts, I have become somewhat skilled at extracting methodological hints from ethnographic texts themselves. It is my expectation (at least a hope!) that the body of this research report provides similar hints to the methodologies used in its process, both for the examiners of this report and the odd[344] individual that might come across it in the future.

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[343] The process is illuminated – though sometimes to the point of highlighting its absurdity – by critical texts on methodology. Perhaps the most entertaining example of this genre of texts is Ford's two-volume "Paradigms and Fairy Tales" (Ford 1975a, 1975b), though Potter provides a similarly illuminating example (Potter 1996b). Timely readings (and re-readings) of Camus (1955) and Wilson (1982) pulled me out of existential oscillation.

[344] I'll leave it to the reader to determine what meaning of this word I intend.

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Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

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_don

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Figure 80. Permission to reproduce figures from Durr (1996)

Figure 81. Permission to Reproduce 'Dilbert' Cartoons (Figure 71 & Figure 72)

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Figure 82. Addendum to Permission from United Media, to Include Australian

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