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Peer Control in the Industrial Workplace

Jay R. Howard
Butler University, jrhoward@butler.edu

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JAY R. HOWARD
Indiana University - Purdue University
at Indianapolis at Columbus Center

This case study of Kleer Windows, a firm which manufactures doors and windows for the recreational vehicles industry argues that the influence of the work group can under certain conditions be harnessed by management in their attempts to control workers. Peer control exists when co-workers seek to monitor and influence each other's level of productivity. Data were collected during three summers of ethnographic research. A comparison of the control systems utilized in the production, shipping, and receiving departments at Kleer Windows reveals that peer control is likely to stimulate, rather than inhibit, productivity when two conditions exist. First, when workers are motivated to monitor one another through an interdependence of reward — making the rewards of each worker dependent upon the effort and productivity of all co-workers as well as the effort of the individual worker (i.e., through the use of a group bonus system) — peer control that stimulates productivity is increasingly likely to develop. The second condition necessary for peer control is that workers be able to monitor each other through an interdependence of task — organizing work such that each worker is dependent upon co-workers for the successful completion of their work tasks (i.e., serial production) — contributes to the establishment of peer control.

INTRODUCTION

The influence of the informal work group as a source of worker resistance to management control strategies is well documented in both recent and classic sociological research (Molstad 1988; Juravich 1985; Halle 1984; Storey 1983; Hill 1981; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1956; Whyte 1955; Roy 1952; 1953; 1954; Mayo 1933). Management has adopted various strategies in the attempt to overcome the tendency of the informal work group to restrict productivity. Individualized piece rate systems have been used in the attempt to motivate workers to increase production (Burawoy 1979; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1956; Roy 1952; 1953; 1954). However, these attempts have had only limited success as normative standards for production quickly develop within the work group. The group bonus system attempted in the Hawthorne studies also met with work group restriction of production. These findings raise the issue, is it possible for management to harness the influence of the informal work groups in the drive to increase productivity? If so, under what conditions is the informal work group likely to stimulate the productivity of its individual members?

This ethnographic case study of Kleer Windows,[1] a firm which manufactures windows for truck caps, vans, recreational vehicles, and mobile homes as well as truck cap doors, argues that peer control is the most significant determinant of the productivity of individual work group members. Peer control occurs when work is organized in a fashion that encourages co-workers to monitor and influence each other's level of productivity. At Kleer Windows, peer control stimulated productivity in the production

departments and, to a lesser extent, in the shipping department. The objective of this research is to identify the conditions that led to this outcome, rather than the more common tendency for informal work groups to limit productivity.

At its most basic level, there are at least three dimensions of control (Edwards 1979; Hachen 1988). Control involves (1) the direction of work; (2) the evaluation and monitoring of the work task; and (3) a system of reward and punishment. At Kleer Windows co-workers set the pace of work, monitored and evaluated each other's work effort, and contributed to the direction of work. Workers who conformed to the group's norms were positively sanctioned (i.e., through intragroup status gains). Those who failed to fulfill the expectations of co-workers were negatively sanctioned in a myriad of ways (i.e., taunting/name calling). In the production departments at Kleer, the informal work group stimulated the productivity of individual workers. In the shipping department, the informal work group operated to ensure a level of productivity within a peer defined range of acceptability. In the receiving department, the informal work group had minimal impact on member's productivity. Analysis of these findings suggests that not only can the influence of the informal work group be used to decrease productivity, it also can, given appropriate conditions, be used to stimulate group productivity.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted over three summers (1989 to 1991) of full-time employment at Kleer Windows, two summers on the second shift and one on the first shift. The decision to conduct ethnographic research at Kleer came after entering the field as a temporary employee. I observed the informal work group acting to limit productivity of individuals in some cases, as my graduate training in sociology had led me to expect. However, I also observed the informal work group's influence in stimulating production, an effect I had not anticipated. I began taking systematic field notes, writing brief notes to myself concerning the day's events both during work and immediately after working hours as I sat in my car in the parking lot. Upon returning to my home, I wrote more elaborate field notes using the brief "reminders" to stimulate my recollection of events. I gathered any printed materials made available to employees concerning Kleer Windows, Inc. and often questioned co-workers regarding their understanding of policies and events at Kleer. Hypotheses and insights were developed in a process of analytic induction (see Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lindesmith 1948) over the three summers I was employed at Kleer and as I studied and attempted to synthesize the field notes during the remainder of the year. Hypotheses were developed and revised as the search for negative cases dictated.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

Kleer Windows employed approximately 500 people, about 65% were females, in a three plant operation in the midwestern US. The years 1989 through 1991 were relatively lean years economically for people seeking low-skill, manufacturing jobs in this part of the country. Kleer's large size presented workers with relative job security at a time when many smaller manufacturing firms were laying off workers or closing down completely. For the many unskilled, poorly educated single mothers employed there,

Kleer was one of the higher paid jobs available to them. The base wages for production line employees, who were predominately female, averaged nearly $6.00 per hour. When combined with production bonus earnings ($100-$200 per week), the wages were higher than those available in other low-skill manufacturing jobs available for women in the area. Receiving department jobs were predominantly held by males, while Shipping Department jobs were held exclusively by males.

Kleer did have an internal labor market mechanism which allowed workers to 'bid" on jobs that came open before "outsiders" were hired. This allowed experienced workers, primarily males, to move to the less physically demanding jobs in Shipping and Receiving. Older workers were frequently anxious to make such a change despite the lower pay levels in Shipping and Receiving. The operation of the internal labor market caused most new permanent employees to be hired onto the production lines. Another alternative for experienced production line workers, both males and females, was to move to semi-skilled jobs on the line, such as saw operator or tube bender, which were somewhat less physically demanding than the regular production line assembly jobs but still earned bonus wages.

Kleer Windows, Inc. was not a unionized firm. In fact, the employee hand book, which employees were required to read before they began work stated, "It is Kleer Window's [sic] intention to preserve and maintain a non-union status throughout the Company." Between my first and second summers of employment, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters failed in a union organizing drive which generated only minimal interest among the employees. Throughout my employment at Kleer I could not locate a single worker who strongly advocated unionization.

For most of my employment at Kleer, I was a member of the Shipping Department, which allowed a significant amount of mobility within the shop. This mobility presented the opportunity to observe a total of fifteen departments (eleven production lines; two shifts of the Shipping Department; and two shifts of the Receiving Department) and the nature of control and resistance within those departments.

Differences in the nature of the work task and the organization of work allow for comparisons across departments of the control strategies utilized under differing conditions. These control strategies evolved both through the intentional efforts of management (i.e., the establishment of a group production bonus) and through trial and error (i.e., the establishment of a productivity "rule of thumb" in the shipping department).

PEER CONTROL IN THE KLEER
WINDOWS PRODUCTION DEPARTMENTS

In the Production Departments at Kleer Windows an interdependence of task was created through the use of a serial production format. The production lines were organized such that each worker was dependent upon workers ahead of them in the assembly line. Worker B could not perform his task until worker A had performed her task. Worker C was dependent upon B and in turn A, and so on until the end of the line.

Each of the production lines consisted of a "prep" area with five to ten workers making parts necessary for the operation of the assembly lines where most crew members perform their work. The use of the term "assembly line" tends to invoke the notion of technical control. However, this was not the case. Technical control requires

that for a significant majority of the workers, the pace and ordering of the task be dictated by machinery or technology (Edwards 1979). Kleer Windows' assembly lines had no conveyor belts, or other technical apparatus, that dictated the pace of work by moving work objects into and out of each worker's area. Instead, some workers would place work objects on carts and slide them to the next station after the cart was filled. Other workers were stationed along a long table. The windows and doors were slid into and out of each workers area by hand. While the sequence of work was determined by the technological organization of the workplace, the pace of work was not set by machinery, but by the level of effort of one's co-workers.

Incentives to increase the pace of work were provided by the company's use of a group bonus system. The group bonus created an interdependence of reward, linking each crew member's rewards to the effort of the entire crew. A group bonus system differs from the more common piece rate systems (see Roy 1952; 1953; 1954; Whyte 1955; Burawoy 1979), in that the amount of the bonus earned is determined by group productivity rather than individual performance. Most studies agree that when individual piece rate systems are used as motivating factors, productivity is restricted to a normative level that is less than the capacity of the worker. In the group bonus system utilized at Kleer, the department received a set amount of bonus payment per window or door produced (i.e., $3.00) after reaching the required quota. With the exception of a few particularly complicated doors and windows, all products manufactured by the department large or small, easy or difficult to assemble paid the same amount of bonus. The accrued bonus is then divided evenly among all department workers present on that shift that day. So if a crew of ten workers produced fifty windows over quota they each earned $15.00 in production bonus for that particular shift. While there were weeks when departments earned $200 in bonus wages, the norm was closer to $100 per week. The workers in these production departments had a lower base wage (approximately $6.00 per hour versus $7.50 per hour) than did shippers and receivers, however, the group bonus consistently allowed the former to earn more than the latter.

The group bonus system combined with a serial production method created an effective system of peer control which stimulated productivity. As Clack (1967) suggested, when successful completion of one's work task is dependent upon other individuals, workers will have a tendency to monitor each other's work both in quality and quantity. There is much less need for close management supervision. Workers who could not, or would not, maintain the pace were socially sanctioned by their co-workers. Offending workers were excluded from break time gatherings, frequently verbally abused behind their backs and to their faces, and subjected to threatened and actual minor physical abuse. Graffiti depicting them as homosexuals appeared on chalkboards in the bathroom stalls (placed there by management to discourage graffiti on permanent fixtures). This created tremendous pressure on individuals to maintain the hectic pace of production. Workers who did not maintain the pace set by the group, often quit their jobs in a few days. Co-workers were glad to see them go.

A woman from the window line was complaining to a group of shippers and receivers at the time clock:

> Here I am bustin' my ass all night, while people who won't [work as hard] get paid the same money as I do. We haven't made a decent bonus all week. Hell, days [day shift window line] has one less

worker and puts out a hundred more windows a day! It's time we got rid of some people who won't work!

At Kleer, as on Linhart's (1981) automobile assembly line, new employees often felt the wrath of more experienced co-workers making the first day on the job extremely stressful. New employees who couldn't "keep up" were not included in break time social gatherings and were often the main topic of conversation during such gatherings.

There was a lot of complaining about the "new guy" on doors during break. Apparently he was only finishing five plates for every twenty that Dana [an experienced door line worker] finished. According to his complaining co-workers, the new employee told his group leader.

"I shouldn't have to work as fast as the others" (implying his inexperience should cause the group to tolerate his slower pace)." His group leader retorted, "The hell you don't!" In a few days the new worker quit.

Experienced workers would also verbally attack each other if one was perceived as "not working hard enough." When he got "ahead" and ran out of work, a male bander (the last position on the line) on a largely female production line would call out, "Come on, you buncha bitches!" Threats of physical harm and small but significant physical abuse were sometimes used to pressure co-workers who were not producing fast enough. On one occasion, I witnessed two crew members who perceived a third as "not keeping up," throwing screws at him and yelling, "Let's go!" The pain inflicted was minor, but the point was clearly made.

In addition to pressuring co-workers to work harder, line workers also discussed and debated the way in which their foreman and group leaders divided the work among the crew. The foreman had the authority to place workers on the line wherever he or she saw fit. Workers' frustration was occasionally directed at foremen and group leaders for what was perceived to be the faulty assignment of individuals to particular tasks, as the following field note illustrates:

It's that damn Denice's [door line group leader] fault we're not making any money. She always takes the easiest job for herself and then assigns the people she wants to talk to to work next to her. It's no wonder we can't make any fuckin' bonus!

On another occasion, Terry whose wife, Dana, worked on one of the lines complained to his fellow shippers at break:

They've got Dana doin' that plating job by herself. There's no way she can keep up. That's a two man job! If Denice would get her shit together and put another person on that job, they'd make some money.

Burawoy (1979; 1985) and Roy (1953) compare individual piece rate systems with games. Roy (1953) describes workers attempting to beat the quota "for the hell of it" and piece work as an effective means of passing the time at least when meeting the quota is a challenge. Burawoy (1979) and Shostak (1980) suggest games and horse play often have the effect of reducing the meaninglessness associated with factory work. Burawoy (1985) also argues that this type of game playing, where one attempts to "make out," creates consent to control, thereby legitimating the conditions wherein workers are exploited.

In the group bonus system utilized at Kleer surviving on the production lines was more than a game as far as workers were concerned. A game implies some degree of choice to participate. To be a member of a production line meant you were automatically part of a group struggle for income and acceptance. This struggle was not taken lightly by Kleer employees. One did not win or lose alone. One failed or succeeded with one's co-workers (team). If a "player" did not make at least an equitable contribution to the group effort, the group lost income and the player lost status and acceptance within the group. If you contributed to "losing the game" too frequently, your team could make your life miserable. Making a bonus was more serious than a game. One did not play "for the hell of it." One played for the group's income and acceptance.

In sum, peer control in the production lines was produced through an interdependence of task, created through the serial production format, and through an interdependence of reward, via the group bonus system. Through the creation of these work structures, management provided an opportunity for the informal work group to pressure individuals to maintain a high level of work effort. Peer control was enforced with sanctions such as bathroom chalkboard graffiti, verbal and physical abuse, and exclusion from social groups. Peer control also resulted in pressure on supervisors to make job assignment decisions that allowed line workers to make the largest bonus possible. The influence of the informal work group effectively operated to create pressures for high levels of effort from individual group members.

RESISTANCE IN THE PRODUCTION DEPARTMENTS

Resistance in the production departments was very limited. When production line workers ran out of needed supplies during the shift, it was common for them to run to the rear of the building to the supply "cage" to get the needed item and to run back to their work station. This was a perfect opportunity for social loafing that was rarely capitalized upon. Foremen and co-workers were not ordering the workers to literally run for supplies. There were even company regulations against running inside the plant. Nonetheless, workers often ran so as to minimize time away from actual production.

Bonuses and quotas were based on time studies conducted by management. I witnessed several time studies during my third summer of employment. While other researchers (i.e., Balzer 1976) have found workers engaging in systematic slowdowns while being observed by time study officials, I could not detect such resistance. I asked the workers being studied if they sped up or slowed down when being observed. The consistent reply was, "You just work at a steady pace. Like normal. Don't go too fast or too slow." But in practice the "normal" pace for line workers was as fast as they could possibly work.

Despite the general acceptance of the fast pace of production, when there was little possibility of earning bonus money production workers engaged in systematic slowdowns. Break time conversations were dominated by workers complaining about the situation. "I ain't gonna bust my ass for nothin!" was the usual sentiment. Frustration was often directed at the other shift, who always did "the good runs and left the shit for us."

Peer control on the production lines proved to be highly effective at maintaining high levels of productivity. The routinization of the work tasks into an assembly line

format and the accompanying physical immobility of workers contributed to peer control. The routinization of tasks meant that work productivity was easily measurable. A worker who was not "keeping up" could readily be identified by his or her foreman, and even more importantly by co-workers. The lack of mobility kept workers at their work stations, where they could be observed by co-workers who maintained an active interest in their productivity levels. These factors contributed to low levels of resistance to management and high levels of productivity on the production lines. Workers effectively pressured each other, and, as noted above, even their supervisors, into increased productivity when they could earn a group bonus because of their dependence upon one another for the bonus and for completion of their work tasks.

PEER CONTROL IN THE KLEER SHIPPING DEPARTMENT

In the shipping department there was no means of earning a production bonus. Despite that fact, peer control did exist, although with somewhat different results in terms of productivity. One reason for the differences was the inability of the company to effectively routinize the work tasks of the shipping department to make measurement of productivity easy and unambiguous. This made resistance to control relatively easy to hide from upper management. Yet, the shippers themselves monitored and sanctioned each other's work productivity.

The primary task of shippers was to locate finished product in the warehouse areas of the shop, bring it to the loading docks via forklift, and then manually load the correct number of each type of door or window ordered into company trucks for delivery the next day. Shippers were usually paired off into "teams," making each shipper dependent upon his partner for the completion of the assigned load.

Factors such as (1) the organization, or more appropriately the lack thereof, of the warehouse areas of the shop; (2) the difficulty in determining whether a particular order had been completed by the production lines; (3) the necessity of shuffling stock racks in the limited space of the warehouse areas; and (4) the uniqueness of each load made measuring productivity a very ambiguous process. This difficulty led Kleer management to develop a "rule of thumb" regarding the number of trucks that should be loaded each shift.

The necessity of completing a certain number of "loads" each shift and the team loading format created an interdependence of task within the shipping department. In order for the department to reach its expected level of productivity, all shippers had to be contributing to the group's output. Shippers were therefore, not only dependent upon their partner, but also on all other shippers to complete the group work task. A reallocation rule, whereby shippers who finished loading one truck were reassigned to help those shippers not yet finished, created an interdependence of reward. If shipper A was not making an equitable contribution to the group's productivity, that meant shippers B and C had to contribute even more effort without any corresponding increase in reward.

The combination of the "team" loading structure, the "rule of thumb" productivity expectation, and the reallocation rule contributed to a system of peer control that led to a level of productivity within a peer defined range. Shipping crew members sought to ensure that everyone did "their share" of work. Workers who were seen "standing around" were taunted by crew members with cries of "Prebreak [meaning

the offending party was taking his break before the official break period]! If you ain't got nothin' to do, come help me!" Workers who continually were away from their work area on informal breaks, were paged by other workers on the public address system. "Jay Howard report to your work area," was considered an especially harsh insult because it implied for the entire shop to hear, that the offending party was not pulling his "share" of the load in the crew. As Balzer (1976) found at Western Electric, dissension within the workgroup was caused by feelings you were "carrying other people."

The timing of informal breaks was important. Other crew members were tolerant of them, providing the worker had contributed his "fair share" to the day's loading. This meant that, in general, breaks early in the day were frowned upon because it was not yet apparent that the worker had made his required contribution to the group effort. Co-workers were more tolerant of informal breaks after lunch when a shipper's contribution was evident. As with the production line workers, offending shippers were likely to find their name included in obscene graffiti on restroom chalkboards.

Crew members were clearly interested in monitoring the work productivity of each other. My first day at Kleer Windows, I was assigned to work with Bruce. Bruce was to "train" me to load trucks while he also serviced the lines. Bruce was constantly in and out of the trailer giving me little or no advice as to what I should be doing while he was gone. Often I was left in the trailer with nothing to do, worrying about the rest of the crew's developing opinions regarding me. The first time Bruce wandered away leaving me in the trailer to load by myself, Rob [shipping foreman] came in and said, "Hey Jay, don't let Bruce make you do all the loading." I heard the same comment from each of the other three crew members at various points throughout the shift. I initially attributed this concern to Bruce's tendency toward social loafing. However, I soon discovered workers, in general, closely monitored the effort of one another.

The day I began my third summer of work at Kleer, which was my first on the day shift, I had a very similar experience. I was assigned to load a semi with Nick, the group leader. I was loading, and sweating profusely, in the trailer while Nick was using the forklift to gather the next rack to be loaded. Stu came into the trailer:

> Doncha let Nick make you do all the loadin' while he rides around on the forklift. Ya got to watch that asshole or he'll have you doin' all the fuckin' work!

[Later in the day,] I finished loading a rack into the trailer by myself, while Nick was again out on the forklift. I walked across the dock looking for something to do. I spotted Roy unloading a rack into a trailer by himself. I went inside and began helping him. Roy greeted me with:

> "Whatsa matter, Nick got you doin' all the work?" "Oh, he's all right," I responded, not wanting to appear to be a "whiner" on my first day. "Hey man, don't let the motha fucka leave all the loadin' for you to do."

In a few minutes, Nick returned. When he discovered me helping Roy, he said to me (loud enough for Roy to hear), "You helpin' that weakling? Let him do his own work!" These experiences alerted me to crew members' monitoring of one another to ensure an equitable division of the crew's work.

Nick's reaction to my assisting Roy illustrates both his concern with Roy's contribution to the group's productivity and one of the ways shippers attempted to "goad"

each other on to higher levels of productivity. As in the case of the bathroom graffiti, "deviant" co-workers often found their masculinity challenged. The most common of these ritual insults were anti-female in nature, as male co-workers were called "bitch," "slut," and "pussy."[2] Shippers also gave one another derogatory nicknames which would be used when a worker was not performing up to the crew's standard. Jim, a driver who helped load in shop occasionally, became "Dr. Dolittle — and that's not just cuz he talks to them gophers! [Jim frequently fed potato chips to gophers during break time.]" Gene was "Bugger." I was occasionally called, "College Boy" or "Lil' Buddy."

Often these nicknames would take the form of associating an individual with another shipper, who was considered a "bad" worker. Nick, the first shift group leader, became "Miller [the shipping foreman] Junior — just stands around doin' nothin', while tellin' everybody else to get to work." Terry frequently heard, "G.J." for "Gene Junior." When I started on the first shift, after two summers on the second, Nick frequently called me, "Terry," referring to the second shift group leader who was fired for walking off the job after getting into an argument with Gene between my second and third summers of work. I retaliated by calling Nick, "Bruce," a former shipper who had worked on both shifts before transferring to Receiving. The "bad" worker with which one was associated varied frequently. Anyone, including those who usually were the most productive workers, could be the "bad" worker if they had not been producing up to the group's norms that day.

> About five minutes before quitting time, Larry and I finished loading a semi. We walked past Nick on our way to the bathrooms to wash. Nick called to Larry:
>
> "Hey, pick up those doors leaning against the post and toss 'em in the singles rack. Will ya?" Larry responded, "Let 'nights' take care of 'em."
>
> "O.K. Roy," Nick retorted to Larry. Larry turned around, picked up the doors, and put them in the rack. Nick looked at me and grinned.

By linking Larry with a "bad" worker, in this case Roy, Nick took advantage of Larry's desire to maintain status within the group. Larry's concern for the group's opinion of him was significant enough for him to reconsider and comply with Nick's directive. As Shostak (1980) has noted, peer acceptance is of high importance to many employees. It is a need that is second only to wages for many workers.

Teasing co-workers about loading errors was an effective means of quality control in the Shipping Department. Making a loading error also meant risking loss of status within the group. Truck drivers enjoyed the opportunity to publicly announce loading errors they discovered when making deliveries:

> There's those two assholes who fucked up my truck, [Mack shouted at Mike and me as he entered the building.] Cain't you guys get your shit right? You guys gave me 8 grays and 16 dark windows, when I needed 12 of each. You also got the wrong 45 by 12's! I need front solids and you loaded front sliders! You're s'posed to be double checking each other, ya know!

Such public proclamations were common and there was little shippers could say in self defense. Loading errors and minor mishaps while driving the forklifts were regularly brought to group attention for public ridicule thus creating peer pressure to avoid mistakes.

RESTRICTING PRODUCTIVITY IN THE SHIPPING DEPARTMENT

Despite the peer produced pressure to maintain an equitable level of work effort in the shipping department, resistance to control was a frequent occurrence. "Intentionally restricting production; [or] encouraging others to restrict production . . ." was defined as a serious infraction of company policy according to the Kleer Windows Employee Handbook. Violation of this rule was officially " . . . considered cause for discharge on the first time." Yet, shippers, and occasionally their foremen and group leaders, made it a frequent practice to limit their own productivity and to attempt to limit the productivity of other shippers. In research this is the more commonly found impact of the informal work group on productivity (i.e., Roy 1952; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1956). The pressure to limit productivity was felt when particular shippers began to produce "too much." To produce too much could lead to an increase in management's "rule of thumb" for productivity in the department without a corresponding increase in pay. At that point the payoff of work effort to level of reward would be decreased for shippers.

Each summer when I began working, I was repeatedly told by other shippers, group leaders, and even foremen, "Take it easy." "We want to make this [particular work task assignment] last until lunch. Stretch it out." "Pace yourself." "We ain't in no hurry." "There's no need to set any land speed records." These admonitions were intended to teach me informally not to exceed the group's norms of productivity.

On several occasions, after being told to "slow down," I intentionally kept working at the same pace in order to test my co-workers' reactions. The following field note illustrates a typical response to my deviant levels of productivity.

> Stu and I were loading a semi at one of the bays outside the building. It was a hot day, 85 degrees outside the trailer, easily 100 degrees inside. Stu was driving the forklift and directing the load. I was assisting him. After setting the rack of product inside the truck, Stu would return to his water bottle, which sat on the forklift, for a drink and a short "break." Each time he would say to me, "There's no need to be in no hurry. Take it easy." I would nod briefly and keep loading. Stu would watch me for a few moments and then resume helping me load the product in the trailer.
>
> After this scene was repeated several times, Stu picked up his water bottle off the forklift, walked over to where I was loading and sat down on a stack of boxes. This effectively stopped me from loading until he got up, because he was sitting right where I needed to load more boxes.
>
> Later, after we finished loading a rack, Stu took the empty rack out of the truck with the forklift. Instead of picking up the next rack to be loaded and placing it in the truck, he said, "I'm going to fill my water bottle. Take a break." He then drove off, leaving me standing in the trailer with nothing to load and no way to bring anything else to load into the trailer. He had once again effectively stopped my deviant productivity.

In general, shippers could limit the productivity of co-workers by monopolizing the forklift. The norm was that the senior worker had the choice of whether to drive the forklift himself or let the less experienced shipper drive. By assuming the role of the driver, the shipper could more easily control the pace of work.

"Story telling" was another means of limiting a co-worker's productivity. Co-workers, occasionally including group leaders, would shut off the forklift so their partner could hear them talk about whatever topic was on their mind. The "helper" was restricted in his ability to engage in productive work until the driver was finished relating his story.

In sum, an interdependence of task was created in the Shipping Department through the team loading format and management's "rule of thumb" for productivity.

An interdependence of reward was created through the use of a reallocation rule. Together these factors led to a system of peer control that produced a level of productivity within a peer controlled range. Obviously, management played a role in defining the acceptable level of productivity by establishing the informal "rule of thumb," but shippers resisted all attempts to increase the expected level of productivity through their informal sanctioning of one another. Shippers sought to ensure each crew member contributed an equitable share to the group's expected productivity. At the same time shippers also attempted to ensure no shipper produced too much, which could lead to an increase in the expected productivity level without a corresponding increase in reward.

CONTROL AND RESISTENCE IN
THE KLEER RECIEVING DEPARTMENT

The individualized nature of work tasks was the most important variable in shaping control and resistance in the receiving department. With the exception of the two first shift receivers whose primary responsibility was to unload delivery trucks as they arrived, each of the receivers had unique job responsibilities which, in practice, did not overlap with the responsibilities of any other receiver. Each of the four "glass pullers" were responsible for supplying glass to particular production lines. Each had particular storage areas for "his" glass which were segregated from other pullers' glass. One receiver ran the supply "cage" during the first shift. Another did the same on the second shift. This position's primary responsibility was to place delivered supplies and tools into stock, and, when necessary, assisting production line workers in locating those supplies. Two other receivers were "metal men." Their job was to keep certain production lines supplied with metal for making door and window frames.

Because each receiver had his or her own uniquely defined job responsibilities, rather than a shared work task, as in shipping, or a serial production line, as in the production departments, they had much less interest in monitoring and controlling each others' productivity. Receivers were not, to any significant degree, dependent upon each other to perform their work task. Therefore, it did not matter whether another receiver got his or her job done. The rest of the crew was not dependent upon them for completion of their individualized work tasks.

In Receiving, as in Shipping, no group bonus was available. Receivers were paid a straight hourly wage with no opportunity to increase their income by individually or corporately increasing their effort. Therefore, there was no interdependence of reward as well as no interdependence of task.

Officially, according to Miller (who had been the Shipping foreman, but was transferred to Receiving as foreman during my third summer of employment), the department had a reallocation rule. Receivers were supposed to assist each other if they finished their work ahead of time. In practice, such assistance virtually never occurred. Randy, one of the metal men, often complained that the other receivers, in particular Bruce (a glass puller), never came to assist him, despite their official obligation to do so.

> Bruce is supposed to come help me when he's done pullin' glass, but the lazy motha fucka never does! They all stretch it [their individually assigned work tasks] out so they don't hafta help. Even when they do get done, they stand around in back and bullshit, while I'm up here bustin' my ass.

As long as receivers kept the production lines stocked with needed materials (i.e., glass, metal), production line foremen seemed unconcerned with what receivers did during their spare time. Relations with production foremen were generally quite relaxed and friendly. Foremen would page receivers if problems arose. Receivers were quick to respond and cultivate good relations with the line foremen. Production foremen would even join receivers during their informal breaks, "standing around" behind the building and smoking or drinking coffee during working hours.

The only person who showed any concern with receivers who didn't seem to have much to do was their new foreman, Denny Miller. The previous foreman, Dan, had non-receiving responsibilities which kept him in the front offices most of the day. Dan pretty much left receivers on their own. If he didn't get any complaints from the line foremen, he assumed the job was being done satisfactorily. If Denny, on the other hand, discovered receivers standing around, he would, as his crew put it, "invent work" for them. Quite often this meant rearranging stocked supplies to make them more accessible or to merely appear more orderly. At other times it meant being sent outside the shop to "clean up" the old semi trailer used for storing surplus and obsolete stock or to stack old glass crates which were to be returned to the supplier. In order to avoid being given such tasks, receivers made it a practice to "look busy" by engaging in impression management (see Molstad 1988) when Denny came around.

Because receivers primarily worked alone and because of their need to move throughout the building and between buildings, they were subjected to relatively little monitoring by either supervisors or co-workers. Receivers spent a considerable amount of time socializing in warehouse areas of the building, which were not readily visible to other employees. The supply cage was a popular gathering spot, since if their supervisor happened along one could pretend to be there to pick up some necessary supplies. Pete, who operated the cage during day shift, informed me, "Standing around and talking is one of our favorite pastimes." Linda, who ran the cage on the second shift, frequently could be found reading a novel and drinking a soft drink in the cage. On those occasions when she got tired of hearing production workers complain to her about this practice, she would move to a back room in the cage where she was out of sight, but could hear if anyone came into the cage. During my second summer of employment, Linda averaged one and a half hours of reading, two or three nights each week.

In sum, attempts at control were largely ineffective in the receiving department. Receivers tended to work at the minimum level necessary to avoid friction with their supervisor or line foremen. Their work tasks were individualized instead of interdependent. Because the reallocation rule was routinely ignored, there was no interdependence of reward. Instead, receivers attempted to "stretch out" their assigned work task to make it consume the entire shift whenever possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Control in the workplace is an expression of the larger phenomenon of social control — the various means used by groups within society to bring its recalcitrant members back into line (Berger 1963). Societies utilize a number of control mechanisms, such as physical violence, economic pressures (i.e., threats to one's livelihood), persuasion, ridicule and gossip, social ostracism, morality, customs and manners, and

the influence of intimates — family and friends. Underneath this pressure toward conformity is a profound desire to be accepted. Identity is not "given" by virtue of being born human. It is bestowed in acts of social recognition. The self is constructed through interaction with other humans (see Mead 1974; Cooley 1902; Berger and Luckmann 1967). In a sense, we become that as we are addressed (Berger 1963). The groups to which we belong provide significant feedback which the individual uses in formulating a sense of identity. The individual faces tremendous pressures toward conformity in order to maintain a positive sense of self.

When considering the workplace, there is a tendency to think of control systems as being originated by forces outside of the group whose members are subjected to control (i.e., Edwards 1979). However, because individuals acquire a self through interaction with others, the groups to which an individual belongs can potentially be a significant agent of control. Under certain conditions the group can serve to control the behavior of its individual members. In the workplace, management can potentially harness the influence of the work group so that workers themselves actively seek to monitor and increase the productivity of their co-workers. The concept of peer control recognizes the influence of social factors in production and the managerial desire to bring these factors under their control. To what degree did the management at Kleer Windows intentionally create a system of peer control? I never raised that issue in my discussions with management representatives because of fears that it could have adverse effects on my co-workers. To raise the issue would have had the effect of making it more salient to management and potentially result in an intensification of work for employees. However, based on Kleer management's patchwork and continuously evolving approach to dealing with worker problems, I believe management stumbled into a system of peer control that was effective on the production lines through a process of trial and error. I do not believe management fully understands why the system is effective. Rather, management takes an "if it works, don't fix it" approach to worker control.

Nonetheless, at Kleer Windows, as in the workplace in general, there are intentional attempts to control the individual members of the organization. There is an ongoing struggle on the part of management and the various groups of workers to establish a dominant definition of reality, that includes such notions as "a fair day's effort" and the "good worker." Management's desire is to maximize workers' level of effort. This goal may be pursued through the use of peer control, whether or not management understands the intricacies of the system. Peer control exists when co-workers actively seek to monitor and influence the productivity level of individual work group members. Peer control may operate to limit or stimulate the productivity of individual workers. Interdependence of task, making workers dependent upon each other for the completion of their work task, is one factor that contributes to the establishment of peer control that pressures co-workers to increase or maintain high levels of productivity. Could peer control exist without an interdependence of task? Conceivably it could. However, explicitly linking performers with their performance has been shown to reduce social loafing (Jackson and Padgett 1982; Kerr and Brunn 1981; Williams, Harkins and Latane 1981; Latane, Williams and Harkins 1979). By making work tasks interdependent, workers are better able to determine who is, and who is not, maintaining the group's desired productivity level.

The second condition necessary for peer control wherein pressure is created for high levels of productivity is an interdependence of reward whereby the rewards of each individual worker are dependent upon both individual effort and the effort of the work group. This creates motivation for workers to monitor each other's productivity. In the production departments this was created through a group bonus system. One reason for the effectiveness of this system in the production departments was the lack of "rate cutting" at Kleer. I could find no worker who could recall the quota for bonus being raised, except when more workers were added to the particular production line. All windows and all doors manufactured by a particular line paid the same bonus rate regardless of size or difficulty to manufacture. Overt "rate cutting" by Kleer management would likely have severed workers' perception of the link between levels of effort and financial reward. Had there been a history of "rate cutting" at Kleer it is likely that peer control would have been less successful.

As this analysis implies interdependence of task and interdependence of reward are the most significant factors contributing to management's ability to harness the influence of the informal work group to increase productivity. However other conditions are also necessary, but not sufficient, for peer control. Visibility of co-workers, the measurability of productivity, and the openness of the work process to peer influenced productivity increases are some of these factors.

Peer control has a number of similarities and contrasts with the Japanese model of organization. For example, involved workers are the key to increased productivity in peer control as well as in Ouchi's (1981) Theory Z. Japanese management practices have often emphasized devotion to the firm. Ouchi argues it is the task of management to coordinate individual efforts in a productive manner while giving employees incentives to take a cooperative, long range view. However, the incentives provided at Kleer Windows stressed short range goals, namely maximizing that day's production bonus. While the usual company as "team" or "family" appeals were made in meetings and in written form, workers scoffed at the idea. Nonetheless, Kleer production workers maintained very high levels of work effort without developing significant "loyalties" to the company.

In both Theory Z and Friedman's (1977) "responsible autonomy," the element of "trust" is stressed as a major factor in productivity. In the system of peer control that evolved at Kleer, trust was not necessary for the successful operation of the control system. In peer control, management doesn't "trust" workers to perform to the best of their abilities. Nor does management concede elements of control so that individual workers may use their discretion in the process of production, as Friedman suggests. Instead management relies on co-workers, or the work group, to ensure each individual's productivity.

Ouchi (1981) also suggests that another important lesson of Theory Z is subtlety. By this he means management needs to use and recognize the personalities, strengths and weaknesses of individuals in coordinating production. Management By Stress (MBS) (Parker and Slaughter 1988) also recognizes management attempts to utilize the workers' sense of observation. Peer control, too, stresses this subtle recognition of individual differences. However, instead of relying on management to develop this capacity, co-workers' knowledge of one another's strengths and weaknesses was utilized. For example, production workers pressured their foremen to assign work

tasks in such a manner that best utilized individual skills in the drive for higher productivity.

Parker and Slaughter's (1988) analysis of the "Management By Stress" system has some additional parallels with the operation of peer control. In the MBS system stress serves as the force that drives and regulates the production system. Management stresses the production system to reveal weaknesses in a number of ways: increasing line speed; cutting the number of people or machines; or, assigning workers additional tasks. The MBS system assumes that pressure is the best way to motivate workers. The pressure is allowed to fall onto production workers, team leaders, and lowest level management by making them solve the problem.

At Kleer Windows co-workers were the most significant source of pressure to maintain high levels of work effort. It was not one's supervisor, but one's peers that communicated one's shortcomings and successes. In the MBS system, peer pressures against absenteeism and "working in the hole" exist, but the source of pressure is most clearly management's attempts to stress the system. The key distinction between peer control and these Japanese organizational strategies is the reliance on co-workers to perform management's task of controlling individual workers. All control systems, including peer control, are in constant need of confirmation and reconfirmation by those they are meant to control. While people need recognition within society so as to have an image of self, society needs the recognition of many in order to exist at all (Berger 1963). Individuals can attempt to resist social control by refusing to recognize a particular social reality, by withdrawing from it, or by manipulating social structures in unforeseen ways (Berger 1963). If the individual can find others who will join in acts of resistance to social control, a counterculture is created. This group can then maintain "deviant" identities and meanings in the face of social pressures. While social control is a powerful force, it is not beyond resistance, particularly in the context of a deviant group.

NOTES

1. Kleer Windows is a fictitious name, as are the names of the Kleer employees mentioned herein.

2. Female Kleer Employees used the same set of anti-female derogatory terms in reference to each other as did the male employees. The purpose of the insults were the same as well, to insult or "goad" the offending co-worker toward higher levels of productivity. Occasionally female employees would get into heated arguments, exchanging insults over the supposed spread of malicious gossip by one worker about another. In general, among Kleer employees, to be feminine was to be slandered as inferior.

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