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ABSTRACT

By telephone, 33 employers in a rural Arizona county were surveyed concerning their experiences with new employees in the workplace. It drew from two strands to understand employers' workplace expectations. The first drew from sociology and looked at the workplace in terms of how young workers experience the labor market. The second strand looked more at the labor market and organizational issues in moving from school to work. Employers were asked about the following: work availability; skills and competencies expected from employees; attitudes toward work expected from employees; pay, benefits, and potential for upward mobility; job task technology; patterns of authority; reward system; and social interaction. Employers identified several character traits as desirable--general value orientations, public relations ability, and specific work skills--but placed greater emphasis on the first two. Most employers said they really had no minimum requirements. They liked to train new employees according to their own preferences. Gender of the worker and location of the job in the labor market appeared as important mediators of workplace authority structure and worker autonomy. Entry-level workers earned minimum wages. Some employers took the view that the work itself should be the employee's incentive to enter and stay on the job. Employers did not uniformly recognize entry-level employee needs for socialization, on or off the job. (Appendixes include 29 references and an interview schedule.) (YLB)

# School To Work Transition: Employer Attitudes Towards Employees, Jobs, and the Workplace in Rural Arizona

by

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## Overview

This research surveyed by telephone employers in a rural Arizona county concerning their experiences with new employees in the workplace. Three general questions were addressed by the study:

1) What are selected employers expectations for and experiences with newly hired employees (recently left or graduated from high school)?

2) What are the workplace opportunities for new employees (recently left or graduated from high school) in what is often their first job?

3) How does workplace opportunity vary across job setting and workplace habitus?

## Theoretical Perspective

The study draws from two strands in order to understand workplace expectations of employers and their experiences with new employees. The first draws from sociology and looks at the workplace in terms of how young workers experience the labor market and the institutional opportunities and constraints part of the occupational structure. Drawing on work by Borman (1988; 1991), questions were asked which address the following aspects of the workplace: (1) job task technology, or how jobs are organized and carried out; (2) patterns of authority, or the line of command from manager to worker; (3) reward system or how work is rewarded; and (4) social interaction, or how work lives are negotiated. Cultural reproduction theories are discussed with

explanation for the school to work transition based on cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and the linguistic subculture perspective, with reference to the importance of language to socialization (Bernstein, 1975; 1990).

The second strand looks more at the labor market and organizational issues in moving from school to work. Economic explanations are examined with look at the human capital perspective including the specific skills, attitudes, and background experiences that employers desire in young people. Traditional labor theory (Shultz, 1977) argues that the school to work transition is guided by three assumptions: (1) there is one labor market in which everyone competes; (2) the marketplace is rationale and competitive; and (3) best prepared get the best jobs. Alternatively, segmented labor theory argues that the labor market is divided into two major segments, one which provides access to good jobs with career ladder and criteria for success and a secondary labor market with low paying jobs, part-time and irregular hours and little opportunity for advancement and evaluation based on social relationship between employer and employee. In this view, gaining a job has to do with "job shelters" maintained by discriminatory hiring practices and competition serves to keep control of workers and wages (Borman, 1991).

Existence of A Working Cohort Directly out of High School

Borman (1991) cites U.S. Department of Education data which reports that many students enter the work force directly after high school or after attending college for a limited period of time. For the year 1985:

-- 48% of high school graduates do not go to college or any other institutionally based training program, the following fall.

-- 25% of college freshmen complete college four years later;

-- 3/4 of a given cohort of high school graduates have not completed college four years later.

For the most part they have found jobs in the regular labor force.

The Nature of Workplace Commitment

Yankelovich (1980) suggests a major shift in workplace experiences and expectations of both younger and older workers. He points to a scaling down of commitment to work (and its accompanying financial rewards) in order to seek self-fulfillment, an individually based pursuit of self-fulfillment. Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah et al., 1985) argue that individualism has run amok in American society, and look for a new social movement aimed at restoring the dignity and legitimacy of democratic politics. Such a world would reduce the punishments of failure and the rewards of success. It would include meaningful work for all, with a return to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all not merely as a way of advancing the self. Education, in such a setting promotes a whetting of appetites in which students are given more than technical and career oriented skills. Schooling must also connect private aspirations with public meanings.

Bellah and his team also look at several different definitions of work drawn from the experiences of people interviewed in their study. As an example, Bellah et al., cite Joe:

> Joe joined his present employers as an assembly-line worker. There the personnel director found him--son of the local high school coach, popular athlete, and class officer now enrolled in night school classes--and promptly offered him a full-time job in the firm's front office. Here he has remained, steadily working his way up to become head public relations officer for the local plant and then turning down promotions that would take him away from Suffolk (pp. 67-68).

Work, for Joe, involves more than just search for more money to rise the ladder of individual success. Work involves cooperation, being part of the team, and not being singled out individually.

Work readiness: The business perspective. A recent study by the Committee for Economic Development (1991) asked employers, students, parents and teachers about employment skills and readiness. In general, employers and to a slightly lesser extent teachers felt that students lacked preparation for work: "almost entirely missing... are the disciplines necessary to achieve these goals: dedication to learning, discipline in work habits, and learning how to solve complex problems. And, underneath it all, of course is the lack of basic skills in reading, writing, math, understanding written and verbal instructions, and doing arithmetic functions" (p. 8). The report goes on to argue a reality gap with students and parents deluding themselves about school and workplace expectations. The report goes on to urge for national standards.

Work readiness: The employee perspective. Willis' (1977) case study of youth in Britain's Midlands examines the experiences of approximately 15 boys in a town of 60,000 part of the industrial Midlands. The lads develop their own sets of rules that include machismo, lack of achievement, stick together and no "informing on one another". The lads reject school values and adopt an anti-school set of beliefs, which reject authority in many forms. Sexism and racism are part of the lads subculture, and how they interact with the world. Willis suggests that the lads' attitudes are directly drawn from the attitudes of working class male work. Chauvinism, toughness and machismo are part of the shopfloor culture and workers gain (or attempt to gain) control of the work processes including the flow, pace and control of speed of production. Willis explains this as the attempt to control the autonomy of

space and the lads mirror the behaviors of their fathers, but this time, in school.

Willis points out the ever present sense that "practice is more important than theory" and that an "ounce of keenness is worth a library of certificates." The objective basis of learner participation becomes a "moral" basis. Deference and politeness become ends in and of themselves; right attitudes for jobs and for employers.

Willis points to commonalties between school, family and work. Good work is seen as having open talk, sex and booze, the possibility of dossing or goofing off, doing and not "pen-pushing." Lads reject future orientation and want to live now. Lads look forward to work with all work seen as basically the same; jobs are seen as containment and work is manual. Work is not seen as providing freedom to express and grow. By the time a realization that the shopfloor is simply another way of doing labor for others, it is often too late to make the transition to higher education (and the accompanying bills, etc.).

Willis' explanation for the Lads partial understanding of how their attitudes ultimately limit occupational mobility has to do with linguistic orientations. Drawing from Bernstein (1964; 1975; 1990) the idea of a subcultural socio-linguistic code provides a part of the explanation. While language is no less rich for the lads, it does not value those insights which are apart from experience. The immediate is more important than the abstract. Meanings are in the force of creativity of cultural forms (deeds, actions, dress and activities) rather than the mental set.

The Lads realize where they are headed for the bottom of the jobs hierarchy. While clerical and apprenticeship work is available, they would have to give up freedom, autonomy and independence. The Lads also

recognize that most work in industry is basically meaningless; little skill or training required; work is deskilled and desensitized. While this is an important penetration into culture, life, and work for the working class, there are a number of limitations. The sexism of the Lads is not supported in school (or culture); the rejection of mental work as feminine along with the mental versus manual distinction; and the racism of Lads is a false penetration because it blames other groups (particularly the equally disenfranchised minorities) for their own dilemmas. As a result, the Lads are excluded from access to higher paying and higher status middle class professions.

To sum, the view presented is that work that youth face obstacles and difficulties in negotiating the labor market, independent of their own skills and development. The purpose of the research will be to see, from the expectations of employers, whether or not these difficulties are made worse by the kinds of work and workplace expectations available to youth.

Natriello (1987) points out that traditional questionnaires to employers focus mainly on the "traits" of new employees, characteristics which are seen as most advantageous or problematic. Natriello suggests employer comments have as much to do with questions asked as with true needs and the lack of a developed rationale by employers for such responses limit their "usefulness". This research attempts to address this gap by asking employers a relatively different set of questions based on categories and findings reported in Borman's (1991) study of youth in their first "real" jobs.

## Methodology

The research project began in early June, 1992. A preliminary review of literature was accomplished during the first few weeks of the project. Listings of potential employers were collected and phone interviewing procedures,

including taping and transcribing data were arranged. A group of eight students enrolled in a qualitative research class did all interviewing between July 13 and July 30, 1992; all interviews were accomplished by phone and tape recorded. All tape recordings were transcribed. The first analysis of data was completed by the middle of August, 1992. The short timeline was required by project sponsors; data interpretation and report writing continues into the present.

Sources of the Data

The director of the Navajo County Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provided lists of employers in the five major communities in the County. These lists of employers were provided by the Chambers of Commerce in five separate communities in rural Arizona. Employers were selected through a randomized process in which every 12th name from the list was selected. Employers were contacted by telephone, asked whether the person in charge of hiring and/or working with new employees would be willing to participate in the approximately 1/2 hour phone interview, and if yes, a date and times scheduled. In the case of smaller businesses, owners and operators were usually the same person. Those unwilling to participate were thanked, with the next name on the list contacted. In all, thirty-three employers were interviewed. A follow-up letter was mailed out thanking employers for participating and reminding them of the scheduled time and date of the phone interview. A complete list of businesses interviewed is given below:

Table 1

Employers Interviewed
(by Business Type, Person Interviewed, and Number of Employees)

| Type of Job | Person Interviewed | # of Employees (Full/Part-time) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Motel | Manager | 10 (3/7) |
| 2. Business (Sales) | Manager | 5 (2/3) |
| 3. Dep't Store | Manager | 100 (30/70) |
| 4. Utility | Manager | 320 (300/20) |
| 5. Doctors Office | Manager | 4(3/1) |
| 6. CPA | Owner | 4 (2/2) |
| 7. C'nty Agency | Manager | 15 (15/0) |
| 8. Small Business | Owner | 5 (2/3) |
| 9. Supermarket | Manager | 50 (30/20) |
| 10. Bank | Manager | 25 (15/10) |
| 11. Small Bus. | Owner | 10 (3/7) |
| 12. Plant Nursery | Owner | 10 (2/8) |
| 13. Therapist | Owner | 5 (1/4) |
| 14. Bank | Manager | 25 (15/10) |
| 15. Auto Shop | Owner | 10 (10/0) |
| 16. Publisher | Owner | 3 (1/2) |
| 17. Fast Food | Manager | 15-20 (10/10) |
| 18. Bank | Manager | 11 (5/6) |
| 19. Clothing Store | Owner | 4 (3/1) |
| 20. Restaurant | Owner | 15 (10/5) |
| 21. Oil Business | Manager | 7 (7/0) |
| 22. Title Co. | Manager | 2 (2/0) |
| 23. Printing | Owner | 7 (3/4) |
| 24. Clothing Store | Owner | 5 (3/2) |
| 25. Bank | Manager | 39 (20/19) |
| 26. Auto Shc | Owner | 2 (2/0) |
| 27. Restaurant | Manager | 10 (7/3) |
| 28. Hotel | Manager | 32 (32/0) |
| 29. Radio Station | Manager | 8 (4/4) |
| 30. Auto | Owner | 3 (3 /0) |
| 31. Radio Station | Manager | 7 (3/4) |
| 32. Fast Food | Manager | 9 (6/3) |
| 33. Dentist Office | Manager | 2 (1/1) |

During the following three weeks, employers were interviewed on the telephone. Questions were read to or asked of the employers, which were audio taped, and transcribed for data analysis. Following the interviews, there was discussion among the principal investigator and interviewers concerning interview procedures, difficulties, and questioning strategies. But essentially,

the interview protocol was completed prior to the beginning of all of the interviews, and all employers were asked the same questions, though variations across interviewers existed.

Employers were asked questions (see Appendix A) about: 1) work availability; 2) skills and competencies expected from employees; 3) attitudes towards work expected from employees; and, 4) pay, benefits and potential for upward mobility. Drawing on work reported by Borman (1991), these interviews probed more deeply how employers thought about these categories and included discussion of:

1) job task technology - how jobs are organized and carried out.

2) patterns of authority - line of command from supervisory/manager to worker.

3) reward system - how work is rewarded.

4) social interaction - how work lives are negotiated.

These categories were the basis of the protocol and phone interviews.

Data Analysis

Following the phone interviews, each call was transcribed and the typed text was coded using grounded theory procedures (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Although this process seems more deductive than inductive, more verification than exploration, the detailed texts provided both-- verification of existing categories and new examples of and meanings for how these were expressed in everyday practices.

Each set of questions was seen as a category or section heading; the goal of the analysis was to describe how each category was described in everyday practice and its central meaning to understanding workplace perspectives of employers; One aim was to see whether employers, with more focused

questioning, would report related perspectives about work, consistent with those reported in Borman's (1991) study of young workers.

Work Availability - Types of Entry Level Jobs

The types of entry level jobs available, as described by the businesses interviewed, are listed below:

Table 2

Types of Entry Level Jobs

| Restaurant/Hospitality | Retail | Other |
|---|---|---|
| cook | cashier | graphic designer |
| dishwasher | sales clerk | receptionist |
| janitor | service station attendant | office assistant |
| waiter/waitress | order entry clerk | radio announcer |
| maid | plant nursery worker | bookkeeper |
| | | auto mechanic |
| | | office clerk aide |
| | | bank teller |
| | | painter's assistant |

Of the businesses interviewed, the data showed few entry level jobs at present and a prediction of few new job openings and little growth in the near future. Employers report that job openings will be mainly due to replacement of current staff by attrition.

*"There won't be any growth, but as for as replacements go, I imagine that in two years there will probably be a dozen, based on past performance."*

*"When we talk about growth I will anticipate doing some additional hiring, like during the holidays for seasonal help."*

*"I would expect the vacancy rating to be about 3%."*

As was indicated in Table 1, the jobs available were divided between full and part time positions, with full time positions usually earned after a certain period of time or after proficiency was demonstrated. In general, many employers saw full-time employment as one of the major benefits of work.

*"I still have employees here that have been here since the store opened in November of '90 that are still not full-time employees. You know, you have to remember that a lot of the full-time positions are hardly ever given up here on the mountain."*

A recent issue of Rural Conditions and Trends (Spring, 1992, p. 6) supports the finding of low availability of new entry-level jobs with the largest declines in rural employment were among workers 16-24 years old (-4.3 percent) and young adults 25-34 years old (-3.4 percent). Rural counties with large minority populations also experience above-average unemployment rates while counties with large Native American populations report a 9.4 percent unemployment. Recession caused increases in unemployment often persist for some time after business conditions begin to improve (Rural Conditions and Trends, Winter 1991/92, p. 10). While there was disagreement among employers interviewed, some suggested that the jobs currently being filled would be available for at least the next five years.

Availability of employees. When the employers were asked if there were current shortages of potential employees, the majority replied that there was no shortage of employees. However, when positions becomes open, a

percentage of the businesses report a shortage of employees in the 18-22 year old bracket. One business managers interviewed stated that:

> *"Living in a rural community, most kids that are looking for a career, obviously are wise enough to pick college, so there's a void from 18 to 22 or 23 up here."*
>
> *"So young people are looking at this and they're saying, I could pump gas for the rest of my life and there's nothing against a kid that want to pump gas, however, the void up between 18-23 is almost exaggerated."*

It is likely that many able young adults leave the area for a time to pursue other endeavors; In terms of supply and demand, while some employers may feel there is a shortage of adequately skilled young adults, this appears to be largely due to the types of work available and the ability to attract talented young employees to fill these minimal wage jobs.

## Workplace Attitudes and Skills

When queried about attitudes of young workers, the employers in this study identified several character traits they found desirable. Table 3 is a compilation of terms used by employers to describe workplace skills and attitudes. The number in parentheses refers to the frequency of that particular word or phrase in the interviews. General value orientations, public relations ability, and specific work skills are listed as desirable characteristics.

Table 3

Worker Characteristics Valued by Employers

General Characteristics of Employees (# of responses in parentheses)

personal appearance [neat, clean dress, clean-shaven, hair] (19)
positive (upbeat) (8)
enthusiastic (5)
good attitude (5)
courteous (3)
friendly (2)
pleasant (2)
caring attitude (1)
get along(1)

Work Related Values and Attitudes

punctual [on time, prompt] (14)
professionalism [business decorum] (7)
communication (6)
prepared to work (5)
attendance (3)

Work Related Skills

work with public (15)
teachable (3)
phone skills (2)
work under stress (2)
not too assured (1)

## Dispositional Characteristics

However, the employers interviewed placed greater emphasis on general dispositional characteristics of employees (general value orientations, human relations) than on specific skills.

*"They need to have a sweet spirit. I expect them to be able to greet the public."*

*"The would have to be personable..."*

*"I do expect them to be courteous because we are dealing with the public."*

Hochschild (1983) study of airline attendants points to the downside of these expectations which asks workers to commercialize their feelings by putting on a "public face." The damage, particularly for young women, is to the long term commitment of employees to a job with great emotional costs and little pay back. While it may be reasonable to expect employees to be personable when dealing with the public, the major lessons that young workers learn is to "commercialize their feelings." Sometimes, these skills were referred to as "smile skills."

Communication Skills

Entry level employees had to "represent the company well," work with the public, and to be pleasant on the telephone. Many said that the employee had to be able to communicate, which was defined as "good grammar, reading and writing skills." Other communication skills mentioned included the ability to follow instructions and to pay attention to detail. In sales, an important skill was the ability to assess level of communication.

> ***"You have to be able to take, within three seconds, a stance on communicating with people on their level...if you talk above them, you've lost the interview; if you talk below them, they control it."***

One person said that the new employee had to have "job survival skills" and seemed to define that to mean the ability to get along with others.

Employer expectations. While employers mentioned some specific skills that they would like to see, most indicated that they really had no minimum requirements. Employers indicated that they would prefer to do their own training in necessary skill areas. Some said that they would like the employee to have graduated from high school, but then quickly added that wasn't a requirement. Employers generally expected very little in terms of work experience:

> ***"(I've) been hiring people just fresh out of nothing and then training them."***
>
> ***Basically there is really no experience that I really need you to have, coming in the door"***

*"I really don't expect anything from new employees."*

Even when the job required graphics and lay out skills (which are fairly technical) an employer said that he could train someone to do it.

Penn (1986) notes that young workers often succeed or fail because of the attributes assigned to them by their employers and other workers. Since the workplace is an unfamiliar place to new workers, they are forced to improvise as they go, making guesses about what they are supposed to do. Some of the young workers, like struggling actors, make mistakes and may not get a permanent part. Other workers seem to have been handed a script and know exactly what to do. This is because supervisors have made a number of inferences about the person, sometimes even before the person was hired. Penn (1986) also observes that there is a tendency to attribute actions of an individual to stable, internal characteristics of the individual rather than to situation variables. The system presumes that these characteristics transfer from the school setting to the workplace, and from one workplace to another. In the words of one employer in the study:

*"I don't want to have to teach that to them. They should have learned that by the time they get to me."*

Immaturity or inexperience? When examining the lists of desirable attitudes and skills of young workers, the issue of maturity comes up.

*"Obviously, maturity plays a key factor."*

*"...And yet I do have that percentage that are still not mature, responsible. You know they can kind of walk the line for so long and then all of a sudden they slip off and you can start seeing that."*

Yet, one wonders whether the skills youth are expected to develop as part of going to school actually transfer to the workplace, or whether participation

(let alone success) in school requires a different attitudes and skills, which do not necessarily transfer.

> *".....they have neither been trained or acclimated to a work atmosphere through the high schools or through the little college they have here. The work ethic seems to be void. Everything seems to be fun and games; however, when you sit down and you have to indicate to these people, wait a minute, I'm depending upon your production to make a profit in my product. Without you producing and I keep paying you, then it's a losing proposition."*

Employers try to weed out those individuals who do not conform to expectations. When employees don't respond favorably to these demands, it may be easier and more cost effective for the employer to simply hire another entry level worker.

> *"Most of them do very well because we work with them... If they just can't do it, they would probably like to look for another job."*

To sum, employers in this study expected entry level workers to manage their emotions and have general dispositional characteristics associated with more mature workers. As will be pointed out later, at the same time, the young workers should be willing to work for minimum wage with few or no benefits or incentives. Youth are expected to conform or look for another job.

## Employer Views on Training Needs

In addition to the dispositions and attitudes reported in the previous section, employers were asked questions concerning the types and sources of training that would help prepare youth for employment. While employers suggested that families and schools could do a better job of preparing youth for work, employers

indicated that in the end, they like to train new employees according to their own preferences.

Schools and Employment Training

Employers felt that schools and teachers needed to become more aware of the workplace by visiting. They suggested resume writing, more job fairs, and letting "them know what is expected of them in the workplace."

> *"Teachers need to come ... interrelated with the work field. What I mean by that, they need to visit with perspective employers."*
>
> *"I would like to see more participation and more on-the-job type things going on at the schools. I know that we've had several students from the schools that did that,"*
>
> *"Encourage students and teachers to take a tour of the bank so that we can let them know what banking is like in general, what jobs are available in banking."*

This is part of the more general view that schools and youth are out-of-touch with the demands of the workplace.

Family Life Doesn't Prepare Youth for Employment

Similarly, the employers viewed families as not being familiar with the workplace nor of teaching dispositional attitudes seen as a requirement for success in the workplace.

> *"Most generally some of the newer people are tremendously under-prepared. They don't realize that when working on a commission basis only, they have lost the haven of mommy or daddy giving them an allowance and saying `have a nice day,"*
>
> *"Some were born with a silver spoon in their mouth."*
>
> *"Probably from the home we need to do a better job of telling our kids what really is going on. I think they have no concept. They think that there's an endless supply of money."*

Employers also indicate lack of realistic expectations on the part of youth themselves concerning getting and keeping a job.

> *"I think students need to become more self starters, you know, do it on their own instead of waiting for someone to do it for them."*
>
> *"They have an attitude that they can just demand a lot going into a job."*
>
> *"they're expecting the perspective employer to bow down from whatever their needs are."*
>
> *"... Their attitudes are cockier and they're not willing to put in the effort."*

Sources of Training

While school, family and individual are the sources of attitudes and dispositions towards work, the specific training skill development related to the job is seen as coming from the employers themselves. The source of training varies from a single owner, supervisor or peer, to more complicated tasks done by specialists; it may include on-the-job observation or more comprehensive step-by-step methods with materials specially prepared and training consultants utilized.

> *"Our training, depending on the job, is either done here in the store or done at the training center in Phoenix."*
>
> *"We send them to Phoenix for a week and that is at no cost to them," "we have a complete training program in every area here that all employees go through and as needed."*
>
> *"You end up taking somebody under your wing and saying, 'O.K. now, this is point A, we want to get to point D, so consequently we have to go through points B and C to get there'."*
>
> *"Probably most of that training will come from my wife."*
>
> *"I work with every new waitress that comes in. I have a routine that I want done. I want them all to do it my way."*

Specific training needs. Employers cited customer service (human relations skills), office machines, training in welding, food, cash register knowledge, retail merchandising, etc.. largely based on the types of jobs being filled. However, employers like to train new employees according to their own specifics.

> *"If they want to learn more on the computer, then I'll bring them back here and show them how to design an ad or how to lay out copy or how to originate a copy."*
>
> *"They may spend from one to five days with our head housekeeper learning the way we do things"*
>
> *"I will look for specific things, specific work background so that I can fit you into the office."*

Job Task Technology

This aspect of the study, job task technology, refers essentially to how youths experience the different tasks and activities they have to perform on their new jobs in the eyes of the employers. Four properties or characteristics of work are identified: (1) repetitiveness -how repetitious the tasks or activities are; (2) difficulty -what difficulties new young employees encounter in performing the tasks and activities; (3) preparedness of employees -the degree to which employees can effectively and efficiently perform the tasks and activities; and (4) potential for skill development - the provision of formal training for employees to improve their performance on the job.

Most employers characterize work as generally routinized but not repetitious in terms of activities. For instance, a bank teller has to attend customers everyday, but by the same token, there are different customers or the same customers with different banking needs. But what may make his or her tasks repetitious is that even if there are different customers with different needs the counting of money

does not change, in essence. Similarly, the secretary has to write letters on the computer, make bank deposits, and the like, on a daily basis.

Employers are also likely to see job tasks and activities as not difficult if employees have the basic skills training needed for the job. In the eyes of employers, young employees who lack the basic technical skills have difficulty in performing the job tasks, and are considered under-prepared.

In order to enhance young employees performance efficiency, employers train them on the job, i.e. informal training. Employees are guided and checked by more experienced fellow co-workers and supervisors until they can get things done effectively and precisely, i.e. according to employers' preferences and needs. As reported by Borman's (1991) case study of Val, work performance was structured and geared by Winn, the manager, on how to write contracts and the sort. As a compensating factor, Val had the responsibility to train the new workers coming in the company.

It would appear that employers are more interested in productivity than in deciding a democratic way of how the job should be carried out. Employees are seen as good workers to the extent that they can produce profitably. For this main reason, employers train employees on the job, giving them the necessary skills for them to meet the manager's needs irrespective of what employees' needs or expectations might be. There does not appear to exist any dialogue between employer and employee to reach an agreement on both employer's and employee's needs and expectations.

There seems to be discontinuity between how the youth are taught in school and what happens in the workplace. The school seems to advocate critical thinking skills in building a more democratic society (Bennett & Lecompte, 1990). But the labor market, at least for young workers directly out of high school, is still guided by

the principles of scientific management. Employers expect youths to respond to the current labor market and to produce, not to be critical let alone transformative.

Because of employers' strive for productivity, the potential for employees to develop higher order skills on the job is lessened. Employees' expectations to find a job they can do, be treated as human beings, and at the same time be productive, seem to be washed away by reality. Productivity prevails over any social skill or higher order thinking employees may have.

The outcome, then, what employers most desire from young employees, is the product of their performance. As one employer points out

> ***"We do need someone that realizes that they don't make money unless we make money."***

In order to reach this ultimate goal, employees are required to possess the basic skills. These are conceptualized by managers as technical, mechanical, and step-by-step procedures. For instance, a maid's work will be cleaning the rooms, making the beds, and things of that nature. As a result, the employee who follows the step-by-step rules and procedures set by the manager may be viewed as prepared and efficient. To the contrary, the employee who has higher expectations than just simply carrying out rules and procedures, in addition to the technical and mechanical skills, is viewed as under-prepared.

According to employers, specific structural competencies of tasks and activities are difficult to perform because young employees do not possess the basic mechanical and technical skills and seem not to fully conform to rules and procedures, the "1, 2, 3 type things," as one manager put it. However, as proposed by Borman, the school-to-work transition is best understood as "talent matching - the degree to which young workers' skills and attitudes harmonize with employers' needs - and socialization - the extent to which the worker accommodates to the workplace" (1991, p. 30).

## Patterns of Authority

While work experience is the object of many research investigations, the contextual setting of the workplace is less frequently studied. The current study focuses on several areas of the work experience. One important goal was to probe employers' attitudes toward the autonomy of young workers, and whether or not employers placed any value in fostering such workplace autonomy. In the discussion of employee attitudes, "being a self starter" or initiative is identified as one of the attitudes employers want to see demonstrated by entry level workers;

> ***"I think students need to become more self starters, you know, do it on their own instead of waiting for someone to do it for them."***

If initiative was seen as valuable by employers, it was of interest to know whether employers indicated that they encouraged worker autonomy. However, the research found no clear relationship between the employers' desire for worker initiative and the fostering of initiative by allowing worker autonomy.

Borman (1991) identified two factors as key determinants of the kinds of workplace experiences available to young people: (1) gender of the worker; (2) location of the job in the labor market. In the current study, these factors also appear as important mediators of workplace authority structure and worker autonomy.

### Gender and Workplace Autonomy

Gender significantly affects workplace autonomy, primarily because of the type of entry-level work performed by young women. Most often, women "were given highly routinized, unskilled, and marginalized or closely monitored roles and responsibilities" (Borman, 1991, p. 135). For example, in describing young women's experiences in banking institutions, she reported the rigid enforcement of rules

regarding absences and lateness, and the equally rigid monitoring of work flow. Yet, she discovered that young men often found better jobs with better financial rewards, more sophisticated and transferable technologies, and more flexible authority structures.

The current study found similar patterns in the relationship between gender and the authority structure of the various workplaces. One example of how gender interacts with the autonomy of women workers, occurred in a restaurant. The owners hired both men and women as cooks and kitchen help, but hired only women to be waitresses explaining, "we never hire waiters." One of the owners explained that her husband worked a long time training the cooks and kitchen help:

> *"He's teaching the cooks that are working for us to follow his footsteps so he cannot be here once in awhile. We have two cooks in addition to my husband. They're working together."*

Hence, the goal of the training for the cooks was to enhance their growth of autonomy and to promote initiative. On the other hand, her procedure for training the new waitresses restricted, rather than enhanced their autonomy:

> *"I work with every new waitress that comes in. I have a routine that I want done. I have ways. I want them all to do it my way I spend a couple of days. My husband has been working with them (the cooks and kitchen help) a long time. For my waitresses, I have a set of rules and regulations written. Do's and Don'ts. Not for the cooks and dishwashers."*

She further explained that she monitored the waitresses' emotions and required specific social behaviors from them:

> *"Waitresses, I make no bones about wanting to see what they're doing at all times. I want to make sure that the customers are being treated right. I monitor it very closely when I'm here...I tell them to leave their personal problems at home....I don't allow smoking while they're in a uniform to be seen by a customer. I'm strict in those things. The restrictions are on the floor. Once they leave that room (employee lounge) they put on a new face."*

In fact, both owners monitored all the employees, however the degree of monitoring was much more rigid for the waitresses:

> *The cooks, we constantly check to make sure they're putting the food out right, cooking the way we want them to. They're closely watched. It's not like Big Brother; it's just that we have a lot of money at stake here.*

The two owners were experienced restaurant owners and were very careful about what occurred in their restaurant. However, the very close attention paid to the waitresses' behavior, the short length of training, and the list of "Do's and Don'ts," indicated a greater control over their behavior, and a lower investment in their personal autonomy. It appeared that characterizing of waitressing as "women's work" accounted, at least partially, for the highly determinate nature of the work as well as the rigid nature of the authority system.

Gender may also contribute to the greater degree of autonomy experienced by young men working in the automotive shop. While the employees in this particular shop were expected to conform to a specific dress code, "short hair and be clean shaved and wear neat, clean clothes or a uniform," the authority system they experienced was much more relaxed than that of the waitresses. In addition, they experienced a significant degree of personal autonomy. This autonomy was a partial consequence of means of remuneration which was commission-based. Additionally, while the final product was closely inspected by the owner, it appeared that the workers experienced considerable autonomy during the *process* of repairing the cars and although workers were paid individually they worked together as a team:

> *They talk all day long because they help each other out. If one has a problem they can't figure out, the other comes in. There's a lot of communication.*

Further, the owner described continuous training of employees with employer and employee working together in close proximity:

> *My husband specifically watches what's going and helps them. We're very particular with the work that we do here. It's very important for us to know that anything that goes out of the shop is repaired right.*

The automobiles were checked completely before they were returned to their owners, "he (the owner) basically checks every automobile before it goes out. He does that with all of them, no matter how long (the men have worked here)." However, despite this final, and obviously very careful monitoring of the finished product, the actual workplace behavior of the men reflected far greater autonomy than the regulated behavior of the waitresses. The men in the shop even had input as to their hours and their schedules:

> *"..we open at 7:00 a.m. and we want someone here. But if someone needs some time off...they're kind of self-employed. There's a lot of trust on our part and theirs too."*

They took days off:

> *"They are almost self-employed. Like one of our gentlemen, he wanted to take next Monday off. It makes ft hard on us for a day or two, but everybody has to have time off. We stay open until noon on Saturday, so he'll have Saturday, Sunday and Monday off. That's okay. We have never said you can't do it, because everybody has to have time off."*

They use the telephone as they needed:

> *We haven't had any problems with phone calls. If they want to make a personal call, it's okay. We have two separate lines coming into the shop and we've never had any problems with that, or receiving calls.*

The conditions leading to this degree of autonomy appeared to include both the method of remuneration and gender stereotyping of the job.

Interpersonal Relationships

In Borman's case study, she wrote about Rod's work in the coin shop, she described the value of "indeterminate" work and the nature of the personal relationship between Frank and Rod which developed in Frank's owner-operated business. She argued that Rod's work was better work because while his boss, Frank, provided him with strategies for completing his tasks, Rod was allowed to devise the means by which he would solve both the interpersonal and technical tasks associated with his job. The means to solve the problems were not proscribed, therefore Rod's work was indeterminate, and of higher value.

In the current study, autonomy and indeterminate work experiences also appeared to be consequences of the nature of the business and the relationship between owner and employee. Employees frequently had a higher degree of autonomy in workplaces that were owner-operated (as opposed to corporate), and also in workplaces where the owner and employer worked in close physical proximity. This appeared true in the above automotive repair shop where owner and employees worked side-by-side.

Reward System

Related to the issue of workplace autonomy is reward system. Reward system refers to salary, benefits and other remuneration that an entry level employee receives from work. In the current study, employers viewed rewards in three basic ways: (1) the salary and benefits, (2) workplace autonomy, (3) employee training.

Salary and Benefits

An approximate average salary earned at the entry level in the businesses interviewed was $6.75 an hour. The most common response employers gave when asked about wages earned was minimum wage. Time on the job and one's ability to fit into the organization were factors that influence one's ability to earn more

money. However, the additional amount of money to be earned was often not very significant.

> *"Well, obviously, staying on the job and good work performance is definitely going to probably land you a better position here at the store. See what happens, we have six levels at the store here...so each level you go up 25 cents."*

A few of the entry level employees were provided the opportunity to work on a commission basis. The commission was over and above the base salary. However, one must be proficient at the task in order to take advantage of the commission offered and this was generally not something that the entry level employee was capable of take advantage of.

Some of the employers interviewed did not offer a benefits package to employees. For those who did offer benefits the waiting period for benefits ranged from 30 days to one year. Often, only full time employees were eligible for benefits.

Workplace Autonomy as a Benefit

Some employers took the view that work itself, should be the incentive to enter and stay on the job;

> *"Just other than the security of knowing that they have a full-time employment."*
>
> *"Because they want to eat. There aren't many jobs available and we're good to work for."*

Another employer said that a relaxed atmosphere in which to work is an incentive:

> *"...I think happiness on the job, obviously salary is important, but if you have somebody on your case from the time you walk in the door. A person is only going to take it so long. Salary isn't everything."*

Similarly, lack of close monitoring was seen as positive benefit of some workplaces.

*"No, there's really no use of, there's no monitoring. When I'm here, I keep an eye on what she's doing, just to make sure that the ads look the way I want them to, but really, quite a bit, she's on her own. I tell her I need so many ads done and so many things researched, and I'm gone. So she, they pretty much have to take care of themselves and still get done what I need them to get done."*

There appeared to be an interrelationship among social relations (employer/employee relationships), owner- or corporate operated businesses, and the degree of autonomy granted to employees. In the advertising, graphic design and automotive repair shop, such relationships developed with positive outcomes for employee autonomy.

Employee Training

The major investment in the employee was on-the-job training by the employer. The time spent on this varied from almost none to as much as two months training. For the most part, the training provided was specific to the task at hand not directed toward the future. Additional school could be considered an asset, yet employers did not routinely view it as their responsibility to provide such schooling:

*"Well, if a person were to go to night school and take accounting classes, and get into a position to where they could be a full-charge bookkeeper, then there may be an opportunity. You know, right time, right place. There may be an opportunity to move up. But that would require, well, I would not hire them as an accountant and I don't have just plain old bookkeepers."*

In general, employers did not view investment in the employee's education as an investment in the future of their organization.

Working beside the boss. The owner of another business, however, described work opportunities which offered a significant degree of additional training. The employees in this business worked in an office behind the owner's home, and used the kitchen and living areas of her home during the course of the day. The owner explained that the work of her employees, while technical and precise, was not

difficult, but did require training--training she provided. Work activities included graphic design, filing, research, order writing, outside sales, and telephoning. She described training her employees by working beside them:

> *"I sit down with them and show them how to build an ad, and then I sit down with them and show them how to look up something and how to talk to people on the telephone...I'm not into writing (directions and training guidelines); it takes too much time."*

In addition, the owner offered her employees opportunities to develop new work skills:

> *"They learn graphic design here which is something you could pay $2,500 - $3,000 to learn at a school. They learn sales which as always been good to me. We're going to get into video production, so they learn video production. They learn radio production, which is also very valuable in the marketplace."*

The workplace is changing from one with an emphasis on the manufacturing center to one that is service oriented. Lower wages and fewer benefits, particularly in the workplaces studied, are the standard. From the perspective of employers, at least, there are still significant opportunities to develop new skills in a friendly and caring work environment. However, the opportunity for these youths to advance "up the ladder" from within these smaller organizations, is limited.

> "Our society today has moved from a goods-producing economy to a service-producing economy; this change has altered the fundamental rhythm and character of daily work life for all workers and has placed young workers in unusually disadvantageous positions. Work for the typical eighteen-to- twenty-two-year-old service employee in this study required middle-class deportment of the job but paid less than blue-collar work." (Borman, 1991 p. 127)

These theme is continued in the final section of the paper which looks at social interactions in the workplace.

## Social Interaction

Employer responses to questions focusing on social interaction in, or related to the workplace reflected an acknowledgment of the needs and desires of employers to interact with one another:

> *"I want them to be comfortable."*
>
> *"They talk all day long because they help each other out."*

This is tempered, however, with employer needs for productiveness and effectiveness:

> *"They can visit freely when the customers aren't there."*
>
> *"Don't have a problem with it as long as they don't waste all their time doing it."*

The degree to which formal or informal policies "govern" or guide social interactions at the workplace seem to vary with the employers ability to assess employee job performance and organizational productiveness Past experiences of the employer or the workplace were also related to the development of guidelines and policies regarding workplace social interaction.

### Informal Socialization within the Context of the Work Setting

In this study, employer attitude's towards employee workplace socialization ranged from clear prohibition of such behaviors ("I don't allow personal talk out on the floor.") and begrudged lack of control ("We don't really frown on it - they just need to focus on the customer," "As long as they're doing their job they can talk with each other") to relaxed acceptance ("We're a pretty laid back office.. I just don't to see them having a pizza party [during work hours]") and actual nurturing ("We always visit when someone comes in") of informal employee interaction.

Work settings with less than ten employees seemed to be more tolerant of and had fewer regulatory norms or policies limiting workplace socialization than employers with more than ten employees, reinforcing the use of "procedures" when

employers have limited opportunity to assess employee performance or productiveness.

Three employers in the study converted workplace rules to promote the "at work social interaction" of their employees:

> *"We set up a table and share Thanksgiving dinner together in the store because we have to be open."*
>
> *"Once a month we have a potluck during the regular operating hours of the bank.")*

Each of these work settings had a 100% female workforce and one employer acknowledged that her employees

> *"need to work, but it's the relationships that keep them (working) here."*

Opportunities to Develop Work Relationships Outside of the Work Setting

Outside of work events, such as holiday parties and "company" picnics were common place among the employers in the study. Notable exceptions were two workplaces unable to hold such events due to continuous operation of a small retail business (open 364 days a year) and incompatible work schedules (transport company). Company organized (and sometimes sponsored) sport teams were mentioned by five of the businesses as means of fostering out-of-work social interactions among employees. Although competitively-selected teams were not evident in this study, teams organized by the employees themselves met with more success than those generated by employers

> *"A bunch of us get together to play volleyball."*
>
> *"I tried to get a softball team together, but it ended up being just my wife and myself because all of my employees live about 15 miles away."*

Employers with a workforce that consisted entirely of females did not mention participation in sporting events or teams as a means of socializing outside of the workplace.

Opportunities to Socialize with Non-employees

With the exception of retail oriented businesses, where socialization with non-employees is inherent in the nature of their work, participation in community service activities such as "Adopt a block" and company-sponsored charitable activities were cited as the main arenas for social exchange with non-employees. Other forms of social exchange were met with a lack of employee interest or too much interest.

> *"We invite our employees to go to Chamber parties, but they don't."*
>
> *"We use to take our employee to parties with us, but she became too much of a friend and not enough of a worker."*

Most frequently, however, opportunities to socialize were not initiated by the employer.

Workplace Facilities and Amenities

Workplace facilities varied from setting to setting in response to the size and scope of the businesses interviewed. Employers with businesses based in their homes emphasized the sharing of their house, yard and family with employees. Employers with "business specific" work sites tended to have a "break room" or a "locker room" but only very large employers (100-plus employees) had both.

Privacy. Employer attitude's towards employee privacy and use of work place "instruments" such as telephones, for personal use, paralleled but were more restrictive than general employer attitude's related to informal social interaction in the workplace. Home-based businesses were more inclined to allow employees to make personal phone calls;

> *"Sure...as long as it's not all day long"*

while other companies preferred that employees only receive telephone calls while at work, and those calls should be of an "urgent" rather than social nature.

*"If a child says, `I need to talk to Mom' we'll interrupt her."*

*"We page employees for phone calls by their clock number - if I hear their number too often, I'll confront the employee."*

Employee initiation of personal phone calls while at work varied and examples are found which allow a great deal of latitude (some of the employers with less than five employees), total prohibition, and alternative phone use to making of calls of limited duration for personal business that cannot be conducted after the end of the work day or on the employee's days off.

*"It's O.K. as long as they don't sit on it all day."*

*"We frown on it...We raise hell with them if they do."*

*"They can come in before work or use the phone over the lunch hour to make calls if they don't have a telephone at home."*

*"Employees must Use the pay phones in the lobby to make personal phone calls."*

Some of the employers viewed use of the telephone as one of the few "benefits" that they could afford to extend to their employees.

To sum, employers did not uniformly recognize entry-level employee needs for socialization, either on or off the job. Many sponsored annual "ritualized" events such as a summer picnic, holiday parties and sport teams - which may have had a positive impact on employee morale - but not all were executed with employee social interaction as a goal or focus for the activity. Several "small" employers, in the survey, merit special recognition for their awareness and responsiveness to employee needs for socialization, and their efforts yielded a tangible benefit for their workplace - they claimed to be able to retain qualified employees for extended periods of employment with "low" (hourly) wages and few or no benefits. Use of the telephone for personal calls (incoming and outgoing) may be representative of the sensitivity of employers to worker needs.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to query employers concerning workplace issues in a largely rural county in Arizona. Thirty-three employers, representing a range of businesses were interviewed by telephone. The findings provide useful information which support many of the findings reported in Borman's (1991) study of young employees in their first "real" job. One aspect of youth employment that stands out is the low level of technical skill required of these employees. The flip side is that high levels of social and interaction skills are required. While the data is limited, it does indicate some of the challenges faced by young workers in finding jobs which lead to job advancement. For the most part, jobs are dead end and one must make choices concerning living in a rural area or seeking greater opportunity in more urban work settings. Finally, the study provides evidence of how employers, under questioning and probes, think about young workers, training, and the workplace.

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## Appendix A: Employer Interviews

1. What types of entry-level jobs are available in your company or business, goods producing or service sector jobs?

2. What vacancy rating is expected during the next two years due to replacement or growth or those sorts of things?

3. Are there shortages of skilled employees currently?

4. What are the workplace or marketplace demands typically encountered by young workers? Do they need to be neat, on time and those kinds of things?

5. What are their responses to these demands? How do they respond to that generally?

6. What specific skills, attitudes and background experiences do you desire from new employees?

7. What are the minimum skills and/or competencies expected from new employees? What are the minimum level of skills that you would accept?

8. What attitudes toward work are expected from new employees?

9. Do you currently hire women in nontraditional jobs? Are you willing to hire adequately trained women in nontradtional positions? If so, what positions?

10. Do you feel that entrepreneurship training would be beneficial to Navajo County students, that is training specific to the job that they would be taking on that would be provided by JTPA.

11. What business might be developed in Navajo County to spur the economic development in the county? You know, what kinds of things in the future are coming along that might spur the economy up?

12. How can teachers, employers, and young workers themselves become empowered to understand the marketplace of your youth jobs? What kinds of things could we give them that would assist them in understanding more of the big picture?

13. Are there are any workplace issues that are unique to your community, to the type of work performed at your specific workplace?

14. What is the work routine of new employees? Is it the same everyday or does it vary?

15. How difficult is the work to be accomplished? Are potential employees, under-prepared, prepared, or over-prepared?

16. Where does one receive instruction on how to accomplish the job? Is it from written materials or from supervisor or co-workers?

17. Are new employees hired part-time or full-time?

18. What are the salary and benefit packages offered to new employees pay per hour, sick leave, vacation, personal leave, medical, dental?

19. What incentives, if any, are provided to employees for staying on the job beyond the things just mentioned?

20. What potential is there for employees to develop new skills while on the job?

21. What is the certainty that the position now being filled will still be around one year, five years, ten years? Is it very certain, certain or unsure? You know, that the position will be there, like job security.

22. How much money, if any is invested in new employees upon the beginning of hire, I mean, things like training, uniforms, equipment, an estimate on your part.

23. What programs or policies do you have to assist employees that need better skills to be successful on the job? Any training or mentoring kinds of activities offered after initial orientation and training?

24. What opportunities for social interactions, conversation and social talk are available to employees? Is there participation outside of work such as picnics or sports?

25. Is there a lunchroom, lounge, lockers or restroom for the employees to converse, that sort of thing?

26. Are employees permitted to use the phone for personal calls and under what circumstances?

27. To what extent do new employees have autonomy on the job? How closely are they monitored? Any use of technology to monitor their work flow, that sort of thing?

28. Have employees been let go during the past year and for what reasons might they be let go?

29. How many times could a new employee show up ten minutes late without being sanctioned? Before being fired?

Ok, well, that's basically all I have to ask. I appreciate your time and efforts and we'll be getting this information out to you and hopefully it will have an impact on new employees and how we do our job here. Thank you very much, good-bye.

*END OF INTERVIEW*