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CLERICAL WORKERS' RESPONSES TO MANAGEMENT CONTROL
OF OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY

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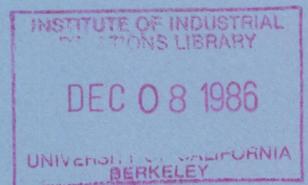
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ABSTRACT

This exploratory ethnographic study describes some of the control strategies used by a multinational manufacturer of communications technology to influence the attitudes and productivity of its clerical employees. Production quotas were applied to all clerical activities but workers were also rewarded for their ability to creatively solve on-the-job problems. In addition, clerks were socialized to regard their jobs as careers, and they were expected to make personal sacrifices to benefit the corporation. The ways that the clerical staff responded to these efforts to control will also be described. Some found the rewards inadequate and they quit after a short time. The remainder, however, did not question the corporation's definition of the situation. They devised ways to satisfy their job's requirements. These ranged from superhuman efforts to meet the targeted goals to quasilegal maneuvers to circumvent them.

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INTRODUCTION

Power, or the ability to obtain compliance, is exercised through means ranging from persuasion to physical coercion. Adams' influential essay argues, however, that all expressions of power ultimately rest on the "actual physical control that one party may have with respect to another" (1970: 117). As I hope to show in the following account, when parties come to an interactive arena holding shared views of how power is to be legitimately exercised and with whom the locus of control must reside, Adams' notion of ultimate physical control becomes irrelevant.

Ethnographic data collected in three sales offices of a U. S. based multinational corporation will be used to examine the variety of techniques the corporation used to obtain compliance from its clerical employees. Some techniques, such as ubiquitous production quotas, were direct means by which compliance was sought and failure negatively sanctioned. The more widely used compliance techniques were indirect. Control was exercised primarily by professionalizing clerical positions. Clerical workers were socialized to internalize the corporation's goals and to make personal sacrifices that would further the company's interest. This strategy had the dual effect of creating a compliant work force while enabling the corporation to flourish in a highly competitive market. This account will also consider the responses by the workers to these control strategies. Some were, in fact, willing to make the required sacrifices. Others, however, refused, and they developed resistance strategies to deal with the situation.

BACKGROUND

The data offered here were collected during the course of short term field research carried out in the sales offices of an American-owned multinational manufacturer of communications-related technology. For the purposes of this discussion, we will refer to it as the Communications Corporation, or C.C. It is primarily a descriptive account. The manager of a research group within the corporation wished to subsidize a series of pilot ethnographic studies of office work in order to discover more about the social structure of offices. His group was designing new technology they hoped would not be rejected because it disrupted established office social routine. A more detailed understanding of the social aspects of office work was thought to be needed to develop a successful product. Three graduate students of anthropology were hired for a summer to conduct field studies in three of the corporation's sales offices. A codirector and I were asked to supervise the students and coordinate the interface between the corporation's research division, the field sites, and our university base. In addition, the manager asked us to informally observe social dynamics within his own research group and to comment on them as we saw appropriate. Our report to the corporation consisted of ethnographic accounts of the three customer service divisions focusing on the strategies and procedures office workers developed to carry out their responsibilities, and a discussion of some of the political aspects of the administration of the Anthropology Project. The report was submitted to the Research Division and edited by them prior to internal circulation.

Data were collected for six weeks in the Customer Service Divisions (C.S.D.) of three of the corporation's 99 branch offices located in the continental United States. All are located in Northern California. Each

branch is responsible for marketing and maintaining the office equipment manufactured by the corporation within a circumscribed territory. The three branches each employed between 200 and 250 employees and were divided into Sales, Service, and Administrative Divisions. The Administrative Division, the site of our data collection, was the smallest of the three. It was subdivided into Internal Control, concerned with accounting, secretarial functions, and internal administration, and Customer Service, whose primary activities involved past-due collections, nonroutine billing, and overseeing the installation and cancellation of equipment. Each Customer Service Division consisted of a manager and between nine and twelve employees, most of whom were women. During the data collection period, two of the three Customer Service Division managers were also women. None of the other managers and only a small minority of the remaining personnel in the non-administrative divisions were female.

The field workers were present in the offices during regular working hours four days a week. They spent half their time engaged in participant observation and informal and formal interviewing and the remainder assisting with some of the routine tasks of the C.S.D., including filing, typing, completing bills, and responding to customer complaints and inquiries. This methodology allowed the ethnographers to collect observational data in a relatively unobtrusive way while gaining a first-hand picture of the day-to-day experiences of the office workers. The help the ethnographers provided also served as a token of their appreciation to the very busy clerical workers and probably made the managers more favorably disposed to the relatively long data collection period than they might otherwise have been.

CONTROL STRATEGIES

A variety of strategies were used by the Communications Corporation (C.C.) to control Customer Service Division (C.S.D.) employees and to obtain their compliance. These techniques were based on understandings the corporation held about the nature of daily life in complex societies, the structure of bureaucracies, and the interests and goals of white collar workers. Space limitations prohibit an in-depth discussion of the assumptions. They are summarized below to provide a context in which to assess the ethnographic material that follows:

The first group of assumptions on which control strategies were based derived from commonly held beliefs regarding the nature and quality of daily life in industrial society. During the course of human evolution, people developed as social creatures with intrinsic affiliative needs. Technological advancement, however, has brought about a decline in the number of opportunities individuals have to develop and maintain strong multifunctioned social bonds to meet these needs. Since most people are no longer tied to family groups or specific locales, they are free to pursue work where it is available. One price of this freedom has been the loss of a well defined reference group and a clear sense of identity (Hobsbawm 1969). Part of the corporation's strategy for control was seen in its efforts to satisfy what they perceived as unmet affiliative needs in its employees. It did this through the opportunities it provided its staff to develop an identity as a "C.C. Person." Achievement was lavishly rewarded through corporation-generated public recognition. Few other avenues for similar acknowledgment of individual worth were available to employees in the course of their normal routines. Encouraging participation in corporation-based leisure time as well as job related activities was

further designed to give employees a multipurposed reference group in an otherwise alienating mass society. Collins argues that this sort of manipulation is apt to be more effective than direct coercion since it is based on loyalty and emotion (Collins 1975).

Page's (1956:5) classic statement on the dangers of bureaucracy describe the second set of principles that the corporation used as a basis for employee control: "[Many of us] are often deeply concerned with the presumed dangers of standardization and routinization, of impersonality and interchangeability, of bigness itself. These traits of bureaucracy are viewed in many quarters as an imposing threat to freedom, individualism, and spontaneity..." An ideology that emphasized individuality, autonomy in decision making, and the importance of personal development was primary at the Communications Corporation. Each worker's individual contribution to the larger effort was singled out for attention. This type of control is not unique to this corporation but rather part of the standard repertoire many organizations use to instill desired behavior in high level employees (Collins 1975:300). It is expected that these employees will identify with an organization because of their own power within it. In their efforts to further their own personal interests, they will benefit the corporation as well. What was unusual was C.C.'s attempt to use these same strategies to control support personnel whose work consisted of routine clerical tasks and who had very little power. "YOU make the difference" is a paraphrase of one slogan that was current throughout all levels of the corporation during the field work period.

The third basis for worker control was derived from the conventional image of white collar workers. It asserts that part of their susceptibility to manipulation by their bosses resides in the structural

ambiguity of their position (see Crozier 1971 for a review of this literature). They are likely to consider themselves underpaid and perhaps exploited, yet are unlikely to see the solution to these problems in collective action. Instead they are thought to identify with their bosses and to see individual mobility as the route to a changed situation. Since managers will choose those most like themselves for promotion, consciously or unconsciously, white collar workers will act in ways which make them appear similar to those above them. In this view, the promise of promotion is regarded as a powerful mechanism for insuring conformity and compliance. This was the third basis by which C.C. attempted to obtain compliance.

These factors provided the ideological underpinnings for the strategies used by Communications Corporation to control the productivity of the Customer Service workers we observed. In the sections that follow, I will examine how these principles were translated into imperatives for behavior.

Socialization

We may consider socialization the process by which behavior is shaped into culturally meaningful activity and the mechanism involved in learning new social roles. There has been somewhat less research on socialization into new adult roles than there has been on childhood socialization. Nevertheless, studies of the process in adults have shown the importance of face-to-face communication and informal learning in the creation of new identities (Olesen and Whittaker 1968; Kamarovsky 1967). The role of formal instruction in adult socialization is small, even when the requirements of the situation require new technical training. A wide variety of techniques were used by the corporation to teach employees to identify with it and become "C.C. people."

After a brief period of on-the-job training, all of C.C.'s Customer Service Division employees in the United States were sent for three weeks to the corporation's national training facility. The center was physically secluded and inaccessible to outsiders including family members. Although ostensibly such isolation provided the recruit with a distraction-free environment in which to learn new skills, a powerful basis for informal learning was also created. Training of this sort possesses all the features of a classic initiation ritual designed to mark the transition from one status to another (van Gennep 1960). Recruits were removed from a familiar environment and their customary sources of social and emotional support. In a context that required celibacy and communal living, they were permitted to interact only with a group of strangers, some initiates like themselves, others experienced leaders. In this highly charged environment, recruits were instructed in the behavior that would be required once training was over. The intensity of the training period was designed to compellingly introduce recruits to their new identity as C.C. people.

When the initiate returned to the office, omnipresent visual symbols reinforced this new identity. In the offices where we worked, these included plaques acknowledging various types of successful efforts, posters advertising the corporation's products, sales promotions, the monthly output of the sales people, and pep slogans that ranged from reminders of the importance of guarding company "secrets" to ones that reinforced in the workers' minds their own importance to the corporation.

Loyalty to the corporation was reinforced in other ways as well. One example was the Communications Corporation Community Involvement Program (CCCIP). Although all members of a branch were eligible, in the one for

which we have data, members were drawn primarily from the C.S.D. CCCIPs undertook volunteer projects such as fundraising for community causes or special tutoring programs. The letter to employees that solicited their involvement ended with a slogan that implied sure-fire success: "C.C. people + C.C. funds = effective community involvement." One intent of the CCCIP was to provide employees with an identity that transcended the boundaries of the corporation. The letters of appreciation that were framed or filed were tangible evidence that this goal was being met: "Dear Mr. [Manager], We, the members of the Fountain Foundation really have not found sufficient words to thank the Northern Branch of the Communications Corporation for your recent donation of time, service, and funds," began one. The fact that four letters were received by one branch between June 27 and July 15 gives an unsystematic indication of the extent of one branch's involvement in CCCIP activities.

The corporation's technique for recruiting new employees is the final loyalty building mechanism we will discuss. A \$100 "finder's fee" was paid each time an employee recommended someone who was eventually hired by the corporation. In one of the branches, twenty percent of the personnel were hired through such personnel recommendations. Many corporations favor this recruitment technique because they feel they can use the loyalty already present in a friendship as the basis from which to build loyalty to the corporation. This strategy has long been the basis for hiring "in all the more 'political' positions in the higher levels of organizations, and especially in 'entrepreneurial' kinds of interorganizational networks in business, finance, government, and the professions" (Collins 1975:303-304). We mention it here to illustrate the extent to which the Communications Corporation sought to professionalize its clerical positions and to control

clerical employees through encouraging them, too, to identify with the corporation.

Production Quotas

Monthly production quotas, known at Communications Corporation as "targets", were the most direct means of management control over the clerical employees and were a constant feature structuring the organization of time and social relations in the C.S.D. Individuals, work groups, and the branch as a whole, were all ranked in relation to one another according to their success at selected key activities. Any task that was potentially quantifiable might be designated as a targeted activity. "Points" were awarded based on how close the individual, group or branch came to meeting or exceeding the quota. The "value" of a target, the number of points that would earn a perfect score, and even whether an activity would be targeted at all, were all subject to monthly reevaluation based on revisions in marketing strategies at the regional or national level. For example, one of the C.S.D.s' primary targets was Unbilled Revenue Control. It was "worth" 190 points and constituted fifteen percent of the branch's ranking in marketing support. This particular target was created to assure that bills under dispute would be resolved promptly since the longer a bill remained unpaid the harder it was to collect. A C.S.D. that billed at least 98.5 percent of its outstanding revenue in a given month earned the full 190 points. Only ninety points were awarded to C.S.D.s billing between 96.5 and 96.9 percent while none was earned for anything less than 96.5 percent. Individuals were responsible for a proportion of each month's billing quota designated by the C.S.D. manager. Billing 98.5 percent earned the employee a "five" on their monthly evaluation for that target. Ratings on all individually-targeted activities were a factor in

deciding merit salary increases.

Target performance also had secondary effects, since how well individuals met their targets would influence how they were treated by both managers and peers. Said one C.S.D. employee bitterly:

Last month, I made my target and I was everybody's golden boy. I missed it this month and now they make me feel like a black sheep. But, that's how they operate here. What counts is not how you do your job but how the numbers come out.

Since employees were evaluated on the basis of both individual and group performance, targets served as an important means of peer pressure. At staff meetings, managers would chastise workers who were not meeting their targets and praise those who were more successful, in an effort to utilize peer pressure as a complement to more authoritarian forms of control.

Employee Evaluations

Although some C.S.D. employees were convinced that the ability to meet targets was the only aspect of their performance valued by the corporation, in fact, only 55 percent of employee evaluations were based on these "quantitative" standards. The remainder of workers' overall performance was determined by the bimonthly "qualitative" evaluations they received from their supervisors. Ratings of "five" through "one" (some employees referred to them as "A" through "F") were used to assess the extent to which C.S.D. workers had made an emotional commitment to the corporation.

The importance of the qualitative evaluations cannot be overestimated since it was through them that employees were socialized to regard their clerical jobs as careers and to make the goals of the corporation their personal goals as well. Good qualitative evaluations by themselves would

neither lead to promotion or even retention; however, high quantitative scores without excellent qualitative evaluations would also lead C.S.D. workers to a dead end. This point was made clear to a relatively new employee during her semiannual evaluation conference with her manager, who told her:

As long as you meet standards, targets, it's O.K. as far as I'm concerned. But, what I want you to tell me is what you do over and above job requirements. What you feel you do that makes you better than normal. How do you see yourself, that's what I would like to know . . . I know you probably think you are working above average . . . I thought it would be best to talk to you first.

While a "three" ("C") was defined on the evaluation form as "normal/reasonable," employees learned to regard it as a "failing grade." The clerical workers were also pressured to accept their manager's assessment of their performance, at least on paper. Employees were required to sign their evaluations before any merit salary increase was authorized, although they could contribute any contrasting opinions of their own to their personnel files as well.

Employees were rated on 19 qualitative criteria. Fifteen of these assessed employees' motivation to succeed through their willingness to do more than was required by their formal job descriptions. "Self-reliance and initiative" was the largest of the three subcategories on the employee evaluation form. It contained nine items including the "extent to which employee displays initiative to seek out new or additional responsibilities" and the "extent to which employee, during manager's absence, seeks out proper resources for assistance rather than delay projects." "Dependability" was the next largest subcategory. In it,

employees were rated on such criteria as "remains flexible in order that tight schedules are met" and "extent to which employee works under pressure without close supervision."

Proportionately less emphasis was placed on peer relationships, although the clerical employees were evaluated according to criteria such as "extent to which employee cooperates and offers assistance to coworkers" as well. Workers were, therefore, expected to mold themselves not only to the needs of management, but also to the requirements of coworkers. During the evaluation meeting described above, the employee was advised by her manager:

Look for things about yourself that others in the group object to so you can change . . . You're too serious. People think you're always angry or upset . . . I joke with the others but not with you because you take things too seriously.

Qualitative evaluations served to control C.S.D. employees in two important ways. First, workers were rewarded for displaying personality characteristics that would generate hard work despite the low wages they were paid. Second, workers were encouraged to regard their jobs as sources of personal satisfaction in a society that provided few other avenues for recognition of individual achievement. Rewarding employees engaged in routine clerical tasks for initiative and self-reliance was intended by C.C. to have this effect.

The case of the collections representative who walked off the job during the field period more clearly reveals the standards the corporation applies to its clerical staff and the behavior it hopes to evoke. The woman had been a productive and promising worker for the previous four years. Her performance suddenly took a nose dive and she began to miss her

targets. She quit her job within three months of the decline in her performance. Since her supervisor had recently redefined her responsibilities, some of her coworkers attributed her leaving to the pressure of an unreasonable work load. Said one:

Instead of giving moral support to someone in trouble, they ride them as close as is humanly possible. Every single account is questioned and the rep is continually asked, "What about X account? Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you do that?" I, myself, feel it's a counterproductive way to do things since you end up spending more time worrying about being dogged than trying to make the collections. Yet, her bosses and other coworkers saw her failure to carry out her responsibilities as purely a motivational problem. They felt she had lost her "will" to do a good job, that she no longer cared about her work, that she took no pride in what she was doing. In other words, when she was no longer willing or able to respond to the pressures management imposed, she lost her value to them as an employee.

Career Counseling

The Career Counseling Program was designed to teach the support staff to anticipate upward mobility as an intrinsic feature of their tenure with the Communications Corporation if it was desired by the employee. Career Counseling was, in addition, another method by which clerical employees were manipulated to meet the corporation's needs. Each worker and his or her supervisor met for an annual career counseling session during which the two set short and long range goals for the employee and plotted the means that would be used to achieve them. Both were advised by their respective career manuals, however, that primary responsibility for both the planning of goals and the likelihood they would be attained rested with

the employee. "The manager is available to give opinions, advice, and information . . . But, whether the employee chooses to accept and use them is part of his responsibility to himself. His career, his future, is his to manage" (Kellogg 1965, quoted in Career Guidance Manual, Communications Corporation).

The Subordinate's Check List of Questions was intended to help the worker prepare for the Career Counseling session. It told the employee how to consider her/his objectives (e.g., "In what positions and/or fields am I most interested? . . . Are these realistic in terms of my abilities?"), strengths and weaknesses, readiness for promotion (e.g., "Am I ready now for promotion? If so, to what and why?"), and how to develop strategies to attain professional goals (*italics in original*).

The language of the check list was action-oriented throughout. The unequivocal message was that success at the corporation was based on a combination of careful planning, hard work, and good attitudes. Resources for "self development," according to the manual, were everywhere: requesting special assignments and extra duties would facilitate development while carrying out one's present job; study groups with coworkers would allow one to develop new skills; community activities and church groups offered leadership experience.

Supervisors were acknowledged to play a more pivotal role in the employee's career trajectory in the handbook designed for managers. Since the primary goal of the career counseling session was to arrive at a "mutually agreeable action plan," the manager was encouraged to view the management role as advisory rather than directive. A manager's function in this case was to help the employee determine whether she/he had thought through the stated objectives and understood what would be required to meet

them. If, however, the manager disagreed with the employee's career objectives or self evaluation, she/he was advised to:

Introduce frankly and honestly the major factors which caused you to question the reasonableness of his/her career objectives (or self evaluation). Chances are the reasons will center around information he/she probably didn't or couldn't factor into his/her thinking such as unknown job requirements (Manager's Career Guidance Handbook:5).

In the area of promotion, however, the supervisor reasserted direct authority. "Take the lead at this point," the handbook advised, "these are judgments you have to make. Naturally be considerate of your subordinate's viewpoint -- but it's your decision" (italics in original).

The Career Counseling Handbooks illustrate clearly how an ethic of individual achievement provided the ideological basis for management control at the Communications Corporation. Employees were told that they alone were responsible for their success or failure at the corporation. Through "self development", they were expected to mold their careers to achieve upward mobility. The extent to which this strategy to control clerical employees had the intended effect will be discussed in the final section of the paper.

Individuality as an Ethic

In many other ways, an ideology emphasizing the importance of each employee to the corporation pervaded the branch sales offices. Workers expressed varying degrees of cynicism about the seriousness with which the corporation held this philosophy. Meetings to gain staff input before certain decisions were made were routine in some of the branches we studied. Managers said the opinions of the clerical staff were an essential factor in branch decisions that affected their jobs. Most

employees, however, saw these meetings as thinly disguised attempts to impose a mandate, regardless of staff sentiment on the issue. For example, a meeting was held at one branch after the Customer Service manager had been fired. Although the staff was asked who they would recommend for the new manager, most felt that a decision had already been made and that they were being consulted merely to perpetuate the belief that subordinates had a voice in administrative decisions.

Another way the corporation tried to convince employees that it valued them as individuals was through their techniques for rewarding excellence in productivity. In addition to merit salary increases and the promise of strong evaluations, gifts were offered as production incentives. The support staff of the branch in each region with the highest annual score on the quantitative targets was awarded with a banquet and their choice of a bonus gift. The advertising copy in the gift catalogue illustrated the extent to which a uniform ideology stressed the importance of the individual to the corporation:

Letting you choose your gift is a way of giving you something tailor made to your taste . . . It also avoids the disappointment of receiving something you already have or a gift that does not fit your personal interest. This gift is given with the warmth of a smile and the sincere wish that it will add to your enjoyment in the days to come.

The 38-item catalogue consisted primarily of merchandise most people would be unlikely to purchase for themselves: a portable car vacuum cleaner, a garbage can carrying cart, an electric vibro engraver, a portable electric air compressor, a rug shampooer. Many of the others were for recreational or leisure time use: luggage, a volley ball, a badminton set, an ice cream

freezer. Offering employees gifts for recreational or personal use allowed the corporation to intrude into nonwork areas of the lives of their staff. Gifts "tailor-made" to workers' personal preferences were offered because the corporation intended employees to feel it valued each of them as an individual.

Competition and Cooperation

Structured competition was an important technique through which the Communications Corporation attempted to build loyalty and exercise control over employees. Like the other motivational strategies we have discussed, this technique was not used exclusively for clerical workers but rather was part of C.C.'s overall efforts to induce all of its employees to internalize corporation goals. Loyalties were encouraged along structural lines using a "segmentary" principle as the basis of affiliation. Bohannan (1963:137) has described this as:

a projection of the idea that my brother and I are antagonistic to each other only so long as there is no person more distantly related to us who is antagonistic to both of us. I join my brother against my half brothers. My half brothers join me and my full brothers against the group of our father's brothers' sons. They join us, again, against our fathers' father's brothers' sons' sons.

Within the corporation, employees would be encouraged to form alliances on the basis of shared membership in a production group, a division, a branch, a region, or the corporation itself, according to the requirements of the situation.

Individuals were expected to be directly competitive with the others in their work group for strong evaluations, salary increases, and promotions, yet had to work with them as members of the same team to

accomplish tasks they were delegated as a work group or division. Intradivision cooperation was fostered by the intense rivalries that we observed between the Administrative, Sales, and Service divisions in each branch. A branch as a whole, however, had to function with some degree of internal harmony since its performance was ranked relative to the other branches in the Region. On the most general level, loyalty to the corporation at the expense of its competitors was expected to be the overriding principle of affiliation.

Fomenting distrust and promoting competition between coworkers were techniques management used to channel loyalty away from peers and direct it to the corporation. Employees were rewarded for their accomplishments primarily as individuals and they were expected to be discreet about the nature and extent of the rewards. One clerical worker was told by her supervisor at the conclusion of her evaluation interview:

It's better that you don't share with the others what we discussed today. Or about your salary either. Talk like that only causes problems; it can make things miserable for everyone. You don't want to get yourself messed up in that bullshit . . . You shouldn't even listen to talk that would leave you open to getting drawn into that kind of shit.

The intent of this supervisor was apparently to convince the employee that communication with her coworkers about management policies would be deleterious to her own professional goals. At another branch, a management trainee was advised by her supervisor her first day on the job, "Don't leave your Experiential Grid¹ lying around. That's the policy here." The essence of this control strategy, then, was to demonstrate that while vertical alliances were a useful way to insure job security, horizontal

alliances were nonproductive and would, in fact, be discouraged.

While horizontal loyalty between coworkers was not encouraged by management, cooperation between members within divisions was essential for the branch to maintain targeted production levels. During the field period, one of the ways that was accomplished was by operating the Customer Service Divisions with less than their full complement of employees without adjusting production quotas to reflect the absences. Some absences were due to delays in filling open positions while others were caused by employees on scheduled vacations. We do not know whether "short staffing" was an intentional policy at the branch level or simply a temporary belt-tightening measure. However, the fact that each of the three C.S.D.s was functioning with less than a full staff led us to assume that the situation was not unknown to higher level management. One branch, for example, was operating with just about the third of its billers during the data collection period; another had several of its collections representatives absent. The effects of working with so many staff missing were dramatic; as one biller explained, "This place runs at 110 percent capacity all the time. Staffing assumes 100 percent. It works fine when everyone is here. So when someone is not here the place has to go into a fire drill mode." The result of short staffing was to increase interdependency between clerical workers as they strove to meet their own and their group's production targets.

Internal cooperation within the C.S.D. was also enhanced by the interdivisional conflicts that were ubiquitous. When in one branch the manager's secretary came into the Administrative area to use the photocopying machine she was lightheartedly told, "This is an Admin copy machine. This is Admin territory. No senior staff are allowed in the

room." The tensions between Administration and Sales were especially severe because of the extent of their interdependencies. Admin, for example, was targeted on the number of days that lapsed between when a new contract was signed and when the order was processed by the C.S.D. It was, therefore, high priority for them to receive new orders from sales as soon as they were final. Sales commissions, however, were calculated from the date an order was signed rather than processed, so sales persons had little incentive to submit new orders promptly to Administration. There was ongoing conflict between the two groups, and Administration had little power to influence the course of events. In the words of one clerk:

The sales people have no understanding of how our jobs work so they're always forgetting to fill out the forms. They say it's easy enough for us to simply straighten them out ourselves so they shouldn't have to bother with them. But regardless of them screwing up, we still have to meet our targets . . . I'd like to reject all their orders just once to teach them a lesson. But I can't -- since we're targeted on late orders. And then the sales people say to us that we deliberately overburden them with paperwork that's really our job, not theirs. It's constant war around here.

We suspect this tension was tolerated by management because it was more important to them that sales persons be out in the field making sales than conscientiously completing paperwork. However, structured conflict of this sort had the latent effect of building loyalty within the Customer Service Division as they united against Sales as "the enemy."

Competition was also intended to encourage productivity by uniting a branch as a whole against C.C.'s other branches in a Region. Branches were ranked relative to one another on both sales activity and targeted

productivity criteria on monthly, quarterly, and annual bases. Computer printouts informing branches of each one's relative rank were circulated at least once a month along with covering memos from regional managers singling out the successful branches for praise and the less effective ones for chastisement. One such memo read in part:

Attached is a new computerized report showing June's Order/Install/Cancel Lag results. Congratulations and numerous accolades are due the [X] and [Y] branches who successfully achieved all three targets for the second consecutive month. Unfortunately, the remaining branches did not achieve a single lag target between them which is the primary driving force behind this memo . . . For those of you who are struggling with these targets, I would encourage you to contact [X] and [Y] for input on how they have managed to consistently make IR/CR lag.

As in an athletic league, outperforming "the competition" was the only route to recognition since excellent performance alone would not guarantee success. And, because of the frequency with which rankings were computed, there was constant pressure on everyone in a branch to produce, although tension was perhaps even greater when a branch ranked very high.

A customer assistant explained:

Management is worried because we're in 19th [i.e., last] place in the Region so far this year. Last year, we were Number One but the pressure to stay on top wiped us all out. That's why we've slipped so badly. As one branch after another kept dropping out, we had to work harder and harder to stay on top.

Being "Number One" meant relatively little to the clerical workers who were minimally rewarded for their efforts either in financial or other

ways. All they got was the satisfaction of having met the standards set by the corporation. However, they were under intense pressure from management and the Sales division to do their share to facilitate the efforts of others.

Loyalty to the corporation itself was also generated through the idiom of competition. An intense concern with security marked most C.C. activities and there was real fear of industrial espionage. When one new employee asked if he could bring his girlfriend to the company picnic, he was told, "You can bring anyone you like as long as she doesn't work for [the chief competition]." Tangible expressions of this concern ranged from the nondisclosure agreements employees had to sign when they were hired to the posters that blanketed office walls reminding staff of the importance of discretion in the handling of business-related information. It was not paranoia alone that fed these fears. C.C. encouraged its own employees to spy on workers for other corporations. Through the Competitive Hot Line [Know something . . . Share it! Call (phone number)], employees were expected to convey to management the details of competitors' products, procedures, and policies. The corporation encouraged its workers to express their loyalty through this means as well.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO MANAGEMENT CONTROL

Finally, we will consider three ways the clerical employees responded to pressures imposed by management's efforts to control productivity at the Communications Corporation: (a) leaving the corporation, (b) circumventing company regulations, (c) internalizing the corporation's goals and striving to achieve them.

Leaving the Corporation

With only a few exceptions, the three Customer Service Divisions were staffed by employees under thirty-five. This was generally true in the Sales and Service Divisions as well. Although some accepted their positions in the C.S.D. with the intention of building a career with the corporation, for most, the job was initially a means of survival in a California job market glutted with the well educated. The majority of C.S.D. employees in the three branches had some college experience, and many had bachelor's degrees, although a high school diploma was the only educational prerequisite for the job.

Turnover in the branches seemed high during the period for which we have data, although we have no longitudinal basis for comparison. One Customer Service manager said she lost one employee a month out of a total staff of nine in the ten months she had been in charge, although she did not specify how many had transferred and how many had quit. Similarly, the Branch Control manager of one of the other branches said there had been fifteen personnel changes in his branch in the three months he had worked there. During the first half of 1977, figures for personnel movement in another of the three branches showed that 12 percent of the total staff (n=250) left. The majority (18/29 or 62 percent) left voluntarily or were asked to resign; the remainder sought or were transferred to other locations.

Unhappy employees and those contemplating resigning attributed their dissatisfaction to the constant pressure under which they had to work. Said one, "It would simply be impossible to satisfy C.C." A clerk who was planning to leave as the field period ended explained:

The pressure here can get tremendous. Like last May's sales contest. All the sales people were going crazy trying to get their new

equipment installed before the deadline at the end of the month.

They were constantly on our backs here in Administration, especially on the scheduler and the [equipment order entry clerks]. And, on top of that, [the branch manager] showed up with another new project. For some, the job took a heavy personal toll. The clerk quoted above said he never smoked or drank before starting work at Communications Corporation three years earlier. Now, he regularly did both.

Many left to take jobs with smaller "rival" companies where their training and experience were valued and the pressure to produce was not as intense. Others sought opportunities in entirely different fields. Of three who were considering leaving or who left immediately prior to the start of our field work, one bought a ranch in Utah, one opened a sporting goods store, and the third intended to start a rest home. Each indicated they wished to get as far as they could from the kind of work C.C. had to offer.

We received mixed reports concerning horizontal mobility within the corporation. Although job openings were posted and hiring from within was preferred, one employee told us he perceived subtle discouragement of his wish to transfer because of the uncertainties management encountered in hiring and training new staff. He was reluctant to ask his supervisors for letters of reference because he feared they might minimize his abilities in their wish to retain him. Given the level of turnover in the three branches we studied, this employee's fears may have had a basis in reality. During the first half of 1977, 24 percent of one branch's total staff (n=250) were new with only five percent (n=12) transfers and 19 percent (n=48) new hires.

Circumventing Company Regulations

Employees circumvented the demands of the system in a number of ways. The most obvious were their attempts to avoid ratebusting in their efforts to meet production targets. For example, during the field period, in order for billers to rate a "five", 98.5 percent of the bills for leased machines must have been dispatched. One of the branch control managers promised to buy his billing clerks a drink if they exceeded the corporation's target and billed more than 99.5 percent. The billers, in their enthusiasm, exceeded even this quota and only .3 percent of the revenue remained unbilled. When the figures were posted, they were initially delighted with their success. Upon reflection, however, one told the anthropologist:

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to exceed the target by that much since maybe now the Region will be expecting us to do it all the time. It took a lot of extra energy to do it and we couldn't possibly keep it up. We have other things to do here, too.

This same fear was expressed in one of the other branches when a target was exceeded by 50 points beyond the manager's projection. One clerical worker remarked, "That might be too good for us to have to live up to." Workers in these situations tread a delicate line between exerting themselves to meet the projected targets but being careful not to exceed them.

Another way that employees maintained control in the light of management efforts to dominate was through discretionary reporting of information. For instance, letters asking for credit adjustments were targeted for resolution within 30 days of receipt of the complaint. Billers learned to record on the Adjustment Form approximately the same date for receipt of the letter and for its resolution so that complaints would appear to have been resolved within the authorized time span. In other cases, clerks routinely post-dated cancellation orders if they could

not get them processed in time to meet the monthly target. Billers often indicated on production sheets that an account had been billed manually when, in fact, it had not yet been. The demands of the target system led employees to develop quasilegal maneuvers both to avoid personal reprimand and to sustain branch performance at levels favorable to all concerned.

Although employees found the pressures unrelenting and intense, the corporation was not totally unresponsive to their inability to meet production quotas. For example, a memo was sent from the Regional Manager to all branch managers in the middle of the field period sharply lowering the production levels required for clerical employees to earn excellent ratings. The memo read, in part:

We have reviewed the [Branch Marketing Support] measurement system in light of the first half performance levels, the current Marketplace pressures, the span of control of the first line manager and the impact of our manpower replan, and concluded that a restructuring is in order.

The "performance curve" for the first half of the year was substantially adjusted downward so that performance the corporation had considered mediocre was now evaluated more favorably:

(Table I goes here)

The number of "secondary" targets was also reduced from 25 to 16 and a new "performance curve" was developed for the remainder of the year. Although it actually differed little from the one that had been used during the first half of the year, the new curve showed greater flexibility in the range of performance ratings.

Internalizing the Corporation's Goals

Those Customer Service workers who intended to stay at Communications Corporation planned to do so because they perceived their jobs in a positive light rather than because they felt there were no employment alternatives. The positive features they mentioned were intrinsic to the jobs themselves; they were not indirect or secondary benefits of the positions. The salaries, for instance, were not among the jobs' attractions. The typical C.S.D. employee earned less than \$12,000 annually at the time of the study. The social aspects of the work also held relatively little interest. In comparison with many other types of offices, there was very limited informal socializing among C.S.D. workers. Employees tended to start work as soon as they arrived, rarely ate lunch together, and seldom saw one another outside the office. Daily job pressures left them with little time for conversation; lunch was often skipped or taken as a quick break, although these practices were not compensated with overtime pay.

C.S.D. employees particularly enjoyed the nonroutine aspects of their jobs which required that they use intelligence and ingenuity. The billing clerks, for example, consistently reported the resolution of billing problems as one of the challenging aspects of their work. The machines the corporation marketed were ordinarily leased to customers. The factors involved in determining a billing plan included the type and number of machines leased by the client, the amount of monthly use, and the length of the leasing contract. Because billing plans changed frequently in response to a highly competitive market, it usually took a biller about a year to learn all the details of the job. One billing clerk remarked, "It's true that the billing system is ridiculously complicated, but that's what makes

the job challenging and fun. It can take a lot of effort to figure out where the problem is and that keeps me from getting bored."

The collections representatives (CRs) found challenging their need to develop and use a variety of strategies to recover outstanding revenue. Although CRs were targeted each month on their success at collecting a specified proportion of this revenue, they themselves would decide on the means they would use to recover it. Effective CRs, for example, knew which bills and accounts were worth extraordinary collections measures, such as paying the client a personal visit, and which were not worth the effort. The ongoing opportunities CRs had to test their persuasive skills were another aspect of their job they found challenging. Some said they were proud of their ability to "motivate" their clients to settle outstanding accounts. Success in the areas described here depends primarily on the personal talents and resources of an individual employee. C.S.D. workers valued their jobs not only because the work regularly provided them with opportunities to use these creative skills but also because the corporation would reward them for the effectiveness with which they did so.

The clerical employees also valued the opportunities for upward mobility that their jobs seemed to provide. Some took the Career Counseling sessions very seriously and anticipated an unhindered career trajectory provided they gained the necessary on-the-job experience. One billing clerk, who had been on the job for several years, said she expected to be promoted to Internal Control Manager within the next several months. A collections representative with less than a year of experience gave herself three years in her present position before she would seek promotion to Customer Service Manager. Promotion to these first level management jobs was, in fact, common. Two of the three Customer Service managers in

the study gained their positions in this way.

The target system itself provided another important source of job satisfaction for C.S.D. employees.² The ethic of individual responsibility that pervaded both the corporation and the society as a whole impelled employees to consider the targets as personal goals to be attained rather than as a rigid set of standards imposed on them. One of C.C.'s many slogans -- "Remember, 'NOTHING HAPPENS UNTIL SOMEBODY MAKES IT HAPPEN' -- that somebody is YOU!" -- aptly described how some did perceive the targets. The existence of production quotas gave clerical workers a means by which their own contributions to a larger effort could be measured and acknowledged. In a mass society such as ours where anonymity is one of the few constants in daily life, such recognition may take on great significance.

Many of the clerical employees took personal responsibility for the targeted goals even when external circumstances interfered with their ability to meet them. The interdependencies of individuals, teams and divisions in the corporation meant that C.S.D. workers were targeted in areas over which they did not have complete control. For example, although clerical workers were targeted on the speed with which new orders were processed, they were dependent on the sales teams for promptly submitting the required forms. Although it might have been reasonable for the clerks to request the target be reformulated so they would not be responsible for factors outside their control, to the best of our knowledge, this never happened. Instead, clerks devised a variety of ways ranging from an "order tracking system" to the use of personal persuasion in order to meet the target. The target itself, though questioned, was not challenged. Similarly, although collections representatives were hampered in their

efforts if billing problems were not promptly resolved, they alone were responsible for the collections target. There was no formal means to acknowledge this interdependency and CRs planned their work as if they had complete control over the situation. They did not seek to restructure the organization of their work. Even cases of equipment failure provided new challenges for some C.S.D. employees. The data entry system in one of the branches failed just as a targeted deadline was approaching. It could not be fixed in time to meet the target. Rather than requesting that the deadline be briefly extended, those responsible drove 25 miles to another branch to input the data and returned home with the feeling of a job well done.

The high rate of turnover at the Communications Corporation indicated that all did not respond to these pressures with equanimity. But, for many, it was precisely these constraints that made an otherwise routine job challenging and satisfying. These employees would work without compensation through lunch, after five, and on weekends. They saw their jobs as actual or potential careers and they would spend time and physical and emotional energy carrying out their commitment. This constituted one of C.C.'s most effective control strategies: encouraging clerical workers to regard the targets as personal goals guaranteed these employees' loyalty and productivity.

CONCLUSIONS

Rarely do corporations such as the one described here allow researchers essentially unimpeded access to their sales offices, for they are their lifeblood in a highly competitive business world. The Anthropology Project was afforded an unusual opportunity to observe how

techniques to increase support staff productivity were used, and to examine some of their effects. Nevertheless, a short term ethnographic study like this cannot provide sufficiently detailed data to identify the circumstances under which staff are able, or willing, to comply with the corporation's wishes, and those under which the pressures come to be perceived as too unrelenting and the rewards too few.

The corporation sought to control its clerical staff through a series of positive and negative sanctions and by socializing them to see their own upward mobility tied to the success of the corporation. These control strategies were uniformly applied in all branches, yet they were successful to different extents. They brought about dramatically different levels of office productivity which also varied sharply over time. A longer field period would have allowed us to better understand how support staff work behavior was influenced by interactions among the staff, between support staff and management, and between them and the other two divisions in the sales offices. A longer field period would also have enabled us to assess the nature of the social differences between the three offices and to evaluate their implications for office productivity. Such data await the results of future investigation.

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NOTES

1. An inventory of the tasks a trainee must accomplish before being considered for promotion.

2. Katherine Newman's insights were instrumental in developing the material in this section.

3. Organizations and individuals have all been given pseudonyms.

TABLE I

Original and Adjusted Performance Curve

Rating	Original	Adjusted
5	94.46	87.0
4	88.33	60.0
3	78.57	62.0
2	46.31	46.0