
Shaun F. Ryan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the nature of employment relations, labour management and the organisation of work in the New South Wales commercial (or ‘contract’) cleaning industry. The cleaning industry has grown rapidly in Australia over the past decade, in terms both of the number of firms involved and of the number of people employed; and cleaners now comprise one of the largest occupational groups in Australia. Despite the large size of some of the cleaning firms in terms of market share, economic turnover and the number of people employed, both the industry and cleaning work itself have until recently attracted little attention from academic researchers. The industry has been hidden from view, and the work performed by cleaners regarded as economically marginal and unimportant. The industry has typically been characterised as has having minimal human resource management practices and precarious employment arrangements, with wages and work conditions shaped by a ‘race to the bottom’ arising from fierce industry competition and contractual uncertainty. This thesis attempts to revise this characterisation and, in part, to fill the research lacuna surrounding contract workers in service sector employment.

Rather than opting for a traditional focus on institutional and collective organisation and employment relations at a macro level, the thesis analyses employment relations, the labour process and the organisation of work from a micro perspective at the ‘mop floor’. To this end, the thesis explores the lived reality of the work of cleaners and operational managers, with particular attention paid to how they organise work and ‘make out’, and how the social relations of employment are conducted across diverse and fragmented worksites.

The research focuses on a single organisational case study of an Australian and NSW industry exemplar. The evidence base includes interviews with managers from medium and large-sized cleaning firms, industry consultants and union officials. Participant observation is also used extensively used to obtain evidence on the perceived realities of work and organisation for those on the front line of cleaning work – the cleaners and their supervisors – and in order to understand how they make sense of their working world. The research
presented in the thesis acknowledges the importance of context and the effect that context has upon coming to an understanding of the world of work for manual service workers.

The analytical framework draws upon and critically evaluates literature from the ‘New Service Management’ school, arguing that in many cases normative models of human resource management, which primarily draw upon stereotypical examples of frontline service work, do not accurately reflect the work undertaken by manual contract service workers. Specifically, the thesis analyses the peculiarities of service work in an industry that, on the one hand, is characterised by organisational fragmentation and the spatial dispersion of cleaners and their managers, but which, on the other hand, is bound together by common practices emanating from a powerful underlying industry culture. Like other manual services, cleaning is an industry characterised by a structure that appears to be dysfunctional and difficult to organise, let alone to explain. This thesis explains how cleaning firms seek to overcome the apparent difficulties of organisation, low profitability and client expectations.

In sum, the study suggests that cleaners and operational managers are caught between two competing imperatives: those of the employer (the cleaning firm) and those of the client and the client’s employees, giving rise to a series of multiple employment relationships. These relationships enable cleaning firms to overcome a number of organisational issues including the management of fragmented work. Evidence is provided outlining a range of coping strategies adopted by cleaners and operational managers in their daily work routines, that enable them to cope with unrealistic work schedules and managerial efforts to intensify work.
PREFACE

While I take ultimate responsibility for the content of this work, I also acknowledge my many debts. This study focuses on an organisational case study of an Australian and NSW industry exemplar. It draws upon evidence gathered from interviews with industry managers, industry consultants, representatives from the industry association and union officials. I am particularly grateful to all those who took part in the study. As the management of the case-study firm and most informants requested confidentiality, I have decided not to use the real names of any of the informants, and all names used in this study are pseudonyms. I am grateful to Dimitria, Paola and Goranka – colleagues and students – for providing me with a list of Greek, South American and Eastern-European names. This list has formed the basis for all names used in the thesis.

Special thanks are due to the managing director of the firm that owns the case-study organisation for granting me access to its subsidiary. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance received from the group manager, human resources. This manager was instrumental in shaping my thoughts on the NSW cleaning industry and challenged a number of my assumptions. He also facilitated the interviews with managers from the case-study organisation and the participant observation research.

My deepest respect and gratitude is extended to those working on the mopfloor. The cleaners I came into contact with shared with me their work, their stories, their food and their culture. Where possible, I have tried to incorporate their voices and experiences in the analysis presented in this thesis.

This thesis has been a long time in the making and the journey began in New Zealand. Professor Patrick Walsh sowed the seeds for thinking about service work and the study of manual service workers. Professor Erik Olssen’s exhortations to restore human agency are still ringing in my ears. Thanks are due to Associate Professor Bradon Ellem for luring me across the Tasman to the University of Sydney and to staff, friends and colleagues from Work and Organisational Studies for their warm welcome and collegiality. At one stage I was beginning to despair of ever gaining access to a case
study firm, and I am particularly grateful to Professor Russell Lansbury for his assistance in helping me obtain access to the firm that eventually formed the basis of research presented in this thesis. Thanks are also due to Dr Grant Michelson (the ‘Gunner’) and Dr Harry Knowles (‘Old Bull’) for extending the hand of friendship and providing much needed support (and a beer!) when the going got tough. I will remember Friday afternoons and evenings at the ‘Royal’ with some affection. The next one’s on me. Professor Andrew Herod, from the University of Georgia, helped shape my thinking on precarious employment and restructuring of cleaning work.

I would like to acknowledge the support of colleagues in the School of Management, Curtin University of Technology. The friendship of David, Kandy, Allan, and especially Jane was crucial toward the end, and I thank you for not giving up on me.

My biggest debt and gratitude is to my supervisor, Dr John Shields. John has been not only a supervisor, but also a mentor and friend. He has been an exemplar of scholarship; and his knowledge of work, the labour process and management astonishes me, as does his formidable editing skills. That this thesis is completed is due to his patience, perseverance and sheer bloody-mindedness. Thank you.

I would like to express my appreciation to those who assisted in the preparation of the research material and the presentation of the thesis. Gabrielle Godard transcribed all of the recorded interviews; Anjana Burrun assisted in the preparation of the bibliography, and I am grateful for the assistance of Dr Margaret Johnson in proofing and copy editing.

Finance is a major hurdle facing all students and I am grateful to the University of Sydney for granting me a University Postgraduate Award. Thanks are also due to the staff in the school of Work and Organisational Studies for the opportunity to teach and research.

The research presented in this thesis was conducted according to human and ethical approvals obtained by the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee, reference number: 02/02/56.
The title of the thesis is inspired by the first song from Australian rock band, AC/DC’s 1976 album of the same name.

My heartfelt thanks go to Tracey. Thank you for believing in me and for giving up so much to come to Australia. You will never know just how much of this thesis is due to you, and how sorry I am for how things turned out. My parents, Clare and Doug Ryan, have instilled a love of learning in me. Mum, you won’t believe it, but I have finally finished.

Finally, a special word for Sue, who has brought me so much joy and happiness, and whose love and support carried me through at the end. Thank you for restoring my faith. I will owe you for a long time!
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INTRODUCTION

ROMANCING THE MOP

This thesis examines a hitherto neglected industry and occupation in Australia – that of commercial cleaning. I examine the commercial cleaning industry in New South Wales (NSW), the most populous of the Australian States and home to the largest number of cleaning firms and the largest concentration of cleaning industry employees. Using a combination of case study analysis, participant observation and more orthodox empirical research, the thesis examines and analyses employment relations and the organisation of work in the NSW cleaning industry. The study focuses on a close case study of a single organisation, a firm that is an exemplar of the industry in NSW and Australia generally. The pseudonym that I have chosen to give to the NSW operation of this firm is ‘Complete Clean’, while ‘Complete Clean Australia’ refers to its Australia-wide operations.

As will become clear in the chapters that follow, cleaning is one of the largest occupations in Australia and cleaning firms are some of the largest employers of labour in the country. Yet, despite the size of the industry and the large number of firms within it, neither the industry nor cleaning work itself have until recently attracted much attention from academic researchers. Coyle (1986: 6), for example, argues that cleaning as an industry has been ignored: ‘just as the social value of cleaning is undervalued, and only noticed when it is not done, so cleaning as an economic activity has been considerably underestimated.’ This is undoubtedly one of the hidden injuries of an occupation that carries a longstanding social and occupational stigma. That this should also extend to neglect within the academy is doubly regrettable – and it is an oversight that this thesis seeks to remedy.

1.1 Key Research Themes and Questions

Clearly, it is impossible to understand the nature of work and the employment relationship in any organisation without locating work and management within the
relevant industry context. Cleaning is a high volume, low cost industry in terms of the amount of work and the reward attached to it for cleaners and their managers, the value placed on it by customers/clients and the public\(^1\), and the amount that customers/clients are prepared to pay for it. The cleaning industry in NSW and elsewhere is characterised by intense market competition, where contracts are won or lost based on price and cleaning firms are prepared to bid for contracts at a loss in order to retain business. Corporate strategy amongst cleaning firms is thus focused intensely on cost minimisation and, since labour remains the largest cost in the industry, wages and conditions of employment are under constant attack. It has been claimed that fierce industry competition has led to a ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of cleaners’ wages and conditions.

Another defining characteristic of the industry is that of organisational and spatial fragmentation. Cleaning firms formally organise workers on the site of a third party – the client. Large and small firms coordinate and manage work across numerous worksites and across all hours of the day, and management practices become subordinated to the minimisation of cost and the control of fragmented and disjointed labour around the clock. These characteristics set the cleaning industry apart from many others. They are also features that are at odds with mainstream strategic management theory that draw on normative models of human resource management (HRM) and assume employment commitment and integration results from employer leadership and unitary corporate culture (Guest, 1987).

These structural peculiarities raise a number of overarching questions that this thesis attempts to address. In particular:

- How is it that commercial cleaning firms with seemingly dysfunctional organisational structures and no evident cultural cohesion still manage to survive and succeed?
- How is it that human labour can be harnessed adequately to organisational goals in the absence of these taken-for-granted requirements for organisational effectiveness?

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\(^1\) In most cases, cleaning appears to have no value until either it is not done at all or not done to a sufficient standard to prevent infection, cross contamination and so on.
These two questions are overarching goal domains (Boxall and Purcell, 2003) for the analysis presented in this thesis. However, as Boxall and Purcell (2003: 13) warn us, 'inside one goal, another is embedded'. The goal domains identified above should not distract from other, more specific research questions that emerge from the literature and from the thesis evidence itself. Embedded within these more focused questions other sets of domains. One such domain is that of 'strategic choice' (Child, 1997), and much of the analysis presented in this thesis seeks to explain the respective choices made by senior managers, line managers and cleaners relating to organizational structure and labour coordination.

This thesis attempts to locate the analysis of cleaning as an industry and an occupation within the domain of the 'services sector' and 'service work'. It has been argued that industrial relations and management as academic disciplines have yet to fully incorporate an analysis of work within the service sector, where employment patterns are distinctively different than those found within the manufacturing sector. In services, there are generally higher percentages of women, casual and part-time workers; and rates of unionisation tend to be lower. For these reasons Beechy (1987: 191-2), for example, has argued that 'we need to develop an analysis of employment which does not take manual work in manufacturing as its model.' Macdonald and Sirianni (1996b: 5) argue of the worker-management dyad that through 'the addition of a third party, the customer, the labour process relationship becomes a triangular interaction that complicates attempts to theorise management control strategies.' They suggest that models of management and work developed from studies in factory settings have focused on hard results and ignored the relational elements of production: meaning they have little value for the analysis of services.

While it is accepted that models of management based upon manufacturing require reworking, there is also a need for caution. Some writers have suggested that the distinction between services and manufacturing is 'overdrawn' (Sturdy, 2001). Others caution that, despite structural change and the rise of new management concepts, much of management practice has remained traditional and therefore relevant to the analysis of contemporary work (Warhurst & Thompson, 1998: 7). In this thesis we attempt to
bridge the two strands of research - services and manufacturing - and present an analysis that draws upon relevant theories and ideas from services while recognising that many of the assumptions behind management practices with services are based on the continuity of earlier models. In later chapters we draw upon theory derived from the analysis of work in a factory setting to explain how cleaners simultaneously resist and accommodate management and the demands of their clients and customers.

The location of cleaning as an *occupation* within the cleaning industry gives rise to a number of themes for analysis:

- Commercial cleaning embodies ethnic niches and gender-structured forms of employment.
- The interaction between the client/customer, the cleaner and their managers is an important component of the labour process and the management of labour.

An analysis of cleaning as an *industry* highlights the prominent role of cultural phenomena in the peculiarities of structural forms and labour-management practices within the industry. While existing studies of service work and service organizations explain the importance of cultural cohesions within organizations, few studies have sought to examine manual work such as cleaning as a cultural *form* or expression, let alone the role that culture might play across and between industries. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to examine shared assumptions and collective patterns of behaviour across the cleaning industry.

There are, however, a number of conceptual weaknesses within the burgeoning academic literature on services. The academic research on work in services has highlighted a new labour process based on ‘relational’ management, where the customer and client play an integral role in the management control of workers and their emotions (Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996b: 5-6). This literature has consistently examined service work and service/customer relationships through front-line interactive service work or white-collar employment (for example, Frenkel *et al.*, 1996; Korczynski, 2002; Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996a). Studies of manual-service work, and service work that is often completed ‘behind the scenes’ but involving some customer interaction, are absent
from the mainstream management literature. This lacuna is troubling, since Australian (Cully, 2002) and international analyses of the ‘service society’ (for example, Thompson et al 2001; Warhurst & Thompson, 1998) suggest that the future of work in services lies in low paying, low tech jobs, such as commercial cleaning. In this study, we seek to overcome this deficiency, to demonstrate that manual service work does entail customer service work, and to show that cleaners, like other manual workers, do undertake work that is both interactive and emotionally demanding.

Other research on services has attempted to bridge the divide between the academic and practitioner strands through a focus on the customer and service quality (for example, Schneider and Bowen, 1993; Schneider and Bowen, 1995). These ideas have been given credence in the ‘New Service Management’ school – a school of thought that highlights the salience of HRM practices in aligning customer and employee satisfaction (see Korczynski, 2002). The ideas in the ‘New Service Management’ school are particularly salient to this thesis. As we shall demonstrate, cleaning firms have embraced the rhetoric of the customer and have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to incorporate customer service as a business strategy and to instill quality customer-oriented service into the hearts and minds of their employees (Sturdy et al, 2001). Analysis presented in later chapters seeks to highlight a number of deficiencies in this literature and suggests that attempts by employers to align employee and customer satisfaction are fraught with tension and contradiction. It will be argued that in some cases, including commercial cleaning, employee alignment with the customer can serve to undermine management control.

We also explore another major theme drawn from the international literature, that of cleaning as an instance of ‘precarious’ work. Here, we argue that cleaning involves employment that is both ‘precarious’ and ‘peculiar’, in an industry that is both ‘non-standard’ and atypical. Within cleaning, the most of the workforce is either part-time or casual. Women predominate (although not among the ranks of management); and multiple jobholding is common, often within the one organisation. As we shall see, the precarious nature of cleaning has a number of implications for the management of

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2 Until recently, studies of manual service work have tended to be confined to the field of sociology. For example Macdonald and Sirianni’s (1996) collection includes manual services and Fine’s (1992, 1996) studies of restaurant work.
labour and for the social relations of employment. These structural characteristics lead to several questions for analysis:

- To what extent does commercial cleaning rely on informal networks and patterns of recruitment?
- To what extent does commercial cleaning constitute a new employment regime of ‘precarious employment’?

The study also considers a number of stigmas and stereotypes associated with the work of cleaning. Cleaning has often been portrayed as dirty work, and those undertaking cleaning are associated with their work through physical taint (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Rather than accepting this stereotype, the analysis depicts the work of cleaning as meaningful, and demonstrates how marginal workers are able to create meaning and identity in their work. Existing international studies of the cleaning industry have tended to ignore the subjective experience of cleaners, with employees’ accounts of the labour process ‘on the mopfloor’ either absent or under-interrogated. By way of redress, the study offers a close analysis of the labour process - the way in which labour is ‘managed’ and ‘controlled’ - in cleaning. By incorporating consideration of the labour process and the subjective experiences of cleaners, we demonstrate the complex patterns of compliance and accommodation that characterise the lived experience of cleaning work.

Following Collinson (1992: 28), particular attention is paid to ‘the interrelationship between subjectivity and resistance, compliance and consent’. The following record of one particular episode, generated by means of participant observation research (discussed below), highlights some of the contradictions and challenges faced by cleaners in their daily – or nightly – work: contradictions and challenges that are explored in detail in the later chapters of the thesis:

On one site, our last duty for the day was to mop out the commercial kitchen of a large industrial factory. There were four of us and the other three were in a hurry as the completion of this task meant we could go home. Jadranko spread the degreaser and other cleaning products on the floor, Jacobo followed
behind him with a scrubbing machine, and Milorad and I followed behind mopping the floor dry. The pace of work was frenetic. I was lunging with the mop and extending my arms and my twisting my body; sweat was pouring down my face. Milorad stopped me and demonstrated the art of mopping. He showed me how to splay the mophead and demonstrated the use of the mop with minimal body movement. The idea was, Milorad explained, to let the mop do the work and to keep the mop close to the body and not to overstretch. As I watched Milorad work the mop it was as though it had become part of him and they were a pair of dance partners in perfect synchronisation as they wheeled across the kitchen floor. I could not help but wonder, was Milorad controlling the mop or was the mop controlling him. (Field Notes, 26 July 2002)

This vignette illustrates the aesthetic side of cleaning work. It was almost as though Milorad was romancing the tools of his trade. The story also highlights a central further point of analysis within this study:

- In what ways do cleaners accommodate themselves to their work?
- How do they seek to cope with the reality of the mopfloor?
- How, in their own way, do they develop an attachment to, and pride in, the efficiency and grace of their work?

The position of cleaners and ‘marginalised’ service workers have captured the imagination of ethnojournalists (for example, Ehrenreich, 2001; Wynhausen, 2004) who have published bestselling exposes highlighting the plight of service workers in the modern economy. These accounts are based on the time spent undercover by these journalists in service jobs and their struggles, and those of service workers, to make ends meet and to cope with the onerous demands on the service workers’ bodies and time. The journalists claim that the work is devoid of meaning and morale and present service workers like cleaners as having little or no control over their work – as victims of a harsh regime of labour exploitation. While acknowledging the importance of market structures and organizational processes, the analysis presented in the thesis
rejects the assumptions underlying such accounts of cleaning as marginalised work and cleaners as marginalised employees, powerless, and as victims of their circumstances.

1.2 Framework for Analysis

Within the Australian industrial and employment relations literature, much of the research and analytical focus has been upon institutions and collective organisations, and studies have traditionally focused upon bargaining structures and collective agreements. The research presented within this thesis takes a different tack. Rather than according primacy to unions and collective bargaining, the study examines employment relations, the labour process and the organisation of work from a micro perspective – on the mopfloor. To be sure, this gets us closer to the lived experiences of Milorad and thousands of other workers like him. But taking a micro (or ‘inside-out’) perspective, I argue, also enables us to better understand the true nature of the industry itself: of industry-wide structures and practices and their impact on line employees, those charged with ‘managing’ them. If, as is frequently argued, the macro shapes the micro, then it is equally true that examining the micro allows us to better appreciate the nature of the macro.

Towards this end, the chapters in the thesis are arranged as follows: Chapters 2 - 4 provide a historical and theoretical background. Chapter 2 argues that cleaning is a peculiar industry containing peculiar forms of employment. Chapter 2 outlines the current state of the Australian and NSW cleaning industry. This chapter examines industry structure, identifies the main industry players, highlights the fragmentation of the industry, and describes industry characteristics and the collective regulation of employment. The chapter then examines the historical background of the NSW industry and highlights aspects of the industry’s historical path-dependency. The chapter also contends that developments in the cleaning industry need to be understood in the context of government contracting-out and private sector out-sourcing of cleaning services.

Chapter 3 reviews the existing literature on the cleaning industry and seeks to locate cleaning (as an occupation and as an industry) within wider debates on employment in services. This chapter also highlights some of the critical debates on work and employment in services. In particular, it is argued that cleaning represents a new
employment regime based on precarious employment arrangements of part-time, casualised work with short hours and insecurity of tenure. The arguments presented in this chapter attempt to address some of the shortcomings and omissions within the existing literature on cleaning.

Chapter 4 presents a framework for understanding the peculiarities of service work and explains the research methodology applied in the thesis. This chapter reviews a number of influential international studies of service employment and argues that, despite some shortcomings, these still have much to offer a more rounded understanding of social relations within commercial cleaning. It reviews the critical literature on human resource management, pointing out its relevance to an understanding of the peculiarities of cleaning work and employment. Particular attention is paid to the prescriptions and shortcomings of the ‘New Service Management’ school, particularly the limitations of its ‘best practice’ orientation. This chapter also outlines a framework for understanding culture within commercial cleaning, arguing that industry characteristics supplant those of individual firms and that analysis of social relations within commercial cleaning needs to be understood in terms of wider industry ideas and practices.

The next two chapters outline the research methodology and introduce us to the case study firm, Complete Clean. Chapter 5 describes and reviews case study research method and the use of ethnographic method, particularly participant observation, for understanding the context of work, the work itself, and the meanings attributed to it. Chapter 6 describes the case study firm (Complete Clean) that formed the basis for this study and presents salient features of this firm. Chapter 6 also describes how the research into Complete Clean was conducted and the sites visited during the participant observation phase of the research.

The major empirical findings of the thesis are set out in Chapters 7-10. These chapters explain and discuss findings from the case study to explain the social relations of employment in the NSW commercial cleaning industry. It opens with a description of the organisation and reorganisation of cleaning work and considers how cleaning firms seek to manage temporality as a business strategy. Chapter 7 also explains the complexity of social relations in cleaning through an analysis of the multi-faceted
employment relationship between the cleaner, the customer/client and the employing firm.

The following two chapters (Chapters 8 and 9) examine intended HRM strategy policy and practice within Complete Clean in terms of what management wants to happen, and then discusses the lived and enacted experience of HRM. These strategies enable cleaning firms to overcome some of their organisational complexities. The arguments, discussion and analysis presented demonstrate a number of shortcomings in the 'New Service Management' school literature and highlight the limited uptake of sophisticated HRM practices within the industry. Chapters 8 and 9 highlight the importance of industry culture and the development of informal employment practices to overcome the challenges of industry fragmentation. Unlike other studies of the cleaning industry, this thesis examines the role of front-line operational managers scattered across diverse work sites as the vital link between the employer and cleaners. It also explains their role as cultural agents, and their importance in interpreting and implementing management strategy.

Chapter 10 draws together a number of different themes explored in the earlier chapters. It discusses the subjective experience of cleaners by examining how cleaners construct a positive identity, and explains how cleaners engage in practices that enable them to cope on the mopfloor. It returns to a model from the management literature dealing with manufacturing to demonstrate that the experiences of service workers are comparable with those on the factory floor.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis and presents keys findings and the limitations of the research. A key finding is that cleaning firms are able to survive and succeed and overcome the difficulties of organisation across space. Cleaning firms make use of labour market vulnerabilities and are able to exploit the complexities and multiplicity of employment relations to avert problems of labour control. The findings presented in the thesis support the international literature, demonstrating that cleaning is dominated by a regime of precarious employment and suggesting that precarious employment in services is becoming the norm. Overall, then, the findings confirm that cleaning is a peculiar industry and contains peculiar forms of employment. This thesis concludes by
arguing that researchers need to ask different questions when analysing modern, decentralised organisations, and identifies areas for future research.
CHAPTER 2

THE NEW SOUTH WALES CLEANING INDUSTRY, PAST AND PRESENT: STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION, WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

This chapter examines the literature dealing with cleaning in Australia and demonstrates the size and complexity of the contemporary industry. In doing so, the discussion draws on insights from the literature on contracting and outsourcing literature and the small number of case studies of cleaning within this literature. While there is a paucity of research focused directly on the cleaning industry, the substantial research on cleaning contained within the literature on outsourcing provides useful insight into the Australian and NSW cleaning industry, and particularly into the degree of competitiveness within the industry. The outsourcing literature also helps to account for the growth of cleaning firms since the late 1980s.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Section 1 examines the current structure of the NSW and Australian cleaning industry. This section overviews the industry's historical development and its current structural characteristics, including an overview of the size and organisation of the industry. It also introduces us to some of the organisational peculiarities within the industry. Section 2 describes the chief characteristics of the cleaning industry workforce, including the numerical dominance of the industry by part-time employees, women and immigrants. Section 3 examines the historical and current patterns of unionisation, industrial relations and award regulation in the NSW cleaning industry. Returning to the theme of structural change, Section 4 furthers our analysis of the current state of the cleaning industry by highlighting three major sources of structural change with the industry: outsourcing, contracting out and privatisation. The concluding section summarises the main findings and arguments advanced in the chapter.
2.1 Industry Development and Structure

Historically, cleaning has been a ‘hidden’ occupation and industry in Australia. Although there are several contemporary studies of women taking up cleaning work as domestics and maids (Higman, 2002; Meagher, 2003), little is known about cleaning and the occupation of ‘cleaner’. The meagre accounts of cleaning available in a range of historical studies have tended to focus on the gender divisions of employment and the occupational segregation of women. Nevertheless, useful insights on the work of cleaners can be gleaned from historical studies of Australian women and histories of unionism amongst cleaners and associated workers.

The history of cleaning in Australia parallels and reflects the employment of women. Since the beginning of European settlement, women have been employed to undertake cleaning and associated domestic duties in Australia in private homes, hotels, boarding houses and the like (Hargreaves, 1982: 14). Sheil (1991: 297-98) explains that while cleaning has an ‘ancient lineage’, somewhat like the closely associated job of watchman, it only developed as a specialist occupation in the late nineteenth century. The specialist cleaner, as distinct from other domestic workers emerged, in part, because of changing public perceptions of health and hygiene, underpinned by new laws and institutions dealing with health and infectious diseases and the need to prevent the spread of disease. Women were crucial to the development of the new specialist cleaning occupation. Sheil (1991: 298-99) argues that by 1900, labour-saving technology had displaced women in domestic service and freed them for employment as specialist urban cleaners.

It is impossible to gauge accurately the extent of cleaning work in Australia in the early years of the twentieth century. Cleaning was considered a marginal activity, often given to apprentices, porters and shop assistants when other work could not be found for them. However, many of the features of the current industry were evident in the early twentieth century. In addition to a small number of full-time cleaners working for department stores, there was a much larger number of part-timers employed early morning or in the evenings. As in much of the cleaning workforce today, in the late colonial era the average age of the NSW female cleaner was 47 years, and instrumental reasons were evident in their choice of work. Much of the work was seasonal and
casual, and there is some evidence that employment conditions were at least as precarious as they are today (Sheil, 1991: 300; Beasley, 1996).

The early years of the twentieth century witnessed the formation of the first specialist cleaning firms; firms that contracted their services to other organisations. These new firms (window cleaning firms, for example) employed only males. Other occupations also developed around cleaning. For instance, master caretakers were employed to take care of large buildings and they, in turn, employed women to undertake cleaning duties (Sheil, 1991: 300, 304). The First World War marked another major turning point in the industry's historical development. In 1915 the NSW Government Cleaning Service (GCS) was established as part of the NSW Department of Education. According to Jensen and Liebenberg (1995: 15), 'it was created for the dual purpose of cleaning schools and providing assistance for those war widows that were not adequately covered by the existing social security system'. Until its privatisation in 1994 the GCS remained the largest employer of cleaners in NSW, employing mainly women cleaners and many workers from NESB. The GCS and its privatisation had a major impact on employment relations and conditions of employment within the industry, a point which shall be considered at a later point in this chapter.

In some respects, it is difficult to generalise about the cleaning industry in Australia today since cleaners are employed in-house by a variety of businesses and by private cleaning firms who contract their services to other firms and public sector agencies. The fact that the industry often operates on the margins of the 'legitimate' economy also makes measurement of the industry problematic. This is reflected in the differences between official figures reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and industry insiders.

Cleaning in Australia is big business and has experienced rapid growth since the 1980s. This growth reflects changes in public sector contracting and corporate demand for cleaning services, as firms increasingly outsource their non-core functions, including facility maintenance and cleaning and changes in public sector contracting. According to the industry peak body association, the Building Services Contractors Association of
Australia (BSCAA)\(^1\), the transfer of business to outside providers has not expanded the total market (Jeffs, 2001). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the total value of the cleaning market is $2.1 billion, with profit margins of 7.3 percent (ABS 2000). However, industry insiders dispute the ABS figures, and the BSCAA claims the industry is worth $3.5 billion, with profit margins before tax of 5-5.5 percent (Jeffs, 2001).\(^2\) Profits margins vary according to business size, with smaller firms having lower overheads and on-costs; and these tend to be more profitable than larger firms (Jeffs, 2001; see also ABS, 2000). The BSCAA estimates public sector business to be worth 20–25 percent of the industry total (Jeffs, 2001).

The literature on cleaning identifies a number of trends regarding industry characteristics and the nature of cleaning organisations. In the countries considered in the literature (United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Israel and New Zealand) the cleaning industry is comprised of many cleaning firms. Most firms are small ‘mop and bucket’ operations, although a handful of large organisations control 60-80 percent of the industry in these countries. A plethora of small firms, and the dominance of a small number of larger firms, means that the industry is highly polarised.

The cleaning industry has grown steadily in developed market economies since the Second World War. Expansion has been driven by the growth in office space since the 1960s and by businesses contracting out cleaning services. The biggest impetus to growth of the cleaning industry came in the early to mid 1980s when developed market economies began to pursue a neo-Liberal agenda and contract out public services to private companies.

Since the mid-1980s, across the developed world, there has been major growth in both the size of cleaning companies’ workforces and in the industry’s share of employment in the national economy. This has been accompanied by the growth of multi-national cleaning companies and mergers and take-overs amongst cleaning firms of all sizes

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\(^1\) The BSCAA was formerly known as the Australia Building Services Association. I refer to both as the BSCAA.

\(^2\) The figure of 5-5.5 percent is an industry ideal. On many contracts, the profit margin is typically 1-3 percent (interviews with industry managers and cleaning industry consultants; Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a, 1989b).
(Allen & Henry, 1996; Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a, 1989b). The relative size of the industry can be difficult to measure because of the clandestine operations of many firms and the fact that they operate on the margins of the economy (Leonard, 1998). Despite the size of the industry and market dominance by a handful of large firms in each country, the industry remains intensely competitive. Low entry costs and capital requirements have meant that competition is frequently fierce and profit margins low, typically 1-5 percent of the contract price, although given the low capital-labour ratios involved, the return on capital can be very high (Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a, 1989b; see also Aguair, 2000). Coyle found that return on capital for cleaning firms in the United Kingdom was as much as 27.5 per cent for the years 1980-1981, compared to an average of 10 per cent for British industry as a whole (Coyle, 1986: 6); while in New Zealand return on capital was 30 to 50 per cent, twice the national average (Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a: 46). As cleaning is a labour intensive industry, the largest cost faced by cleaning firms is the labour component of their contract. The competitive nature of the cleaning industry has profound implications for employment and social relations within the industry as employers attempt to reduce the cost of their labour component and seek to maximise the work obtained from their labour force.

The nature of competition within the industry means that firms often bid on contracts at a paper loss, hoping to recover costs by subcontracting work to cheaper providers, by cutting cleaners’ hours and reorganising work, or by creating ‘specials’ whereby the firm encourages clients to purchase additional cleaning above and beyond contracted specifications. In Australia, according to the industry journal Inclean (Oct-Nov, 2004: 15), this has resulted in a situation in which ‘numerous quoted tendered prices, particularly in NSW, [are] way below accepted industry benchmarks’. By the same token, in 2004 one of the largest NSW firms announced that it would abandon price-driven tendering in favour of delivering a cleaning package based upon quality and service (Inclean Dec 2004: 35): a decision that probably has much to do with the fact that larger firms have higher overheads and face more public scrutiny, and so experience considerable difficulties in competing on price with smaller and/or less scrupulous firms.

Contract cleaning is a very diverse and fragmented industry, and figures relating to the number of firms can fluctuate widely. Exhibit 2.1 details the number of cleaning
enterprises in Australia and NSW in 1988 and 1999. Cleaning firms in this State have the largest concentration of industry activity compared to the rest of Australia with 42 percent of the industry income (ABS, 2000).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enterprises Australia</td>
<td>4181</td>
<td>5938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enterprises NSW</td>
<td>1452</td>
<td>2026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There were 5,938 cleaning enterprises in Australia in 1998-1999, with 62.5 percent of the total firms employing four people or fewer, but together employing only 12.1 percent of the total workforce. Many of these small enterprises are family-based ‘mop and bucket’ operations that are not formally registered as businesses. Conversely, those enterprises employing 100 or more people accounted for less than two percent of all enterprises but employed 55 percent of the workforce (see Exhibit 2.2 below). These large firms are of particular interest. Many of them have diverse business interests, beyond cleaning services, providing catering, security, grounds and building maintenance, dry cleaning and laundry services. Some of the larger firms also provide labour hire services. The industry is dominated by a handful of major players and this small number of enterprises employs around two-thirds to three-quarters of the NSW cleaning workforce (see Exhibit 2.3 below). According to the BSCAA, 90 percent of the 6,000 cleaning businesses in Australia are small businesses, employing fewer than 20 people. Of the small firms, average turnover is $500,000. By contrast, seven companies turn over $25 million or more, while two have a turnover of $250 million (Jeffs, 2001).

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These small firms are coming under the increasing attention of the Australian Tax Office for tax evasion. Cleaners and cleaning firms have been identified by the ATO as culprits of the underground economy (Sydney Morning Herald, 4 May, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons employed</th>
<th>0-4</th>
<th>5-9</th>
<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-49</th>
<th>50-99</th>
<th>100+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises</td>
<td>2613</td>
<td>3374</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>1398</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Enterprises</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment*</td>
<td>5344</td>
<td>8212</td>
<td>5810</td>
<td>8962</td>
<td>4113</td>
<td>8009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Employment*</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a: includes working proprietors & partners

Both within Australia and further afield, the cleaning industry is characterised by the fragmentation of product markets and the cleaning companies themselves. The growth of demand for contract cleaning services has led to changes within the industry. Since the 1980s, large companies have pursued an aggressive policy of acquisition of smaller companies, and this had been accompanied by amalgamation between the larger players themselves (Allen & Henry, 1996; Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a, 1989b). The industry is now dominated by a few fragmented organisations with decentralised organisational structures. These large firms are the embodiment of a paradox, in that they are not always what they might seem to be:

The contract giants are not as substantial as they appear.... they are hollow (rather than 'hollowed out') entities who formally organise workers on somebody else’s site. They are multi-site operations, yet they do not own the sites. They are mass service firms, in terms of employment, yet they possess few tangible assets other than the offices which house their ‘lean’ management… Their major asset is, in fact, difficult to conceptualise and even harder to capitalise: it is the value created by customer loyalty – the goodwill
of a client to renew a contract and release a further stream of profits. (Allen & Henry, 1996: 73)

If the contract giants are hollow, then they are also geographically dispersed. Many employees within the cleaning industry never enter the registered office of their employer. The fragmentation of cleaning firms also blurs employment relations and introduces the possibility of informal employment practices (Allen & Henry, 1996, 1997). Industry fragmentation is a key theme in the analysis presented in the later chapters of this thesis.

There is considerable market diversity within the industry, with the BSCAA identifying commercial (retail, offices, CBD high-rise buildings, shopping centres and transport), education (schools, TAFE and universities), defence force establishments, remote sites (major mining and industry companies), sport and other events and health as the major market segments (Jeffs, 2001). Australian Bureau of Statistics data (ABS, 2000) registers the dynamics of market diversity, which identifies the cleaning of commercial buildings and premises as the dominant industry sector, followed by education premises, domestic premises, retail premises, hospitality and industrial premises.

Most of the larger cleaning firms undertake a range of cleaning activities and actively tender across all market segments. Although the industry is dominated by a handful of large players, there is considerable scope for smaller firms. This is evident in the number of small and medium sized firms providing specialist cleaning services such as window cleaning, fire damage cleaning or targeting certain market segments such as retail centre or hotel cleaning and the like. The withdrawal of larger cleaning firms from retail centres because of insurance risk premiums has opened up the market for smaller, specialised firms who are prepared to accept the risk.4

Although the Australian cleaning market is small, claiming around 5 percent of the global cleaning industry, it has made contributions. For instance, many of the industry's pioneering innovations originated in Australia, including backpack vacuum cleaners

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4 Many larger firms are unable to obtain insurance for the cleaning of retail centres because of public liability risks (interviews with industry managers and consultants).
and rotary polishers (Jeffs, 2001). Such innovations in techniques and equipment are partly due to the intensely competitive nature of the industry. They also contribute to the extraordinary rate of productivity claimed by the industry. Australian firms are acknowledged world leader[s] in productivity in CBD high rise buildings, and many claim they can clean $1,000m^2$ per hour (Building Owners and Managers Association [BOMA], 1990; Jeffs, 2001), compared to only 300-400$m^2$ in North America$^5$, although such levels of productivity are generally achieved at the expense of quality and the erosion of cleaners’ conditions of work.

While the BSCAA has reported very few acquisitions within the Australian industry (Jeffs, 2001), there have been significant acquisitions and international mergers since the 1960s. Exhibit 2.3 outlines the major cleaning firms in NSW and traces their patterns of ownership. In order to protect the confidentiality of those organisations listed below, the data only includes material that is publicly available from company publications, internet websites or other published sources. The exhibit highlights the size and complexity of cleaning in NSW. Tempo and Berkeley Challenge (now Spotless) dominate the Australian industry. Both are publicly listed companies and are in the top 500 Australian companies. Both are also amongst the largest employers in Australia across all industries.

The NSW cleaning industry is dominated by Berkeley Challenge (part of the Spotless Group that undertakes cleaning in Australia and internationally) and Tempo Services. In 2001 Tempo acquired the third largest cleaning firm in Australia, the Prestige Property Group. It is difficult to trace the precise ownership patterns of many of the cleaning companies, but Brosnan and Wilkinson’s (1989b: 85) observations about the ownership of New Zealand cleaning firms appear to be equally apposite to the Australian industry:

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$^5$ An influential international cleaning periodical noted that in Australia the ‘typical timings, used for costing purposes by contractors, are up to four times higher than those typically used by their UK counterparts’ (C&M cleaning and maintenance, January 1996: 28).
Exhibit 2.3 Largest Cleaning Companies in NSW

Broadlex Cleaning Australia Pty
- Formed 1969 by owner/founder.
- Provides a range of cleaning services.
- Successful tender for NSW Department of Education Contracts.
- Business concentrated in NSW and ACT

Source: Broadlex internet site: www.broadlex.com.au

Swan Services Pty. Ltd:
- Formed 1964 by owner/founder
- Provides range of cleaning services.
- 1000 employees.
- Business concentrated in NSW and Queensland.

Source: Swan Services internet site: www.swanservices.com.au

Menzies International (Australia) Pty. Ltd:
- Formed 1968 by university student.
- Family owned.
- 1000 employees 1999
- Company now operates in Australia and the United States (United States since 1984).
- In 1999 acquired Allcorp cleaning (800 employees in 1996) who was a major player in NSW and Queensland. Allcorp trades under own name within Menzies Property group.


Tempo Services Pty. Ltd:
- Formed 1995. Now publicly listed company.
- Cleans all market segments. Other business interests include security, courier services, health and facility management.
- In 2001 Tempo acquired Prestige Property Services, the third largest NSW cleaning company with 8000 employees nationally
- Tempo holds the world’s largest cleaning contract employing over 3500 staff to clean 1970 public sector sites in NSW (government contracts account for 25 percent of Tempo’s business).
- Five-year school cleaning contract worth $460 million to Tempo.
- Total Australian employees: 7000
- Company has diversified its outlook and now employees 1200 people in the United Kingdom in cleaning and facility management contracts.


Berkeley Challenge Ltd (part of Spotless group of companies since 1999. Now trading as Spotless as of September 2003). Trading as Spotless since September 2003
- Long and diverse history (dates back 60 years) – originally a small New Zealand cleaning firm (Crotchalls)
- Now stand-alone company within wider service oriented publicly listed organisation (Spotless Group).
- Spotless Services employs 17,000 people in Australia
- Berkeley Challenge employed 12,000 cleaners across Australia in 1995. Today employs 9000 staff across 2400 contracts.
- Largest provider of services in Australasia
- Formerly owned by P&O Services Ltd – sold to Spotless Group in 1999
- Very influential internationally has owned or been owned by American, British and New Zealand cleaning companies. Once part of a multi-national cleaning empire
- At one stage, its New Zealand parent company (Crotchalls) held 90 percent of British National Health Service cleaning work.

The ownership of cleaning firms is constantly changing through mergers and takeovers and the changing maze of wholly owned subsidiaries allows the larger companies to submit several tenders for each new job by using the names of one of their acquired competitors. This constant changing of identities also serves the purpose in that it helps the contracting firms to escape previously acquired reputations for bad service.

Despite numerous takeovers and acquisitions, the cleaning industry in NSW has remained relatively stable for many years, with few threats to the handful of firms that dominate the industry. This situation has changed somewhat with the introduction of cleaning franchising into the Australian market. For a number of years franchise firms have existed in Australia, although these have been oriented predominantly towards the personal and household markets. Although most cleaning franchises are small, the spread of the world’s largest cleaning franchise, Jani-King (an American franchise giant), into Australia has alarmed some of the larger firms (Inclean April 2001: 6; April 2000: 12). An industry manager noted that Jani-King had been buying up a large number of smaller contracts and on-selling them (Interview, 2002). In the past decade, large international cleaning firms have sought to establish a presence in Australia through franchising. Jani-King claims to have established 630 franchises in Australasia (Inclean Oct-Nov 2004:14-15). The development of franchising has spread to large firms (including the firm studied in this thesis), who have adopted it in order to retain profitability by franchising their brand/trade name, expertise and operations. It is not my intention to examine the development of franchising in any detail here: suffice it to note its development as a response to the competitiveness of the wider industry and its implications for the social relations of employment.

Current business strategies within the industry have seen cleaning firms increasingly ‘contract-out’ risk, and some limited human resources practices have been adopted. The soaring cost of insurance, including public liability insurance, and the costs of ensuring compliance with occupational health and safety legislation, have impacted significantly upon larger cleaning firms, forcing them to search for new business models. Although none of the large firms have publicly acknowledged it, franchising has enabled these firms to contract out some of the costs of insurance and legislative compliance. In return for specialist skills in contract preparation, training and superior purchasing power for equipment and chemicals, along with administrative support, franchising is
seen as a way of growing the business of large organisations while sharing some of the costs. In a franchise model, the risks associated with employment are transferred to the franchisee, and it may be that franchising has become a replacement model for subcontracting in the cleaning industry.

Until recently, customers and clients in the cleaning industry were fragmented and disjointed. This has changed in recent years with many national organisations, such as banks and supermarkets, now organising their cleaning contracts on a national basis, and often dealing with one company. This contrasts with the previous situation in which contracts were organised on a site-by-site or statewide basis. Now, some larger national clients have formed purchasing groups; an example is Cyberlinks, which was formed to negotiate cleaning contracts. This trend has been accelerated by the development of facility management. Cleaning companies have responded by providing an additional range of services, including catering, building maintenance, grounds maintenance and security, to meet the needs of customers. Such practices have placed downward pressure on contract prices. With cleaning firms being forced into providing the same level of service for less money, additional pressure has been applied to conditions of employment and the organisation of work.

One of the major problems facing the cleaning industry is the growth of illegal subcontracting. Sub-contracting has always been prevalent in the cleaning industry as firms have contracted-in specialist services such as window and carpet cleaning and rubbish removal. Illegal contracting occurs when cleaning firms bid for a contract (often at a very low price; sometimes at a loss) and then sub-contract the work to other organisations (interestingly, the larger players in the NSW industry are facing competition from several growing medium-sized firms that began as subcontractors to larger firms). Illegal subcontracting has grown to such an extent that many industry workers are being paid well below award-prescribed minimum pay rates and have had their entitlements, including superannuation payments, withheld (Interviews with industry managers and consultants 2001, 2002). In recent years, the larger firms and the industry association have sought to eliminate illegal subcontracting within the industry. In April 2002, an amendment to the Cleaning and Building Services Contractors (State Award) came into force, making the principal contractor liable for the actions including pay and conditions of the sub contractor (Subclause 39: Subcontracting).
Some firms have used sub-contracting as a means of driving down wages and recovering costs on low-margin contracts. Subcontracting has also proved useful in allowing some firms to circumvent the State cleaning award. In NSW the award is vigorously supported by the larger and medium-sized cleaning firms to ensure an even playing field and to prevent undercutting by competitors. In NSW, award wages and conditions have become the accepted norm of employment conditions. Unlike Western Australia, there is as yet no evidence of the uptake of Australian Workplace Agreements (Interview with industry industrial relations consultant, 2003; Interviews with industry managers, 2002). However, there is also no evidence of above-award wages being paid except in very few cases where the client has agreed to pay an additional amount to cleaners performing additional duties such as light maintenance (Interview with industry consultant, 2003). Other unscrupulous practices used by employers to cut costs include placing pressure upon employees to quit their jobs and continue to work as individual contractors (effectively becoming ‘self-employed’). Such tactics reduce wages, avoid the need to pay annual leave and sick pay entitlements and allow employers to bypass laws concerning unfair dismissal. The relevant union, the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers’ Union (LHMU) is often placed in the difficult position of recovering money for underpayment of wages with cleaning companies being ‘wound up’ or declaring themselves bankrupt (Interviews with LHMU organisers and officials, 2001, 2002).

Cleaning in Australia, then, is a very competitive industry. The tendering process ensures that contracts are often secured on the basis of price, making profit margins very low. The largest cost facing cleaning firms is that of labour hire. Jeffs reports that 80-85 per cent of contract prices are labour-related costs. On average, direct wages

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6 More than one industry insider interviewed pointed out that all firms, large and small, have been involved in illegal subcontracting at one stage or another.


8 A full-bench decision of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission has closed the loophole on such practices by ruling that in the case against Endoxos cleaning company employers have ‘a continuing responsibility for its workers after they were advised to resign and then resume their jobs on individual contracts’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 15-16 November 2003, p. 7).

9 In the above example, Endoxos sold its cleaning contracts and was in the process of winding up operations as the union closed in to recover cleaners’ monies.
account for 60 percent of total costs but workers compensation premiums (10.56 percent of direct wages or 6 percent of the contract price), and superannuation of 9 percent of direct wages raise the total cost of labour further still. Other costs, including spiralling public liability insurance premiums, have an adverse effect on already low margins (Jeff, 2001; see also ABS, 2000). Low rates of technology uptake in Australia and the absence of equipment advancement in robotics, chemicals and equipment (Jeffs, 2001) have meant that cleaning firms pay careful consideration to the labour component of the industry and to the organisation of work on cleaning sites.

2.2 Workforce Characteristics

The size of the Australian contract cleaning labour force has more than doubled since the early 1990s. However, this growth is not in new employment; rather it is a recycling of employment from private sector firms and public sector agencies. Researchers who have examined the broader changes in the Australian labour market point to the 'continued evolution of the economy from labour-intensive agrarian/commodity production to labour-intensive Fordist manufacturing and thence to labour-intensive flexible service provision' as underpinning employment change (Cully, 2002: 141). Exhibit 2.4 records that most estimates put total employment in the cleaning workforce at 100,000 or more. Cully's research on Census figures shows that cleaning is the third largest employing occupation in Australia (behind sales assistants and secretaries and personal assistants) with numbers increasing by nearly 29,000 (18 percent) between 1986 and 2001 (Cully, 2002: 146).

Unpublished data from the 2001 Census allows us to present a broad picture of the number of cleaners employed across Australia. Exhibit 2.5 demonstrates that the majority of cleaners are concentrated along the Eastern seaboard of Australia in the

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10 This data was obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics by the LHMU. It is important to note that some of the data will be skewed by who returned their Census forms, how the question was phrased, or whether the person understood or felt comfortable answering the question. This is particularly significant for non-English speakers and 'illegal' workers. Occupation is identified through the question, 'In the main job held last week, what was the person's occupation?' Consequently, those people for whom cleaning is a second job do not show up in this Census data at all (LHMU, 2006 'Summary of 2001 ABS Data on Commercial Cleaners').
most populous States. Cleaners are employed across a range of industries although these tend to cluster into one main grouping: accommodation, pubs, taverns, bars and hospitality, education, hospitals and nursing homes. The two largest groups are 'cleaning services' and 'other industries', reflecting the diversity of the employment of cleaners across the Australian economy. This study is interested chiefly in those employed in 'cleaning services'. These cleaners tend to be employed by commercial cleaning firms and undertake their employment on the site of the client.

Exhibit 2.4 Cleaning Industry Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment Australia</td>
<td>44322</td>
<td>95001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment NSW</td>
<td>13949</td>
<td>32123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW employment as % of Australian total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSCCA (Jeffs, 2001)b</td>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>130000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaners Australia</td>
<td>159501</td>
<td>188365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHMU</td>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaners Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>100 000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a: ABS survey of 2994 business in the cleaning services industry.
b: Industry Association estimates.
c: Authors calculations based on Census data.
Sources: ABS 'Cleaning Services, Australia, Cat. 8672.0 1990 and 2000; Jeffs, 2001; Culy, 2002; LHMU, 1999a.

Part-time and casual employees dominate the labour force numerically in the cleaning industry. Although official statistics show a relatively even gender profile, insiders contend that the industry is dominated by women. Exhibit 2.6 details the composition of the cleaning workforce as reported by the ABS (1990, 2000).
### Exhibit 2.5 Cleaners (ASCO 9111) by Select Industries for all States/Territories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>OT(a)</th>
<th>Total Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5710   Accommodation</td>
<td>4330</td>
<td>2533</td>
<td>3402</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5720   Pubs, Taverns and Bars</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5740   Clubs (Hospitality)</td>
<td>1197</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7866   Cleaning Services</td>
<td>23613</td>
<td>17672</td>
<td>13680</td>
<td>7021</td>
<td>8611</td>
<td>1387</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>1309</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>73975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>841   Education</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>842   School Education</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>2960</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post School Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>843   Education</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8611  Nursing Homes,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undefined</td>
<td>2658</td>
<td>1735</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8613  Nursing Homes</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Homes,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undefined</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other industries</td>
<td>19941</td>
<td>14602</td>
<td>15446</td>
<td>5779</td>
<td>8139</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>68278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1426</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56231</td>
<td>39614</td>
<td>39177</td>
<td>15614</td>
<td>20268</td>
<td>5182</td>
<td>2727</td>
<td>2572</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>181423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: a. Other Territories Source: ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing (unpublished data)*

The official statistics are at odds with those presented by the BSCAA and the LHMU. The BSCAA argues that 75 percent of the workforce are part-timers working less than 15 hours per week (Jeffs, 2001), while the LHMU contends that 65 percent of the workforce is part-time with one third working less than 15 hours per week (LHMU, 1999a).

Casual workers are becoming more common in the cleaning industry. Although official ABS statistics indicating that nearly a quarter of the cleaning workforce is casual are
probably inaccurate,\textsuperscript{11} anecdotal evidence suggests that some cleaning companies are using more and more casuals. The LH MU has argued that these workers are ‘permanent either part-time or full time’ (LH MU, 1999a: 29). This suggests that that employment in cleaning is precarious. Burgess and Campbell contend that ‘the use of a ‘non-standard’ part-time or casual workforce is usually taken as indicative of the concept of precarious employment’ (Burgess & Campbell, 1997: 8-10). Indeed, the number of casuals is of some interest. A number of the largest firms use no or very few casuals, and those using casual employees do so on a regular basis under event management contracts.\textsuperscript{12} Like the majority of the part-time cleaning workforce, these casuals undertake firm induction and training programs and are viewed as part of the core workforce (Allan, 1998; Walsh, 1990). On the other hand, the Spotless Group of companies, for example, employs 10,000 casuals in its 30,000 strong workforce (Spotless Group, Annual Report, 2000).

\textbf{Exhibit 2.6 Cleaning Industry Labour Force Composition 1988 and 1999}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Employment Characteristic} & \multicolumn{2}{c|}{\textbf{1988}} & \multicolumn{2}{c|}{\textbf{1999}} & \% & \% \\
\hline
 & Males & Females & Male & Females & Males & Females \\
\hline
Proprietors* & 2727 & 1606 & 2403 & 1926 & 5.0 & 4.1 \\
\hline
Employees & & & & & & \\
\hline
\textbullet~Permanent full-time & 4762 & 2295 & 11905 & 8778 & 25.0 & 18.5 \\
\hline
\textbullet~Permanent part-time & 15894 & 17038 & 21282 & 23969 & 44.7 & 50.6 \\
\hline
\textbullet~Casual & 12029 & 12710 & 25.3 & 26.8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textit{Note:} a. Includes working proprietors and partners, working directors of incorporated enterprises.
\textit{Source:} ABS ‘Cleaning Services, Australia, Cat. 8672.0 1990 and 2000.

\textsuperscript{11} The ABS Cleaning Services Australia survey defined casuals as ‘employees not entitled to take holidays’ (ABS, 2000: 14). The ABS definition of casual is flawed; it includes many workers who do not have a casual employment contract and aggregates across groups who have very different entitlements and work arrangements (see Murtough and Waite, 2000).

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Clean Co (not real name) has a contract for cleaning Stadium Australia, which has variable cleaning needs. Because cleaning is needed after an event, 40 casuals are employed on a regular basis. Clean Co. has a full- and part-time workforce in excess of 8000 cleaners. Allen & Henry (1997) found a similar use of casuals in the UK.
Until the NSW Government Cleaning Service (GCS) was privatised in the early 1990s, there was little research that examined the details of the NSW cleaning workforce. In response to the privatisation of the GCS, a study was commissioned to examine the impact of privatisation on cleaners.\textsuperscript{13} Lyn Fraser’s study of the former GCS workers gives us an insight into the composition of the cleaning workforce. Fraser (1997) found that at time of privatisation 77 percent of GCS workers were female, 76.8 percent were 40 years of age or more and approximately 42 percent were from a non-English speaking background (NESB). Industry Association figures confirm this picture of an industry organised around part-time work, with an aging workforce and a significant proportion of NESB workers (see Exhibit 2.7 below). Until the 1990s, many cleaners were from a Continental background; today these are being replaced by Asian immigrants (Jeffs, 2001). Interviews with industry managers and other insiders revealed that the composition of the cleaning workforce tended to reflect prevailing patterns of immigration. As such, while many cleaners in the 1960s and 1970s were from Greek, Portuguese and South American backgrounds, these have been replaced by cleaners from former Yugoslavian countries and the Middle East. In recent years, new cleaners have come from Asian countries such as Korea, China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia. Although there is much variation between cleaning firms, it is evident that most firms rely upon an ageing, part-time workforce comprised of significant numbers of NESB workers. These characteristics confirm that workers in the cleaning industry, especially NESB women, are likely to be ‘concentrated in an extremely narrow range of poorly paid and low status occupations which typically involve repetitive, onerous and boring work with little job security and a high risk of occupational injury and disease’ (Alcorso, 1991: 20). Exhibit 2.7 details the labour force of four large NSW cleaning firms.

Although it appears that the GCS had a particularly stable workforce, this is not so in other cleaning firms. The LHMU contends that turnover rates in the industries which it organises average 43 percent (1999a: 4). Exhibit 2.7 reveals turnover rates ranging from 40–70 percent across three different NSW cleaning firms. Turnover rates in the cleaning

\textsuperscript{13} The study was commissioned by the NSW Ethnic Communities Council and the commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.
industry are very high and are as much an indication of the instability of cleaning contracts as they are of dissatisfaction with the work or a particular employer.

Exhibit 2.7 Selected Labour Force Characteristics: Four NSW Cleaning Firms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Company A</th>
<th>Company B</th>
<th>Company C</th>
<th>Company D</th>
<th>LHMU estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW employees</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1400+</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent part time</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent NESB</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>30-50 years</td>
<td>30-50 years</td>
<td>47% more than 45 years</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>40-45 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual staff turnover (%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0(^e)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of service</td>
<td>less than 9 months</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>80% less than 3 years</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>20% less than 3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a. Interview with training and development manager 2000 (this firm was acquired by a competitor in 2001)  
b. Interview with NSW general manager 2002  
c. Unpublished company statistics 2002. NESB figures also include those from ESB (other than Australia).  
d. Interview with human resources officer 2000 (this firm acquired company A in 2001).  
e. The manager interviewed for this company claimed a turnover rate of 0 percent and stated that this was a 'problem'.

Fraser’s study of women from NESB working in the GCS is particularly relevant here because it is one of the few Australian studies that explores why women take up cleaning. It also explores these women’s preferences for the GCS (Fraser, 1997: 23). GCS women interviewed by Fraser gave the following reasons for their uptake of cleaning work:

- Convenience of hours, suitable for maintaining family responsibilities.
- Immigrant friends and relatives recommended it to them.
- They needed the money.
- Limited employment alternatives for people of NESB.
- It was something they felt they could do with requiring high levels of English proficiency.
- Government employment was perceived as more secure than other jobs.
• Better regulation of wages and conditions working for the government as compared to experiences with other employers.
• A desire to work in a school environment with children and teachers.

Males also listed reasons similar to those outlined above.

By supplementing Fraser’s research with a 1999 LHMU survey of 1000 NSW cleaners it is possible to build a more complex picture of the demography of the cleaning workforce. The LHMU survey (1999a: 6) identified the following workforce characteristics:

• A majority of cleaners left school before the age of 15 years.
• 25 per cent were born in NES countries.
• Around 40 percent of cleaners start a new job each year.
• Around 60 percent of cleaners are female.
• The majority of cleaners are over 40 years of age.
• One third of all cleaners rent their homes.
• Nearly half of all cleaners still have dependent children living at home.

From the evidence presented it may be inferred that many NSW cleaners are working in the industry for instrumental reasons and because the general labour market offers them few alternatives. This is confirmed by wider Australian studies of NESB workers and employment, which have identified poor English skills, a lack of recognition of internationally-acquired qualifications and the absence of alternative local employment opportunities as the main reasons for entry to cleaning. This has contributed to the structuring (or clustering) of certain groups of workers into groups of occupations, often with poor employment relations outcomes (Alcorso, 1991, 2002; Peck, 1996). The impact of local labour market and labour force patterns upon work choice and employment opportunity are examined in more detail in Chapter 10.

2.3 Union Representation, Industrial Relations and Award Regulation

Although it is not the intention of this thesis to chart the history cleaning industry unionism in any detail, a brief survey of the path of union development in the industry
allows a sharper appreciation of the nature of industrial and employment relations in the industry today.

The formation of unionism amongst cleaners and other miscellaneous workers was a most peculiar process: a process that, according to one author, defies logic and conventional explanations of the process of union formation. Sheil (1991) asks what it was that stimulated such an unlikely group of workers to form trade unions:

> Widely scattered, ill-defined, profoundly demanding and expanding activities carried out by ageing, scandalously low-paid, short-term or casual shift or night labourers, qualified by nothing but the skills engendered in them by home life and the capacity to use them for an inhuman number of hours at a time: these were the unlikely general characteristics of the original members of the organisation that was eventually to turn into the great Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union. What circumstances could have linked the people in any one of these three barely discernible categories of work with each other? (Sheil, 1991: 49)

Sheil argues that unionisation amongst cleaners and other marginalised workers ‘would have meant going against the grain’ (1991: 306). As such, he sees unionism as something imposed upon workers in this industry: ‘unable to organise themselves, they had to be organised’ (307). What these workers had in common was ‘solitude, not solidarity’ (1988: 50).

The first cleaning union, the Watchmen, Caretakers and Cleaners’ Union (WCCU), was formed in 1910 by the Organising Committee of the NSW Labor Council, taking advantage of State arbitration laws that allowed the registration of small unions. Although limited in size and geographic coverage, the fledgling union achieved a small measure of success when it gained its first award and was able to standardise rates of pay and regulate hours of work (Beasely, 1996: 3-5).

Changes to NSW industrial law in 1912, particularly the formation of ‘Industrial Boards’ to oversee award-making in each industry, meant that the WCCU was able to sign up other groups of workers for award coverage, and in 1914, the WCCU changed
its name to the Miscellaneous Workers' Union of NSW to reflect the greater diversity of the union's membership base. The union faced a number of difficulties typical of those facing unions in the service economy today, including the rapid turnover of members and their spatial dispersal. However, cleaners, watchmen and caretakers also organised elsewhere in Australia, eventually laying the foundations for the Federal Miscellaneous Workers Union (FMWU), formed in 1915. The FMWU had a successful history of organising in Australia, with cleaners being the mainstay of its membership.

The history of the FMWU and its predecessors reveals the arduous, unpleasant and often difficult working conditions of cleaners. Cleaners working in the 1930s and the 1950s recalled working broken shifts, experiencing underpayment for their work, and having to work with inadequate equipment (Beasley, 1996: 22,35). These complaints are still heard today as evidenced by the number of articles in NSW branch newsletters drawing attention to the underpayment of wages, unscrupulous employers and unsafe working practices and conditions (LHMU Focus on NSW).

The FMWU and its predecessors have always organised around an eclectic membership base, often resulting from amalgamations with other unions. This process progressed a step further in 1992 when the FMWU amalgamated with the Federated Liquor and Allied Industries Employees Union of Australia to form a new industrial super-union, the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU). At the time of its formation, the LHMU had a membership of 180,000. Although the union has since widened its membership base, cleaners still comprise a large percentage of the membership of the LHMU.

Despite the numerous difficulties faced by cleaners in their working lives, the industry in NSW has been relatively free of major industrial disputation. One exception was the 1966 NSW school cleaners' strike. In what can now be seen as a forerunner of the events that led to the privatisation of the NSW Government Cleaning Service in 1993, in 1965 the newly-elected Askin Liberal Government announced that it would replace the GCS with contract labour in 14 new State high schools. The announcement, and the placing of advertisements calling for tenders, unleashed a major response from the union and the wider public. Cleaners held mass meetings, demonstrations, pickets and rolling strikes involving 5000 cleaners across NSW. Protests continued for seven months and
the Askin Government was forced to withdraw plans to contract out parts of school cleaning (Beasley, 1996: 105-107).

Today, in terms of membership numbers, LHMU, is one of the largest unions in Australia.\textsuperscript{14} The LHMU has a long history of organising both industrially and politically and has traditionally maintained close links with the Australian Labor Party. In NSW, a number of Labor government ministers in the lower and upper houses are former LHMU officials. These ministers have been able to win important concessions for service workers. In NSW, for example, a protracted union campaign that included broad community support and organisation at the grassroots level, drawing upon the inspiration of the US Service Employees’ International Union’s ‘Justice for Janitors’ campaign, has been successful in protecting cleaners’ hours and jobs by preventing the subcontracting of 7,000 jobs from NSW Schools (LHMU Union News 11 November 2005).

Despite its numerical size, the LHMU does not enjoy a uniformly high rate of membership. Australian union density overall is around 23.1 percent (Cooper, 2004) and, although the exact density in the cleaning industry is unknown, most commentators assume that it is significantly lower than the national average. Membership is stronger in larger cleaning firms and within particular market segments such as schools and government facilities. Thus in 2002 Complete Clean had a density of 27 percent (Interview with HR Manager, 17 April 2002), whereas the union membership rate among NSW school cleaners was around two-thirds (Interview with NSW LHMU officials, 12 July 2002).

As discussed earlier, the majority of cleaning firms have four or fewer employees. As a consequence, organisation and collective bargaining in the industry has historically focused upon larger employers. This is the result of both unions hoping to gain a greater payoff for their efforts and because only the large firms tend to have specialist human resource management and industrial relations staff, with whom union leaders feel more comfortable negotiating. Large cleaning firms with higher overheads that wish to remove wages from contract negotiations with clients by maintaining a wages floor

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\textsuperscript{14} Cleaners employed in-house, for example, hospital cleaners, are covered by other unions.
through the operation of the award, expect the LHMU to play a role in policing the industry and to take the lead in eliminating subcontracting. However, this appears to be a problematic strategy for the LHMU because the fastest rates of cleaner employment growth are occurring in smaller firms which are more likely to circumvent the award and avoid collective agreements (though large firms are by no means guilt-free in this regard). These structural characteristics, combined with the fragmented and dispersed nature of cleaning, the irregular hours of work and poor English skills among cleaners, have made the LHMU’s policing of wages and conditions difficult (Interview with LHMU organiser, 4 April 2003), particularly in smaller firms where cash-in-hand payments are common.

Unlike other States, the minimum pay and conditions of employment for NSW cleaners are determined by an industry-wide award that, in turn, is based on collective bargaining and a collective agreement between the LHMU and the peak employer body, the BSCAA, which represents employers. Although the Federal Workplace Relations Act, 1996 allowed individualised contracts in the form of Australian Workplace Agreements, the State award remains the norm for most cleaners and their employers in NSW. Significantly, large cleaning firms have actually supported collective bargaining and the maintenance of a common rule agreement regulating wages and a minimum of working conditions. Exhibit 2.8 details wages prescribed in the 2000 and 2003 Cleaning and Building Services Contractors (State) Award. Given that most cleaners are employed on shifts of between two and four hours duration, shift allowances and part-time loadings assume importance in the make-up of cleaners’ wages. When wages are increased, employers attempt to cut back on shifts, on the number of cleaners employed in a shift, or on the allowances paid to cleaners. Allowances include additional payments for the disposal of refuse, cleaning toilets, and handling or cleaning offensive substances.15 While the LHMU has sought to increase the pay rates for part-time cleaners (the majority of the workforce and union members), employers have called for an increase in the amount paid to full-time cleaners (Interview with George, industry consultant, 12 February 2003). While there is no legal requirement for continuance of employment upon transfer of contract, the LHMU has managed to negotiate a ‘status

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15 These are the most common allowances available to commercial cleaners. Cleaners using specialist equipment (for example, steam cleaning) or those working in hospitals are entitled to a greater range of additional payments.
'quor’ agreement to provide a degree of security and continuity, although because it is essentially an unregistered and, thus, unenforceable agreement, it is widely abused (Interview with LHMU official, 4 April, 2003).

Exhibit 2.8 Award Wages (NSW) 2000 and 2003 (Cleaning and Building Services Contractors Award).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time employee Weekly rate $</th>
<th>Part-time Employee Hourly Rate $</th>
<th>Casual Employee Total Hourly rate $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Night Shift Worker A(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Shift Worker B(b)</td>
<td>573.30</td>
<td>634.70</td>
<td>14.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken/Afternoon/Early Morning Shift Worker</td>
<td>500.40 - 508.70(c)</td>
<td>564.20</td>
<td>14.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Shift Worker A</td>
<td>444.10</td>
<td>499.90</td>
<td>14.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Shift Worker B</td>
<td>444.10</td>
<td>499.90</td>
<td>15.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
(a). Interview with training and development manager 2000 (this firm was acquired by a competitor in 2001).  
(b). Interview with NSW general manager 2002.  
(c). Unpublished company statistics 2002. NESB figures also include those from ESB (other than Australia).  
(d). Interview with human resources officer 2000 (this firm acquired company A in 2001).  
(e). The manager interviewed for this company claimed a turnover rate of 0 percent and stated that this was a ‘problem’.

While wages in the cleaning industry, particularly those paid to part-time cleaners, are comparable to or better than those paid in other service industries, the LHMU (2003a) contends that cleaners constitute a large part of the working poor because of short hours and fragmented, insecure employment (Buchanan and Watson, 1997; Watson et al, 2003). Recent campaigns by the LHMU, supported by sympathetic journalists, have led to newspaper articles highlighting that the average wage in the Australian cleaning industry for the years 2003-2004 is below the poverty line\(^{16}\) (‘A Dirty Business’,

\(^{16}\) The average wage for cleaners (inflated by managers' and supervisors' salaries) of $14,360 is below the Henderson poverty line of $15,288).
Sydney Morning Herald, 14 April, 2006 and ‘Taken to the Cleaners’, The Australian, 15 April, 2006).

In NSW, the LHMU has maintained a significant presence and, through negotiations with the largest employers and the industry association, has managed to win small wage increases (see Exhibit 2.8). Collective bargaining and the maintenance of an award supported by large employers and the industry association have meant that NSW cleaners have been able to retain minimum working conditions and have thus far avoided the ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of wages and conditions evidenced in other states (LHMU, 2003a; ACIRRT, 2002; Watson, et al, 2003). It should be noted, however, that wage increases in the cleaning industry tend to reflect increases in minimum wages won by the union movement before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission through ‘safety net adjustments’ (Watson et al, 2003).

2.4 Structural Transformation: Outsourcing, Contracting-out, and Privatisation

The most influential developments in the industry since the early 1990s have undoubtedly been the outsourcing, contracting-out and privatisation of cleaning services. Indeed, it was this that finally brought the Australian industry to the attention of researchers working in disciplines other than labour history. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s a number of Australian academics began to turn to their attention to the changing nature of working life arising from the application of neo-liberal economic policies. Much of the interest of academics was driven by change in government policy, which moved towards competitive tendering and contracting as government at local, State and the Commonwealth levels began to scrutinise the activities of the public sector with a view to reducing costs to the taxpayer and improving service provision. Other studies considered cleaning in terms of new work arrangements or work reorganisation. Most such studies have generally only analysed cleaning performed within the public sector. Of cleaning in the private sector, there are very few published studies.\(^\text{17}\) The work of cleaning and cleaners themselves began to be included in a range

\(^{17}\) One exception is the Young and Macneil (2000) study of outsourcing at a NSW a meat processing operation (called Meatcho). Among the functions considered for outsourcing at Meatcho was the internal cleaning service. Meatcho management thought the internal cleaning arrangements were too costly and called for tenders in the hope of reducing costs. Three
of studies dealing with 'lean production' in Eastern Sydney hospitals (O'Donnell, 1995) and a series of papers and research findings in competitive tendering and contracting, predominantly emanating from the then Sydney Graduate School of Business in the early 1990s.

The terms outsourcing, contracting-out and compulsory competitive tendering (CTC) are very similar in meaning, but different in context. Outsourcing can best be described as the process or transference of 'services to a third party that had traditionally been carried out in-house' (Young, 2000: 99). This definition can also include services that are won by contract from in-house teams that provide services at arm's length 'under contractual conditions not governed by typical employment provisions' (Young, 2000: 99). Contracting-out, on the other hand, more commonly refers to outsourcing in the public sector (Hall, 2000: 24; Paddon & Thanki, 1995; Small, 1996; Walsh & O'Flynn, 2000; Young, 2000). Compulsory competitive tendering is a process related to the contracting out of public services (Walsh & O'Flynn, 2000: 98). Competitive tendering in the Australian public service has followed New Zealand and British practices of public sector reform. The commercialisation and privatisation of public services within Britain has been shaped by the adoption of a 'compulsory' model of competitive tendering introducing market testing and competition to public services (Walsh & O'Flynn, 2000: 455).

One of the main benefits of outsourcing is potential cost savings. Domberger (1998: 40) argues that cost savings of up to 20 per cent can be achieved by outsourcing. Common reasons for outsourcing include numerical and functional flexibility, market discipline and testing cost effectiveness, access to new technology and skills and sharing the risk of investing in these, the 'hiving-off' of industrial relations problems and the stimulation of cultural change (Benson, 1999; Hall, 2000: 29-30; see also Young &

contractors submitted quotes, and while some quotes were cheaper than the current internal costs for cleaning, other quotes were more expensive. Management rejected the option to outsource cleaning in favour of retaining an internal cleaning service with enhanced training and redesign of work for existing staff, including team working (Young and Macneil, 2000: 152). The inability of contractors to persuade Meacco management that they could provide a quality service at the required standard was an important factor in the retention of an internal cleaning service. This study demonstrates some of the problems associated with service quality in contracted services and that the 'threat' (or consideration of the possibility) of outsourcing can improve internal productivity.
Macneil, 2000). Other reasons for outsourcing include potential changes to workplace power structures, work intensification and changing management’s role within an organisation (Young & Macneil, 2000: 142). Cleaning firms are often well placed to exploit their potential advantages. In many cases, cleaning firms are able to deliver a service at much reduced cost (albeit commonly at the expense of quality). Moreover, they have evolved to meet labour flexibility demands, can provide a specialist service, and have access to the technology necessary to provide specialist services.

There are also significant risks associated with outsourcing. One of the main criticisms of outsourcing relates to its potential to impair quality and performance (Industry Commission, 1996; Young, 2000). Financial savings are not always realistic and there may be considerable costs involved in the tendering process itself (i.e. transaction costs) and in contract monitoring (i.e. agency costs). Studies of outsourcing have pointed to the potential for reduced employee morale, increased industrial conflict, and adverse impact upon employee health and safety (Small, 1996; Young & Macneil, 2000). Other potential problems include a loss of control over service inputs and a loss of skills and experience within the organisation (Hall, 2000: 31). These issues will be explored in more detail in the following analysis of outsourcing and contracting-out in NSW.

Much of the growth of the cleaning industry in Australia has come from businesses contracting out their non-essential services. As mentioned earlier, there is evidence that NSW firms were contracting out general and specialist cleaning services as early as the late nineteenth century. While it is difficult to quantify, the growth of the outsourcing of cleaning from in-house to external contractors, it is reasonable to assume that the trend in Australian cleaning followed that of the United Kingdom, where rapid growth occurred in the 1960s. Growth in cleaning has naturally tended to follow the increase in population and in building development. Recent figures suggest that many private businesses are contracting-out cleaning. The extent to which cleaning in private firms has been outsourced is evident in Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) panel data indicating that one third of firms contracted services, including cleaning, between 1990 and 1995 (ACIRRT, 1999: 142). Other evidence of the extent to which cleaning has been outsourced is presented in a study of outsourcing amongst members of the Metal Trades Industry Association which found that a majority of
respondents outsourced some of their non-essential activities. Of these, cleaning was
the activity most likely to be outsourced (Benson & Ieronimo, 1996).

If anything, outsourcing and contracting-out in the private sector have lagged behind
that in the public sector. The same AWIRS panel data indicated that over 50 per cent of
public sector organisations contracted-out cleaning and other related services
(ACCIRT, 1999: 142). There is much evidence of privatisation and outsourcing in the
Australian public sector (for example: Industry Commission, 1996; Domberger & Hall,
1995; Domberger & Rimmer, 1994). At the Commonwealth and State levels,
outsourcing and privatisation have been pursued quite aggressively. NSW has not been
immune from this process. After the election of the Greiner Liberal Coalition
government in NSW in 1988, contracting-out in the public sector received considerable
attention. One of the first acts of the Greiner government was to initiate reform of the
public sector with the aim of reducing its size and its cost to the taxpayer. One of the
central aims of the reform was to reorientate the role of the State towards the provision
of services that could not provided by the public sector (Fraser, 1997: 13). The
privatisation process encountered internal resistance – and ultimately an electoral
backlash slowed it down – but the contracting-out of services proceeded apace.
Competitive tendering and contracting was encouraged and promoted to achieve
' savings' to support core government services. Competitive tendering guidelines
published in 1991 were issued by the government to guide agencies in their contracting
and tendering decisions (Industry Commission, 1996). All publicly funded agencies
were required to introduce plans to assess the suitability of their business for
competitive tendering and contracting-out (Fraser, 1997: 14).

Cleaning in the public sector was one of the first services identified for contracting-out.
NSW Treasury figures indicate that cleaning is among the top three NSW public sector
contractors by annual value and in the top 13 in terms of contract numbers (NSW
Treasury, 1996). Similar patterns are in evidence for the rest of Australia (Industry
Commission, 1996; Young, 2000: 98). The contracting-out of public sector cleaning has
provided a major boast to the expansion of private sector cleaning firms (Fraser, 1997;
Jensen and Liebenberg, 1995) and has contributed to oligopolistic tendencies amongst
the larger firms.
The logical culmination of the contracting-out of public sector cleaning services was the privatisation of the GCS itself. The ‘reform’ of the GCS is of particular interest to this study since the GCS was the largest cleaning industry reorganisation in NSW, and its privatisation had far-reaching consequences for private sector cleaning firms and those workers involved in the reorganisation.

As noted above, the GCS was formed in 1915 to clean schools and to assist war widows through providing them with paid employment. It remained under the auspices of the NSW Department of Education until 1980, when it was transferred to the Commercial Services Group and expanded its range of clients to include technical colleges, offices, court houses and other public sector institutions, including schools. By 1989 its workforce stood at around 12500 employees, many of whom were women and people from NESB (Fraser, 1997: 14), making it the largest single employer of cleaning labour in Australia.

Throughout the 1980s various attempts were made to transform the GCS. As Jensen and Leibenberg (1995: 15) note, although the ‘GCS paid neither sales nor notional corporate tax, its costs prior to 1989 far exceeded its revenue’. Reforms commenced in 1980 sought to reorganise work by moving from full-time work to broken shifts. These reforms did not go far enough, and in 1989 an agreement was struck with the FMWU on the issue of productivity improvements. Over the next three years, efficiency gains of 40 per cent were reported, and the GCS was ‘commercialised’ (Jensen & Liebenberg; 1995: 15; Fraser 1997: 14). These efficiency gains were achieved by reducing the workforce from 12,500 to 7,500 cleaners through voluntary redundancies, and introducing a system of user charges.

The GCS began to record a satisfactory profit and the State Liberal-National Party Government expressed satisfaction with the outcomes. However, the extent of reforms, and commercialisation of the service, masked the Government’s intent to sell off the

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18 Fraser (1997: 14) notes that broken shift arrangements caused problems for the cleaners in terms of transport arrangements and issues of personal safety from working at night.

19 ‘Commercialisation’ meant the introduction of user charges whereby the various State-sector clients would pay for use of GCS services on a commercial basis. It also encompassed restructuring and cost reductions within the GCS (Fraser, 1997:14).
GCS. Consultants undertook a review of the GCS in 1992 to recommend options for disposal. Of the various options put forward, the ‘sales with conditions’ option proved to be the most attractive, with possible savings of 24 percent from privatisation (Jensen & Leibenberg, 1995: 16; Fraser, 1997: 15). In July 1993, the Cabinet took the decision to sell the GCS, without any consultation with the union.

The decision encountered strong resistance from the FMWU. The union argued that further productivity increases were possible and that if the GCS was opened up to competition, a viable in-house bid was possible (Jensen & Leibenberg, 1995: 16-17). The FMWU mounted a vigorous campaign and organised large public demonstrations and rolling workplace stoppages. It also solicited community support for opposition to privatisation. (FMWU NSW Branch newsletter Focus on New South Wales, various issues 1993-1995). In September 1993 the Public Service Association and the FMWU applied to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission for GCS staff either to be reinstated or to receive redundancy payments. The Commission judgment, handed down in August 1994, criticised the reform process, particularly the failure to consult with unions and employees.

Despite public protests and the best efforts of the FMWU, the State government proceeded with the privatisation of the GCS. The GCS was restructured into five zones (independent regional geographic units) and tenders were called for quotations for the purchase of former GCS contracts, plant and equipment. Guidelines were drawn up and seven private companies were able to demonstrate that they could meet the tender specifications. The path for complete privatisation was smoothed by the announcement that no in-house tender would be accepted. Three contractors were successful in winning tenders: Berkeley Challenge Pty Ltd, Tempo Services Pty Ltd and Menzies International (Australia) Pty Ltd – three of the largest private cleaning contractors in NSW and Australia (see Exhibit 2.3). Work began on the new contracts in 1994 (Fraser, 1997). It was estimated that privatisation would save the State government $136 million over the first three years of the contract (Jensen & Liebenberg, 1995:25).

The introduction of CTC in the NSW public sector has not introduced effective competition in the area of cleaning. Public sector contracting has only strengthened the position of the industry giants and contributed to the oligopolistic tendencies within the
industry. For example, expressions of interest for tendering of work formerly undertaken by the GCS were only considered by firms 'with an annual turnover greater than $15 million, more than 500 employees and capable of funding $5 million per zone' (Jensen & Liebenberg, 1995: 20-21). Tenderers for the provision of cleaning and other hotel services in NSW hospitals had to meet the criteria of 'a cleaning contract worth more than $500,000' and/or pre-existing contracts in nursing homes (Hall and Domberger, 1995). Such requirements have led to the predominance in education and hospital cleaning of a small number of contract giants - virtual state-sponsored monopolies - that owe their prominence to the specifications of public sector cleaning contracts.

The case of the privatisation of the GCS is also revealing in that it highlights a number of inconsistencies in the contracting-out process in the public sector. Jensen and Liebenberg report that to prevent monopolisation, the Government’s policy was not to award more than two school cleaning zones to any one company. They also reported that the Government would not accept the lowest tender and that tenders had to 'show evidence of sound human resource polices and practices' (1995: 21). Employment was to be protected by the incoming contractor and no redundancies were to be introduced during the five-year life of the contract (Jensen & Liebenberg, 1995: 22; 25). Most of these conditions were not met.

The first round of contracts was worth approximately $36 million per zone (a total of around $180 million). In order to make a profit on the zones they had tendered for, the incoming contractors reduced the workforce. The LHMU reported a reduction of 24 percent in workforce size between 1994-1999. The union also noted that hours had not been reduced by a similar amount, leading to claims of work intensification. The union argued that privatisation of the GCS had enabled the government to save 30 percent of the cost of cleaning (LHMU, 1999a: 10) and that this cost was being borne by workers. While the first round of contracts included five zones, this was expanded to eight zones for the second round of contracts (1999-2004). Of the original contractors, only Berkeley Challenge failed to resecure its tender.20

20 Their tender price was more than its competitors.

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The experience of Menzies International (Australia) illustrates the difficulties of securing public sector contracts selected on the basis of price. Menzies International held one zone in the first round of contracts (1994-1999) and three zones in the second (1999-2004) round. As a successful tenderer, the firm embarked on a dramatic alteration of work arrangements. According to the LHMU, Menzies had undertaken to reduce its costs by 20 percent by cutting working hours by 30 percent. Working arrangements were to be changed under a program called ‘Smart Schools 2000’; a program that involved the introduction of team cleaning and a reduction in the number of cleaners assigned to hygiene cleaning, which would have allowed the firm to reduce payment of special allowances for toilet clearing and other ‘dirty’ work. Cleaners were also to be trained to work in ‘more productive’ ways and the cleaning labour force was to be split into core and peripheral workers (involving the increasing use of casuals). However, the LHMU mounted a successful campaign of resistance and in 1999 took the case to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal. The union argued that the reduction of hours was unrealistic and that the new working arranging would have an adverse impact upon health and safety (LHMU, 1999a; LHMU, 1999b). The report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (2000: 12-13) concluded that while there was scope for productivity improvements in cleaning contracts, the productivity targets proposed by Menzies were unrealistic. Menzies ‘voluntarily’ withdrew from their contract with the NSW Department of Education in January 2002 (Inclean, Jan. 2002: 5) and the contract was re-tendered.

The performance and quality of cleaning under CTC was a major media issue in NSW in 2000. Newspaper headlines declared that schools had become ‘dirty, cockroach-infested, unhygienic places, because cleaners are only given nine minutes to clean each classroom’ (Sydney Morning Herald, 3 April, 2000). This allegation resurfaced three years later, with blame again directed firmly at the privatisation of school cleaning (Sydney Morning Herald, 29 March 2003). Privatisation of the GCS has meant a cut in cleaning hours at most schools and a deterioration of cleaning quality. The privatisation of school cleaning has highlighted the transformation of work from inputs based on

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21 For Menzies side of the story see their submissions to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (1999).
hours to outcomes based on quality and specification requirements (NSW Teachers Federation, 1995; Fraser, 1995; 1997). The cleaning of schools and the reduction of working hours devoted to cleaning schools by private contractors was raised as an election issue at the time of the 2003 State election and postcard campaign by the LHMU.\footnote{In the lead up to the renewal of the Department of Education contracts in 2002, immediately prior to the State election in early 2003, the LHMU issued a postcard entitled 'Keep it Clean. Give Us Time' featuring a cleaner as the minute hand on a watchface. On the back of the card is an open letter to the NSW Premier. This campaign is on-going and the LHMU has been using its links with the Labor government to highlight working conditions for school cleaners. See LHMU website <www.LHMU.org.au> for reports and news articles.}

A 1996 Industry Commission inquiry into competitive tendering and contracting by public sector agencies found that contracting could have a major impact on employment relations. The Commission noted that one of the potential cost savings from CTC was 'transfers' from employees, including reductions in wages, conditions and intensification of work' (Industry Commission, 1996: 147-150). Conditions of employment and wages under CTC were scrutinised. The Commission found that under CTC, levels of public sector employment were likely to decrease; however, new employment opportunities were also envisaged as employees gained positions with new contractors or became self-employed contractors themselves. The Commission found that, based upon international evidence, there was likely to be a reduction in employment in the industry, as well as a restructuring of employment from full-time to part-time positions. However, the Commission stopped short of attributing this to the use of CTC and argued instead that staff reductions and the restructuring of employment opportunities merely reflected wider labour market trends (Industry Commission, 1995: B4).

Participants in the Industry Commission inquiry argued that CTC would have adverse effects upon women and NESB workers in low-skilled occupations. The Commission endorsed these predictions, concluding that CTC might 'exacerbate the difficulties these employees have traditionally faced in the labour market' (1996: 183). In response, the NSW Ethnic Community Council was commissioned by the Bureau of Immigration and Population to investigate the impact of CTC upon employees in the NSW GCS. The resulting report (Fraser, 1997) exposed a number of negative outcomes for former
employees of the GCS. When the GCS was contracted-out in 1994, over 7,800 cleaners were transferred to private contractors, resulting in all losing sick leave and long service entitlements and being transferred to a less generous superannuation scheme. The report found that the privatisation of the GCS had led to a perception of a decrease in job security and an intensification of work through the reduction of hours and the number of workers, leaving remaining workers to bear the brunt of reductions.\(^{23}\) One of the successful tenderers in the first round of contracts announced that it would reduce hours at its 240 sites by 31-32 percent, while many part-time employees faced an immediate 10 percent reduction in working hours (Fraser, 1997:18). The report found that such consequences carried profound implications for health and safety, with a number of respondents reporting an increase in over-use injuries (Fraser, 1997: 28, 43).

The contracting-out of many public cleaning services at a Commonwealth, State and local council level has stimulated interest in the plight of workers who find themselves transferred to private cleaning firms, typically with an accompanying loss of conditions of employment. The plight of these workers has attracted interest in the conditions of employment for the thousands of cleaners employed by private cleaning firms (the majority of the present day cleaning workforce). The union movement itself also has begun to take interest in the collective memory and experiences of workers involved in cleaning. The ACT Trades and Labor Council publication *Everyone needs cleaners, eh!* (Murphy, 1997) sought to capture the range of experiences of female cleaners and to provide an outlet for them to express their frustrations, hopes and aspirations. This book is unique in that it contains a collection of stories, poems and recollections based solely on the voices of women who participated in a workshop. The stories, poems and recollections highlight the precarious nature of cleaning work and the intense and often dangerous working conditions involved. The recollections also confirm that cleaning, for many migrant workers, is 'trapped' work.

The use of CTC in the NSW public sector warrants close attention as it demonstrates that, while the contracting out of services such as cleaning has resulted in cost savings for the government and the firms involved, these gains have been achieved largely at

\(^{23}\) These findings are supported by Small (1996). In survey undertaken with support of the LHMI, Small found that the reduction in hours increased work intensification and that cleaners were often performing unpaid work.
the expense of workers' entitlements, their hours of work, and their wellbeing. One of the unintended consequences of CTC has been that the cleaning industry, and the conditions of employment within it, have entered into public discourse. Contracting and competitive tendering in the public sector have also served to illuminate far more clearly the conditions of employment of cleaners engaged in private sector work.

2.5 Conclusion

The cleaning industry is a major contributor to the Australian economy and is one of the largest employers of labour in the country. Although there are thousands of cleaning firms, the NSW and wider Australian industry is dominated by a handful of contract giants, many of whom have expanded with a series of mergers and acquisitions and by securing stable public sector contracts. Falling profit margins, high overheads and intense competition have eroded the profitability of many larger cleaning firms, allowing the entry of smaller and medium-sized firms into the market. The composition of the Australian workforce is similar to that found in many international cleaning industries, where women and migrant workers are compelled to take up cleaning work because of financial pressures and a lack of alternative employment opportunities.

In order to understand the industry's current characteristics better, this chapter has traced the development of the NSW commercial cleaning industry from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. In doing so, it has argued that the development of the occupation of 'cleaner' has mirrored wider trends in the economy. As the occupation of cleaner has evolved, so too has industry structure been transformed, especially through the development of firms contracting their services to other firms. Since the early 1990s, contracting-out and privatisation of public sector agencies have contributed significantly to growth in the industry and to the deterioration of working condition for those formerly employed in the public sector.

The themes and ideas presented in this chapter are recurrent throughout this thesis. As can be seen, cleaning is an intensely competitive, low-profit margin industry with labour the most significant cost faced by employers. Consequently, cleaning firms are
engaged in a constant struggle to retain contracts and contain costs. Women and NESB workers tend to bear the brunt of this struggle through the erosion of their conditions of work. Public sector contracting-out and privatisation are indicative of how the business community and state sector view cleaning as a cost to be minimised, with savings made through work intensification and the erosion of conditions of employment. It is this background of intense industry competition, low-profit margins and the struggle to contain costs that have shaped, and continue to shape, the social relations of employment in the cleaning industry, a point which will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

Overall, the chapter has suggested that a full understanding of the industry’s current state must consider the factors that have shaped the industry over both the short- and the long-terms. The contours of the industry have been shaped by both the forces of historical continuity and historical change. The implications of this chapter suggest strongly that a proper analysis of the case study firm, Complete Clean Australia, requires an historically-informed understanding of the wider cleaning industry and industry developments.
CHAPTER 3

SERVICE INDUSTRIES, SERVICE WORK AND COMMERCIAL CLEANING: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE OF THE AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

Having surveyed the Australian cleaning industry’s chief structural, workforce and industrial relations characteristics, it is time to examine relevant propositions and debates in the international academic literature on service work. As noted in Chapter 1, the cleaning industry has been largely ignored by scholars of management and industrial and employment relations, particularly in Australia. This chapter explores the existing academic knowledge of work organisation, employment relations and the management of labour in commercial cleaning industries.

The chapter begins by highlighting literature dealing with the service economy and reviewing the literature on, and debates about, the growth in services. Some problems of classifying services and the service sector are also highlighted. The existing literature on the service economy and service work is analysed through two distinct conceptual constructs: service industries and service occupations. In considering the concept service industries this thesis explores wider issues relating to service work and employment; in examining service occupations it focuses specifically on work and employment within the commercial cleaning industry. The chapter seeks to locate the cleaning industry within the service economy, and provides evidence that an analysis of commercial cleaning needs to be grounded in the literature on services. Following a broad analysis of services in general, it then examines the implications for cleaners. In particular, the international literature is reviewed and the implications for ‘human resource management’ practices are identified. The role of technology in work organisation in cleaning is then considered, before an examination of cleaning as ‘work’ and the ‘identity’ of cleaners. The chapter concludes by considering briefly some of the difficulties associated with the unionisation of workers in the cleaning industry and by
reviewing those factors contributing to the success or failure of the organisation of cleaning workers.

3.1 Conceptualising Service Work

One of the problems of researching services is determining exactly what is meant by the term 'service sector', or even 'service sector work'. Service work is heterogeneous by nature and this makes empirical generalisations about services quite difficult (Hoque, 2000: 3-4). Typically, services are defined in terms of what they are not; that is, services are not agriculture, mining or manufacturing (Gershuny & Miles, 1983: 10). Other definitions refer to the attributes of service work, including intangibility, perishability, variability, simultaneous production and consumption, and inseparability of the customer from the service process (Korczynski, 2002). There have been a number of attempts to classify services on the basis of their utility, and on intermediate and final demand, and also to locate services within a four group taxonomy including distributive, producer, social and personal services (Daniels, 1993: 3-6). A common distinction is typically made between consumer services (including retailing, entertainment and personal services) and producer services supplying business needs, including cleaning (Marshall & Wood, 1995).

Allen and du Gay (1994: 265-6) warn against 'conceptualising service work solely as an economic phenomenon'. Rather, they argue that service employment constitutes a new identity and that service work should be understood in terms of what they refer to as 'cultural relations'. According to Allen and du Gay (1994: 266) 'culture' 'refers to the production of meaning.' For them, service work is as much about the production of meaning as it is an economic identity. They argue for a re-conceptualisation of service work as a 'hybrid identity' where the 'boundaries between the economic and the cultural are blurred in much contemporary service work' (1994:266). Workers in these regimes are required to acquire the necessary skills of presentational, emotional and relationship management that go beyond those traditionally confined to a 'discourse of manufacturing' (Allen & du Gay, 1994: 266-69). Such an approach carries profound implications for the way that service work like cleaning is perceived. These arguments,
suggesting that the work of cleaning entails the management of emotion, attitudes and behaviour, are tested empirically in Chapter 9 of this thesis.

For the purposes of this thesis I will define services classified as ‘producer’ services, as those ‘services produced mostly for firms rather than individuals’ (Sassen, 2001: 91). Producer services are distinct from consumer services in that the latter are geared to the reproduction of the labour force. Producer services are of some interest as it is this segment of the service economy that has experienced the greatest growth and expansion (Wood, 1988: 103). It is generally accepted that commercial cleaning is located within the realm of producer services. Consumer and producer services can be subdivided further into those with perishable, semi-durable, or durable attributes. Cleaning is a perishable producer service which relates to the service process rather than the product. It is perishable because cleaning is by definition recurrent; that is, the cleaning process is consumed on an ongoing basis (Daniels, 1985: 6).

Other difficulties in the classification of services arise in making the analytical distinction between service industries, comprising the service sector as a whole, and service occupations, found in all sectors of the economy (Allen, 1988a: 96). One influential analysis of the service economy defined service workers thus:

When we refer to ‘service workers’ we often have in mind, not the nature of the final product ... but something more immediate: the nature of the particular job they engage in. A service worker in this ... sense is anyone who engages in work whose immediate output is typically non-material or ephemeral. Thus white-collar workers, sales workers, catering, cleaning, security, even transport workers, could all be considered to be in service employment. (Gershuny & Miles, 1983: 47-8)

A number of authors have argued that it is important to distinguish between service industries and service occupations (Allen, 1988a; Gershuny & Miles, 1983). This is because service employment is not necessarily restricted to service industries. Cleaners, for example, are employed in manufacturing as well as in service industries, so conceptualising service occupations by focusing on what people do as opposed to the
industry which employs them is a more useful form of analysis when examining employment change and the distribution of occupations (Allen, 1988a: 103). On the other hand, commercial cleaning can reliably be conceived of as an *industry* located within the sector known as services. As such, the analysis of the literature relating to employment relations and work organisation within the commercial cleaning industry will begin by considering cleaning as an *industry*, followed by cleaning as an occupation. The analysis of cleaning as an industry is located within the wider context of service industries.

3.2 Explaining the Rise of Service Work

Until the 1980s, the economy of Australia was dominated by agriculture and manufacturing. Today, however, some 70 percent of the working population is employed in services (OECD, 2002). The majority of these new service jobs are low paying and or seemingly low-skilled, such as commercial cleaning (Saseen, 2001; Thompson et al., 2001).

There are a number of competing explanations for the decline of manufacturing and the rise of the service economy. Simple explanations point towards developments in labour-saving technology and the loss of skilled production jobs to low-wage economies (for example, Frenkel, et al 1999; Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996a). Others argue that the feminisation of the workforce has stimulated demand for consumer services previously provided by women, ‘which in turn has produced more service jobs that are predominantly filled by women’ (Macdonald & Sirianni, 1996b: 2).

The debate about the growth of service sector employment has coalesced around economic factors, although contributions from sociology and political economy have also been important. Conventional economic explanations for service growth have been organised around two main premises: firstly, that there has been a relatively slow growth in service labour productivity compared with other sectors; and secondly, that there had been a more rapid increase in service demand (Marshall & Wood, 1995: 15). Much of the debate about the growth of services is linked to economic factors, including debates around productivity. It is generally argued that services are less
productive than manufacturing. Put simply, service provision, it is argued, is more labour intensive than manufacturing. In an expanding economy, manufacturing can reduce labour inputs and achieve greater efficiency using new technology and processes. It is argued that services can only expand by increasing the number of employees and thus increasing the overall size of the service sector (Marshall & Wood, 1995; Daniels, 1985: 1993).

Demand (consumption) factors are viewed as important in the growth and expansion of services. Services tend to be income elastic: as incomes rise, demands for certain services increase. This is especially evident in the demand for consumer services (Daniels, 1985: 46,50). One of the more compelling arguments for the expansion of service industries has been the rising demand for producer services, and the accompanying increase in supply. Daniels (1985: 53-4) explains that producers will attempt to lower their costs by seeking external services if they can be sourced at a lower cost with no accompanying loss of quality. Secondly, a business may seek to increase the attractiveness of its product by contracting outside consultants or other services to make its product more attractive to consumers. Third, demand for producer services is, in part, related to the demand ‘for some companies to “hive off” unpopular tasks, such as jobs involving unsociable working hours or low status of repetitive work’. Fourthly, many firms will contract-in staff to cope with variable labour requirements. Although there is some disagreement as to the extent to which demand for producer services has shaped service employment growth, it is widely recognised that such demand has played a major role in the international division of labour (Daniels, 1993: 17). These arguments have particular relevance for the NSW cleaning industry. As explained in the previous chapter, NSW cleaning firms have been able to expand because of firms seeking to lower costs by contracting out their cleaning requirements to specialist firms.

According to Daniels (1985: 56), ‘sociologists equate the appearance of the service society with a new type of society which is commonly labelled post-industrial.’ Such a society has also been labelled ‘high tech’, the ‘knowledge economy’ or the ‘information society’ (Daniels, 1985: 21). Sociological explanations accounting for the growth of services point towards the importance of knowledge, information and the changing occupational structure of white-collar work as key reasons for the expansion of service
industries. This has occurred through the expansion of existing occupations in accounting, banking and the like, and the appearance of new occupations arising out of ‘by-products of new technology’ (for example, computer programmers) or expenditure on leisure activities (including sports clubs and tourism) (Daniels, 1985: 57-8). Associated with the expansion of knowledge work is a concomitant “de-skilling of some occupations to create low-skill service jobs” (Daniels, 1985: 58). However, as Thompson et al. (2001: 923) argue, ‘key growth areas in future employment will be low level service jobs rather than knowledge work as currently understood.’

One of the more influential critiques of the concept of the post-industrial society is that proposed by Gershuny and Miles (1983), who argue that service economy growth is not directly related to the growth in the demand for services at the expense of manufacturing. In their pioneering study, The New Service Economy (1983), they contend that there is a trend towards the substitution of goods for services and that there has been a shift towards a ‘self-service economy’, whereby the purchasing of goods is overtaking the consumption of services. As such, the growth in service sector employment per se cannot be accounted for by growth in service consumption per se; trends towards self-service have meant that many employees in service industries and occupations are involved in the production of material commodities (Allen, 1988a: 109-110). According to Gershuny and Miles (1983), technological and organisational change is increasing the number of service workers required to maintain the production of material commodities in ‘manufacturing and the service industries’ (Allen, 1988a: 113). In short, the association between physical production and service provision is not simply a nil-sum game.

Critical structuralist approaches to the development of the service economy have rejected conventional interpretations and analysis (Thompson et al. 2001). The critical approach to service development and location is underpinned by the restructuring approach. Restructuring arguments are based upon the idea of a new spatial division of labour (Massey, 1995), whereby the process of capitalism has not changed but, rather, has been transformed. Under the restructuring approach, production has been reorganised, transforming employment relations, production, investment and technological change (Marshall & Wood, 1995: 60). Restructuring approaches to the growth and location of services also take into account the feminisation of work and the
supply of female labour, and the polarisation of service work. These factors have important implications for the commercial cleaning industry and are explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

3.3 Interpreting the Nature and Significance of Service Work

As service working has become dominant in the economy so have service forms of employment. This section examines service work as a ‘new employment relationship’, characterised by flexibility, occupational and ethnic segregation and the polarisation of work and income between highly skilled and well-paid jobs and poorly-paid jobs requiring few skills. As will be demonstrated, a number of writers have argued quite persuasively that the rise of the service economy has led to a polarisation of employment opportunity and incomes and have signalled that the service economy is indicative of a ‘new employment regime’.

Gershuny and Miles (1983) analyse in some detail the impact of new technology on service employment. They argue that ‘many producer services do not involve significant amounts of skilled work’ and include within this generalisation services like cleaning, catering, pest control and ground maintenance. They characterise commercial cleaning as entailing a low wage regime with precarious working hours and employment opportunities. They contend that technological change may at time increase labour productivity, but in other cases technology may reduce demands for functions like cleaning. For example, they explain that information technology ‘may require less cleaning and maintenance ... than older industries’ (Gershuny & Miles, 1983: 168). What they fail to consider, however, is that new technology may stimulate the demand for new services in the form of specialist cleaning firms, servicing information and technology cleaning requirements.1

Like many other analyses of the service economy, Gershuny and Miles (1983: 168) tend to locate business services in the ‘peripheral’ segment of the economy. Technological innovation is stifled by firms contracting-out to cut costs by employing

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1 This is evidenced in the growth of specialist firms to clean computers and other IT technologies not normally undertaken by more generalist cleaning firms.
'low-wage, marginal labour in conditions that would be challenged by the unionised workforce of large firms' (Gershuny & Miles, 1983: 169). Speculating on the need for tight labour control, Gershuny and Miles point to the possible introduction of employee monitoring devices to improve timekeeping and scheduling, and the introduction of technology to replace the employment of cleaners. Writing in the early 1980s, they noted that while firms operating in the business services segment of the economy tended to be small, it was likely that there would be significant future growth in the size and scale of business operations in cleaning. As has been seen, in the Australian context this is a prediction that has been partly fulfilled. Yet, in important ways, their predictions have missed the mark. For instance, one of the most telling criticisms of Gershuny and Miles' argument for a shift towards a self-service economy is that the 'self-servicing' argument has failed to take into account that, especially within business services, there has been a rapid growth of employment in labour-intensive activities like office cleaning where there is little likelihood of technological substitution (Allen, 1988b: 129).

Other analyses of the service economy, including those undertaken within disciplines of economic and human geography and sociology, have examined closely the range of employment regimes within service industries. Lash and Urry (1994: 201) have argued that the 'actual delivery of many services is in fact provided by relatively poorly-paid employees, who may have little involvement or engagement with the overall enterprise, and who may be subject to "functional flexibility".' According to Lash and Urry (1994: 204-205), service employment has been subject to a process of restructuring and reorganisation. In particular, services have been vulnerable to what they describe as 'production reorganisation', characterised by intensification, rationalisation, commodification (of service products), and replacement and flexibility (of labour inputs). These processes are said to have led to development of what a number of writers call the 'new employment regime' in service economies (Allen, 1988b; Frenkel et al, 1999; MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996b; Sassen-Koob, 1984; Sassen, 1996, 1998, 2001).

The 'new employment regime' in service industries embodies a number of key characteristics. These include casualised jobs and casualised employment relations. Other characteristics include the polarisation of income and occupational structures, and
the development of an uneven labour geography based upon the feminisation of employment and the growth of part-time jobs. Furthermore, the ‘new employment’ regime is said to be stratified by race and gender (Sassen, 2001). Another central feature of the ‘new employment regime’ is said to be the ‘loosening of employment relationships’ which are reconceptualised as ‘service relationships’ (Allen & Henry, 1996; Rees & Fielder, 1992).

A key process in the restructuring of service employment is the ‘flexibility’ of labour and the growth of flexible forms of work within the service economy. Atkinson (1985) argued that organisations divide their workforces into ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ groups to achieve functional and numerical flexibility. Functionally flexible workers – that is, multi-skilled workers capable of being deployed across a wide range of typically team-based task activities – are ‘core’ workers essential to the efficient functioning of an organisation. Numerically flexible workers are ‘peripheral groups’ of workers employed on a casual or contract basis to supplement the requirements of core groups of employees. Peripheral workers do not enjoy the same benefits of job security and internal labour markets as core employees and are vulnerable to fluctuations in an organisation’s level of production.

Atkinson’s model is an ‘ideal type’ that seems to fit few companies (Allen, 1988a: 201), and care must be taken when using core/periphery distinctions to analyse service industries and service occupations like cleaning. Drawing upon Walsh (1990), MacDonald and Sirianni (1996b: 12) caution that:

In many firms, contingent workers perform functions essential to the operation of the firm and can comprise up to two-thirds of a firm’s labour force while “core” workers perform nonessential functions. For example, a majority of the key functions in industries such as hospitality, food service, and retail sales are performed by workers who, based on their level of benefits, pay and job security, would be considered periphery workers.

This scenario is typical of the NSW commercial cleaning industry. Difficulties over the utility of the core/periphery or flexible specialisation model do not detract from the fact
that much of the work in the service economy is increasingly becoming reorganised around gender, and impermanent and part-time and reduced hours of working:

The growth of service jobs is crucial to the expansion of part-time jobs. The pressures to reduce labour costs in industries with limited profit margins such as catering, retail and cleaning, assumes added weight when these account for a growing share of jobs. In addition, many service industries require work at night, on weekends, and on holidays, which would entail costly overtime payments for full-time workers. And since many of these jobs do not require many skills or training, they can be downgraded into part-time, more lowly paid jobs. … Part-time jobs can recruit women easily, create greater flexibility in filling various shifts, and reduce costs by avoiding various benefits and overtime payments required by full-time workers. (Sassen, 2001: 289-90)

The expansion of part-time work is directly related to the processes of occupational segregation. Crompton and Sanderson (1990: 59) contend that part-time work is ‘increasing in the service sector, the fastest growing category of women’s employment’. They also note that the expansion is ‘particularly prevalent in “personal service” occupations’ including cleaning.

Much of the literature on the service economy notes that service work is essentially an urban phenomenon concentrated within large cities (Marshall & Wood, 1995: 94; see also Daniels, 1985; Massey, 1995). Within cities, ‘local labour markets have themselves increasingly become polarised as manufacturing has declined’ (Marshall & Wood, 1995: 103). Sassen’s (2001: xviii) examination of economic globalisation and ‘global cities’ has led her to conclude that globalisation ‘entails a new type of economic structure’, one which has led to a degree of spatial and socioeconomic inequality evident in cities.

Service employment is polarised between two extremes. Service jobs tend to be either well paid and highly skilled or very poorly paid, requiring few skills and having few language requirements. This in direct contrast to manufacturing which, in developed western economies at least, tends to be characterised by middle-income jobs (see
Sassen-Koob, 1984; Sassen, 1998; MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996b). Furthermore, as Sassen (1996: 584) argues, it is necessary to 'distinguish the characteristics of jobs from their sectoral location': many advanced jobs and industries, for example, contain many low-paying, casual, dead-end jobs. The polarisation of service work has been accompanied by the erosion of internal labour markets. The polarisation of income and occupational structures has meant that many employees in the service economy now comprise part of 'the working poor' (Ehrenreich, 2001; Wyhhausen, 2005). These arguments have particular relevance for this thesis since cleaners in Australia have been identified as members of the 'working poor' (see LHMU 2003a, Buchanan & Watson, 1997).

Employment in service industries has also been characterised as involving segmentation by race, ethnicity and migrant status. Although service work has opened up opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities, they remain 'at the lowest rung of the service employment ladder' (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996b: 14). Immigrant workers and immigrant communities have frequently been important features of economic restructuring and the supply of low-wage workers. Recent immigrants contribute directly to the expansion of low-wage regimes and share disproportionately in the polarisation of income and the casualisation of employment relations (Sassen-Koob, 1984, Sassen 1996). One characteristic of labour market restructuring, explains Sassen (1996: 587), is the 'shift of labour market functions to the household or community':

> There is a large body of evidence showing that once one or a few immigrant workers are hired in a given workplace, they will tend to bring in other members from their communities as job openings arise. There is also evidence showing great willingness on the part of immigrant workers to help those they bring in with some training on the job, teaching the language, and just generally socialising them into the job and workplace. This amounts to a displacement of traditional labour-market functions such as recruitments, screening and training from the labour market and the firm to the community or the household. This shift increases the responsibility for and the costs of

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2 This has been eroded with the trend from permanent to casual employment and from full-time to part-time employment.
participation in the labour market for workers, even if these costs are often not monetised. (Sassen, 1996: 587).

Such recruitment patterns are important in contributing to the process of clustering and the development of ethnic niches (Waldinger & Der-Martirosian, 2001). As shall be seen, this is particularly so of labour recruitment and work relations in the cleaning industry. Sassen argues that this raises two important questions. Firstly, to what the extent does the casualisation of labour markets impact on employment outcomes for immigrants and, conversely, what is the impact of a casualised labour force on labour market outcomes? Secondly, in what ways are immigrant workers an effective source of labour for casualised jobs? (Sassen, 1996: 588). These questions, along with the reorganisation of labour market functions, are examined in more detail in the following section.

3.4 Analysing ‘Human Resource Management’ Practices in Cleaning

The previous sections outlined the development of the service economy and examined employment and work within service industries broadly defined. This section examines the service occupation of cleaning in detail. Here, I review the literature relating to the cleaning industry per se and highlight the main findings from this research. These findings inform a number of research questions which will be explored in detail in the thesis. A number of researchers have argued that service industries have been neglected in employment studies (Hoque, 2000; Massey, 1995: 169). Hoque (2000:2) argues that despite the growing economic importance of the service sector, empirical research on services has been lacking. The little research that does exist on the commercial cleaning industry, like that of other services industries including hospitality, ‘tends to be removed from the mainstream’ (Hoque, 2000: 2).

While cleaning is alluded to in many studies of the wider economy, and domestic forms of cleaning have received considerable attention from researchers, studies specifically

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3 A niche is ‘a set of economic activities in which immigrants are heavily concentrated, here defined in terms of representation rates at or above the 1.5 level’ (Waldinger & Der-Martirosian, 2001: 237).
focusing upon commercial cleaning as work and as an occupation are far less common. A majority of the English-language studies of commercial cleaning have been located in the United Kingdom, the United States, Israel, Canada and New Zealand. The majority of these English-language studies have been conducted by sociologists (United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Israel); others have been undertaken from a feminist perspective (United Kingdom, Canada). The British cleaning industry has attracted considerable attention from economic and human geographers. Within the mainstream industrial and employment relations literature, cleaning has been ignored, except for a study of cleaning and cleaning organisations in New Zealand. The human resource management literature is generally silent on the cleaning industry and on those who work within it. To date, there have been no direct academic studies on cleaning in Australia, although cleaners have been referred to briefly in studies on outsourcing and non-standard work (for example, Allan, 1998) or other studies of paid domestic work (for example, Meagher, 2003)

A number of central themes can be observed across these various strands of literature on cleaners and the cleaning industry. These themes tend to be common across all countries studied. Extant studies of the cleaning industry concur that cleaning exemplifies a new employment regime, a regime that is often precarious and embodies employment practices that compound the vulnerability of cleaning workers. Most of the research on the cleaning industry has considered employment relations from the perspective of the closely related theoretical constructs of ‘subcontracting’, ‘fragmentation’ and ‘flexibility’, leading to the development of a ‘new employment relationship’ based upon ‘employment risk’ and ‘precarious employment’ (Allen & Henry, 1995, 1996, 1997; Reimer, 1999; Bernstein, 1986; Leonard, 1992; Rees & Fielder, 1992). This research confirms that the expansion of the cleaning industry has occurred at the expense of cleaning employees’ pay and conditions of work.

The concept of ‘precarious’ employment has been adopted as an analytical tool for exploring changes in the labour market and the erosion of employment conditions (Burgess & Campbell, 1998). Thus, the theme of precarious employment is prevalent across all international studies of cleaning. Allen & Henry (1997, 1996) have adopted Ulrich Beck’s analysis of work and employment in his Risk Society (1992) to explain insecurity in employment relationships in selected United Kingdom service industries.
Following Beck, they argue that 'standard' employment has been replaced by a new 'regime of insecurity', featuring individualisation, the organisational fragmentation of the workplace, coupled with flexibility in hours worked and the length of employment – a situation of employment insecurity', and typical of contract cleaning (1996: 67). The literature on contract cleaning, based upon empirical studies in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and Israel, portrays cleaning as precarious work. Precariousness has been introduced through a variety of practices. Research has identified the process of tendering as introducing formal insecurity, whereby job tenure is limited to the length of the contract, and social relationships within the industry are constitutive of arbitrary employment relationships (Allen & Henry, 1996; 1997). Other research has highlighted the competitive nature of the industry, whereby the need to reduce costs and increase quality has led to a situation of work intensification (Rees & Fielder, 1992; Bernstein, 1986). This has been associated with the privatisation and contracting-out of government services, reducing and intensifying the remaining number of jobs (Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989). Precariousness is also emphasised in the literature relating to patterns of labour turnover and recruitment into the industry (Rees & Fielder 1992), which is based upon gendered and ethnically structured labour markets (Bernstein, 1986; Coyle, 1985, 1986; Leonard, 1992; Beechy & Perkins, 1987; Munro, 1999).

The international literature highlights how precarious employment is embedded in the commercial cleaning industry through competitive tendering and the acquisition or loss of contracts. Allen and Henry (1996) explain how the process of tendering introduces formal insecurity whereby job security is often limited to the length of a contract. However, they contend that work is both regular and insecure in that there is commonly continuity of employment between contracts, but also insecurity in the way that that 'clients and management reproduce a job which is formally precarious' (cf. Allen & Henry, 1996: 69-70).

The extensive discussions of precarious employment in Australia have not directly addressed the case of cleaning work and have tended to view precarious employment in terms of 'non-standard' or 'atypical' work. The use of a 'non-standard' part-time or casual workforce is usually taken as indicative of the concept of precarious employment in Australia (Burgess & Campbell, 1998: 8-10). Cleaning, however, tends to be more complex than this. Allen and Henry (1995: 156) claim that 'part-time work, irregular
work or casual work are hardly new to the cleaning sector' and many casual cleaners are employed on a 'quasi-permanent' basis (Allen & Henry, 1995: 159). Like the majority of the part-time cleaning workforce, casuals undergo company induction and training programs and are commonly viewed as part of the core workforce (Allan, 1998; Walsh, 1990).

As explained in Chapter 2, the largest cost faced by cleaning firms is that of labour hire, and labour cost reduction has become a defining feature of management strategy within the industry. This, of course, is not unique to Australia, with the international literature also highlighting the fact that in order for a cleaning firm to survive and succeed it has little option but to become involved in attempts to increase workloads, intensify work practices and lower the wages of the cleaners it employs (Allen & Henry, 1996; Bernstein, 1986; Leonard, 1992). The international literature indicates that cleaning firms are able to lower wages and intensify work by using flexible work practices and non-union labour. It has been noted that women, especially NESB women, tend to have lower union-participation rates and are perceived by employers as actively seeking flexibility in work time (Leonard, 1992).

The international literature on cleaning identifies a number of paths to work intensification. It is claimed that labour is intensified in four main ways: (1) transfer of workers; (2) reduction of workers; (3) reduction of hours; and (4) self-imposed intensification (Bernstein, 1986: 406-7). The contracting out of cleaning work means that cleaners are employed by the contractor and not by the institution being cleaned. Thus, the contractor can transfer workers from place to place, using the same labour force, resulting in reduced costs per employee and an intense workday for the cleaning worker (Munro, 1999: 79-80). Probably the most prevalent form of intensification is providing fewer workers than stipulated by the original agreement between the contractor and the institution. Closely associated with the reduction in worker numbers is the reduction of hours, whereby contractors deliberately reduce the numbers of hours devoted to cleaning a site. Self-imposed intensification is evident in situations where contract workers display dual forms of commitment or higher commitment to the host organisation than to their employer. It can also occur in situations where cleaners are paid according to the area cleaned (Bernstein, 1986: 407).
These possibilities have thus far not been as evident in the NSW cleaning industry since the system of industry-wide awards and collective agreements limited employers’ ability to reduce wages, despite the industry’s relatively low level of union density. However, employers have sought to make ‘savings’ through the casualisation of formerly full-time jobs and their conversion to part-time status. Employers have also been able to make savings through the non-replacement of workers who are absent or on sick leave, or by use of damaged or broken equipment, ‘thus putting the onus on workers to use more exhausting and time consuming manual methods’ (Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a: 50). Moreover, while there is little evidence of NSW employers regularly transferring workers from site to site, there is evidence of self-imposed intensification, something that is under-explored in the international literature. Work intensification in NSW is also secured through an additional means: productivity increases. As explained in the previous chapter, threats of privatisation and contracting-out were used by the state government to secure productivity increases from cleaners. After the GCS was privatised, the state government was able to secure additional productivity increases from contractors who then passed these onto their cleaners through a reduction in the number of cleaners and hours devoted to a site.

A common theme found within the academic literature on cleaning is that of managerial power and authority. For example, it is claimed that when a contract changes hands, the firm losing the contract will ‘cherry pick’ the best employees and arrange for their employment on another site. The incoming contractor may or may not take on those employees not picked. However, in some instances, the incoming contractor may prefer to start with a fresh workforce, especially when hours of labour have been cut and new work practices and organisation are introduced. Contracting and outsourcing, or the transfer of contracts to a new service provider, can involve a renegotiation of terms and conditions (Allen & Henry, 1996; Coyle, 1985, 1986; Rees & Fielder, 1992). According to Allen and Henry, the authority and power needed to coordinate workers across multiple sites is the key to securing precarious employment practices (1996: 74). Cleaning companies are comprised of a very small headquarters-based staff and tend to rely upon scattered and fragmented supervisors and unit managers, with a very high ratio of cleaners to managers (Allen & Henry, 1996). Supervision in the cleaning industry has been presented in the literature as being direct and arbitrary. It is claimed that supervisors and unit managers are responsible for the
organisation of work and have wide-ranging powers with an ‘emphasis placed upon the capacity of the supervisor to directly control the activities of the cleaners’ (Rees & Fielder, 1992: 362). This reflects a wider pattern of organisation within the industry where quality is maintained through direct and intensive supervision, rather than by improving the basic skills of employees (Rees & Fielder, 1992: 362).

The examination of managerial power and authority in the international literature has been rather limited. Most studies have pointed to the arbitrary nature of labour management, and those studies that have tried to explain this tend to do so in terms of overcoming the spatial fragmentation of work (Allen & Henry, 1996; Rees & Fielder, 1992). These studies have drawn upon theories relating to economic geography and have not acknowledged literature from management studies. To date, none of the international studies have examined the link between corporate strategy and management, nor how human resource management practices adopted by cleaning firms secure precarious employment regimes. While the international literature has examined in detail the precarious position of the cleaner, a major omission from the analysis of the cleaning industry is the position of management. In particular, little is known of the working experience of front-line managers and supervisors and how they organise their work and cope with competing demands from their senior management and the client/customer.

Given the hollow nature of the organisational structure of many cleaning companies, and the high ratio of cleaners to managers, the issue of labour ‘control’ assumes particular importance in any study of this industry. The existing literature on cleaning is generally silent on how cleaning firms overcome the spatial dispersion of their cleaners (an exception here is Allen and Henry, 1997). The problem of control over cleaning workers becomes one of managing workers dispersed across multiple job sites. Many workers are not situated in immediate proximity to supervisors and perform their tasks across widely distributed work sites. Existing studies on cleaning have failed to consider how cleaning firms can overcome these organisational difficulties by co-opting the client through the application of a double layer of management (Gottfried 1991; Macdonald & Siriani, 1996a).
In this thesis, I argue that contract cleaning workers are invariably subject to dual control by both the client and the cleaning company. The contracting company (the employer) controls its workers by delimiting working norms including hours of work, the type of tools and materials used, and task specificity as outlined in the service contract. The client controls contract workers by requesting variations through surveillance and the monitoring of the workers’ performance. The wider literature on interactive service supports the idea of dual surveillance, with the customer as manager and customers reinforcing management control efforts (Leidner, 1996: 40; Fuller & Smith, 1996). The literature on control in interactive services explains that customer feedback is used to monitor employees and to evaluate whether they are delivering quality services to customers (Fuller & Smith, 1996: 74-5). Customer feedback and reporting is an important element of control of both the contractor and its employees. Poor quality may be used as leverage against a contractor to improve service or to renegotiate contracts; it may also be used as leverage against cleaners and motivate them with self-discipline, attention to quality and conformity to the norms of control within the industry. In subsequent chapters, I highlight the role of the customer and the client in shaping the social relations of employment.

This section has reviewed the large international literature on cleaning as a service occupation. It has found that there are a number of commonalities within the literature relating to cleaning as a regime of precarious employment where work intensification abounds. These arguments are incorporated into this thesis where it is suggested that the Australian experience, in large part, reflects that found internationally. However, a number of significant gaps have been identified in the existing literature. Precarious employment in Australia has not been fully explored beyond narrow arguments relating to non-standard and atypical employment. Other gaps exist in the examination of the role of managers, and of management strategy and policies in creating regimes of precarious employment. The existing literature on cleaning is also silent on the role of the client/customer in securing control and consent in the industry.
3.5 Technology and Work Reorganisation in Cleaning.

While studies on the cleaning industry have examined employment regimes in some detail, less attention has been paid to the technical organisation and reorganisation of cleaning work. Traditionally, cleaning work has been semi-autonomous, with cleaners left to their own devices to arrange the order and timing of their tasks (Gold, 1964; Hood, 1988a, 1988b). New technology, and Neo-Taylorism, in the guise of Just-In-Time and Total Quality Management, have contributed to the reorganisation of cleaning work, significantly eroded the autonomy of cleaners and control over their work and increased the intensification of their work (see Aguiar, 2001). Whereas cleaners used to operate under ‘zone cleaning’, undertaking a range of different cleaning tasks normally with a clearly defined area like an office floor, work reorganisation has seen the fragmentation of cleaning tasks and the rise of mono-tasking. Under ‘mono-tasking’ or ‘task specialisation’ cleaners now perform a limited range of tasks across multiple spaces (Aguiar 2001: 239, 261-2). Technology has played an important role in the fragmentation and reorganisation of cleaning work. Although the use of technology may imply the need for a skilled cleaning workforce, the adoption of Taylorist practices, including task specialisation, has eroded the skills of cleaners.

As has been seen, Gershuny and Miles (1983) have highlighted the growth in the ‘self-service’ economy sustained and stimulated by technology and technological innovation. Although Gershuny and Miles (1983) were concerned not to overstate the significance of technological innovation in business services like cleaning, not all have shared their view of the limited penetration of new technology within this industry. A recent French study has found that cleaning is ‘currently undergoing major changes in scope and complexity and increasing use of information technology’ (Djellal, 2002: 119). This study argues that information technologies are having a profound impact on the employment structure of the cleaning industry. For Djellal (2002: 120-22), the cleaning industry is being transformed by innovation and increasing reliance on technology ranging from robotics, new tools and machines to what the author describes as ‘information technology.’ Djellal argues that cleaning is no longer a simple operation involving unskilled labour. Instead, he points to a transformation of cleaning from simply ‘transforming or improving the state (of cleanliness) of a given medium’ to one which consists of three distinct operations. The first operation is what he characterises
as 'material logistical operations': the cleaning of offices, machinery and so on. Furthermore, within the first operation, cleaning firms can be divided into 'simple material logistical operations' that do not innovate, and 'complex material logistical operations' that do innovate. The second operation is 'logistical and data-processing operations' using databases and quality control to 'improve time management, quality management and performance assessment. The third operation is 'contract or relational service operations' involving the customer, including the offering of 'contact services' (read customer services), forms of consultancy services and 'the introduction of flexible methods'. According to Djellal (2002: 123-24), the main change within the cleaning industry - at least in France - has been towards the second and third operations.

While technological innovation has influenced the organisation of work in the cleaning industry, its main impact, according to Djellal, has been upon employment systems. Cleaning contains two models of employment flexibility: a dominant 'neo Taylorist model of quantitative flexibility that exists side by side with a model of organisational adaptability' (Djellal, 2002:127). Exhibit 3.1 outlines the key characteristics of cleaning firms (typically small firms) whose operations are organised around material logistical operations (read neo-Taylorist) requiring little or no technology. It is claimed that these firms rely upon labour that is predominantly unskilled, composed of immigrants and engaged on a part-time basis. For these neo-Taylorist organisations, employee loyalty, identification and motivation have been identified as major problems (Djellal, 2002: 128).

At the same time, technology and increasing client expectations, coupled with changing product markets, have stimulated the demand for a more highly skilled cleaning workforce, giving rise to a new organisational model (see Exhibit 3.1). This model is one of 'organisational adaptability'. For the cleaning industry, this model is characteristic of larger firms embracing new technologies and relational-based service management. The organisational adaptability model differs from the Neo-Taylorist model in that emphasis is placed upon human resource management practices, investment in training and technology along with the professionalisation of the industry and new organisational structures (Djellal, 2002: 130).
Exhibit 3.1 Neo-Taylorist and Organisational Adaptability Models for Cleaning Firms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation/Trajectory</th>
<th>Employment Characteristics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firms characterised by a simple logistical trajectory:</td>
<td>Neo-Taylorist quantitative flexibility model:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Much of the workforce is female</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Much of the workforce is unskilled</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Employees many foreign workers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• High turnover linked to search for external flexibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Frequent use of part-time labour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Low share of managerial and supervisory staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• High level of quantitative flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• These are mainly operations performed on a tangible object, and which require no particular processing, information codification or technology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coexistence of complex material, informational and service-based logistical trajectory:</td>
<td>Organisational Adaptability model:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Operations whose principal medium is information (data-processing and codifying operations).</td>
<td>• Fewer Women in the workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Notion of service, of service relation: here, the customer takes an active part in the production/transaction process.</td>
<td>• Low part-time rate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Low level of external quantitative flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High share of managerial staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase in share of higher occupational categories and managerial staff linked to the emergence of new functions and to professionalism</td>
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Significantly, Djellal’s view of the up-skilling impact of technological innovation is not shared by industry insiders within the Australian cleaning industry, who argue that there has been little change in technology over the past 20 years and question the extent of the impact of technological innovation. It is also clear that the Australian industry has not received the same level of investment in training or technology as seen in France. As noted in Chapter 2, despite the intensely competitive nature of the industry in NSW and Australia, industry insiders argue that technological innovation has been relatively
limited (Jeffs, 2001). These claims ignore the fact that the Australian cleaning industry has lead the way in the development of back-pack vacuum cleaners and gas-operated rotary suction polishers. Indeed, it seems that the industry in NSW conforms more to Djallal’s (2002) neo-Taylorist model of employment characteristics with large numbers of women, migrants and part-time employees. In Australia, the impetus for change in work organisation in the cleaning industry has come not from technological innovation but rather from intense competition in the market place and the desire of some larger cleaning firms to differentiate themselves in terms of service and quality. Despite this, Djallal’s model is of some relevance to our analysis. Although the Australian industry may seem to present neo-Taylorist forms of work organisation, later chapters demonstrate characteristics of ‘organisational adaptability’ through the incorporation of the customer in the service process.

3.6 Cleaning ‘Work’ and Cleaner ‘Identity’

An examination of how cleaners are represented in the literature, how they and others view their work, and how cleaners develop a sense of identity as workers will also consider what the existing literature has to say about why people are drawn to cleaning work, how people are recruited to the industry, and what are the basis and significance of the gender division of labour within cleaning. Here I argue that the manner in which cleaning work is socially constructed, and also the prevalence of informal recruitment and selection practices, contributes to the precariousness of employment within the industry.

The non-academic literature on cleaning has tended to depict cleaners as victims of precarious employment relations, and has highlighted the servility of the employment. These generalisations are common in the research of ethno-journalists (for example, Ehrenreich, 2001; Wynhausen, 2005) investigating the lives of the working poor. Such studies have tended to conflate and objectify the experiences of cleaners and have failed to consider how cleaners cope with their work and how some workers in this industry

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4 Indeed, these innovations have reinforced the neo-Taylorist assumptions behind cleaning in Australia by developments in technology that contribute to the ‘speeding-up’ of work by employees rather than the transformation of work or the elimination of cleaning.
find satisfaction and dignity in what they do. As this section demonstrates, the academic literature also falls short on examining worker motivation and possible sources of satisfaction that can be derived from cleaning work.

As 'work', cleaning is quite difficult to define. Leonard (1992: 154) argues that 'cleaning only becomes work when it is removed from the boundaries of home, family and marriage.' As paid workers, cleaners and their work have attracted a number of different labels. Typically, cleaners and their work are often 'hidden', with cleaners seen as constituting a 'twilight army' (Community Action, 1984) performing tasks that are undervalued and underpaid. Cleaning is represented as being hidden because it is often performed outside 'normal' working hours early in the morning or at night, or even over weekends (Coyle, 1985, 1986). Compounding the invisibility of cleaning is the underrecognition of the worth as cleaning as work. At work, cleaning and cleaners 'remain unacknowledged unless work is either not performed or not performed to a standard that reveals their past presence' (Allen & Pryke, 1994: 468). Furthermore, the contracting-out of cleaning institutionalises a social divide between the cleaner and the client's workforce. Cleaners occupy different spaces, and frequently take their breaks at different times, while their hours of work mean that they have little contact with their client's workforce (Allen & Henry, 1997: 188-89; 1996: 71; 1995: 159). While these observations are true for a number of cleaners, as later chapters will demonstrate, work reorganisation in the cleaning industry and the extension of the working day for more Australian workers has actually increased the visibility of cleaners.

According to many sociologists, cleaning is perceived and often represented in the literature as 'stigmatised' and 'dirty work'. In order to make a living, cleaners have 'to do a lot of other people's dirty work' (Hughes, 1954: 49), but cleaners adopt a number of practical as well as rhetorical and discursive strategies to find meaning and worth in their tasks (Gold, 1964; Hughes, 1958; Hood, 1988a, 1988b; see also Saunders, 1981; Walsh, 1975). According to Gold (1964: 21), a janitor's conceptions of himself [sic] are thoroughly wrapped up in his work. He is aware that society judges him, and that he judges himself, largely by the work he does. He is constantly trying to achieve higher status for himself through public recognition of higher work status.
Hughes (1964: 52) has argued that notions of ‘dirty’ work play a role in the drama of work relations. Cleaners, like other groups of workers who engage in occupations that are ‘perceived as dirty and degrading ... are seen to personify the dirty work such that they become, literally, “dirty workers”’ (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999: 413).

Studies of cleaners (see Gold, 1964, for example) reveal that cleaners are aware of how others perceive their occupation. Everett Hughes (1958: 60) found that janitors are frank about their work being ‘physically dirty work’ and declare their disgust with certain aspects of the job, such as rubbish collection. However, he also noted that ‘the physical disgust of the janitor is not merely a thing between him and the garbage, but involves the tenant [client] also’ (Hughes, 1958: 50; see also Gold, 1964). The tenant or the client plays an important role in the ordering of work and in the making or breaking of routines for cleaners and janitors (Hughes, 1958; Gold, 1964; Hood 1988a, 1988b). Cleaners and janitors also define themselves and their work in terms of fellow cleaners and janitors belonging to a stigmatised occupation. Importantly, however, cleaners and janitors embrace a quite different self-identity. As individuals, they portray themselves as being better workers than their fellow cleaners and janitors (Gold, 1964:27-8). Another study found that although cleaning does not rate highly on occupational prestige scales, it is not without its rewards. Indeed, cleaners perceive their work as ‘good work’ and not necessarily demeaning (Hood, 1988b: 97; see also Davis, 1984 for another take on this line of argument).

The temporal nature of cleaning/janitorial work can have important implications for how cleaners perceive their work and how they interact with clients and tenants. Jane Hood’s study of cleaners (she refers to them as ‘custodians’) at an American university revealed a number of key differences between day and night cleaners (the ‘third shift’), contributing to the ‘stigmatisation of time’. Cleaners were not only stigmatised by ‘place and peer cultures, but also by time’ (Hood, 1988a; 1988b). Night cleaners enjoyed less supervision and could often set their own work pace and routine, as well as having discretion over how their work was organised. Social boundaries between

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5 While cleaners were able to point out the degrading nature of their work and the poor work habits of their colleagues, they did not do so in reference to themselves. Typically, one cleaner tends to see her/himself as better than other cleaners (Gold, 1964).
clients/tenants and the cleaners were often relaxed. In contrast, day cleaners were in more continuous contact with ‘high status people’ (Hood, 1988a: 104) and had less autonomy and control over their work. Day cleaners felt pressured to exhibit a better sense of dress and felt that they were being scrutinised by clients and tenants (Hood, 1988a; 1988b). Day cleaners were also more likely to be embarrassed by their work, while night cleaners were less likely to ‘experience their jobs as “dirty work”’ (Hood, 1988b: 95, 102). For the purposes of this thesis, the key point here has to do with the varying temporal and spatial nature of the worker-client relationship and how this, in turn, helps to shape worker self-concept and identity.

Hood (1988a; 1988b) found that shifting cleaners between day and night shifts caused a number of problems for cleaners, especially for those transferred from night to day shifts. Sharing the same space as clients could result in job conflicts as cleaners confronted arrogant or rude clients who deliberately walked over wet floors. Such conflicts, argued Hood (1998b: 107), reinforced the stigmatisation of cleaning work. Cleaners also faced internal conflict and injury to pride when their shifts were changed. Many night cleaners identified very strongly with the areas that they cleaned and were proud of the fact that they could leave an area cleaned at the end of their shift. Day cleaners, by contrast, spent much less time on their areas and did not have the same sense of satisfaction at the end of their shift (Hood, 1988a: 102-104).

However, the cleaners in Hood’s study were not wholly powerless within their situation. Indeed, they adopted a number of strategies to improve their control over their work and their clientele. These strategies could alternate between ‘cultivating and training clients’ and outright resistance that eventually changed clients’ behaviours (Hood, 1988a: 109-11; see also Gold, 1964: 20-7). Hughes argued that janitors could achieve power over their clients by making use of those facets of their work that they themselves found most repulsive – that is, garbage handling. In the garbage, janitors could learn of the tenant’s financial status and their love lives. In a case of what only can be described as reverse surveillance, Hughes argued that in the garbage the janitor could find ‘a magical power over that pretentious villain, the tenant’ (Hughes, 1958: 51; see also Gold, 1964). As this implies, dirty work and stigmas around notions of dirty work can be powerful precursors to the development of occupational and workgroup cultures (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).
Given the precarious nature of cleaning work and the prevalence of low rates of pay within the industry, a number of researchers have examined why people are drawn to employment as cleaners. Gold (1964: 39), for example, finds that all the janitors that he interviewed (they were all male) ‘were either ‘forced into the occupation by the necessity of earning a living, or “somebody talked them into it”’. Other studies confirm that financial circumstances are instrumental in pushing women, in particular, into taking up cleaning work, and suggest that such work is rarely a matter of free choice (Leonard, 1992: 155-6). Angela Coyle (1985: 7) argues that women and ethnic minorities constitute ‘trapped’ sections of the workforce and who take up cleaning out of necessity, not by choice. For recent migrants, in particular, cleaning is rarely the employment of choice. Immigration policies, a lack of English language skills, the non-recognition of skills and qualifications and racism experienced in their new country have forced many migrants into the cleaning industry. In some cases, a lack of qualifications has forced migrants into seeking working in cleaning (Neal & Neale, 1987). In other instances, entry into the cleaning industry provides a potential stepping-stone to upward mobility, or is seen as a stop-gap or short-term measure (Aguiar, 2000; Meagher, 2003). In some studies, family responsibilities and children are cited as reasons for women choosing to enter the cleaning industry (Coyle, 1985; Hood, 1988b). However, as Coyle (1985: 8) warns, ‘it would be wrong to construe cleaning as convenient work for women. Cleaning hours cut right across the day and there is evidence that cleaning hours disrupt family relationships … rather than accommodate them.’ Structural patterns and segregation along the lines of gender and ethnicity are important factors in determining the composition of the cleaning workforce. As we shall see, these factors also play a major role in shaping worker identity and work relationships in cleaning.

Distinct patterns of gender differentiation have been detected in the cleaning industry. A study of British women cleaners by the Low Pay Unit in the early 1980s found that most cleaners were ‘between the ages of 35 and 59, married with family responsibilities, and with work histories that usually covered a range of low-paid, unskilled “women’s work”; many were also from ethnic minorities (Coyle, 1985: 7). The findings of the Low Pay Unit are almost identical to findings from the United States, Israel, Canada and Australia. Gender differentiation occurs within the work
performed by men and women. This raises an interesting conundrum: women cleaners often perform tasks that they undertake at home, suggesting a permeable boundary between paid and unpaid work (Aguiar, 2001); and yet men are also employed as cleaners. The employment of men is often different to that of women. While women tend to be predominantly employed on a part-time basis and undertake ‘light cleaning’ duties as an extension of their role as wives and mothers, men tend to be over-represented in the numbers of full-time cleaners and their work attracts different job titles and reward, reinforcing a process of vertical segregation. For example, men often undertake ‘heavy’ or ‘industrial’ cleaning tasks requiring the use of machinery or ‘strength’. Men’s jobs within cleaning are often redefined as ‘janitor’, ‘general labourer’, or ‘general maintenance’, with the job titles differentiating men’s cleaning from women’s, and attracting different grading and reward structures. Men are also far more likely to be found in the ranks of managers and supervisors within the cleaning industry (Aguiar, 2001; Bernstein, 1984; Coyle, 1985,1986; Iler, 1982; Munro, 1999; Neal & Neale, 1987; Rees & Fielder, 1992). However, as a number of the studies have shown, there is no rational basis for the gender division of labour within the cleaning industry, and women can often be found performing tasks defined as ‘men’s work’.

Researchers have paid close attention to the pattern of recruitment of employees into the contract cleaning industry (Aguiar, 2000, 2001; Allen & Henry, 1996; Bernstein, 1986; Coyle, 1985, 1986; Leonard, 1992; Munro, 1999; Rees & Fielder, 1992). Despite high-labour turnover, few companies are willing to bear the costs of staff recruitment or retention. Most staff are recruited through networks of friends and relatives already in formal employment, and management has little involvement in the recruitment of the majority of the workforce. According to Leonard (1997: 158-9), informal recruiting in the contract cleaning industry is important in creating bonds of mutual trust and obligation and, more importantly, in maintaining a docile and loyal workforce. Cleaners become obligated to supervisors and colleagues for getting a job in the first place, which reinforces arbitrary employment relationships and compounds the vulnerability of workers (Rees & Fielder, 1992: 362). Labour informally recruited via an intermediary already employed by the organisation can be controlled by group pressure, and this has immense advantages for an employer. However, the intimacy of work relationships can also be advantageous to employees. Problems of meeting contract obligations may be averted through the manipulation of social relationships within the
workplace. For example, if a cleaner has to take time off work, his/her peers might join together and redistribute the workload between them. Informal recruitment also makes exploitative work less alienating because cleaners often work with friends and family (Leonard 1992: 157-161). On the other hand, the recruitment of supervisory and managerial staff tends to be less informal. Rees and Fielder (1992: 361-2) found that ‘internal labour markets were not considered a realistic possibility’ in the United Kingdom and that managerial vacancies were filled from existing managers within the company or by advertising externally.

In most Anglophone developed market economies, cleaning, like other service industries, relies heavily upon NESB immigrants (Aguiar, 1992; Coyle, 1985, 1986; Neal & Neale, 1987) and ‘from secondary labour markets wholly on the basis of their social characteristics’ (Rees and Fielder, 1992: 364; Aguiar, 2001). This is characteristic of the broader changes evident within the service economy (Sassen-Koob 1984; Sassen, 1996, 1998, 2001; Waldinger & Lee, 2001). The empirical chapters which follow highlight the NSW industry’s heavy reliance on migrant and NESB workers and how the use of such workers contributes significantly to the patterns of employment relations and the social relations of work within the industry.

3.7 Unionisation in Service Work and Cleaning

This final section considers briefly the existing research on unionisation in service industries. The previous section raised a range of questions relating to the presence and role of unions in service industries and occupations. This section will analyse the challenges to the unionisation of service workers and critique some of the reasons for low rates of unionisation within service industries. It then examines the successful organisation and re-organisation of cleaners in the United States and the implications this has for organising service workers elsewhere.

Given the size and the pervasive nature of the service sector there is a paucity of academic research on unionisation and organising in the service sector (Bennett & Delaney, 1993). Bennett and Delaney (1993: 105) argue that although unions have been
successful in organising in the public sector of services, ‘the pattern of unionisation of private firms in the service sector varies widely’. Moreover, they point out that

little research has been conducted to explore the unique problems and prospects involved in organising private firms, especially small firms, in the service sector, even though it may be argued that, if organised labour is to reverse its declining membership trend, successful organising in the service sector is essential.

There is a range of explanations offered for the low rates of unionisation in services. One of the most salient arguments is that ‘traditional’ methods of organising developed around manufacturing are not applicable to the organisation of service workers. Hence, service workers present a challenge to ‘traditional’ organising models. Green and Tilly (1987, cited in Savage, 1998: 231) explain a number of key differences between service and manufacturing workers. Firstly, service workers often have no history or personal experience of unionism; secondly, service workers are more likely to be in contact with customers and are thus more inclined to identify with them than with fellow workers; thirdly, service workers, including women, immigrants and people of colour are perceived as less likely to be interested in unionism and thus ‘unorganisable’; and finally, ‘traditional’ models of unionism have failed to come to terms with many characteristics of service industries including small workplaces, high labour-turnover, and contingent, part-time and temporary workers. Likewise, Cobble (1996) contends that service work embodies a new employment relationship, one that involves the customer and often takes place in small, spatially fragmented establishments where an emphasis is placed on quality and the blurring of managerial functions. In these firms, the indistinct line between employee and employer renders unions irrelevant.

However, these generalisations sit rather uncomfortably with the fact that unions have been able to establish and maintain a presence in many areas of service work, including cleaning. As we have seen, the LHMU has a long history of organisation and representation in the Australian cleaning industry. Elsewhere, the commercial cleaning industry is an interesting example of the development and application of new models of unionism in the service sector. Developments in Britain and the United States
demonstrate the challenges facing unions in services and how factors that inhibit union organisation might be overcome.

Unionisation amongst cleaners in the United States and the United Kingdom developed at a steady pace in the 1960s and 1970s. In Britain, many cleaners were organised into blue-collar general unions and white-collar public unions. Campaigns to recruit cleaners in the hospitals and local authorities and the ‘Night Cleaners Campaign’ were successful in attracting many cleaners, including a large number of women, and often for the first time, into a union (Munro, 1999; Coyle, 1985). In the United States, janitors are covered by a range of public and private sector unions, the largest being the private sector Service Employees’ International Union (SEIU). Like its United Kingdom counterparts, the SIEU has had some success in organising the ‘unorganisable’ – ‘poor immigrant workers’ (Waldinger et al, 1998).

To be sure, the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s precipitated a decline in unionisation amongst cleaners in the United Kingdom and the United States, with unions coming under concerted attack from both employers and the state. As a result of privatisation, contracting out and intense competition between cleaning firms, unions lost members and pay and conditions were eroded (see Coyle, 1985,1986; Mines & Avina, 1992; Howley, 1990; Erickson et al, 2002; Waldinger et al, 1998). Yet the continued union presence in cleaning cannot be ignored and while this thesis is not concerned primarily with the nature of institutional industrial relations in cleaning, it is nevertheless incumbent to consider briefly why unions have managed to maintain their presence in this industry and, in some instances, even to improve their position.

Unions organising cleaners face many problems in common, whether they be located in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, or elsewhere. One of the most common problems associated with the organisation of cleaners is getting access to workers scattered across hundreds of different sites (Savage, 1998: 235) and who often work outside ‘normal’ working hours. Cleaners often work by themselves and have little contact with other workers, even on larger worksites. Multiple jobholding has also been identified as an impediment to union solidarity (Reimer, 1999: 170). Research has identified a range of issues confronting the organisation of cleaners. One of these is the occupational structure of the industry. In the United States, for example, employers
invariably make use of the relatively plentiful supply of immigrants and high labour-turnover rates to defeat union organising initiatives (Mines & Alvina, 1992: 432-33). A non-stable workforce and lack of identity or attachment to an employer or the worksite is a double-edged sword for union organisation.⁶

The literature has also identified outsourcing and contracting as blurring the responsibility between the building owners, those renting the building and the cleaning contractors in terms of making collective agreements (Erickson et al, 2002: 544).⁷ Privatisation too poses serious challenges for unions. Unions are often powerless to protect pay and conditions if cleaning contracts are retained or awarded in-house; and they face difficulties in organising workers if services are contracted out (Beechy & Perkins, 1987: 171-2). As noted in the previous chapter, these challenges were faced by the LHMI in NSW after the privatisation of the GCS. Globalisation and immigration have also posed challenges to unionism by changing the social composition of the cleaning workforce (Sassen, 2001; Wells, 2000). At the same time, unions have been slow to incorporate and accommodate ethnic and gender restructuring. Migrants’ lack of English-language skills and fear of deportation compound the perceived difficulties of organising cleaners (Erickson, 2002: 547).

Although the existing literature highlights the considerable challenges faced by unions in the service sector, unions have fought back and have successfully begun to organise spatially dispersed groups of workers. The clearest instance of an effective re-unionisation campaign is that of the SEIU’s widely publicised Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign which in the mid-1980s demonstrated that the obstacles to organising service industries were not insurmountable (Howley, 1990: 71).

The central aim of the JfJ campaign was to ‘win decent wages and conditions for building service workers’ and, to this end, the campaign adopted a ‘dual strategy without relying on a union contract (or even union recognition) and of mobilising

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⁶ On the other hand, as noted by Howley (1990: 63), ‘a lack of attachment to the job translates into less fear of losing one’s job, often a key deterrent to militancy.’

⁷ In the United States, for example, building owners and contractors have been successful in blurring lines of responsibility to circumvent the National Labor Relation Act and thus avoid any obligation to workers as defined under the Act. According to Howley (1990: 65-66), this ‘provides a powerful incentive for building owners to subcontractor services.’
community support and public support for the janitors’ movement’ (Howley, 1990: 67). To some commentators, the success of the JfJ and similar campaigns lay in the recognition of the role that space and scale can play in industrial relations. What was new about the JfJ approach to organising was that it embodied ‘geographic unionism’. Realising that employer- or site-specific organising is not feasible, geographic unionism sought to organise ‘all workers and negotiate with employers across a local labour market’ (Savage, 1998: 236-37).

While the JfJ campaign in parts of the United States demonstrates the success of new models of organising, studies of unionism amongst British cleaners suggests less the need for new organising strategies than the importance of allowing genuine representation within existing union structures. Angela Coyle’s (1985, 1986) feminist analysis of the United Kingdom cleaning industry is a rather pessimistic (although realistic) view of the future of trade unionism in this industry. According to Coyle (1986), unions organising cleaners face challenges not only from the outsourcing and privatisation of cleaning but also from the fact that unions for cleaners have failed to represent the interest of women workers. Coyle charts the successful unionisation of cleaners in the 1960s and 1970s and laments their decline in the 1980s. Coyle (1985: 20) argues that while unions like the ‘National Union of Public Employees were successful at recruitment of women cleaners, it was no more successful than other unions in extending representation to this group of workers.’ Munro’s (1999) analysis of cleaning and catering workers in the United Kingdom’s National Health Service has demonstrated that unions need to be cognisant of gender and ethnicity and to improve the participation of women and black and minority workers in union structures and organisation. Munro (1999: 194) contends that unions for cleaners and other service workers should broaden their agenda because ‘women ancillary workers are more likely to be involved in workplace struggles which are defined as outside of union activities.’

As I have explained, women, peoples of colour and NESB immigrants are very heavily represented in cleaning. In order for unions to be relevant for these groups of workers, it has been suggested that unions must ‘engage in a meaningful way with the identities of workers’ (Savage, 1998: 226). This goes against ‘traditional’ organising models that appeal to ‘workers solely on the basis of their identity as workers for a specific employer’ (Savage, 1998: 231). Union organisation around ethnic identity has been
found to be an important component in the unionisation of immigrant room cleaners and catering workers in the San Francisco hotel industry. Recognition of ethnic clustering, and developing creative strategies that understood and accommodated workforce diversity, enabled the San Francisco Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees’ International to overcome what were seen as traditional impediments to organising the ‘unorganisable’ (Wells, 2000). What this campaign demonstrated is that one size does not fit all when it comes to organising. However, these lessons have not been heeded by the LHMU in NSW. Chapter 2 explained that the composition of the NSW cleaning workforce (see Chapter 5, for Complete Clean) is largely drawn from migrant and NESB workers. Despite this, by the time the research for this thesis had been completed, the LHMU had still employed only one NESB organiser (Interview with LHMU official, 4 April, 2003).

Any analysis of unions for cleaners needs to be embedded in the wider service economy. As this section has demonstrated, “traditional” models of unionism are not readily applicable to service workers. However, as the success of the JfJ and San Francisco hotel workers campaigns have demonstrated, “unorganisable” workers in the service sector can be mobilised and effectively organised. It is does not necessarily mean that the ‘traditional’ union models must be discarded. However, the British experience demonstrates that while unions can organise and integrate service workers into blue-collar unions or into white-collar public sector unions, these unions have also recognised the need to reassess their representative functions to include all workers. For all unions, the lesson is that diverse and multiple identities and local organisation are the potential building blocks of success. The success of the JfJ campaigns in North America have been noted in Australasia, and the LHMU and Service and Food Workers’ of New Zealand have recently joined the US Service Employees’ International Union in a bold tripartite campaign to organise commercial office cleaners (see Ryan & Herod, 2006).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature relating to work and employment in the service economy. Various explanations for the rise of services have also been examined. While
there has been much disagreement over the extent to which services dominate the economy, as well as about how best to define and classify ‘services’, the literature has tended to agree that the services are characterised by a marked polarisation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ jobs. Within the service economy there has been a rapid growth of the number of part-time, low-paid jobs. Many of these positions have been filled by women, ethnic and racial minorities and immigrants. The literature relating to the cleaning industry has tended to mirror these trends.

This chapter has also examined industry characteristics and has offered a preliminary analysis of the composition of the cleaning workforce and how cleaners and others perceive the work of cleaning. The literature on the cleaning industry has focused on the experiences of work and has argued that cleaning constitutes a new regime of precarious and risky employment. This chapter has examined what the existing studies have to say about how unions might deal with this challenge. Two promising strategic options emerge: firstly, that union strategy can be more attuned to the spatial peculiarities of cleaning work and cleaning worker recruitment; secondly, that union strategy can be more mindful of the factors that serve to shape the social and work identities of cleaning workers.

Overall, this chapter has highlighted a range of strengths and weaknesses in the existing literature on service work in general, and cleaning in particular. The chapter has highlighted a number of oversights in the literature on services, and in Australian and international literature on cleaning. These oversights will be addressed in this study. In particular, it is revealed that cleaning as precarious employment has not been fully explored in the Australian context. Other areas warranting redress are an examination of the restructuring of cleaning work, and how work restructuring leads to work intensification.

Absent from existing studies of services and cleaning is any detailed examination of front-line managers and their working experience. Although the literature on services acknowledges the role of the customer in distinguishing services from manufacturing, there is a paucity of research on the role of the customer in cleaning. The role of the labour process has been neglected in existing studies on cleaning ‘work’ and the
‘identity’ of cleaning. This thesis examines the labour process as a central theme in the analysis of cleaning ‘work’ and in constructing an ‘identity’ at work.

An important omission in the literature on services is how firms organise and manage work across different work sites and maintain service quality. Later chapters will examine how customers/clients play an important role in the organisation and management of work. First, though, it is necessary to explain the analytical framework and research methods that will be applied.
CHAPTER 4

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The preceding chapters examined the development and characteristics of the Australian cleaning industry and the existing literature relating to service work, including commercial cleaning. This chapter outlines the conceptual framework applied in this study. Although there is little research on the commercial cleaning industry, there exits a wide body of literature on work in the service sector generally. Salient features from this literature will be highlighted, and a framework for analysis of the cleaning industry will be outlined.

This thesis takes a broad conceptual perspective and recognises that no one theoretical approach is appropriate or sufficient for a full analysis of the NSW commercial cleaning industry. The theoretical approach is drawn from critical literature on employment relations and human resource management. The chapter also presents a framework of analysis for the study of cultural behaviour and cultural manifestations in the cleaning industry. In recognising the limitations of single perspective frameworks of cultural analysis, we seek to develop a broad framework that enables us to view culture from several perspectives. In particular, attention is drawn to the salience of workplace culture and the operation of an industry culture.

4.1 Theorising Work and Employment in the Service Economy

Previous chapters have demonstrated that a proper analysis of the commercial cleaning industry needs to be firmly located in the context of the service economy. Equally, the conceptual framework applied in this study derives primarily from the literature relating to the organisation and management of work in the service sector. Three key studies of the service industry have shaped the framework of analysis for this thesis. Two of these, Korczynski (2002) and Frenkel et al (1999), are typical of studies of 'front-line service work'. The third, by Herzenberg et al (1998), analyses service work from a wider
perspective and covers work other than that performed by front line, white-collar workers.

In their international comparative study of the organisation of front-line service work, Frenkel et al develop a framework drawing heavily upon micro- and organisational sociology in what they describe as a 'structuration approach' (1999: 24). Drawing upon Giddens (1976), they argue the need for

empirical research that facilitates the understanding of social action from the standpoint of those involved and a close acquaintance with structural factors—markets, technology, labour market institutions—that enable regular or typical social action (social structure or organisation) to be identified and analysed. (Frenkel et al, 1999: 24)

In their application of a 'structuration' approach to work and work organisation, Frenkel et al (1999: 24-27) situate their analysis around five interrelated concepts: 'work relations', 'employment relations', 'control relations', 'co-worker relations', and 'customer-worker relations'. Within each of these 'relationships', research and analysis is organised around 'bureaucratic', 'entrepreneurial' and 'knowledge-intensive' forms of organisation or work arrangements. The Frenkel et al model is especially salient to this study since it demonstrates the complexity of social relations across service employment and the way in which the customer plays an integral role in social relations.

Work relations covers the complexities and nuances of work by exploring both the 'medium' of work and the 'act' of work. 'The medium of work refers to what is typically work in the course of completing tasks', while 'the act of work refers to the activity or process whereby various media, knowledge, creativity and skills are employed to complete the task' (Frenkel et al, 1999: 62). Knowledge, skills and creativity are key variables in the analysis of the act of work, as are the conceptual distinctions between routine and professional workers. These distinctions will become more evident when we examine Herzenberg et al's (1998) study of the service economy.
Frenkel et al emphasise the importance of vertical and lateral relations within their framework. For them, vertical relations – the hierarchical division of labour – are represented implicitly in employment and control relations. ‘Employment relations’ describes the ‘conditions of employment’, including: ‘pay, training, promotion systems’– ‘the procedures and practices governing relationships between workers and their employers’ (Frenkel et al 1999: 24, 93). Control relations, on the other hand, are the exercise of power and the act of managerial control. Service work, especially frontline service work, is typically characterised and distinguished by relationships between groups of co-workers and between customers and workers. Lateral relations – divisions of labour – are evident in relationships between co-workers and between customer and worker (Frenkel et al, 1999: 24).

Each of the above ‘relationships’ is examined further through the conceptual lens of ‘bureaucratic’, ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘knowledge-intensive’ forms of organisation or work arrangements. Bureaucratic organisations, according to Frenkel et al, are those characterised by routine work, while entrepreneurial organisations are characterised by ‘risk-taking behaviours’, cost minimisation strategies and ‘internal contracting’ (Frenkel et al, 1999: 28). Knowledge-intensive organisational forms are typically ‘networks’ whereby ‘the processing or creation of knowledge is a central activity (Frenkel et al, 1999: 27). It is proposed that cleaning, with some qualifications, fits the bureaucratic form of organisation.

Although the framework adopted by Frenkel et al was designed chiefly for application to front-line white-collar service work, its structuration approach has a useful heuristic value in analysing other forms and types of service work, including that of cleaning. As this thesis will demonstrate, most models of work and work organisation in the service sector do not readily accommodate the case of commercial cleaning. Although much cleaning work is routinised, commercial cleaning firms are not necessarily ‘bureaucratically’ organised. However, they often exhibit entrepreneurialism and embody networked forms of knowledge.

A more useful analysis of service work that includes a range of service employment beyond white-collar, front-line service work is that provided by Herzenberg et al (1998). In their analysis of ‘a future of lousy jobs’ and poor performance in the US
service sector, Herzenberg et al (1998: xi, 149) are critical of the lack of imagination evident in existing approaches to understanding the service economy, and of the dependence on models and methods derived from manufacturing. By drawing on a number of US case studies, Herzenberg and his co-researchers create a taxonomy of service work considered by one author to be 'the best recent source of directly relevant evidence of the nature of service jobs' (Korczynski, 2002: 45). Their model has been incorporated into a number of different studies of the service economy.

Herzenberg and his co-researchers outline a taxonomy of four different types of work systems to encompass the degree of variety in service work, and argue that 'each of the four work systems relies on a different basic mechanism or set of mechanisms to regulate how work is done and to induce workers to act in certain ways consistent with employers' goals' (1998: 41). Moreover, they explain, 'each work system could be subdivided, but none of the four could be folded into one of the others' (Herzenberg et al, 1998: 41). Table 4.1 outlines each of the four work systems identified by Herzenberg et al.

The 'tightly constrained' work system is typical of the work undertaken by telephone operators, fast food workers and data entry clerks. In this system, jobs are narrowly defined and work is highly routinised and subject to close managerial control. 'Unrationalised labour-intensive work' systems include cleaners and janitorial workers, as well as low-level retail sales and child care workers, for example. In this system there is low organisational rationalisation and loose control. 'Semi-autonomous systems' are characterised by jobs with moderate responsibility and careful management emphasis upon screening of job applicants, and internal job ladders to secure worker commitment. Examples include clerical and administrative workers. 'Highly-skilled autonomous' work systems include jobs that are typically defined as 'professional', requiring formal training and providing opportunities for career progression and advancement (Herzenberg et al, 1998: 41-43). Although there are some difficulties in categorising occupations into one of the work systems, the process of firms choosing a particular system is uniform and depends upon 'its history, goals and business strategies; its choice of technology; and incentives in particular products and labour markets' (Herzenberg et al, 1998: 44). For example, 'a low-cost strategy often leads to reliance
### Exhibit 4.1 Work Systems in the Service Economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tightly constrained</th>
<th>Unrationalised labour-intensive</th>
<th>Semiautonomous</th>
<th>High-skill autonomous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
<td>Telephone operators, fast-food workers, data entry clerks</td>
<td>Janitorial services, low-level retail sales, childcare</td>
<td>Clerical &amp; admin. Jobs with relatively broad responsibility, low-level managers, some sales workers</td>
<td>Physicians, high-level managers, laboratory technicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business strategy/markets served</strong></td>
<td>High volume, low cost; standardised quality</td>
<td>Low cost, low volume; often low or uneven quality</td>
<td>Volume and quality vary</td>
<td>Low volume; quality often in the eye of the beholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent of organisational rationalisation</strong></td>
<td>High (jobs designed by management)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task supervision</strong></td>
<td>Tight</td>
<td>Loose</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output monitoring/ performance measurement</strong></td>
<td>Machine or technological pacing common</td>
<td>Quantitative measurement</td>
<td>Quantitative measurement in some cases</td>
<td>Quantitative measurement rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal education/ credentials</strong></td>
<td>Low to moderate</td>
<td>Low to moderate (skill often unrecognised)</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal, firm specific training</strong></td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Significant for those who climb job ladders</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-the-job training</strong></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Some informal, unrecognised OJT from other workers</td>
<td>Limited to moderate</td>
<td>Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pay</strong></td>
<td>Often flat hourly; some bonuses linked to output or profits</td>
<td>Sometimes piece rate; sometimes flat hourly</td>
<td>Often flat hourly; some bonuses linked to output or profits</td>
<td>Usually salary; salary or profit share may be linked to billing, attracting clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Screening of job applicants</strong></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Careful</td>
<td>Usually very careful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal job ladders</strong></td>
<td>Limited except in some union firms</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Important for some workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobility across firms</strong></td>
<td>Lateral mobility in some cases</td>
<td>Lateral, no upward mobility</td>
<td>Most experience not portable</td>
<td>Lateral mobility; upward mobility in some professions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Herzenberg et al. 1998: 42-3.*

The distribution of workers across these different systems is uneven and reflects the diverse nature of the service economy. Herzenberg et al (1998: 45-46) estimate that in 1996 four percent of the US service sector worked in a tightly constrained system, compared to 26 percent working in unrationalled labour-intensive work systems. The estimated proportions of workers in semiautonomous and high-skilled autonomous positions were larger, with 29 and 40 percent of the service workforce, respectively. Women were said to predominate in tightly constrained and semi-autonomous work systems.

Unrationalled labour-intensive work systems are of particular interest here as it is in this system that Herzenberg and his co-researchers have chosen to locate janitors and cleaners. Although there are some problems with seeking to fit different types of service occupations into four work systems, this thesis adopts the term ‘unrationalled labour-intensive’ as a conceptual device to differentiate the work of cleaning from other types of service work. Other occupations falling into this work system include truck drivers, clerical homeworkers and child care workers. Many jobs in unrationalled labour-intensive work systems are poorly paid, often by piece-rates, and quality is usually unrewarded. Firms located within this work system tend to downplay quality and have little incentive to improve performance. Skill and knowledge within unrationalled jobs tends to remain unrecognised and internal job ladders are non-existent (Herzenberg et al, 1998: 48).

Workers in an unrationalled labour-intensive occupation are typically managed by quantitative (time) and socialised/customer and simple control mechanisms. Herzenberg and his co-researchers (1998: 48) argue that janitors (cleaners) tend to face qualitative control mechanisms where employees complete fixed tasks and employers can measure output. The assignment of quantitative control mechanisms to janitorial work by Herzenberg et al is simplistic and ignores the role that the customer plays in determining performance and patterns of work. Cleaners and janitors may also face what Herzenberg et al describe as ‘simple control’. As they remark, ‘employers resort to simple control in a wide range of ... settings in which wages are low and a perception
exists that there is little potential to improve performance through technology or job
design' (1998:50). In this situation, the relationship between workers and supervisors is
an important determinant of performance and quality. Evidence of this can certainly be
found in the cleaning industry. In the previous chapter it was explained that cleaning
made extensive use of arbitrary forms of labour management.

Business strategy in the service economy tends to involve a trade-off between price and
quality. Moreover, business strategy is an important determinant of the choice of work
system. Typically, firms choosing a price strategy will adopt unrationalled labour-
intensive work systems. Cleaning and janitorial firms, according to Herzenberg et al,
compete on price rather than service quality. Although some firms offer cleaning
services aimed at the ‘prestige’ segment of the market, clients tend to prefer cost over
quality and are unwilling to pay a modest 1 or 2 percent premium for a quality service.
Furthermore, like other studies of the cleaning industry (see Chapter 2) they found little
evidence of expenditure on capital; rather, the accent was on competitive strategies of
cost minimisation, particularly in relation to labour costs. Such strategies may, in
Herzenberg et al’s analysis, lead to the adoption of illegal employment practices (1998:
74-5).

One of the more challenging aspects of Herzenberg et al’s analysis of the service
economy is their prescription for the improvement of performance within service
industries. This improvement, they argue, is derived from the reorganisation of work
coupled with the incorporation of knowledge and skills. However, they reject
‘manufacturing’-based reforms of statistical control processing, Total Quality
Management and Just-In-Time production as ‘having limited relevance in unrationalled
labour-intensive services’ (1998: 83-4). Rejecting scientific management models of
work organisation (which they describe as the ‘engineering model of production’) as
‘unscientific’, unworkable and problematic in their application to services, Herzenberg
and his co-researchers promote an alternative model which they term ‘interpretive’
(1998: 85-7). The subjective nature of much service work, for example in determining
what is clean and what is not, along with the inseparability of the service product from
the service process and role of the customer, highlight the limitations of engineering
(1998: 87):

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The interpretive model takes as problematic what the engineering model takes as given: the prior definition of the product and the independence of the production process from the design of the product. In the interpretive model, workers develop [soft] skills and [competencies] in understanding customer wants and needs. They then translate those wants and skills into the services they provide. If the worker finds the service and method of provision he has initially chosen are not producing the intended or desired effects, he modifies the service or method of delivery or his interpretation of what the customer wants or needs. The worker continues to adjust his interpretation of customer needs until he perceives that they match the customer’s expectations.

In the ‘interpretive model’, it is claimed that performance in services is derived from improving ‘processes as whole’ through knowledge, skills and teams (Herzenberg et al, 1998: 90-4).

One of the many examples of the interpretive model outlined by Herzenberg et al is cleaning and hotel housekeeping. Interestingly, these occupations combine both engineering and interpretive models in the process and production of work. For example, ‘After deciding what a ‘clean’ room means, and in what respects a particular room is not clean, the housekeeper selects methods to do the job most quickly and effectively’ (Herzenberg et al 1998: 89). Cleaning and housekeeping, according to Herzenberg et al (1998: 101) have ‘potential for performance improvements’ (of both the engineering and interpretive kinds). Training, coordination and team work, better and lighter equipment and the development of standardised architecture may all lead to productivity improvements in these unrationlised labour-intensive industries.\(^1\)

Although the arguments presented are generally persuasive, the Herzenberg et al model does have some significant shortcomings. A potential weakness is that it does not take into account the soft and behavioural skills required by workers in unrationlised work systems. Nor does the model consider the impact of unionisation or union pressure.

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\(^{1}\) Interviews with industry managers and numerous articles, columns and letters in cleaning industry publications share Herzenberg et al’s analysis of the potential for productivity improvement in the industry.
Herzberg and his co-researchers also acknowledge that their model of work systems is a static one. In order to overcome this conceptual weakness, they broaden their analysis to incorporate ‘changes in work systems resulting from new technology, organisational restructuring, and shifts in business strategy’. Their conclusion is rather pessimistic and they see little hope for increased productivity or job quality in the US service economy as it now stands (Herzberg et al., 1998: 57). Unlike a number of other writers on the service economy mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, Herzberg et al. are sceptical about the impact of technological change and innovation in the service industry. Citing the example of the cleaner’s backpack vacuum, they argue that technology is incremental rather than transformational and has little impact upon productivity or real improvement of jobs (Herzberg et al., 1998: 58). In any case, technological change in the cleaning industry has typically resulted in work intensification. A further problem is that the model does not take into account the degree of product/service market competition or consider the impact of this upon business strategy. These weaknesses notwithstanding, the model offers a valuable range of conceptual and analytical insights.

Drawing upon these two influential studies of the service economy and service work, this section has provided a broad framework for analysing work, employment, co-worker and customer relations for contextualising the occupation and work of cleaning. This framework operates as an heuristic device for coming to terms with business strategies, characteristics of employment and the labour process across different work systems. The theoretical framework adopted Frenkel et al. and Herzberg et al. has tended to concentrate upon industrial/employment relations and sociological perspectives. Herzberg et al. (1998) present a broad analysis of the service economy and tend to ignore the micro-level of organisations. Their prescriptions for curing the ills of dead-end service jobs includes increasing minimum wages, improving service productivity, encouraging multi-employer institutions and expanding collective bargaining.

Both models, though, share a significant weakness: neither adequately integrates consideration of human resource management into its schema. The role of human resource management in transforming work and productivity is accorded a marginal
status in their analysis.² Frenkel et al (1999) recognise the role of human resource management in co-worker and customer relationships but fail to fully integrate it into their structuralist analysis.

4.2 Conceptualising Human Resource Management (HRM) in Service Sector Work

Within the mainstream literature on the service industry, it is often argued that HRM is the key ingredient for securing service quality and regulating interactions between customers and front-line service workers. Much of this literature assumes a positive correlation between HRM and organisational performance, however the latter happens to be defined (Haynes and Fryer, 2000: 240), and adopts a ‘best practice’ approach to strategic HRM (Boxall and Purcell, 2003; Shields, 2007: 89-94).

Korczynski (2002) provides one of the few extensive reviews of HRM and service work. Korczynski (2002: 55) contends that analyses of service employment have tended to over-emphasise management-worker relations, and argues that the role of the customer should to be incorporated into an analysis of service work. In rejecting a simple prescriptive approach to HRM in service work he attempts to put ‘work’ back into the picture, arguing that ‘to have an adequate understanding of HRM it is necessary to have an adequate sociological understanding of the work to which and around which HRM is applied’ (Korczynski, 2002: 198-99).

According to Korczynski, underpinning management approaches to the service industries is a supposed connection between customers and front-line workers. This he characterises as the ‘New Service Management school’, which, he suggests, had its origins in Harvard School HRM in the 1980s. Korczynski (2002: 21) traces the development of HRM within service industries and highlights the continuity with wider management theories of TQM and business process re-engineering. Within the literature on the ‘New Service Management school’, he suggests, there exists a consensus on

² This is not to say that Herzenberg et al have discarded HRM. Indeed, their ‘interpretive model’ of production includes a number of elements that most would recognise as HRM.
HRM practices that should be adopted: careful selection, high-quality training, well-designed support systems, empowerment, teamwork, appropriate measurement, rewards and recognition, and the development of a service culture. (2000: 29)

Within this consensus, emphasis is placed on customer-related attitudes, values and orientation, along with an assumption of the link between customer satisfaction and service worker satisfaction.

In essence, the New Service Management model is a manifestation of the best practice approach to the strategic management of HRM that posits that the adoption of a universal bundle of superior practices will lead to organizational effectiveness. Although there is debate over what bundles or sets of HRM practices lead to outstanding effectiveness, the practices identified by Korczynski above are included in best practice approaches to HRM. The strength of the best practice approach, like that of the prescriptions of the New Service Management School, is the seductiveness of its simplicity and its direct appeal to practitioners. It is questionable, however, whether the model is applicable to the cleaning industry where market pressures and the informalisation of working practices suggest that approaches to HRM are more tailored to meeting key environmental contingencies.

Further criticisms of the New Service Management school relate to its uncritical acceptance of unitarist theories and the marginalisation of conflict. It is also tends to ignore or gloss over inherent contradictions in service work-customer relationships (Korczynski, 2000: 37-40). Korczynski (2002: Chapter 3) also finds wanting critical perspectives on service work, particularly the McDonaldisation theses, which paint a bleak future for service work.

In both rejecting the New Service Management school and highlighting the limitations of critical perspectives on service work, Korczynski proposes the concept of the customer- oriented bureaucracy as a lens through which to examine service work. In arguing for a more informed understanding of the role of the customer, Korczynski stresses that through the customer-orientated bureaucracy
service work is seen as structured by management aims for the customer to experience efficient service delivery and to consume the enchanting myth of sovereignty within the service interaction. Here, HRM is conceived of as having a role primarily in trying to establish a (necessarily fragile) social order that can allow for the creation of profit. HRM functions at two levels. First, it promotes the necessary efficient and customer-oriented behaviour from the front-line staff. Second, it serves to cope with the inevitable ensuing tensions. If there is a meaningful cycle of HRM in service work, it exists in this (analytical) division between on the one hand the policies designed to give rise to certain behaviours from the workforce and on the other designed to cope with the ensuing tensions. (2002: 16)

A key feature of the customer-oriented bureaucracy is tension – the tension between rationality on one hand and irrationality on the other. This tension is evident in the competitive pressures and demands for quality by customers faced by an organisation and the ‘perpetuation of the myth of customer sovereignty’ (Korczynski, 2002: 65). HRM is the proposed means of overcoming these formal tensions.

Within a customer-oriented bureaucracy, a number of key features of work organisation are identifiable, many of them applicable to the commercial cleaning industry. One of the salient features is the role of management in combining rational organisational models with customer orientation, or as Korczynski (2002: 65) puts it: ‘Taylorism is coupled with Tailorism’. Other features include a labour process that simultaneously deals with quality and quantity of work, flexible divisions of labour to cope with customer demands, emotional labour, demand and labour flexibility, and systems of authority based upon rules but one that embraces and incorporates the customer. Management control reflects authority and incorporates the customer (Korczynski, 2002: 64-74).

Korczynski acknowledges that the customer-oriented bureaucracy model has limitations and may not be particularly well suited to sales work where workers stimulate demand, and in some cases are sales- rather than customer-oriented. This re-orientation from customer to sales introduces instrumentality and manipulation in the relationship
between customer and worker (Korczynski 2002: Chapter 6). Like a number of other studies of service work (for example, Frenkel et al, 1999), Korczynski has concentrated on front-line service where interaction with the customer is an implicit part of the service encounter. Such analyses tend to ignore manual service occupations like cleaning that are not implicitly acknowledged as ‘front-line’ work.

One detailed analysis of HRM in a service industry is Kim Hoque’s (2000) study of HRM in the British hotel industry. The hotel industry is a good example of the totality of service work and employment in that it employs a small number of front-line service workers (receptionists, front of house staff, waiters and waitresses), but relies on a much larger group of behind-the-scenes service workers to maintain service quality (for example, housekeeping, janitorial services, kitchen staff and the like). In a review of the salient mainstream literature, Hoque (2000: 10-20) examined a number of factors raised in the literature that were thought to influence the adoption of HRM. These include:

- Product markets
- Strategy-making processes
- Workforce characteristics (including skill and training levels)
- Impact of trade unions
- Impact of labour markets
- Organisation characteristics (including workplace size)
- National ownership (including foreign ownership)
- Impact of financial markets

Hoque (2000: 22) considered the literature relating to HRM within the hotel industry, finding that ‘the industry has been conveniently characterised as labour intensive and exploitative, with there being little or no scope for developmental approaches to HRM’. The literature relating to the hotel industry tended to find that where human resource initiatives were evident, they were ‘more to do with increasing managerial control rather than developing a sense of commitment’ (Hoque, 2000: 23). Extending this research, Hoque (2000: 27-47) hypothesised that the following factors may influence approaches taken to HRM in the hotel industry:

- Price Competition
• Quality enhancement  
• Nature and influence of personnel department  
• Variable nature of demand  
• Workforce resistance to change  
• Workforce instability and labour turnover

These variables were tested to ascertain the strength of their influence on HRM and the adoption of a formal HRM approach. Hoque found that there was little relationship between workplace size, the number of part-time workers and unions on the adoption of HRM practices. No relationship was discerned between the provision of specialist personnel services and the adoption of HRM, nor was a relationship discerned between product market stability and HRM. On the other hand, the results demonstrated that foreign-owned hotels were more likely to take a positive approach to HRM, and highlighted a relationship between HRM and business strategy, particularly when this strategy was based on quality enhancement. Hoque (2000: 82-94) also found limited resistance to technical change, but higher resistance to organisational change. This was explained in terms of fears of job loss accompanying organisational change and the potential for work intensification. Drawing from the research into the adoption of HRM, Hoque concluded that ‘few of the influences on HRM policy choice are unique to the industry’ and that the hotel industry is not sufficiently ‘different’ to other industries (Hoque, 2000: 93).

Hoque’s analysis differs from the ‘best practice’ prescriptions of the New Service Management school in that he acknowledges the role of industry- and organisation-specific strategic choices made by managers in their approaches to the management of human resources. This analysis is more akin to the ‘best fit’ or contingency approach to HRM (Boxall and Purcell, 2003; Shields, 2007: 94-103). This approach rejects the notion of the universal appropriateness of one set of human resource practices in favour of the adoption and adaptation of human resource practices that ‘fit’ an organisation’s internal and external circumstances (Shields, 2007: 94-103).

Although Hoque’s study is not directly applicable to the commercial cleaning industry, the cleaning industry shares a number of the factors that are thought to influence the hotel industry. Like the hotel industry (of which cleaning and housekeeping are central
functions), commercial cleaning firms also face environmental contingencies in terms of product markets, price, quality and variable demands. The cleaning industry, like the hotel industry, is also characterised by firms of varying size, differentiated labour markets and workforce instability. It is proposed that HRM strategies within cleaning, like those found within hotels, are oriented toward increasing management control. This thesis adopts many of the arguments of the ‘best fit’ approach to HRM. The analysis presented in the later empirical chapters explains the strategic choices made by cleaning firms in relation to their wider product markets and explains organizational structure and labour coordination in the context of service industries.

Writers on the service economy, including Korczynski (2002), tend to view HRM as the critical link between customer and service worker satisfaction, resolving tensions inherent in the service relationship between the two. Most of these studies, as previously indicated, have tended to examine a narrow range of service occupations, typically interactive or front-line service work. Other studies have challenged the predominance of HRM and have sought to assess the uptake of HRM within large and, increasingly, smaller firms.

In response to McLoughlin and Gourlay’s (1994: 2-3) claim that non-union firms have been neglected in contemporary industrial relations research, researchers have begun to turn their attention to the nature of employment relations in non-union firms. These studies have variously considered the demise of industrial relations, the decline of trade unionism, the diffusion of formal HRM, and the implications these developments carry for workers (Guest, 1995, 2001). Other studies have examined non-union relations in small and medium sized firms (Dundon & Grugulis, 1999; Wilkinson, 1999); or the employment relations of non-unionism (Guest, 1994; Guest & Conway, 1999; Beardwell, 1997). Employment relations and management practices in these studies have attracted a range of interrelated labels and concepts, including the pejorative labels of ‘Bleak Houses’ and ‘Black Holes’ (Guest and Hoque, 1994), and researchers have attempted to fit employment practices within individual firms into a typology of deliberate value-laden concepts of ‘Good’, ‘Lucky’, ‘Bad’, and ‘Ugly’ (Guest & Hoque: 1994). Underlying these concepts is acknowledgement of the possibility that management may use neither HRM nor industrial relations to manage their workforces (Beardwell, 1997:37).
The ‘Bleak House’ and ‘Black Hole’ constructs are closely related. Bleak House conditions are said to be evident in firms (often small firms) with poor working conditions, poor health and safety practices, and little employee participation and involvement (Wilkinson, 1999: 208). However, critics contend that the concept is narrowly defined and fails to encompass a range of employment and personnel practices. On this basis, Guest and colleagues (Guest & Hoque, 1994; Guest, 2001; Guest & Conway, 1999) have developed a four-fold taxonomy of employment relationships. This is outlined in Exhibit 4.2. In terms of human resource and industrial relations activity, ‘Partnership’ and ‘New Realism’ reflect a high emphasis on HRM and Industrial Relations; ‘Traditional Collectivism’ and ‘Pluralism’ reflects an environment of traditional industrial relations and no HRM; individualised HRM is evident when HR policies and practices have supplanted industrial relations; and the ‘Black Hole’ is a management option with neither HRM nor industrial relations.

**Exhibit 4.2 Relationship between Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrial Relations Activity</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Partnership</td>
<td>Tradional Pluralism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The New Realism)</td>
<td>(Collectivism)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Individualism</td>
<td>Black Hole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Guest, 2001: 97; Guest and Conway, 1999: 368*

**Exhibit 4.3 Classifying Establishment Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HRM Policy and Practice</th>
<th>HRM Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Guest and Hoque, 1994*
In an earlier study, Guest and Hoque (1994) offered a more highly normative taxonomy, again recognising four main organisational categories. This earlier model is described in Exhibit 4.3. Firms were categorised, firstly according to whether or not they had a HRM strategy, and secondly according to the nature of the firm’s HR policies (Guest & Hoque, 1994: 2). On this basis, Guest and Hoque identified four types of firm: ‘Good’ firms – those characterised by clear HRM strategy and HR practices; ‘Lucky firms’ – those without clear HR strategy but taking on some HR practices; ‘Ugly firms’ – those who provide minimum levels of workers’ rights and make minimal use of HRM practices; and ‘Bad’ firms – those characterised by no HRM strategy and low adoption of human resource techniques.

These categories have been included in a number of British studies based upon large surveys of non-union firms (often new establishments). These studies indicate a range of characteristics of non-union firms, including unsympathetic pay mechanisms, poor linkage between market and performance pay, nonexistence of personnel specialists, poor definition of the role of line managers, little evidence of strategy and HRM, poor flow of information and poor briefing of employees. Such findings do indeed indicate the existence of a Black Hole firm (Beardwell, 1997: 47). Guest (2001: 111) contends that the majority of firms in the British private sector may fall into the Black Hole category ‘where there is a low level of HR and no union presence.’ Significantly, Guest and Conway (1999:379) also find that Black Hole firms are concentrated in service industries (food and drink, retailing, hotel and leisure and consumer products) and in construction. Such organisations, they suggest, are characterised by ‘a floating population often operating on the margins of employment’ (Guest & Conway, 1999: 379).

The concept of the Black Hole is useful in illuminating ‘shades of grey and shafts of light ... a mix of pleasant and unpleasant employment forms’ (Dundon et al 1999: 254; Guest & Conway, 1999: 381), suggesting a variety of employment and management practices. Within so-called Black Hole firms, there is some evidence of employee job satisfaction and commitment to the employer, which Guest and Conway (1999: 386) seek to explain in terms of the prevalence of a very circumscribed psychological contract. For example, in such firms satisfaction may be more readily achieved because employee expectations are low in the first place.
Interestingly, the term Black Hole and related concepts have not been applied in the Australian context. Like a number of the theoretical constructs outlined above, the concept of the Black Hole represents a potentially useful device for examining a range of industrial relations and HRM practices. This study *adapts* the concept and seeks to show that it can be used to illuminate a range of employment and managerial practices within established commercial cleaning firms that operate within a broadly conceived industrial relations framework (for example, under the award system) and unionised industry, but with little evidence of sophisticated HR practices.

### 4.3 Organisational Culture

The framework of analysis to this point has been concerned with illuminating the employment relationship and the management of labour. This section outlines a framework for examining organisational culture in the cleaning industry and develops an argument for the incorporation of culture into the analysis of cleaning work. Culture is an important conceptual construct for this thesis because as Hatch (1993: 682) argues, 'In large measure, it is through culture that a person constructs the sense of individual and organisational identity and creates images that are taken for the self and the organisation.' Cultural analysis also offers a way to capture the complexities of organisational life. This thesis presents an argument that culture cannot be reliably conceived from a single perspective but must be viewed from the perspective of multiple metaphors (cf. Alvesson, 2002).

It begins by outlining a working definition of culture and then examining a classic three-perspective model of organisational culture. The idea of subcultures is then examined, with emphasis on the occupation of cleaner and cleaning as a distinct subculture within the service sector. The discussion of occupational and subcultures highlights the importance of examining culture at the workplace level. In the next section, the focus shifts from the organisational level to that of the industry and the argument that examination of culture within commercial cleaning needs to incorporate an understanding of the interaction between organisationally-specific and industry-wide cultural values and practices.
There are major debates amongst organisational researchers as to the nature of culture and how it might best be studied. Definitions of culture tend to reflect the researcher's view of the world and the preferred methodology of cultural analysis (Ogbonna, 1993). This thesis accepts that organisations are cultures (Smircich, 1983) and adopts Ogbonna's (1993: 43) definition of culture as

the interweaving of the individual into the community and the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one known group from another. It is the values, norms, beliefs and customs that an individual holds in common with members of a social unit or group.

There has been much criticism of the concept of corporate culture and whether or not culture can be manipulated or controlled by management (Alvesson 2002, Ogbonna, 1993; Ogbonna & Harris, 1998a; Harris & Ogbonna, 2002). Willmott (1993: 517), however, warns us that we should take corporate culture seriously because of its links to HRM and the 'governance of the employee's soul'. This aside, culture is a difficult concept to apply to the case of cleaning, and existing studies on the industry do not include any analysis of culture. One of the reasons for this is the nature of organisation within the industry. As explained in the preceding chapters, cleaning firms are hollow organisations that coordinate workers across spatially fragmented worksites owned by a third party. It is this characteristic of the industry that makes any examination of culture within specific cleaning firms especially challenging. Equally, as shall be shown in the chapters that follow, this makes the management of organisational culture from a unitarist and instrumental perspective a particularly fraught affair.

Perhaps the most significant development in organisational culture theory has been the analytical framework formulated by Martin and Meyerson (Meyerson & Martin, 1987, Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Martin & Frost, 1999; and Martin, 2002); a framework that identifies three main perspectives on organisational culture: the 'integration' perspective, the 'differentiation' perspective and the 'fragmentation' perspective. A number of organisational culture researchers have adopted this three-perspective framework to address some of the tensions between functionalist and organicist views of culture (for example, Harris & Ogbonna, 1998a). Martin & Meyerson (1988) explain
that most writers on culture have adopted one of three theoretical perspectives – integration, differentiation or fragmentation\(^3\) to explore cultural manifestations and phenomena. Exhibit 4.4 describes the main features of each perspective. The integration perspective views culture as unitary and consensual. From this perspective, culture functions as a ‘social glue’ that binds an organisation together. Integration studies dominate most writing on corporate culture (Martin, 2002: 159; Alvesson, 2002: 167). The differentiation perspective focuses on inconsistent cultural manifestations. Inconsistencies are evident in action, symbolism and content (Martin & Meyerson, 1988). A differentiation perspective acknowledges the possibility – indeed, the probability – of subcultures and countercultures. An ambiguity or fragmentation perspective ‘conceptualises the relationship among cultural manifestations as neither clearly consistent nor clearly inconsistent. Instead, interpretations of cultural manifestations are ambiguously related to each other, placing ambiguity, rather than clarity, at the core of the culture’ (Martin, 2002: 94). In the fragmentation perspective, culture creates disorder rather than order (Alvesson, 2002: 161).

According to Frost and Martin

The three-perspective framework is a metatheory, which claims to encompass and thereby surpass prior, more narrow theories by moving to a higher level of abstraction, claiming that, when a cultural context is viewed from all three perspectives, a deeper understanding will emerge. (1999: 356)

\(^3\) In their earlier work Martin and Meyerson (Meyerson & Martin, 1987, Martin & Meyerson, 1988; 1), refer to fragmentation as ‘ambiguity’. Later work (collection of studies in Frost et al, 1991; Martin & Frost, 1999; and Martin, 2002) replaces ambiguity with fragmentation.
Exhibit 4.4 Cultural Paradigms: A Three-Perspective View of Culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining Characteristics</th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Inconsistency and consistency</td>
<td>Lack of clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency/Degree of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consistency among cultural manifestations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of consensus among cultural members</td>
<td>Organisation wide</td>
<td>Within, not between, subcultures</td>
<td>Issue-specific consensus, dissensus or confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to ambiguity</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Channelling</td>
<td>Acceptance/acknowledgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor for paradigm</td>
<td>Hologram</td>
<td>Island of clarity in sea of ambiguity</td>
<td>Web; jungle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Meyerson and Martin (1987); Martin and Meyerson (1988)

The utility of the three-perspective approach is that it permits culture to be analysed through three different normative lenses (Martin & Meyerson, 1988). The three-perspective approach is salient to this study as it allows us to examine the different cultural perspectives held by senior managers, front-line operational managers and cleaners (Harris & Ogbonna, 1998a; Ogbonna & Harris, 1998b). It is argued in this thesis that industry characteristics and the spatial dispersion of cleaners across different work sites, mean that different cultural perspectives will be evident within Complete Clean. In particular, it is expected that managers will hold different perspectives than cleaners.

In rejecting the unitary assumptions of ‘corporate’ and ‘organisational’ culture, some theorists have argued for a pluralist view of culture that acknowledges and embraces the existence of subcultures (Harris & Ogbonna, 1998b: 80). A pluralist view assumes that observed culture may be the manifestation of different subcultures. However, Alvesson (2002: 155) cautions that such a view ‘presupposes that the subcultures interact rather than exist independently and isolated within the organisation’. Others, including Van Maanen and Barley (1985: 37), argue that organisational subcultures are not necessarily incompatible with a dominant culture.

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4 See also Alvesson, 2003: 145; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985.
There are a number of arguments accounting for the emergence and function of subcultures within organisations. In a review of the cultural literature, Alvesson, drawing upon Van Maanen and Barley (1985), proposes that subcultures arise from organisational segmentation (division of labour), importation, technological innovation, ideological differentiation, counter-cultural movements and career filters. He also cites a study (Parker, 2000) which ‘found three sources of differentiation: spatial//functional (associated with geographic location and work function), generational (connected to age and length of time in the organisation) and occupational/professional’ (2002: 157-57). In a similar vein, Martin argues that

(hierarchical) lines, whereas in other organisations context-specific subcultures may emerge based on networks of personal contact at work, friendship, or demographic identities (such as race, ethnicity, or gender. (2002: 103)

Moreover, Martin (2002: 103) warns that ‘it is not enough to assume that particular sources of difference cause subcultural emergence, because sometimes this does not happen.’

Whatever reasons for the emergence of subcultures, many studies of subcultures tend to focus on occupations and occupational communities (for example: Gregory, 1983; Trice, 1993; Martin, 1991; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984). Occupations may also produce distinct cultures and some writers, including Trice (1993: xiii), argue that occupational culture has been ignored in cultural analysis. The incorporation of occupations into cultural analysis, argues Trice (1993), shifts the analysis of cultures from a unitary organisational culture to one that incorporates the multiplicity of occupational cultures found with an organisation – that is, to a differentiation perspective. An occupational culture can be defined as ‘the set of ideas, values,

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5 See also Trice (1991: 300) who argues that ‘occupations are probably the most distinctive subcultures in organisational life’ with important implications for personal identity and social status. Of course, labour historians have long recognised the occupational cultures, especially amongst skilled male workers.
attitudes, norms, procedures and artefacts associated with an occupation’ (Watson, 1995: 227).

Occupational subcultures are not ‘closed cultures’, nor do they assume unity or unanimity. For example, Meyerson (1991) found that hospital social workers shared a common orientation and purpose directed toward ‘helping’ people, but were ambivalent about being labelled ‘medical workers’ and about their identification with the profession of medicine. Trice (1993: 13) also warns that occupations are not homogeneous and that occupations themselves may manifest subcultures. Occupational cultures also serve different purposes for different occupations. In higher status occupations (doctors, for example) occupational cultures make use of symbols of professionalism. For lower status occupations (for example, prostitutes or cleaners) occupational cultures serve as defensive mechanisms, protecting members’ self respect (Watson, 1995: 227-29).  

Later chapters explore the idea of cleaning as an ‘occupation’ and suggest that cleaners adopt a variety of cultural forms as defensive mechanism in overcoming the stigmatisation of their work.

Closely associated with the idea of occupational cultures is the concept of occupational communities. Occupational communities are evident in strong occupational cultures and link the work and non-work lives of members into a community based on and around an occupation (Watson, 1995: 229-33, Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Van Maanen and Barley (1984: 288-89) explain that behaviour in organisations is more appropriately viewed through occupational rather than organisational lenses, and propose the idea of occupational community as an alternate frame of reference for understanding organisational behaviour. According to Van Maanen and Barley (1984: 290-91), focusing on occupations preserves the experience of work, alerts us to social control in organisations, adds to understanding of conflict and diversity, and explains ‘how a given line of work can be said to influence one’s social conduct and identity, both in and out of the workplace.’ An examination of occupational culture is thus essential to a rounded understanding of work culture.

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6 American studies of cleaning (for example, Gold, 1964) paint a vibrant picture of an occupational culture and community. See Chapter 2.

7 There are two recognised types of occupational community: a community based on the occupation as a whole; and a community based on a common geographic location (Watson, 1995: 231). This study will concentrate on the notion of community and occupations.
In his classic study of shop-floor culture, Willis (1979: 185) asks a question: ‘In what sense can we link work with culture?’ Willis (1979: 185-86) argues that work is an important part of our lives, noting that ‘when we are at our most natural, our most everyday, we are also at our most cultural’. At work we become ‘embedded in our culture.’ Since the publication of Braverman’s (1974) influential work, there has been a growing interest in the labour process and the nature of work as a cultural form. More recent accounts of the labour process incorporate workers’ subjective experiences, and acknowledge the importance of power and gender as important elements in examining workplace control, consent and resistance (for example, Collinson, 1992). Much of this literature also attempts to incorporate culture into an understanding of the ‘labour process’.

Within the literature on organisational culture, much of the analysis of work has been through the lens of occupations and occupational subcultures or informal groups. Shopfloor culture or workplace culture is often viewed – in a narrow, bounded fashion – as a subculture (Alvesson, 2002: 152). Surprisingly, as Alvesson (2002: 150) notes, work per se is often neglected in academic analyses of organisational culture. One academic who has examined the relationship between work and culture is Louis (1985, 1986). Louis (1986: 132) explains that ‘one reason for pursuing workplace culture is to understand a particular workplace’ and to understand ‘cultural phenomena in and across work settings.’ Louis (1985) proposes that research into workplace culture should adopt one or more of the following conceptual foci:

- Origins of workplace cultures (antecedents and historical emergence)
- Manifestations of workplace cultures (artefacts, physical symbols, shared understandings)
- Outcomes of a workplace culture (control and organisation of work, commitment and identification)
- Management of workplace culture (cultural control, cultural change)
- Approaches to workplace cultures (what is culture? Assumptions and norms)

According to some researchers (Collinson, 1992; Alvesson, 2002), studies of culture have tended to overemphasise symbolic analysis and underemphasise work. Alvesson
(2002) argues that too much attention has been devoted to idealism and symbolism in cultural studies. He proposes that cultural studies should be redirected towards work and social interaction:

In particular, the type of work people are engaged in and the conditions under which it is carried out interplay with culture, i.e. there is ‘interaction’ between behaviour, material conditions and cultural meaning. Job content, work organisation, level of skills, hierarchical positions, differential opportunities, and the demands and patterns of interaction in different groups and strata should all be carefully considered. (Alvesson, 2002: 148)

Such an analysis, according to Alvesson (2002:153), requires examination of the material aspects of organisational life, the incorporation of work-related activities as the focus study of cultural phenomena, the examination of communities within a culture as the focus of study and a shift in the focus of study from values and beliefs social practices. Put simply, Alvesson calls for an analysis of culture that incorporates, among other things, the labour process. The analysis of culture in the following chapters follows this approach and aims to examine the interaction between work activity and work culture.

4.4 Industry Culture

There is still one very important cultural dimension that must be considered: that of industry-wide culture. Some writers have suggested that in order to understand occupational subcultures and work cultures, one must look beyond the boundary of the organisation (Alvesson, 2002; Martin, 2002). Bounded studies of culture assume that people embody culture and tend to ignore the role that jobs and the transfer of people within and between organisations play in organisational cultures. Martin (2002: 323) asks the question, ‘have these individuals changed organisational cultures while keeping their occupational culture?’ This question assumes particular importance in the case of the commercial cleaning industry. As this thesis will demonstrate, many cleaners work in fragmented workplaces owned by third parties, many spend their day interacting with a client’s workforce and many cleaners hold multiple jobs, often with more than one
cleaning firm. Bounded studies of culture that focus on a specific physical context are not readily applicable to work and industries like commercial cleaning industry, suggesting the need for cultural analysis on a wider scale.

In the 1990s some researchers began to shift the focus of the study of work culture away from the organisation as the locus for culture to the industry in which a culture operates. This gave rise to the development of a conceptual link between industry characteristics and environment and organisational culture (Gordon, 1991; Abrahamson & Charles, 1994; Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Phillips, 1994; Bryman et al, 1996). Industry culture has been defined as ‘a constellation of values and beliefs among managers in an industry concerning appropriate ways of operating and responding to the environment’ (Bryman et al, 1996: 191; see also: Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994). Industry culture includes the related concepts of ‘industry mindsets’ and ‘macrocultures’. Studies examining culture across a range of service industries, and the Californian wine and the fine arts museum industries, have highlighted the relative importance of cultures within industries (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Phillips, 1994). A study of the British bus industry (Bryman et al, 1996), and another study examining the role of macrocultures in the decline of the US steel and automotive industries (Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994), found that industry cultures were important explanatory factors when accounting for industry malaise. What these studies have in common is an analysis linking organisation strategy and the environment. This is not to suggest that industry culture should supplant organisational culture: rather, like Bryman et al (1996: 192) it is argued that ‘an exclusive focus on [organisational culture] may obscure important commonalities among organisations and that in some contexts, these commonalities may be more significant than those associated with single organisations as such.’ Furthermore Bryman et al (1996, 192) propose that it is necessary to recognise that ‘industry level beliefs and assumptions may be an even more powerful influence on cultural forms and strategic orientations in some industries than the kind of factors traditionally examined by organisational researchers.’

Phillips (1994: 398) argues that industry cultures are evident in industry mindsets that ‘transcend suborganisational, transorganisational, and organisational boundaries to be held in common by members of discrete industries’. She explains that industry influences must be taken into consideration before claiming that a particular culture is
unique to an organisation, supporting the idea of organisations having multiple cultures (399). However, writers on industry culture are careful to point out that culture can and does vary within industries (Gordon, 1991; Chatman & Jehn, 1994).

Of the existing studies of industry culture, Gordon’s is perhaps the most influential. Gordon (1991: 396) argues that ‘organisational culture is influenced by the characteristics of the industry in which the company operates.’ In charting a relationship between the organisation and its environment, Gordon argues that organisations are founded on industry-based assumptions that constitute an organisation’s culture. Drawing on Schein (1986), Gordon (1991: 397) suggests that assumptions and values are reflected in ‘behaviour patterns’. Environment and industry assumptions directly influence the managers who shape an organisation’s cultural values, which, in turn, influence organisational forms (strategies, structures, process) and outcomes (performance, survival). Exhibit 4.5 summarises Gordon’s model of industry-driven culture formation. If we see culture, as most writers do, as shared assumptions and values, then it is plausible to suggest that the wider industry environment may exert a powerful influence on an organisation’s culture (Gordon, 1991: 397).

Industry assumptions – that is, assumptions shared by management and labour – assume an important role in Gordon’s model. Underpinning industry assumptions are the competitive environment in which a company operates, customer requirements and demands, and societal expectations. Management seeks to eliminate environmental uncertainty and development structures to deal with uncertainty. For example, stable environments may attract specialised structures and reliability-oriented cultures, while uncertain environments may result in decentralised structures, giving rise to adaptable cultures. Organisations develop cultures around whether or not customers demand reliability (quality of service) or novelty (differentiation of service). Societal expectations are important in shaping rules and regulations in which organisations operate. These assumptions, argues Gordon (1991: 406), ‘cause companies within an industry to have common elements to their cultures. The influence on the assumption is direct and affects all levels and functions in a company’. This has major implications for culture change, and Gordon (1991: 396) explains that the relationship between an organisation and its wider industry environment means that ‘the potential for changing a
company’s culture is limited to actions that are neutral to, or directionally consistent with industry demands'.

Exhibit 4.5 A Model of Industry-Driven Culture Formation

Industry culture has been adopted by some authors to explain industry malaise and inertia. Abrahamson and Fombrun (1994: 731) present an argument based around the idea of macrocultures (interorganisational macrocultures): beliefs shared among top managers across organisations. These beliefs are thought to increase inertia amongst organisations and to influence technological diffusion and strategic innovations among firms. Homogeneity between managers means that many managers across organisations tend to agree on issues of boundaries (competitors or companies cooperated with), reputation (perceptions of other companies) and strategy, creating common interests and the potential for strategic agreement within the industry. Ties and links between organisations are reinforced through trade associations, industry magazines, newsletters etcetera. However, macrocultures and homogeneity may also discourage risk-taking and innovation and lead to ‘the collective failure of industries’. Other factors may also be evident in the link between industry characteristics and organisational culture. For instance, Chatman and Jehn (1994: 546) suggest that employee mobility across firms in an industry may be an important factor in creating cultural similarity between firms.
Bryman et al (1996) present research into industry culture to explain strategic response and 'patterns of managerial action and inaction' within the deregulated bus transport industry. Their findings demonstrate 'strategic issue homogeneity' and a marked similarity within the bus companies around the strategy of survival in the face of falling passenger numbers and growing competition from other companies. Because of common problems faced by all bus companies and a tradition of 'industry values', the authors argue that there is little scope for 'breaking-out' out of the wider industry culture, leaving management with little room to manoeuvre (Bryman et al, 1996: 201-2). There are a number of reasons for this. The authors identify the inheritance of pre-deregulation traditions and senior management deriving from a common (bus) industry background as being responsible for inhibiting innovation and change. Other factors include the potential financial cost of change, an industry history of tight internal control and risk aversion and the absence of transformational leaders (Bryman et al, 1996: 202-3). From these points, they conclude that

industry driven assumptions exert a powerful influence over the values that make up an organisations culture and thereby restrict the range of strategies or structures that it is able to adopt. If a company seeks to create strategies or structures that are inconsistent with the industry culture, it is likely to engender confusion among employees and customers. (Bryman et al, 1996: 205)

For the commercial cleaning industry, the concept of an industry-determined organisational culture is of considerable relevance. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, there are many similarities between cleaning firms and, indeed, between cleaning industries in different countries, and few differences in terms of strategies and cohesion in terms of customer requirements and demands, and the management of labour. The concept of industry culture also has implications for managerial recruitment within the industry. Later chapters identify an industry mindset amongst senior managers and the interchange of management personnel between the larger cleaning companies in NSW. The majority of managers and cleaners are recruited from within the industry and their long periods of service mean that many are steeped in the traditions of the industry.
4.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the main analytical constructs applied in this study. It examines three key studies of the service industry and explains that although they have been found wanting, they provide elements that may be used to illuminate work and social relations in cleaning. In particular the chapter examines how cleaning can be considered ‘unrationalised labour-intensive’ work, characterised by low cost business strategies with minimal training and skills requirements and limited opportunities for advancement. These characteristics are at odds with the best practice HRM prescriptions of the New Service Management school, which emphasises the adoption of best practice HRM as a means to reconcile differences between customer and service worker satisfaction. Alternative views of HRM, it is explained, identify a paucity of HRM practices in many service industries leading to ‘Bleak House’ or ‘Black Hole’ systems of labour utilisation.

Attention then turns to outlining a framework for the analysis of culture in cleaning. It is explained that traditional approaches to the study of culture may not be suitable for the cleaning industry, and proposes the adoption of the three-perspective framework. The framework for studying culture proposes an examination of cleaning as an occupational subculture and highlights the need for the incorporation of industry-wide values into cultural analysis. Structural approaches to the analysis of employment relations and the management of labour tend to concentrate on the more visible manifestations of an organisation. Examining cultural forms and behaviour in organisations permits a sharper understanding of the attitudes and outlook of organisational insiders. As such, this study has adopted a multi-level approach to the study of culture that includes analysis of subcultures and one that emphasises the importance of work in cultural analysis. By arguing for the study of culture at an industry level, it proposes that cultural practices are not necessarily unique in organisations and suggests that macro-level phenomena are important at the organisational level.

Overall, this chapter has sought to establish that there is no one best way of examining the commercial cleaning industry. Instead, it suggests a multi-dimensional approach to understanding the peculiarities of the cleaning industry and work. Such an approach allows consideration of the cleaning industry from different perspectives. Despite the
apparent limitations and the questionable utility of best practice human resource management approach in services, it endorses the need to include consideration of the role of the customer in structuring employment relations in commercial cleaning. The concept of the ‘Black Hole’ firm also provides a useful means of understanding the primacy of informal labour management practice in this industry.

This chapter concludes the analysis of development of the cleaning industry, a review of the international literature and the outline of the analytical framework. In sum, the analytical approach taken in the study follows the best practice or contingency model in that it sees the strategic choices made by owners, managers and employees alike as being conditioned, constrained, enables and shaped by both the structural and cultural characteristics of industry and the specific structures and cultures of individual firms. The following chapters turn to the empirical aspect of the thesis, beginning with a description of the research methodology employed.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter describes and justifies the empirical methodology applied in this study. Given the lack of knowledge about work, culture and employment relations in the Australian cleaning industry, a case study of a large organisation was deemed appropriate to describe the patterns and to place them within the context of the industry at large. One of the enduring features of Australian industrial relations research has been the use of the case study method (Kelly, 1999: 119). This thesis continues this tradition and makes use of the case study method to study the complexities of human behaviour. The first section describes and reviews the use of deep qualitative research in the form of an extended case study of a single cleaning firm. It also explains the importance of ‘representation’ of the subjects involved in the research process. The second section describes the use of ethnographic research methods within a critical framework, including participant observation. In this section, we explain the strength of ethnography in providing a rich, contextualised understanding of work and management, incorporating the voice of employees on the mopfloor.

5.1 Case Study Method

The case study has generally been the preferred research method in many fields of social science inquiry, but especially in industrial relations (Kelly, 1999; Kitay & Callus, 1998, Michelson & Baird, 1995) and management studies (Gummesson, 2000). While, there is no general agreement as to what a case study actually is, it may be defined as ‘a research strategy or design that is used to study one or more selected social phenomena and to understand or explain the phenomena by placing them in the wider context’ (Kitay & Callus, 1998: 103). Kitay and Callus argue that a ‘case study’ is not necessarily a method or research technique in itself. Rather, they argue, a case study should be viewed as a ‘research strategy that involves one or more techniques or methods’ (1998: 103).
Case studies have particular appeal to scholars of industrial relations, management and organisational behaviour. As a research method, the case study can illuminate organisations and allow insight into organisational behaviour in all of its complexity. Case study research also allows researchers to contextualise their research, and aids the understanding of social life (Kitay & Callus, 1998: 104). Case studies are a potentially powerful means of generating theory, new ideas and social change (Kitay & Callus, 1998: 10; Gummesson, 2000: 85). Case studies can also facilitate comparative research.

A case study covers a range of possibilities – from single ‘simple’ cases and single ‘complex’ cases to ‘multiple’ simple cases and multiple ‘complex’ cases (Kelly, 1999: 123) – and researchers are divided as to what constitutes an appropriate number of cases for study (see Eisenhardt, 1989 and Dyer & Wilkins, 1991 for the debates on the merits of single and multiple cases). Within the discipline of industrial relations, researchers have favoured single ‘complex’ cases.¹ Single ‘complex’ cases not only examine a firm or a workplace, but also incorporate a number of different areas of analysis. Single ‘complex’ cases often incorporate interviews, documentary analysis, or observation (Kelly, 1999; de Laine, 1997; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998a; 1998b; and Harris and Ogbonna, 1998b demonstrate how these can be used practically in the analysis of an organisation). This thesis makes use of a major single ‘complex’ case, interspersed with findings from other multiple ‘complex cases’.

According to Yin (1994), three types of case study purpose are evident: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Within management and industrial relations research, researchers have traditionally drawn on exploratory studies² for formulating testable hypotheses, while explanatory cases, according to at least one author (Gummesson, 2000: 85), tend to be avoided by business school academics. The case study used in this thesis

¹ Ogbonna and Harris (1998a: 275) for example, argue that there is a ‘precedent of many seminal single case studies’ in organisational analysis. See also Dyer and Wilkins (1991).

² See also Kitay and Callus (1998: 104)
does not have a single purpose. Rather, its aim is multi-purpose and seeks to explore, describe and explain.

Whatever their specific purposes, case studies tend to share a number of common features. Kelly (1999: 120) explains that case studies examine a defined object of analysis (such as workplaces, workgroups, or firms), place the object of analysis within a wider context, utilise a range of research tactics, are informed by theory and usually 'conclude with some insights into theory'.

There are a number of potential difficulties with the use of the case study as a research method. These include problems of case selection, sampling, gaining access, confidentiality and ethical considerations (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991, Kitay & Callus, 1998). Time constraints and geographic location are also important factors in case selection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Criticisms have been made of case studies in terms of generalisability, validity and reliability and in the difficulties of replication and, hence, the validation of studies (Kitay & Callus, 1998; Gummesson, 2000).

In order to minimise the apparent weaknesses in case study research, a number of authors have called for a multi-method approach to case research.\(^3\) By using a range of methods in collecting data, findings are 'validated', data obtained is 'appropriate' ('as opposed to exhaustive') and the 'quality' of data collected is improved (Buchanan, 1999).\(^4\) In this thesis, participant observation is used as a multi-method approach that includes observation, interviews and documentary analysis. Such an approach has been labelled 'triangulation' (de Laine, 1997: 279; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 230-32) and has been described as 'favourably predisposed towards providing a cross-check on data' (de Laine, 1997: 279).

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\(^3\) This line of argument also applies to the next section which details ethnography as a research method.

\(^4\) For a detailed examination of issues of 'credibility' in qualitative research, see Silverman (2001), Chapter 8.
One of the main criticisms of case study research is that of validity. Triangulation and reporting findings back to the subjects studied in the case for comment and validation (respondent validation) are important factors in ensuring validity in case study research (Silverman, 2001: 233; see also Morill & Fine, 1997). Silverman (2001) adds that the use of the constant comparative method (use of more than one case), deviant case analysis,\(^5\) and use of quantitative techniques can improve the prospects of validity in case study research.

For some researchers, particularly those who view qualitative research as being purely descriptive in nature, generalisability is not an issue (Silverman, 2001: 249). Hammersley (cited in Silverman, 2001: 249) proposes that one way to overcome questions of generalisability in qualitative research is by ‘obtaining information about relevant aspects of the population of cases and comparing our case to them.’ Other methods include asking questions about case selection (‘purposive sampling’) – selecting a case based on the parameters of the wider population of study and theoretical sampling. Bryman (1988: 90, cited in Silverman, 2001), for example, argues for qualitative research that follows theoretical rather than statistical models. He explains that ‘the issue should be couched in terms of the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes’. Silverman (2001: 251-52) extends Bryman’s argument by proposing that theoretical sampling should include case selection in terms of theory, choosing what he calls ‘deviant cases’ (cases which may contradict theory), and changing the size of sample (extending or narrowing sample size) during the research. This means that cases are chosen not according to their typicality, but on the basis of whether or not the subject population within the case is typical of broader phenomena to which the theory refers (Bryman, 1988, cited in Silverman, 2001: 252).

Some researchers argue that we should not be distracted by debates over reliability, validity and generalisability. Gummesson (2006: 97), for example, questions whether or not it is even possible to generalise in a social context. After reviewing debates concerning reliability and generalisation, he concludes:

\(^5\) A deviant case is one that contradicts theory
As long as you keep searching for new knowledge and do not believe that you have found the ultimate truth but, rather, the best available for the moment, the traditional demand for generalisation becomes less urgent. (Gummesson, 2000: 97)

Van Maanen, an influential ethnographer, argues that criteria of reliability and validity in research method are 'overrated', and problems of representation are more important (1988: xi). He challenges researchers to address the issues relating to the observed behaviour, the experience of the observer (the researcher), and 'the representational style selected to join the observer and the observed'. This thesis recognises the limitations to case study research and adapts Van Maanen's challenge to present research findings in a manner that incorporates not just what was observed but the experience of the observer.

This section has highlighted the use of case method as a research strategy. Case studies can include a range of different research techniques. One common technique often incorporated into case study research is participant observation (often called 'ethnography') and this study draws heavily on this research technique.

5.2 Ethnography Method

This section outlines and justifies an ethnographic approach to the study of work, employment relations and culture to highlight the salience of ethnographic research techniques for analysis of work, culture, employment relations and organisational behaviour. After defining what an ethnographic approach to work might entail in terms of data-gathering, data presentation and the writing up of ethnographic research, it considers in some detail the field of organisational ethnography, and highlights the dichotomy between organisational and other forms of ethnographic research. This framework is then narrowed down by examining critical ethnography as a theoretical domain within the ethnographic paradigm. The use of a critical approach is a key facet of the methodology
employed in this thesis. Details of how the ethnographic study of the commercial cleaning industry was conducted are examined in the next chapter.

There is much debate over what ethnography is, and about what constitutes ethnographic research (Atkinson, et al., 2001; Shaffir, 1999). Like the concept ‘culture’, ethnography has a long and fragmented history, attracting a range of theoretical and epistemological positions over the past century. Most writers tend to define ethnography in terms of gaining personal, first-hand experience of a research setting (whether it be social or cultural) by use of participant observation. Others, writing from an anthropological perspective, see ‘ethnography as the work of describing a culture’ or, as Malinowski puts it, ‘to grasp the native’s point of view’ (quoted in Spradley, 1980: 3). Ethnographic purists see cultural interpretation and analysis as their goal and eschew all other viewpoints. Increasingly, shortened forms of ethnography are employed in research across a range of disciplines from anthropology and sociology to education and nursing, among others (de Laine, 1997; see also Atkinson et al., 2001). What distinguishes ethnography from participant observation and case study methods is that the latter are ethnographic techniques. Ethnography’s central aim is cultural analysis, and to ‘provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for organising fieldwork and analysis’ (de Laine, 1997: 102).

One definition commonly applied is that put forward by Weick (1985: 568), who defines ethnography as ‘sustained, explicit, methodological observations and paraphrasing of social situations in relation to their naturally occurring contexts.’ The interpretation of Hammersley and Atkinson is of particular worth here:

We interpret the term ‘ethnography’ in a liberal way, not worrying much about what does or not count as examples of it. We see the term as referring primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives or an

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6 Atkinson, et al (2001: 4-5) noted that participant observation is not the exclusive preserve of ethnography and that ethnography, can and should, include other research methods. One (older) participant observer has argued that under the influence of postmodernism, participant observation has been renamed ‘ethnography’ and has been conflated with a range of qualitative research methods (Gans, 1999: 541).
extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to through light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (1995: 4)

Similarly, as Burawoy explains, unlike other social sciences, ethnography is collaboration and a shared worldview between the participant and the observer (1991: 291).

There are a number of reasons why ethnography is attractive as a research method. Friedman and McDaniel (1985:115) see four distinctive features of ethnography:

- Ethnography requires direct and personal observation of people and situations being studied.
- Ethnographers make their observations in the context of people doing their jobs and interacting with others at work.
- Ethnography gives prominence to the words, interpretations, and experiences of the people studied.  
  - The ethnographer shares his or her observations with the reader.

These features have ensured that ethnography has played an important role in the study of work, employment relations and workplace culture. Yet, despite the apparent advantages offered by an ethnographic approach to work, it also shares many of the disadvantages and problems of case study research.

Social science research is often organised around the idea of hypothesis testing (Agar, 1996: 133) and ethnography has in the past been criticised for its rejection of positivism and its inability to test hypotheses like orthodox scientific method. This is reflected in wider epistemological tensions between positivist-oriented quantitative approaches to research and qualitative methodologies. One of the debates within disciplines using ethnographic research methods is that to do with the role of hypothesis testing. In recent years, some ethnographers have rejected the positivism implicit in hypot

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7 This should also include ‘narrated’ experiences.

121
and testing. However, some, including Agar (1996), have called for a systematic (that is, ‘scientific’) approach to ethnography. For Agar (1996: 44), drawing upon the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), ‘one can use positivist methods in new light by setting up hypotheses that come from ethnographically constructed patterns rather than some prior theory.’ Agar (1996: 218-19) also challenges the meaning of the term ‘hypothesis’ and explains that it does not simply mean a ‘statement of covariance between two variables’. Rather, he argues that a ‘hypothesis has a broader sense as “an idea to check out”.’ Agar explains:

At this broader level, ethnography is full of hypotheses at all stages of the research. Something learned in a conversation becomes a hypothesis to check in further conversations or observations. Or an entire ethnography may be a test of a hypothesis at this sense. (1996: 219)

The explanatory frameworks and propositions contained in this thesis are not seen as systematic research questions to be tested and proven or disproven in any narrow scientific sense. Rather, they have been used to direct and to shape wider research questions and lines of inquiry. The analytical framework developed in the preceding chapters informed the questions asked in formal and informal interviews and shaped my ‘observations’ on the worksites visited.

While ethnography has been criticised for its lack of scientific rigour, one of the more distinctive features of ethnography has been the presentation of research observations. There have been major debates over how ethnographic and other field research should be presented. A central feature of the debate has been one of representation. In recent years, there has been a shift towards writing based upon realist (objective portrayal), confessional (acknowledgement of the fieldworker’s presence in the field) and impressionist (dramatic reconstruction) tales (Van Maanen, 1996; see also Martin, 2002). Reflexivity is also evident

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8 For debates over the representation of cultural studies see Martin (2002) Chapter 9 ‘Writing About Culture. A Crisis of Representation’; within ethnography more generally, see Van Maanen (1988).
in a number of studies where authors have tried to determine the extent and influence of their presence in the research setting. Denzin and Lincoln (1998b) point to a crisis in ethnography and qualitative research between representation and legitimacy, and as to where the author fits within the text. The analysis presented in this thesis straddles the competing aims of presenting an objective analysis while acknowledging the impact of my presence upon the research process.

Traditional ethnography has tended to be equated with 'macro-ethnography' and is based upon deep and sustained immersion in a culture with the aim of holistic understanding of the wider culture under study. For scholars and researchers from disciplines other than anthropology or sociology, a more manageable approach to ethnography is attained by adopting 'micro-ethnography'. Micro-ethnographies (sometimes known as 'particularistic' ethnographies) are focused more narrowly upon particular settings to overcome time and other constraints (de Laine, 1997: 17, 102). Organisational ethnographies and ethnographies of work are common examples of micro-ethnographies and are becoming increasingly common in management research where the research is more tightly focused and conditions of access are stricter (Morrill and Fine, 1997; Gummesson, 2000). The research presented in this thesis makes use of micro-ethnography.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in organisational ethnography and in the way that ethnographic research can enrich organisational sociology and studies of organisational culture (Morrill & Fine, 1997; Rosen, 1991). Ethnography has also made an important contribution to the study of work (Smith, 2001; Hodson, 1998; 2001; Schwartzman, 1993). Organisational ethnography can be traced back to the empirical studies conducted at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant in the 1920s and 1930s (Schwartzman, 1993). Since that time, sociologists and ethnographers have taken an intense

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9 Martin (2002) and others also engage with postmodernism and alternative writing styles.

10 I am aware that a stance on objectivity may be at odds with my use of critical ethnography as explained on the next page.

11 For an excellent example of micro-ethnography using the extended case method (which enables a macro perspective to be undertaken from a micro study) see the collection of studies in Burawoy et al (1991).
interest in work at the shop-floor and managerial level, across blue- and white-collar work, giving us rich and contextualised studies of organisations and work.

Smith argues for the use of the label ‘ethnographic approaches to work’, rather than the narrow label of ‘ethnographies of work’ (2001: 221). Within organisational and work ethnographies a numbers of themes are evident, ranging from informal relations, systems of meaning, environments, change, ethics and normative behaviours (Morrill & Fine, 1997) through to control (Rosen, 1991). On the basis of an extensive review of the organisational and ethnographic approaches to work literature, Smith (2001) points to three themes evident in this literature.

First, ethnographic approaches highlight how nominally routine jobs are complex:

No single approach to the study of work has been more effective than the ethnographic in uncovering the tacit skills, the decision rules, the complexities, the discretion and control in jobs that have been labelled routine, unskilled and deskilled, marginal and even trivial. (Smith 2001: 221)

Following this line of argument, this thesis takes issue with the perception of cleaning as unskilled, routinised work and presents the work of cleaners as involving a number of skills taken for granted; it highlights the inherent complexities in this work and the relationships between clients and the client’s workforce.

Second, Smith notes that ethnographic approaches to the study of work have demonstrated how complex jobs are routine. For example, ethnographic research has shown how the work done by professionals is ‘ordinary, accessible and routinised’ (2001: 223) and that divisions between workers may be more artificial than real, suggesting that skill and competency divisions may be socially constructed.

Third, ethnographic research, notes Smith (2001), has played a major role in explaining power, conflict and inequality at work. Perhaps the greatest strength of ethnographic
approaches to work is that they give prominence to employees’ voices (Hodson, 2001: 50). This thesis recognises the strength of ethnography in highlighting the experiences of the marginalised in the labour process and in giving prominence to their voices.

As demonstrated above, ethnography is a broad church accommodating a number of different conceptual orientations. Guiding the organisational and work ethnography outlined in the following chapters is the perspective of critical ethnography. Critical social theory is generally acknowledged as originating from the Frankfurt School (de Laine, 1997; Alvesson and Deetz, 1999) and has been influential in ethnographic research seeking to move beyond the interpretive paradigm that dominated much social science research until the 1980s. While a number of ethnographers working from a critical paradigm draw upon critical theory (de Laine, 1997; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998), not all do so. One leading exponent of critical ethnography points out that critical ethnography is not ‘to be confused with critical theory (associated with the Frankfurt school) which is a theory of capitalist society’. Critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose and is ‘value laden’ (Thomas, 1993: 4, 47). Although there are many different views as to what critical ethnography entails, those working in the area tend to recognise the political and emancipatory undertaking of their research.

Jim Thomas’s *Doing Critical Ethnography* (1993) is one of the more influential accounts of critical research. He explains that ‘conventional ethnography describes what is; critical ethnography asks what could be’ (1993:4). Alvesson and Deetz (2002: 199-200) summarise Thomas’ explanation of the task of critical ethnography as that which:

- views cultural phenomena in more critical terms (accentuating the repressing and circumscribing aspects of culture);
- chooses its subject matter in terms of injustices, control, and the like;
- is more inclined to scepticism with regard to data and information;

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12 The view of Thomas is supported by another influential ethnographer, Michael Agar (1996). However, it does seem that these two are perhaps exceptions in that a number of those working within qualitative research do draw upon concepts and ideas from the Frankfurt School (Alvesson and Deetz, 1999: 186).
• adopts a de-familiarising mode in its interpretations (tries to avoid established ways of thinking and emphasises whatever is non-natural in the phenomenon under study);
• considers language in terms of power;
• reflects upon the research process itself – how has the researcher’s involvement affected the data;
• asks about the broader relevance of the research; this is how do we answer the question, ‘So what?’.

This thesis seeks to honour these prescriptions. In particular, critical ethnography is used to explore employment relations and workplace culture, but not just from a managerial perspective. It is employed to incorporate and give prominence to the voices of those who comprise the cleaning workforce, and to recognise those factors that structure employment relations and confer meaning and identity within the cleaning industry.

In recent years, organisation research (Deetz, 1985; Alvesson & Deetz, 1999) and management research (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000) have been shaped by critical theory and by researchers adopting a critical perspective. Critical ethnography, I suggest, also has considerable potential in research on work. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998: 283-6) explain that critical research on workers and work can, among other things, lead to the ‘production of more useful and relevant research on work’, recognise worker knowledge and force recognition of alternative workplace arrangements. Critical research eschews the narrow focus on validity in favour of trustworthiness based upon plausibility of research to the research participants (Kincheloe & McLaren: 287-88). In this sense, critical ethnography has considerable emancipatory potential.

Criticism of critical ethnography is directed towards contradictions in its ideological and political stance. What, asks Agar (1996: 27-28), if those being researched do not like the politics you proclaim or reject your authority to speak on their behalf? Other criticisms highlight the idealism of critical ethnography’s emancipatory goals and the way in which data is coded in critical ethnography in highly normative terms: ‘control’, ‘domination’,
'hierarchy', 'resistance', and the like (de Laine, 1997). Despite these limitations, the core strength of critical ethnography is that it takes seriously the issue of power and demonstrates that 'there's no such thing as non-political research' (Agar, 1996: 29).

This section has sought to demonstrate the effectiveness of case study research and the use of ethnography in researching work and the experiences of those who perform work. While recognising the limitations of the case-study research, and the normative intent of critical approaches to ethnography, it argues that both methods are useful in examining work organisations and working life at first hand. If ethnographic evidence is tainted by the predilections of the field researcher, then it is also the case that the documentary record is shaped by the agendas and agency of those who produce and preserve such records.

5.3 Conclusion

Building on the points conveyed in the previous chapter regarding the importance of including organisational and industry culture in the conceptual and analytical framework, this chapter has sought to describe and justify the two chief elements of the research methodology applied in this thesis. The study is based on a single complex case study that incorporates critical ethnographic techniques for the study of work, employment relations and culture in the commercial cleaning industry. The use of a single complex case permits detailed insight into the dynamics of behaviour at work and the incorporation of a number of different areas for analysis.

I propose that use of ethnography as a research method embodies a number of distinct advantages. It is salient in the study and analysis of cultural manifestations and allows us to understand work and to participate in social situations as an insider. Such a method allows researchers to come to terms with the world view and understanding of organisations from the perspective of those who comprise them. In doing so, they embrace the use of critical ethnography in giving voice to the experiences of workers as well as their managers, and acknowledge the role of the researchers themselves in the research setting.
This chapter concludes the analysis of the development of the cleaning industry, a review of the international literature and the outline of the conceptual framework and empirical methodology applied in this study. The following chapters turn to the empirical sections of the thesis, beginning by describing the general features of the case study and outlining the application of the research methodology to the NSW operation of Complete Clean. Chapter 6 explains how empirical data was drawn from interviews with key industry informants and managers and participant observation studies of a number of different worksites.
CHAPTER 6

COMPLETE CLEAN AUSTRALIA (NSW): A REPRESENTATIVE CASE STUDY

The previous chapter outlined the general research design and methods applied in the thesis and explained the use of case study and participant observation research methods. This chapter introduces the case study organisation, Complete Clean, and describes the mode of case-specific empirical inquiry applied. In describing the case firm, the chapter draws on other research evidence to supplement and contextualise the evidence on Complete Clean itself. This material derives from interviews with a variety of industry informants, including union officials, industry association officials, industry consultants and managers from other cleaning firms.

I begin by describing the organisation that forms the basis for much of the empirical research contained in this thesis. After briefly examining the history of Complete Clean, I overview the firm’s strategic, structural, cultural, human resource management and employment relations characteristics. The chapter explains the process of participant observation research and the work sites visited for study. Next, the chapter addresses the matter of generalisability. How ‘representative’ is Complete Clean; and how confident can I be about generalising findings based on evidence from this one case? Here I return briefly to some of the possible limitations of case study research identified in the previous chapter and demonstrate how we generalise with confidence from a single case. Finally, I discuss the evidence obtained from other sources within the cleaning industry, evidence that adds to confidence regarding the generalisability of the Complete Clean case.
6.1 Introducing the Case: Complete Clean Australia

Most of the empirical evidence presented and analysed in this thesis is drawn from research based upon an 18-month study with an Australian-wide cleaning firm, here called Complete Clean Australia. I refer to the NSW operations as Complete Clean. Research about and within this organisation focused upon its NSW operations, as this was its largest centre of operation and the firm is managed out of the NSW office. Complete Clean should be considered in light of the material presented in Chapter 2, which outlines the cleaning industry in Australia, demonstrating that Complete Clean shares a number of similarities with other Australian cleaning firms.

Complete Clean Australia operates as a stand-alone organisation within a larger firm, here called Integrated Service Provision Australia (ISPA). ISPA is a multi-faceted organisation and one of the world’s largest providers of services, operating in a number of different regions. ISPA is an Australian-owned and publicly listed company and is among the top 100 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. Its head office is based in Melbourne. ISPA is involved in a number of different sectors, including manufacturing, but most of its business is in service provision, including food services, cleaning, security, facility and asset management, linen and laundry services and grounds maintenance. Although most of its service-based business is located in Australia and New Zealand, it also operates in Asia, the Middle East, parts of Europe and America. In 2000, ISPA employed over 30,000 people and serviced 20,000 clients across Australasia (ISPA Annual Report, 2000), making it one of Australia’s largest employers. The origins of ISPA can be traced back to the 1940s when it began operations in dry cleaning and the provision of laundry services.

Complete Clean Australia is the specialist cleaning business within ISPA (in Australia) and is the largest unit within the wider organisation. IPSA operates cleaning businesses in New Zealand (and elsewhere) under its own name. Complete Clean Australia was acquired by IPSA in the late 1990s and had over 9,000 employees at the time of

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1 There is some overlap between Complete Clean Australia and Complete Clean (NSW) as the Australian-wide operation is managed out of the NSW office.
acquisition. In 2002 it had just over 7,000 employees. Complete Clean Australia has had a long and revealing history in Australasia and around the world, with its origins in New Zealand in the early 1940s. Complete Clean Australia is the product of the amalgamation of a New Zealand and an Australian company in the 1980s. While Complete Clean Australia has been owned variously by giant American and British cleaning firms, and has undergone numerous changes of name, it has retained its identity and brand name. In the late 1980s, the parent organisation controlled one-third of the contract cleaning market in the United Kingdom and was also dominant in the laundry industry (Allen, 1988).

Complete Clean Australia has played a major role in the development of contract cleaning around the world and has pioneered the contracting of cleaning and other services in the health industry. It has been recognised as a world leader in the provision of contract services in cleaning and in the 1960s it was the first firm in the world to offer services to hospitals on a contract basis. While Complete Clean Australia and its previous manifestations have been lauded as world leaders, throughout its history the organisation has attracted considerable criticism in Australasia and the United Kingdom for its employment practices and service quality, and for its dubious registration arrangements in Bermuda (Brosnan & Wilkinson, 1989a, 1989b; Coyle, 1985, 1986; Allen, 1988b). The firm’s long history and diversity of ownership have had a significant impact on culture and employment practices with Complete Clean Australia.

6.2 Firm and Workforce Structure

In many respects, Complete Clean Australia is typical of most large Australian cleaning firms. What sets it apart is its size and organisational structure within a wider service

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2 Complete Clean Australia has had over 12,000 employees in the past when it held a number of school cleaning contracts. The number of employees can fluctuate depending upon the number of school cleaning and other educational contracts held.

3 History based on a number of documents provided by management of Complete Clean Australia.

4 John Allen’s research does not mention Complete Clean Australia. However, at the time of Allen’s research, Complete Clean Australia was owned by the major British firms that he mentions (see Allen, 1988b).

5 This was before its current ownership.
organisation. Interestingly, Complete Clean Australia is one of the few cleaning firms in Australia that is not part of a family empire. Although Complete Clean operates in all Australian states and territories, most of its business and revenue is from the Eastern seaboard (IPSA Annual Report, 2000). The firm serves a number of different cleaning markets, including retail, education, office and commercial and industrial cleaning. At one stage in the 1960s and 1970s Complete Clean held the contract for every Commonwealth government building (Interview with senior operational manager, 19 November, 2002). Complete Clean is currently developing and expanding contracts in the more lucrative areas of cleaning where it can capitalise on its brand name and areas of expertise, including pharmaceutical cleaning and the cleaning of hospitals.

As previously mentioned, Complete Clean has operated as an independent unit with IPSA since its acquisition in the 1990s. Its headquarters and management staff are based in Sydney. It has its own management structure and support staff, along with its own payroll, finance systems and IT systems. These systems remained in place until the middle of 2002 when Complete Clean Australia’s computer and finance system was incorporated into that of IPSA. It is difficult to assess the fit between Complete Clean Australia and IPSA. Most managers spoken to were rather evasive about the subject although some did admit that the fit was ‘quite uneasy in some respects’, pointing to the singularity of a firm that operates with cleaning as it main business being owned by one that had catering as its central operation. The centralisation of accounts and administration during 2002 caused further disquiet amongst managers, leading some to suggest that Complete Clean had lost its identity within the wider organisational structure (Interviews with senior operational managers, 2002).

Complete Clean services some 1,500 sites across NSW and has an impressive 85 percent contract retention rate. Some contracts have been retained for over 20 years,

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6 Until the late 1980s Complete Clean Australia had been part of a family empire. It is now emerging from this, although one manager noted the centralisation of the parent company, IPSA, and thought that it was run like a family empire (Interview with Senior Operational Manager, 2002).

7 With the incorporation of all accounting and payroll systems in IPSA, Complete Clean Australia is unable to disaggregate employment data after mid-2002.

8 2001 was a “bad year” according to one manager, with the retention rate slipping to 78 percent (Interview with Senior Operational Manager, 2002).
while the reported average of this business is two to three years. Although Complete Clean faces stiff competition because of its large overheads, its competitive strategy, as represented by manager interviewees, is based on its size, length of time in the industry and its recognisable brand name. Close attention is paid to quality and customer satisfaction and the organization regularly invests a lot of money in client surveys (see Chapters 8 and 9).

The last international owners of Complete Clean Australia in 1980s identified market differentiation as a source of sustained competitive strategy. Research by the parent company found that Complete Clean was one of the largest cleaning companies in Australia and that it held a 10 percent market share. The parent organisation sought to force a cultural change on Complete Clean Australia, specifically to reorientate its culture from that of an inward-looking organisation to one focused on the customer. New logos, stationary, uniforms and language were adopted. A ‘road show’ was embarked upon to win over employees and to sell the message to clients that Complete Clean Australia was different to other companies. According to senior managers, this strategy was highly successful and enduring. Indeed, uniforms, logos and corporate mission remained unchanged until very recently (Interviews with senior operational managers, 2002 and 2003).

At the time the research for this study was undertaken, Complete Clean Australia employed around 6,000-7,000 cleaners, 1,600 of whom were based in NSW. Exhibit 6.1 describes the size and composition of Complete Clean’s workforce in NSW and Australia.
### Exhibit 6.1 Complete Clean Australia: Workforce Size and Composition, 2002-3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>% of Total Employees</td>
<td>Total Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casuasls</td>
<td>1393</td>
<td>6702</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>4055</td>
<td>6258</td>
<td>989</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>1254</td>
<td></td>
<td>327</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Complete Clean Australia</th>
<th>Complete Clean Australia (NSW)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3494</td>
<td>727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3208</td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Figures from payroll. Supplied by Complete Clean Australia, Group Manager – Human Resources.

During the Sydney 2000 Olympics, NSW, Complete Clean employed an extra 1,100 staff to fulfil its contract as housekeeper to the Olympic, Media and Para-Olympian villages. Overall, the majority of the firm’s employees are part-time and casual, with women in a slight majority. However, there were also some significant differences in workforce composition between NSW and the firm’s Australia-wide workforce. The proportion of part-time employees was much higher in NSW than in the rest of Complete Clean Australia (70.9 percent compared to 60.5 percent). Conversely, casuals comprised a much lower percentage of the firm’s NSW workforce (5.5 percent) compared to the average for its Australia-wide operations. There are several explanations for the lower percentage of casuals in NSW. The Cleaning and Building Services Contracts State Award (2002) prescribes that casual employees be paid a minimum of three hours for each engagement. Given that part-time cleaners in NSW are engaged on a three-hour shift anyway, managers preferred to use regular, part-time

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9. The recruitment and selection of cleaners for the Sydney 2000 Olympics contract was delegated to a contract human resource consultant.
employees. Some managers explained casuals were used only to cover staff on holiday (Interviews with senior operational managers, 2002).

The firm had a ratio of one manager to 32 line employees, and in 2002 Complete Clean Australia employed 211 salaried managers and a further 372 supervisors and leading hands. Exhibit 6.2 provides data on the number of salaried managers, supervisors and leading hands in the firm’s NSW and Australia-wide operations. Complete Clean claimed to employ no casual supervisors or leading hands.\textsuperscript{10} While it was not possible to obtain data on the gender of supervisors and leading hands, anecdotal evidence suggests that the great majority of these employees are men.\textsuperscript{11}

Exhibit 6.2 Complete Clean Australia: Management and Supervisory Staff, 2001-2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management (Salaried staff)\textsuperscript{1}</th>
<th>Supervisors and Leading Hands\textsuperscript{2}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA - NSW/ACT</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1. November 2001  
2. February 2002  
Trainees (CAA): Cert 11: 430, Cert 111: 22  
Source: Figures from payroll. Supplied by Complete Clean Australia, Group Manager - Human Resources

The firm has a staff turnover rate of 45 percent for both the firm’s national and NSW workforces, comparable to that of the industry average: (see Chapter 2). As indicated in Exhibit 6.3, average job tenure was also relatively high, especially in NSW – this is indicative of the ability of Complete Clean to retain contracts because of its reputation for service excellence and long-established expertise. While the majority of employees had tenure of five years or less, Complete Clean employees in NSW tended to have

\textsuperscript{10} This claim is not wholly accurate. On one site, I spoke to a cleaner who claimed that he was paid to work as a leading hand during the weekends.

\textsuperscript{11} However, in certain market sectors, women are more likely to have supervisory positions. This includes retail. I also encountered women supervisors in a private hospital and in an office sites.
longer periods of engagement than for all States combined, and this would appear to result from the larger number of long-term contracts retained in NSW.

Exhibit 6.3 Complete Clean Australia: Length of Service, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>5-10</th>
<th>10-15</th>
<th>15-20</th>
<th>20-25</th>
<th>25-30</th>
<th>30+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>5420 (80)</td>
<td>948 (14)</td>
<td>260 (3.8)</td>
<td>95 (1.4)</td>
<td>31 (0.46)</td>
<td>10 (0.14)</td>
<td>4 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA - NSW</td>
<td>1127 (69)</td>
<td>302 (18.6)</td>
<td>117 (7.2)</td>
<td>47 (2.8)</td>
<td>18 (1.1)</td>
<td>10 (0.6)</td>
<td>3 (0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA - NSW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breakdown:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Figures supplied by Complete Clean Australia, Group Manager – Human Resources*

Complete Clean Australia has traditionally relied heavily upon migrant communities for supply of its workforce, with major implications for employment relations within the industry. Historically, Complete Clean has been known as a ‘Portuguese and Greek Company’ reflecting the ethnic backgrounds of the majority of its employees. While later chapters will demonstrate the changing ethnic composition of the firm’s workforce, at the time of my research the firm’s Sydney-based operational managers were still predominantly from Portuguese and Greek backgrounds.\(^{12}\) The Complete Clean Australia 2002 Staff Survey (which was sent to 6,160 staff)\(^ {13}\) included questions on employees’ nationality and background. Respondents reported a total of 68 different countries of origin. Of English speaking countries, the United Kingdom and New Zealand were the most strongly represented. Of non-English speaking countries, the most prominent were Macedonia, Greece, Italy, Croatia, Malta, Chile and the

\(^{12}\) Respondents to the 2002 Management Staff survey reveal nine countries represented in the English and non-English ancestral countries.

\(^{13}\) This survey is carried out by an external organisation and was conducted in 1994, 1999 and 2002. I was given access to 2002 survey data and findings.
Philippines. The number of employees identifying themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander increased from 0.5 percent of the workforce in 1994 to 5 percent in 2002, while those of 'other ancestry' declined from 65 percent to 52 percent of the workforce. Overall, in 2002, people from English and non-English countries comprised 44 percent of the workforce (Complete Clean Australia ‘Staff Survey’, 2002; ‘Staff Newsletter’, December 2002).

Complete Clean also has an older workforce, and this reflective of prevailing industry trends. Interviews with operational managers and the 2002 Staff survey indicate an aging workforce. Currently, 47 percent of the workforce is aged over 45 years (Complete Clean Australia ‘Staff Survey’, 2002; ‘Staff Newsletter’, December 2002). This older age profile is reflective of the wider cleaning industry in Australia.

Turning to the firm’s organisational structure, it is evident that Complete Clean is both a complex and a fragmented organisation. Management and salaried staff are employed by Complete Clean Australia Management Pty Ltd, while all other employees are employed by a variety of different ‘paper’ companies. At one stage, Complete Clean had more than 60 companies registered as part of its NSW operation. According to manager interviewees, this is attributable to an anomaly in the NSW Workers’ Compensation legislation, which allows each constituent company to be treated as a separate employer for premium payment purposes. This confers immense advantages on Complete Clean (and other cleaning companies) in terms of premium savings under Workers’ Compensation legislation (Interview with senior operational manager, 11 April 2002).

Like all cleaning firms, Complete Clean has a relatively flat management structure. Operational managers have wide spans of control and enormous responsibilities. Exhibit 6.4 describes a typical organisational structure in the Australian cleaning industry.

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14 These findings should be read as impressionistic only. The majority of surveys returned made no indication of country of origin.
This management structure has typified Australian cleaning firms for a number of years. In recent years, some cleaning firms, including Complete Clean Australia, have replaced the term 'Area Manager' with 'Customer Service Manager' (CSM) and 'Customer Site Supervisor' (CSS). Typically, Divisional Managers are responsible for a geographic region and have ultimate responsibility for all sites and contracts with a specific region. Business development and cost control is a major part of their job description, and they have responsibility for CSM and CSS staff. Divisional Managers tend to be located in the office and conduct site visits when necessary. Customer Service Managers and Customer Site Supervisors are responsible for a range of clients and contracts. They are known as Area Managers because they normally manage a range of contracts within a given geographic region.

These managers are the link between the organisation and the cleaners on the mopfloor. Area Managers spend their day in the field, servicing clients and conducting site visits and inspections. With Complete Clean, CSMs and CSSs are encouraged to spend no more than eight hours a week in the office. These managers have demanding responsibilities and are responsible for recruitment and selection, training and development, occupational health and safety, communications and industrial relations.
on site. Quality control, productivity and staff supervision are key performance goals of CSMs and CSSs. They also have responsibility for purchase of equipment and cleaning materials. For all operational managers, leadership and customer satisfaction are primary position objectives (Internal Documents, Complete Clean Australia). Much of the analysis presented in Chapters 7-10 focuses upon the experience of these front-line operation managers.

A larger site may have a specialist manager dedicated to that site. These people are known as Customer Site Supervisors. In Exhibit 6.4 above, the broken line indicates the division between the employing firm and the majority of its employees. As demonstrated in subsequent chapters, the majority of cleaners and supervisors will never enter the premises of their employers. Instead, area managers (who themselves spend little time at their place of employment) act as a conduit between the organisation and its employees. This arrangement has major implications for the management of fragmented work organisation in the industry and the predominantly informal nature of the employment relationship in the industry.
Exhibit 6.5 outlines Complete Clean’s operational structure.\textsuperscript{15} Those employed in the structure outlined below are known as ‘operational staff’. While this study will focus on the firm’s operations within Sydney, where appropriate it shall also draw attention to significant regional differences. Operations in NSW are mainly centred upon Sydney and the regional centres of Canberra (ACT), Wollongong and Newcastle. Sydney is split into what are known within Complete Clean as ‘teams’: a Sydney suburban team and a central Sydney city team.\textsuperscript{16} Operations follow the management structure outlined in Exhibit 6.5 whereby regional and other divisional managers are responsible for a number of areas and customer service managers, who in turn have responsibility for all cleaning operatives. Although the structure depicted appears to be rather hierarchical, in reality both the operational and management structures are quite flat or horizontal with few reporting levels. As explained above, managers have a wide span of control and

\textsuperscript{15} ACT is included in the operations of NSW.

\textsuperscript{16} This structure was correct until late 2002.
responsibility for a large number of line employees. The implications of this for the management of labour within Complete Clean are explored in later chapters. Administrative structures, including finance and marketing, tend to be divorced from the operational structures, while contracting/estimating staff work is undertaken in tandem with the front-line operational staff. The dividing line between supervisors, leading hands and cleaners and management staff represents a physical separation as much as does the traditional salary/wage distinction.

6.3 Researching Complete Clean

The research into Complete Clean took place over an 18-month period between March 2002 and September 2003. During this time I made contact with and interviewed 20 senior and front-line operational managers. Other interviewees included a retired regional manager of 33 years experience with Complete Clean, senior support staff, including Complete Clean’s contracting/estimating manager, and IPSA’s injury management specialist. The interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix 3 for interview themes) and, where possible, were conducted off-site, typically on the site of a customer/client, for front-line operational managers. The questions raised in the interviews were drawn from a review of the wider literature on cleaning and from themes and issues identified from interviews with key industry informants (See Appendix 1 for themes). As Thomas (1993: 37) explains, ‘it may be difficult to decide what do or do not count as data’. This study followed Thomas’ suggestion of conducting a ‘preliminary literature review and reflecting upon the broad issues as a way of excluding topics that will be addressed’ (1993: 37). The interviews and the questions asked sought to explore the culture of Complete Clean through an examination of events, attitudes and behaviours that were identified by the researcher as taking place daily (Mouly and Sankaran, 1995: 44). Interviews ranged from one to three hours and, once completed, were transcribed in full by a professional transcriber and then checked for accuracy by the researcher. Time pressures and the limited time spent on site by front-line operational managers (here I mean customer service managers) meant that most interviews were limited to a maximum of one hour. Following accepted

17 It should be noted that English was not the first language of most of these interviewees, and that a number of interviews were conducted in broken English.
practice in ethnographic research, I undertook ‘a retrospective review… at the end of the interview to determine the underlying themes that have emerged’ (Mouly and Sankaran, 1995: 44).

The Complete Clean interviews were undertaken at a time when the organisation was embarking on a culture change initiative, and many were thus of a very candid nature. A number of the interviewees expressed concern about their comments being attributed to certain individuals with Complete Clean. Significantly, the strongest concerns regarding confidentiality were those expressed by middle and front-line operational managers rather than senior managers. Given that I interviewed almost all of the firm’s operational managers, I have followed a policy of not naming or identifying interviewees and participants in the research process. Further, I have avoided identifying operational managers according to whether or not they are responsible for the Sydney City, Sydney Suburban or Regional NSW operations. Special care has been taken not to disclose the gender of the small number of women operational managers in the firm. Accordingly, rather than identifying interviewees by specific position held, I have decided to attribute all material from formal interviews to three sources: ‘senior operational management’, ‘operational management’ and ‘operational support management’. Exhibit 6.6 indicates the positions to which these generic descriptors have been applied. The names of all cleaners, leading hands and supervisors have also been disguised. Unless comments are general, references to individual sites have been avoided.

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18 However, in several places I attribute general comments and quotes to management from regional NSW. In other places I do identify operations along the lines of city or suburban, but only in a general manner.

19 This is a shame as major differences were noted in management style and organisation of work according to gender.
Apart from interviews, I analysed Complete Clean Australia and Complete Clean documents, and was given free access to the organisation’s intranet system. I perused the Complete Clean Australia Mission Statement, management documents and policies ranging from injury management to managing performance. I was also able to gain access to official company documents and unofficial documents including the history of the origins of Complete Clean Australia (See Appendix 4). Where possible, I attended team meetings between regional and general managers and their customer service/customer site managers. These meeting were intended to be held on a monthly basis, but in reality were held less frequently and were generally free-wheeling sessions where full and frank exchange between managers was encouraged. However, I did not attend many of these as the reaction of those attending the meetings made it clear that this was their time and space. Time spent chatting over lunch or coffee in the tearoom, or passing conversations with managers, proved invaluable for this study. During the course of the study I remained in regular contact with Complete Clean Australia’s Human Resource Manager (who was my point of contact within the organisation). We met frequently to exchange ideas and to seek points of clarification. During these meetings I sought feedback on my research and ideas and on the material gathered from the cleaning sites visited and hypotheses that I had developed. A report on the research was delivered to senior managers via a special seminar (discussed further below).
Apart from studying the management of Complete Clean and Complete Clean Australia, I wanted to gain access to their cleaning staff. Originally, I had hoped to formally interview a number of cleaners. This proved to be unworkable. Ethical and personal safety issues meant that interviews could not be undertaken offsite, and the hours of work of most cleaners, along with multiple job-holding, the rush to get to the next job and sheer exhaustion, meant that a number of cleaners approached were reluctant to be interviewed before or after work. Embarrassment at perceived lack of English skills meant that most of those approached did not wish to be recorded on tape. While I was free to negotiate with managers over gaining access to cleaners during working time, most managers were reluctant to formally release cleaners from their duties to take part in an interview. The competitive nature of the industry, time pressures and chronic understaffing on most sites were cited as reasons for management not allowing interviews during work time.

Originally, it had been my intention to gain employment as a cleaner and to undertake a period of participant observation research. After negotiation with the relevant regional and general manager and their customer service mangers, I spent a period of three months working as a cleaner and visited 11 different sites. These sites are listed in Exhibit 6.7. Sites were chosen in conjunction with each regional manager and were selected on the basis of potential interest to me, ease of access, exposure to the maximum number of cleaners and the opportunity to experience a range of cleaning across a number of geographic locations.\textsuperscript{20} The worksites I visited reflected the market strength and core business of Complete Clean and included retail, industrial and commercial and office sites. I also spent time on a pharmaceutical site and at a private hospital. The amount of time spent on a site varied according to the site’s size, the number of cleaners and hours of work. For example, on some sites I spent only an evening; on other sites I worked for periods of up to two weeks, spending time with cleaners on morning, day and evening hours of work.

\textsuperscript{20} For some sites, clients’ security arrangements precluded my access and on other sites I was asked to leave by the clients’ representatives. I chose a variety of sites around Sydney, partially in order to experience the geographic and spatial organisation of cleaning labour markets.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Subsite</th>
<th>Cleaning</th>
<th>Site Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On site Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Professional &amp; Retail Site</td>
<td>Studio Complex</td>
<td>Studios/offices/toilets, etc</td>
<td>CSM &amp; CSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retail Site</td>
<td>Outdoor &amp; retail area, offices, food area, toilets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Administrative &amp; Commercial Site</td>
<td>Government &amp; Commercial Offices</td>
<td>Offices and facilities</td>
<td>CSS (Evening)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Industrial Pharmaceutical site</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical laboratory &amp; warehouse complex</td>
<td>Laboratory/warehouse/office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Commercial Office site - IT industry</td>
<td>Commercial Offices</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Private Hospital</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Office/wards/theatres/birthing rooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Administrative and Commercial Site</td>
<td>Commercial &amp; Government Offices</td>
<td>Office cleaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Factory Site</td>
<td>Aluminum Factory</td>
<td>Factory offices &amp; common rooms/change areas/toilets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Factory &amp; Warehousing site</td>
<td>Food Production Warehouse</td>
<td>Warehouse/offices/common areas/toilets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Central City Retail Site</td>
<td>Prestige Retail Site (City)</td>
<td>Retail areas, outdoors/table bussing</td>
<td>CSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Central City Office Site</td>
<td>Commercial Offices, Café Court</td>
<td>Offices and outdoor areas</td>
<td>CSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Apartment Block &amp; Retail Area</td>
<td>Prestige Waterfront Apartments</td>
<td>Outdoor areas, apartment block</td>
<td>CSM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Time spent on the sites enabled me to overcome my difficulties in interviewing cleaners. I had made it clear to managers that it was my wish for them to place me on a site and to treat me like any other cleaner. The one change that I requested, after it became clear that cleaning was solitary work (discussed further in Chapter 7) was that I be placed alongside other cleaners where practical. Typically, a visit to a site for a period of participant observation involved both a period of time with the Customer Service Manager (or Customer Site Supervisor or Supervisor, where present) followed by a more extensive period of time with cleaners. On each site I wore a Complete Clean uniform and the site manager or supervisor would introduce me to the cleaners I was to work with. I was introduced as a university student who was interested in the cleaning industry and the experiences of individual cleaners and who was writing a thesis on cleaning. The manager or supervisor usually informed the cleaners that I had permission from Complete Clean Australia to be on the site and that what they said to me would be confidential and that they would not be identified in the research.  

On most sites I was paired with a cleaner and spent the day with them, or if it were a morning or evening shift, I would spend that time with them. On larger sites, where the majority of workers were employed on a part-time basis, which generally meant doing a three-hour stint on a site, the site manager would rotate me around cleaners every hour. On larger sites where day cleaning was common I spent 6-8 hours working alongside cleaners, and was able to spend much time in conversation. During this time I was frequently able to ask the questions that I had initially intended to ask in a formal semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2 for questions/themes). As the fieldwork unfolded, I found myself following Spradley’s dictum for ethnographic researchers, that ‘initially ethnographic data should be gathered by listening and observing, “not to discover answers, but to find which questions to ask”’ (Spradley, 1970, cited in Schwartzmann, 1993: 56). On those sites where the work was mainly part-time (three hours a day) I tended to spend around 10-20 minutes at the beginning of work talking to the cleaner. We would then work together and make up the time in order to complete the allotted work within the three-hour period.

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21 On a number of sites, the manager or supervisor tried to play a joke on their cleaners and introduced me variously as the new managing director of Complete Clean Australia, the managing director’s son (who was himself a cleaner) or as a new regional manager. As introductions were often made in Greek, Portuguese, Spanish or Italian, I was not aware of this until much later.
On these sites I would work as directed alongside other cleaners. Often we established an exchange relationship. In return for spending time talking and answering questions, I would help cleaners complete their tasks. During the three-month participant observation period, I gained a wide range of cleaning experience and learnt to operate a range of machinery from polyvacs and polishers through to outdoor scrubbers. I cleaned toilets, scraped chewing gum off public areas, cleaned graffiti, vacuumed floors, emptied rubbish, polished windows, mopped and dusted and completed a wide variety of cleaning duties. The ethnographic research enhanced my human capital in ways that I could not have imagined at the outset!

In most cases the reception from the cleaners was extremely welcoming and positive. As demonstrated in later chapters, much cleaning work is solitary and repetitive in nature, and many cleaners welcomed the company and the diversion. Most expressed amazement that someone was interested in them and their work.\textsuperscript{22} More than one thought that I was a little crazy. Here, I should point out that my New Zealand origins were a great help. Cleaners expressed interest in my accent, a number had visited New Zealand and Peter Jackson's enormously popular film \textit{The Lord of the Rings} proved to be an ideal icebreaker.\textsuperscript{23} On only two occasions did I experience hostility from cleaners. On one site, a mother and daughter accused me of being a management informant and would not talk to me until I had established my credentials as a student.\textsuperscript{24} In another case, a supervisor was having an on-going dispute with his manager. He pointedly told me and the manager that he did not want me present, that he was too busy to 'babysit' someone and that he was short staffed on the site. I told him that I was proficient at

\textsuperscript{22} I acknowledge the possibility of the 'Hawthorne effect' in the course of the fieldwork. However, as explained in Chapter 9, cleaners were comfortable in engaging in cheating of clients and unsafe and unhygienic practices in front of and alongside me. In other cases I was asked to join cleaners in expropriating clients' resources and time from the employer.

\textsuperscript{23} Many cleaners wanted to discuss the film and asked me about the location and whether not 'Middle Earth' really did exist in New Zealand.

\textsuperscript{24} In this case, the mother had suffered an accident at work and her supervisor was putting pressure on her not to report the accident. She was suspicious of the supervisor and me. Her daughter, who worked with her in one of the few cases of teamwork within Complete Clean, was a student. After production of my student card, both relaxed and agreed to talk to me.
cleaning and that I could do any task he put me to. He consequently became one of the most invaluable informants that I met during my participant observation.\textsuperscript{25}

In many instances, cleaners made it clear that they were pleased to have me on site. I was willing to undertake jobs that cleaners tended to dislike, particularly vacuuming and dusting.\textsuperscript{26} I was also prepared to do some of the more unpleasant tasks. For many cleaners, having an extra person to assist them meant they could get ahead in their work and, in some cases, complete their task on time. Again, the emphasis was on fostering reciprocity. In exchange for their time and talk, I willing gave them my labour. During time spent on the worksites, I was also incorporated into the cleaners’ networks. I learnt the secrets of the sites and of the clients. Cleaners willingly shared their meals with me, and I became acquainted with the delights of Spanish, Portuguese and other food.\textsuperscript{27}

In another unexpected twist, I became the conduit between Complete Clean and its cleaning workforce. Because of the nature of work organisation (explored further in Chapter 7) many cleaners have little information about their employer. In many cases, the continual turnover of contracts meant that often the only sign of the employer was evident in the uniform the cleaners wore or the company name on their pay slips. Cleaners often grilled me about Complete Clean, asking who its owners were, the size of the organisation (which caused surprise to many) and whether or not it was making a profit. Many did not know that Complete Clean Australia is a multi-State operation.

On the sites, and when I was in the offices of Complete Clean and Complete Clean Australia, I collected brief field notes according to accepted ethnographic practices (Emerson \textit{et al}, 2001; Spradley, 1980; Silverman, 2001). I carried with me a small notebook. When meeting cleaners I explained to them what I was doing, outlined the

\textsuperscript{25} This supervisor relaxed when he realised that I was not a management informant. He also told me he was grateful that I did not ‘dob’ him in when he brought his niece and nephew to the site as he was caring for them at the time, in direct violation of Complete Clean and the client's rules on Occupational Health and Safety.

\textsuperscript{26} Older cleaners found the backpack vacuum cleaners painful to use. Dusting of desks was annoying as many clients kept personal items on them and there was the constant fear of breaking something.

\textsuperscript{27} During this time I also learnt the location of good restaurants and places to shop for authentic ‘ethnic’ food.
confidentiality of the research, and asked if they minded my taking brief notes and jottings. Unlike other researchers who would escape to the toilet and the like to record their observations, I followed a policy of openness and recorded brief jottings in front of cleaners and their supervisors.\footnote{28} This practice appeared to work, and cleaners would often stop and tell me to write something down that they were about to tell me. Depending on the individual, I would modify this practice. I refrained from ‘jotting down’ those matters which participants regraded as secret, embarrassing, overly revealing, or potentially harmful’ (Emerson \textit{et al}, 2001: 357). Generally speaking, I would try to refrain from making notes and jottings in the field, since I was aware that the process of note taking could distract me ‘from what was happening in the immediate scene’ (Emerson \textit{et al}, 2001: 357). Where possible, I sought to rely on memory and made jottings to record technical detail regarding the arrangement and organisation of work and the operation of equipment. These jottings were written-up in full in a journal on the same day and frequently expanded on during the train journey home, or at home.

Field notes described the setting, the people I met and observed, their reaction to me and my feelings towards them and the work that I was doing. I recorded in detail the conversations I had, the work I observed and took part in and how work on each site was organised. I also recorded in some detail the reactions of the client’s workforce and general public to myself and the cleaners I worked with or was observing.\footnote{29} On the completion of the field research, the field notes were indexed and were reviewed and sorted into organising themes and categories for analysis and to reveal wider patterns (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, Spradley, 1988; Silverman, 2001; Thomas, 1993; Atkinson \textit{et al}, 2001). These themes and patterns underpin much of the empirical analysis presented in Chapters seven to ten. Where possible, I made use of detailed field notes to include the ‘voice’ of the subject under study (the cleaner) and to present ‘multiple voices’ in the analysis contained in this thesis (see Emerson, \textit{et al}, 2001; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995; Martin, 2002).

\footnote{28} There is major debate amongst ethnographers over the most appropriate time and place to record field notes (Emerson, \textit{et al}, 2001:356-57). I acknowledge this debate and modified my practice according to each situation.

\footnote{29} Note the deliberate use of ‘I’. Although I do not want to disappear into the ghetto of reflexivity, I do recognise that reality is observed and shaped by the subjective experiences of the observer/author (see Martin, 2002, Chapter 9 ‘Writing About Cultures’).
6.4 Complete Clean: A Representative Case?

One of the criticisms of case study research is the extent to which findings can be generalised to a wider population. However, such criticisms tend to ignore the spatial reorganisation of service industries. Following Allen and Henry (1997: 187), this thesis does not argue that the employment experiences of cleaning workers are heterogeneous across all firms; rather it is proposed that similarities of employment experience, work organisation and the organisational structure of cleaning firms are the norm and not the exception. These similarities arise from the reorganisation of the service economy (Christopherson, 1989) and from the presence of an industry culture.

According to Christopherson (1989: 132), the service economy is being reorganised along the lines of network-based flexibility between firms, and this is said to have major implications for the division of labour within service firms. A number of these changes are examined in later chapters. They include the rise of small firms in the cleaning industry and the fragmentation of worksites and employees. Perhaps the most salient implication of the reorganisation of the service economy is the way in which

the standardisation and rationalisation of services is eroding local differences in production and consumption. More people do much the same thing. ... In some service-dominant economies, the systematic rationalisation of production and distribution in retail, health, insurance and banking firms is altering local economies and employment possibilities to make them more similar from place to place. ...

... we need to examine not only those processes in production that create new forms of local difference but also processes the intent of which is to reduce local differences. (Christopherson, 1989: 141)

Likewise, in a series of detailed studies of British service firms, Allen and Henry (1996) found that despite great diversity between three related service industries (cleaning, catering and security), firms operating in these sections of the service economy showed a number of similarities. Many of these similarities have already been canvassed in Chapters 3 and 4. To recap: these similarities include a flat, mobile management
structure and ‘hollow’ organisational forms containing multi-site operations with few tangible assets (Allen and Henry, 1996: 72-74).

The commercial cleaning industry is not immune from this process of strategic, structural and cultural convergence. In Australia, as we have seen, there have been mergers and amalgamations throughout the history of the cleaning industry, especially amongst the largest firms over the past decade. Industry standardisation is furthered by outsourcing and competitive tendering, which means that cleaning firms ‘do much the same thing’ (Christopherson, 1989: 141). Allen and Henry (1997: 187) argue that their studies of United Kingdom service firms (cleaning, catering and security) demonstrate ‘the similarity of contract work and employment rather than its geographic difference.’ It is these shared patterns that allow us to generalise with considerable confidence on the basis of evidence drawn primarily from a single complex case study firm.

6.5 Corroborative and Supplementary Research

Originally, the aim of this thesis was to present a study based upon the use of multiple complex cases. However, this improved impossible, as there was considerable reluctance from those firms approached to allow a researcher access to their organisation, much less to their employees. Like many organisational ethnographers before me, I shared the frustrations of trying to gain access to organisations and had a number of false starts.30 A senior manager from one of the larger cleaning firms expressed an interest in participating in the study, and promised to introduce me to senior management and arrange for access. Unfortunately, this firm was soon involved in the merger with a rival firm and the manager left the organisation. In another case, meetings were established between the CEO of the cleaning firm, one of the main clients of this firm, my supervisor and myself. All expressed enthusiasm and interest in the study and protocols for how the study would proceed were established. I was introduced to the senior manager in the firm who was responsible for industrial relations. An application with support from the CEO was put forward to the University of Sydney’s Ethics Committee to approve the study, but for reasons unknown, the firm

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30 For an account of the frustration of fieldwork and ethnography in researching the world of work, see Smith (1997a, 1997b, 2001).
withdrew their support and failed to respond to phone calls or requests for meetings. Other requests for access to NSW firms, or interviews with their managers or owners, met with firm rejection. After 18 months of frustration and repeated attempts to gain access to a cleaning firm, I was successful in gaining access to Complete Clean Australia.

In the meantime I had made contact with the LHMM in NSW and had conducted meetings with the union’s research staff and NSW Assistant secretary. I also made contact with the industry association, the Building Services Contractors’ Association of Australia (BSCAA). During this time I made contact with industry consultants, who are major players in the NSW cleaning industry. I interviewed one of the partners from a firm that provided specialist industrial advice and industrial relations advocacy to the cleaning industry. Interviews were also conducted with the management of the internal cleaning services of a Sydney university. The way in which this university procured cleaning services was particularly illuminating, since it employed 40 cleaners directly to clean a certain number of university buildings, but put the rest of the cleaning work out to tender. The main contract cleaning firm at this university employed approximately 200 cleaners. In these respects, the initial research ‘journey’ did allow me to gather evidence from the wider industry; evidence that, for the most part, corroborates that obtained from the managers and cleaners of Complete Clean.

As such, while the research findings presented in the ensuing chapters are based primarily on evidence from Complete Clean, it is interspersed with evidence from smaller and shorter studies and interviews with managers from other major NSW cleaning firms (see Appendix I for interview questions). I was also able to consult an official from the NSW Department of Educating and Training regarding training arrangements in the cleaning industry. Exhibit 6.8 outlines the key informants and background interviews. The information obtained in these interviews formed the basis for subsequent interviews, and shaped the approach of the study taken with the case study firm.

 Industry consultants advise clients on the merits of each tender bid, and, in some cases, would draw-up tenders and manage the tender process.
### Exhibit 6.8 Key Industry Informants and Background Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cleaning Firms¹</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training and Development Manager</td>
<td>Large firm (5000 employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Officer</td>
<td>Large firm (5000 employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO and Industrial Manager</td>
<td>Large firm (1000 employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Medium sized cleaning firm (50 employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Medium - large firm (1000 employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Association</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>BSCAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Consultants</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two consulting firms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial Advocates</strong></td>
<td>Advisers to cleaning industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University</strong></td>
<td>Management - Internal Cleaning Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LHMMU</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW Assistant Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Organiser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Officers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired NSW Assistant Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official from NSW Department of Education and Training (Traineeships and Apprenticeships)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former personnel manager NSW Government Cleaning Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: 1. Case study firm not included*

### 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced Complete Clean as a major player in the Australian cleaning industry and outlined its salient structural features, including operational and organisational structures. I identified Complete Clean was an industry pioneer and explained that a number of cleaning practices adopted internationally were developed by Complete Clean. Sites of research were identified and issues of confidentiality addressed. It was explained that although complete Complete Clean does have some atypical characteristics, it also shares characteristics evident in the wider industry. In general, these result from spatial reorganisation and the standardisation of services across the industry. Details were also provided of the extent of interview- and
participant observation-based evidence-gathering within Complete Clean, as well as of
corroborative and supplementary interview-based research involving sources from the
wider cleaning industry. From this I have argued that Complete Clean is a representative
case; a case from which findings generalisable to the wider cleaning industry may
validly be drawn.

This chapter concludes the background and analytical framework section of the thesis.
The following chapters explore in detail with reference to Complete Clean a range of
challenges relating to the management of labour, the practice of HRM and how cleaners
and their managers cope with their work and construct a positive identity.
CHAPTER 7

THE WORK OF CLEANING: THE ORGANISATION OF WORK AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE NSW COMMERCIAL CLEANING INDUSTRY

This chapter will examine work reorganisation and the new social relations of work in the NSW commercial cleaning industry. The analysis is industry wide, but focuses on one organisation, Complete Clean Australia, using this company to explore the labour process and the organisation of work in the cleaning industry with particular attention to how work has been reorganised from ‘zone cleaning’ to ‘mono tasking’ and the specialisation of cleaners and their work. It will also examine the organisation of time in the cleaning industry and how it is contested by employees, their managers and clients. The intersection between the labour process and the organisation of the work, along with the nature of the employment relationship between cleaners, employers and the host organisation, contribute to the peculiarities of the cleaning industry. The gender division of cleaning labour will be considered, and how this gender division is mediated by the segmentation of regional labour markets. The analysis presented in this chapter is based upon larger worksites requiring multiple cleaners undertaking a range of cleaning tasks and assignments.

7.1 The Organisation of Work in Cleaning

Because of the operation of an industry culture and the recycling of managers within the industry, forms of work organisation in cleaning tend to be universal across Australia. However, factors such as the size of the site to be cleaned, the market within which the cleaning firm operates and the needs of clients determine how work is structured and organised on each site. Frequency of cleaning (more regularly in a hospital than an office) and public image of the building (for example, of a bank) play
roles in the organisation of cleaning work. Despite these contingencies, there is remarkable similarity in the organisation of cleaning work within NSW.

As explained in Chapter 4, Herzenberg et al (1998) provide a taxonomy of service work in which cleaning is included as part of the unrationalised labour-intensive work system. By adopting Herzenberg et al’s (1998) analysis it is evident that cleaning work and its organisation are hybrids of ‘engineering’ (read ‘scientific management’) and ‘interpretive’ models of production whereby cleaning work is routinised but discretion is left to cleaners in determining what and how to clean, according to customer needs and wants. Workers in unrationalised labour-intensive occupations are typically managed by quantitative, customer and simple control mechanisms.

At a simple level, most cleaning is organised around part-time work and is timed to take place either before or after the start or finish of other work on the client’s site. Despite variations in cleaning schedules, most cleaning takes place between 5a.m. and 9a.m in the morning and from 5.30p.m. to 10p.m. in the evening. Collective bargaining and the maintenance of a common rule award system have distinguished between day and night cleaning, and have prescribed different rates of pay for different time periods. The award handed down in 2000 prescribes day cleaning as taking place between the hours of 6a.m. and 6p.m.; and as day cleaning attracts lower rates of pay than night cleaning or early morning, most cleaning takes place between these times. To a considerable extent, the award codifies accepted practice within the industry and many cleaning contracts (particularly with the CBD and the cleaning of offices) specify that cleaning be undertaken in the early evening.

Harry, an industry manager and now owner of a medium sized firm with 25 years experience, explains:

Clients don’t like cleaners working around them. They don’t like the sound noise of vacuum cleaners whilst they are working. They get real shitty on you: “We’re having a meeting, shut the bloody thing up”; you know. We’ve educated them that the cleaning is done at night and that’s the way it’s expected.
He then goes on to say that night cleaning is common:

for the very simple reason that if somebody doesn’t show up at night you’ve
got a chance of replacing them. If they don’t show up at 2 in the morning how
are you going to get somebody else out of bed to come and do it? (Interview
12 Feb 2003).

These sentiments are shared by managers at Complete Clean and are typical of the
wider industry.

While part-time employees dominate the cleaning industry, there have been concerted
efforts by some cleaning firms to convert part-time jobs into full-time positions. To a
large extent this is motivated by cost savings. As one industry manager explained, it
arises from

The extension of cleaning into things like shopping centres, which require
full-time based staff. The opportunities to re-organise jobs so that you can
have full-time staff on them, and cost savings. Instead of running part time
cleaners from six till nine at night, a lot of companies have gone into putting
cleaners on from 5.30 [pm] till midnight full-time. And the hourly rate drops
by a couple of dollars an hour so there’s a chance for you to increase your
margins. The client pays for the electricity so it doesn’t worry you (Interview
with Harry, 12 Feb 2003).

The discussion of my fieldwork and the sites visited (see Chapter 6) demonstrated that
full-time cleaners were likely to be found in ‘prestige’ sites like retail, shopping centres,
food courts, hospitals and industrial sites where the contingencies were more likely to
be variable, and work less routinised and more subject to the vagaries of the behaviour
of the wider public. Some of these sites were staffed and cleaned on a 24-hour basis to
cope with customer and client demands.

Work organisation in cleaning is largely determined by the size of the site and the
requirements of the customer. For small sites requiring one or two part-time cleaners
such as an office or a small suburban bank branch, the cleaner will undertake all
cleaning tasks and has some discretion in the organisation and timing of work (even here conventions and accepted practices regarding the order and timing of work are followed) in order to meet client demands and the contract specifications. On larger sites work is structured and organised according to the needs of the site, and along the lines of specialisation of cleaning tasks. However, even here there is much variation. Chapter 3 briefly outlined the organisation of cleaning work and argued that cleaning work has traditionally been characterised as 'zonal', whereby a cleaner would undertake all the required cleaning tasks within a specific area or geographic space with limited supervision. In office cleaning, for example, this might include dusting, emptying rubbish, vacuuming, mopping floors and cleaning toilets and bathrooms. During the course of my fieldwork, the sites I spent time on were large sites where specialisation and divisions of labour were evident.

The following situations faced by cleaners highlight difficulties and challenges implicit in the variability and unpredictability of cleaning work. Although most cleaning contracts specified the frequency and standard of cleaning, the majority did not include any recognition of the variations within the work or routine, or of the duties and additional dirt accumulated by clients or forces of nature.\(^1\) To my knowledge, cleaning firms and their clients had not come to terms with changes in the perception of the public and government towards security. For example, the removal of rubbish bins from train stations and other public places such as malls and shopping centres for security reasons meant increased work for cleaners, a fact not unnoticed by their managers. In other cases, cleaning work could be impeded by weather. In two sites that I visited – both were retail centres – rain and wind added considerably to the work of cleaners with the accumulation of leaves and other debris. It sometimes meant that cleaners were unable to perform their work and would have to make it up at a later time, further intensifying their work. In this respect, the work of cleaning can be seasonal in nature. End of year functions and Christmas parties in offices and commercial centres, for instance, meant that cleaners were often unable to perform their duties, and resulted in additional work on Friday evenings or the following Monday. For cleaners, end of year and Christmas celebrations rarely result in the sharing of the festive spirit. Office

\(^1\) This is not to say that all contacts did not acknowledge this. So-called 'prestige contracts' would often have clauses relating to additional cleaning work. In this section I am referring to office cleaning in general.
parties and drinks after work on Friday for the host client mean that cleaners are unable to complete tasks and have to incorporate them into their next shift.

Older cleaners spoke of the change in the nature of dirt and dust experienced in office cleaning. One of the biggest contributors to dirt and dust in offices was smoking and the associated debris of ash, cigarette butts and ashtrays. Cleaners recalled the horror of dropping full ashtrays and the mess it entailed. Today, smoking bans in offices have relocated dirt and ash from the office to building entrancesways and outdoor areas, increasing the work of outdoor cleaners. However, air-conditioning and the increasing reliance on technology such as printers and computers has contributed to overall levels of dust in offices.\(^2\) Perhaps one of the biggest nuisances currently experienced by cleaners has been the development of takeaway café-style coffee in cardboard or polystyrene foam cups. Take-away coffee such as ‘lattes’ and the ‘flat white’, where the milk is steamed and frothed, leaves liquid residue in the bottom of the container when the coffee has cooled. Empty coffee containers thrown into office and desk/work station rubbish bins have made the emptying of rubbish bins hazardous. In the course of my field work I witnessed the spilling of coffee residue when emptying rubbish bins and the anguish this would cause cleaners. I experienced this myself one evening when emptying bins: coffee residue was spilt on the carpet and I noted the panic of getting behind in my work while I had to stop and mop up the stain (Field Notes, 21 June 2002).

As one of the largest and oldest cleaning firms in Australasia, Complete Clean Australia set the tone for the organisation of cleaning work and many of its methods of cleaning and work practices have been exported around the world through its various subsidiary companies and mergers. Managers from Complete Clean Australia have been in demand around the world for their expertise in handling cleaning in difficult and demanding markets like hospitals and health care centres. A reading of the company history reveals the extent to which scientific management and Taylorist ideas had been incorporated into work practices since the 1940s. Complete Clean Australia was one of

\(^2\) Modern equipment such as printers generate large amounts of dust, while computers blow dust around with their cooling fans. They also make the task of cleaning difficult. Most cleaning contracts prohibit cleaners touching electronic equipment, meaning that cleaners have to work around this equipment.
the first cleaning firms anywhere to introduce standardisation for each cleaning task and to adopt training manuals, along with strict quality and financial control.\textsuperscript{3}

The competitive nature of the Australian cleaning industry has meant that that the industry has long been focused upon productivity and efficiency. While zonal cleaning methods have been the norm for most cleaners, by the 1970s larger cleaning firms had begun moving towards a division of labour based on task specialisation (Discussion with HR Manager Complete Clean, Field Notes, 8 July 2003). Within the wider literature, this is sometimes referred to as ‘team cleaning’.

7.2 Work Reorganisation: Towards Team Cleaning.

With one exception (Aguiar 2001), the reorganisation of cleaning work has thus far been neglected by academics.\textsuperscript{4} In seeking to explain the reorganisation of the work of Toronto cleaners, Aguiar (2001) examined changes in the workplace from the rise of post-Fordism and the role of managerial strategies like JIT/TQM in the reorganisation of work. Within Australian literature there has been considerable debate over post-Fordism (Fieldes & Bramble, 1992; Hampson \textit{et al}, 1994) and its implications for the management of labour, with most commentators arguing that it has promised much but delivered very little. In any case, work reorganisation in Toronto as well as NSW has not taken place along post-Fordist lines. Aguiar (2001: 239) found that cleaning has been reorganised from a ‘traditional zone cleaning’ approach to one of ‘gang (team) cleaning’. This shift, he argued, was facilitated by the adoption of new technology and the penetration of Taylorism and scientific management. These are observable in the Australian cleaning industry, but the shift has not been as sudden and elements of work reorganisation evident in North America have been a feature of the Australian industry since the 1940s.

\textsuperscript{3} From a history of Complete Clean Australia in possession of author (no publication details available).

\textsuperscript{4} A special issue of \textit{Antipode} (2006. Vol. 38, Issue 3) devoted to cleaning industry and the experiences of cleaners in the global market attempts to address this deficiency.
Work reorganisation within the cleaning industry has involved a shift from 'multi-tasking' to 'mono-tasking', which has given rise to work specialisation and intensification. This reorganisation has taken place under the post-Fordist guise of 'team' working, but without its attendant promise of industrial democracy (see Aguiar, 2001). Since the late 1990s there has been significant international interest (particularly in the US) in team cleaning because of the promised savings in labour costs, increased quality and enhanced worker safety. Typically, team cleaning involves teams of four specialists working in harmony: a light duty specialist (dusting, spot cleaning and emptying rubbish); a vacuum specialist; a bathroom/toilet specialist; and a utility specialist (cleaning entrance glass, lobbies, other flooring). Each specialist uses specific tools and undertakes specific tasks that can be measured and benchmarked against performance standards (Walker, 1997).

The proponents of team cleaning argue that it

improves quality production time and the quality of cleaning by refining jobs/tasks to their purest form, then transforming these functions into separate specialist positions. Unlike zone cleaning ... employees are not accountable for all cleaning tasks in an assignment area, but form a staggered assembly line that allows each specialist to cooperatively assemble their component of the cleaning program in a prescribed sequence and manner throughout a facility. (Inclean, Feb 1999: 22)

It is not clear when team cleaning was first used in Australia; nor is it easy to gauge the extent of its uptake within the wider industry. The preferred practice from the outset appears to have been the use of mixed modes of work organisation incorporating both zonal cleaning and assigning tasks to specialists. Indeed, there is an element of resistance to team cleaning with the Australian industry. An editorial note in the Australian cleaning industry magazine argued that

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5 The International Sanitary Supply Association publishes sample cleaning time standards that include the amount of square feet associated with each task and how many minutes a task should take.
Team cleaning is a much discussed method in the US. However, major building service contractors in Australia consider team cleaning to have been tried and found wanting. Not only do local executives cite lack of staff accountability and supervision difficulties, they also point out that Australian contractors are achieving (without team cleaning) significantly higher productivity rates than those being quoted in the US. (IncLean, August 2001: 37)

Within Complete Clean team working had been tried and found wanting. Kosta, a CSM, explained:

Myself I use only for one month. The customers complained. There are still people inside. The cleaners have six floors. One pick up the rubbish, one do the dusting, but there are still people inside. And sometime, the cleaners after complain, say ‘Why I do the dusting, we can swap around? One day do the dusting, one day the vacuuming’. But the cleaners don’t do the vacuuming properly. Leave for the next day for another man. Better separate responsibility for everything. (Interview 7 November 2002)

Like a number of other managers, Kosta found that team cleaning and the rotation of tasks left him in a vulnerable position. Arguments supporting the use of teams in cleaning point to increased performance by arguing that the use of teams removes the discretionary process from cleaners. An article in an influential trade magazine argued as follows in support of team rather than zone cleaning:

Zone cleaning is often very political and custodians [cleaners] quickly become good politicians. In zone cleaning the custodian quickly realises who the squeaky wheels are and what it takes to lubricate them. Therefore a disproportionate amount of time is spent on a few individuals areas at the detriment to the remainder of the building, thus creating inconsistencies in appearance. (CMM online 2001 ‘Team Cleaning what’s in it for workers?’)
In the Australian context, where the competitive nature of the industry, coupled with unrealistically priced contracts, ensures that cleaners and managers cut corners and are complicit in circumventing contract specifications, team working in the North American sense is unworkable. As demonstrated in Chapter 10, political behaviour on the part of cleaners and managers was crucial in ‘making out on the job’, retaining contracts and returning profit to the contracting organisation.

Despite these reservations, the terms ‘team’ and ‘team cleaning’ remain in currency within NSW and Australia. As the Group Manager HR for Complete Clean Australia explained, the idea behind teams in the Australian context was that three or four cleaners moved through a building together. This, he explained was rarely used; rather, the term ‘team’ was used to describe a group of cleaners. (Field Notes, 8 July 2003)

International proponents of team cleaning argue for a rotation of cleaners in terms of tasks and between buildings or sites in order to prevent boredom. They also recommend systematic training to promote multiskilling. It is uncertain when, but some managers reported that Complete Clean had experimented with the rotation of cleaners across and within different sites every 3-4 months (Interview with Christos, operational manager, 6 June 2002). However, the policy was universally disliked by frontline managers because of issues of quality and accountability

I don’t rotate all of them because we used to do that before. And rotation in cleaning with the cleaners you make your job more harder than what you have because the cleaner is going to that floor if you tell him you’re going to be rotated, you’ve got to be on top of your cleaners all the time because the standards will drop because automatically he knows somebody else is going to come on his job and he’s going to do it, he’s going to clean it. So he’s not going to put the good effort on that particular area if someone comes in to do his job if he’s going to be rotated. When you leave somebody on that floor or whatever area it is, you will have a better quality job because he or she knows they are responsible for that job. You don’t approach anybody else. It’s he or she. You’ve got to go to the person. So if you’re rotating him around very often you’re going to point your finger to so many; other than if you want to chase him up every day. But if you’re going to chase your cleaners every day
on the floors you may as well do the job. They are there. They’re responsible for that. And I find it works. I’ve heard this from managers in [Complete Clean] before and I brought this to a meeting and I said I will be prepared to rotate my staff. But if I need to; if the person is not handling the floor, I’m not going to wait until it gets to the client before I make some changes. If there’s a problem there, we change it. We put somebody else there to improve the quality. But rotating the cleaners around to make the job easy for them you’ve got to be very careful. (Interview with Christos, 6 June 2002)

Cleaning tends to be viewed as a necessary expense, but an expense to be minimised. In recent years, businesses and state sector agencies contracting cleaning services have increasingly demanded cost reductions and increases in productivity from cleaning firms. When contracts are renewed, the work is often undertaken on the basis of cost reduction to clients and an increase of efficiency on part of the cleaning firms. This situation often leads to changes in work organisation and has been evident in school cleaning in NSW. When the NSW GCS was privatised and school cleaning put out to tender in 1994, Complete Clean was one of the successful firms, winning two zones worth around $72 million per annum. This contract was lost in 1999 and the incoming contractor (Newclean) had undertaken cost savings of 20 percent to the government (LHMU 1999a).\(^6\) Traditionally, schools in NSW had been cleaned under a zonal method, whereby a cleaner would undertake all cleaning tasks in her/his allotted area.

When Newclean (The firm’s name is pseudonymous.) undertook to introduce cost savings to the government, it proposed to do so by reorganising work. Under zone cleaning, a cleaner may clean toilets/bathrooms if they are within his/her allocated area, attracting an additional allowance. Newclean proposed to reallocate toilet and bathroom cleaning to one specialist, saving the firm the payment of the toilet allowance. Across the hundreds of schools that it cleaned, this equated to a significant weekly saving. Further savings were to be made by reducing hours by an average of 30 percent across

\(^6\) Complete Clean claimed that it was acknowledged as the best cleaner across all the zones. Evidently the Complete Clean tender for the second round of contracts was 9 percent higher than the successful tender. Interview with Drako (senior operational manager) 5 April 2002.
all sites and through a reduction in the number of cleaners. Increases in productivity were achieved by reducing hours across sites, resulting in work intensification for cleaners and a reduction in their hours of work (LHMU, 1999a). For Newclean, the key to achieving productivity gains and cost savings was in the reorganisation of work. Under their ‘modern division of labour’ plan, Newclean proposed to introduce team cleaning and work specialisation (Newclean, 1999). The plan was not successful and attracted considerable union resistance; and cost savings were not achieved. Given that Newclean had based its tender submission on achieving considerable cost savings, the NSW government was placed in the embarrassing position of having to pay Newclean additional money to fund its productivity increases, and eventually Newclean had to withdraw from the contract at a considerable loss (Interview with Darko, senior operational manager, 5 April 2002).

7.3 Time and Work

According to one sociologist, ‘all work is temporally structured’ (Fine, 1990: 95), and all organisations attempt to control the relationship between time and task. Perhaps no form of work is more temporally structured than cleaning. Firms contracting their services to other businesses faced an added dimension in that ‘demands from the environment [customers and clients] influence the temporal reality of tasks ... which affects the responses of workers and, through this, work outcomes’ (Fine, 1990: 111). The shift from zonal forms of cleaning and the restructuring of cleaning work into task specialties reflects management’s concern with time and the manipulation of time and task to ensure efficiency and profitability (see Hassard, 2000).

An analysis of a tender document from Complete Clean for a 27-level office block in Sydney reveals the following time analysis for cleaning of toilets and tea rooms. As shown, the quoted times are significantly less than the industry-recommended times for cleaning. It is the manipulation of time that determines which tender bids are successful. Despite industry claims to the contrary, it is widely known that the lowest tender is invariably accepted. As such, work time has become a commodity subject to

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7 From Complete Clean ‘Tender Contract Analysis’ [name removed], Sydney. In possession of author.
careful scrutiny. Managers and in larger firms, specialist estimating managers walk a
tightrope between submitting a tender based on a price that will be accepted by the
client and one that will ensure lip service to quality performance, but leave enough
margin so that further time can be appropriated from workers, cleaning tasks and
frequency so that profit may be made on the contract in what Hassard (2001: 17) has
described as time becoming the means by which money can be appropriated. A
document from Complete Clean on quoting, planning and time standards warns:
‘Remember it is easier to put in more time if necessary than take out any excess’ (in
possession of author).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Cleaned</th>
<th>Assumed Time</th>
<th>Quated Area (Male)</th>
<th>Quoted Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toilet Pan</td>
<td>1.50 min/pan</td>
<td>3 toilet pans</td>
<td>2.03 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinal</td>
<td>1.00 min/urinal</td>
<td>2 urinals</td>
<td>1.35 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand Basin</td>
<td>0.75 min/hand basin</td>
<td>3 hand basins</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tearoom</td>
<td>1.00 min/tearoom</td>
<td>All tearooms</td>
<td>0.45 min each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the tender for the above block of offices reveals a number of differences in
terms of total hours of cleaning. Five cleaning firms submitted tenders and these
warrant close examination in terms of their implications for the organisation of work.

The figures submitted from each of the five firms (all large firms) reveal considerable
variation in terms of weekly cleaning hours and the annual cost of cleaning for this site.
Cleaning firm 3 submitted the lowest tender, including an annual cost significantly
below those quoted by other cleaning firms. It is not known who won the tender, but
had cleaning firm 3 won the contract it may have had to subcontract the work to another
firm in order to recover its costs. In any case, the successful tender would almost
certainly have adopted what managers term ‘reshuffling’, whereby work on the site
would be reorganised, hours cut and some part-time jobs converted (if possible) into
full-time work. Managers and supervisors would also be expected to sell additional cleaning services (known as ‘specials’) to enhance the contract and increase returns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tender</th>
<th>Total Hours/Week</th>
<th>$ per Annum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Firm 1</td>
<td>80.50</td>
<td>384,793.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Firm 2</td>
<td>82.70</td>
<td>426,032.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Firm 3</td>
<td>68.95</td>
<td>339,963.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Firm 4</td>
<td>71.35</td>
<td>365,582.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Firm 5</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>367,629.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such figures demonstrate the extent of competition within cleaning and provide a rationale for work intensification and speeding up within the Australian industry (Ryan, 2001a). It is for this reason that cleaning firms in NSW have sought to avoid status quo union collective agreements which retain the existing cleaners at a site and prevent their hours or conditions of work being eroded when a contract is transferred to another firm. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the work of cleaning has its own rhythms and is organised to coincide with when the work of the client and the host workforce has finished.

Intense industry competition has contributed toward work reorganisation and the development of new technology and techniques within the cleaning industry. As discussed in earlier chapters, the Australian cleaning industry is the most competitive in the world, a situation that has stimulated the development of new equipment and techniques. Backpack vacuum cleaners, for example, tend to be widely used in Australia and New Zealand (Inclean, April 2001: 13) but less so elsewhere. Other developments have been geared towards saving time and removing waste from work practices. For example, gas polishers save time by removing the need to interrupt rhythms of work to unplug and move power cords, an important consideration in a
competitive industry where the saving of minutes and seconds means the difference between profit and loss on tight contracts.

7.4 The Social Relations of Employment

In NSW and elsewhere in Australia, large numbers of cleaners are now employed by firms that specialise in providing services to other businesses. Whereas the majority of cleaning work was once undertaken by in-house employees, changes over the past 10 to 15 years have seen cleaning increasingly outsourced to commercial providers. Cleaning firms like Complete Clean have been well-placed to meet these changes. For example, when the GCS was privatised in 1994, Complete Clean successfully tendered for a number of school cleaning contracts and absorbed thousands of ex-government cleaners into its employ. These cleaners, like many other cleaners who found their jobs outsourced, often found themselves with new employers while remaining at the same site of work. While outsourcing sometimes results in changes to the organisation of work, it invariably results in a change of employer. One of the key peculiarities of the cleaning industry is that it ‘formally organises workers on somebody else’s site’ (Allen and Henry, 1996: 73), giving rise to a multiplicity of social relationships.

As explained earlier, cleaners tend to work on the site of the client and their only contact with their ‘employing’ organisation is through their customer service manager (CSM) who provides the interface between the client and the employer. Exhibit 7.3 below demonstrates the complexities of the employment relationship in the cleaning industry.

This situation is not atypical in services, although its analysis has tended to be confined to front-line interactive service work. Within services like cleaning, work is structured to ensure that the service is delivered, ostensibly according to the requirements of the customer and clients. In cleaning this is achieved through the standardisation of routines and tasks. Cleaning, like other service work, is characterised by a triangle of intersecting interests between cleaners, managers and customers which can results in patterns of conflict and cooperation (Frenkel et al, 1999: 17; Leidner 1993).
For frontline managers (here I am referring to CSMs and CSSs), the dynamics of the relationship between their clients, their regional manager and the employing organisation can place them in a difficult and tenuous situation. Frontline managers on a daily basis renegotiate their relationship with their clients and their managers and the cleaners for whom they are responsible. How managers cope is explored in Chapter 9; suffice it to say that many feel squeezed by the weight of conflicting expectations. One CSM explained that he felt that clients thought they owned him and spoke of his cleaners having to do additional work for clients, such as taking in dry cleaning, that was not included in the contract specification (Field Notes, 7 March 2003).
For cleaners and their managers, working as contract workers on somebody else's worksite, the employment dynamic is multifaceted. While cleaners recognised that they were employed by somebody by virtue of their uniform and pay slip, many found themselves in a relationship with their client/customers. This relationship included the building tenants and their employees and the building manager. Indeed, many cleaners that I interacted with spoke of identifying with the building tenants rather than with Complete Clean. While the implications of this for how cleaners cope with the daily realities of their work are explored in more detail in Chapter 10, the multifaceted nature of the social relations of work could be both liberating and subjugating (Willmott, 1993). For example, with regard to the latter,

Miguel [a CSM for a ‘prestige’ contract] told me of a ‘pretty Chinese’ cleaner who was sexually harassed by drunken clients [tenants of the space she was assigned to]. This happened more than once. Miguel complained to the building manager. The manager wanted to do nothing as he didn’t want to lose the clients. Miguel was told to remove the cleaner. He felt that he had no choice but to comply. (Fieldnotes, 7 March 2003)

Miguel also spoke of having to fire other staff after an unjustified and unsubstantiated complaint by a tenant in a building.

On the other hand, the relationship between cleaners and building tenants and building managers could provide workers with some protection from arbitrary managers and supervisors. For example, Kosta, a Customer Site Supervisor, spoke of his frustration with one of his female cleaners who was 73 years of age, explaining that she was lazy and did not do a thorough job. However, the cleaner was liked by the clients and the he was told ‘not to touch her’ (Interview with Kosta, operational manager, 7 November 2002). One of the more interesting aspects of my fieldwork was observing the interactions between cleaners and their clients (see Chapter 10). For many cleaners, the demands of clients and the tenants with whom they came into direct contact, rather than their managers or the specifications of the contract, provided the direction for their work activity. These informal interactions could be both a source of joy and pride and a
source of stress and work intensification for cleaners, as they became caught between the conflicting demands of their manager and the host clients.

The dynamics of social relations between cleaners and the client and the client work force could also be contradictory. Managers reported that in some cases they faced difficulties in that their cleaners preferred to identify with the client and the client’s employees, rather than with Complete Clean. On the other hand, identification with the client could be the difference between satisfactory or poor performance in terms of cleaning quality. Cleaners who identified with the client would often undertake additional duties, work longer or attempt to provide cleaning to a higher quality. Later chapters explore this contradiction in more detail.

The complexity of social relations in the cleaning industry may provide spaces for unions to gain a foothold and bypass the traditional employee-employer-union relationship. In recent years, unions representing cleaners in Australia and elsewhere have proven adept at exploiting opportunities provided by the complex relationship between contracting firms, building owners and their managing agents. In NSW, the LHMU has made use of multifaceted relationships in cleaning to gain access to cleaners and potential members through ‘building levels of respect with building owners’. Through the use of computer programs (‘Cityscape’) the LHMU has identified and isolated the top 100 buildings in Sydney as sites for organising and for building relationships with building owners (Discussion with LHMU NSW assistant secretary, Field Notes, 12 July 2000). These actions were inspired by the SIEU J4J campaign in Los Angeles whereby the SIEU divided the geography of the city into manageable and logical sectors and made use of scale as a focal point for identification and organisation. This tactic was followed by a campaign to obtain a universal contract by placing pressure on building owners to sign contracts with unionised firms (Savage, 1998: 240-1).

7.5 The Gender Division of Labour

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, cleaning as work is structured along the lines of gender and the assumed skills and abilities of women. Within the NSW cleaning industry and
within Complete Clean it was evident that to a large extent work is organised and structured along the lines of gender and the blurring of boundaries between paid and unpaid cleaning work. The wider literature on cleaning highlights a division of labour based on physical strength (for example, Aguair, 2001). For almost all of the sites I visited, work was clearly segmented along gender lines. For example, women undertook ‘light’ duties in office cleaning like emptying office rubbish bins, dusting, polishing and cleaning lunch and tea rooms, while men undertook the ‘heavy’ aspects of cleaning such as emptying and collecting outside bins, floor polishing and the like. For some jobs and on some sites the margins between the divisions of labour were blurred and often overlapped. Women and men were observed cleaning toilets and on one large site men undertook light cleaning such as cleaning an office. (Interestingly, in this case, the men were not required to dust!) For those jobs where the blurring around the division of labour tended to occur, such as in toilet cleaning and mopping, supervisors and managers assigned workers according to whom they thought most suited in terms of skill and ability, and according to the preference of cleaners. As cleaning toilets attracted an additional rate of pay, some cleaners expressed preference for this work.

The managers I interviewed within Sydney acknowledged a division of labour and were comfortable with it. The following excerpts are typical of the views of male managers:

Interviewer: Do women do different types of cleaning than men?

It depends on what sort of job. But with the office you don’t put a man in. [Interviewer: why not?] I – I can’t do it. I won’t even do it. The way the women can do the dust … the woman is a more detailed worker. A woman is better for the office cleaning. For industrial areas or commercial areas you need the man, it’s too heavy. A lot of mopping, a lot of scrubbing. Too heavy for the woman. For the office, employ the woman. In the toilets yes, but in the office area put a woman on. (Interview with Stavros, senior operational manager, 19 November 2002)

Another manager responded to a similar question:
I made some changes a couple of years ago through the building. We used to have half and half of the staff, say 50/50 females and males. When we re-shuffled [reorganised work practices and hours of work – invariably to cut costs] the building I come to appoint putting one cleaner in each floor and giving the full responsibility on the floor. It doesn’t mean the females or the males not doing. They are doing that. But there is more work involved in heavy jobs. We have more heavy areas here for males than the females. So I’m not saying the female cannot do the toilets but there’s other things involved. Heavy equipment, machinery, which we prefer the guys to use it. With the other side with the floors in office areas we find a woman is more responsible for – it looks like the housewife, it’s just the floors, it’s an office area, they’re more responsible for tables and dusting. The only thing we find they do struggle a bit with the vacuum but we’re putting in place vacuuming that we try to spread it to the guys to alleviate the women. It is not discriminate one to the other. But I found a woman is more responsible for office areas. But I have guys working office areas here and they do a tremendous job. But I have at the moment more women than guys. (Interview with Christos, operational manager, 6 June 2002)

Other managers explained to me that women expressed a preference not to be allocated to the heavier cleaning tasks of polishing or operating machinery.

The two sites I visited that were managed by women who were attached to the site full-time demonstrated a division of labour based on gender and accommodation to this division. One site was a private hospital and the other a ‘prestige’ central city shopping centre and food court. When questioned about the appointment of women as managers for these sites, senior managers spoke of the appointments in terms of gender and women’s attention to detail, and their ability to take care of the finer details of cleaning.

While academics have identified a division of labour within the cleaning industry based on the gender characteristics of women, the competitive nature of the industry, coupled with regional variations within the NSW labour market, complicates this analysis in several distinct ways. Interviews with managers and discussions with supervisors and
cleaners on the sites reveal that the ability to keep a clean house and to take pride in one’s own ability to clean at home was a distinct liability in the NSW context. Managers spoke of having to ‘unlearn’ their women cleaners and explained that while previous experience in the industry was a bonus, skills brought in from the home were not. In the Australian industry, where speed and the ability to cut corners are at a premium, skill and pride in presentation take second place.

The availability of labour and the vagaries of regional labour markers in NSW also cut across the gendered division of labour in cleaning. In regional centres like Wollongong and Newcastle, the gender division in the structuring and organisation of work are less evident. When asked about the gender division of labour, Doug, a senior operational manager with Complete Clean, explained:

It is a generalisation. It was never true in Newcastle and Wollongong. Yes it was true in Sydney. When I first started there was a lot of hard floors in those days ... If you go back to the 50s and the 60s and even through to the 70s many city buildings were hard floors. Vinyl floors, cork floors, parquet tile floors. Those floors need to be machine buffed. In Sydney it was traditional that using a polishing machine was a man’s job, so it didn’t matter where you went in Sydney it was always the men doing the polishing and the women did the vacuuming and the dusting. I thought that was normal until I was exposed to Newcastle and Wollongong, which were totally the opposite because in those towns where all the migrant male workers worked for the steel works the only work really available for the migrant female was cleaning. So it meant that in those towns I discovered to my surprise that you had these women all working on polishing machines, which they handled quite well. You had these enormous Serbian and Croatian women on the end of a polishing machine and boy they were good. I asked how come these women are on these machines, where are the men and I was told, don’t be silly, in the new Australian migrant community you were looked down upon if you were a cleaner, so you were a steel worker. So the men went into the steel works and you couldn’t get men to do cleaning because cleaning was women’s work. And in their communities, which are patriarchal, they would regard cleaning as women’s work. (Interview with Doug, 23 April 2002)
This point was confirmed by regional NSW managers attending a presentation to Complete Clean on my research progress and preliminary findings (September 2003).

Researchers examining the cleaning industry elsewhere (for example, Aguair, 2001: 247-8) have pointed to gender divisions not only in terms of task assignment, but also in terms of wages, arguing that wage differentials between light cleaning (typically assigned to women) and heavy cleaning (men) are indicative of an industry that views men as the breadwinners within their families. There is no conclusive data that there are significant wage differentials between men and women in the NSW cleaning industry. While men are more like to be employed on a full-time basis, the hourly rate of pay for full-time cleaners is 27 percent less that that of part-time cleaners. The relative strength of the union in the industry and the existence of both State and federal awards across the Australian cleaning industry mean that significant difference is hard to discern between the wages of men and women. Any differentiation between wages according to gender is likely to occur in the assignment of work tasks. From an analysis of the award, one area where wages differentials exist is in terms of allowances. While both men and women are assigned to toilet cleaning, thus attracting a daily or shift allowance, men are more likely to be found undertaking 'refuse disposal' (sorting and feeding of compactors and incinerators), attracting additional daily allowances. In NSW, and within Complete Clean, there is no evidence of additional payment for the operation of cleaning equipment.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain patterns of work organisation within the NSW cleaning industry in terms of structures, practices and relationships. I have argued that the organisation of cleaning work is subject to variation and is structured temporally and that time and the manipulation of time is key in understanding some of the peculiarities of cleaning work. The competitive nature of the cleaning industry, and demands from clients for increased productivity at a reduced cost, have been major factors in the reorganisation of work. Whereas work was once undertaken by cleaners in
zones, this has shifted towards increasing task specialisation and the adaptation or adoption of a modified form of team cleaning. The implications of these changes are explored elsewhere; suffice it to say that they have lead to increased pressure and work intensification.

The social relations of work and employment between cleaners, their managers, clients and the client’s workforce lead to a number of contradictions for cleaners and their managers in terms of identification with their employer or the client. The chapter has also demonstrated that work is structured along gender lines but that this is tempered by spatial variations in labour market – and especially labour supply – factors.

The following chapter examines management intent and the management of human resources. I will examine the human resource strategy, policies and practices of Complete Clean, along with the management of culture and customer service. The following chapter attempts to explain how cleaning firms overcome the peculiarities of work organisation in the industry.
CHAPTER 8

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, STRATEGY, POLICY AND PRACTICE IN COMPLETE CLEAN

This chapter examines the role of corporate strategy in the development of human resource management strategies within Complete Clean. Cleaning firms are a good example of the metaphorical organisational iceberg whereby the surface manifestations of its organisation serve to obscure the more informal side (Harvey & Brown, 2001: 220-21). Complete Clean Australia is an ISO 9000 quality endorsed organisation with formal and detailed policies and procedures covering all aspects of managing the organisation and its human resources, but as Allen and Henry (1996) argue, the peculiarities of the cleaning industry mean that informal practices of work and management dominate. Within all cleaning companies there is a constant challenge to maintain quality customer service and retain control over fragmented worksites.

I will examine management strategy and intent within Complete Clean as an exemplar of wider human resource practices within the NSW cleaning industry. This chapter looks at the form and substance of management practice and how managers and employees respond to formal and informal organisation. The chapter begins by explaining that human resource activities are primarily directed towards management before moving onto an idea of ‘customer service’ as corporate strategy that drives intended human resource policies and practices. I then examine human resource policies and practices within Complete Clean relating to training and development, occupational health and safety, recruitment and selection, and motivation, performance and reward.

8.1 Managing the Line

One of the difficulties confronting large cleaning firms like Complete Clean is not so much in developing human resource polices but in their implementation and
integration. Consequently, human resource activities tend to be directed towards salaried staff: that is, management and administration staff; confirming the argument that human resource activities are primary directed towards management (Purcell, 1994: 58). As explained by the human resource manager,

If there are 7000 cleaners and 200 salaried staff I see myself as an advocate for the salaried staff. I suppose in a practical sense there is no way I could represent 7000 cleaners. If we were going to set up a Human Resources Department that was to try and achieve that, being a frontline staff advocate you’d need a Human Resources manager in every town. So it doesn’t work that way. The advocates for the cleaners are the line managers. I’m an advocate for management. I am there to support management. But not the cleaners ... In our culture one thing is absolutely critical – that the line manager has total responsibility for the cleaners. I don’t interfere. The only time I’d interfere is when I sense that a cleaner is coming to me who has been given the total stuff around by line management. If I sense that’s the case I’ll intervene. But that happens rarely. The line managers handle their staff reasonably well. I’m there if they make mistakes. (Interview with Group HR Manager, [date removed] 2002)

At the time of this study, Complete Clean did not have a written strategic human resource management plan.

Although there is a large body of literature examining the connection between HRM and service quality, many large service firms in Australia have not yet adopted formal human resource management strategies. This is perhaps reflected in the slow up-take of human resource management practices among Australian businesses (Michelson & Kramar, 2003). Within the parent company (Integrated Service Provision Australia) human resource management has not been seen as a priority, and it was not until 1999 that a human resource manager was appointed; even then the appointment was made only reluctantly and after it was conceded that the position was necessary to ‘align the business with modern practices’. One senior manager from ISPA boasted that he did not believe in human resources and that the person eventually appointed was an
operational manager and not a human resource professional (Interview with senior operational manager from Complete Clean [name and date withheld] 2002). This view tends to reflect prevailing tendencies within the wider industry, whereby human resource managers are appointed to deal with legislative requirements surrounding superannuation, occupational health and safety and other compliance issues rather than as ‘strategic partners’. In NSW, at the time this study was undertaken, only a few of the larger firms had a human resources department of any substance. Within Complete Clean there was one human resource manager and an assistant whose main duty was to administer the traineeship program. Management of industrial relations within Complete Clean followed that of the wider NSW industry and was left to the peak industry association (BSCAA).\(^1\) Complete Clean and several other large firms contracted-in industrial relations expertise when required.\(^2\)

Within Complete Clean as in other cleaning firms, responsibility for the implementation of the limited human resource management policies and activities fell upon the CSMs and CSSs. One senior operational manager explained:

In almost every aspect of our business we are dependant on the Customer Service Manager and the site manager to convert theory to practice because back here at head office we can come up with all the theories and policies in the world, but how do you get those to work in the real world? The answer is, because we can't contact the cleaners directly we have to go through the line managers. We are as a company only as good as the line managers. So if you want all the cleaners to wear red socks ... how do you go about it? It's no use writing a memo, because you can't get a memo to all the cleaners and half of them can't read English anyway. So the only way you can get them to wear red socks is you've got to get the Site Managers and the Customer Service Managers to get the message out there that you've got to wear red socks. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. (Interview with Doug, 17 April 2002)

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1. Membership of the BSCAA is comprised mainly of representatives from the larger cleaning firms.
2. It is interesting to note that this person was a former LHMU official.
It is this structure within the cleaning industry that leads to the development of informal human resource strategies and practices. In many cases it is left to the frontline managers to make it up as they go along, trying to fit previous experience and ideas of what they think will work with Complete Clean Australia policy and procedure. I explore this in more detail in the next chapter. However, it does signal the prevalence of a trial and error approach to management and a clear gap between management intent and the lack of sophisticated human resource management, evident on the cleaning sites. Obtaining access to managers could be difficult as well, and regional managers acted as the interface between Complete Clean and the frontline management who would spend a day or less each week in central office. In an attempt to overcome some of these difficulties Complete Clean invested considerable time and money in developing a staff intranet so that frontline managers could keep up to date and in touch with company policies and announcements. The long hours of work of most CSMs, coupled with their limited opportunities for accessing the intranet, suggest that that this initiative will probably not overcome communication difficulties within Complete Clean.

8.2 ‘Customer Service’: Principle and Practice

There are no specific studies of HRM practices within the cleaning industry, but studies of related service industries (mainly of hotels and hospitality) have found that personnel practice has been ‘poor’, and has directed labour cost containment and minimisation of employer commitment to employees (Price, 1994). Within the practitioner literature on services, however, there exists a plethora of arguments linking HRM, service quality and performance (for example, Schneider & Bowen, 1993; Haynes & Fryer, 2000). These arguments are seductive in their simplicity but difficult to apply to the cleaning industry, where few cleaning firms have HRM departments or even specialist human resource managers. However, all cleaning firms recognise the importance, if not the sovereignty, of the customer and attempt to align themselves towards the needs of the customer. Customer service operated as a normative device within larger firms and was taken as a given in their approaches towards human resource management. In most
cases, this was tempered by pragmatism and a close eye on the financial status of contracts.

Complete Clean had adopted the rhetoric of customer service and had attempted to orient its culture towards this end. The adoption of a customer service-based culture was undertaken in the late 1980s by the previous owners of the firm and was highly influenced by the ideas outlined in Jan Carlzon’s *Moments of Truth* (1987). According to Carlzon, an organisation is ‘not material assets, rather the quality of contact between an individual customer and the employees who serve the customer directly’ (1987: 2-3). Carlzon’s vision was one where organisations reoriented themselves to the needs of customers and where the traditional model of the organisation was turned upside down so that responsibility and decision making were delegated to frontline employees. The points of interaction between employees and customers/clients were the moment of truth in service relationships, and the beginning and end point of a successful service relationship.

All senior Complete Clean managers were paid to attend a seminar hosted by Carlzon during a visit to Sydney in the mid-1990s; several spoke to me of the impact that Carlzon and his ideas had had upon their thinking. A senior operational manager from Complete Clean explained the importance of Carlzon’s ideas:

[Interviewer] When I first met you, you mentioned Jan Carlson’s *Moments of Truth*. Where does that fit into the scheme of things?

[Interviewee] It came out of the purchase [of Complete Clean by another firm] and we got a new Managing Director, [name removed] and he was hell bent on change and culture change and he wanted to take it from an inward looking culture to an outward looking culture. I think he was right at the time. …

When he arrived … he perceived a very inwardly focused organisation, where internal politics and machinations overrode any other consideration. And customers were treated second best. So he set out to try and achieve a culture change, which became a customer driven culture and orientation. In many ways I think we succeeded, so those moments of truth in the way customers are dealt with at the front line was part of that culture change process and he
must have read the book and heard of the SAS experience and decided that it was one that he felt was a model that we could learn from. He gave us all a copy of the book. We studied it and we talked about it and the Moments of Truth certainly rang a bell with me in thinking that you know, we had – in those days – we had over 10,000 cleaners; sometimes up to 11 or 12 thousand cleaners. To think we had that many cleaners out there who every day were confronting and reacting with our customers whilst we back in Head Office, where there is only a few dozen of us, we hardly ever saw a customer and we came to realise through Jan Carlson’s theories that of course it was taking the organisational pyramid, turning it upside down and having the cleaners on the top of the organisation chart and the Managing Director down at the bottom and it was those thousands of cleaners who were impacting and reacting with the customers. That struck a chord with us all. That was part of our culture change process. The cleaners were out there keeping the customers happy. So we had to empower the cleaners and try and make them better at doing that.

[Interviewer] Where do you actually apply this ‘moments of truth’ philosophy into the company?

[Interviewee] Try and empower the cleaning staff to make a difference at the front line. We tried to get to a culture where at each work site there was like a little committee of the local staff on the work site who were to meet regularly and talk about their local issues and try and solve their local problems. We also produced that Training Manual, which was customer satisfaction – you see, we took customer satisfaction as our catch phrase, so customer satisfaction is on our mission statement, it was the training pack, so the whole thing was driven at achieving customer satisfaction by empowering the cleaners and by doing that, using that training pack and also then by trying to give them some autonomy or some decision making process on a local level by having them meet. There could be, say, 10 cleaners in the building. At the start of the shift they all tend to walk in, say hullo to each other, grab their tools, and go. Even though there are 10 people on the site, traditionally they work separately. So typically a cleaner could come to work, say hullo to his mates, go and work for 3 or 4 hours, come back to the office where you sign
on, say goodbye to his mates and go home. Nothing particularly uplifting about that experience. The idea of getting the cleaners together on the site, so that when the 10 cleaners arrived to start their shift you actually took 5 or 10 minutes just to have them in the room together and you talk to them about customer satisfaction values before they started their shift. Try to involve them in that thinking, that process. That was at the root of it all. I think we succeeded. (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 11 April 2002)

The 10 minute meetings at the start of cleaning shifts have lived on and are known within Complete Clean as ‘tool box’ meetings. While I witnessed no meetings being held during the course of my fieldwork, almost all front-line managers claimed to use them on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Interviews with CSMs revealed that the meetings were the only practical way to communicate with cleaners dispersed across fragmented and sometimes geographically isolated worksites. During these short meetings, issues of occupational health and safety would be discussed, equipment demonstrated, the need for quality work emphasised, and sometimes the concerns and grievances of cleaners would be aired. It was obvious that the pressure of time and the fact that meetings took up time that would be otherwise devoted to the actual task of cleaning, meant that meetings were often short and of marginal value.

Unlike its competitors, Complete Clean Australia sought, wherever possible, to ‘engage’ its employees and to seek feedback from them. This was mainly undertaken through what Complete Clean Australia termed a ‘staff climate survey’, which was undertaken in 1994, 1997 and again in 2002. The confidential survey was sent to all cleaners and managers and probed their responses to questions on the service provided by Complete Clean Australia to its clients, cleaners and managers, perceptions about their jobs and their views on Complete Clean Australia as a whole. This survey was a major undertaking and involved considerable time and expense.

The responses of senior managers reveal the complexity of patterns of culture within Complete Clean. While there is evidence of a corporate culture centred around customer sovereignty and service, the wider organisational culture within Complete Clean was more diffuse and left to operational managers to interpret as best they could
(Smircich, 1983). According to Martin (2002) and Meyerson and Martin (1987) this could be explained in terms of Complete Clean comprising a ‘differentiated’ and ‘fragmented’ culture resulting in inconsistencies and ambiguity (see Chapter 4).

8.3 Induction, Training and Development Within Complete Clean

There is some ambivalence around the need for training in the cleaning industry. A guide book for Australian entrepreneurs considering entering the cleaning industry noted:

The most successful cleaning services we spoke to said they employed inexperienced cleaners for ... two reasons. Firstly, an experienced cleaner commands a higher salary per hour compared to an inexperienced cleaner. Secondly, an experienced cleaner has developed particular ways of cleaning ... If you have an experienced cleaner, you will have to retrain him/her to eliminate bad or wasteful cleaning habits. Most cleaning services we spoke to said it was easier to start from scratch. (Entrepreneur Business Centre, 1998: 1160-1)

Formal training and development for cleaners within Complete Clean reflected this ambivalence, although in recent years training has begun to be taken more seriously as the industry has increasingly focused on compliance issues related to occupational health and safety and risk management. Risk management has been of major concern to large cleaning firms, who have faced costly litigation from clients and members of the public. Interviews with senior managers from Complete Clean reveal that risk management is one of the main challenges facing the industry. It had become such an issue that Complete Clean has withdrawn from almost all cleaning in retail centres.

While the Australian cleaning industry is characterised by a high rate of labour turnover, this does not necessarily mean that all new cleaners joining a firm have no experience, or require training. The acquisition and loss of contracts means that experienced cleaners are recycled from cleaning firm to cleaning firm. Whatever prior experience cleaners might have had, Complete Clean required all cleaners to be
formally inducted into their site of work. A senior manager explained the induction process:

There's the purely local induction, which is site issues and safety: knowing your way around the site; knowing what's expected of you. They are operational issues. If you're starting work as a cleaner in a building you've never been in before you certainly need to know fire exits, safety procedures and what is expected of you. There's a different induction too in terms of the company [IPSAS and Complete Clean] ... part of the team. Trying to put across some of the positives about working for a large company - that's on a different plane. That is done in a de-centralised way. We don't have - in Sydney anyway - any centralised induction process. In some cases we do in [Complete Clean] where they get you to come into the office. [IPSAS] do that, they have a central induction model where you actually go to the office and get inducted in the office before you go to the site. We've never done that here. Sydney is too big. Starting as a cleaner in Campbelltown, why would you get someone to go from there all the way into here to get inducted for an hour and go all the way back? They wouldn't do it. It wouldn't be practical. There are financial considerations too because if you're to do it that way we'd have to pay for someone down this end to actually do the induction.\footnote{One large cleaning firm in Sydney used centralized induction.}

There are two ways of looking at it. I'm not entirely happy with the status quo because it could easily be argued that in making the inductions entirely de-centralised you lack control over those inductions. I can't comment on the quality of the induction that takes place out on the site tonight. That comes back to the problem we were talking about earlier where I am not a Human Resources Manager for the 7000 cleaners. So how well they're inducted is beyond my control. I can only try and influence the couple of hundred or so salaried managers, supervisors, administrative people. So my sphere of influence is those 200 salaried people who I'm trying to persuade to do things better. (Interview with Doug, 17 April 2002)

New cleaners with little or no experience and who work 15 hours per week or more, or cleaners wanting to obtain recognition for their skills, were encouraged to undertake
formal training through the Certificate II and III in Asset Maintenance (cleaning Operation) (Ryan, 2001b). The lead for the development of a national qualification for cleaning was taken by Complete Clean in 1998 and Complete Clean Australia now has hundreds of cleaners undertaking the traineeship. Training is closely related to occupational health and safety issues and the impetus for a national qualification in cleaning came from the managing director of Complete Clean Australia, who recalled a potentially fatal accident that he experienced when working as a cleaner (Interview with managing director [name and date removed] 2002). On-the-job training takes place when supervisors or CSMs identify areas of skill deficiency in individual cleaners. This training is carried out on an ad hoc basis and aimed atremedying apparent deficiencies on the spot, but the need for a quality job completed within tight time frames means that front-line managers tend to monitor the skills of their cleaners as part of quality management on their sites.

8.4 Occupational Health and Safety

While education and training has been a challenge, one of the biggest challenges facing cleaning firms has been managing occupational health and safety. The industry, along with unions and government agencies, has spent much time and money investigating healthy and safety in cleaning (Alcorso, 2003; Gaudry [LHMU], n.d.; Aickin, 1996). The fragmented structure of work and the spatial diversity of worksites present an almost insurmountable challenge for cleaning firms. A senior manager explained:

"The real central problem is the diversity of sites and the spread of staff. You cannot manage every site hands on. As an industry there are a lot of Worker's Compensation claims and predominantly soft tissue injuries and strains. This has increased premiums dramatically, again over the last 10 to 15 years. How do you control it? We've got all the policies, sure, we've got policies, procedures, strategies, documents, manuals; you name it. We've got a whole department over here. Our risk management department is there. The risk management team, the Worker's Compensation team, Occupational Health & Safety team are all there. In my mind it's extremely difficult because you can't exert influence because of that spread of your staff. The real difficulty is that"
none of our staff are really supervised strictly. So the average cleaner comes to work and works on their own, even in a high rise building, so you might have two dozen cleaners in a high rise building but they tend to be on their own most of the time. So what’s commonplace is that when someone has an injury or an alleged injury there’s no witnesses. So sometimes there’s always a suspicion whether the injury was genuine or whether it was exaggerated.

We’ve put a lot of effort into it over the years. We’ve improved our policies and procedures. We’ve improved every damn thing we could lay our hands on but the missing link here is that we really can’t improve communication at that site level. It comes back to my red socks theory. How do I get everyone out there to wear red socks? I can’t go and talk to them all or write a memo to them all, it’s no good putting out another policy because they don’t get to see it. So we keep coming back to that fundamental problem with the cleaning industry is how do I get any message out there on any issue whether it be safety or red socks.

I can’t see any great changes coming about in the way that it is just so difficult to communicate through our middle management and the Regional Managers, the Customer Service Managers, the supervisors, to try and get the message down to the sites. We’ve got safe working policies and procedures but those are typically produced on paper but they don’t get handed out to all the sites. (Interview with Doug, 17 April 2002)

The challenges of providing a healthy and safe workplace is most of the most difficult facing the cleaning industry. One claim for compensation by a client or a member of the public or a serious workplace accident could erode all profits on a contract for years to come. It is because of this that frontline managers would sometimes place pressure upon cleaners not to report accidents. I explore this and cleaners’ responses in the next chapter.
8.5 Recruitment, Selection and Retention

Formal procedures regarding recruitment tend to be directed towards the recruitment of managers, while cleaners are recruited by informal processes that fall outside the formal control of Complete Clean. While polices and job descriptions are supposed to be used in the recruitment of operational managers, the reality is that senior managers draw heavily upon their own experience and instincts. Some were not above direct age discrimination. A senior operational manager explained,

[We] currently have an inherited – probably an ageing – operations team. So what we've been trying to do for the last 12 or 18 months is where we're employing new Customer Service Managers, we're avoiding hiring the people who have been through 9, 10 or 12 companies. We figure we can teach anyone to clean. We can get a potential manager and teach him how to control cleaning. So we're saying to ourselves we don't need a guy who has been here for 20 years in the game, got all the bad habits and all the rest of it. Let's get some fresh blood. So what we're trying to do now is look for young intelligent guys. They have to be young. A guy over 35 or 40 years is not going to handle the grind. His lifestyle is established. His Mrs is not going to put up with the hours these people work. So we are looking for young guys that ... are very well educated...  

Another guy, ... an engineer [who] worked for State Rail, is looking for a change, I've hired him. He doesn't know anything about cleaning, he's been indoctrinated into the business. He's showing a lot of promise. We're looking at people who are essentially first of all are prepared to work the hours involved and that is the difficulty. We look for intelligence, we look for honesty. All of those things that are so subjective that how do you know whether you've got what you want anyway. You just don't know. But basically those who are prepared to work and are looking for a future in the industry. (Interview with Darko, 5 April 2002)

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4 Within the operational management of Complete Clean only one manager had a degree qualification. One of the stars among the senior management team, he left under cloud when it was found that he had been working his own business on the side.
Generally speaking, operational managers were selected on the basis of their willingness undertake long hours and demonstrate hands-on, problem-solving ability focused towards meeting the needs of the firm: values seen as traditional for managers in cleaning, as was the need for presentation and the ability to speak some English (even if it was broken). University graduates were generally avoided because of their inflated expectations (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 11 April 2002).

Supervisors tended to be recruited internally and this was argued by one manager as evidence of an internal labour market and cited the example of a one in seven chance of being promoted to leading hand or higher (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 17 April, 2002). While there are specific policies and procedures regarding the selection of supervisors, operational and frontline managers tended to look for experience. The multiplicity of different sites and different types of cleaning within Sydney makes generalisations difficult. In some cases, managers spoke less of the value of experience and more in terms of a potential supervisor having ‘the spirit to dominate the team’ (Interview with Goran, operational manager, 13 June 2002).

The recruitment of cleaners themselves was more informal and left to supervisors and frontline managers. Formal policies regarding the recruitment of cleaners tended to be abandoned as managers faced endless problems in finding and retaining sufficient numbers of cleaners. One area that was closely monitored was that of ensuring operational managers knew the background and status of their cleaning staff. In the past managers paid little attention to whether or not their cleaners were entitled to work in Australia. Crackdowns by the Department of Immigration and Multi-cultural and Indigenous Affairs and the forcible removal of cleaners from an inner-city work site meant that senior managers spent much time ensuring that operational managers understood the need to know the work status of their cleaners. During my time with Complete Clean I attended management meetings where presentations were made highlighting and reinforcing the firm’s wish that only cleaners of legal status be employed by Complete Clean.

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5 This figure was based on 7000 cleaners, 200 managers and 500 supervisors plus leading hands.
Chapter 2 examined the turnover rates for selected NSW cleaning firms and Chapter 6 explained that Complete Clean had an annual turnover rate of around 45 percent of its cleaning workforce and around 30 percent of its frontline operational managers. While attrition and resignations partly accounted for the high turnover rate within Complete Clean and the wider industry, the termination of contracts and gaining of new ones meant that the number of employees was in a constant state of flux. Cleaning firms developed a variety of informal practices to cope with the addition and loss of staff. As explained below, cleaning firms would do all they could to retain competent cleaners:

[Interviewer] What happens to cleaners on a site when a contract is lost?

[Interviewee] They are normally terminated. You tend to try and keep the good ones. If you had a really good cleaner or supervisor you’d try and transfer them to another site. We do a lot of contracts and we have vacancies coming up all over the place. But if suddenly you’re going to lose a large contract you’ve got a dozen people there, you can’t just give them jobs somewhere else, it is too difficult. In the olden days they would say if those dozen cleaners were really good what you should do is go out and sack a dozen poor cleaners that you had elsewhere and put the good ones where you had the poor ones and to some extent that was done. Of course in the modern world you can’t just go to a cleaner and sack him, you’ve got to have due cause and process. So now you might have these good cleaners there who are better than others but you’ve got no valid reason to sack the others, you have to sack the good ones. You try and hang on to a few that you think are really good and try and squeeze them into somewhere else. But usually you have to let them go. (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 17 April 2002)

Staffing policies and practices within Complete Clean have been directed toward management, with front-line operational managers being left to interpret and implement these policies on their sites. The devolution of the implementation of human resource strategies to CSMs enables cleaning firms to overcome some of the tensions associated with organising work across fragmented worksites. Human resource strategy, policy and practice within Complete Clean tended to be oriented towards ‘customer service’ and the minimisation of risk.
8.6 Motivation, Performance and Quality.

Motivation, performance and quality are closely related and operate as means of management control in spatially dispersed and fragmented service industries like cleaning. One of the constant challenges facing the cleaning industry is the motivation of cleaners and their immediate managers. While there was the possibility of promotion within Complete Clean from a cleaner to a leading hand to supervisor, and then to customer service manager or higher, most cleaners had little interest in promotion. The daily reality for most cleaners was that they worked intensely long hours doing a job that could not possibility be done to the required standard in the 3-4 hours allocated to them. For many cleaning companies, employee motivation is an on-going issue. A number of senior managers fondly recalled their time under the previous ownership of Complete Clean when the company was turned from the vestiges of a family-owned company into a modern professional organisation and resources were devoted to training and development, and motivation of employees. Under ISPA this had taken second place, although Complete Clean had developed and was trialling a reward program called 'Clean Rewards' [not real name]:

It’s trying to encourage cleaners to do a better job and [be] better employees by giving them a tangible incentive, so we’ve lit upon this idea, it’s on trial at the moment. The [Clean Rewards] is just a piece of paper that converts to vouchers. There’s no cash involved, we’re avoiding the use of cash, which is always dangerous. So it’s payment in kind. If you’re a good cleaner you can be given some [Clean Rewards] you can save them up and exchange those for vouchers. So you can get cinema or McDonald’s tickets or record store tickets, that sort of thing in exchange for your [Clean Rewards]. So they’re simply a currency exchanging your good performance for some sort of reward. It’s trying to give the front line managers the opportunity to reward their staff for good performance. It’s nothing new. We haven’t had anything like this in recent years, not for a long time. It will be interesting to see how well it really works. The problem area is always the degree to which the Customer Service Managers and the site managers ... the degree to which
they actually run with it. Whether they think it's worthwhile, it's useful, they'll do it. If they ignore it, if they don't think much of it and they don't use it, then it falls on its face. (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 17 April 2002)

The Clean Rewards program was designed to orientate employees to the needs of customers and to motivate them to normalise the values of Complete Clean. For example, the completion of a training course, consistent grooming and personal hygiene, demonstrating initiative and flexibility and responsibility for a work area, along with good quality work, could attract a Clean Reward voucher. The rewards were based on a graduated points system with more points being attached to personal grooming, care of equipment and the demonstration of initiative and flexibility than to work quality or attending training ('Clean Rewards' Internal Document, Complete Clean).

As demonstrated in the next chapter, frontline managers were ambivalent about the value of the clean rewards system, and many devised their own program of rewards that included the direct use of cash, again illustrating the informalisation of management practices. Formal performance management is the preserve of salaried management down to the CSM level.

Operational managers (including CSMs and regional and general managers), on the other hand, were subject to an annual performance review based on their management of budgets, sales, labour control and workers compensation, debtors and, most importantly, returning a profit. Performance on each of these criteria was monitored, measured and rewarded by predetermined performance targets and indicators. Most managers were acutely aware that they were only as good as their last monthly profit and loss statements. Like the cleaners, performance monitoring involved considerable input from clients and customers. Client survey results were important in performance management, and managers were expected to average 7.5 out of 10 on the surveys and provide a return of 65-70 percent. These surveys were administered twice yearly and were hand delivered. Managers who met the criteria could expect an annual bonus of up to 20 percent, although in practice many managers failed to reach this and there was
widespread dissatisfaction with the performance and bonus system within Complete Clean. Dissatisfaction was expressed with the level of money allocated to the bonus and that much of the work of managers was subject to influence by uncontrollable factors. This was reflected in the staff climate survey, which demonstrated a negative 12 percent change in performance rewards and management between 1997 and 2002 (Complete Clean Australia 'Staff Newsletter', December 2002). With the main criteria focused on the bottom line, managers were forced to manipulate clients and their cleaners, contributing to the precarious nature of employment within the cleaning industry.

The management of performance was left to frontline managers and the client/customers with no direct involvement from Complete Clean. For cleaners, performance management is ignored or, if adopted, is decentralised and informal. As explained by one senior manager, it is 'the site manager, site boss [who] determine which of the cleaners are good and which is not and manage them accordingly' (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 17 April 2002). This suggests that Complete Clean took a default approach of informal bureaucratic control. While it was often left to frontline management to determine the performance of cleaners, management discourse plays an importance role in performance and behaviour at work through the operation of bureaucratic control in the form of written policies and texts 'that articulate participation in terms of formal role expectations' (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996: 65). Each cleaner is supposed to be given an induction handbook which outlines expected behaviours including customer orientation and satisfaction, quality, team work, what cleaners must and must not do, health and safety, and the like. Cleaners and their supervisors were supposed to sign a form indicating that they had received the book and that they understood its contents (Complete Clean Induction Handbook, 2001). The induction book was the crucial link between cleaners and the organisation, and by prescribing standardisation of cleaners' activities, provided bureaucratic discipline (Homer-Nadesan, 1996) – an important means of overcoming some of the difficulties faced in trying to organise fragmented and dispersed workers. Homer-Nadesan's study of university cleaners (she called them 'service workers') found that

The formal organisational literature provided to incoming service workers can be analysed by distinguishing between (1) how the role is constituted in
relation to the [client/customer] through verbal codes and (2) how the role is constituted in terms of prescribed practices, that is, the explicit and (codified) set of practices service workers are expected to enact. (1996: 63)

This was evident in the handbook produced by Complete Clean.

Within Complete Clean, quality and performance were closely linked. One of the features of the Australian cleaning industry is the continual trade off between cost and quality. In many cases, contracts were won on the basis of being able to demonstrate the lowest price while maintaining a quality standard of cleaning. Within the wider industry, the term 'quality' had assumed an almost mythical aura, and Complete Clean was not immune from this. All interviews and conversations with managers and cleaners eventually came around to the issue of quality. In an industry characterised by fragmentation of worksites and the dispersal of workers, 'quality' and quality inspections provided one of the few direct means of control by Complete Clean and its senior managers of the organisation of work and the activities and attitudes of operational managers and cleaners.

We do regular QIRs [Quality Inspection Reports] on most of the jobs over about [$50,000]. Below that they're pretty small. So we do QIRs. The Customer Service Manager's outside of formal QIR's role is in fact to be in the buildings and wandering around and checking what's happening. You don't have to check the entire building to know fairly accurately what level your service delivery is at. You go into a high rise building, for arguments sake, at the end of the shift and you find that the ladies' toilet is pretty ordinary. So it's not hard to pick these things up. The common areas are easy to check and that's all done physically. The QIRs are done independently, the Customer Service Manager doing it on his own perhaps with his Regional Manager or in company with the client. Interestingly, [with] the quality assessment, from our point of view, the prime aim is only that it passed, not that it be there. We can walk through and I know that we do it, walk through with the client and the client says, 'Oh shit, yes this is good'— and we're looking around. I've been on these inspections with the Regional Manager — holy fuck [LAUGHTER] when was the last time we cleaned this joint! And
the client says, 'Oh I'm very happy'. So we're all delighted. So no one is
going to say to the client that was, yeah, shit – you know – so it's all about
short term appeasement and just stay in there for the next period … (Interview
with Darko, senior operational manager, 5 April 2002)

Quality and control of staff was achieved through a dual process of formal inspections
on large contracts and by informal inspections by CSMs every time they visited a site.
Quality was also monitored on a daily basis by supervisors and by clients.

Within Complete Clean, strategies relating to the management of performance and
quality were directed at management and salaried employees. Formal human resource
policies and procedures aimed to secure the cooperation of management staff through
formal bureaucratic control. On the other hand, strategies relating to the management of
performance and quality of cleaners were more informal and left to individual CSMs to
develop and implement their own practices. Formal practices relating to the motivation
of cleaners were adopted by Complete Clean, but as explained, these tended to be
viewed with ambivalence by CSMs.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explained management intent within Complete Clean and has
demonstrated that management strategy, policy and practice are geared towards
providing customer service and controlling work across fragmented and dispersed
worksites. It also explained how practices and policies surrounding motivation,
performance and quality were intertwined and oriented towards management control of
behaviour, attitude and work. The corporate strategy of Complete Clean has reflected a
cultural change whereby customer service and 'moments of truth' become the basis of
human resource management policies and strategies. This shift in focus has been
directed towards management, and operational managers have been expected to
implement these across the operations and sites under their control. Other human
resource strategies have been adopted with the aim of improving communication and
minimising risk to the employer. Policies and practices aimed at the management of
motivation, performance and quality lend control over operational managers and
cleaners to senior management. However, as explained, these policies and practices were not always implemented by operational managers.

As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, frontline operational managers face the challenge of translating HRM policies on service quality in the numerous fragmented worksites. This was achieved rarely through training or formal announcement, but by use of recruitment and the selection of employees who came with these skills instilled in them. As shall be seen, in many cases this could be hit and miss. While this chapter examined what senior managers intend to happen, the next chapter examines what frontline managers/supervisors actually can enact or apply.
CHAPTER 9

BETWEEN ‘UGLY’ AND ‘BAD’: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN COMPLETE CLEAN

The previous chapter examined management strategy, with Complete Clean as an exemplar of ‘intended’ human resource and management practice within the NSW cleaning industry. This chapter takes issue with the new ‘service management school’ which posits that human resource practices including selective hiring, quality-training, support systems, empowerment, teamworking, measurement, reward and recognition, coupled with a service culture, are the key ingredients of contemporary service work (Korczynski, 2002: 21). Adoption of this bundle of human resource practices, it is argued by proponents of the New Service Management school, will deliver competitive success, customer oriented behaviours (read ‘service quality’) and employee satisfaction (Korczynski, 2002: 25). Although it is evident that many service providers in the cleaning industry, particularly the larger firms, have adopted training and a service culture, many of the practices identified as essential for a successful customer-service mindset have remained little more than rhetoric as the industry has followed a competitive business strategy of cost minimisation over that of quality. In many respects, human resource strategies reflect business strategy. This remains an interesting paradox, since cleaning firms – in public, at least – espouse quality over cost.

In this chapter I move beyond management intent to explore the reality of labour management and social relations within Complete Clean. I do this through an examination of the cleaning manager’s world through the practices and experiences of front-line operational managers. The chapter begins with an examination of Complete Clean’s pragmatic approach to managing human resources. I argue that pragmatism and informal practices result as cleaning firms attempt to resolve the tension between the formal organisation of work and the development of informal employment practices. Informal human resource practices are explored in Complete Clean’s approach to recruitment and selection. The tensions between competitive strategy and the ideals of
the New Service Management school are explored through an examination of the motivation, performance and reward of cleaners and front-line operational managers.

9.1 Practicing Pragmatism

Drawing inspiration from Legge, I argue that the implementation of HRM within the NSW cleaning industry is one that is 'largely ad hoc, opportunistic and fragmented' (1995: xiv); that is, 'enacted', where the reality is quite different than the espoused rhetoric. In some respects, much of the NSW (and wider Australian) cleaning industry fits Guest's (1995, 2001; Guest & Conway, 1999) 'black hole' characterisation of employment relations. 'Black hole' firms are those with neither a union presence nor formal human resource management, where informal practices may abound. Yet there is also variation in the adoption and uptake of sophisticated or even strategic human resource strategies among larger cleaning firms. For the most part, human resource strategies are increasingly focused upon legislative compliance, particularly in the area of occupational health and safety. Interviews and discussions with union and industry representatives tend to highlight the horror and bleak view of employment practices among smaller firms that fall outside the gaze of the union and the industry association, and who have few resources to devote to the employment of specialist human resource staff. In these firms, employment and human resources practices tend to be based upon convention, and follow wider industry culture whereby 'formal and informal practices co-exist within large corporations as a means of "getting the work done"' (Allen & Henry, 1996: 67).

Allen and Henry argue that fragmentation within the cleaning industry means that

the large contract firms are structured by what may be referred to as a tension between on one hand, the objective of orchestrating workers across a multitude of sites on a legal basis and, on the other, the need for work to be done at each site regardless of formal legal requirements laid down by the state. Where the former characteristic points to the formal organisation of

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1 See Alcorso (2002) for a brief discussion of human resource strategies and practices with two large NSW cleaning firms.
work and employment ... the latter points to the possibility of informal employment practices. ... The fact that these industries are comprised of fragments implies that this tension will be felt more sharply the larger the organisation. ... The leading operators in the [cleaning industry], however, attempt to resolve the tension between the formal/informal worlds of work in different ways through social relations in production. (Allen & Henry, 1996: 74)

Within Complete Clean and other cleaning firms, the social relations in production are tempered by a sense of pragmatism and a widespread sense of scepticism towards a strategic approach to the management of human resources. As I will demonstrate, this scepticism is primarily driven by a lack of financial resources.

Arguments over the pursuit of business strategies based on quality or cost tend to be rather simplistic, but in the case of the cleaning industry these are particularly relevant. As a highly competitive perishable producer service, cleaning is concerned with cost minimisation, and this has important implications for social relations in the industry (Daniels, 1985). Larger cleaning firms walk a continuous tightrope between cost and quality. Ultimately, employees – both managers and cleaners – bear the cost of maintaining this tension.

The pragmatic approach to the management of social relations is also expressed in the corporate culture of large cleaning firms. With Complete Clean Australia, for instance, one senior manager explained the key corporate values in terms of pragmatism and cost minimisation:

We have a mission statement. Corporate values are hard to pin down. There’s a strong streak of cynical pragmatism that runs through the organization. I think that’s – without being too pessimistic – I think that’s a result of the industry we work in. It’s highly competitive and highly cut-throat in the way the business is run. There is no [quarter] given in any area, be it sales or Human Resources or anywhere. So we’re in a very demanding market place: demanding from our clients, and a very competitive market place from the point of view of our competitors. Therefore, I think that the people who have
been in the industry, like me, for a long time have been battle hardened. It’s a battle weariness perhaps. It’s a cynicism born of battle fatigue perhaps. Not a lot very uplifting about being in the cleaning industry…. So corporate values, I’m afraid I have to be honest and say you’re not looking at the warm and fuzzy corporate values that many organizations espouse. I think our corporate values tend to be more the cold and prickly. Make a profit at any cost. Treat people OK until they get in the way and then we’ll have to get rid of them because we’ve lost the contract anyway. It leads to enormous cynicism. Our people become an expendable commodity. When we win a contract we hire staff. Everyone is happy to win a contract. You win a large contract you hire a couple of dozen new staff, fantastic, when you lose a large contract you have to fire a couple of dozen staff and this continual process of hiring and firing and winning and losing contracts is very wearying. So I suppose I’ve become somewhat cynical about corporate values.

Such views reinforce the precariousness of the employment in the cleaning industry. In terms of the internal culture, the same manager explained:

Very hard nosed. Very commercial. Very much win at all costs and avoid failure. Quick to damn, faint to praise. It’s the nature of the industry we’re in and unfortunately we don’t seem to have been able to rise above that. You’re generalising of course when you’re answering these questions. (Interview with Doug, senior operational manager, 11 April 2002)

A senior operational manager for NSW highlighted the pragmatic approach to business within Complete Clean and the lack of funding for human resource strategies:

I could get shitty, which I'm not going to do. [Complete Clean Australia’s] core value has always been – make money; hit the budget. There are no excuses for not meeting it. Your prime role in life is to make the money. We’ve had millions over the nearly 8 years that I’ve been here, and longer for a lot of the other guys, religiously been subjected to the Human Resources preachers and the seminars and all the rest of it. Getting guys involved in Quality Management programs and all the rest of it, but they’ve never budgeted for it. They’ve never funded these ideals. It’s become somewhat of a
standing joke. The guys all know that it’s all very well but at the end of the
day I can be the best corporate citizen that [Complete Clean Australia] has but
if I can't meet budget I'm out on my arse. So I’d say to you quite unashamedly
that the biggest core value that [Complete Clean Australia] has is meeting the
bottom line. (Interview with Darko, senior operational manager, 5 April 2002)

These tensions result in a human resource vacuum within Complete Clean and other
larger cleaning firms. When asked whether or not Complete Clean considered itself to
take a ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ approach to human resource management, one senior operational
manager responded:

Fairly hard. It tends to be rather pedantic and the approach will be – follow the
letter of the law. So if the letter of the law says we’re allowed to sack you,
we’ll sack you. If it says we have to pay you a redundancy payment we’ll pay
that to you. But if it says we don’t have to, we won’t. We can’t afford to. It’s a
very stern approach to Human Resources. (Interview with Doug, 11 April
2002)

However, the ‘hard/soft’ dichotomy has limited value when applied to the cleaning
industry, as it implies some notion of strategy or strategic intent in terms of integration
of human resources with business strategy (‘hard’) or a developmental view of
employees (‘soft’) (Legge, 1995: 66-7). Within the cleaning industry, the focus upon
managing employees is in terms of compliance with the award (which is a common
rule and establishes broad parameters only; it is questionable to what extent the award
is adhered to across the wider industry); and HRM, where and if it is adopted, tends to
be orientated towards compliance. In terms of Guest and Conway’s typology (see
Chapter 4), Complete Clean and other cleaning firms fall somewhere between ‘Ugly’
and ‘Bad’ in terms of the level of workers’ rights and the minimal/low adoption of
HRM techniques.

Informalisation and pressure to meet budgets and squeeze profits out of tight contracts
could lead to work intensification and the cheating of cleaners of their entitlements.
One of the difficulties of fragmentation and informalisation is that senior managers
often have no real idea of what is happening on particular worksites or else turn a blind
eye until complaints are raised. Although a particular cleaning firm could have a
reputation as a ‘good’ employer, employment practices across different sites come down to those implemented and condoned by individual CSMs and supervisors. Union officials point out that competitive pressures in the industry could mean that collective agreements (Awards) are often bypassed and managers are under pressure to ‘skim’, resulting in cleaners not being paid toilet allowances or non-payment for doing extra hours (Interview with LHMU official, 4 April 2003). During my fieldwork the majority of cleaners that I spoke to had at one stage been cheated out of entitlements and leave by their managers (typically by another employer), although most said that Complete Clean was a fair employer and tried to do the right thing.

9.2 Recruitment and Selection

According to some researchers, cleaning is ordered along the lines of patriarchy (read ‘gender’) and class; however, this ordering is ‘rent by antagonisms and contradictions’ (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996: 50). As explained in the previous chapter, local labour market pressures, and the need to ensure fast completion of work, can and often does override gender and other structural factors in the organisation of work. In terms of recruitment and selection, pragmatism and the need to complete work leads to the development of informal practices of work, and plays a role in the ordering of social relations.

Like most other large cleaning firms, Complete Clean faced a continual challenge in recruiting cleaners. In parts of the Sydney, particularly in the middle class areas, there were no local cleaners, and cleaners would have to be recruited from outer suburbs. For instance, I worked at site in North Ryde where no local cleaners were available and many of the cleaners commuted a considerable distance from Liverpool (Fieldnotes, 8 July 2003). Within Complete Clean this was compounded for parts of the operation. I attended a monthly meeting of management staff for the suburban Sydney operation where considerable time was spent (in some anguish!) discussing the shortage of cleaners. Managers spoke of the problems of transport and that many cleaners did not have a car (compounded by the fact that cleaning work tends to take place outside the normal hours of regular public transport), the high turnover among staff, the number of illegal employees (that is, not having required work permits) and having to rely increasingly on recruiting students. I noted that there were no answers to their perennial
problems; however, the regional manager did explain that managers could obtain a cash bonus for hiring trainees to undertake a TAFE Certificate II in cleaning operations and that perhaps this could be used as an inducement for cleaners (Fieldnotes 18 April 2004). The central and city operation suffered to a lesser extent from this problem as it was able to draw upon the large immigrant population in the city centre (notably Bangladeshi people residing in Redfern). Ethnic clustering (Waldinger & Der-Martirosian, 2001) meant that labour markets and places of employment did not readily match. For instance, in the suburbs where a number of cleaners were located (for example, Liverpool and other Southern suburbs), there were more people wanting cleaning work than there were cleaning jobs, resulting in many cleaners commuting considerable distances to work.

Recruitment of cleaners within Complete Clean is informal and is devolved to CSFs and supervisors. Very rarely would Complete Clean advertise for cleaners, and most recruitment was done through word of mouth, although some managers would occasionally use an employment agency. In many cases, cleaners were recommended by relatives, a practice that is widely used around the world within commercial cleaning. Within Complete Clean the use of family members was not discouraged officially, although operational managers varied in their views about using family members. Some managers had had negative experiences in the past and were vehemently opposed to using family members, arguing that if you had a problem with one family member, you ended up having a problem with all the family. Other managers were more pragmatic, a fact tempered by having their own partners and children working in the industry. In any case, managers tended to split family members up across sites, although in some areas family members, particularly spouses, worked on a site together. Again, a pragmatic approach dominated, and it was recognised that the use of families could resolve some of the issues of transport and workers covering for each other when one or more were absent from work for illness or injury (Leonard, 1992).²

² However, some managers explained that losing one family member to illness often meant losing all the other members from the site as well, hence their strident opposition to using family members. I was struck by the open hostility and animation of some managers when discussing the use of families.
Within Complete Clean recruitment was a continual challenge, but not as much as staff selection. One senior operational manager explained:

our record at front line recruitment is not good. Our staff turnover is so high that one of the contributing factors there is that our staff selection is so poor. So even getting people [front line managers] to think about the attributes they're looking for in that hiring process, even that was a revelation to some of them. There is no single template for a great cleaner. But there’s no doubt at all that there are attributes that you can point to. Someone who really needs a job and really needs to work hard, cleaning is hard work. Someone who is totally reliable has very little time off, someone who is reasonably physically fit and someone who is of a good nature and is happy to smile at customers, you can put all that into a mould and say there’s your ideal cleaner. And then you try and encourage your front line managers to recognise those attributes as being worthwhile; and having recognised that, the next time I go out and hire someone, don’t just take anybody, but look for those attributes. (Interview with Doug, 11 April 2002)

Where possible, front-line managers employed cleaners that fitted with Complete Clean Australia’s idea of customer service and quality management systems. In some respects the recruitment of cleaners within Complete Clean conforms to the New Service Management school’s ideas on hiring workers in the ‘basis of their personality traits or attitudes’ rather than technical skills (Korczynski, 2002: 21). This was particularly noticeable among premium clients where cleaners would be interacting with the client’s workforce, or visible to members of the public. Interviews with front line managers reveal a level of ambivalence about skills and previous experience in cleaning. Some managers explained that they preferred experienced cleaners (if only to save time in training), and others explained that they preferred to train cleaners themselves. In most cases, front line managers highlighted the importance attached in selection decisions to personal presentation, good manners and how a potential cleaner answered clients and their managers. One manager claimed, ‘I can pick up from the hands, from the way they present to me, I can feel, say 80 percent how good or bad a
person he is to be a cleaner’ (Interview with Goran, operational manager, 13 June, 2002). In other cases, managers had to take what they could get and hope for the best.

Much of the rhetoric of the New Service Management school’s arguments regarding the selection of employees applies to women in the cleaning industry. It was obvious that within Complete Clean women were generally recruited and selected along the lines of gender for certain types of work (for example, dusting and detailing) and this was especially evident in premium contracts where personal presentation, personality and attitude were important in dealing with clients and the public. For example, women managers and supervisors were evident in premium contracts like private hospitals and retail centres. The women managers I interviewed were aware of their appointment as supervisor or CMS coming from their eye for fine detail and for their ability to interact and negotiate with clients. There was also the idea within Complete Clean that clients and building managers in prestigious retail centres preferred dealing with women.

Through experience, managers and supervisors learnt what made a good cleaner and what did not. After being struck by union complaints and unfair dismissal cases, front line managers within Complete Clean learnt to engage new cleaners on probationary periods or on a 2-3 day paid trial period before offering continuous employment. Recruitment was also ordered along the lines of gender and patriarchy.

Finding ‘good’ cleaners was a continual challenge faced by managers, as was staff retention. This situation was particularly difficult when recruiting and selecting cleaners to service premium contracts.

You go through a hand picking process. Giving them the utmost, which is probably the hardest factor in the whole equation in finding that good staff. I'm sure you've heard it from other people, but you don't go to a school to study to be a cleaner. You're not out there to try and be the best cleaner on Earth; it's not real motivating, like, Hey! I'm the best cleaner. So we've got a real dilemma, a real juggling act to try and attract some of these good quality people to come on board and then stay with us. (Interview with Branko, senior operational manager, 24 April 2002)
The dilemma in recruiting, selecting and retaining cleaners is ameliorated to some extent by the use of ethnically constructed labour markets. In Chapter 3 the international literature on cleaning noted that cleaning relied upon gendered and ethnically constructed labour markets. In many cases the background of the manager or the supervisor would set the tone for the whole site. The ability to manipulate relationships is one of the keys to securing work in fragmented industries like cleaning. An industry consultant explained that this situation is evident in NSW; and he outlined his preference for a particular ethnic group:

From my experience cleaning companies tend towards employing one particular race as far as possible so that if your company, my old company, we employed so many Thai people. We had 600 at one stage. And why? Because we had Thai speaking supervisors so the more people of one race the easier was the communication between the staff as well as from supervision down. One of the major companies was built on Greek people and so it goes on. (Interview with George, industry consultant and medium cleaning firm owner, 12 February 2003)

Other cleaning firms have also experimented with use of single-language and ethnic groups (see Alcorso, 2002). The use of single ethnic groups on sites enables cleaning firms to overcome some of the problems associated with fragmentation and the need to ensure that work is done to a satisfactory level when contract specifications are almost impossible to meet. A number of managers commented to me that having a single ethnic group on a site and supervised by a person from the same background meant for ‘good’ supervision. As one manager aptly put it: ‘no one kicks you like someone from your own race’.

Within Complete Clean managers would, where possible, target specific ethnic groups for employment. One senior operational manager explained that he would target particular ethnic newspapers when advertising for cleaners for large start-up contracts. He also expressed his preference for employing Indonesians:

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3 Name and date removed. Interestingly, this comment was repeated to me in various forms by a number of different people from cleaning firms and the union.
I think they are a race of people that, with[in] my personal experience, are fairly pleasant in their manner and again nothing too much is trouble. Like, ‘How far do you want me to jump?’, basically. I’ve got to the age of 40 and noticing the different races because it’s quite an important criteria for me and I just found that this particular – we don’t have that many of them and what we do are just like that. That’s their nature. (Interview with Branko, senior operational manager, 24 April 2002)

Within the wider industry such attitudes expressed management’s desire to seek a workforce with built-in compliance, and this enabled senior management’s challenge of coordinating work across a fragmented industry. Senior managers were acutely aware of the importance of social relationships in meeting contract obligations and maintaining the flow of work within and across different sites. One manager explained with respect to supervisors and managers employing staff from the same ethnic background, ‘It works as an advantage. They have this internal culture where they like to rely on themselves and don’t like to let each other down and it works well.’ (Interview with Aleksandar, senior operational manager, 5 April 2002)

There was considerable variation between managers and supervisors in terms of which ethnic groups they preferred to employ. While a number of supervisors liked to employ South Americans, and Complete Clean had many of these people in its employ, this group of people also encountered the most negative responses from managers. One operational manager explained that he did not like to employ South Americans and that he had to get rid of them (Interview [Name removed] 22 November 2002). Another operational manager explained:

I don’t prefer certain cleaners. I will prefer not to have certain backgrounds. Like Chileans. I prefer not to have Chileans because they become very friendly with you and they have a tendency to manipulate their people. Everything has to be working to their advantage. If it doesn’t work their way they will try to cheat. It’s a constant battle with the Chileans. In the case of [name of site removed] I will prefer not to have any Macedonians because they have a big tendency not to take Occupational Health & Safety regulations
very seriously. For example – ‘Nah that’s OK’. They work very dangerous.
(Interview with Manoli, operational manager, 12 November 2002)

On the other hand, Goran, an operational manager, expressed a preference for South Americans and people from the former state of Yugoslavia. Generally Australian-born Anglophones (here, I mean white, Anglo-Saxon Australians) were avoided and there few employed by Complete Clean as cleaners.

You’ve got to use your common sense. That’s why I use a lot of South American people or from Yugoslav [sic]. They have a sort of sense how to do the cleaning. So obviously training is one part but use common sense the other part. Some people they haven’t got that sort of sense, basically I just don’t employ them …. A lot of young Aussie people they haven’t got that sense because a lot times you say its not clean, and they’ll say its 200 percent cleaner than my house. What are you going to say? (Interview, 13 June 2002)

In cleaning, the ability to manipulate ethnic relationships is one of the keys to ensuring compliance on the workplace and could lead to exploitation. One of the difficulties facing CSM’s was absence from work due to illness, injury or annual leave. Because of the competitiveness of the industry, it was not uncommon for hours to be manipulated or the number of staff reduced on a site down to the bare minimum to do the job. When a cleaner was absent, this could cause chaos. In many cases, the work could not be shared out among the remaining cleaners and a manager would have to scramble to find additional workers at all hours of the day. Experienced managers learnt to manipulate social and ethnic relationships to their advantage. A number of front line operational managers (CSMs) I interviewed had joined the cleaning industry because few other options were available to them when they arrived in Australia, due mainly to lack of recognition of their qualifications and skills. They were able to use migrants’ eagerness to seek work to their advantage. One manager explained that he liked to use part-time cleaners and have them depend on him for more work in order to supplement their income. He explained that he liked his cleaners to rely upon him and that he, in turn, would rely upon them (Interview with Goran, operational manager, 13 June 2002). Managers with Complete Clean developed such relationships and established a pool of cleaners that could be called upon at short notice to cover shortages and absences. Such
relationships were an important motivational tool in the repertoire of managers and additional work could be handed out as a reward to favoured and trusted cleaners.

From my time spent on various cleaning sites around Sydney, it was evident that cleaners, supervisors and managers built up and maintained a network of reciprocal relationships. These were even more noticeable on sites where the supervisor/manager and cleaners were from the same ethnic background. However, such relationships could and did lead to tensions. Managers complained that cleaners would manipulate their social relationship and ethnic ties to their advantage, and supervisors and cleaners complained that managers would do the same to extract favours or to secure additional work without additional payment.

The employment of migrant workers has been claimed by some to one of the key reasons behind the high rates of productivity in the Australian cleaning industry. By drawing upon the economic vulnerability of migrants, the Australian industry has been able to secure a productive and relatively compliant workforce.

The people that we employ, the industry employs, is all the ethnic groups and so at times individuals that came to Australia doing cleaning tasks but they got a different education so you find that if we – it happens in every country – if the locals are the main source of labour provision it will be people with little ambition and drive and motivation … so you don’t get a very good workforce. When you mix it like we’re able to do it here in Australia it makes a big difference. So we have people from all different backgrounds now just doing cleaning. But for language barriers or the qualifications they’ve got to go through school again and they can’t afford to do that, they have a family they need to provide for so they can’t stop work to go full time into studying again. So the circumstances vary, but I think it is the labour force [that accounts for the high labour productivity in Australia]. (Interview with Javier, senior operational manager, 9 April 2002)
By drawing upon ethnically-segmented labour markets and making use of a migrant workforce, cleaning firms are able to overcome some of the difficulties of industry fragmentation.

9.3 Motivation, Performance and Reward

One of the peculiarities of the cleaning industry is the way in which employees come with built-in motivation to work. For a number of cleaners, particularly those from a NESB, cleaning was seen not so much as work of choice, but as a job that could be done with minimal training and limited English-speaking ability. Limited opportunities in the wider labour market and in obtaining work through ethnic and family connections meant that many cleaners were motivated through economic necessity or through the manipulation of social relations. However, economic necessity and social ties might be important in compelling cleaners to work, but did not always ensure good performance. As a consequence, managers were faced with a constant challenge in trying to motivate their cleaners. This situation was compounded by the fact that cleaning could often not be completed to the standard required by the client and cleaners were under constant pressures: of time, and to maintain a façade of quality; in the cleaning industry motivation became a challenge of encouraging cleaners to meet performance and quality standards.

On the frontline of cleaning work, managers developed a range of motivational techniques. Some managers used the Clean Rewards systems, but many found it was of little incentive and developed their own means of motivating staff. For instance, on one larger site with a majority of Spanish-speaking cleaners, the CSM organised a monthly barbecue, which was popular among the cleaners. In many respects, motivation was closely aligned to staff retention as well as performance. A senior manager explained,

If you’ve got a good cleaner – you have to look after the cleaner. The real good cleaners – talk nicely of course, you know, all the time. I always talk to them nicely. You tell the supervisor to talk to them nicely. To make them happy, don’t upset them. If they’re a good cleaner they’re not going to leave.
If you treat them well, they stay. (Interview with Stavros, operational manager, 19 November 2002)

Communication was viewed by managers as an important part of motivating cleaners:

By asking them what it is that they want. Do you need another job? Are you after more hours? ... So you just ask people are they happy with what they have. Sometimes they want Saturday, sometimes Sunday, sometimes Monday to Friday and you're all ears trying to treat them with the greatest respect at all times. There are moments that are hard when you give them a shoulder to cry on. It’s all of that. You're a priest, you're a husband, a brother – you know it’s basically all of that. I'd be talking a whole lot of shit talking to you, you have to be like this or be like that, it’s not about that at all. People will only respect you as much as you give back to them. You talk badly to a cleaner and one day you come here in the morning and he’s not in. (Interview with Michael, operational manager, 13 June, 2002)

In the cleaning industry, the award is a paid-rates award and over-award payments are hence very rare. Managers needed to be careful when they flouted the rules of Complete Clean and directly rewarded their cleaners. Several managers recounted taking loyal and performing cleaners out to lunch and claiming it as a business expense or recorded it as taking a customer out to lunch. In other cases, where additional cleaning was required such as ‘specials’ or one-off cleaning such as fire or flood damage, a manager might negotiate a higher rate with the client (and not inform Complete Clean) and pay the cleaner extra.

Motivating employees and managers in the NSW cleaning industry is closely aligned with performance and quality management. As noted earlier in the chapter, human resource management practices within Complete Clean Australia tended to follow what has been termed a ‘hard’ strategy. Within Complete Clean Australia and other cleaning

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4 Within Complete Clean there were a very small number of cleaners who were paid above the award rate for undertaking light maintenance duties such as changing lights and the like. This was only done when the client agreed to pay the difference.
companies, there was a fine line between ‘hard’ and ‘firm’ management on the one hand, and systematic bullying on the other. A senior operational manager within Complete Clean explained that social relations within cleaning were predicated upon loyalty, and that most CSMs did the job because of loyalty to Complete Clean or to their general or regional manager. Cleaners were often intensely loyal to managers and supervisors and to family members for getting a job in the first place: a process reinforced by bonds of ethnicity. The discourse pervading the cleaning industry and that used by managers in particular, is indicative of social relations within Complete Clean. The same senior operational manager explained that a CSM is ‘kicked by the client, kicked by the cleaners, kicked by managers, goes home and is kicked by his wife’ (Field Notes, 28 October 2002). Interviews with industry consultants, union officials and managers from medium and large cleaning firms also highlighted the ‘hard’ approach to management within the industry. To a large extent, the cleaning industry is dominated by ageing managers who have traditionally relied upon arbitrary management practices, legacy of an earlier period. An industry consultant explained the approach to supervision and management in cleaning:

They [the cleaners] used to be treated like dirt and they were yelled at and talked down to in front of others. That doesn’t happen now. With the advent of OH&S and Safety and Quality Assurance and those sorts of things, people started to realise that they couldn’t get away with lots of things they used to do. Do the job or else, or have sex with me or I’ll sack you, and all of those sorts of things. And they were rife. But no longer. They’ve joined the world. (Interview with George, industry consultant and owner of medium-sized cleaning firm, 12 February 2003)

Intense competition, unrealistic performance specification and unrealistic customer expectations contribute to arbitrary employment practices in the cleaning industry. The competitiveness of the industry means that, in terms of overarching performance standards, adherence to a minimum level of cleaning is the main preoccupation of most managers and supervisors. The monitoring of performance at the site level is predicated upon regular inspections with the client and management by walking around (BOMA [Building Owners and Managers Association] 1990). Within Complete Clean, CSMs and other operational managers underwent some training, whereas supervisors did not,
and the latter tended to be appointed on their ability to clean and not on their people management skills. On some sites, supervisors resorted to bullying and intimidation tactics to ensure task performance. I recorded in my field notes the experience of Pablo and myself. Pablo and I had spent the evening emptying rubbish bins and cleaning toilets in an office tower. While we were cleaning,

Pablo told me of the story of a cleaner on his first day. The supervisor told the new cleaner that the toilets were not cleaned properly. The cleaner had to go back and do them again. Other cleaners on the site told Pablo that this was what the supervisor did to all cleaners to sort of let them know who was boss. Not long after telling me this story, [Mario] (the supervisor) came up to Pablo and me and told us that the men’s toilets on level 10 were not clean. We had cleaned these earlier, and upon returning to level 10 found that the toilets were perfect and were as clean as when we had left them. (Field Notes, 19 July 2002).

It is difficult to determine with any certainty the extent of such practices within the cleaning industry and even within Complete Clean. As demonstrated in the next chapter, such practices may be widespread, and reflecting the informalisation of management and work organisation within the wider industry.

Not all managers resorted to bullying to motivate their employees and to maintain performance. In a twist upon Burawoy’s (1979) concept of ‘making out’ and turning the labour process into a game, some managers attempted to engage their cleaners and linked together motivation, training and performance. Many would also try to establish a social relationship with their cleaners, and a number of managers spoke of working beside their cleaners and lending a hand when needed. The following responses from three CSMs demonstrate the way in which operational managers would seek to link motivation and performance:

You tell them nice wording and encourage them, that they’re the team. It’s not a bad company they work for. It’s so hard really; it’s so hard. If they’ve got it in their mind that, ‘Oh, I’m only getting paid this much and why should I be worried about it’, it’s really hard. But treat them as a friend and believe to
[indistinct] because really if they go to a factory and work somewhere else and there’s a boss behind them all the time, ‘Hey you – you haven’t done this, you haven’t done that’. They don’t like that atmosphere. I’m talking about good cleaners. But there’s staff here, they need that too from time to time. They need, you know, a kick in the butt. But good cleaners, you’ve got to treat them as a friend, but there’s people that respect you when you ask them to do something. (Interview with Gabriel, operational manager, 7 March 2003)

I let them work by themselves and make their own decisions. I will check them, but if there is no problems they continue on their own. I share the responsibility with them and I teach them what I’m doing, they can do it also. I show them how to do it. I motivate them, saying, ‘You start a career, a future; it’s not just cleaning. There is future in the company’. So the guys who actually are interested and doesn’t want to take shortcuts, I support their potential. Several of my guys end up in the same position as me or even higher. (Interview with Manoli, operational manager, 12 November, 2002)

I just pick one cleaner and I help him, hands-on. Then if you do that basically you tell the cleaner don’t sort of give me any excuse because I tell him that job you can do in 8 hours, and what sort of standard he can do. If they say no I get hands-on and show them. I always make a joke, ‘Can you do it? No? For $50 I do it for you’. So if you do that the cleaners know you know if they cheat and they will pay you respect. (Interview with Goran, operational manager, 13 June, 2002)

For operational managers themselves, motivation was primarily a matter of economic performance and minimisation of workloads. Interviews with operational managers revealed that on average, they worked 12-14 hours per day and were on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Operational managers were also at the beck and call of customers, and a number started work at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. in the morning and did not finish until well into the evening. Opportunities for time spent with family were usually limited to hours around the middle of the day. Managers spoke of the high divorce rates in the industry and the toll on personal and family life. Ivan, an operational manager, summarised what many managers felt:
Actually the whole life is this job. Maybe 80 percent in the job. 20 percent for family and outside... My family are used to me now. They lost me day and night. Very seldom we sit together. Maybe happen in the weekend. But I don't have to be five o'clock at the meals, or breakfast. Maybe sometime happen but there is not time you know.

For the families it is really hard. It depends on what kind of person your partner will be. If she want you in the morning home or night time be early home, or weekend, forget about it. We finish the job, the office and Monday morning - the telephone, 24 hours seven days. Something happen. Many times it's happened to me if I go even to a funeral, it happens something urgent I say, I have to go. 'Oh no, please stay we have to go after together', you know. Even at Christmas, my main day in the [Church (denomination removed)]— gather some friends and relatives coming up, something wrong I have to go out to the job. (Interview 12 November 2002)

In many respects, managers were motivated to perform and to meet customer and client expectations, not so much in terms of financial reward or promotion but in order to lessen their own workloads. Managers who were able to encourage their cleaners to maintain standards and demonstrate reliability, and who could meet client expectations, faced fewer demands on their time and could avoid callouts late at night or early in the morning. Interestingly, though, a small number of managers, who seemed to acquiesce to all their clients' wishes, spoke of the freedom associated with their work, where the fragmentation and informalisation of the cleaning industry meant that they were their own bosses. These managers may have been enacting coping strategies and demonstrating their ability to accommodate adversity (Knights and Willmott, 1989) by distancing themselves from the customer through self-management and freedom to organise their own work (Ezzy, 1997).

Financial reward and performance bonuses were a source of dissatisfaction for operational managers at the CSM level. Long hours of work and the responsibility for up to 200 cleaners and millions of dollars worth of contracts was not reflected in the salary of CSMs, many of whom earned around $50,000 to $55,000 per annum. Because of the competitive nature of the cleaning industry and the tight margins on most
contracts, many managers received, at best, only minimal performance bonuses. Although, social relations in the cleaning industry meant that managers were at the beck and call of clients, many managers derived a sense of satisfaction from meeting client demands and expectations. In many respects the tension between achieving a profit on the contract and meeting client and cleaners expectations became a form of a game where ‘making out’ was a balancing of competing demands (Burawoy, 1979). I explore this in more detail in the next chapter.

Interviews with senior managers revealed a sense of satisfaction from delivering customer service and from their interaction with a wide range of different people. One senior manager explained work in the cleaning industry as an addiction:

It’s an industry that you seem to [be addicted to], I suppose – I am passionate about the job. You’ve got to be dedicated because obviously the long hours that it expects. The expectation by clients and the fact that it is a very competitive industry. When I say addicted I suppose I put the job probably before sometimes the family and the social environments that we experience at times. My wife often says if you paid as much attention to your family as you do your job [Laughter] – and I suppose I am at times guilty of that. It’s a job that requires long hours because most of our cleaners work either during the day or after hours, so therefore if you're investigating something or you're following up a problem in a building or whatever then you’ve got to work those long hours. The administrative type duties, the paper work, the reporting of all of that you’ve got to compile, a lot of that takes time and in order to get all of that up to date and variations to the contract etc, yeah it requires a lot – responding to emails, which is another issue within our industry, which has become more apparent recently. (Interview with Marko, senior operational manager, 9 August 2002)

In many respects, senior and operational managers normalised the development of a service culture and their relationship with clients and customers (Frenkel, et al, 1999; Korczynski, 2002).
9.4 Training

One of the tenets of the New Service Management school is the importance attached to quality training systems, and Complete Clean Australia has demonstrated leadership in establishing formal training for the cleaning industry. Prior to the development of industry-wide training, only 8 percent of cleaners attended any in-house training, while less than one percent attended external courses while working (Ryan, 2001b). Formal training within the cleaning industry had been encouraged by changes in technology and by government tenders for the supply of cleaning services requiring ‘evidence of proof of training’. In any case, formal industry training emphasised ‘behavioural’ competencies over technical skills, including the ability to work effectively in teams, time management, and customer service (see Ryan, 2001b).

Within Complete Clean, however, operational managers were ambivalent about formal training. Some managers who had achieved their Certificate II and III in Asset Maintenance were positive about formal training; some saw some value in cleaners learning the colour coding system for hygienic or safe cleanings, while others tended to be sceptical about the value of training. Those who were sceptical saw formal training as a way for Complete Clean to obtain workers’ compensation and payroll tax concessions. Other managers explained that they preferred to train the cleaners themselves, ‘because this way the cleaner know that way you want it’ (Interview with Theo, operational manager, 3 June 2002). Another operational manager explained, ‘cleaning is not something you can teach on a course and most of my cleaners’ English is not their first language, they’re just sitting there wasting their time’ (Interview with Goran, 13 June 2002).

Technical training, including the use of specialised machinery such as stripping, polishing and scrubbing machinery, tended to be undertaken by supervisors. Changes in the organisation of work had diluted skill within the cleaning industry, and whereas in the past it would take a year or two to become proficient in all aspects of cleaning (including the use of machinery) under zonal modes of cleaning, changes towards mono-tasking meant that a cleaner could learn on the job in two or three days. The development of formal training in the industry was supposed to expose cleaners to all the technical aspects of the industry, but in many cases, cleaners were unable to practise
their skills in the workplace or use specialised equipment (this was especially the case for office cleaners).

The response of CSRs to training demonstrates the limits of formal organisational control in fragmented work like cleaning. Although the culture of Complete Clean heavily promoted training, selection of cleaners for training programs was left to individual managers. The ambivalence of some managers to training demonstrates the difficulties cleaning firms face in trying to implement human resource policies and strategies on the mopfloor.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored employee and manager perceptions of the reality of management practices within Complete Clean as an exemplar of the wider NSW cleaning industry. It has also sought to highlight the differences between management intent and management practice. By drawing upon the work of economic geographers (Allen & Henry, 1996), I argue that larger cleaning firms are fragmented and rely increasingly upon informal employment practices in order to ensure that work is completed on the sites. The tension between formal organisation and the informalisation of social relations and employment practices is acutely evident within Complete Clean. As demonstrated, the success of implementation of Complete Clean policy and its limited range of human resource practices and the adherence to the award depends upon individual managers. It is the devolution of management from head office to individual managers across fragmented sites that leads to the development of informalisation and contributes to the precarious nature of social relations within commercial cleaning. Underpinning management practice within Complete Clean is a corporate culture and human resource management strategy based upon compliance and the maintenance of profitability and performance quality, with the aim of contract retention.

This chapter also takes issue with the New Service Management school and demonstrates that the diffusion of human resource management practices in industries like cleaning are limited and constrained by wider structural factors and the organisation of work. As demonstrated, the NSW cleaning industry makes use of ethnic
labour markets and is able to resolve issues of recruitment and selection by drawing upon family and wider social networks. Performance in the cleaning industry is linked to motivation, recruitment and selection and quality management. As demonstrated, performance reflected the 'hard' approach to managing human resources, but was tempered by operational managers who attempted to engage their cleaners through establishing social connections and by working alongside them and engaging in practices outside of the formal organisation. What the cleaners themselves thought of their managers is examined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 10

COPING ON THE MOPFLOOR: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IN CLEANING WORK

Previous chapters have examined the organisation of cleaning work at a macro level, and management intent and management practices within Complete Clean. This chapter sheds light on the lived reality of cleaning work through the experience of cleaners on the mopfloor. It attempts to incorporate the subjective experience of cleaners into the social relations of work and to give voice to how they endeavour to make sense of their world.

This chapter explores a number of related themes. The first section outlines the subjective experience of cleaners by examining how cleaners reject objectification by management, clients and others of them and their work. This is illuminated through an examination of why and how employees take up cleaning work. It also examines how cleaners construct a positive identity out of ‘dirty’ and stigmatised work and the strategies adopted to ascribe meaning to this work and to derive a positive identity from it. Further, it explores how cleaners engage in emotional labour as a strategy to elicit positive responses from clients, the client’s employees and members of the public. The second section of the chapter examines in the detail how cleaners and managers deceive the client into believing a quality service has been provided through impression management and manipulation of perceptions of quality and value. Adopting Burawoy’s analysis of ‘making out on the job’, it also examines a range of coping strategies enacted by cleaners in their daily work routines, and explains how cleaners collude with their managers in seeking to overcome low profitability and unrealistic service expectations.
10.1 Constructing and Enacting Subjectivity, Commitment and Identity in Cleaning Work

In recent years, the critical literature on service work has rejected the managerialist interpretation of service employees and their relationship with customers and clients as being essentially unproblematic and harmonious. The extant critical research on the social relations of service employment has highlighted the complexity of the employment relationship. Sturdy (2001: 8), for example, has critically argued that the responses of service employees to discourses on ‘customer service’ are ‘often varied and unpredictable or paradoxical, complicated in part by the three-way nature of the service relationship.’ Drawing upon a wide range of research, he explains that service employees

may collude with management in controlling the customer, albeit for different ends. Alternatively, they may resist the demands of emotional labour. . . . Other forms of employee resistance are more clearly directed at opposing its symbolisms as servility and/or preserving pre-existing service discourse or ethics such as those of occupations and local communities. (2001: 8)

There are a number of ways of conceiving and understanding the subjective experience of cleaners and the search for meaning in their work. These are compounded by a vast and unwieldy literature on ‘subjectivity’ and the related topic of ‘identity’, and their interpretations. Rather than become enmeshed in a myriad of definitions and debates my examination of the subjective factor follows Thompson and McHugh (2002: 220) ‘by focusing on the experience of people in work organisations through the common themes of subjectivity and identity’. One of the more common approaches to subjectivity is based on Henriques et al’s (1984: 2-3) twofold definition:

First is the ‘condition of being subject’: the ways in which an individual is acted upon, and made subject to the structural and interpersonal processes at work in organisational life. Second, the ‘condition of being a subject’, possessing individuality and self-awareness. Thus the term encompasses the fundamentally contradictory experience of work and the subjective development and regulation of people’s emotions, desires, fantasies, a sense of self. (Thompson & McHugh, 2002: 220)
Another way of conceiving subjectivity and identity is through the concept of ‘space of action’. Homer-Nadesan (1996: 59) draws upon Daudi (1986) to explain ‘space of action’ as an expression of ‘the individual’s striving for freedom for autonomy and personal interest. This striving implies a conscious decision to be the subject that decides, as opposed to an object that is decided upon’.

My research confirms that cleaners attempt on daily basis to maintain autonomy and engage in a range of behaviours to protect their dignity at work (Hodson, 2001). These strategies have been identified as follows by Hodson (2001: 17-18) in his examination of influential workplace ethnographies:

- Resistance to attacks, including active and passive resistance to overwork, and exploitation.
- Organisational citizenship. Even in the face of abuse and overwork, workers are engaged in trying to perform their jobs in a successful and efficient manner. Some of these activities enable production above and beyond organisational requirements.
- Independent meaning systems through the attainment of meaning outside the institutionally scripted flow of organisational activity.
- Social aspects of work life, especially co-worker relations.

All four of these dimensions are evident in the following analysis.

10.1.1 Careers in Cleaning? Motivation and Commitment

While this study did not specifically set out to measure and test workers’ motivation for undertaking cleaning work, it is revealing to examine the motivations and paths that led those cleaning workers whom I came into personal contact with during the course of my fieldwork. Meagher’s (2003: 73) study of paid domestic workers (including cleaners engaged in the cleaning of private homes, rather than commercial enterprises) identified five ‘career types’ in domestic services. This provides a useful heuristic device for examining the motivation of cleaners, based on their length of stay in

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domestic work and their potential for mobility out of the occupation. Meagher’s career types include: ‘stop-gap for students’ (short duration of participation); ‘stepping-stone’ (step, path or route to alternative work); ‘filler’ (choice of occupation based upon lack of alternative opportunities, ease of entry and the extent to which work could be arranged around other needs like family); ‘career’ (occupation and work motivated by choice and perception of opportunity for self advancement or as path to own business); ‘dead-end’ (occupation and work of last-resort, unable to move out of occupation and limited mobility) (Meagher, 2003: 73-91).

During the course of my participant-observer research, I worked alongside many different cleaners. Where possible, I asked the cleaners what motivated them to undertake cleaning work. Some of these reasons are explored in Chapters 3 and 9, where I explain the importance of community and networks based around family and ethnicity. In other cases, it was apparent that the ‘career types’ identified by Meagher (2003) were also evident in cleaning directed towards the commercial (as opposed to the domestic/personal) market. Of the range of careers identified by Meagher (2003), few of the cleaners that I worked with expressed interest in a ‘career’ in cleaning. One cleaner of many years experience recounted leaving Complete Clean to start his own cleaning firm, but having to return after the business failed (Field Notes, 17 June 2002). More pronounced was the number of students undertaking cleaning as a ‘stop-gap’ measure until they finished their studies and progressed to their ‘real’ careers. For these workers, cleaning was chosen as an interim job because of the limited employment opportunities for international students (thus cleaning being dually motivated by ‘filler’ needs), although one cleaner who was studying at university described the work as being ‘convenient’, with regular, consistent hours and ‘not as hard as being a waitress’ (Field Notes, 21 June 2002).

The majority of cleaners and operational managers whose reasons for taking up cleaning were recorded in my field notes or interviews indicated that cleaning was a ‘filler’ or ‘dead-end’ career, particularly in the case of women. A large number of women (and some men) reported that their lack of English skills, and non-recognition of their international skills and qualifications, meant that cleaning was an occupation based upon lack of choice. For those women with children, cleaning work was also a
matter of convenience. These reasons also meant that cleaning was a 'dead-end' career and a number of cleaners expressed resignation to their position and occupation. Cleaners themselves were aware of the self-fulfilling link between a lack of English skills and the 'dead-end' nature of their career. For example, Milena (an accountant by training) explained that she became a cleaner because of her lack of English skills, but the nature of cleaning work to which she was assigned, which was either individualised or undertaken with other South American cleaners with poor English literacy skills, meant she had no opportunity to practice speaking English and to develop her skills in order to seek a job as a tax adviser (Field Notes, 4 July 2002). Contemporary journalistic research by Wynhausen (2005) provides an Australian account supportive of Ehrenreich’s (2001) best-selling exposé of the American working poor and draws attention to the reality of dead end careers for cleaners and other manual service workers in the Australian economy.

For many cleaners, the motivations for undertaking cleaning were multifarious and wide-ranging. For some, especially men, the appeal of cleaning work lay in the nature of the work itself. Lefterfis (an office) explained that he liked to work by himself. However, he also engaged in cleaning for instrumental reasons, explaining that he did cleaning to earn extra money to pay for gardening equipment that he had placed on lay-by and that he planned to give up cleaning when he had paid this off, to establish his own gardening business (Field Notes, 19 July 2002). Jorge (on a factory site, employed full-time), the son of migrants with their own small cleaning business, explained that he was cleaning to support his son and to fund his university studies. For Jorge, cleaning was something that he tolerated, and he appreciated that unlike many other cleaners, he had time to do the job at this site, could work at his own pace, and despite officially starting at 6am, did not have to begin cleaning until later (Field Notes, 25 July 2002). Hamish (on a 'prestige site'; and one of the few 'Australian' cleaners I came across) claimed he liked the work as he was left to his own devices with 'no one to hassle [him] or distract [him]' (Field Notes, 9 July 2002).

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1 This may seem somewhat odd given that most part-time cleaning work takes place in hours outside those of child-care providers. Some women explained that their preference for evening cleaning work arose from the availability of spouse or relatives for child care duties at this time. Coyle (1985: 8) warns that cleaning is not 'convenient' for working mothers and the hours of work 'disrupt family relationships'.

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In other cases, career options were not so clear. John (another of the small number of ‘Australian’ cleaners I came across), an architect by training but working as a courier during the day and a cleaner at night, claimed to be doing cleaning for spending money and to help clear the $1 million he had accumulated in debts relating to his investments (Field Notes, 5 July 2002). In the case of part-time cleaners (the majority of those I worked with), multiple careers were evident, with a number of cleaners claiming that cleaning work was a secondary occupation pursued to enable them to save money and to get ahead economically with mortgages and other financial commitments. The testimonies of two other cleaners (both at the same site) demonstrated that trying to untangle the complexities of motivations for cleaning work is fraught with difficulty. One was cleaning in order to help her mother complete her cleaning tasks; the other was standing in for his mother for two months, in addition to doing his day job in construction, while she was recovering from a workplace accident (Field Notes, 21 June 2002).

Meagher’s (2003) study relates only to paid domestic workers and does not examine fully either the cleaners’ motivations for entering the industry, nor the role of management or the wider industry in structuring work to exploit the personal situation of workers. As examined in Chapter 9, front-line managers may seek to target the motivations of cleaners and use these to extract commitment and consent. In other cases encountered in my field research, it was evident that managers actively sought out those who were economically vulnerable and who would depend upon the manager for economic and employment security. In most cases cleaners were motivated not so much by career choices, but by the structuring and operation of the labour markets for immigrants and NESB employees.

Given that most cleaners are engaged in work of least-preferred choice, accompanied by short hours, precarious contracts and low pay, it might be expected that overall levels of job satisfaction among cleaners would be low. However, a British study of job satisfaction which explained satisfaction in terms of ‘satisfaction with a job as a contractually held post, not satisfaction with work in the more general qualitative sense’
(Rose, 2003: 507), found that caretakers and cleaners were more satisfied than other higher paid workers.\textsuperscript{2} As Rose (2003: 526) explains:

The occupational hierarchies of earning, prestige and skills ... disappear for the distribution of job satisfaction. Poorly paid child care workers with low negotiable skill have higher overall job satisfaction levels than sales managers enjoying fat bonuses; cleaners with low negotiable skill qualifications are likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction than the school teachers whose class rooms they tidy.

These findings were explained by Rose (2003) not in terms of quality of work, but in terms of the extrinsic and material facets of jobs (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005: 37). These findings tend to confirm the instrumental approach taken by many cleaners towards their work. Interestingly, the Complete Clean Australia staff survey revealed similar findings. Responses to the question: ‘I like the work I do in Complete Clean’, revealed that Sydney CBD cleaners averaged 4.11 out of 5 and Sydney Suburban cleaners averaged 4.37 (Complete Clean, ‘Staff Survey Report’, 2002: 34).

Where possible, and bearing in mind my status as an outsider (a situation sometimes compounded by CSM’s having a joke and introducing me as a new senior manager)\textsuperscript{3}, I asked the cleaners what they thought of Complete Clean. The responses to this question provide further insight into satisfaction with the job and the employer. Although I became the repository for much dissatisfaction and discontent (particularly among cleaners who also had supervisory duties), it was apparent that cleaners often defined Complete Clean in terms of what it was not. My field notes are replete with accounts of cleaners being under-remunerated by employers in terms of wages, allowances, hours and leave. Many of the cleaners I came into contact with during my field work with Complete Clean explained that they ‘liked’ or felt ‘satisfied’ with Complete Clean

\footnotetext{2}{Caretakers were the second most satisfied group of workers, with 71 percent above the sample median, while 63 percent of cleaners and domestics were above the sample median (Rose, 2003: 515).}

\footnotetext{3}{These misunderstandings were cleared up, and did not affect workers; perception of me and their responses to my questions.}
primarily because they felt that Complete Clean did not deliberately cheat them or rip them off (Presentation to Management, 9 April 2002).  

Although Rose (2003) argues that sociologists have given prominence to affective and intrinsic facets of work (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005: 37 for a fuller discussion) over the rational and extrinsic facets of work, there is evidence of the intrinsic dimensions of satisfaction amongst Complete Clean employees. As explained in earlier chapters, employment and other social relations in the cleaning industry are largely determined by relationships that extend across and tap into kinship and ethnic networks. There is also evidence of satisfaction being objectified by cleaners. Veronica, a cleaner of 27 years with Complete Clean, explained that a cleaner who liked a building would try and remain in situ when a contract changed hands. She also explained that cleaners would often follow a supervisor they liked to another site (Field Notes, 17 June 2002). Maria explained that Complete Clean ‘is as good as the manager’. She liked her supervisor and manager and therefore claimed to like Complete Clean and was satisfied with her job.

Edwards and Wajcman (2005: 37) take Rose’s (2003) argument one step further and ask whether it may be the case that childcare workers and cleaners ‘are genuinely committed and identify with their work even though the job lacks the pay and status that would ordinarily lead to such investments?’ The answer, they argue, ‘cannot simply be read off from the ‘external’ characteristics of jobs; it is mediated by ... diverse subjectivities (Edwards & Wajcman, 2005: 39). The implication is that workers’ experiences of cleaning are diverse, and understanding the lived experiences on the mopfloor needs to take into account the often contradictory nature of the work and employee responses to the work.

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4 Despite this generally positive picture of equity within Complete Clean, some cleaners I worked with reported that some allowances (particularly the payment of the allowance for cleaning toilets) were not being paid. In these cases the non-payment related to supervisor deceit and the reluctance of the cleaners to report to their CSM.
10.1.2 Stigmatisation and Identity

It has been argued that 'some service jobs carry a stigma' (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990: 216; Saunders, 1981) and cleaning is frequently taken as the archetypal example since it is stereotyped as low-status, dirty work. Hodson and Sullivan (1990: 217) contend that although cleaning has a number of positive aspects, these are typically counterbalanced by less desirable duties, such as handling rubbish and cleaning toilets. Here, cleaning becomes dirty work through the social construction of the notion of physical taint (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Cleaners are typically set apart from other workers. They dress differently to the client's employees and have a set uniform that distinguishes them as cleaners and simultaneously sets them apart as other (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996: 64). On most of the sites that I visited, cleaners had their own spaces, including storage rooms, change rooms and lockers and tea/lunch rooms, that were physically separated from those of the clients. On a number of sites the tea/lunch rooms were significantly separated from those of the client's employees by geographic space. In this section I argue that stigmatisation and its rejection are focal points for cleaners constructing a sense of identity,

For cleaners, stigmatisation meant disrespect and degradation (Hodson, 1995). According to Davis, 'to strip [cleaners] of their respectability by defining them as disrespectful strengthens the respectability of others (Davis, 1984: 234). In the course of my fieldwork I encountered a number of cleaners who reported a lack of respect shown to them by other service workers, particularly security guards. My field notes recorded a conversation between myself, a cleaner and a cleaning supervisor at a 'prestige' site occupied by professional studios and retail outlets with a large number of cleaners:

During the break I had a discussion with Harry and Diego over the position of cleaners. Harry didn't like the disrespect shown to cleaners by security guards (Harry was a licensed and trained security guard). Security claimed that Harry lost a radio and Harry was sure that he returned it. Security were hassling him

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5 The Complete Clean Australia uniform was not unattractive and the firm had invested a considerable sum of money in recent years in modernising their uniform. However, one researcher of women cleaners has argued that the dress of service workers means 'their very bodies were inscribed with differences of class' (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996: 67).
over it. Diego [a supervisor] explained that this was the way of the world and that cleaners were treated as second class. [He] gave an example of calling security to unlock a door [so that he could clean] and having to wait 45 minutes in the rain. When he went to see what the hold up was, the security guard was having a 45 minute coffee break. The guard got shitty at Diego and stormed off. Diego also told another story of having lost 2 hours [of work] because of having to wait for security. (Field Notes, 19 June, 2002.)

The nature of this site, with professional suites and a retail centre, meant that cleaners were constantly interacting with the public. As explained in more detail later, this could be both a source of pride and joy and a source of discontent. Cleaners at this site reported being shy when they first started working there and felt reluctance at having to sweep between people. Petra, a cleaner of 10 years experience, explained that when she was sweeping between tables, customers and the public could be rude and condescending. Children were particularly problematic during the holidays and would throw food to bait the cleaners. When confronted by Petra the children would taunt her by saying that it was her job to clean it up. She explained that she often had to call security to threaten the children (Field Notes, 25 June 2002). On the same site I came to terms with my own sense of stigmatisation and otherness. It was an evening and there was a sense of excitement among the cleaners as a red carpet event had been scheduled by the client. The site was crawling with security guards, television cameras and numerous Australian actors and celebrities. I was rather uncomfortable and embarrassed walking and working among all the glitterati wearing my cleaner’s uniform. I noticed that people seemed either not to notice us cleaners or seemed to look right through us, despite the fact that we were mingling among them and cleaning between their feet at tables. Some of the guests barely moved out of our way and I had the impression that we were supposed to show deference and move out of their way. Some threw cigarette butts in our direction (Field Notes, 19 June 2002). On another site (industrial), two cleaners explained that cleaners were looked down upon and ‘treated as second class’ (Field Notes, 25 July 2002). One of them later recounted that the clients’ employees were rude, explaining how employees with dirty boots would walk over the floor that he was mopping without apologising or asking if they should wait (Field Notes, 26 July 2002).
The lack of common respect for cleaners was particularly evident at a private hospital. Cleaners reported that nurses and hospital staff were supposed to clear away water jugs and glasses, urine bottles and the like, but tended to leave them for the cleaners (Field Notes, 16 July 2002). In an incident at the same hospital, nurses failing to follow proper procedure caused an accident and distress for a cleaner. Cannulas and other sharp objects, including syringes, were supposed to be disposed of in special secure containers as per standard operational practice in the hospital. In this case, a used cannula was thrown into the rubbish bin in the bathroom of a patient. In the course of their duties as the cleaners go around emptying the rubbish bins they typically empty 5-6 bins into a large plastic bag. As the bag gets heavier, it tends to be held closer to the body when lifting. As the cleaner attempted to lift a full bag containing the misplaced cannula, it stuck the cleaner in the thigh. The cleaner reported the incident to the nurses’ station where the nurses present seemed unconcerned and merely gave her a swab to clean up the blood. It was only after intervention of the cleaning supervisor that an incident report was filed and the cleaner received counselling from the hospital chief medical officer and was sent home. The supervisor was incensed at the laxness and indifference of the nursing staff. In another instance, cleaners were called to do a ‘terminal’ clean, that is, disinfecting a room from top to bottom, to remove infection or disease – a task involving much work and some risk. The cleaners were not informed of the nature of the infection and the danger until afterwards (Field Notes, 19 July 2002).

A number of studies have attempted to explain how workers overcome stigmatisation and stereotypes. Fine (1996) argues that employees (he cites the case of restaurant cooks) rely upon a range of occupational rhetorics to define their work and identity. According to Fine (1996: 13), ‘one’s rhetorical identification with work is variable and is used as a strategic resource to embrace or separate one’s self from a work domain’. Holmer-Nadesan (1996: 58) argues that individuals can position themselves with respect to the dominant discourse in three distinct ways. Individuals can choose to ‘identify’: this is to define themselves and relations with others in terms of dominant discourse. Alternatively, they may ‘counter-identify’ and reject formal organisational identity, or ‘dis-identify’, whereby ‘individuals eschew managerial definitions of organisation, identity and practice in favour of alternative designations’. Hodson (1995) contends that workers can deflect abuse and degradation by developing alternative
value systems that 'symbolically reject the definition of the situation provided by those in power.'

A more sophisticated analysis of dirty work and identity is presented by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999). The authors address the seemingly paradoxical situation whereby, despite it being ostensibly more likely that dirty workers would find it a challenge to construct a positive self-identity at work, numerous studies demonstrate that people performing dirty work tend to 'retain relatively high occupational self-esteem and pride' (page 413). This is achieved through occupational ideologies analogous to Fine's (1996) occupational rhetorics that 'provide a means for interpreting what the occupation does and why it matters' (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999: 421). The authors argue (1999: 421-23) that through the ideological techniques of 'reframing' (transforming the meaning attached to a stigmatised occupation through infusion of a positive value and thus neutralising the negative aspect of the stigma), 'recalibrating' (adjustment to the standards that are used to assess dirty work) and 'refocusing' (shifting the focus from the stigmatised features of the work to the non-stigmatised features of work), employees seek to transform the meaning of work by negating negative facets and accentuating or creating positive aspects. However, Ashforth and Kreiner also caution that this symbolic reworking of meaning may be for internal consumption only:

the lower the prestige of the occupation, the less likely that its ideology (or ideologies) will be known or accepted by outsiders. Thus one can generally view dirty work ideology as beliefs that dirty workers primarily tell each other and receptive outsiders (eg family and friends ... [having] their greatest impact on internal rather than external legitimacy. (1999: 421)

Amongst the cleaners I worked with and encountered at Complete Clean there were numerous examples of counter- and dis-identification whereby cleaners across a range of different worksites engaged in a variety of rhetorical and ideological techniques to reject the stereotypes and stigmas attributed to their work. Other studies of stigmatised workers, or workers engaged in dirty work, have argued that such workers tend to 'perceive of themselves to be good people doing dirty work' (Davis: 1984: 233). Such workers, suggest Davis (1984:235), share a 'belief that he [sic] is unjustifiably being defined as a dirty worker, that is being falsely accused'. Although Davis argues that one
of the outcomes of dirty work is social isolation, there is little evidence that cleaners I
encountered viewed themselves as socially isolated. Physical isolation tended to occur
because of the hours of work. However, there is evidence that cleaners were able to
reject perceptions and stereotypes that were attached to them and their work. In the
course of my fieldwork, a number of cleaners I spoke to actively tried to depersonify
the work they were undertaking and rejected the stigmatisation of cleaning as ‘dirty’
work. For those cleaning offices or other commercial premises, the hours of work and
the performing of most cleaning after the ‘normal’ working day may have enabled some
cleaners to escape social contact and stigmatisation by others. However, as
demonstrated in preceding chapters, changes to the working hours of the wider
Australian workforce means that cleaners are becoming less isolated and could not
easily avoid contact with the client’s employees.

A range of rhetorical and ideological techniques were used by cleaners to transform the
meaning of their work. Finc’s (1996) research into the occupational rhetorics of
restaurant cooks found that cooks extensively justified and legitimised their work
through analogies and through the rhetoric of ‘professions’. This was also evident
among cleaners and working supervisors who were eager to present their work as
professional and vital to the client and the client’s organisation. During the course of
my field work, where possible, I asked the cleaners I met the following question: ‘what
makes a good cleaner?’ Although the responses varied considerably, there were also a
number of similarities. Antonio, a cleaner in a large warehouse complex, sat me down
and encouraged me to write in my note book the following points relating to what a
‘good’ cleaner was:

• Good attitude: ‘willpower’.
• Reliable and well educated.
• Neat, tidy presentation.
• Possesses clean and tidy tools and equipment that are kept in good order.
• ‘Good eyes’ and able to ‘pin-point where problems are’.
• Skills to develop and learn ‘tricks’ to make the job easier (Field Notes, 30 July
  2002).
The responses of Antonio fit with what Collinson (1992: 4) terms ‘discourses of denial’. Collinson argues that shopfloor workers engaged in ‘discourses of denial [that] enabled them to reproduce resistant identities and practices that paradoxically enabled them to accommodate and adjust to the material and symbolic conditions of shop floor life.’ These practices were also evident on the mopfloor.

Other cleaners and working supervisors expressed similar sentiments. These responses indicate that cleaners saw themselves as professionals, which reaffirms Davis’ (1984) argument that people tend to perceive of themselves as good people doing dirty work. A cleaning supervisor in a private hospital reinforced her sense of professionalism by explaining that each day she ‘does her rounds’ like a doctor’, checking each room and making sure everything was clean (Field Notes, 15 July 2002). These findings are confirmed by Ezzy (1997: 439) who argues that workers do not become passive reflections of their workplace culture but manipulate and utilise cultural discourses to their own ends.’

Meaning and identity may also be constructed through an understanding of the contradictions of space (Baldry et al, 1998). Cleaning has been described as work that takes place within ‘dominated’ spaces whereby cleaners as workers are unacknowledged peripherals to the dominant users of that space. Here, the space of the client is ‘coded as bundles of surfaces, with each bundle allotted a specific cleaning time or shift … Cleaning space, in this sense, is lived as sections and surfaces’ (Allen and Pryke, 1994: 467). During the day, when the dominant space is occupied by the client, cleaners occupy and appropriate concealed spaces outside the gaze of the client, typically small and concealed rooms, often in a basement, for the storage of their material and equipment and to meet their own needs. However, before or after the hours of work of the dominant user of space, the use of concealed spaces by cleaners is less frequent. As explained by Allen and Pryke (1994: 472),

Beyond the working day … when most cleaning work is performed, the use of concealed spaces is less frequent. … The pre-existing space of [the client] is recorded as sections and surfaces and the space ‘lived’ through the rhythms and practices of cleaning, rather than those of [the client]. Although this overlay does not represent a challenge to the dominant coding of space, it
tends to deflect the power of formal coding and weaken its claim to a singular identity.

In early morning or the evening, the dominant space becomes appropriated space.

The task of cleaning is universal and is not bounded by job position, title or status as exhibited by the client's employees. Cleaners are given the freedom to traverse dominant spaces and have access to areas prohibited to the public or other employees. As a cleaner, I entered the space of senior managers, high technology computer research centres and pharmaceutical laboratories and studios, as well as spaces closed to the public and normally reserved for dignitaries and the 'important'. As a cleaner, had I chosen to do so, I could have accessed documents and files that were forbidden or off-limits to the client's employees. As a cleaner, I was able to access the forbidden world of management and privilege, but by collecting their rubbish, cleaning their bathrooms and kitchens and collecting their towels etcetera, the aura of privilege, celebrity and senior management was significantly reduced. Through the spatial practices of cleaning where space becomes bundles of surfaces, the symbolic power of social space experienced by the client's employees as an expression of managerial control loses aura and meaning.

In other cases, supervisors who cleaned attempted to transform their image by making themselves indispensable to the client engaging in citizenship behaviours on behalf of the client and for Complete Clean. A number of supervisors worked additional unpaid hours each day and undertook additional tasks outside of the contact as a favour to clients. Cleaners were also the eyes and ears of the client and played an important role in highlighting areas of maintenance and repairs. A cleaning supervisor explained that he was employed to save Complete Clean money. During the course of his working day he would empty paper bins and take rubbish down the lifts for the cleaners (a job normally undertaken on most sites by a separate cleaner), saving Complete Clean what he claimed as half an hour of labour a day. He also emptied bins in a separate building on the site as a cost saving to his employer (Field Notes, 20 July 2002). These acts of

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6 These included, but were not limited to leaking taps and other plumbing, lighting and electrical, graffiti and presentation.
‘citizenship’ were not isolated examples, and a number of cleaners were observed acting complicitly and cheerfully in their own work intensification.

Given the salience of stigmas around dirty work, it might be expected that strong cultures would coalesce around the occupation of cleaning or specific work groups on individual sites (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999: 419). However, this seems not be the case in cleaning where, if anything, group identification is predominantly non-work-based. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999: 420) claim that weak subcultures are more likely due to the small number of members of an occupation or the geographic or temporal distribution of members, as is common in cleaning. Despite this, the idea of an occupational community (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984) is particularly salient when considering how cleaners cope with their work. Although many cleaners are geographically isolated and scattered across different worksites, close bonds are formed. It was noticed that NESB cleaners (particularly South Americans) socialised together outside of work in various ethnic clubs and societies, and many worked with relatives and immediate family. Dis-identification was evident among those cleaners who assessed their self-worth and dignity in terms of factors outside of work and the work performed.7

Other cleaners coped with their work by distancing themselves (dis-identification) from the work they performed. Some cleaners reported to me that they were embarrassed by their work. Interviews with CSMs revealed that at social functions some invented other occupations or called themselves ‘facility managers’ rather than cleaners. Paradoxically, for some cleaners, the work of cleaning enabled them to increase their prestige and self-worth in the eyes of their families. Cleaners from South American backgrounds often reported that their families back home were disgusted by their work, but changed their minds when they saw the money that their relatives made, and that they were able to afford to travel and buy a car as a result of their cleaning work. Francisco, a site supervisor, explained the paradox facing many South American cleaners and pointed out the irony of cleaning. According to Francisco, in South America cleaners are the ‘lowest of the low’ and ‘they live outside of the city’. In

7 See Kunda (1992) for a discussion of how workers ‘role distance’ and maintain some distance between their company person and non-company identity.
Australia, South Americans, he explained, were respected as cleaners and it is seen as an honourable job where you can earn good money (Field Notes, 19 June 2002). Other cleaners, typically South Americans, recounted similar experiences and explained that cleaning work gave them the means to travel back to their countries of origin and that relatives were astounded and impressed with what they could earn as cleaners in Australia.

In another example, the cleaner dis-identified with her work through imagination. Paola, an office cleaner, expressed her liking for vacuuming (normally disliked by most cleaners) in terms of her Latin heritage, claiming she had 'too much salsa' and that when vacuuming 'I feel like I am dancing'. Paola was typical of the response of a number of women cleaners to their work. She claimed that she was 'too fussy' and that there was not enough time to clean to her standard while her husband complained that she does not clean as well as home (Field Notes, 5 July 2002).

Counter-identification and resistance were also present, although overt forms of resistance or service sabotage (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002) were less obvious. This was to be expected given my limited time on sites and the fact that CSMs often jokingly introduced me as a manager. As explained in more detail below, the most overt form of resistance was appropriation of time, whereby some cleaners were observed taking long breaks, or hiding in the toilets and leaving a site early. Other forms of resistance included appropriating the client's resources, such as using the client's phone. At one site, several cleaners independently informed me that one of their peers was stealing product from the client (Field Notes, 30 July, 2002). Discussions with supervisors revealed frustration with some of their cleaners and their indifference to their equipment. For instance, cleaners would not pay attention to the correct use of expensive cleaning machinery, so causing delays and expensive repairs. Typically, these were explained to me in terms of the cleaner's stupidity, but an alternative reading may see indifference and inattention as counter-identification to the monotony, routine and pressure of cleaning work (cf. Hodson, 1995, 2001).

Other cleaners demonstrated counter-identification with their role as other to members of the public and the client's employees. On two of the 'prestige' sites were I worked (one a professional studio and retail centre; the other a retail centre and food court)
where cleaners interacted with the public, I was able to observe objectification of clients. My field notes record instances of younger male cleaners flirting with members of the opposite sex (Field Notes, 3 December 2002). In the case I outlined earlier where I was aware of the stigmatisation of being a cleaner and servile nature of our work as we cleaned among patrons at a gala night, I noted that the younger male cleaners rejected their otherness through the objectification of the women present. I was invited to stare, ogle and rate the attractiveness of those present for the gala evening (Field Notes, 19 June 2002).

As argued by Holmer-Nadesan (1996: 72), counter-identification can also imply a form of complicity with management ‘marked by simultaneous resistance and acquiescence.’ This was evident at a large industrial site where the cleaners faced an impossible task of trying to present some semblance of cleanliness amid an environment of dirt, fumes, ash and other particles which meant that areas and items/spaces cleaned would within minutes be soiled again. On this site, there was no meaningful distinction between when an object/item/area was cleaned and when it became unclean. On other sites, cleaners explained that they could look back on what they had cleaned and ‘see when it is done’ (for example, Field Notes, 25 June 2005). On this particular site, though, cleaners were generally not afforded this satisfaction:

Jorge explained that they were expected not to fully clean and that he had to learn to ‘unclean’ by making less effort and cleaning to a lower standard than what he would have liked. Jorge explained that he found it hard to accept a lower standard of cleaning and would deliberately disobey instructions from the client and his CMS. For example, he was instructed not to wipe tables in the canteen and kitchens but did anyway. He claimed he had the time. Also he was told not to mop the whole floor canteen floor, but to only mop up stains. He mopped the whole floor as he said that it only took 15 minutes (Field Notes, 25 July 2005).

The atmosphere on this site, and the attitude among the cleaners present, was depressing. Jorge coped by escaping and mentally distancing himself from the dirt and the work (cf Noon & Blyton, 1997: 163–4). Because of the nature of this site and its constantly dirty state, it made little difference whether Jorge performed his work or not.
He coped by taking long tea and lunch breaks and by spending long periods of time on the client’s phone with his partner.

In another case, I recorded cleaners engaging in citizenship behaviours by doing their best to save Complete Clean money by using dusters for two nights of cleaning instead of the recommend one night, by turning them inside-out, or by turning over the steel wool on polishing machines (Field Notes, 5 July 2002). These examples demonstrate that despite managerial rules and policies, cleaners are able to interpret and develop their own methods for the completion of tasks (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996: 71) and to ascribe meaning and dignity in their work in their own way and on their own terms.

10.1.3 Emotional Labour

As explained above, cleaners can avoid role conflict and stereotyping of their work through avoidance of contact with the client’s workforce. In other instances they may construct a positive identity through controlling their interaction with the client’s employees or through educating the client (Shamir, 1980). They can also by making use of emotional labour to manage their own feelings and the feelings of customers (Hochschild, 1983). Through making people feel good, cleaners are able to manipulate the perceptions of others and give meaning to their work (Wharton, 1996a). Research on emotional labour has focused on interactive service work (Wharton, 1996b: 92) and it may seem unusual to consider the work of cleaning as involving emotional labour. However, my field work demonstrated that on many sites cleaners interacted with members of the public on a daily basis. On sites where interaction with the public was not expected, such as the cleaning of offices after hours, changing hours of work have increased the visibility of the twilight army of cleaners. Interviews with managers within Complete Clean highlighted that interaction between cleaners and the client was an important dimension of service quality, and acknowledged that relations with clients were central to their work, reflecting a wider interest between customer and client interaction and service quality (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996).

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Hochschild (1983: 7) defines emotional labour as 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display'. For her, emotional labour is performed in one of two ways. The first is 'surface acting' whereby the employee enacts emotions that are not actually felt. The second is 'deep acting' where employees are encouraged to experience the emotions that they are required to display. Despite the apparent seductiveness of Hochschild's analysis of the objectification of emotion under capitalism, criticisms of her arguments relate to the analysis of deep acting and the inability to distinguish between the extent to which someone has internalised management rules or is displaying spontaneous and genuine emotion (Ashforth & Blake, 1993; Edwards & Wajcman, 2005; Korczynski, 2002; Sturdy and Fineman, 2001). Indeed, as Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1990: 13) contend, the behaviour of service employees towards customers/clients 'demands acting skills.' They explain (1990: 14) that it is the acting skills of employees, developed in the context of instructions from management and carried out under the threat of sanction in an inherently visible environment, which account in large part for their polite and deferent behaviour.

The critical issue here is the degree of emotional self-control exercised by the employee her/himself; not the extent of any emotional reprogramming by management. Following Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), I take the term 'emotional labour' to mean a volitional act of displaying the appropriate emotion', and I endorse their suggestion that emotional labour can be considered a form of impression management to the extent that the labourer deliberately attempts to direct his or her behaviour towards others in order to foster both certain social perceptions of himself or herself and a certain interpersonal climate. (1993: 90)\(^8\)

My research findings lend little support to the 'managed heart' thesis put forward by Hochschild (1983). Although emotional labour was more evident among women

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\(^8\) Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) identify two functions of emotional labour: firstly, task effectiveness, whereby emotional labour provides a meaning of regulating interaction in service encounters making interaction predictable and removing potentially embarrassing interpersonal problems that might disrupt interactions; and, secondly, the facilitation of self-expression.
cleaners (as predicted by Hochschild), the meaning and enacting of emotional labour was neither scripted nor encouraged; nor was it under the control of management. As indicated in Chapters 7 and 8, managers expected cleaners to be courteous and polite to clients, the client’s workforce and members of the public. On retail sites characterised by day cleaning, cleaners came into regular contact with members of public and played an important role of ‘public relations’ whereby they would provide directions, assistance and information to the public. Some cleaners expressed joy and satisfaction with these contacts and explained that they added to their working experience (Field Notes, 25 July 2002).

Cleaners’ explanations of their interactions with clients and with the client’s employees suggest that any attempts to manage emotion were often bound up in managing meaning and identity (Sturdy & Fineman, 2001). For example, Charlotte cleaned an office area with 200 workstations and continually faced problems with the client’s employees staying back. She explained that the client’s employees did not talk to her for the first 2-3 days. However, by greeting people and asking them if she was cleaning and dusting properly she found that the clients’ employees were now very friendly. The employees knew her by name and would greet and talk to her. Unlike other cleaners, Charlotte had no difficulty or awkwardness in working around client’s employees who were working late (Field Notes, 4 July 2002). Paola, another cleaner in the same building, mentioned that she liked having contact with people. I observed that she was also greeted by name and had no difficulty working around the client’s employees. Paola was also able to display her personality, and floated and danced around the office (Field Notes, 5 July 2002). In another example, Marie, a cleaner in a private hospital, explained to me the importance of being cheerful, noting that patients expected a smile and that being cheerful and polite was the best way to overcome difficult patients (Field Notes, 19 July 2002). Like the checkout operators in Ogbonna and Wilkinson’s (1990: 14) study, it is difficult to know whether or not Marie used acting skills and was ‘seen to mean to smile but still does not necessary mean to.’

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9 Marie spent a lot of time talking to patients. It should be noted that emotional engagement of this type is not necessarily a widely held work competency. I found it difficult cleaning rooms that were occupied by patients and struggled to present a cheerful disposition.
Cleaners reported maintaining a façade of happiness and cheerfulness and interacting or flirting with the client’s workforce. This in turn elicited a positive response from the client’s workforce. Cleaners reported that friendly relations with client’s employees meant that dishes were washed, benches wiped, work stations dusted and rubbish picked up off the floor. Some cleaners noted that good relations with a client’s employees were the only way they could possibly complete their tasks. On those sites where the cleaner had alienated the client’s workforce, life could be very difficult. This was observed, for example, in a large pharmaceutical packing warehouse. Each packing station had a rubbish bin beside it. The client’s employees disliked the cleaner and would often abuse him. I noticed (and so did the cleaner) that they deliberately threw discarded packing material on the floor and not in the rubbish bin, or would throw rubbish on the floor after he had swept (Field Notes, 9 July 2002).

This section has outlined how cleaners attempt to maintain and regain dignity and meaning at work. Through adopting a range of different strategies, cleaners were able to construct a sense of identity that rejected the nature of their work and its stigmatisation. By enacting or internalising emotional labour, cleaners were able to co-opt clients into undertaking some of the tasks they would otherwise have to do. Emotional labour also played an important role in impression management and making out on the mopfloor.

10.2 Tricks of the Trade: Impression Management and Making Out in Cleaning

This section examines a range of coping strategies enacted by cleaners. These strategies were undertaken with the collusion and consent of management. In most cases, impression management tactics tended to be introduced by CSMs, and cleaners were encouraged to follow their lead. Coping through playing the game and making out was more complex still, and while CSMs and managers expected their cleaners to make out, some managers and supervisors were less willing to take the lead, leaving cleaners to their own devices in coming to terms with unrealistic work loads.
10.2.1 Impression Management.

Cleaning firms attempt to overcome low profitability and unrealistic service expectations by encouraging cleaners and their managers to deceive the client into believing that a quality service has been provided. I use the term 'impression management' to describe this phenomenon, and draw on arguments presented in the service quality literature to examine how cleaners and their managers cope with their working world. Impression management is the process whereby individuals attempt to influence the perceptions of others (Rosenfeldt et al, 1995). It is thought that people engage in impression management to obtain influence and power in attempt to enhance self-interest (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2001). Here I argue that impression management is used by cleaners and their managers as a coping mechanism to overcome realities of work and to deceive the client in order to retain contracts and to ensure on-going profitability.

Evidence of the organisation of work in the NSW cleaning industry turns a number of the assumptions and arguments relating to HRM and services or 'customer-focused HRM' (Schneider, 1994) on their head. For example, it is often suggested that there is a relationship between how an employee perceives HRM practices and how a customer perceives service quality, and that employees who are satisfied with HRM practices within their organisation will behave in a positive manner towards customers (Schneider & Bowen, 1993: 41; Schneider & Chung, 1996; Zerbe et al, 1998). As demonstrated in earlier chapters, cleaning firms have introduced few HRM practices associated with positive customer service and service quality. In any case, the literature on quality and customer service is focused on interactive frontline service work and has neglected manual and contract services. However, it should be noted that Complete Clean had incorporated one of the tenets of service quality: that of the client's participation in performance management and quality assessment (Schneider & Bowen, 1985). As discussed in Chapter 8, Complete Clean Australia regularly surveyed their clients, while operational managers devoted much time to relationship-building with clients. It should be noted that some CSMs deliberately tried to meet with their clients off-site, ostensibly in the guise of more relaxed communication, but in reality to manipulate the 'moment of truth' by removing the client from the site and thus
lessening the possibility of the client or their agent personally pointing out deficiencies in the quality of cleaning.

Another tenet of the service quality school is the importance of feedback on performance as HRM practices (Schneider, 1994). In Chapter 8, I explained that the dominance of informal management practices meant that feedback within Complete Clean was not used for developmental purposes; rather, it became a form of management control and was limited to whether an area was cleaned satisfactorily or not.

While it is not my intention to review the extant literature on service quality, it is salient to note that, according to this literature, ‘when a service is provided, the personal relation established between employees and customers will be extremely important for determining the service quality’ (Montes et al, 2003: 307). At the risk of simplification, the literature on service quality tends to fall within two strands: research that focuses on service employees and research that examines strategies to manage service quality by managing the service customer/client (Norman, 2000; Govender, 1998). In recent years, research has increasing highlighted the importance of customer socialisation and that ‘it may be possible to manage the service expectations of the service customers and indirectly manage their perceptions of service quality’ (Govender, 1998: 96-7). Although this literature has primarily been developed around interactive frontline services such as banking, there is evidence that cleaners are very effective at socialising the client’s employees and co-opting them into the cleaning process. This is explored later in the chapter.

Perceptions of cleaning quality by the client and the contracting firms are further complicated by the link between quality and perceived value. Within the wider marketing literature, it has been suggested that value is the ‘ratio or trade-off of quality to price’ (Sweeny et al, 1996: 39). Cleaning firms tend to become caught up in strategies of reducing prices while maintaining performance or improving the performance of cleaners and cleaning quality while maintaining price (cf. Sweeney et al, 1996). Earlier chapters have examined the low value placed upon cleaning by clients, with clients tending to see cleaning as an expense to be minimised. Intense competition within the industry has further compounded the precariousness of this
situation by cleaning firms tendering at unrealistic prices while maintaining a commitment to quality. It is against this backdrop that cleaners, working supervisors and operational managers collude to deceive the client. This is often done through manipulating and managing client expectations and impressions.

The extent to which cleaners and working supervisors seek to manage the impression of the client varies from site to site. In the course of my field work I observed that impression management was more common on ‘prestige’ sites where the contract was worth a substantial amount of money and there were a large number of cleaners employed. On these sites, the client typically had sought cost savings from Complete Clean and reduced the frequency of cleaning and the number of cleaners while expecting cleaning standards to remain constant. It is against this background that cleaners, working supervisors and CSMs collude to retain the semblance of quality. The extent of collusion is evident in the non-performance or under-performance of cleaning tasks contrary to contract specifications.

On almost all of the sites that I visited, cleaners and working supervisors were aware of the importance of appearances; thus entrance areas, hallways and foyers tended to be meticulously cleaned in order to create a favourable impression (Field Notes, 3 December 2002). Areas of quality that could be subject to close client scrutiny and complaint, such as staff toilets, tended to receive a full clean, while other areas received less attention. At a bare minimum, cleaners in offices at least attempt to provide an impression of having cleaned. No matter what time or other pressures were faced by cleaners, rubbish bins beside each workstation would be emptied on a daily basis and the worst finger marks, coffee stains and the like removed. Cleaners tended to bear the brunt of complaints from the client’s employees and would take steps to negate persistent complaints from individuals. Ranko, an office cleaner, explained that he paid special attention to the workstation and areas occupied by persistent complainers (Field Notes, 18 July 2002).

While complaints from the client’s employees were a nuisance, complaints from managers could end in the termination of contracts or the removal of cleaners from a site. Cleaners and working supervisors, while often cutting corners or not cleaning other areas, would ensure that spaces occupied by management were fully cleaned. In a
number of cases, these areas were cleaned beyond contract requirement. On one site (professional suites and retail centre) where cleaning took place both day and night and where cleaners were in the public gaze, perception and impression management were in the forefront of working supervisors. Yiani (a day supervisor) explained that the toilets and office areas of management were always cleaned properly. I observed him inspecting the outside walls where the client’s management offices were located and he explained that he washed the walls – even though they were not covered by the contract – because they were visible to management (Field Notes, 18 June 2002). On the same site, Francisco (an evening supervisor) recounted that he observed that the ‘big boss’ worked on Friday and Saturday. He would watch where the ‘big boss’ sat and try to work out his movements, and clean before he arrived there or have cleaners working in the area. For Francisco, an important part of his management strategy was to have his cleaners ‘looking busy’: ‘Cleaners need to look alert and busy; no slouching or moping around’. Those cleaners in the areas accessed by and visible to the public were expected to be constantly on the move and to maintain the perception of being occupied (Field Notes, 19 June 2002). For Yiani, the perception of cleaners hard at work was part of his strategy for coping at work. Other cleaners engaged in a wide spectrum of coping behaviours.

10.2.2 Making Out

Interviews with operational managers, and time spent on sites with cleaners, revealed that the cleaners and their managers faced extraordinary demands. These were experienced equally by full and part-time cleaners; and by women and men. As the course of my research progressed it became apparent that cleaners adopted a number of informal (and often uncoached) survival strategies to cope with work intensification, a reduction in the number of cleaners, and the preoccupation of management and clients with service quality, enhancement of value and cost reductions. Many of the strategies and techniques adopted by cleaners in the course of their work were related to the organisation and timing of their tasks in order to cope with unrealistic expectations and levels of service. In order to survive cleaners had to engage in ‘making out’. These practices have arisen from what Fine (1992: 1269) terms the ‘culture of production’
where the ‘organisational, market, and client constraints affect the qualities of work products.’

Making out is derived from Burawoy’s (1979) pioneering workplace ethnography where he observed workers in a machine shop engaged in an elaborate system of informal behaviour … which regulated the work process, ensured tasks were met, yet provided the opportunity for the workers to have some control over their working day. [Burawoy] argues that these unofficial activities can be seen in a series of games which employees play. These are games concerned with beating the system, finding the angles … - in other words, ‘making out’. (cited in Blyton & Noon, 1997: 147)

Several criticisms have been levelled at Burawoy’s analysis. One is that it is gender blind (Davies, 1990; Noon & Blyton, 1997). Another is that it fails to fully explore workplace subjectivity (Wilson 2004: 77). A further criticism is that it overstates employee consent and ignores the potential for subversion in the process of making out, and the significance of the fact that employees ‘are continually inventing new ways of making out’ (Noon and Blyton, 1997: 151). Still others have suggested that Burawoy’s analysis, with its emphasis on consent, may not be applicable in services where the emphasis is on employee commitment (Korczynski, 2002: 127-8). Nevertheless, in spite of these shortcomings, the idea of ‘making out’ operates as a useful metaphor for understanding how cleaners and their supervisors come to terms with the reality of their working lives. A point of departure from the situation that Burawoy encountered is that cleaners were not so much engaged in effort bargaining in order to accumulate and make a small bonus and then restricting output to protect group norm; rather, in cleaning, making out was a survival tactic. Cleaners were not engaged in making out for economic means, but engaged in the game of making out to secure ‘time’ and to complete tasks that could not otherwise be completed. Achieving and completion, not accumulation and protection of group work norms, became the aim of making out.

Following Burawoy, I argue that in making out, cleaners were manipulating management rules and the cleaning specifications for their own ends ‘but they were not fundamentally challenging the rules nor undermining management’s prerogative to set
the rules ... [rather they were] consenting to the rules and structures imposed by management’ (Noon & Blyton, 1997: 147). Thompson et al, acknowledging Cressy and MacInnes (1980), argue that

management have also recognised that toleration of, or accommodation to, informal working practices can facilitate labour consent and co-operation – the necessary other side of the coin to control and compliance.(2001: 929)

Although Burawoy’s analysis is concerned with internal employees of a manufacturing plant, his analysis can be applied to manual service workers such as cleaners. By examining the labour process and the organisation of work, I shall seek to demonstrate how cleaners co-opt the client’s workforce into undertaking tasks normally performed by cleaners. Evidence is provided outlining a range of coping strategies adopted by cleaners in their daily work routines. These strategies allow cleaners to cope with unrealistic work schedules and managerial efforts to intensify work. Making out in the cleaning industry includes a range of tactics such as entering into exchange relationships with the client’s workforce, co-opting the client into undertaking tasks normally assigned to cleaners and managing the perceptions and impression of clients through the manipulation of the organisation of work and the labour process. While Burawoy’s machine shop workers ‘made out’, Complete Clean’s cleaners enacted ‘tricks’.

Supervisors (including those who supervised only and those who cleaned) spent considerable time cultivating relations with the client’s employees. These relationships were mutually beneficial for the client as they could extract incidental cleaning work beyond the contract specification without having to negotiate rates or formal agreements with Complete Clean. Supervisors were able to draw upon the expertise of the client’s employees, particularly the maintenance staff. Marginal profits on contracts meant that CSMs were loath to spend money on maintenance of equipment, and many cleaners reported using shoddy, aged and poorly maintained equipment and shortages of cleaning materials and chemicals. Nathaniel, a supervisor on a ‘prestige’ site, reported that he devoted a lot of time on customer/client relations. He described doing a lot of ‘favours’ for the client and received ‘favours’ and ‘extra business’ in return. According to Nathaniel, as a supervisor one of his duties was to grow the business and
by doing favours for the client, he was able to extract ' specials'\textsuperscript{10} from the client. Another supervisor on the same site was observed spending much of his day liaising with the client’s maintenance staff. He and the cleaners would do extra cleaning or small jobs outside of the contract in exchange for favours from the maintenance staff, such as immediate repair of cleaning equipment without the equipment having to leave the site or waiting for the CSM to arrange for repair (Field Notes, 18, 20 July 2002). The Complete Clean Staff climate survey revealed that cleaners considered pleasing the customer an important part of their job, and that cleaners often did extra jobs to keep the client happy (Complete Clean, Staff Survey Report, 2002: 35,36).\textsuperscript{11}

Cleaners were also observed entering into exchange relationships and co-opting the client’s workforce into undertaking cleaning tasks. This was sometimes achieved in a subtle fashion. Manuel, a cleaner and charge hand in a large industrial warehouse distributing foodstuffs, had organised an elaborate system of co-opting the client’s employees into doing some of the tasks he would otherwise have to do. Manuel was one of three cleaners on this site, and while the other two cleaners tended to be dissatisfied and frustrated with their work, Manuel had organised the client’s employees so that he could cope with the demands of the client, who were, in his own words, ‘very fussy’ and demanded a ‘neat and tidy job’. According to the cleaners present, the site was understaffed in terms of cleaners and was difficult to keep clean to the required standard.\textsuperscript{12}

Manuel explained that he helped out the warehouse workers where he could and that ‘they responded’ and helped him by keeping the place reasonably clean. I noted that

\textsuperscript{10} A ‘special’ is extra cleaning negotiated outside the contract. Typically these are one-offs or irregular cleaning to meet special needs. The addition of specials could make the difference between profit or loss on contracts with tight margins.

\textsuperscript{11} The response to the question ‘Pleasing the customer is the most important part of my job’ recorded an average of 4.46 out of 5 for the Sydney CBD cleaners and 4.53 for the Sydney Suburban cleaners. ‘We do extra jobs to keep the customer happy’ recorded an average of 4.11 for Sydney CBD and 4.21 for Sydney Suburban cleaners. Interestingly, these results were among the lowest across Australia.

\textsuperscript{12} Cleaning in this site was complicated by the cleaning needing to be up to food hygiene standard and by the kilometres of conveyor belts carrying boxes of foodstuffs from the factory next door. Interestingly, the factory was cleaned by a different cleaning contractor, while Complete Clean had the warehouse. Some of the cleaners I worked with, cleaning an office complex in the evening, worked for the other cleaning firm in the food factory during the day.
Manuel was well-liked and respected by the client’s employees. Manuel engaged in genuine acts of emotional labour and explained that he was a big believer in being on good terms with the warehouse staff. He explained ‘that if the place was kept clean then people would be more inclined to help keep the place clean and tidy’ (Field Notes, 30 July, 2002).

The warehouse staff were employed on an incentive system and on piece rates based on how many orders and completed pallets of foodstuffs they could assemble. The warehouse was a hive of activity, with numerous forklifts stacking, loading and unloading pallets. One of the jobs of the warehouse staff was to assemble an order from a client on a pallet and then carry it via fork truck for shrink-wrapping before placing in the loading bay for distribution. When a pallet was loaded onto a shrink-wrap machine, the machine would automatically wrap the pallet. However, when the pallet was wrapped, the forklift operator would have to climb of her/his truck and physically separate the pallet from the wrapper. Manuel earned the respect and gratitude of the warehouse staff by kicking the shrink-wrap plastic whenever he walked past a machine that had completed wrapping the pallet, severing the wrap between the pallet and the wrapping machine. This action (and we did it tens of times during the day) meant that forklift drivers did not have to get off their machine to sever the wrapping, saving them time and enabling them to begin loading the next pallet. In this respect, Manuel’s actions enabled the warehouse staff to make out, and they in turn reciprocated (so he claimed) by keeping the place tidy (Field Notes, 30 July 2002).

Although some senior operational managers within Complete Clean disliked cleaners working in teams or working with relatives, these could be an important element in making out. Petra explained that she liked working with her sister: ‘when working with relations you push each other and help each other out’ (Field Notes, 25 June). David and Leonardo, cleaners on the same site, expressed similar sentiments. They ‘pushed each other along’ and competed with each other, and explained they were continually looking for ways to speed up the work so they could leave early (Field Notes, 21 June, 2002).

The reality of cleaning work means that cleaners routinely cut corners. The fact that work could not be completed in the allotted time was either taught to cleaners or was
something that they soon learned for themselves. For example, one supervisor explained that cutting corners was accepted practice in the industry. However, he thought cleaners were not trained to do this. Rather, they learnt themselves, and it was a case of a balancing act. If too many corners were cut then it reflected back upon Complete Clean and could mean loss of a contract (Field Notes, 20 July 2002). Christos, a CSS at a large office complex, candidly recounted how he taught his cleaners to clean in a certain way. In acknowledging that the work could not be completed in a 3 hour period, he taught his predominantly women cleaners to clean one side of the building well and to spot clean the other side. The next evening the other side was cleaned well and the side cleaned fully the evening before was ‘spotted’, in a continuous cycle (Field Notes, 4 July 2002). When corners were cut, typically it was the dusting and vacuuming that was skimmed on. Priorities tended to be rubbish removal, toilets and entrance areas, along with the spaces occupied by management. However, as mentioned earlier, the pretence of quality had to be maintained, so where cleaning could not be undertaken to the level specified in the contract, cleaners would ‘spot’ clean, for example, picking up obvious pieces of paper in order to maintain the façade that the floor had been vacuumed.

Many cleaners reported that by the end of their shift they were running to complete the basic semblance of a clean. Ranko, an office cleaner, put this into perspective. He noted that he had 190 work stations plus common areas to clean, meaning that he had 20 seconds to dust, collect and empty the rubbish and vacuum in each work station: ‘impossible to do and impossible to get around it all’ (Field Notes, 18 July 2002). Faced with these seemingly insurmountable goals, new cleaners often felt a sense of panic when realising all they had to do, often within three hours. Ranko recalled his despair during his first few weeks on the site until he had taught himself to cut corners and to make out on the job. Burawoy (1979: 64) experienced the same stress and anguish in the machine shop: ‘it took me some time to understand the shop language, let alone the intricacies of making out. It was a matter of three-four months before I began making out by using a number of angles and by transferring time from one operation to another.’ The cleaners that I encountered across a range of sites expressed similar sentiments, although there were differences of opinion as to how long it took to learn the art of cleaning. Vesna, an office cleaner in a large complex, thought it was a case of learning ‘your floor: learning how to arrange work and the ways in which to cover the
room in the least amount of time’. She estimated that it took about a week to learn the
efficient layout of a floor (Field Notes, 4 July 2002). Ranko, the office cleaner, thought
it took three months to learn the basics of the job, then a further year to become fully
proficient (Field Notes, 18 July). In any case, it took time to learn where all the doors
were, which keys to use, and where the light switches were. Time spent on learning the
tricks of the trade and making out was mediated by whether or not the cleaner was
experienced and the level of training they had received (see Chapter 9). Crucial to the
process of making out was an awareness and understanding of what the CSM and the
client (here I mean management and not necessarily the client’s employees) or their
agent perceived to be a quality clean.

Once cleaners had come to terms with the art of cleaning and where everything was,
they could then begin to make out. During the course of my field work I became aware
of a collective community of knowledge. Much of this was knowledge was tacit, but
there was some evidence of cleaners sharing experiences and tips for making out with
each other. In the case of cleaning, making out was the pursuit of making time. Given
the relatively high rate of injury in the cleaning industry, anything that could save
unnecessary bodily movement or even a few seconds of time was eagerly adopted. For
office cleaners, one of the more strenuous jobs was that of emptying rubbish bins beside
desks and workstations. While the bins were small, emptying 100-200 bins over the
course of three hours could be strenuous work. Many cleaners adopted strategies for
emptying bins. One of the more common was to leave one or two empty bin liners in
the bottom of the bins. This saved time when emptying the bin into a larger bag by
removing the necessity to return to the cleaner’s trolley for another liner (Field Notes,
21 June, 5 July 2002). In other cases, cleaners learned quickly the importance of multi-
tasking: ‘you do extra things to gain time; do things as you go about doing other things’
(Field Notes, 4 July 2002).

Time spent with cleaners on the mopfloor revealed that the cleaning labour process was
highly-regulated, tightly structured and highly scripted – but not necessarily by
management. As cleaning contracts specified the quality, intensity and systematisation
of cleaners’ work, cleaners developed their own routines and systems. Generally they
followed the outline of the performance of cleaning as specified in the contract; in other
cases they did not. What was evident was that cleaners sought to impose rigour and
discipline on their work. Rigour and discipline were self-enforced through 'tricks'. The most important tool that cleaners possessed was their eyes. In NSW (and in the United Kingdom), the process of scanning space in terms of ascertaining what or what not to clean is known as 'eyeballing' (For the UK, see Allen and Pryke 1994: 467). In terms of making out, the eyes played a crucial role. As recorded in my field notes:

[Ranko] explained the trick to the job was to 'keep your eyes peeled'. He explained he would miss vacuuming if he could. [Normally] he vacuumed a floor twice a week. While he collected rubbish (emptied the bins) he spotted and picked up paper off the floor so he didn't have to vacuum (18 July, 2002).

The following extract from my field notes illustrates the speed and efficiency with which cleaners confronted their work in the cleaning of toilets. The observation is based on my time spent with Lefterfis (an office cleaner) in cleaning toilets:

Enters the toilet with a black rubbish bag and one set of paper hand towels in his hand. Empties the rubbish bin and adds the towels to the holder. Counts the numbers of toilet rolls needed. Returns to trolley, grabs the bucket containing the cleaning equipment [cloth, brush and cleaners] and the required number of toilet rolls. Cleans the hand basin with scouring powder and wipes dry with a cloth. Quickly wipes bench area and cleans mirrors. Replaces liquid soap if necessary. Then cleans toilets and urinals. Sprays bleach in urinals and toilets. Then wipes toilet seats, outside of the bowls and cleans the urinals. Flushes away bleach. Checks everything is done and then mops the floor. Places equipment back in the bucket and places mop bucket and rubbish on his trolley and rushes off to the next toilet. I noted that he ran with the trolley. In female toilets, perfume and deodoriser was sprayed on the ground.13

This action was repeated for each block of toilets and it would take Lefterfis three to five (or fewer) minutes to complete each block. The speed of work was such that when I worked with Lefterfis and cleaned the handbasins while he did the rest, he had

13 The mop bucket was previously filled with hot water and cleanser and was left on the trolley.

14 This was common practice on many sites and was based on the perception that women disliked like the smell of bleach.
completed all the other toilet cleaning tasks before I had even finished the handbasins (Field notes, 19 July 2002).

In large offices, or in the cleaning of other large spaces, one of the potential hazards facing a cleaner was inadvertently neglecting some areas. I noticed that a number of cleaners had developed strategies to ensure all areas were covered. Ranko, for example, cleaned by following his right hand. He claimed this allowed him ‘to speed up’ and ensure that he covered the whole floor without missing anything or crossing over (Field Notes, 18 July 2002). Other cleaners explained that they were often expected to do four or more hours of work within three hours. The secret to overcoming time was ‘having a system’ – or developing tricks. Part of the repertoire of tricks was making use of time. As explained in Chapter 6, cleaning firms were obsessed by time, and time was the enemy of most cleaners. Cleaners learnt to read the rhythms, patterns and trends of dust and dirt. Mondays tended to be days exploited to the full. On Mondays, there tended to be less dirt and dust (particularly in office cleaning, when the offices had been unused over the weekend) and cleaners could catch up on one of the most hated tasks – dusting. For cleaners, the key to taming time was not so much a case of cleaning, but rather a case of ‘maintaining’ a site. The key to this strategy was to ensure a proper clean once a week and then ‘maintaining’ (‘spotting’) on the other days (Field Notes, 18, 19, 25 July).

Pressure from managers and supervisors could lead to making out in an extreme form. Because of cost pressures and low returns on contracts, cleaners complained that management would sometimes skimp on equipment and cleaning chemicals and materials. On one site I visited, cleaners complained about hygiene standards\textsuperscript{15} and the shortage of basic materials such as cloths. On this site, the cleaner was forced to use the same cloth for cleaning the kitchen as he used for cleaning the toilet. A shortage of chemicals and materials, coupled with time pressure, meant that cleaners could sometimes compromise the health and safety of the client and the public. Even on prestige contracts I observed numerous occasions on which cleaners were forced to use the brush used to clean the toilet for cleaning the hand basin and other bathroom areas. In other cases cleaners mopped floors or cleaned using water only, without the

\textsuperscript{15} In this paragraph I have chosen not to identify the site for obvious reasons.
appropriate disinfectant or other chemical cleanser. Such practices meant that cleaners were able to maintain a façade of cleaning, reinforced by quality inspections that were concerned with the appearance of cleanliness.

Making out, then, is an elaborate but imperative ritual or game in the cleaning industry. Although managers of cleaning firms know that cleaning cannot be performed to a quality standard, any complaints from the client are taken seriously and individual cleaners are held accountable for the quality of the clean. Good cleaners neutralise this threat by highlighting potential areas of friction. Office cleaners, for example, realise that they can use tricks and cut corners on the client’s employees’ work stations, particularly if they are cluttered with paper, or with dusting of the backs of chairs, skirt boards around the edges of room etcetera, but as explained earlier, they will take particular care when cleaning areas dominated by the client’s manager.

10.3 Conclusion

As discussed in earlier chapters, cleaners find themselves at the sharp end of ‘hard’ HRM practices and strategies implemented to maximise the output and quality of individual cleaners, while minimising the responsibility of employers. It was suggested that this choice of strategy was partly in response to, and partly mediated by, the spatially dispersed nature of organisation of work across numerous sites. Earlier chapters highlighted informalisation within the cleaning industry, where managers and supervisors were given freedom to organize work across sites as best they could. Informalisation of work practices and the social relationships of employment have given cleaners access to spaces to create meaning and dignity in their work.

This chapter has examined cleaners as conscious actors who work with their own sense of self-awareness and self-worth. Although cleaners at Complete Clean tended to choose cleaning because of constrained occupational opportunities, the sense of resignation felt by many cleaners did not mean they were not interested maintaining a sense of dignity and identity in their work. Cleaners were able to enact or articulate rhetorical and discursive strategies that rejected or mediated the stigmas attached to
their work. The process of constructing a positive self and work identity could lead to citizenship behaviours for the employer. The chapter also challenges some of the assumptions in the service management literature and highlights a number of shortcomings relating to the role of the service employee in ‘quality’ service provision. By engaging in emotional labour and colluding with their managers and supervisors in impression management, cleaners were able to overcome some of the challenges of unrealistic expectations of quality service and secure their own jobs and the profitability of their employer.

It is evident that cleaners enact and engage in a range of tricks and making out strategies to cope with their work. As explained, these strategies ranged from developing exchange relationships and dependencies and co-opting the client’s employees into undertaking some of the tasks performed by cleaners, to tricks to cut corners; but there was a drive to ensure that work was completed to a standard that would satisfy the client. At one level, engaging in tricks might be seen as confirming Burawoy’s contention that workers consent to the rules imposed by management. However, the boundaries between consent and resistance are blurred, and cleaners enacted strategies that can be read as both consent and resistance. This challenges us to consider cleaners’ subjective experiences from a variety of frames of reference (cf. Noon & Blyton, 1997: 165-66). No matter how one chooses to read the experiences of cleaners on the mopfloor, it is evident that understanding the reality of cleaning needs to be informed by the incorporation of the cleaner as subject and actor.
CHAPTER 11

MOPPING UP: KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis has sought to illuminate a phenomenon that is seemingly at odds with mainstream strategic management theory and prescription: how is it that commercial cleaning firms with seemingly dysfunctional organisational structures and no evident cultural cohesion still manage to survive and succeed? How is it that human labour can be harnessed adequately to organisational goals in the absence of these taken-for-granted requirements for organisational effectiveness? How is it that such firms are even able to manage labour control and coordination? My chief finding is that such firms survive and succeed by adopting a variety of adaptive strategies and practices in response to their internal and external environments. In short, they make an art form of organisational formlessness/looseness and management devolution; of internal ‘networking’ and ‘self-management’. They also externalise functions that in other firms are more likely to be located internally. In particular, they accommodate to an industry culture and exploit social relationships and vulnerabilities present in relevant external labour markets.

My purpose, though, has not merely been empirical or descriptive. I have also pursued a conceptual and theoretical objective. Throughout the thesis, I have examined a range of ideas and theoretical constructs that have been developed in an attempt to explain the management and organisation of work in the service society. This has been achieved through the use of a deep, contextualised case study that enabled me to focus attention on the ‘context of the [theoretical] constructs and the role these constructs play in a particular setting’ (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991: 614). In particular, this thesis has examined and critically analysed theories and research into service work, finding that these theories, especially those of the New Service Management school, are wanting when it comes to explaining the nature and meaning of work in manual services like cleaning.
This concluding chapter highlights the key empirical and conceptual findings from the research into the NSW cleaning industry and Complete Clean as an industry exemplar. I revisit key arguments raised in earlier chapters relating to precarious employment, the organisation of work, customer service, the social relations of employment and identity. I also examine the strategic choices made by management and the role of human resource management in strategy selection and strategy-making. I pay particular attention to the role of culture in shaping social relations across the cleaning industry, address some of the limitations of the thesis and discuss avenues for further research.

11.1 KEY FINDINGS

The data and arguments presented in this thesis both confirm and contradict existing theories relating to work and organisation in the service sector. In many instances, the findings presented amplify and further illuminate ideas and peculiarities that are touched on, but not fully elaborated, by other researchers. Clearly, like similar firms further afield, firms in the NSW cleaning industry exhibit a number of peculiarities. These are evident in the fragmentation of the industry, the organisation of cleaning work, recruitment of employees and managers and the social relations of and in employment. Other peculiarities are evident in the dominance of a regime of precarious employment and the prevalence of industry culture taking precedence over that of the individual firm.

11.1.1 Precarious Employment and Work Organisation

The review of the literature on service industries and service work in Chapter three highlighted a number of findings and theories from existing analyses of the commercial cleaning industry. To summarise briefly, the dominant proposition in the existing literature is that commercial cleaning is a low-wage regime characterised by precarious employment. Existing theories and explanations account for the precariousness of commercial cleaning work in terms of the application of human resource management practices that target marginalised migrant and women workers, the use of a contingent
workforce, and the existence of a rigid gender division of labour. The extant research findings referred to in Chapter 2 demonstrate that precariousness is also embedded in commercial cleaning through structural transformation of the industry by privatisation and contracting within the public sector and through outsourcing in the private sector. The data presented in this thesis supports and builds upon these findings.

Both the extant academic research into cleaning and much of the popular journalistic exposés of the cleaning industry (for example, Ehrenreich, 2001 for the US; Wynhausen, 2005 for Australia) suggest that employment in cleaning is highly precarious. As has been experienced by cleaners elsewhere, cleaning in NSW is characterised by employment risk and insecurity, qualities leading to the emergence of a regime of precarious employment. In an industry dominated by ‘champagne cleaning specifications’ at ‘flat beer prices’ (BOMA, 1990) cleaning firms have sought to maintain profitability at the expense of their workforce – and their clients. This is because government and private companies have tended to view cleaning as a necessary expense to be minimised, and have increasingly sought cost reductions from cleaning firms; and the principals of cleaning firms have responded by seeking to transfer cost and risk to other stakeholders. Precariousness is embedded in employment arrangements. The majority of NSW cleaners are engaged on a part-time basis, with short hours and little employment security. The precariousness of employment and social relations within cleaning are compounded by industry fragmentation which gives rise to the possibility of informal employment and working arrangements and the arbitrary power of CSMs and supervisors. Resource-based ‘hard’ human resource strategies adopted by Complete Clean demonstrate that the corporate strategy pursued by cleaning firms also contributes to the development of a regime of precarious employment within the industry.

Industry competition and unrealistic client/customer service expectations – in part fuelled by cleaning firms – have contributed to the reorganisation of work in the industry. Current trends in work organisation in Australia were pioneered by Complete Clean Australia in the 1940s and spread to the rest of the world in the following decades. In this respect, Australian, and in particular NSW cleaning firms have been
and remain world leaders in productivity and innovation. As the main costs in cleaning are primarily related to labour, it is unsurprising that labour time, and attempts to manipulate and expropriate time from the client/customer and cleaners, has become the focus for the reorganisation of work in cleaning. Some cleaning firms, as has Complete Clean, have sought to adopt team cleaning as a means of making more efficient use of time. However, as explained in Chapter 7, in NSW team cleaning has come to be regarded with suspicion and found wanting, especially where issues of quality and the management of performance are tied to the individual and not the team.


The existing studies of the commercial cleaning industry have been conducted within the academic disciplines of sociology, economic and social geography and industrial relations. Within these studies, issues of strategy, choice and decision-making by management have been largely ignored. Mainstream managerial research into the service sector (for example: Frenkel et al., 1999; Korczynski, 2002) has been focused on evincing a 'best practice' approach to strategy and the management of human resources. A key contribution of this thesis to the advancement of knowledge of the organization of work and the social relations of employment within commercial cleaning is in the analysis of context-specific strategic choices made by senior management and human resource practices adopted within commercial cleaning firms.

The core evidence presented in this thesis (Chapters 7-9) demonstrates that the strategic choices made by line and senior management within the commercial cleaning industry are characterised by uncertainty and complexity and reflect the fragmented and dysfunctional nature of the industry. The case study of Complete Clean highlights what might loosely be termed a 'best practice' approach to the development and intended application of policies for the management of human resources, especially at the corporate level. However, as explained in Chapters 8 and 9, the application of human resource policies at the mopfloor level was devolved to individual CSMs and CSSs.
The evidence presented in this study demonstrates conclusively that line managers adopted a contingent approach to strategy and that enacted strategy within Complete Clean more closely resembled the ‘best fit’ model as managers sought to deal with a range of complex environmental contingencies. Such practices ultimately contributed to the maintenance of precarious employment within the wider industry. The ‘best fit’ approach to the understanding of strategic choice within Complete Clean confirms Legge’s assertion that the implementation of HRM is one that is ‘largely *ad hoc*, opportunistic and fragmented’ (1995: xiv).

A key finding from the evidence presented in this thesis indicates that many of the arguments advanced in the New Service Management literature are wanting. This literature has focused primarily on interactive frontline service work, but is deficient when it comes to considering manual service work that does not fit this model, particularly work that it is simultaneously hidden and interactive, of which cleaning is a telling example. While much of the New Service Management literature has acknowledged the role of the customer in the management of employees, it has not readily acknowledged the complexities and the multiplicity of employment relationships typically found in the commercial cleaning industry. While demonstrating limitations within New Service Management School, this thesis also supports more critical research on services (for example, the collection of Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996a) that highlights the disciplinary and surveillance role of the customer in service work. In industries like commercial cleaning, it is frequently uncertain who the employer actually is. Moreover, it is commonly unclear who the cleaner is answerable to and who or what she/he should identify with. Yet this very opacity actually serves a powerful organisational purpose. The variegated nature of social relations in cleaning enables firms to overcome the tensions of organising workers across space. When cleaners identify as much or more with their client as with their employer, problems of labour control can be averted. The New Service Management literature has argued for a strategic approach to the adoption of HRM practices. As I have shown, managers of NSW cleaning firms operate by two distinct sets of rules: one set to justify their own existence as managers; another (literally) to get the job done. As explained in Chapters 8 and 9, HRM practices within Complete Clean demonstrate the distance between
management intent and management practices. Although Complete Clean claims to embrace many of the tenets of the New Service Management school, the need to organise work across fragmented worksites leads to informalisation of management practice and its implementation.

Whereas the New Service Management school emphasises the linkages between human resource bundles and service quality and employment satisfaction (Korczynski, 2002), competitive strategies within the cleaning industry have contributed to the development of human resource policies and practices that fit somewhere between the ‘bad’ and the ‘ugly’ (Guest, 1995, 2001; Guest & Conway, 1999). As demonstrated, Complete Clean is a human resource ‘minimalist’ where human resource polices and practices are primarily directed towards management and salaried staff and the minimization of risk to the firm. As explained earlier, the interpretation and implementation of corporate and human resource strategies is left to CSMs. In an industry characterised by the fragmentation and spatial dispersion of work, this leads to the development of informal employment practices. However, the informal development of human resource practices and their enactment by CSMs not only enables cleaning firms to overcome some of the industry specific obstacles to organisation and profitability, but also to leverage off these industry peculiarities. This is most evident in practices relating to recruitment and selection. By drawing upon ethnically segmented labour markets, operation managers are able to manipulate social and cultural relationships to their advantage.

11.1.3 Identity

Earlier studies by sociologists (Hughes, 1954; Gold, 1964; Hood, 1998a, 1988b; Saunders, 1981; Walsh, 1975) described the stigmatised and ‘dirty’ nature of cleaning work and the associated taint of those performing cleaning work. A key contribution of this thesis to empirical knowledge has been a re-examination of cleaner ‘identity’. While the cleaners observed in this study did occasionally present an image of servility and engaged in behaviour that would ‘hide’ them and their work from the client’s workforce and the public, this study of cleaning workplaces reveals a process of simultaneous resistance and acquiescence. The marginalisation of the cleaning
workforce is not as straightforward as is suggested in some of the academic literature. The evidence presented in this thesis explains that cleaners were able to adopt a range of rhetorical strategies to maintain a positive sense of identity and engaged in behaviours that enabled them to both counter and dis-identify with the more negative aspects of their work. In many instances, cleaners were able to rework space so that places dominated by the client during the working day became appropriated space in the early morning or the evening thus removing a sense of difference or otherness.

11.1.4 Coping on the Mopfloor

It would be naïve to depict cleaners and their managers as helpless victims of restricted and segmented labour markets and precarious employment relations, as is argued by some journalists (for example, Ehrenreich, 2001; Wynhausen, 2005). Much of the academic research into cleaners and the cleaning industry has tended to objectify workers and to see their experience solely in terms of low wages and precarious employment. The research presented in this thesis takes issue with this characterisation. As demonstrated in Chapter 10, cleaners and managers adopt strategies, construct identities and ascribe meanings that enable them to get by. Significantly, workers themselves reject the stigmatised discourse that characterises their work as dirty and undignified. Not withstanding his limited conception of ‘service work’ Korczynski (2002: 201) does make an important point that that ‘servility only captures a small part of the social relations of the workplace.’ Indeed, cleaners and their managers have proven to be extraordinarily resourceful in impression management and manipulating the perceptions of their clients. Thus, cleaning worksites are places of social action in which cleaners and their managers influence and are influenced by the wider environment in which they work. However, for cleaners and their managers, this can be a source of either identity legitimation or personal frustration – or both. For many cleaners, their work confers a sense of satisfaction and prestige; for others, cleaning work becomes a continual struggle to enact tricks and to cope with work intensification and unrealistic expectations of quality from clients. In this sense, the incorporation of ‘making out’ on the job differentiates the research presented in this thesis from other studies and accounts of the cleaning industry.
11.1.5 Corporate and Industry Culture

One of the key findings of this thesis is the limited application of the concept of corporate culture within existing research on the cleaning industry. Although research has demonstrated a tenuous or contingent link between strategy, culture and HRM practice in service industries (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 1988; 1990; Ogbonna & Whipp, 1999), industry fragmentation and the development of informal practices on cleaning worksites mean that the strategies formulated by senior management remain open to (re)interpretation and implementation 'down the line', giving rise to the possibility of internal cultural fragmentation (Meyerson & Martin, 1990). Competitive pressures and unrealistic service expectations by clients suggest that culture within cleaning firms may not be manageable beyond the manipulation of symbolism and surface manifestations of behaviour. My evidence and findings depart from the existing managerial literature on culture in identifying culture as the outcome of social relations in the wider industry rather than something that can be consciously created by management.

Evidence from Complete Clean demonstrates that senior managers hold and actively promote an integrative perspective (Martin, 2002) of cultural unity. Further, the dominant cultural discourse with Complete Clean is one of market orientation and sovereignty of the client (cf Harris & Ogbonna, 1999). However, the need to organise work across fragmented and dispersed sites suggests that internal cultural homogeneity is more fiction than fact. Indeed, the key figures in the implementation of cultural and HRM strategies with Complete Clean are the front-line operational managers. On large sites, CSMs attempt to instil into their cleaners the espoused values of customer service and quality. The degree to which these values are embraced is contingent on several key variables: the extent to which the manager internalises the cultural norms of Complete Clean, the size of the site, the prestige and economic worth of the contract and the expectations of the client. The extent to which cleaners 'normalise' the culture of Complete Clean also depends on a number of factors. In some cases, these are shared with their managers; in others, normalisation of cultural values depends on the relationship between the cleaner and the particular client’s workforce. Thus, within
Complete Clean there is evidence of a significant disjunction between management discourse and its translation into practice on the mopfloor. Ogbonna and Harris (1998: 183) contend that ‘hierarchical position is associated with cultural perspective’, arguing that senior managers take an ‘integrative’ perspective on culture, and middle managers (CSMs within Complete Clean) take a ‘differentiation’ perspective, while workers (cleaners) take a ‘fragmentation’ perspective. The case of Complete Clean supports this argument. The evidence suggests that overall cultural unity is low and that culture is not easily managed or manipulated beyond surface behavioural compliance (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 1990: 14).

On the other hand, there is evidence of shared assumptions and collective patterns of behaviour across the cleaning industry. This thesis suggests that industry culture or macrocultures (Abrahamson & Fombrun, 1994) may be a more powerful determinant of values, attitudes, behaviour, work organisation and practice than is the espoused corporate culture of an individual cleaning firm. Two practices contribute to the development of an industry culture. The first is the recycling of cleaners as contracts change hand. The second is the recycling of managers unable to leave the industry but who seek increased wages or better conditions with competitors. This means that assumptions and values become shared across the industry and not just within specific firms.

For example, by the time the research for this thesis was completed, none of the senior management interviewees were still with Complete Clean. An internal restructuring within the parent company, ISPA, had integrated Complete Clean Australia more closely within its operations and the name ‘Complete Clean’ had been replaced by the name of parent organisation. As result, senior NSW managers had been removed or had left the organisation. All, however, had remained with the industry and taken positions with Complete Clean’s direct competitors.¹

¹ In the same vein, some of these managers were recruited to Complete Clean from rival cleaning firms.
Intense industry competition and a competitive strategy based on cost minimisation and contract retention have stimulated the development of common practices and mindsets across the industry. Although some firms have attempted to differentiate themselves in terms of market segment or by emphasising to varying degrees the discourse of ‘service’ and ‘quality’, the underlying assumptions remain similar. It is the development of an industry-level culture that has enabled cleaning firms to overcome the challenges of fragmented and dispersed worksites, high staff turnover and low rates of contract retention. These findings lend support to recent arguments that criticise ‘the common view that cultures are shaped essentially through internal processes’ (Johns, 2006: 396). In this industry, whatever the managerial rhetoric to the contrary, cultural practice is effectively outsourced – to the industry.

11.2. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

11.2.1 Limitations of the Case Study Research
Like all essays in empirical inquiry, this study does have a number of limitations in scale, scope and method. The research presented in this thesis is primarily based upon the examination, observation and analysis of the policies, practices and organisation of work of the Sydney operations of one of the largest NSW and Australian cleaning firms. Limited analysis was extended to the regional NSW operations of Complete Clean. This firm is acknowledged by the LHMU as a ‘good’ employer at the corporate level. Indeed, discussions with cleaners from Complete Clean generally tend to confirm this impression. Complete Clean is one of the few NSW cleaning firms to have a specialist human resources staff (admittedly, the size of the human resource department and number of staff are small) and other specialist departments in terms of occupational health and safety, injury management and support for front-line operational managers. There are perhaps only a handful of other firms that can claim to have an operation as detailed as Complete Clean. This suggests that the findings presented within this thesis are perhaps reflective of an industry exemplar and not necessarily of wider industry practices. Although the research presented in this thesis included findings from other firms, the inclusion of this material was supplementary rather than detailed and deep.
A number of other cleaning firms were approached in terms of this research and all of them refused cooperation in terms of a detailed study. Many refused to discuss their business or work practices at all. As a consequence, I have been unable to directly incorporate the perspective from small firms or the increasing number of ‘ethnic’ cleaning firms that have developed in NSW and who have been identified as ‘unscrupulous’ by the union, the industry association, and by cleaners themselves. It would have been interesting to access some of these firms in order to understand the career choices made by owners and whether or not this reflected limitations and constrained choice in local labour markets (see Chapter 10).

However, as explained in earlier chapters and above, an industry-wide culture, and the recycling of cleaners and managers among cleaning firms, mean that cleaning firms tend to operate in an industry where standardisation means ‘more people do the same thing’ (Christopherson, 1989: 141). The argument is that practices utilised in one firm will be evident in another. Moreover, as Christopherson (1989: 141) observed some time ago, ‘standardisation and rationalisation of services is eroding local differences in production and consumption’, the implication being that although cleaning firms may operate in different market segments, work and management practices tend to be homogenised across the industry. My findings appear to confirm this. As such, I have confidence in the suggestion that Complete Clean is, on balance, a representative case.

The fragmented and informal nature of the cleaning industry means that my contact with cleaners employed by Complete Clean was limited to those working on larger sites. The pressures on customer site managers and the intense working day experienced by them meant that it was only possible to access large sites and sites that employed three or more cleaners. Accordingly, this study does not incorporate the experiences and lived reality of cleaners working by themselves, or with a family member or relative on small contracts, such as cleaning a small suburban branch of a bank or other small office. Informal discussions with cleaners employed by other firms indicated that cleaners working by themselves on small sites experienced more control over their working life. Typically, these cleaners had some flexibility over their hours of work, including start and finish times. For instance, while they were ostensibly employed on a
three-hour shift, they could leave work as soon as their tasks were completed. These cleaners generally had much less contact with the general public and with the client’s workforce. Some explained that they felt more appreciated by the client’s workforce and would be included in the social functions of the client. In any case, cleaners on small sites rarely saw their managers and did not experience dual layers of control from their manager and the client in terms of quality as experienced by cleaners on larger sites. Sites with one or two cleaners tended to deal directly with the client and, unless there were problems, had limited contact with their manager. Indeed, some CSMs explained that they tended to ignore these cleaners and leave them to their own devices.²

Furthermore, it may be claimed that the responses and opinions presented in the thesis from managers are gendered. At the time research was undertaken, all of the Complete Clean customer service managers were male and only one full-time female customer site supervisor was employed. This manager chose not be interviewed on tape and so I have been unable to directly incorporate her responses into the analysis. In any case, this tends to reflect prevailing industry employment patterns. The cleaners I came into contact with reflected wider employment patterns within the industry. For example, most of the part-time office cleaners I worked with were women, while the majority of full-time day cleaners were men.

A lingering question remains over the use of participant observation as a research technique. Did my presence alongside cleaners and their managers create a Hawthorne effect? Like Burawoy’s workers in the machine shop, cleaners and managers ‘regarded my enterprise with a mixture of disbelief and amusement’ (Burawoy, 1979: xv). Like many researchers before who have used ethnographic methods, there was the sense that I was being watched; and some cleaners, initially, certainly saw me as a company informant (Schwartzman, 1997: 48-9). However, by acting to present an image of myself that was acceptable to the cleaners, I was able to participate in the work routines

² It should be noted that the same managers reported that they tended to use only trusted cleaners on these sites and that small sites with only a few hours of cleaning a week were often used as reward for loyal and trusted cleaners seeking some extra work.
of cleaners. Following Shaffir (1999: 682), 'by projecting both personal and academic interests [in the work and lives of cleaners, their managers and their industry], I was attempting to display a particular image that I hoped would be received favourably.' Where possible, I interviewed managers off site.\(^3\) By wearing the uniform of cleaners and sharing in their tasks, I was able to obtain data that would not have been possible with non-participant forms of observation. As explained in Chapters 6 and 10, cleaners were comfortable in engaging in cheating of clients and unsafe and unhygienic practices in front of and alongside me. In other cases I was asked to join cleaners in expropriating clients' resources and time from the employer.

11.2.2 Dusty Corners and Black Holes: Areas for further research

This thesis has identified a number of avenues for further research. One area warranting further inquiry is industrial regulation and collective bargaining structures in the cleaning industry across Australia. Evidence from other Australian states (notably Western Australia and, to a lesser extent, Victoria) demonstrates that systems of regulation and gaps within the system have consequences for vulnerable workers such as cleaners. Given that the federal government has announced changes to the system of industrial relations and the further simplification of industrial awards, it is questionable whether or not collective bargaining, such as that currently existing between the LHMC and large employers and the industry association in NSW, will be viable into the future (see Ryan & Herod, 2006). Future studies of the cleaning industry could incorporate a national-level analysis and examine how large cleaning firms organise across different states.

Further research is needed into the small cleaning firms that numerically dominate the industry, including their relationship and co-existence alongside large firms that control much of the industry's economic activity. Little is known about the scope of employment relations or patterns of work organisation within these firms, as they tend to fall outside the gaze of the union and the dominant industry association. These small

\(^3\) Indeed, one interview was conducted on one site in a rubbish room surrounded by the stench of rubbish bins.
firms are, quite literally, ‘black holes’ in our knowledge base. In particular, it is not readily apparent whether or not the social relations of employment within firms with less than four employees are more individualised or bleak than in larger firms, and what the consequences of these are for worker motivation and satisfaction.

More detailed research is required into migrants and NESB workers who take up cleaning, and the extent of their work experiences. Current research into these workers has thus far been unable to demonstrate convincingly whether or not cleaning work is ‘dead-end’ work or, alternatively, the means to further opportunity in the labour market, or into self-employment and small business enterprise within and beyond cleaning. Research is also needed into changing employment patterns within the industry, notably the shift to using more full-time cleaners and day instead of evening and night cleaners. It is not known what the impact of the shift to full-time cleaning will have on incomes and whether increased hours of work will preclude women who are seen as being attracted to cleaning because of the hours of work and the part-time nature of the employment.

While most academic research has been critical of social relations and the structure of employment within the industry, a further potentially fruitful avenue for research would be the problems faced by cleaning firms and their management on a daily basis. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, cleaning firms face a continual challenge of recruiting, retaining and motivating cleaners. More work needs to undertaken in conjunction with the industry to develop meaningful training and careers in cleaning. More work is needed on how the industry can repackage and re-image itself as a professional service industry in order to change the focus of the clients and property management agencies from price to a view that embraces quality and added-to value to the operations of the client. This means that the spectrum of social and economic relationships within the cleaning industry require further examination. As explained in Chapter 8, cleaners are caught in a multiplicity of social relationships between their employer and the client or the client’s agent. Little is known about the use by property owners in Australia of procurement agencies for hiring cleaning and other services (‘Taken to the Cleaners’, The Australian, 15 April 2006). Evidence from the ‘Justice for
Janitors' campaign in North America demonstrates that union and community efforts to lift wages and improve working conditions of cleaners need to be directed towards property owners and procurement companies, to ensure that they are providing contracts that are reasonable, and to ensure that work can be done to a minimum standard and that the cleaning contractor can engage workers on appropriate rates of pay and maintain worker entitlements, providing a working environment that is compliant with occupational health and safety legislation. Indeed, as Herzenberg et al (1998: 122) suggest, it may be desirable to adopt a system of employment rights and obligations that transcends unitary firms to include industries, business networks and occupations.

Other interesting questions arising from this study are whether or not the experiences of cleaners employed by commercial cleaning firms are unique and whether the analytical construct of 'precarious employment' has lost its explanatory power. Given that the industry is dominated by a handful of large firms that have adopted facility management as part of their overall strategy, offering their clients a range of integrated property services including security, catering, laundry and grounds and property maintenance, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the experience of their workers with those of other cleaners within in the same organisation. Limited international research (Allen & Henry, 1996 for Britain) suggests that the experience of catering and security workers is at least as precarious as that of cleaners. Reports from the LHMU (2003a) indicate that workers in Australian security, hospitality and caring services, for example, join cleaners in the ranks of the low paid. If the warnings issued by unions, journalists and academics are accurate, and if the trends for employment in Australia for the future continue to demonstrate high levels of 'atypical' and precarious employment, then this calls into question the efficacy of the concept of 'precarious employment'. Precarious employment, as explained in earlier chapters, is seen in employment regimes that are atypical and characterised by fragmented and insecure work arrangements. However, the normalisation of this experience for cleaners and other service workers suggests that precarious employment is increasingly becoming the working norm; and thus we need to consider alternative analytical constructs for describing work and employment that is increasingly becoming typical.
11.3 Conclusion

This thesis, then, has examined a number of aspects of employment relations, labour management and work organisation in the NSW commercial cleaning industry. It has also critically analysed a number of the key arguments and theories relating to the management and organisation of work in the service society. It has examined and analysed a number of tensions in cleaning work, particularly those between the employing organisation and the coordination of work across fragmented and spatially dispersed sites. This study has demonstrated that researchers need to ask different questions when analysing modern, decentralised organisations. The analytical tools of traditional management and organisation theory are simply inadequate to the task. While the conclusions presented in this thesis are not new, in short, following Herzenberg et al (1998), they suggest that we need new rules for researching and understanding the post-industrial service-based economy.
APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

QUESTIONS: KEY INDUSTRY INFORMANTS AND BACKGROUND INTERVIEWS

Organisation

• Your position and title within this organisation?

• Describe your organisation the commercial, legal basis of your organisation (eg
  unlisted private company, publicly-traded company, owner-operated firm,
  other)?

• Which of the following best describes your organisation (an autonomous
  business entity, a subsidiary of an Australian-based firm, a subsidiary of an
  overseas-based firm, other)?

• Apart from cleaning services, what other business activities does your
  organisation undertake?

• How many geographically separate branches does your organisation currently
  have in Australia? NSW?

• What types of cleaning is your organisation currently engaged in?

• Does your organisation subcontract any of its cleaning work or employ
  subcontract cleaners? If so, what kinds of cleaning work?

• Does your organisation have its own central unit for human resource policies
  and practices?

• Is your organisation a member of any Employers’ Association? Name of
  organisation?

• Is your organisation a member of the Building Service Contractors Association
  of Australia (or any other peak industry association)?

Recruitment

• What means does your organisation use to recruit its cleaning staff?

• What methods does your organisation use to select its cleaning staff?

• Are supervisors recruited from internal workforce or from external sources?
• Are managers recruited from internal workforce or from external sources?

**Personnel and Employment Arrangements**

• What is the total size of your cleaning workforce? Australia? NSW?
• What percentage of your cleaning workforce is turned over each year?
• What percentage of your workforce is comprised of people from a Non-English speaking background?
• What nationalities comprise your Non-English speaking background employees?
• What is the average length of service of your cleaning staff?
• What percentage of your cleaning workforce is female? Male?
• What percentage of your cleaning workforce is employed on a part-time basis? Casual basis?
• What percentages of your employees are classified as managerial/supervisory employees?
• What percentages of your supervisory staff are female? Male?

**Training**

• Do your employees have the necessary skills to undertake cleaning work when first employed?
• Does this organisation have an induction program for its cleaning staff?
• Does this organisation conduct training programs for its cleaning staff?
• Does this organisation undertake training for its supervisory staff?

**Work Practices and Performance Management**

• How is work organised and distributed in this organisation
• Are your cleaning employees paid by the hour or for area cleaned?
• How do you decide the area to be cleaned by each staff member or how many staff to employ for that area?
• Do you use incentive payments for your cleaning staff?
• How do you monitor/control your employees’ output?
• Hows does this organisation manage quality?
HRM and management

- What total of this organisation’s operating expenses are labour costs?
- Does this organisation have a computerised HRM system?
- Does this organisation conduct formal appraisals of its cleaning staff?
  Management staff?
- Does this organisation have a performance management appraisal system for
  managerial/supervisory staff?
- What means does this organisation use to communicate with its employees?
- What percentage of your workforce is covered by a collective agreement?
  Individual contract?
- What percentage of your cleaning employees are union members?
- What is your view of employment relations in this industry?
- In terms of your competitive strategy which of these two option is more
  important: Quality or Cost consideration?

Future of Cleaning Industry?

- What have been the major technological developments in the industry over the
  past 20 years?
- What future trends do you envisage for the Australian cleaning industry?
- Do you think we are likely to see further rationalisation in the industry?
- What impact has Facility management had upon your organization?
- Do you think the trend of the outsourcing of cleaning work is likely to continue
  in NSW?
- What do you see as the main issues/problems facing the cleaning industry?
- How will the industry manage its staff and labour in the future?
APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

QUESTIONS: CLEANERS AND EMPLOYEES.

These are the questions that I attempted to ask cleaners on the various worksites.

Background

• Age
• Country of origin/where born
• Educational level /Qualifications

Recruitment into industry

• Why did you become a cleaner (Reasons for working as cleaner)?
• How were you recruited as a cleaner?
• Do any of your family members or relatives work as a cleaner?
• Did your employer give you an interview/Did you have to take an on-the job-test?

Work as Cleaner

• How long have you worked as a cleaner?
• How many different cleaning companies have you worked for?
• Describe the type of cleaning that you do?
• Has this changed over the past ten years (or since when joined the industry)?
• Do you now work harder than you did five years ago? If so, in what ways?
• Has you changed employer because of contracting and outsourcing?
• Describe your training to be a cleaner – was it adequate for the job you do?
• What is the best and worst thing about your job?
• Do you socialise with other cleaners after work?
• Explain how your job is organised. Who determines your work tasks?
• Do you find that you have adequate equipment to your job?
• Do you find that you have adequate chemicals to your job?
• Do you think there are opportunities for promotion in your job?
• Have you ever had a job performance evaluation (If yes, please explain)?
• Have you been harassed on the job by customers or clients?

Work Safety
• Do you think your job is safe? Or, are your working conditions safe?
• Do/did you receive OH&S training on the job?
• Have you ever had an injury at work while working as a cleaner? If so, what type?
• How did you and your employer manage this injury?
• Do you understand the Occupational Health and Safety Act and how this applies to your workplace?

Relationship with management
• How does your manager communicate with you?
• Describe your relationship with your supervisor?
• Have you ever been threatened or cajoled to make you work harder (explain)?

Questions to ask if Supervising other employees
• How many people do you supervise?
• How long have you been a supervisor?
• How were you appointed/recruited as a supervisor?
• Training as a supervisor?
• Problems with other staff/management?
• How do you communicate with management and those under you?
APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH COMPLETE CLEAN SENIOR OPERATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL MANAGERS.

Question Topics:

Background and Recruitment into Industry
- Age
- Country of origin/where born
- Educational level/qualifications
- Recruitment and selection
- Career development and progression

Working Arrangements
- Day-to-Day organisation of work
- Hours of work
- Main clients and types of cleaning performed
- Relationship and client/customer management
- Recruitment and selection of staff
- Management of quality
- Managing performance of managers and cleaners
- Managing motivation and rewards
- Managing Occupational Health and Safety
- Communication with staff

Employment Relations
- Management style
- Wages, conditions of work
- Relations with union
Complete Clean

• Competitive Strategy
• Image among clients
• Image presented to clients
• Key values of Complete Clean
• Profit margins on contracts
• Tendering and contract specifications
• Contract retention
• Public Liability

Future Trends

• Industry changes
• Technology
• Challenges and threats
APPENDIX 4

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED: COMPLETE CLEAN AUSTRALIA

1. Corporate
Quality and Environmental Policy
Customer Satisfaction [Mission Statement]
Complete Clean NSW/ACT Operations structure chart
Management System Procedure: ‘Inspection and Testing’ [Quality and Service Inspection]
Clean Rewards [Reward system for Complete Clean employees]

2. Human Resource Policies and Documents
Employee Guide and Induction Book - ‘Your Job: The Questions and Answers’
  • Human Resources Management System
  • Recruitment
  • Probation
  • Service Agreements
  • Remuneration
  • Induction
  • Occupational Health and Safety
  • Performance Management
  • Job Evaluation

‘A Managers’ Guide to Employment Relations’
‘A Manager’s Guide to Recruiting and Inducting Employees’
‘A Manager’s Guide to Performance Management’
‘A Managers’ Guide to Training and Development’
Position Descriptions
• Regional Manager
• Customer Service Manager
• Customer Site Supervisor
• Leading Hand


3. Staff Survey
Management Survey Report, 2002
Staff Survey Report, 2002
Qualitative Comments from the Staff Survey and Management Survey, 2002
Staff Newsletter, December, 2002

4. Client Survey
Client Survey Report, 2001

5. Tender Documents
‘Cost Break-Up and Cleaning Specification’ document
‘Tender Contract Analysis’
‘Contract Control Steps’ [Quoting, Planning, Time Standards]

6. History
[Author unknown] (n.d.) *The International Name for Service [Complete Clean Australia]. The Story of [Complete Clean Australia] Ltd*, Auckland, Complete Clean Australia Human Resources

7. Public Documents
APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEWS WITH AUSTRALIAN LIQUOR, HOSPITALITY & MISCELLANEOUS WORKERS' UNION (LHMU) OFFICIALS.

Question Topics

Background: (of official being interviewed)

• Position in union
• Where worked before LHMU
• How entered current position

Industry Change

• Changes in cleaning industry
• Subcontracting and alternative organisational arrangements in industry
• Impact of contracting out and outsourcing
• A: Government and public sector
• B: Private sector
• Transfer of undertakings or contract
• Future of cleaning and cleaning industry
• Occupational health and safety
• Impact of ‘Event Management’ and ‘Total Facility Management’

Industrial Relations System

• System of industrial relations in this industry
• Attitudes of employers towards union
• Changes in relationship with management
• Changes in work organisation and impact upon workers
• Assessment of collective bargaining and Award system
• Individualism, Enterprise Bargaining, Australian Workplace Agreements.
• Impact of legislative changes
• Issues of working time
• Union & Union Membership
• History/overview of LHMU involvement in cleaning
• Characterise typical ‘cleaning’ member
• Areas of cleaning union strength
• Difficulties/challenges of organising cleaning members
• Challenges facing unionisation
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Gaudry, B. (nd.) Manual Handling Injury Prevention for Cleaning Contractors and their Employees in State Government Schools and TAFE. Syndey, LHMU.


Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers’ Union [LHMU]. (various years and issues). *Focus on NSW*, Sydney, LHMU.


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