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Conveying the Benefits of Employment: A Comparison of the Organizational Settings of California's AFDC and GAIN Programs

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**Conveying the Benefits of Employment: A Comparison of the Organizational  
Settings of California's AFDC and GAIN Programs**

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## INTRODUCTION

In July 1996, American family welfare policy entered a new era, one that espoused a strong ideological commitment to transforming welfare from a program primarily concerned with providing basic economic support to the eligible poor, to one providing only temporary assistance to families while moving large numbers of poor parents into employment.

Such a welfare-to-work vision is in part premised on the belief that through the communication of programmatic expectations and the availability of supportive services, clients will alter their behavior and find work. It is important, then, that clients understand and act on a complex array of information and that agencies communicate clear and consistent messages about employment. Welfare workers occupy a unique position in this scheme. Their access to knowledge of program regulations and community resources, as well as their “regular” contact with recipients, make them a primary vehicle for informing and motivating recipients.

But creating a communicative worker-client relationship depends in large part on the organizational setting in which workers and clients interact. Legislation and agency directives which attempt to modify worker functions can be undermined by existing work routines, office culture, and cross-cutting organizational goals. These mediating factors are often not fully appreciated by policy makers or by researchers whose methodological approaches fail to look at the street-level. (Lipsky)

The goal of this paper is to provide a model for explaining how organizational settings affect the communicative capacity of different kinds of welfare workers. The analytic utility of this model will be illustrated in two distinct but related applications: 1) identifying distinct, ideal typical workers whose job profiles reflect emblematic sets of organizational conditions, for the purpose here of characterizing their different communicative capacities; and 2) mapping the impact of organizational and larger environmental conditions and changes along the multiple dimensions that constitute the worker-client relationship.

This analysis will involve a comparison of two different programs – Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the cash assistance program in effect in California until 1998, and Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN), California’s employment and training program for AFDC recipients. A major conclusion of this analysis is that certain kinds of specialized GAIN workers, and to a lesser extent specialized AFDC workers have the clear programmatic authority and frequent and flexible client contact that allow them to communicate the benefits of employment in an individualized and motivational style. In addition, the possibility of this kind of communicative space depends in large part on the separation of the cop and counselor roles inherent in welfare programs between two types of workers – caseworkers responsible for regulation-driven benefit issuance and specialized workers assigned the more holistic task of motivating clients and/or providing employment-related resources. This analysis has some broader implications for how we ought to think about the implementation of welfare reform.

#### STUDY SAMPLE AND METHODS

This analysis is based on field work conducted between 1993 and 1997 in AFDC and GAIN offices in four counties in California as part of the process evaluation for the California Work Pays Demonstration Project (CWPDP). CWPDP was a study which evaluated the impact of early 1990s state welfare reforms designed to encourage employment among welfare recipients through financial incentives. Specifically, the new policies allowed recipients to keep more earned income while remaining eligible for benefits<sup>1</sup>.

The CWPDP process study attempted both a detailed history of project implementation, as well as a systematic study of implementation of the policies under study. We not only asked: “what happened

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<sup>1</sup> See UC DATA Reports for more detailed descriptions of the study on which this paper was based. The process study was intended to assess the policy implementation context in order to identify county and office specific variations that could impact the study’s quantitative evaluations. The process study focused on three topics: 1) the management of CWPDP experimental and control cases, as well as the data collection processes; 2) the background organizational and policy changes that affected general office operations; 3) the extent to which agencies informed clients about the new policies in worker-client interactions and through flyers, videos and other media. The last focus was based on the assumption that clients needed to be informed about the new work incentive policies in order to act on them and seek employment.

when, and did it proceed as planned?” but also “how was the policy implemented?” The process study involved collecting information from at least four distinct sources: in-person interviews with program staff using semi-structured interview guides; observations of program staff interacting with clients; program documents; and minutes from regular meetings with state and county staff. Site-visits and in-person interviews with a variety of staff allowed us to draw a profile of program context, including formal and informal organizational structure, management styles, waiting room décor and atmosphere, line worker activities and client processing. (UC DATA, 1997-2) During the summers of 1996 and 1997, researchers visited 26 offices and conducted 152 interviews.

## PROGRAM SUMMARIES

In the normal process of application to AFDC (pre-1998), an individual was seen by a screener or intake worker who reviewed the application for public assistance and supporting documents provided by the applicant. In addition, the worker informed the applicant of any additional paperwork needed to process the application which the client would bring to a subsequently scheduled meeting or mail to the worker. Once eligibility was determined, “recipient” cases were generally transferred to other workers (EWs) who were responsible for adjustments to benefit levels based on monthly client reporting, as well as for an annual “redetermination” of client eligibility. This redetermination interview was the only statutorily required worker-client meeting after the initial intake process. In some places, cases were allocated among more specialized EWs according to additional characteristics, e.g., working recipients, two-parent cases (“unemployed”) and language cases.

Most clients were also registered with GAIN, California’s welfare-to-work program, unless they were categorically “exempt” from participating. Registration meant that the clients in GAIN could be required to participate when program spaces became available. GAIN was organized as a series of training and job search components meant to facilitate clients’ ability to become independent of welfare. During participation, clients received supportive services, primarily in the form of coverage for

transportation expenses and reimbursement for childcare costs. GAIN caseworkers (CWs) were responsible for the provision of this support and for ensuring client program compliance.

GAIN went through significant changes in the early 1990s in terms of agency goals and program components. An earlier emphasis on education and training was largely replaced by an almost exclusive focus on moving recipients into jobs as soon as possible, a policy shift dubbed “work first.” The most significant component in which most GAIN participants were occupied in the mid-1990s was Job Club<sup>2</sup>, conducted by special Job Club workers. During this time supportive services and sanctioning power remained under the jurisdiction of CWs.

In preparation for welfare reform, administrators in three of the counties studied developed pilot projects meant to better integrate the AFDC and GAIN program processes, and thereby serve larger numbers of clients in a more efficient and coordinated fashion. The three pilots were focused on new applicants who were informed in special presentations about welfare reform time limits and programmatic expectations of the importance of finding work quickly. Applicants were then immediately sent to Job Club programs, in contrast to recipients, who typically waited months or years. All three pilot projects also involved greater cooperation among GAIN and AFDC workers in order to create new expedited interorganizational channels for client processing, through joint presentations, “co-location”, and other forms of coordination of worker roles.

In addition to the new methods for informing applicants about welfare reform and involving them in GAIN program components, in two counties there was also an increased use of other specialized workers. Job Developers (JD) played an increasingly important role in identifying job opportunities and matching them up with suitable clients. One county also created specialized workers in AFDC offices who were available to inform recipients about child care and employment resources.

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<sup>2</sup> This activity lasts 3-8 weeks depending on the county. The first week is spent in job readiness training, where activities include learning how to fill out a job application, interview, develop a resume, and identify the hidden job market. Clients also participate in motivational and self-esteem exercises. After the first week, clients move into *job search*, where they locate job openings, set up interviews and apply for jobs.

## THE MODEL

Development of our model came after five years of interviewing workers and observing the worker-client interaction in the AFDC program and two years doing the same in the GAIN program. During the first years of the Work Pays implementation study, we quickly discovered that welfare case workers were hardly mentioning these new rules. Even after five years of aggressive efforts by state and county agencies to promote the program, “Work Pays” information (as the reform program was called), never became integrated into the conversation between workers and clients.

After spending several weeks in welfare offices talking to workers and supervisors, and observing their routines and interactions with recipients, it was clear why communication and coordination around employment goals was so difficult. Because of high caseloads (typically 200+ cases per worker), we often saw workers doing 6 or 7 redetermination interviews in a row with each one lasting no more than 5 minutes. This was the only statutorily required face-to-face contact between clients and workers for the whole year. Also, watching an intake worker rush through the interview gathering the immense pile of information necessary for determining eligibility in order to meet her daily quota was a sobering reminder of the workload pressures created in institutions with limited resources.

The difficulties with adding work-related information to worker-client interactions are numerous and have been discussed in previous work (Meyers, et al., 1998). In this paper we are offering a more general model of the worker-client interaction, which is simply a breakdown of the key factors that influence the quality of that interaction and the ability to communicate with clients, especially about behavioral expectations. These factors are listed in the first column of Table 1 and are described below. This table also lists six different types of workers we observed, whose jobs are broken down in terms of these factors (see below). The factors are not mutually exclusive and comprehensive categories; rather, they identify significant conditions of worker performance that can vary independently of one another and, therefore, have independent explanatory power in the dynamics of worker-client communication. One of the main conclusions of our model, then, is that all of these elements ought to be considered when

evaluating the potential impact of changes in the organization and administration of client case processing.

**Workload** refers to a worker's caseload, assignments, and how worker's time is organized and prioritized. How many cases are to be processed and what is to be done to each case? What are the specific tasks and deadlines? Do workers have any discretionary time? How is their time constrained?

This term encompasses not only the number of cases a worker has, but the kinds of work each case demands. For example, while GAIN CWs tend to have lighter caseloads than EWs, their work tasks are more case "intensive", i.e., they have more involved kinds of tasks associated with each case. These tasks include complicated child care budget calculations; maintaining contacts with colleges and other service providers to ensure continued client attendance; and following the complicated non-compliance procedures. Workload can change not only as a result of fluctuations in caseload size, but also due to changes in policies and practices<sup>3</sup>, worker specialization<sup>4</sup>, changes in information technologies<sup>5</sup>, or reassignment/outsourcing of certain tasks to other agencies<sup>6</sup>.

**Client contact** is a category referring to the amount of time and quality of contact with clients. Quality of contact includes the physical arrangement of contact, such as phone calls, through mail, or in-person; if in-person is the contact structured by interview scripts, written forms, computer screens; is the setting quiet, private, and what resources are available during the contact which might enhance communication. In other words, it is the overall environment in which workers and clients interact and the atmosphere created within the office by the way the program is administered.

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<sup>3</sup> One reason is that new policies must be learned and routines altered, an often significant aspect of normal case management. A more specific example is a GAIN policy change that resulted in a significant reduction in education/training as a GAIN component, thereby both eliminating more intensive case processing in some respects (e.g., childcare which fluctuates dramatically over time) and increasing it in others (as clients change program components more frequently)

<sup>4</sup> e.g., assignment of working clients to specialized EWs or of GAIN participants in existing educational programs, so-called Self-Initiated Programs (SIPs), to particular workers; or moving routine processing of certain documents (CA-7's) to clerical units.

<sup>5</sup> e.g., automation of intake process.

<sup>6</sup> e.g., responsibility for certain types of childcare budgeting from GAIN caseworkers to childcare Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies



Where clients receive benefits for a prolonged period of time, the frequency and regularity of interaction also becomes significant. While contact may be intense at one point, its impact may diminish over time with infrequent subsequent interactions.

**Worker knowledge** is broken down into two categories to capture two key types of knowledge. First, **worker knowledge of programs** is the extent to which workers are aware of, understand, and can locate information on programs, benefits, and opportunities for, and requirements of clients. Second, **worker knowledge of clients** refers to the extent the worker is able to tailor and individualize communication to unique client needs and to personalize contact to build rapport and trust.

**Agency Specialization** is the extent to which line staff are specialized, so tasks are divided between types of workers. Specialized positions lead to specialized knowledge, and are related to the information available to workers and clients that might enhance communication efforts with clients.

At the same time, specialization creates new problems of coordination and cooperation among different types of workers whose programmatic knowledge, workload and role perceptions may limit the ability of these new worker types to reach the client population. Where specialized workers are not integrated into the standard flow of client processing, it becomes the responsibility of general information resources (e.g., brochures and poster) or the EW to make clients aware of their existence.

**Worker authority** is the ability of workers to have an impact on others, in this case on clients, by virtue of their position. Formally this power is determined by a worker's job description. It includes both positive duties on the part of the worker, as well as delegated discretionary space within which workers have room to decide how and when to make use of their power. In AFDC, eligibility workers have authority over clients, because they control the issuance of grants, and they can require clients to sit for interviews or provide certain information, and they have unique access to information that clients might desire or need such as program rules, requirements, and benefits. Worker authority also affects the worker-client relationship by determining the primary objectives of interaction. Some forms of authority (such as control over benefits) are more visible and relevant forms of power than others (counseling on

the benefits of employment), which keep interactions focused on the immediate issues, rather than expanding to include more subsidiary topics.

**Worker incentives** are a key factor in communication and include both rewards and sanctions for certain actions. Typically workers have incentives to complete work on which they are evaluated, in order to avoid more work or negative attention from supervisors or clients. On an individual basis, incentives may include personal satisfaction or intrinsic rewards for more discretionary kinds of behaviors.

**Office culture** is the mission and values of an organization, as they are communicated to staff and become embodied in a worker's role perceptions. Whereas *worker authority* can be regarded as establishing the framework within which workers may act, office culture identifies how and the extent to which given authority is exercised, its content being based largely on workers' perceptions of their organizational role vis-à-vis their client. *Worker authority* represents the objective description of discretionary space, while *office culture* encompasses the subjective experience of exercising it. How and whether discretionary power is utilized is also determined by other structurally limiting factors, especially workload and worker incentives.

### **Worker Ideal Types**

The notion of an ideal typical worker is based on the assertion that certain kinds of communicative capacity can be analytically distinguished and explained by particular clusters of factor characterizations that are likely to arise in different organizational settings. (Table 2) The four types we identify are based on the two dimensions of *policy domain* and *means of communication*. Policy domain refers to the issues which are discussed during worker-client conversations. The *eligibility-related* policy domain refers to policies and program expectations for the standard non-working recipient, while the *employment-related* category concerns those that encourage recipients to find employment. AFDC policies meant to encourage employment, such as income disregard rules and childcare reimbursements, fall on the border of the two categories, as they also affect eligibility and grant amounts. These "Work

Pays” policies are, in some sense, a second tier of the eligibility policy domain and therefore, inclusion of these topics in client discussions by a primarily eligibility-focused worker would shift the worker’s location upward on this dimension (compare the Appeals worker with the Eligibility worker in Table 2). Location on this dimension can also reflect level of information. For example, where an employment-related conversation is narrow in focus (e.g., exclusively about child care policies), the information content is relatively “low”, in contrast to a discussion that addresses the broad range of employment-related issues that affect a recipient (compare the Task Worker with the Job Club worker in Table 2).

The second dimension refers to how information is conveyed to recipients. Does the worker employ primarily standardized presentations of information with little concern for the individual circumstances of the recipient (routinized); or does the worker use a more conversational, interactive approach with the potential to address the particular concerns of the recipient (individualized)?

The resultant 2x2 graph describes four different ideal types of workers. The northwest quadrant (employment/individualized), the *employment counselor*, represents a worker who provides individualized coaching and motivation; the northeast (employment/standardized), the *employment technician*, standardized protocols for training and job seeking; the southwest (eligibility/individualized), the *eligibility counselor*, expertise based, individualized counseling on eligibility-related issues; the southeast (eligibility/routinized), the *eligibility technician*, scripted presentation of eligibility information. This chart also identifies where the different types of workers we observed are located on the grid (discussed below).

**Table 2. Communicative Capacity  
Worker Ideal Types**

**Means of Communication**

		Individualized (+)	Routinized (-)
<b>Policy Domain (Activation)</b>	Employment-Related (+)	<i>"Employment Counselor"</i> <b>Job Club Worker</b> <b>X</b> <b>Job Developer</b> <b>X</b> <b>Task</b> <b>( X)</b>	<i>"Employment Technician"</i> <b>GAIN Caseworker</b> <b>X</b> <b>Worker</b> <b>( X)</b>
	Eligibility-Related (-)	<i>"Eligibility Counselor"</i> <b>Appeals Worker</b> <b>X</b>	<i>"Eligibility Technician"</i> <b>AFDC Eligibility Worker</b> <b>X</b>

**RELATIONSHIP OF MODEL TO THE LITERATURE**

This model focuses on the ability of welfare workers to influence client behavior and more generally in the messages imparted by workers on the front-line to the clients about what is expected of them. First, how do we know messages and expectations are a critical component to successful implementation of welfare reform? Second, why do we focus on the messages imparted by workers on the front-lines? Even before the shift towards behavioral change in welfare, scholars were aware that messages and expectations were critical to the success of programs which sought to change recipients. Hasenfeld (1983) talked about the "technology" for "people-sustaining" services, designed to maintain the welfare of clients, as different from the technology for "people-changing" services that are intended to change the motivation and behavior of clients. Bane and Ellwood (1994) used the concept of culture to refer to the same concerns over messages and expectations, indicating that a shift must be made from the

"eligibility-compliance culture" of the welfare office, to a "self-sufficiency culture," which would refocus the attention of workers and clients from maintaining eligibility to moving clients off welfare.

Both explicit and implicit messages to clients of the system must change to reflect the goals of the newest welfare reforms; specifically new behavioral expectations must be communicated. Explanation of new rules and requirements is necessary but not sufficient; earlier studies indicate that an overall message about behavioral expectations may be necessary as well. The highest performing JOBS programs (employment programs for AFDC recipients) were those that emphasized "high expectations" for both staff (in assisting clients) and clients (in finding employment), and in which this emphasis was recognized by staff at all levels of the agency from the Director to the front-line (Riccio and Orenstein 1996; Bardach 1993).

Workers on the front lines are the most critical for conveying these messages and expectations because they are the primary point of contact of clients with the welfare system. Most organizational conditions at some level get translated into the approach of the worker towards the client and into the setting in which the client and worker interact. Organizational resources, leadership, agency missions, expertise, structures and rules all have an impact on the job, approach and setting of the worker in welfare agencies. The obvious exception to this is that program resources advocated by a worker may in reality be unavailable to a client, for example, a worker may successfully encourage a client to seek a program which has no available slots left. Although our model does not address this situation, it does address the numerous cases where program funds are underutilized because of a lack of knowledge and understanding of those programs among workers and clients. For this reason, we think the worker focus is very useful.

The focus on the front-line worker has a long history in the literature on public service bureaucracies and welfare in particular. In the implementation literature, Elmore (1982) advocates the "backward-mapping" approach which takes the point where the client meets the system as primary and works backward from there. Lipsky (1980) was the first to coin the term "street-level bureaucrat," and to assert that policy is enacted through the actions of those front-line workers. Numerous studies of street-

level bureaucrats followed, which examined various characteristics of interaction between front-line employees of agencies and their clients.

How does our model vary from other literature about the street-level bureaucrat in welfare programs? These works tend to focus on a particular variable, such as discretion, culture, leadership, goal ambiguity, which characterizes the welfare program setting and leads to a more abstract analysis of the worker-client interaction. Our model encompasses these important variables, but has the practical application of identifying keys factors in specific settings which might have implications for the success of programs. Theories of discretion among street-level bureaucrats are perhaps the most common focus, and certainly discretion is a central part of Lipsky, Prottas, Hasenfeld, Handler, Brodtkin, Simon, and Vinzant's discussions of welfare. This concept enters our model in several ways, the most obvious being worker authority, as the ability to exercise discretion derives from authority of workers with respect to clients. The areas where workers have authority, such as issuing benefits, structuring client interaction, providing and requesting information, are areas where workers have some degree of choice over actions and/or procedures. Therefore, identifying the areas of authority also identifies areas of discretion. Discretion is also endemic in the other factors in of model; workload structure affects discretionary time, and combined with incentives affects discretionary behaviors. Office culture is also critical to the notion of discretion, as a worker's perception of her role affects the way she utilizes this discretion. Assuming the preconditions exist for discretionary actions (in terms of positive authority, non-cross-cutting incentives and sufficiently low workloads), the worker's understanding of her role in interactions with clients plays a determinative role in the content of these meetings<sup>7</sup>.

Another way to view the behavior of street-level bureaucrats is their relationship to goals. Are program goals being fulfilled and if not, why not? Social service programs are famous for having ambiguous and sometimes conflicting goals when conceived at the policy-making stage. The actions of

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<sup>7</sup> Under impacted/overburdened conditions, discretionary space may also become significant in how workers cope with the demands of their caseload, by minimizing contact etc. Thus different work conditions can result in retreatist or particularistic attitudes, or in ideal conditions towards transformational approaches. (Meyers, et al., 1998)

line workers are therefore to somehow reconcile or implement these conflicting goals. (See Brodtkin, 1987, 1990) Given these ambiguous or conflicting goals, the behaviors of workers can again be determined by looking at how those goals relate to actual incentives, authority, knowledge, client contact, specialization, and office culture. Another finding in the welfare literature is goal displacement among welfare workers, where the means, such as eligibility processing and rule following in AFDC, become the goal. (Simon 1983, Brodtkin 1995) Goal displacement can typically be tracked back to worker incentives. A worker's primary goal will tend to be eliciting rewards and avoiding sanctions, and how that incentive system is related to program goals is critical in determining whether goal displacement will occur. And with incentives, the other factors, office culture, worker authority, etc. must also be conducive to program goals as well.

Many studies focus on office culture as the overall conditions needed for successful welfare programs (Bane and Ellwood 1994, Sandfort 1996) All seven factors could be subsumed under a general concept of "office culture," however we separate them out for practical reasons, that is, to allow identification of the specific elements of the organizational setting, and to give office culture a more specific meaning to illustrate that it could have independent effects on the worker-client interaction. For example, workers may have the legitimate authority (as determined by their formal job description) to discuss and encourage behavioral changes with clients, but the office environment is not conducive to such discussions because the interview rooms do not allow private conversations; such discussions are countered by warnings about sanctions covering the walls; or because workers' understanding of their role places a low priority on employment-related information or even discourages raising such issues (e.g., it is seen as an invasion of privacy).

## FINDINGS

In presenting our findings, we will describe the AFDC setting first, beginning with the Eligibility Worker (EW) as the ideal typical *eligibility technician*, the organizational changes we observed and their impact on the EW's communicative capacities in terms of our factor analysis. This section will also

include a discussion of other AFDC workers, including the appeals workers and specialized, “task” workers. Second, we will describe a number of different worker types in GAIN, as well as some more general organizational observations.

## AFDC OFFICES

### *The AFDC Eligibility Worker*

The AFDC eligibility worker represents a “natural clustering” of factor characteristics that limit the communicative capacity of this role under its current organizational configuration. AFDC workers, in communicating behavioral expectations to clients, are constrained by their workload pressures, insufficient and rigidly structured contact with clients, a predominantly technical and eligibility-related knowledge base, as well as incentives toward completing paperwork and following routines defined by regulations. In addition, welfare workers generally do not perceive their job as including employment counseling. Nor are there any specialized workers who are able to fill this role (with a few limited exceptions, see below). In addition, welfare workers’ role as cop/gatekeeper for program funds means that nonroutine interactions with clients are often about missing benefits which creates a level of urgency and often hostility that makes other issues secondary. (Meyers, et al., 1998; Bane and Elwood, 1994)

This situation was further entrenched by increases in workload factors that we observed – increased case numbers and frequent rule changes. *Caseloads.* Workers faced rising caseloads in many counties. All four counties experienced increases in applications to AFDC. In at least three of these counties, budget cutbacks and restrictions did not allow the number of workers to grow; hence, cases per worker increased. *Rule changes.* Counties were also continuously experiencing changes to policies and programs. For example in AFDC in 1996, benefit levels changed four times as different laws and court orders became effective. New policies affect all the variables in our model, as new rules are mandates for front-line workers, take time to learn, change the areas over which workers have jurisdiction or authority, and add to the tasks over which workers are evaluated.

### *Organizational Conditions/Administrative Responses*



An ongoing issue for administrators of public bureaucracies is structuring case processing so that essential eligibility-related decisions are equitably made within the constraints set by limited administrative resources (Mashaw 1983). As workload increases, so does the danger that caseworkers will have too little time to give adequate consideration to all cases in a timely manner, resulting in ignored policy goals and increased error rates. This general administrative concern with increasing efficiency, equity and responsiveness to new policies often leads administrators to introduce new methods for streamlining and standardizing case processing. Changes of this type, which we observed in 1995-1997, impacted the communicative relationship in complicated ways, illustrating the independent importance of different factors in evaluating the ability of workers to influence clients.

*banking systems.* Banking Systems are one way that counties have dealt with increasing worker caseloads. Banking systems are arrangements where cases are kept in a central area and handled by a team of workers, rather than being assigned to individual case workers. Under this system, clients no longer have a case worker assigned to them. Their relationship to the front-line staff has changed from an on-going relationship with one worker to discrete interactions with different workers who are assigned specific tasks as they are generated by that case. In banking systems, the emphasis is on completing work as it arises, rather than handling cases as a whole; it is task-based rather than case-based. In exchange for paperwork getting processed faster, the contact with the client is “dramatically altered.” For the administrators there can be an increased accountability for certain tasks, especially where a computer system is utilized for assigning tasks to workers and for tracking their completion. For the workers there is increased predictability in daily workload, as client access to workers becomes extremely regulated and restricted. However, this reorganization of worker caseloads results in a loss of personal contact and ownership, as the unit rather than individual workers become responsible for the entire caseload. Worker’s knowledge of clients becomes more superficial and ad hoc, and less informed about individual circumstances because cases only remain in their hands for the duration of the task to be completed. This

arrangement also results in decreased job discretion, with the agency dictating the content and prioritization of work.<sup>8</sup>

*clericalizing routine tasks.* Another change that occurred recently in one county was the automated processing of „CA-7s“, the reporting form that all clients send in monthly with changes in case information (e.g., household composition, address, earned income) in order to maintain eligibility. Where caseloads are extremely high, EWs did not always notice CA-7 non-receipt for all of their cases, therefore, a special clerical unit was created to register the receipt of all CA-7s. Only those forms with information changes are forwarded to EWs for further processing. Such a reorganization represented a major diminution in the EW case workload. At the same time, this form of automation decreased worker authority over their cases, as clients were automatically cut off when receipt of a CA-7 was not timely recorded by the clerical unit, a decision previously left to the EW.

*automated systems.* Another major change in client processing is the move to automated welfare systems, or SAWS-type systems (Statewide Automated Welfare System). The distinctive aspect of automated welfare systems, which sets them apart from other forms of automation, is the automated client intake process which allows client applications to be conducted on-line, reducing paperwork involved in the application. In the middle and long-run, automation may result in more efficient case processing , allowing workers either to devote more attention to each case, or, as is the more usual situation, to handle a larger caseload. However, such a dramatic organizational shift requires a lot of initial worker training (program knowledge) and slower initial processing as workers become used to the utilization of the system, as well as ongoing training for subsequent system changes. It can also alter the nature of client contact, making the process more opaque and increasing the passivity of clients. Forms which had earlier been filled out by clients are replaced by a series of questions which the EW asks, prompted by a screen usually unseen by the client. The program information that clients receive from the application forms is

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast, where effective tracking systems are not in place, i.e., where worker incentives are not clearly controlled and dictated, worker discretion may actually increase, in terms of which clients to contact and which tasks to complete. Workload may become even less predictable and manageable for workers. This is a significant change

eliminated, perhaps reducing the possibility for clients to raise issues based on what they had already filled out.

*outreach.* An outreach program is a way to increase the information level of the environment in which the worker and client interact. A program such as the Work Pays outreach campaign<sup>9</sup>, may affect the nature of client contact by providing written materials that reinforce the information, that prompt discussion, and that aid in discussion. It may also affect workers' program knowledge as they become aware of Work Pays through the proliferation of materials. The worker's presence may also enhance the usefulness of the written information as clients may understand it better or believe it more when someone in authority explains it.

Outreach may also affect worker incentives. As materials become known to managers, they may be integrated into the normal work routine and requirements. In AFDC offices it was observed that these materials did, after several years, raise the knowledge of workers, but they were most effective where there were specialized workers to discuss them (see below); and where decentralized district offices that were asked to emphasize Work Pays used and embellished the materials. Specifically, the materials were most effective where the culture of the office supported the message and the employment of the materials. This situation occurred in one of the four counties observed. The use of the materials in the GAIN offices illustrates this point further, and is discussed in a later section.

#### *The Appeals Worker*

One type of regular specialized worker in the AFDC office which illustrates where organizational conditions can be made conducive to communication even in the AFDC setting was the appeals worker, an example of an *eligibility counselor*. When clients are dissatisfied with a decision of their caseworker,

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in the worker-client relationship where a substantial portion of the county caseload is managed under such an arrangement.

<sup>9</sup> The campaign, initiated by CDSS staff in 1993 and again in 1995, was an effort to communicate the benefits of working on welfare through a multi-media approach targeting both clients and eligibility workers. Materials included a brochure, posters, buttons, logos on forms, and a video which clients were supposed to be able to view in office waiting rooms.

most commonly a reduction in their grant or being cut off entirely, they have the option of appealing the decision, at which time their case is transferred to an appeals worker.

The work conditions of these workers (column 7, Table 1) are characterized by low caseloads, and specialized knowledge in program policy. They had both the time and mandate to explain policies and misunderstandings to clients during their requisite interviews (where they collected the details for their cases), as well as discretion to counsel them about their situations. They also had authority and discretion to resolve problems (through ongoing communications with workers and clients) by overlooking policy non-compliance (e.g., failure to turn in CA-7 timely), an approach which was often used for first time offenders. This worker type is located closer to the border between the policy domains as they may also discuss the importance of employment-related policies as part of a more general conversation with a client.

*Specialized Workers (“Task Workers”)*

While there is talk and some efforts at transforming EWs into job counselors, counties have primarily pursued efforts at increased inter- and intra-organizational worker specialization as a way of pursuing employment-related policy goals. The development of the JOBS program as an entirely separate program and administration already created an institutional division between an eligibility and a welfare-to-work domain. However, the level of welfare recipient participation in the JOBS program has historically been extremely low<sup>10</sup> and other means were developed to communicate the “Work pays” message to the general recipient population. In addition, child care resources were being significantly underutilized, indicating a failure of EWs to encourage clients to take advantage of these resources. In the context of chronically impacted EW caseloads, workers with responsibilities other than eligibility determination provided an alternative means for personalized client treatment, and increased visibility and legitimacy for specific policies.

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<sup>10</sup> In three of the four counties we studied, only 10-20% of non-exempt recipients participated in GAIN in 1996, while in the fourth, an impressive 65% were enrolled in some activity in the GAIN program.

While the previous changes discussed represent administrative efforts that target the AFDC caseworker's job – the main “problem” of AFDC being to alter worker routines that have evolved in an impacted task environment – the introduction of specialized or “task”<sup>11</sup> workers within the AFDC office represents a somewhat different kind of strategy and focus. The specialized workers' function in this case was specifically to ensure that clients understood and acted on existing employment-related policies by conveying information to them and by helping to guarantee that AFDC EWs made accurate decisions. In short, these specialized workers helped realize the agency's whole range of policy goals and complete the full eligibility determination task. This strategy was pursued in one county which created Work Pays and Child Care Coordinators (WPC and CCC).

The job descriptions for these positions were non-standardized and determined by local offices, sometimes being occupied by the same person. CCCs were created as a way to increase client utilization of existing childcare resources by increasing client knowledge of and ability to maneuver through the complicated rules. These workers impacted interaction between clients and the welfare agency in a variety of ways, including: 1) providing integrated presentations to applicants and to ongoing cases at annual recertification meetings (thus ensuring the scripted communication of certain information); 2) acting as a source of independent individual interaction with clients about childcare information, either through worker referrals or independent client initiative, facilitated by childcare posters in agency offices with CCC phone numbers; 3) taking over responsibility for certain childcare-related tasks from EWs, e.g., Supplemental Child Care<sup>12</sup> calculations and Transitional Child Care (TCC) cases<sup>13</sup>; 4) acting as a general auditor of EW childcare calculations<sup>14</sup> and of all closed cases to check that any closed for income reasons had received proper information regarding TCC; and 5) training EWs in how to use childcare forms.

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<sup>11</sup> *Task worker* is a term used to designate these types of workers whose purpose is to promote a particular, neglected policy goal through a variety of different kinds of interventions and activities.

<sup>12</sup> a benefit meant to meet childcare expenses that exceed the childcare income disregards used for calculating benefit levels for clients with earned income

<sup>13</sup> These are cases closed for income-related reasons who are eligible for child care subsidies for an additional year.

<sup>14</sup> CCC would pull 25 cases/month from the current agency caseload, check if childcare calculations were done correctly, write a report to the director and incorrect cases would be sent back for correction.

WPC also served a variety of roles, including: 1) conducting presentations to applicants and recipients regarding the benefits of work; 2) ensuring that GAIN forms were filled out and entered in to the GAIN computer system; 3) setting up Job Club like program components in the AFDC office for recipients; 4) coordinating community services to assist welfare recipients in becoming work ready and finding a job.

The existence of these workers altered the environment of EW's in multiple ways. In taking over certain tasks previously assigned to EW's, they diminished EW's workload. As an independent case auditor, they altered EW work incentives, in some cases, increasing their workload (by requiring correction of erroneous cases). Their efforts to increase available policy information also likely increased worker program knowledge and altered role perceptions (that employment-related policies were also part of an EW's job). Increased client knowledge of these policies (and changed client attitudes about the program) may have also altered the kinds of topics discussed in worker-client conversations. The existence of task workers as a referral source also allowed EW's to refer clients for more in-depth discussions when their own time or knowledge was lacking.

While task workers had a variety of functions, their own contact with clients was one of their most significant impacts. Information about certain program expectations and rules became a routinized, integrated part of client processing for a larger part of the client population, and one usually separate from interaction with case workers. As their contact was primarily in standardized presentations to groups of recipients or applicants, their communicative capacity was as an *employment technician*. To the extent they were also available for one-on-one referrals for more individualized conversations with recipients, their role had greater potential for becoming an *employment counselor*. (Table 2)

The ability of task workers to perform this communicative role (as compared with EW's) is explained by differences in the elements that constitute their job profile (column 6, Table 1). These workers generally had low or no caseload, allowing them to work one-on-one with clients or to spend time in presentation and resource development. Their programmatic knowledge was technical but limited in scope and the flexibility of their job allowed for the possibility of multiple sites of contact with both

clients and workers in their multiple roles (of informer, task processor, and auditor). They had authority to discuss employment-related issues with clients and understood this task as their primary role. Thus, these specialized workers represented an entirely different clustering of factor elements.

## GAIN OFFICES

### *GAIN Caseworkers (CW)*

The GAIN program has a different policy core from the AFDC program – activation, rather than income maintenance. The status of being a GAIN participant brings with it an additional bundle of rights and obligations. A GAIN caseworker (CW), analogous to the AFDC EW, is responsible for ensuring that both the agency and the client fulfill their responsibilities.

In the GAIN offices we found, in contrast to the AFDC environment, an office culture that gives workers legitimate authority to motivate clients to seek employment, but where the incentives created by the program hinder the best intentions of most workers. This information is summarized in the third column of Table 1 for the GAIN CW.

GAIN case workers generally saw their role as moving clients towards work, though how individual workers described this role varied, both in terms of how personalized a role they played (supportive service provider vs. counselor),<sup>15</sup> and in terms of how effective they considered their efforts and those of the program more generally in assisting clients.<sup>16</sup>

However, caseworkers are primarily responsible for ensuring that clients are moving smoothly through program components – typically employment and education-related activities – and have the necessary support services to meet their obligations (in particular, childcare and transportation). Like AFDC workers, their jobs are bureaucratic in that they are evaluated on correct performance of routinized

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<sup>15</sup> “I just make sure they get the supportive services they need. Very little counseling occurs.”

“The whole time I stress that their primary goal is to get a job.”

“I counsel them about the advantages of going to work. Since I used to be on welfare, I know how hard it can be...”

<sup>16</sup>“I feel like I finally make a difference now by introducing them to what welfare reform means and orienting them towards work.” An extreme negative example, “I just shuffle people around till they get disgusted with this...and

tasks (by means of computerized flags) – the processing of paperwork and the application of sanctions when clients do not comply with program requirements. Their responsibilities are especially time consuming given caseloads of between 80 and 220 clients. Contact with clients is relatively infrequent, occurring only when a recipient is out of program compliance or starts a new program component. Thus, GAIN CW's can be characterized as *employment technicians* (Table 2).

The following story from the field provides an example. When GAIN caseworkers were asked what they did in their jobs, they quite often said they really loved their jobs because they were able to motivate people to find work. However, when observing what they actually did with clients during the first 30 or so minutes they spent with them, it was seen that most of the time was taken up with filling out paperwork for childcare reimbursement and arranging their next program activity. In addition, caseworkers' non-client time was spent largely doing childcare budgets and following the arduous reconciliation procedures for noncompliant clients. Thus, there was often a disjuncture between what workers did and what they thought they did.

This characterization is not meant to denigrate the importance of these kinds of interactions. Enrolling clients in program components, especially in larger urban areas, requires the CW to identify and arrange enrollment and service provision in close geographic proximity to the client's residence from a variety of decentralized service providers. In addition, the CW must explain to clients how to utilize these organizational systems, with which clients may never have had any previous contact. This introduction often includes complicated rules for childcare reimbursement.

Often intake and general caseload demands eliminate the possibility of communicating even these essential programmatic aspects. For example, in one GAIN CW-client interaction observed, the worker spent a considerable period of time explaining how to get the client's childcare provider approved and how to fill out the reimbursement forms, etc. Afterwards, he commented that if he had had more than one intake that day, he would have eliminated the entire childcare discussion. As another GAIN CW observed, when caseload demands reach a certain level, workers switch into "county mode". The possibility of engaging in a conversational style of interaction becomes impossible and interaction is



reduced to “read this, sign here,” as workers come to focus on what they are evaluated on, i.e., meeting paperwork requirements for case processing.

This “high information” nature of most worker-client interactions points to another important aspect of client contact that limits the ability of caseworkers to become more focused on self-sufficiency in their interactions with clients. Because AFDC and GAIN eligibility rules are so complicated, the primary meetings between EWs/CWs and clients already involve significant amounts of eligibility information that a worker must communicate and a client must understand. Often clients already have enough to do in understanding this information. As one GAIN CW observed, clients are often “burned  
irty minutes of discussing technical questions around eligibility requirements, leaving little potential for broader discussions about a recipient’s situation.

The structural weight of paperwork processing, and its ability to make issues of worker discretion or role perceptions almost superfluous, is illustrated well by one of the pilot projects. In this pilot, regular GAIN CWs were given additional training and discretion. The goal was to create a new micro-organizational culture focused on encouraging clients to find work by increasing personalized contact with clients. One pilot worker said that initially the change in role perceptions from “record-keeper” was very difficult. However, she had now made use of her new discretion, created in part by her low caseload of approximately 70, to set up appointments with clients to explain the urgency of welfare reform, encouraging them to voluntarily enroll in Job Club. She was also able to make weekly or biweekly follow-up phone calls to see how their job search was going or to inform clients of appropriate job leads as they came up, using a card catalogue she had recently created with the skills and interests of clients. However, in a subsequent conversation nine months later, her caseload had gone up close to “normal” levels of over 200. As a result, she no longer had frequent contact with her clients, and she found that her actual daily work had reverted to a traditional Gain caseworker job.

#### *Job Club Workers (JC)*

What distinguishes the GAIN offices more significantly from AFDC offices was the presence of specialized workers who were responsible for activities specifically designed to counsel, supervise and

facilitate client efforts in finding work. The most important type of worker observed was the job club worker (summarized in column 4 of Table1). Job club workers have a small caseload (between 10 and 20) for a limited duration of time – usually four to six weeks. During the first week, they lead participants through a workshop that teaches job search skills, such as resume writing, searching for a job, and interviewing, and self-esteem building for four to seven hours/day. Clients are required to treat this workshop as a job in order to learn about the expectations employers would have of them as employees.

This intense and prolonged contact doing job-related activities greatly facilitated a job club worker's ability to identify and address the particular barriers clients face in their efforts to find work, whether those barriers are psychological or material, such as child care problems, professional clothing, domestic abuse. An especially important part of a JC worker's role was addressing the pervasive misconceptions and fears about working; for example, clients raised concerns about a dollar for dollar reduction of benefits, or being cutoff of AFDC and Medicaid if one gets a job, and in this setting the worker could explain how program rules did not, in fact, allow these events to happen. GAIN JC workers are also able to utilize the misgivings and experiences of participants as they came up in discussion to repeatedly illustrate to everyone the advantages of employment as well as recipients' ability to overcome common work-related obstacles. Ideally then, Job Club provides a forum where clients are repeatedly exposed to new ideas and given opportunities to develop certain job search skills, receive positive affirmation, and to develop social skills through interaction with other participants<sup>17</sup>. These social skills, called "soft skills", were identified by many JC workers as one of the most significant barriers to client employment.

After one week of preparation, the job club workers follow their group into the job search part of job club where they monitor recipients' efforts to find job leads, submit applications and go on interviews, providing necessary support and supervision to keep clients on track. It is often in job search

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<sup>17</sup> The Job Club also points to another aspect of client contact that is significant – office location. Numerous GAIN CWs and JC workers observed that the existence of Job Club and Gain offices in locations separate from the AFDC program, often creates both the possibility and expectations of a more professional, less stigmatized space, where calmer, more involved types of communication can occur.

where many problems come up for the first time because this is when what has been learned must be applied. Continued worker-client interaction is crucial here for many clients' success, a situation which was difficult to maintain in some job club settings where infrequent follow-up meetings, larger group settings from merging different job club classes, and the return of JC workers to the classroom to begin with a new group often left recipients with little ongoing contact.

GAIN job club workers, therefore, have a very different kind of job from ordinary case workers, which allows them to relate to clients more as whole people with complex and interrelated problems. Their contact with clients is more frequent and flexible, and their main priority is achieving a particular outcome – client employment. Their task is inherently ad hoc and individualized as the problems of moving recipients into employment are variable and complex. The work discretion required for this is made acceptable by the fact that these workers are not charged with accounting for distributed funds and have no direct sanctioning power over clients. Therefore, their jobs need not be so rigorously defined by procedural safeguards. Thus, it is the particular combination of office culture, caseload size, worker incentive structure and worker authority that have made the job club worker more able to communicate with clients, and makes them an example of an *employment counselor* (Table 2).

The JC worker position also illustrates more generally how worker authority impacts worker communicative capacity and structurally limits it for some positions. The primary objectives of worker-client interactions are fundamentally tied up with the kinds of authority the worker has over the client, i.e., what is at stake in the meeting. For example, EWs issue benefits and have the most direct control over continued eligibility and grant amounts. Worker-client contact in this context, then, tends to be focused on questions or problems with clients' checks. There is therefore often an urgency to many EW-client interactions with the client taking an adversarial stance and hostile tone of "where is my check" or "why did you cut me off." EWs authority over benefits fundamentally affects the worker-client relationship, both by limiting the capacity for such infrequent interactions to expand to include more peripheral topics (e.g., employment and work), and even to the extent those topics are discussed, the implicit threat over benefits colors their form.

In other positions for which employment is more central to the job profile, authority over benefits is more attenuated (e.g., Gain CW, Job Club) or non-existent (pilot workers, Work Pays Coordinator, Job Developer), and the expectations of clients are different. Workers are not besieged as the source of checks, but rather as a source of information and resources, or at least as an independent set of requirements. These workers may have less impact on client attention, but in any event, the perception that such workers are in a different relation to the purse, affects the tone of client contact.

While the Job Club setting has great potential for communication between the worker and clients both on a one-to-one basis, and especially within a group setting, organizational conditions and available resources can vary and substantially impact the job club environment and experience. Overextended and overburdened programs, with for example, increased caseloads and overcrowded facilities, or poor materials and worker training and program knowledge can lead to routinized, superficial and ineffective interactions between workers and clients.

### *Pilots*

The pilot programs that developed in three counties were efforts at increasing the presence of an employment-focused program in the welfare offices as a way of addressing the traditional problems of program coordination and the subordination of employment-related goals. The presence of these pilots had numerous and varying effects on the EW work environment and highlighted the roles that workload and office culture continue to play in distinguishing the two programs.

Interaction between pilot GAIN workers and EWs increased EW knowledge of the GAIN program and often made them more amenable and responsive, due both to changes in role perceptions (e.g., feeling part of an integrated effort to help clients) and workload (pilot workers took over responsibility for presenting certain kinds of eligibility-related information). The level of interaction varied among counties from limited interaction between GAIN CWs and selected EWs during new joint presentations to all applicants, to more involved coordinating interactions between intake workers and

pilot workers located in welfare offices, to co-location of GAIN CWs and EWs in the same units with regular interactions about common clients.

Pilots accelerated and made more continuous the interactions between clients and workers from both AFDC and GAIN, as applicants were moved into GAIN components relatively quickly.<sup>18</sup> The shortened delays to enrollment and participation resulted in both a clearer initial message about work and a more sustained effort at keeping clients' focus on employment.

This difference in office culture is illustrated well by the perceptions of many pilot GAIN CWs who had previously worked as AFDC EWs. When they were EW's these workers said they felt they could do little for clients (one worker even said that "EWs had to develop means of self-protection from the vast human misery over which they administered"), in their new jobs as pilot workers they could offer clients information and opportunities that were comparatively valuable. ["Clients can make your day here which never happened as an eligibility worker except once or twice when someone got into Job Club."]

The pilot projects also demonstrate the significance of changing office culture. As part of the initiatives in one county, the Dean Curtis job club model<sup>19</sup> was used to train pilot workers and subsequently became a general training for the agency. It was intended to teach all workers to recognize clients as capable of working. Certain practices associated with the pilot also spread throughout the agency. For example, posting client job successes on the walls of the pilot units was adopted by many GAIN and AFDC units throughout the office.

The existence and persistence of different office cultures, though, was also readily apparent. Internal conflicts between GAIN and AFDC and between both of them and the pilots were common. Selection processes for pilot workers were often regarded by many workers as elitist and unfair. The new training pilot workers received, as well as changes in their job tasks, produced micro-cultures which other, non-pilot workers did not understand. The very existence of pilots also indicated that current

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<sup>18</sup> This contrasts with the delays associated with non-referral to GAIN and typically long delays before initial participation and between program components.

practices were no longer considered satisfactory by management and created the threat and uncertainty of changes to work routines, evoking hostility among many regular workers.

### *Job Developers (JD)*

In addition to the new methods for informing applicants about welfare reform and involving them in GAIN program components, two counties were also using another type of specialized worker, job developers (JD), who became increasingly important in the interactions between the agency and many clients. These workers were responsible for developing relations with employers in the community who were interested in employing welfare recipients, identifying recipients with the necessary qualifications, and matching clients to jobs.<sup>20</sup> JDs are another example of a worker whose job conditions allow them to relate to clients as an *employment counselor*, providing individualized information about employment-related resources. (column 5, Table 1; Table 2) Their caseload is limited to referrals for the purpose of developing resumes and identifying appropriate job opportunities.<sup>21</sup> And there are correspondingly few rules and regulations governing these interactions with clients. Their programmatic knowledge is employment-related, such as rules governing earned income and supportive services, and their knowledge of clients is individualized with regard to employment-related information and to some extent to typical hindrances to employment. Client contact for JD's is flexible and most importantly guided by the provision of concrete employment opportunities as JD's performance is evaluated on employment outcomes. The JD's role as an *employment counselor* differs somewhat from the other example of this type, the JC worker, in their more limited contact (usually only two to three meetings) and narrower focus on a specific resource. In some ways they are less counselors than service providers. However, their primary task of finding clients work requires individualized contact. One must be acquainted with a

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<sup>19</sup> The "Dean Curtis" model is a program designed by the private company, Curtis and Associates, for organizing the orientation and job club components of GAIN, which stresses getting a job. Numerous California counties have adopted this approach.

<sup>20</sup> In one county, these two functions – interface with employers, interface with clients – were being separated into separate job developer worker types.

<sup>21</sup> In some offices, JDs also had their own caseloads as normal GAIN CWs, and that severely restricted their JD role.

recipient's abilities and interests and address their particular problems in order to successfully place them in an appropriate position.

Job developers are not only an example of an ideal worker type, but also illustrate how agency specialization impacts the way other workers communicate with clients. JD's provide GAIN CWs and JC workers with new sources of information about job listings and an additional worker to whom clients may be referred, both of which give workers additional tools for motivating clients. Concrete job opportunities and referrals reflect an emphasis on finding work and impact a worker's program knowledge, client contact and worker authority. Both the actual resources the JD provides as well as their presence in the office environment<sup>22</sup> can also impact general office culture by increasing the presence of employment as an important topic for workers to discuss with clients.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of JDs on client communication was most significant in one of the pilot programs, where referral to a JD was part of the routinized processing of applicants. In this setting the presence of JDs acted as both an important incentive pilot workers could use to convince applicants to participate in the program, as well as an additional site of worker-client contact where the agency's message of employment as a first priority was clearly established. However, such intense individual treatment was only provided to a few applicants, because there were low numbers of participants and the time and number of JDs was limited.

In contrast to this pilot program, JD's impact on client contact was more attenuated in the normal GAIN process. While many JDs in GAIN offices also received referrals from CWs, the percentage of clients affected was significantly smaller. The JD's main impact in GAIN programs was through: 1) the arrangement of job fairs, to which significant proportions of the GAIN and AFDC client population were

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<sup>22</sup> An impact which can extend into the AFDC offices to the extent that JDs or AFDC administration independently disseminate job listings to AFDC workers or post them in front lobbies.

<sup>23</sup> Though this again depends on adequate discretion to practice new role perceptions and employ new messages in the face of existing routines. (see below)

invited<sup>24</sup>; and 2) the arrangement of mass hirings and individual positions at particular companies or organizations. The latter opportunities were generally communicated to GAIN CWs and JC workers who were expected to identify and inform qualified clients, an arrangement that was chronically underutilized by GAIN CW's. When new resources are not integrated into current client processing procedures, but rather depend on the additional initiative of other workers, two conditions must exist: 1) workload constraints must not be prohibitive; and 2) workers' role perceptions must include the utilization of this new resource. One or both of these conditions did not appear to hold true. A number of JDs complained that CW's would not cooperate in identifying and informing qualified clients of job opportunities, considering it an extraneous task. This characterization implies a difference in role perception. At the same time, numerous CWs mentioned high caseloads as prohibiting their discussion of all but the essentials for paperwork processing. In order to work around this problem, many JDs also had tools for direct access to clients, primarily through the development of a database of client resumes, making it in fact easier for them than CW's to identify clients appropriate for jobs.

## CONCLUSION

This model and the findings that illustrate it, have important implications for the success of welfare reform. First, developing the right kind of office culture, while perhaps necessary for promoting work, is not sufficient for creating individualized, employment-related worker-client interactions, as role perceptions matter only where a worker has the resources to act on them.<sup>25</sup> Thus, efforts by welfare agencies to teach caseworkers to treat recipients as customers will likely fail without corresponding changes in job conditions and performance evaluation criteria that give workers more time with each client.

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<sup>24</sup> The impact of job fairs is unclear as data for tracking was unavailable. Beyond the symbolic function, a number of JDs thought the impact was minimal because GAIN clients need more continuous supervision ("baby-sitting") and support than job fairs offer. "They just came in and took pens and left," said a JD.

<sup>25</sup> As one EW observed after a day-long welfare reform training program that was meant to make the local office culture employment-focused, "That was all well and good, but I have to go back to my caseload now."



Second, the caseworker role is inherently limited in its capacity to establish rapport because its primary focus is on completing paperwork and following routines defined by regulations. This means that creating a new kind of worker-client relationship may require division of tasks between case processing and employment focus, rather than trying to create a super case manager. This is especially true given the organizational tendency to overburden the case processing system, thus displacing employment-related goals. It also mitigates the conflicting roles of counselor and cop by dividing them up between different kinds of workers.

Third, even with program components specifically designed for changing client attitudes and facilitating their efforts at seeking employment, these activities are time and labor intensive, and are likely to succumb to similar agency pressures to increase the flow of clients through the program. This can result in overcrowded facilities and increased demand for worker attention that reduce job club to a standardized, superficial assembly line management of clients who receive little individualized attention. Thus, even with the creation of a specialized employment counselor, there is a limit to the caseload they can take.

Fourth, discretionary power is clearly not an unalloyed good, as Evelyn Brodtkin's study of JOBS caseworkers in Chicago welfare offices demonstrates (Brodtkin 1997). The asymmetries between worker and client, both in information and authority, means that workers have the capacity to set the terms of interaction in ways that not only diverge sharply from a client's legal rights, but also from a program's purported goals. And workers do this often in response to other workload and programmatic pressures.

These four points suggest broader methodological implications for how we ought to understand welfare reform. Most obviously is the point that the implementation of policy, especially of the kind envisioned under the latest welfare reform, involves a complicated and time-consuming re-negotiation of existing organizational routines. Communicating and inducing behavioral change in clients is particularly dependent on those routines. Only by looking at the street-level where the client meets the system can the transformative potential as well as the empirical limitations of welfare institutions be correctly

ascertained. And the contributions of the organization setting to the factors outlined in the paper, such as worker authority, incentives and time structure, must be carefully assessed.

Thus, if we take the new welfare-to-work goal of reform at all seriously, the worker-client relationship is still critically important to the potential success of many recipients. The ideal worker is one who guides the recipient through the complex structure of welfare regulations, acts as a clearinghouse for community resources, and motivates recipients away from the utter destitution that time limited benefits promises to bring. It is important, therefore, to examine carefully how the changing organizational conditions of welfare reform in progress affect the possibility of a robust worker-client relationship.

**TABLE 1. Factors affecting workers' ability to communicate with clients**

	<b>Worker AFDC types: Ideal Types</b>	<b>AFDC Caseworker eligibility technician</b>	<b>GAIN Caseworker employment technician</b>	<b>Gain Job Club Worker employment counselor</b>	<b>GAIN Job Developer employment counselor</b>	<b>Task Worker (Presenter/Referral) employment technician/counselor</b>	<b>Appeals Worker eligibility counselor</b>
<b><u>FACTORS</u></b>							
<b>Workload (caseload and task "intensity")</b>	high numbers;	moderate to high numbers;	low-medium numbers;	low-medium numbers;	high numbers/low-med numbers	low numbers	low numbers
	moderate intensity	moderate-high intensity	low intensity	moderate-high intensity (identifying employment resources)	low intensity (preparing information-related resources)	moderate-high intensity (preparing and participating in appeals cases)	
<b>Client Contact</b>	Time constrained, rigidly structured, and infrequent (yearly and as problems arise). Contact also primarily about benefits	Time constrained, rigidly structured, and infrequent (at start of new program component [every 4-12 months] or for program non-compliance)	Frequent, continuous and relatively flexible for limited time.	Can be relatively frequent and flexible	Standardized group presentations/ Flexible	Flexible but limited to time before hearing	
	<b>Instrumental*</b> - routinized and little information about work	<b>Routinized*</b> - routinized and high information about work	<b>Transformational* - individualized,</b> largely in group setting, and high information about work	<b>transformational* - individualized,</b> and high information about work	<b>Routinized*/ Transformational*</b>	<b>Transformational* - individualized</b> and high information about relevant policy issues including employment-related	
<b>Worker Knowledge</b>	Of Program - technical (eligibility regulations)	Of Program - technical (supportive service regulations)	Of Program - motivational (employment related)	Of Program - employment-related	Of Program - narrowly focused employment-related policies	Of Program - technical (policy expert)	
	Of Client - routinized	Of Client - routinized	Of Client - individualized	Of Client - individualized	Of Client - routinized/individualized	Of Client - individualized	
<b>Agency Specialization</b>	No (in one county yes)	Yes (Job Club Workers, Job Developers)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
<b>Worker Authority</b>	Determine eligibility and issue benefits	Ensure smooth flow through program components and arrange supportive services.	Motivate clients to seek work.	Identify client qualifications and provide them with appropriate job opportunities	Informing clients about particular policies and resources	Gather facts for appeals case. Explain and counsel client. Resolve cases informally.	
		Motivate clients to seek work" (discretion to talk about work, in part because no direct authority over grant)					
<b>Worker Incentives</b>	Completing paperwork - usually avoid more work by not encouraging employment [bureaucracy]	Completing paperwork - [bureaucracy]	Getting recipients employed (sometimes outcome based, sometimes little formal evaluation)	Getting recipients employed (outcome based performance)	Effectiveness at informing clients about particular policies	Resolution of client complaints	
<b>Office Culture (role perceptions)</b>	Emphasis on requirements, atmosphere of fear,	Emphasis on requirements, but in the context of an	Emphasis on the individual advantages and program	Emphasis on the individual advantages and program	Emphasis on the individual advantages and program	Emphasis on understanding client's situation and resolving	

discouraging rather than inspiring (discouraged from using authority over benefits with discretion including discussion of work as an option) Clerical	employment focused program Clerical	expectations of employment and self-sufficiency Professional	expectations of employment and self-sufficiency Professional	expectations of employment and self-sufficiency Clerical	case informally when possible. Professional
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\*Meyers, et al. (1998)

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