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## ABSTRACT

Despite Ontario's profusion of training programs, diplomas, and certificates for office workers, they need coherence and transferability in training that makes it possible to keep up with changes in their current work, and they need their work experience and training to be transferable to training for other occupations. There is a growing disjuncture among the new work, training needs of office workers, and kinds of training available. Office work is becoming more complex, and its links with other occupations need to be made more specific. Training is being delivered in shorter, more fragmented pieces that particularly focus on technical training or the so-called "soft" employability skills. Entry-level training is getting shorter, while entry-level requirements for many office support jobs are becoming more complex. Cuts in public funding to college and community-based programs have resulted in fewer seats in public programs. Setting standards--sometimes seen as a panacea or, at least, the requisite starting-point for a coherent training system--would add to the confusion and opacity of training options for individual workers. It would also be an instrument to further privatize training. Making training a more "profitable" enterprise makes it less accessible to workers. Through activism, advocacy, and support of unions and organizations, a truly worker-centered and worker-driven training system could begin to eliminate the current confusion, fragmentation, inequities, and ineffectiveness of training for office workers. (Appendixes include 31 endnotes and 18 references.) (YLB)

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## Snakes and Ladders: Coherence in Training for Office Workers

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by

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## Snakes and Ladders: Coherence in Training for Office Workers

*“It’s so confusing. I might be wasting a lot of my time and going into debt if I take this course. They will give me a diploma, but will it be worth anything?”* (Office worker, Office Workers Career Centre, June 1999)

The current training industry in Ontario displays a profusion of training programs, diplomas and certificates for office workers. They range from short-term on-line software certification offered by software manufacturers to multiple year college programs. Trainers, counselors, researchers, adult educators and office workers themselves are constantly grappling with a key problem: the privatization, proliferation and lack of coherence in the training available to office workers mirrors chaotic changes in the work itself, and makes it very difficult for workers to figure out whether, or how best, to invest in their own future. In this discussion we do not attempt to find some previously hidden coherence in the current training market, or to impose our own order. Rather, we examine the issues that contribute to the lack of coherence and a range of existing institution-based approaches which attempt to address it. In particular we will examine the limitations to the proposal that the development of training and occupational standards could fix the problem.

This discussion is based in the experience of a group of workers, community-based advocates, trainers, and union representatives who have been involved in a series of initiatives to support office workers in Toronto.<sup>1</sup> Over this last decade our efforts have been informed by several observations. The first, made in the early 1990s, was that federal and provincial adjustment and training programs have not served this large group of workers, and that without changes in policy and approach, a quarter of the women in the labour force would continue to be systematically excluded from these resources.<sup>2</sup> The second was that most office workers in the private sector do not have strong unions or associations, and that even in the unionized public sector many struggle for recognition within their broad bargaining units.<sup>3</sup> Consequently most office workers do not have the means to influence the changes taking place in their work, or to advocate for the training or labour adjustment programs that will assist them as the occupation changes or if they are displaced. The third observation, made in the mid-1990s, was that office work itself was in the midst of not simply technological change but something more like an industrial revolution.<sup>4</sup> Even experienced workers had a hard time staying on top of the changes and this was happening as workplace and public training resources were decreasing. The fourth was that, in Toronto at least, office workers were the occupational group that has experienced the largest and the most permanent job loss through the decade, and that the resulting labour market has become highly competitive.<sup>5</sup>

In 1994 and 1995 the Metropolitan Toronto Clerical Workers Labour Adjustment Committee spent eighteen months researching the profound changes that were taking place in office work and examining the training resources available for workers who were entering and those who were already in the occupation. The Committee’s critique of

available training was that a central problem for workers was not in program content but in lack of transferability from one program to another.

“... accreditation for clerical training is not transferable: it is not developmental, does not accumulate, and does not assist individuals in progressing either through clerical occupations or into other occupational areas”. (de Wolff, 1995)

As a result of the Committee’s lobbying efforts, the Clerical Workers Centre was funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and opened in 1997.<sup>6</sup> The Centre offers counseling and referral services for laid-off office workers as well as workshops and a self-directed computer lab. While it has not conducted any job training, the Centre’s advisory group did establish a network of office work trainers as a direct response to the observation about non-transferable training. Since 1999 the Centre has been called the Office Workers Career Centre.

The experience of attempting to support the development of a more coherent training system has prompted our title, “Snakes and Ladders”. The experience has been much like the classic board game: we see the opportunity to move in one direction, and find it blocked for office workers; more office workers report difficulties with the training system, our determination to try to sort it out is re-kindled and we investigate another possibility and find that it opens up more problems than it solves. By describing the range of issues that we have encountered in the process, we hope to provide some cautions about the “snakes” we have encountered, and identify some “ladders” which could be included or strengthened in future strategies adopted by organizations of office workers and their advocates.

### **Changing Office Work : Why Non-transferable, Fragmented Training Is A Current Problem For Office Workers**

In the last decade and a half office workers have experienced the equivalent of an industrial revolution in their work. This process has been largely undescribed and uncommented on in workplace, union or training forums, and is remarkably invisible, much like the work itself. Office work processes, the tools office workers use, who they work with, where they work, when they work – all have changed and continue to change at a remarkable rate. Most office workers’ jobs have intensified, requiring the processing of more information in shorter periods of time. Workers need to be familiar with and competent in a wider range of tasks, office hardware and applications; they have increased customer service responsibilities and require a broader knowledge of the sector in which they are employed.

There have been several moments or stages in what many call the information revolution where office workers have experienced the most dramatic changes. The first was the introduction of main frame computers in large offices which ran word processing and

accounting programs in the 1970s. The second was in the mid-1980s when personal computers were introduced to most offices. During this phase, office workers had to learn about computers and software, but the equipment was not widely used for more than more complex text production. The third, and the most significant in changing work processes, was the introduction of reliable, relatively inexpensive in-house PC networking that coincided with the recession of the early 1990s. The capacity to network internal accounts, databases, and text transformed most office work processes and precipitated the first significant job loss that the occupation has experienced.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth moment or stage is the current explosive growth of e-business. The use of the Internet for a wide range of business transactions is actually a further phase in the reconstruction of business administration; this makes externally networked administrative work processes available to all sizes of workplaces, in all industrial sectors. For office workers, e-business development almost certainly means further job loss over the coming decade, and that the remaining workers will be expected to:

- work at an increasingly complex level, with a wider range of software,
- analyze data for trends and anomalies, and respond to more complex communications including high volumes of email
- update information on web sites, and write promotional descriptions of inventories and services.
- access a wider range of data bases, and use the Internet to source information and supplies
- coordinate the data entry and maintenance of in-house systems with a wider variety of out-sourced databases and services.

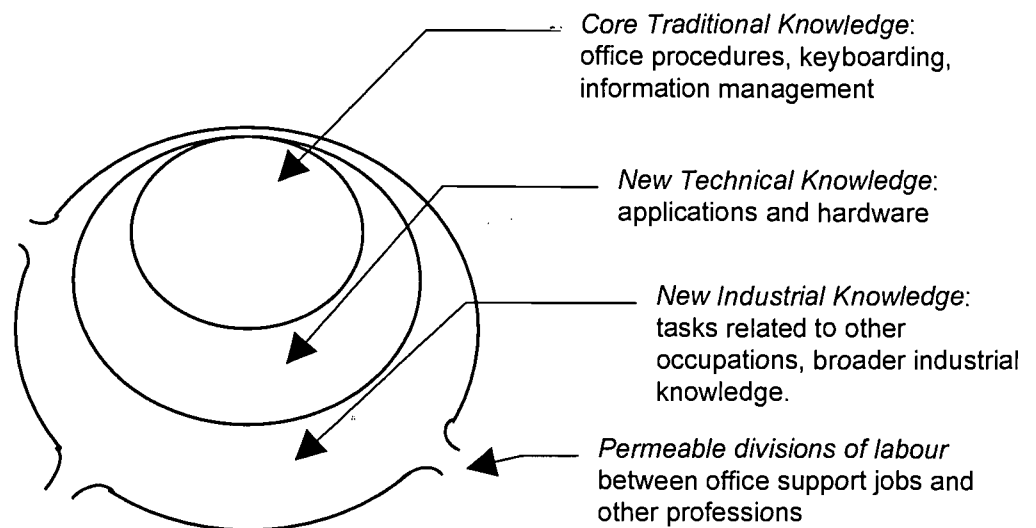
Further, because the Internet makes it possible to deliver from a distance a wide range of administrative support systems and services, a growing number of workers are displaced from traditional workplaces and employment relationships and are employed on individual contracts – as distance workers or by administrative and financial services contractors. In these new employment relationships they provide services for a variety of client companies that constantly change, rather than a single in-house group.<sup>8</sup>

One of the on-going effects of the restructuring is the increasing permeability of more traditional divisions of labour between office workers and other professionals and managers. Managers and professionals are doing more text production and communication than in the 1970s. The other side of this picture is the elimination of many office support jobs, combined with the computer encoding of information that is basic to a range of other occupations. This has meant that support workers are increasingly doing components of what used to be other people's work. In the course of our research in the past five years we have come across receptionists who handle entry health care counseling, receptionists who vet manuscripts for publishers, and payroll clerks who maintain the local area network. Accounting clerks regularly handle smaller workplace accounts up to the point of audit, administrative support workers handle preliminary design tasks using computer assisted design applications, office support

workers handle basic technical support problems, and receptionists are maintaining web sites.

*Figure 1* (below) captures the kinds of knowledge that office workers need in their current jobs. We use the term “knowledge” here very deliberately. Office work is often described as “low skilled” and is regularly reduced to a set of measurable, practical tasks. Skill based descriptions rarely capture how office workers provide the “glue” that holds most offices together, and are not designed to look for the complexity or breadth of the knowledge that is required. Our studies suggest that the traditional core knowledge of office procedures and information management continues to be the foundation of most current jobs. The tools needed to carry out most tasks are changing constantly; this requires continual technical learning of software applications and some knowledge of how to maintain or service the hardware. The range of knowledge about clients, types of transactions, organizational information, etc. that most jobs now require has expanded. The tasks that many support workers are now responsible for used to be the domain of other occupations or professions. Computer assisted design, for instance, makes it possible for support workers to do routine technical tasks. And, the downsizing of the last decade has created many situations where jobs are merged: we have, for example, encountered receptionists who are responsible for entry-level counseling in education and social service settings, pay roll clerks who are responsible for maintaining the local area network, and general office clerks who maintain a library.

**Figure 1: Kinds of Knowledge Required in New Office Work**



The 'invisibility' of the occupation means that most employers and many trainers do not easily recognize the changes in the knowledge and skills required to be a contemporary office worker, particularly in the knowledge illustrated by the outer ring of *Figure 1*. Consequently, the implications of the intensification of the work and its permeability into other occupations are double-edged. On the one hand, most office workers find that they are handling more complex responsibilities and that they are not recognized for it, either in their pay or in the kind of respect that they receive at work. On the other, the new responsibilities can open up new interests and for some, a way out of an occupation that is shrinking.

We are beginning to see office workers forging new career paths, which are important because they point to directions which may assist the large numbers of workers who have been, and are likely to continue to be displaced from the occupation. Traditionally office support work has had a certain internal mobility: payroll clerks have become human resource assistants, and typists have become secretaries and administrative assistants. Office support work has also provided a certain experience which, often combined with additional training, has provided mobility into more specialized or more senior jobs: general office clerks become office managers, accounting clerks become accountants, customer service clerks become supervisors and purchasing clerks become buyers. Many of the new paths are related to specializations which can branch out from the basic professional knowledge of business applications most office workers now have. These include paths where individuals move from local area network (LAN) support, to LAN administration, to network engineer. Or, from providing associates with software applications support and trouble shooting, to help desk, to computer instructor, to application solutions provider. Or, from administrative assistant responsible for in-house publications to specialized desktop publishing, to multimedia design, to web mastery. Also, more support workers are performing more tasks related to those occupations for which they provide support in the course of their work, and are more likely to pursue these as career interests than ever before.

These changes in the work indicate a need for particular kinds of entry-level training and upgrading for employed workers which is grounded in the needs of workers to stay on top of the changes in their occupation. The observations present several challenges for trainers. The first is to make it possible for workers to assess whether they need training or not: many displaced workers are highly trained, although they may not have the credentials to prove it to a new employer. In an increasingly competitive labour market, credentials rather than experience may be what distinguishes one worker from another. The second is to make it possible for large numbers of workers to find their way into other occupations. Trainers need to be more prepared to use extensive prior learning assessment and recognition to assist workers as they navigate current labour market. The third challenge is to design coherent training for entry into and upgrading in occupations where the tools are changing dramatically and where the responsibilities are expanding into areas traditionally understood to be related to other occupations. The fourth is to design training which reflects the mobility of traditional occupational tasks in the workplace, and which can provide bridges out of this shrinking occupation into an

expanding group of related occupations – for those workers who are interested in doing so. That is, workers have a need for coherence and transferability in training that makes it possible to keep up with changes in their current work, and they need their work experience and training to be transferable to training for other occupations.

### **Fragmentation and Privatization**

There is a growing disjuncture between the new work, the training needs of office workers, and the kind of training that is available. The occupation is becoming more complex and its links with other occupations need to be made more specific. The available training, on the other hand, is being delivered in shorter, more fragmented pieces which particularly focus on technical training (the middle circle in *Figure 1*) or on the so called “soft” employability skills like communication and dressing for success. Entry-level training is getting shorter, while the entry-level requirements for many office support jobs are becoming more complex.

Office workers learn about their work in many different ways: they can learn relevant skills in public and secondary school, they are continually learning from each other on the job and on their own at home; sometimes they are trained on the job; and they take a range of public or privately provided courses or programs, usually at their own expense.<sup>9</sup> But the informal learning and the certificates rarely accumulate or contribute in any predictable way to access to further training or employment. This issue – “lack of transferability” – is actually a bundle of issues, and is the result of a particular history.

For much of the century the training office workers needed and received was relatively stable, as were the work and its related career paths. That is, the training was predictable and similar in both public and private institutions. Many students received keyboard training in secondary school. Public colleges, technical institutes and a small number of private business schools provided up to two years of post secondary training in diploma programs. The public colleges provided the most consistently recognized diploma, which set a commonly recognized standard in training. In both the public and private institutions, typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, office procedures and business English courses did not change often. Some colleges offered refresher diplomas for people returning to the workforce, which would include more complex courses like report writing. In the bigger institutions, courses could be taken separately and credits could be applied over time to a diploma. Even though they were similar, the programs were treated as proprietary to each institution, which made it difficult for students to transfer credits between programs.

The broad transformation of office work processes that began in the seventies not only revolutionized the work – it also contributed to the fragmentation of the provision of training. In the early 1980s employers actually spent significant resources re-training their existing office support staff to use the new office technologies.<sup>10</sup> This short burst of employer demand for on-the-job training has been the model for much of the development of short, modularized, technical skills based courses which dominate the



current market. As a result, on-the-job training has become synonymous with the technical training needed to use the constantly changing software. Subsequently, many software producers recognized that product training was a complementary revenue generator, and have developed and marketed their own programs and certificates, and franchised instructors and training institutions to deliver them. The established public and private programs that provide the longer job readiness programs (to be distinguished from on-the-job) have struggled to keep up with what the software industry proclaims is state of the art training: they have had to upgrade their training equipment, develop distance learning capacities, shorten and modularize their courses, and become certified deliverers of manufacturer's certificates. One of the overall effects is that training for office workers has fractured into a mosaic of mostly technical skills based courses and programs.

Changes in public policy and programming have also facilitated the fragmentation of training availability. In the last decade public funding to college and community-based programs has been drastically cut. This has resulted in a decrease in the numbers of seats in public programs, and at the same time a proliferation of shorter courses. In 1996, the federal government altered regulations and requirements for benefits and training under the Employment Insurance (EI) program, and began the process of transferring the responsibility for administering labour market development and training programs to the provinces. The associated federal legislation signaled a significant policy change. At the same time as it was getting out of the business of training, the federal government set up mechanisms which support the development of a private training market. Where EI training funds had been used to purchase block seats for eligible trainees, in 1997 the program began to transfer training funds to individuals in vouchers and loans.

The Ontario provincial government has not picked up the transferred responsibility, a position which complements its other actions regarding training which include a 20% cut to colleges, the reduction of access to student loans, and the elimination of support for workplace literacy programs. These federal and provincial actions have not been articulated in one coherent training policy, and their effect can be seen in the programs that are currently available in Toronto. In 1995 there were 27 community-based programs in the city which delivered clerical related vocational training.<sup>11</sup> In 2000 there are none.<sup>12</sup> Many of the same agencies exist, but because of the elimination of federal support for training, all are focused on providing employment and career guidance rather than vocational training.

College programs have had to restructure in response to a 20% cut to their contribution from the provincial government in 1996 and the federal EI shift from purchasing block seats to individual vouchers in 1997. In Toronto the colleges went through a joint consolidation process to avoid duplication which resulted in the elimination of one of the four office administration programs. Two of the remaining programs have significantly cut back on their enrolment and shortened their diplomas. All four colleges have developed shorter certificates, multiple entry points when students can start programs, and single courses which are offered through their continuing education programs. These shorter units have developed in part in response to the demand of students. But everyone

involved acknowledges that the most significant reshaping has been in response to the change in federal EI which offers workers/students support for only 26 weeks of training, and which requires that they get into a program as quickly as possible after their claim is approved.

In the private sector there has been a proliferation of training institutions which offer diploma and shorter certificate programs related to office work. A 1999 list indicated that there were at least 43 private institutions offering office administration and computer training in the city, compared with 6 public institutions.<sup>13</sup> The fee structure, course length and multiple entry points of private institutes is tightly matched to EI provisions, and has changed accordingly over the decade. They have also been affected by the provincial government's decision to stop providing student loan assistance to welfare recipients in 1995. Immediately after this decision, enrolment dropped significantly in a number of office administration programs. In addition, the province has also begun to hold both public and private training institutions responsible for student loan defaults. This policy has caused a small number of private institutions to close and many others to become much more cautious about offering the more coherent, longer programs because their higher fees are a greater risk.

Both private and public trainers are struggling with figuring out how to stay relevant to the occupation and remain economically viable. In interviews, instructors in four diploma courses (public & private) illustrated the challenges by describing how their basic diploma program used to provide enough time for students to start from no experience with a keyboard to typing 60 words per minute with few errors. Now students in some programs need to demonstrate 50 words per minute to get their diploma, and even this is apparently very hard to accomplish in the shorter time period. They observed that students who did not have strong English skills no longer had a chance of getting through the program because it was so abbreviated. They also said that they had very little time to teach the kind of broader knowledge of business and the world that office workers increasingly need: they didn't know how or when their students will learn basic geography, general current events, or English grammar.

As the student who is quoted at the beginning the article says, the resulting array of training is confusing. The confusion cannot somehow be fixed solely by encouraging students to be more informed consumers of training. The confusion is in the lack of coherence in the courses that are offered, in the speed with which the occupation itself is changing, its relative lack of importance in the view of employers, and the reduction of time and space – even in the multi-year diploma programs for students and instructors – to develop an overview of these changes and adequate responses to them.

## **So Why Don't We Develop Training Standards?**

The people involved in the Office Workers Career Centre have outlined this lack of fit between training and the new work, and the need for more coherence and transferability in training in a number of different ways, and in a range of forums with trainers, workers, employment counselors, employers, government and unions. When the Centre was established in 1997 the steering group set out to form an Office Work Training Network to discuss these and other issues, and to begin to establish common interests and initiatives related to transferability and coherence.

This was not a successful initiative. Most trainers were under tremendous strain in this period. They were having to compete with each other in new ways, and had very few extra resources to invest in figuring out whether they were interested in a new form of collaboration. Initially the Centre planned to make referrals to those programs that were associated with the Network and with the development of the best training practices outlined in the 1995 Report, but this possibility was removed when HRDC appointed two training brokers for all EI training funds distributed in the city. It left the Centre with very little room to negotiate common interests between its clients and local trainers.

What was striking, however, was that there was a consistent interest in a discussion of developing training content standards. Trainers, workers, union representatives, employers, HRDC representatives and employment counselors have all said at different times that training standards are the obvious solution to the problem as we stated it.

On the face of it, the development of training standards appears to have the potential to solve a number of problems. In order to produce standards, some central body would have to analyze the complexity of both training and the occupation to identify different levels of expertise. This exercise would presumably map out the occupation and sketch in possible future directions. Workers and union representatives have said that if it was done thoroughly, the extent of both the technical and the non-technical knowledge and skills that are needed in the occupation would become more visible. Students and workers have said that it would be easier to assess and describe their own level of expertise if there were standards. They feel that it might make it easier to figure out which training program to enroll in, and easier to describe their level of expertise to current or new employers. They think that standards could make "shopping" for courses easier, that there would be fewer differences across programs, or that the differences and how they applied to a possible career path would be more obvious. Employers echoed this, saying that they do not know what the current array of diplomas and certificates actually mean, and that they don't know what to expect from graduates of programs that they don't have some personal experience with. Counselors have observed that standards that were recognized by both trainers and employers would make it far simpler to counsel people about their career plans. And trainers have expressed a certain interest, anticipating advantages such as students getting into the right courses, and a possible reduction in the amount of time spent keeping up with changes in the occupation.

Because of the consistency of the interest in standards, we reviewed existing standards related to the occupation, and conducted interviews which both updated the Centre's information about existing training programs and investigated trainers' interests in a more coherent training system. Our observations about the business of creating standards have tended to problematize the apparently obvious solution. Our caution focuses primarily on the difference in the interests of all parties involved in the establishment of training standards – workers, trainers, employers, government, office equipment and software manufacturers – and the fact that these interests are at times conflicting. The creation and maintenance of standards are often sites of intense negotiation and struggle, and the results tend to reflect the interests of the party(ies) who can collectively bring the most effective resources to that struggle.

### **What standards exist?**

“The value of every diploma is different. It depends on the reputation of the school and how well it is accepted by employers, not on whether it is from a college, private vocational program or a university” (Interview, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities staff, 11/2000).

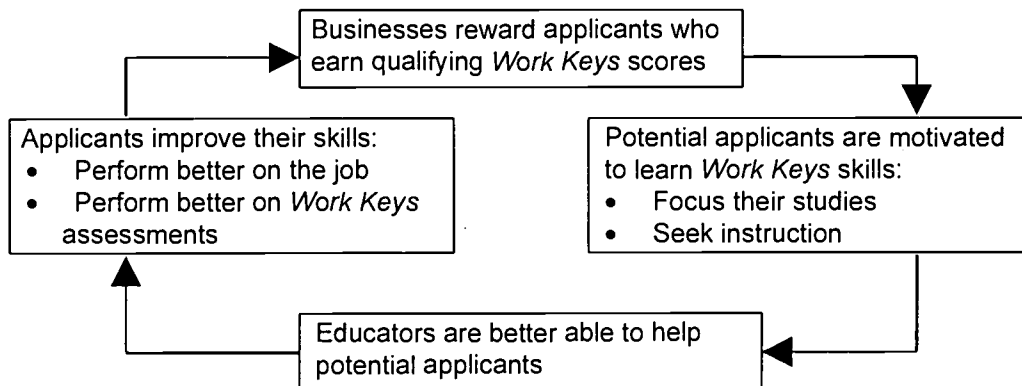
As we looked for existing standards we discovered that, rather than there being an absence of standards, there are many. Private training programs, government funded programs, large employers with training programs and some professional associations all have established training standards. It is, however, just about as difficult to make “sense” of the profusion of standards as it is to find coherence among the profusion of training programs. In fact, in the new environment of competition among trainers, standards are being used as a promotional tool – a way of setting programs apart from each other rather than a tool which easily establishes commonalities and coherence.

First, we should briefly describe two different kinds of training standards: performance standards and content standards. Performance standards are slightly different from content standards: they describe how well learners should know or be able to do something. Examples include the accepted number of error free keyboard words per minute or grades needed to pass academic portions of the curriculum. Content standards in vocational programs generally detail a course and/or program by the academic, technical and employability content that is expected to be taught. Academic standards usually refer to subjects taught in schools and universities; technical standards relate to job specific knowledge and skills; and employability standards relate to thinking, problem solving, communication, interpersonal skills, responsibility and integrity.<sup>14</sup>

## How to create your own standards

A small industry has evolved around the production of standards designed to assist workplaces, training providers and associations. A number of tools are available to develop 'local' standards that have an impact on a particular program or workplace, rather than on the entire occupation. *Work Keys* is an example of this kind of tool: it is notable because it has been promoted by the Association of Community Colleges of Canada. This system makes it possible for employers and trainers to measure skill levels, to develop detailed job profiles and to assess individual trainee/employee performance, the potential of job applicants, and trainee/employee development. Each of these measures is based on a common set of observations about the measurable skills related to a job or occupation. The system promotes itself as being able to "help" by designing a system which tightly integrates the needs of business with those of trainees and trainers, as illustrated in *Figure 2*.

**Figure 2: How *Work Keys* Helps<sup>15</sup>**



The *Work Keys* process is constructed around the conceptual connection between the descriptions and measures needed to establish a set of skill standards and those required to create workplace job descriptions and performance appraisals, and it facilitates a practical interchangeability between each.

### *Employer standards*

Some large employers have developed in-house training programs which include courses for their office workers. They tend to be constructed around the management of service and/or product quality, which in turn defines the content standards of training and employee performance standards.<sup>16</sup> The standards are usually specific to each workplace's job descriptions and expectations, and are consequently different from workplace to workplace. At least two of the major Canadian banks have extensive, distance delivered curricula. One of these in particular illustrates the concerns many workers have about employers' use of training standards. This particular bank's training modules are

available on-line at every branch and bank work place.<sup>17</sup> Employees are expected to log on during their work day, which is not easily accomplished in pressured workplaces, and to work through the units at their own pace. Employees are assured that their supervisors do not see their responses to questions, but they are also told that supervisors will electronically monitor how often they log on and how far they have progressed through each course. The system will not allow individuals to progress from one module to the next unless they have demonstrated that they can meet a set of performance standards at the end of each module. An assessment of how far and how quickly workers have progressed through the training is included in employees' individual performance appraisals. Performance standards are the central mechanism in this system which make it possible for the employer to turn training standards into criteria against which individual job performance is measured. Bank workers do not have any form of collective representation, let alone a union, from which to challenge these employer practices.

### *Software manufacturers' standards*

There are a plethora of certificates and standards related to office software that are provided by software manufacturers themselves. The most relevant of these to office workers is the Microsoft Office User Specialist certificate (MOUS). In this case the manufacturer uses a set of standards as the basis for examinations of different levels of expertise, publishes study and self-examination tools and selects testing centers, authorized instructors and course outlines.<sup>18</sup> Other manufacturers certify users and trainers in a similar manner, including Novell (Local Area Network Administrator and Certified Internet Professional), IBM, Oracle, Lotus and many others.

### *Existing government standards*

The Ontario government has developed a detailed set of content standards for the publicly funded college office administration diploma programs. It is an example of a process which is based in the interests of the government and employers. These standards were reviewed and updated in early 2000 following a survey of faculty in each program, selected business representatives and a focus group discussion. They make it possible for the government to hold colleges accountable for the delivery of a certain service and "product" – that being students who have reviewed a body of knowledge and who are skilled in particular ways. While the ministry has little capacity actually to visit and monitor programs, the potential for sanctions motivates faculties to spend time and energy ensuring that their program can be articulated to the standard.

The standards setting process is actually the "soft cop" to the harsher ministry requirement that a high proportion of graduates are placed in jobs. This latter requirement has been even more strongly formalized in Ontario since the fall of 1998, when the *Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Project* for colleges was launched. The KPIs are a "performance-based funding initiative," in which survey data in five areas (graduate employment; graduate satisfaction; employer satisfaction; student satisfaction and graduation rate) are compiled and ranked for all twenty six Ontario colleges. When fully

implemented, up to 10% of the Ministry's grants to each college will be tied to KPI performance; this process began with the 2000-2001 budget year. The implementation of this system has been enormously controversial within colleges. Faculty have objected to the exclusion of their input. Some have argued for a much broader system of evaluation that includes, for example, issues of the colleges' responsiveness to community needs and their performance in access and equity measures. The implementation of the funding incentives, some have argued, effectively preserves the disadvantage of the colleges that score at the lower end of the indicators, giving them even fewer resources with which to address performance problems. And finally, while providing students with an opportunity to give feedback on the quality of the learning experience, the KPI project is another example of one that privileges employers' needs to "ensure an even more job-ready graduate from the Ontario college system."<sup>19</sup>

The discussions that occurred during these most recent revisions to the content of the colleges' office administration diploma programs provide a glimpse of how the standards setting process itself was negotiating between the interests of employers and those of educators in the colleges. The process assumed that the interests of students were essentially the same as those of employers: students were only marginally involved in the process. The focus group easily established a consensus that the kinds of knowledge and skills that entry-level office workers need is increasing. On examining the consensus from the perspective of what can take place in a year-long, multiple entry point, first level program, however, the educators indicated that they were very concerned about being able to teach all of what was needed.

The Ministry was not prepared to take a position that suggested that colleges could not deliver what employers wanted; nor was it prepared, however, to intervene in the funding tensions which have forced colleges to shorten programs. It placed faculty in a position where they had at least to appear to do what many were increasingly feeling was "the impossible".

"Office workers have to know something about how business and government work. Our students don't know how to read newspapers, don't know the geography of this country let alone that of the globe, don't know the names or positions of politicians. We need more than a year to prepare them to be anything like 'information workers in the global economy'." (College program coordinator, interview, February/2000).

"Most of our students are recent immigrants. They have to have a certain level of fluency in English to enter the program, but for many of them this is the first learning other than ESL that they have done in English, and they are still struggling with the language. They are fine learning office software, but keyboard skills involve language skills, and most take the full program to work up their speed and accuracy." (College instructor, interview. January/2000)

“We are developing a short component on the Internet, but we can’t go into it in much depth. They just barely get through the current curriculum. Anyone wanting to do much with the Internet needs to go into the Business program.: (College program director, interview, November/1999).

Their comments suggest that office work should no longer be treated as an entry-level occupation that can be learned in a short period of time.

The Ontario government also licenses private vocational programs, but it sets no common content standards for private trainers. To be licensed, an institution must show that it is a responsible business, that it is properly governed, provides an adequate facility, and has taken care of safety and liability issues.<sup>20</sup> Each institution must also show that it has a course of studies which will prepare students for a vocation. An adult training design specialist then reviews this program. Perhaps most importantly, programs must find employers who will state that the program will produce the kind of workers that they will hire. Each private trainer develops its own set of standards.

The federal government has established a different type of standard which specifies entry-level skills for office workers, among a wide range of other occupations. The Essential Skills Profile (ESP) developed by Human Resources Development Canada is intended to capture entry-level requirements for literacy, numeracy, computer literacy, oral communication, thinking skills, working with others and the necessity for on-going learning. Although it has retained some responsibility for labour market development, the federal government has, however, devolved its jurisdiction over training and education to most provinces. Consequently, the ESP is designed as a *guide* for curriculum developers, trainers, career counselors, employers, parents, and students. It is noteworthy that the picture that this standard paints of entry-level office jobs is of work that is significantly less demanding than either that reported in all the research done in conjunction with the Office Workers Career Centre, or those described in the levels developed in the Ontario Ministry’s 2000 review.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, a broader use of the ESP for office administrative skills would be a source of serious concern. The federal government, however, has no jurisdiction to use the ESP as an accountability measure with trainers: it was not being used by any of the programs in the Center’s Training Network, and does not appear to be well known by employers.

### *Unions*

To the best of our knowledge, unions representing office workers in this region have not developed strategies to use training standards and certification to strengthen their members’ ability to either capture jobs, or to improve their bargaining position with employers. The British Columbia Government Employees Union has developed a proposal that would make Clerical/Administrative Support Work an apprenticeable trade. This strategy recognizes the extent to which office workers learn on the job, and would ensure that those members who are involved would receive consistent training over a



number of years. Some unions in other sectors and occupations – those with a more defined group of employers, or with more organized bargaining power – have been able to work with technological change and displacement by insisting on relevant training. Labourers, electrical workers and auto workers unions have, for example, been able to provide their members with some security through training. For instance, because the labourers union in Pennsylvania state is the only certified trainer for asbestos removal, its members are the only workers qualified to handle this work.<sup>22</sup>

### *Professional associations*

A small number of office related professional associations have established credentials for their own membership by establishing standards for the training that they should receive, and certifying specific training providers to issue a certificate. This is a “guild” strategy which is built on the assumption that certification can provide members with an advantage in their negotiations with employers. This strategy is successful when the association has: i) control over all the relevant training; or, ii) all workers in the occupation are members. The goal of this strategy is to establish a legitimate claim that only credentialed association members have the required background to do the job adequately. In the field of office work, the International Association of Administration Professionals<sup>23</sup> and the Payroll Association both detail several levels of achievement, outline courses which need to be taken in order to achieve each level, and identify approved course providers. Neither association, however, has a large membership in Ontario and their credentials are not widely recognized by employers, workers or trainers.

### **Concerns about standards**

A set of significant concerns arises from this review of existing standards. First, it appears that standards setting processes commonly equate the interests of students/employees with those of employers. Other researchers have described this effect:

“...skills development is being transformed from the chance for individuals to gain bargaining power in the labour market, into an opportunity for employers to gain workers whose knowledge and skill is already tightly harnessed to the interests of business.”<sup>24</sup>

Among the many concerns about the differences between employers’ and employees’ interests, one that we want to highlight, is that significant numbers of office workers are being displaced from the occupation and need to move beyond the occupation and the requirements of their current employers. Another is that employers tend to pay relatively little attention to any of the working conditions for office workers, and that it is generally not in their interest to identify the increased responsibilities and knowledge required to do the redesigned work.<sup>25</sup>

The second, related, point is that there is a danger that tools like *Work Keys* are most likely to be used to measure the technical tasks noted in *Figure 1*, and that they are less likely to be used to describe the increased knowledge required to handle the new work. Third, the difficulty of preparing workers for the current workplace suggests that trainers, employers and workers all need to reconsider the assumption that office work is an entry-level occupation that can be supported by short term and fragmented training. Fourth, the content of skills or competency standards is not significantly different from that of detailed job descriptions and workplace performance criteria, and can be easily translated for these other purposes. Without vigilance on the part of employee advocates, standards to which students/workers can be expected to perform in the workplace can easily be used in employee performance assessments. And finally, those employee associations which do use training and certification standards to demonstrate the employability of their members are not currently strong enough to influence the training or the employment market to any significant extent.

### **The Problem of the Dominant Standard**

The previous section's examination of existing standards and their limitations makes it clearer that the impulse to establish standards which would enable workers to sort their way through the maze of available training is really an impulse to create a dominant standard – a meta-standard which can articulate existing standards and programs to each other. However, a review of experience elsewhere suggests that in our current political climate which is encouraging the formation of the training industry, the development of meta-standards is most likely to focus on the development of a mechanism to articulate privately provided training to a publicly sanctioned credential. It could address the broad concerns about the lack of an overview and coherence to the system, but it would not necessarily address the concerns that emerged in our review of more local standards – those that pertain to the ability of workers to articulate their own interests in the form and content of training.

#### *The existing dominant standard*

The current system actually does have one dominant performance standard which operates in both the public and private training systems – the *employability standard*. Programs must demonstrate that their graduates are employable, that is, as indicated by their employment status after graduation. Publicly funded programs are required to demonstrate that a certain proportion of graduates find employment in a related job after graduation. Regardless of other more detailed program standards, this is the meta-standard on which continuing funding to colleges is based. Unlike the Ontario colleges, private programs are not required to publicize what kind of employment their graduates have found, or whether the jobs are related to the program. Consequently, this measure is not one that is particularly useful for students who are attempting to understanding a program's particular place in the training mosaic, or who want a particular kind of job, or who want training that will open up other occupational or education opportunities.

### *Industry-wide standards*

While the employability standard is pervasive and is in many ways a defining mechanism of the market driven training system, efforts do exist to develop more effective and directed training systems. Many governments recognize that a common set of standards, or a meta-standard, is not likely to arise from a strictly market driven system, and that they are not likely achievable without complex negotiations. In Canada the federal government has supported the formation of over thirty industry specific sector councils whose mandate is to anticipate and develop the human resources for each industry. Each council has a structure which involves representatives of employers and employees. Many of these councils have established industry-wide standards and certification programs. They operate to some extent like employee associations in that they outline a course of study and levels of achievement, identify and approve training providers and certify individuals.

The most immediate difficulty encountered by office workers with this system is that it is industry-specific, and not particularly adaptable to an occupation that crosses all sectors and may not necessarily be defined on the basis of any one industry. The industry that is most like a sectoral employer for office workers is the finance and insurance sector. Yet the traditional reluctance on the part of banks and insurance companies to work with government, and their unwillingness to work in a joint structure with employees have made the industry-specific route for office workers tenuous and unpromising.<sup>26</sup> There has been little enthusiasm for a cross sector, occupation-based council either from employers or from government.<sup>27</sup>

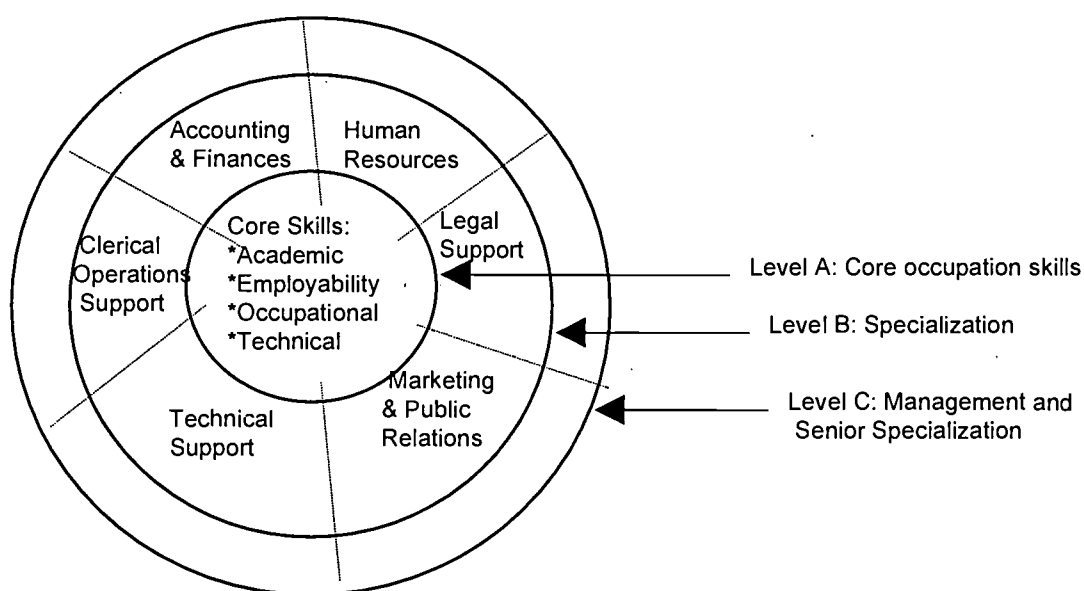
### *Country-wide occupational standards*

The Canadian government has not attempted to produce occupational standards for administrative occupations, but the United States has taken up this initiative. The federal National Skills Standards Board (NSSB) began the process of developing voluntary standards for occupations in business and administration services in 1998.<sup>28</sup> The stated rationale for the initiative is that federal standards will increase business efficiency and international competitiveness by assisting employers to find employees from across the country who will best match their needs. The intention is that a wide range of public and private training providers will be able to deliver programs which correspond to the standard. The standards project has conducted a feasibility study that involved representatives from unions and associations, employers, the temporary service industry, software manufacturers and trainers.

The report of the feasibility study maps out an overview of training for office workers, and provides a comprehensive picture of administrative support occupations which is represented here in *Figure 3* (next page). It proposes that the NSSB standards should be organized in modules which would represent training content or performance standards for each of the segments of the circle. It recognized that the content and standards for

each of these segments might be different in different industrial sectors: that the kinds of skills required by human resource assistants might, for instance, be different in real estate than in steel manufacturing. The national standard could include fifteen or twenty industry specific circles similar to *Figure 3*, each with its own mix of common and industry specific standards. The proposal also recognized that individuals needed to be able to demonstrate different levels of expertise and that they would not necessarily work or train in one area of expertise or industrial sector. It proposed that individuals could demonstrate levels of expertise by progressing in a relatively straight line through course modules out from the middle of the circle, or by a more random accumulation of courses in different areas.

**Figure 3: NSSB Overview of General Business Administration Training (Non Industry Specific)**



Over the past decade Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand have both developed National Qualification Frameworks which are similar in scope and intent to the NSSB project. They are characterized by the “institutionalization of modularization” which makes it possible for federal governments to “steer” a system which is largely composed of private trainers, and which has the apparent flexibility to modify its content readily according to the needs of employers.<sup>29</sup> The result is a system of training modules which narrows the learning project to one that now focuses much more closely on employer-defined skills. Further, the completed projects in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand have been lengthy and complex, and have diverted the training expertise and energy of unions for a number of years. While the exercise of developing an overview, or framework like the one proposed to the NSSB, satisfies some of the frustration with the absence of an overview in training by providing a whole picture, its translation into a set of accepted

standards has been enormously labour intensive and problematic from the perspective of workers.

The NSSB project is currently stalled because it has encountered a difficulty similar to our sector council approach – there is not an established group of employers who understand administrative workers to be their core workforce and the project has not found enough employers to become involved. In both the U.S. and Canada there are a growing number of businesses which can be classified as “business administration” or “services to business”, but it is a relatively new and rapidly changing industrial sector which does not necessarily identify itself as such.

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) representatives participated in the NSSB feasibility project. Most have become involved in developing the Federation’s position on the development of NSSB standards in a wide range of occupations. This working group has taken the position that it will continue to participate in the NSSB process because there are potential positive gains for US workers, particularly those in occupations or sectors where there are not union-controlled education programs, or which do not meet the criteria for apprenticeable occupations. But they have also registered some very strong concerns. The first of these is a concern that the NSSB process not undermine current union controlled apprenticeship programs by legitimizing lower quality alternatives:

“...skill standards that are in the public domain could give rise to a robust training and certification system that competes with union labor market programs, including registered apprenticeships, head on. The new NSSB system could serve to shut unions out of the worker training and placement process, legitimize non-union programs that de-skill and socialize the cost of worker training.”<sup>30</sup>

Union representatives were concerned that the system would make it possible for employers to communicate their needs for workplace skills directly to trainers, making it possible to further cut unions and workers in general out of the definition of training needs. Another serious issue they raised is the system’s reliance on the reduction of holistically defined jobs into codified skills or competencies. This could make it possible for employers more easily to create jobs that combine less skilled functions with more highly skilled functions, but without a corresponding increase in the rate of pay – a variation on the process of de-skilling. On a broader social policy level, they were concerned that the NSSB project would entrench a two-tiered post-secondary education system in the US. Some people would have access to a broad education through colleges and universities and others would be tracked into a narrow job-related system that had few connections with the broader system. If the NSSB business administration project moves into a start up phase, union representatives intend to continue to meet and strategize: they will participate with considerable caution around these issues, and are prepared to leave the process if their issues are not accommodated.

These experiences in other countries are, at the least, cautionary tales for those of us at the local level in Canada who are tempted to see the development of a dominant set of standards as a straightforward way to proceed.

### **Some Conclusions**

The changes that are affecting office administration have created challenges for workers struggling to navigate their way through the growing complexity of hype, new tools and knowledge required in the work, and a much more competitive job market. In turn, the needs of workers challenge trainers to design a training system that would:

- prepare workers for the breadth of responsibilities and knowledge required in the current work (and not simply the skills) and change quickly as those demands change. This may require re-thinking whether office work is an “entry-level” occupation and whether shorter training programs can adequately prepare workers for it.
- assess whether experienced workers need training or whether their need is simply for credentials, and extensively use prior learning assessment and recognition to meet those needs
- recognize links to new occupations and areas of knowledge that are developing in the workplace and facilitate the mobility of experienced workers into these areas.
- assist students / workers to see whether or how existing training programs fit together, and how they can meet their knowledge as well as skill development needs.

The proposal to address these challenges by developing either local program standards or meta-standards is fraught. When the suggestion comes from worker advocates or representatives, it usually expresses the hope that standards will make it possible for workers to gain some bargaining power with their current or future employers. Our review suggests that while the process of developing a meta-standard might create some coherence in the training system, it doesn't necessarily increase workers' bargaining power. And it can open up new, negative consequences for workers in the process. Most critically, standards setting processes that are based on skills and competency descriptions tend to equate the needs of employers and employees, and make it possible for employers to negotiate their needs directly with trainers. This is not an acceptable way to proceed for those in an occupation where the knowledge needed to do the work is consistently not recognized by employers. Standards development processes tend to focus on more narrowly defined skills and not on the broader knowledge needed to work in or to negotiate the labour market. Each of these observations highlight a central concern for office workers – there are few worker organizations that are prepared to define workers' training needs or that are strong enough to provide an adequate challenge to training providers and employers.

Without strong worker advocates in the development of training program, workplace or meta-standards, there are several possibilities that are potentially damaging not only for individual workers, but also for the occupation as a whole:

- the content of skills standards can be used by employers to assess individual employee performance and development.
- the broad knowledge required in the new work could easily be left out of such a system; entry-level student/workers may not be adequately prepared for the work.
- the large numbers of experienced workers who are being displaced will not find assistance in using their experience to move into other occupations.

There are several concerns over and above those that are specific to office workers that are raised by the possibility of a project to develop a meta-standard. A meta-standard would provide a mechanism for incorporating private trainers into a publicly sanctioned system of credentials, and would consolidate the current process of developing a private training industry and facilitating its advancement in international trade in education and training. When it is understood from an industrial policy perspective, the “branding” of standards is an essential step in the process of developing training as a service industry which has tradable commodities, and preparing it for inclusion in current international trade negotiations.<sup>31</sup> For US trainers, for instance, the ability to advertize that the credentials they provide meet both their own (high and excellent) standards as well as US-wide standards is likely to provide them with a considerable advantage in an international market. If this is helpful to the private training industry, it is not necessarily beneficial to office workers seeking transferable qualifications.

Moreover, meta-standards do not necessarily guarantee higher quality training. The systems being developed in the US and Australia have little capacity actually to monitor or evaluate local program delivery. We also share the concern of the AFL-CIO about the potential that a meta-standard in vocational training could increase the distance between skills-based vocational education and knowledge-based academic post secondary education, making it more difficult than it currently is to move between systems. Office workers are constantly working with information, and like other information workers, they need a solid academic background in order to understand that information well enough in order to work with it.

Canada has not yet initiated occupation-based standards projects, except through its human resource sector councils. Even in the context of the upcoming trade negotiations the federal government is unlikely to undertake such a project because it has little remaining jurisdiction over training and there is no sign that the provinces are about to embark on such a complex project. We feel strongly that there are enough concerns about the standards setting process that labour and community-based groups should not initiate it.

We may have some space in Canada then, to strengthen office workers’ organizations and their approach to training and standards development.

## **Where the energy might be better invested**

Organizations that represent office workers need to be supported so that they develop more strength in their negotiations with employers and are encouraged to develop stronger policies on training for their members. Office workers identify themselves both as workers and as professionals, and are organized into both unions and professional associations. Each strategy has potential for furthering this objective.

A large number of workers could be affected by some collaboration between the many public and private sector unions that have training clauses in their collective agreements. Those bargaining units that include office workers could begin to work together to identify what kinds of employer-supported training are most useful to their members. This kind of collaboration could put unionized workers in a position to negotiate content and transferability with training providers. The training committees of the Canadian Labour Congress or provincial federations of labour are ideally located to facilitate these kinds of working groups.

The International Association of Administrative Professional certification, as well as standards developed by the Payroll Association and others, should be examined and taken into account more extensively throughout the training system. Training organizations should be sensitive to, and reflect these efforts to define occupational expertise. And while there is generally an uneasy relationship between associations and unions, both want the knowledge and expertise of their membership to be recognized by employers. Thus there may be some room for collaboration on the content of training and negotiations with training providers.

Given the current political context and the status of training in international trade agreement negotiations, it is entirely possible that Canadian proposals for meta-standards for many groups of workers will emerge in the next several years. If that takes place, public sector unions are in a particularly strong position to respond. Over the last decade they have been involved in a massive project to develop pay equity job descriptions, and have developed considerable expertise in office work classification systems. As we noted earlier, the content of detailed job descriptions is similar to that of training and performance standards – the difference is largely in how they are used and who controls their use. There is some potential for the public sector unions to pool this expertise, and to develop a strong challenge to trainers to provide training for their current and future members that enables them to perform and progress in their work. A more proactive step could be for the unions to identify and “capture” the training needed for each job classification, and to certify those training providers who could provide students with the needed courses. The effect of such initiatives could be broader than unionized public sector workplaces. Public sector unions could begin to see that it is in their interest to claim that their members are highly qualified and that they can set the performance standard, particularly in situations where services, along with their members, become privatized.



The enormous reconfiguration of office work and the explosion in knowledge requirements for office workers show no signs of slowing over the next decade, given many of the trends, like the development of e-business, noted in this paper. We have argued that an exercise in setting standards for the occupation – sometimes seen as a panacea, or at least the requisite starting-point for a coherent training system – will add to the confusion and opacity of training options for individual workers. It will also be an instrument to further privatize training. In rendering training a more “profitable” enterprise, it is also made less accessible to workers. It is clear that the stakes are high for office workers, much higher than our “Snakes and Ladders” title might indicate: the kind of debt individuals must take on under these circumstances has much higher consequences than a board game. There are, nevertheless, “ladders” for the occupation, the system and individual workers: through the activism, advocacy and support of key unions and organizations, a truly worker-centered and worker-driven training system could begin to eliminate the current confusion, fragmentation, inequities and ineffectiveness of training for office workers.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We use a number of terms for this group of workers interchangeably throughout the article, as well as in practice. “Office workers”, “office support workers”, “clerical workers”, “administrative workers”, “information workers” all are intended to capture a cluster of over twenty occupations which include office clerks, receptionists, bookkeepers, secretaries, administrative assistants, data entry clerks, customer service clerks, and production clerks. The term “information workers” best captures the new work that most are involved in, but it is not a term that is commonly used to describe this group, nor do most office workers identify with it.

<sup>2</sup> 23% of women in the labour market were clerical workers or secretaries at the time of the census in 1996. “Labour Force 15 years and older by detailed occupation and sex”. *The Nation Series 1996*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> At the end of the 1980s when unionization rates were higher, approximately 72% of public sector office workers were unionized, compared to 11.7% in the finance sector and 26.2% in manufacturing. Julie White, 1993, page 173.

<sup>4</sup> de Wolff, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Job loss among office workers has been particularly high in Toronto. Between 1989 and 1997 35% of clerical jobs were lost in the city, that is 92,600 jobs. This is by far the largest job loss of any occupational group in the region. de Wolff, 1995; Bird and de Wolff, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> The partner organizations involved in the Clerical Workers Center were the School of Labour at George Brown Community College; Times Change, an employment counseling service for women, and Advocates for Community-based Training and Education for Women.

<sup>7</sup> de Wolff, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> de Wolff, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Glenday (1995) and his co-researchers demonstrated that university office workers learn a significant amount on the job, and that a significant component of their work is training others. Also, a survey conducted in February 1999 by *The Office Professional* showed that of the 1,210 survey respondents, 29% had a college or university degree; 53% had a college program diploma or courses in high school; 53% had taken individual courses; and 73% had received training on the job.

<sup>10</sup> Between 1980 and 1985 approximate 60% of Canadian employees trained on-the-job for computer technologies were clerical staff. This dropped off significantly between 1985 and 1991 when only 20% of those trained by employers were clerical staff. Source: Gordon Betcherman, *et al*, 1994. Page 39.

<sup>11</sup> de Wolff, 1995, page 87.

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<sup>12</sup> Many community programs now provide short “career readiness” courses which include information that is similar to that provided in components of their old “training” courses. They are not called “training”, or included in a training program because there are no government sources of funding for “training”, ACTEW, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> This is not a comprehensive compilation. Most counseling services in the city operate without a list of current training organizations and the courses that they offer because they require a significant investment of time to compile and update. The most comprehensive lists are kept by the EI training “brokers” in the city – individuals who are contracted to make the match between an individual EI recipient of a training voucher and the This list was shared by a job counsellor in an interview.

<sup>14</sup> Wills, J., 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Figure taken from *Work Keys Technical Handbook*, (1997) page 5.

<sup>16</sup> The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has created an influential and widely recognized template for workplace management practices which assure quality service and products. The ISO does not set out standards for different occupations, but establishes management practices which are intended to assure “quality”. These management practices involve developing detailed expectations of the particular work process and the implementation of measurable performance standards which sometimes are complemented by training.

<sup>17</sup> Workplace observation (10/98).

<sup>18</sup> All of the approximately thirty Toronto area MOUS test centers are private institutions.

<sup>19</sup> From Ministry bulletin, *kpixpress*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Ontario’s Private Schools Act provides the framework for the regulation of private vocational institutions.

<sup>21</sup> The federal government’s Essential Skills Profile is available on-line at [www.globalx.net/hrd](http://www.globalx.net/hrd).

<sup>22</sup> The Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) in the United States adopted a strategic plan in the early 1990s which focused on developing training programs and certification. The resulting initiatives established its members as skilled handlers of asbestos, launched an apprenticeship program and changed the name of the occupation from general construction laborers to “construction craft laborers”. The occupation had previously been seen as unskilled – these changes have resulted in higher wages and increased union membership. Aronson, de Wolff and Herzenberg, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> The International Association of Administrative Professionals was formerly known as Professional Secretaries International.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson and Jordan, 1999, pg. 1.

<sup>25</sup> This point was illustrated during our recent study on the impact of e-business on office work. All but a handful of the over fifty employers and e-business implementation experts interviewed for the study had thought about the impact of e-business on office jobs. Those who had considered it were support service providers who said that when users were not included in a re-design, there tended to be very large problems with implementation. de Wolff, 2000.

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<sup>26</sup> The Clerical Workers Labour Adjustment Committee was initiated by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB), and was structured and funded in much the same way as an early Sector Council. The study "Job Loss" was very similar to the kinds of industry reviews that councils undertake in their start up phase, and a number of committee members held the position that the next phase of committee activity should be to establish an office work sector council. The Council approached both the CLFDB and HRDC with this possibility in 1996, and was discouraged, finding little support for an initiative that was occupational rather than industry based.

<sup>27</sup> Two cross-sectoral councils have been supported by HRDC: Women Into Trades and Technology and the Aboriginal Human Resource Council. Both have had some success, but are constantly working within a system that doesn't quite fit what they do.

<sup>28</sup> Observations from the NSSB consultation, Chicago, November 1997. National Alliance of Business, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson and Jordan, 1999. See also Ewer, 1998 and McBride, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> AFL-CIO, 2000, page 6.

<sup>31</sup> Training and education has been included in Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) discussions, and will be in the coming round of negotiations for the 2005 Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).

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## The Labour Education and Training Research Network

Training Matters is funded by the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada* for a period of five years. During that time, we expect to produce innovative research that critically examines the provision of training for the Canadian workforce. In addition to publishing books of collected articles on selected themes, we are publishing a working paper series to disseminate as widely as possible the research being conducted by members of our Network.

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