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# *Service work*

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## **Introduction**

All advanced economies are dominated by service industries. While we may never live in economies in which 'everyone will serve someone else and no one will be making anything' (Rohantyn, 1984), most people in employment work in a service industry. Over 10 per cent of the UK workforce are employed in the retail sector (Jarvis and Prais, 1989), and 'more Americans now work in physicians' offices than in auto plants, in laundries and dry cleaners than in steel mills' (Herzenberg *et al.*, 1998, p. 3). The trend in advanced economies towards service industries from manufacturing and agriculture is still continuing. Between 1974 and 1994 service sector employment rose by 9 per cent to 73 per cent in the USA, by 13 per cent to 71 per cent in Australia, and from 50 to 60 per cent in Japan (OECD, 1996). Castells (1996, ch. 4) estimates that in the UK in 1990 service sector employment stood at 70 per cent.

Despite this, many of the dominant concepts and metaphors used to analyse employment are rooted in manufacturing. For instance, one of the key themes for debates in recent decades has been around the existence and nature of post-Fordism. We are told both literally and metaphorically that the machine that changed the world is that most emblematic of manufactured items, the car (Womack *et al.*, 1990). Important debates about high-performance work systems and about 'lean production' ways of working continue to revolve around research in manufacturing workplaces. In some analyses the main point of interest regarding service industries concerns how far work organisation there is lagging behind that in manufacturing (Poynter, 1999). Employment in manufacturing industries is implicitly seen as the norm to which employment in services will gravitate (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994).

This book is an attempt to move away from this way of thinking. It focuses on the nature of employment in services. The main reason it does this is not

the numerical importance of employment in services but the fact that *there are unique factors in service work that make its separate analysis essential*. There are a number of these factors, which are drawn out below in the discussion of what service work is, but the most important is that in a lot of service work there is direct contact with the *customer*. Here customers become an important part of the social relations of the workplace. As Whyte (1946, p. 123) puts it, 'when workers and customers meet . . . that relationship adds a new dimension to the pattern of human relations in industry.' Employment which has traditionally been seen as dominated by the dyadic management-worker relationship must be seen as potentially influenced by the three-way relationship involving management, workers and customers. There is good reason to agree with the conclusion to Benson's (1986, p. 288) insightful study of an American department store: 'Taxonomies of management practice derived primarily from manufacturing may not be readily applicable to service industries with their more complicated social reality and greater variability.' The task, then, is to develop analysis that can aid understanding of the specific nature of service work.

Because the role of the customer is the most important *unique* aspect of service work, this book's main focus is on those jobs involving direct customer contact. Specifically, the book is primarily concerned with customer contact jobs in the mass-customised and medium-customised market segments. So, for example, the book concentrates on the work of customer service reps in call centres, tellers in banks, and nurses and nursing aides in hospitals, rather than doctors, management consultants, lawyers or other 'knowledge workers' who have significant contact with customers. As such the book focuses on what MacDonald and Sirianni (1996, p. 3) have called 'the emotional proletariat'. As the numbers employed in service work generally have grown, so have the numbers employed in direct customer contact jobs. Indeed, Hochschild (1983, p. 11) estimates that as many as half of American women in paid employment are in customer contact jobs requiring a degree of emotional labour.<sup>1</sup> This book's focus on customer contact jobs also mirrors the focus of management in recent decades. Managers in many firms have come to see the interaction between their customer service workers and (potential) customers as 'the moment of truth' for the firm (Carlzon, 1987). This is the moment when important impressions of the firms are formed which influence future consumption decisions. Hence management has devoted increasing energy to trying to ensure that their customer service workers act in the appropriate way to customers. Increasingly, management is seeing customer service work as one of the key terrains of competitive advantage or disadvantage for the firm (Schlesinger and Heskett, 1991a).

These are all good reasons to have a book focused on customer service work. Another good reason is that the existing literature on the subject is difficult to comprehend *as a whole*, riven as it is by a schism between two broad approaches that contain very different images of the nature of customer service work.

The first broad school is the *new service management school*, led by a group of influential, mainly American, human resource management (HRM) academics. Here, the argument is that the alienating, assembly line approach to organising service work belongs to the past, and that to deliver the sort of qualities of service that customers want requires an 'empowerment' approach to service work. Schlesinger and Heskett (1992) argue that only by treating workers in a more humane way, by 'de-industrialising the service sector' can managers expect workers to give good quality service to customers. As long as firms can hire the right sort of people with the right customer-focused attitude (Stanback, 1990) and treat their workers well then their customers will receive good service. Schneider and Bowen (1995) have summarised research which apparently shows that customers' perception of the quality of service is significantly correlated with service workers' perception of the climate of their firm. The more favourably service workers view the firm and how management treats them, the more favourable are customer perceptions of the service delivered by these same workers. Within this school, the three-way relationship of service work is a *win : win : win* one. Customers win because they receive qualitatively superior service, workers win because they become empowered to act on their firmly held customer service values, and are freed from the old industrial tyranny, and managers win because customers keep coming back to the firm. This *win : win : win* story comes through well in Zemke and Schaaf's (1989) discussion of Marriott Hotels. The authors enthuse (p. 118):

The current Mr. Marriott credits his father with the philosophy of taking care of employees as he wanted them to take care of the customer. 'My father knew if he had happy employees, he would have happy customers and that would result in a good bottom line.'

Against this approach is a range of *critical perspectives* that suggest very different images of customer service work. Unlike with the new service management school it is difficult to speak of a coherent critical school on service work. As Chapter 3 shows, there are important differences between some critical perspectives. However, they do share a common thread in arguing that the contemporary nature of service work is increasingly harmful to workers in a number of ways. Perhaps the best known critical perspective has been expounded by George Ritzer in *The McDonaldization of Society*. This analysis portrays customer service work as variously, fake, invasive, emotionally draining, demeaning, highly routinised and alienating. On the fake nature of customer service work, Ritzer (1999a, p. 116) writes:

Most of the people we encounter in the new means of consumption are simulations... The blackjack dealer at a Las Vegas casino, the ticket taker at Disney World... the counterperson at McDonald's, and the cashier at Wal-Mart are all

playing well-defined roles. Their employing organisations have developed a series of guidelines about how they are supposed to look, speak, behave, and so forth... There is little or no room for creativity or individuality... The blackjack dealer and the counterperson are simulations – they are fakes.

How are we to make sense of service work when confronted by such contradictory images from the new service management school and from the critical perspectives? Addressing this question is one of the central tasks of this book. The main argument of the book revolves around viewing much of contemporary service work through the lens of the *customer-oriented bureaucracy* – a form of work organisation in which there are dual, and potentially contradictory, logics at play. The logics are those of routinisation and efficiency on the one hand, and those of the customer and customer orientation on the other.

Before this argument is elaborated more fully, however, the necessary building blocks need to be in place. First we need to ask: just what is service work and how does it differ from manufacturing? And we also need to consider what different types of service work there are. In addition, this chapter reviews the key competitive contexts driving the reorganisation of service work. The final section of this chapter outlines the structure of the book.

## What is service work?

Attempts to draw clear distinctions between manufacturing and services date back over two hundred years. The original theorists and supporters of the emerging capitalist system were keen to draw out these differences because they saw manufacturing as synonymous with capitalism (think of cotton mills, for instance), and services as remnants of the feudal society that they wished overturned (Delaunay and Gardrey, 1992). The following quotation from Adam Smith brings out this praise for the manufacturer and the barely concealed contempt for services. For Smith there were two types of labour (1776, pp. 314–15):

The former, as it produces a value, may be called productive; the latter, unproductive labour. Thus the labour of a *manufacturer* adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon... The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds the value of nothing... The *services* [of the menial servant] generally perish in the very instant of their performance, and seldom leave any trace or value behind them.

As capitalism has developed, however, it has become clear that Smith's approach to distinguishing between manufacturing and service work is

flawed. Service sectors are dominant parts of the major capitalist economies; most analysts would agree that much of service labour *is* productive labour. In the middle of the twentieth century writers began to identify the service sector as an increasingly important *tertiary* sector of capitalist economies alongside the primary, agricultural sector and the secondary, manufacturing sector (Fisher, 1935; Clark, 1940; Fourastie, 1949). Daniel Bell (1973) theorised that underlying the growth of the tertiary services sector were inevitable changes in the overall long-term composition of demand in capitalist economies. He pointed to the work of the German economist Christian Engel, famous for the 'Engel curve'. The Engel curve shows that with rising affluence, demand for the primary necessities of life (arising from the primary sector) is soon nearly saturated and over time becomes a smaller part of overall demand. The Engel curve shows that the same is true for demand for products of a secondary necessity, mostly associated with the secondary, manufacturing sector. Therefore, over time the composition of demands proportionally gravitates towards the tertiary services sector. Hence the considerable growth of that sector in all capitalist economies.

But this still leaves us with the question of what it is about services that makes them different from the secondary, manufacturing and primary, agricultural sectors. Here five attributes of services are traditionally highlighted – intangibility, perishability, variability, simultaneous production and consumption, and inseparability.

### *Intangibility*

Manufacturing work creates a tangible product that 'can drop on your feet' (Herzenberg *et al.*, 1998, p. 22). By contrast there is an intangible element to what is produced in service work. The quality of service that diners receive at a restaurant, or the way in which a nurse attends to a patient, cannot be touched. The 'product' here in part involves how the service recipient perceives the service. As Zemke and Schaaf (1989, p. 14) put it, the product in services is 'something more slippery to measure than the physical dimensions of a product'.

### *Perishability*

This refers to the temporally specific nature of service work. Service work cannot be stored in the way that cars can be stockpiled and information filed. As Herzenberg *et al.* (1998, p. 22) state, 'the great bulk of services cannot be produced in advance, shipped and then stored until a customer comes along'.

### *Variability*

Because customer actions within the service interaction may not be tightly prescribed by an organisation, and because customer perception of service may vary by individual, there is more scope for *variability* within customer service work than in work on materials or information. As Fuller and Smith (1991) note, customers tend to be 'idiosyncratic' in their expectations of, actions within and evaluations of service work.

### *Simultaneous production and consumption*

During the service interaction, at the same time, the worker produces and to a degree the customer consumes. By contrast, in manufacturing there is a clear buffer between the activities of production and consumption.

### *Inseparability*

This refers to the way in which the customer takes part in the service process. The customer cannot be separated from the service process. Some authors have gone so far to describe customers as *co-producers* in service work (Lachmann, 2000; Schneider and Bowen 1995).

These attributes can help us think of the important differences between services and manufacturing, but the list is not meant to suggest that all service work has each of the five features. Service work involving work mainly on information rather than on customers will share only a few of the above characteristics. The work of back-office jobs, that is, those with no customer contact, is generally non-perishable, because information and files can be saved to be used another day. Similarly in the work of a hospital clerk who deals with information for the running of the hospital there is a separability of production and consumption. We can say, however, that *customer* service work, where there is direct interaction between a worker and a service recipient, will feature each of these attributes to a degree. It is the presence of the customer in the service labour process that underlies the qualities of perishability, simultaneity and inseparability, while the qualities of intangibility and variability are often attributes of work on information as well as attributes of customer service work.

Another important point to stress is that not all forms of customer service work have the above five attributes to the same degree. Many forms of service work – think of retail work, for instance – do involve an exchange of tangible goods and so cannot be said to involve absolute intangibility. Indeed, we will see below that some typologies of different forms of service work use one or

more these attributes as an axis against which to plot forms of service work. If in this sense there are 'degrees' of service work, this should tell us that the distinction between manufacturing and services should be seen as a relative rather than an absolute one. Delauney and Gardrey (1992, p. 120) have suggested that it is necessary for theory 'to abandon the old separation between the secondary and tertiary sectors, and to consider that all activities tend to have both an industrial and a service dimension, although in different proportions'. As Quinn (1992) has pointed out, the majority of jobs in so-called manufacturing industries do not involve work on objects but rather involve work on information or customers. The car design worker does not alter tangible goods, but manipulates information in diagrammatic form. Further down the product chain, the work of the car sales staff involves primarily working on customers. The picture becomes potentially even more muddled when we consider that some types of work officially classified as service work are actually manual jobs which involve work on objects, rather than information or customers. Think of garbage disposal workers, for instance.

The easiest way to avoid confusion in thinking about types of work at this level is to remember that there are three basic media of work – objects, information, and people (US Dept. of Labor, 1991; Barley, 1993). Industries officially classified as manufacturing or services may involve a range of jobs which deal in each of the three media. It is only jobs involving working on people as customers, that is, customer service work, that have all of the five attributes discussed above. It is *customer* service work that is the primary focus of this book.

## Types of service work

If a book on HRM in service work is to be useful it must be able to help analysis at two levels. At the higher level of abstraction it should be able to say meaningful things about the nature of employment and management in service work *as a whole*, highlighting factors that are common across all service jobs. The previous section, looking at the ways service work has been differentiated from manufacturing, is at this level. At a lower level of abstraction this book should also help shed light on *specific types* of service work, allowing students and analysts interested in specific types of service work to be aware of the factors that might make that form of service work take on particular characteristics. This section is written at this lower level of abstraction. It deals with how types of work within services have been differentiated by academic writers.

At the most basic level, writers have examined the different occupations of service work. There have been a number of important studies of specific types

of customer service occupations that have mainly focused on the nature of the management–worker dyad. Over the last two decades there have also been a number of insightful studies of specific service occupations which have begun to consider the customer as an important part of the social relations of work – studies of health care workers (Foner, 1994), department store workers (Benson, 1986), fast food workers and insurance sellers (Leidner, 1993) and call centre workers (Frenkel *et al.*, 1999) among others. At their best these studies are rich with detail on the lived experience of types of service work, and of micromanagement practices in these workplaces. They can build up engaging and sensitive pictures of the occupations being studied, and are important in reminding us of crucial contextual factors that inform the nature of service work. On their own, however, they can do little to help us have a more *general* understanding of service work.

At the other extreme, there is also a stream of writing that simply uses general categories of work, such as unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled, and applies them across all types of work – service work, information work, and work on objects. While it is clearly important to be able to make generalisations across all types of work, this approach is at too high a level of abstraction for our purposes, glossing over as it does the important distinctive elements of service work. It is one of the kernel arguments of the book that there are important unique elements of service work (the presence of the customer, the intangibility, the simultaneous consumption and production and so on) that suggest the usefulness of its separate analysis. In this regard, it runs directly counter to arguments such as those by Beynon (1992), who suggests that there is little distinctive about service work that warrants its separate analysis.

Another approach to distinguishing types of service work is taken by economists. Here the classic work is that of Singleman (1974). Singleman argued that the service sector was comprised of four distinct subgroups: distributive services (transport, communication, trade), producer services (banking, business services, real estate), social services (health care, education, public and nonprofit services) and personal services (home help, hotels, restaurants, travel, repairs). He argued that the Engel curve was too simplistic in suggesting that spending and employment in services went up proportionally as affluence rose. He used data to show that in fact there were important differences in the relationship with affluence between the *types* of services he elucidated. Although these categories of service work still have currency with economists and even industrial sociologists (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995) it is not clear how the distinctions are useful in considering forms of employment and management practices within services.

Recently, however, there have been a number of attempts to delineate types of service work which do seek to have relevance for the nature of employment and HRM. These typologies generally involve the authors taking one or more of the five distinctive dimensions of service work and plotting types of service

work against these dimensions. Leidner (1993), Mills (1986), Fitzgerald *et al.* (1991) and Lashley (1997) have all taken this approach – with remarkably similar results. Each approach is briefly outlined before the commonalities across them are highlighted.

Leidner (1993, p. 26) suggests that there are three main types of ‘interactive service work’. The key dimension that underlies her typology is the degree to which the service interaction is separable from the product being sold or delivered – or what was discussed above as the *inseparability* of the customer from the service provided. First, there are jobs with a weak degree of inseparability:

in some jobs the [service] interaction is a crucial part of the work process *even though it is not part of a product being sold* or provided. The success of salespeople, fundraisers, bill collectors, and survey interviewees depends on the workers’ ability to construct particular kinds of interactions.

Second, there are jobs where

a product exists apart from the interaction, but a particular type of experience is an important part of the service. For example, patrons of Playboy Clubs expected titillation and deference as well as food and drink (Steinem 1983), and airline passengers who buy tickets primarily to get from one place to another, are promised friendly service on their journey.

Finally, there are jobs where

the interaction is inseparable from the product being sold or delivered – for instance, in psychotherapy ... or teaching.

Mills (1986) puts forward four criteria for distinguishing types of service work. Two of these criteria implicitly coincide with the dimensions of inseparability and variability. From his criteria he argues that three basic types of service organisations can be identified. First is the ‘maintenance-interactive service organisation’ where ‘the service provider ... is not so much involved with the production of the service but with dispensing it’ (p. 27). Examples include retail organisations, fast food restaurants, and banks. Next is the ‘task-interactive service organisation’. Here, ‘employees ... are not only dispensers of the service but, more significantly, are producers [of the service] also’ (p. 30). Finally, there are what Mills terms ‘personal-interactive service organisations’, where the service provided in the interaction is the entire product. Mills cites health care, religious organisation and psychological therapy as examples.

The threefold typology developed by Fitzgerald *et al.* (1991) is derived by plotting service work against six dimensions. These dimensions are:

- (i) customer contact time;
- (ii) extent of customisation;
- (iii) extent to which the employee exercises discretion in meeting customer needs;
- (iv) degree of focus on people or equipment;
- (v) source of value added – front or back office;
- (vi) extent to which focus is on separate product or service process.

The dimension of the degree of customisation closely maps onto variability, while the final dimension pertains to intangibility. The three main types of service work that Fitzgerald *et al.* identify on the basis of these dimensions are ‘mass services’, ‘service shops’ and ‘professional services’. So for instance, in mass services, there is low contact time customisation and discretion, and the focus is on equipment, the back office and the product. In professional services, contact time, customisation, and discretion are high and there is a people, front-office and service process focus.

Lashley’s (1997) analysis builds on the work of Schmenner (1995) and Heskett *et al.* (1990). He argues that useful distinctions, between types of service work can be made, but that there will be slight differences in these distinctions depending on whether one looks through a marketing, an operational management or an HRM lens. For each of these lenses he states that plotting service work against two dimensions or axes leads to identifying four types of service work. For each of the lenses one key dimension is the degree of standardisation/customisation. In his model, the other key dimension varies. From a marketing focus, he suggests that the degree of tangibility is a key dimension, from an operations focus it is the degree of labour intensity and from an HRM focus it is the locus of control. For the sake of simplicity, however, he implicitly suggests that these dimensions will tend to co-vary; that is, service work that has a high degree of tangibility will tend to have low labour intensity and there will be largely external control. This allows Lashley to present an overall model of types of service work as summarised in Table 1.1.

The type of service work in at bottom left (1) is the *service factory* where there is a high degree of standardisation and where labour intensity is low, tangibility is low, and control is externally located. To the right (2), the level of standardisation is still high, but now labour intensity and tangibility are high,

**Table 1.1 Lashley’s typology of service work, incorporating a marketing and an operations management approach**

<i>Degree of customisation</i>	<i>Degree of intangibility, and labour intensity</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>High</i>	(3) Service shop	(4) Professional service
<i>Low</i>	(1) Service factory	(2) Mass service

and control becomes internal. This type of service work is labelled 'mass services'. Moving to (3), services are highly customised but labour intensity and tangibility are low, while control is external. This is the *service shop*. Finally, at (4), customisation is high, as are intangibility and labour intensity, with control located internally. This is the category of *professional service work*.

Although Leidner, Mills, Fitzgerald *et al.* and Lashley have all used different approaches to developing typologies of service work, there is a great deal of overlap in the resulting categories. As represented in Table 1.2, the authors have an essentially similar type of service work in mind as existing at the lower level of the hierarchy of service work. This is the work typified by the fast food worker where the product (the burger) represents an important buffer between production and consumption, between the producer and the consumer, and where there is an organisational focus on the product being delivered, rather than on the service process of the delivery of that product. This is the form of service work with the least differences from manufacturing work.

As also summarised in Table 1.2, there is also considerable overlap in the type of service work the authors see as occupying the middle level of the hierarchy of service work. Here the service process is an important part of the 'product' being delivered; the organisation has both a back-office and front-office focus; there is an important degree of intangibility. The bottom row of Table 1.2 shows the different labels that have been put to identify work at the upper end of the hierarchy of service work. An archetypal example is the work of the psychiatrist in which the service interaction *is* the product, where the focus is on the process of the interaction rather than on the back office producing a separate product.

**Table 1.2 Different labels for similar types of service work**

<i>Leidner (1993)</i>	<i>Mills (1986)</i>	<i>Fitzgerald et al. (1991)</i>	<i>Lashley (1997)</i>
Service where there is weak inseparability	Maintenance-interactive service work	Mass services	Service factory
Particular type of experience is part of the product	Task-interactive service work	Service shops	Mass service/ Service shops
Interaction inseparable from product	Personal-interactive service work	Professional services	Professional services

This classification of types of service work can be used to clarify the focus and potential usefulness of this book. The book's main focus is on the first two types of service work, and it will generally exclude from consideration the professional form of service work. A key point is that there has been a migration towards the middle category of service work. Herzenberg *et al.* (1998) have gone beyond the creation of categories of service work and, in a meticulous process, have also estimated the percentage of US service workers in each category. Their category of 'tightly constrained' work system closely corresponds to the Fitzgerald *et al.* 'mass services' and Lashley's 'service factory'. They estimate that only 4 per cent of US service workers can be placed in this category. Their category of 'high skill, autonomous' work system closely matches Fitzgerald *et al.* and Lashley's idea of professional services and Mills's concept of personal-interactive service work. Herzenberg *et al.* place 40 per cent of US service jobs in this category. This means that, in their estimates, 56 per cent of US service workers are located in their middle categories of 'semi-autonomous' and 'unrationalised labour-intensive' work systems. These categories map onto the middle categories of service work summarised in Table 1.2.

## **Competition and the context of service work**

The above discussion begs questions about which factors have driven employers in their restructuring of service work. This section addresses these questions by examining the main competitive contexts of contemporary service work.

Commentators have noted that there has been a considerable intensification in competition in service industries over the last two decades. A number of writers express this in terms of a shift in power from producers to customers (Abercrombie, 1991; Hammer and Champy, 1995; Kumar, 1996, p. 12; Poynter, 1999). DuPuy (1999) makes this point in his book *The Customer's Victory*. He argues that 'we are moving from a long-standing period in which what was scarce was the product, to a period where what is scarce is the customer' (p. 38). Important service industries, such as airlines, telecommunications and financial services, were 'deregulated' in many advanced economies in the 1980s and 1990s (Katz, 1996; Regini *et al.*, 2000). Governments lifted a number of regulations that had limited the operation of market forces in these industries. Competition therefore intensified.

Even in service industries which had only been lightly regulated, and in which therefore deregulation could not have a significant effect, competition intensified, particularly because domestic economies became increasingly subject to globalisation. The pressures of globalised competition have implications

for service work, involving as it does direct interaction with customers, that are rather different from those for manufacturing work. Front-line service work involves perishability, inseparability and simultaneous production and consumption. This means that such service work must be located geographically close to the customer. This constraint does not exist for manufacturing, where there is a buffer between production and consumption. In manufacturing, the forces of globalised competition can mean that production may be relocated to another country which has lower labour costs, or else may be undercut by competitor firms operating in that low-labour-cost country (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Burawoy, 1985; Klein, 2000). By contrast, the requirement for service work to be located close to customers leads Herzenberg *et al.* (1998, p. 16) to estimate that 'only about 10 per cent of the service [that is, information and customer handling] workforce holds jobs directly exposed to international competition.'

While there is, therefore, a constraint on the implications of globalised competition for front-line service work, globalisation can still have significant implications. Specifically, the rise of large multinational corporations specialising in service industries has meant that while the front-line work cannot be exported, capital and accompanying management approaches can be imported to compete against local capital and its accompanying management approaches (Segal-Horn, 1989; Goffee and Scase, 1995). A number of commentators have noted this phenomenon of internationalisation in retailing (for instance Fine, 1995; Akehurst and Alexander, 1996; Shackleton, 1998a). Poynter (1999) has argued, more generally, that the dominance of US-owned multinationals has meant that the dominant accompanying management approach has been 'the American model' of service work. Deregulation and the phenomenon of large multinationals competing with each other helps explain commentators noting both the intensification of competition in service industries and the rising levels of capital concentration in some of those same industries (for example, Fine, 1995; Poynter, 1999). The rise of multinationals has eliminated many of the smaller domestic service firms. These multinationals have undertaken more proactive and direct competitive practices than the smaller, often locale-specific, service firms had in the past. Another significant aspect in the structure of global capital has been the merging of firms across previously distinct service industry boundaries. Klein (2000) describes this process as being informed by the search for 'synergy', or systematic opportunities to cross-sell to customers.

Meanwhile, in the public sector, many governments have promoted the restructuring of important service jobs, in health care work and public welfare work for instance, by introducing (quasi) forms of competition (Pollitt, 1990; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Smith and Lipsky, 1993; O'Donovan and Casey, 1995; Grimshaw *et al.*, 2000; du Gay, 2000a). In the UK, for instance, Conservative governments introduced a form of internal market system within the public National Health Service, and in the USA welfare provision has

involved extensive (competitive) contracting out to nonprofit organisations. Where it has not been possible to introduce forms of competition, management has sought to shift power from (state monopoly) producers to service recipients through other means. Key policies include the redefinition of the citizens who are service recipients as customers, the introduction of 'customer'-related performance measures and the 'empowerment' of these customers, particularly through the establishment of so-called citizen charters. These charters, which should more accurately be termed customer charters, set out expected service standards and establish clear and relatively open complaints procedures. In some cases, service recipients are given cash instead of services and are allowed to purchase the services that they feel suits them (Ungerson, 1999). The overall restructuring of public service work has been informed by a fundamental shift in some governments from a (production-led) role as a model employer to a (consumption-led) one as a model service provider (Heery, 1993).

So far I have outlined the intensified competition and quasi-competition experienced in service industries over the last two decades. But what is the terrain of this competition? Is it a competition of price, or of service quality? Have service firms competed by offering the cheapest and most efficient services, or have they competed by offering superior service quality? The answer is that they have had to compete at both levels *simultaneously*. As Goffee and Scase (1995) put it, the key management dilemma is to provide 'high-quality but affordable services'. 'Store wars' in retailing have been informed by both price competition and service quality competition (Fine, 1995). Heskett *et al.* (1997) have formalised these dual pressures by arguing that contemporary consumption decisions are driven by what they term the 'customer value equation', which is as follows:

$$\text{Customer value} = \frac{(\text{Tangible}) \text{ results} + \text{Process quality}}{\text{Price} + \text{Customer access costs}}$$

Customers will return to do business with those service firms which offer higher 'customer value' through both lower price and higher service, or process, quality. Not only is customer perception of the service process part of the customer value equation, but it is also becoming a very important part of the equation. Lash and Urry (1994) concur, arguing that 'the quality of services has become of greater importance to people', for 'part of what is consumed is the physical and semiotic context' of the service process (p. 204). Zemke and Schaaf (1989, p. 4) note that in the

1987 Gallup Poll asked 1,045 people what makes them decide not to return to a given restaurant. Number one on the lists of reasons, identified by fully 83 per cent of the respondents, was poor service. Not food quality, not ambiance, not price. Poor service.

In the UK retailing context, du Gay notes that competition based solely on low price is giving way to competition entailing service quality (1996, p. 105). In an overview of the implications worldwide of the forces for change in the telecommunications industry, Katz (1996, p. 10) highlights the dual pressures noted here: 'pressures for costs savings, flexibility, and more customer-oriented service provision are shaping the changes occurring in work and employment relations.' Indeed, the increasing centrality of service quality in the terrain of competition has given rise to a whole set of service management literature dealing with the issue of service quality. This literature is examined in Chapter 4. The greater role of the service process within the value equation flows logically from intensified competition. In situations of weak competition, customers may have had to settle for correct and efficient service outcomes, regardless of the service process. However, with intensified competition customers can increasingly now aim to settle for correct and efficient service outcomes, with a favourable service process as well. The dual terrain of competition is important to bear in mind, for it has significant implications for the organisation of front-line service work, suggesting as it does a migration of service work (below the level of professionals) towards the middle category of service work identified in Table 1.2.

In sum, this review of the competitive context of service work has shown that many service workers are employed by large (Rothman, 1998), often multinational and multi-industry firms which compete on the basis of price and service quality, and often seek to exploit cross-selling opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The book traces the implications of this context for the management and experience of service work (mainly with reference to the UK, the USA and Australia).<sup>3</sup> The following section gives an outline of the book's structure.

## Structure of the book

Here I briefly outline the structure of the book and sketch how its main arguments are related to its structure. The reader can consult the concluding chapter for a detailed summary of the main arguments.

The book is about the experience of service work, and it is about the management, particularly the human resource management, of service work.<sup>4</sup> Unlike many other texts focusing on HRM it does not feature separate chapters dealing with the HRM 'cycle' of selection, appraisal, development and rewards (Bratton and Gold, 1999). These areas are certainly examined in the book, but their analysis is located in the context of a wider understanding of the nature of service work. It is a central argument of the book that *it is impossible to understand HRM in service work – the policies pursued, the meaning ascribed by management and the workforce to those policies, and therefore their likely*

*success or failure – without first understanding the nature of service work.* What is the nature of service work, how can we understand the social relations within it and what are the key forces underlying its organisation? These are the key questions that must be addressed before it is possible to see the reasons behind, and the meaning of, individual HRM practices. These questions are not trivial ones to which answers can be quickly fired off. They require careful evaluation. The book is structured to give such an evaluation, which can then also offer an adequate understanding of HRM in service work and the *systematic* contradictions within it between 'hard' and 'soft' policies, and between rhetoric and reality.

Two chapters, therefore, are devoted to examining the main existing perspectives on service work and the implications of their approaches for the content and meaning of HRM. The influential new service management school is examined in Chapter 2, with the following chapter evaluating three important critical sociological perspectives. Important weaknesses are located in each of these approaches. Chapter 4 puts forward two important ideas – the first being that service work cannot be understood without at the outset understanding the customer. With an understanding of the customer established, the chapter then puts forward the second idea, namely that the nature of service work is best understood if examined through the lens of the customer-oriented bureaucracy. Within this concept, 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 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 those designed to cope with the ensuing tensions. Chapter 5 illustrates these arguments by providing an overview of the management and experience of three important types of service work – hospitality work, call centre work and health care work. Chapter 6 acknowledges the limits of the concept of the customer-oriented bureaucracy in illuminating front-line work by arguing that sales work, particularly in its extreme forms, tends to be of a fundamentally different nature and requires separate analysis. There are distinct implications for HRM here also.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus in more detail on central aspects in the nature of service work – empowerment, control and emotional labour. In examining these aspects it draws out key implications for a range of HRM practices such as recruitment, culture management, stress management, appraisals, and performance-related pay. The analysis of HRM derived between Chapters 2

and 8 clearly shows that the front-line workforce cannot rely on decisions made by service management to work unambiguously to their benefit. Two chapters are therefore devoted to examining the regulation of service work, with regard to the systematic gendered segregation and disadvantage that exists in many front-line occupations, and with regard to trade union strategy, structure and ideology. The concluding chapter summarises the main arguments of the book, and looks at implications of its analysis for the wider study of HRM. It also considers the implications for overall characterisations of the service economy.

## Notes

- 1 Although also note that there are some significant differences between advanced economies regarding the proportion of the workforce in customer contact jobs. For example, Lash and Urry (1994, p. 109) point out that in the USA and the UK the proportion of the workforce in advanced consumer services sector (that is, a sector with high customer contact) is twice the size it is in Japan and Germany where there is less individualised consumption.
- 2 Front-line workers, although often working for large organisations, are often located in small workplaces. See Chapter 10 for more on this.
- 3 The nature of service work, just like other forms of work, will clearly differ between countries according to the nature of their overall political economy. In comparisons of the political economic nature of countries, commentators often group the UK, the USA and Australia together – whether under the label of an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ model or (with Canada) under that of a ‘service economy model’ (Castells, 1996, p. 229). Esping-Andersen (1990) is alone in putting forward an international political economic taxonomy centrally related to service work, suggesting that there are three ‘worlds of welfare capitalism’ which differ centrally according to the relative distribution of employment in producer services, health/education/welfare services and ‘fun’ services. It is not hard to place the UK, the USA and Australia together as leaning more heavily towards individualised consumer, ‘fun’ services than for instance, Germany and Japan. Firms in the UK, the USA and Australia also tend to have similar pressures toward ‘short-termism’ (Hutton, 1995) in business decisions stemming from pressures for immediate returns to financiers, and have relatively unregulated labour markets. These commonalities make it useful to concentrate the focus of this book on this group of countries. On the other hand, where appropriate, the book does also call on literature relating to other countries. As Lash and Urry (1994, p. 197) note with regard to Esping-Andersen’s arguments, while there are distinctions between countries it is still the case (a) that there are significant divergences within individual countries, and (b) that, therefore, there are cases of important similarities of certain industries between different countries.

- 4 Debates on the definition of HRM have spawned a 'cottage industry' of academic writing (Bratton and Gold, 1999, p. 4). In this book, HRM is understood to mean a set of management practices and rhetorics concerned with managing the employment relationship – mainly, but not exclusively, the 'employment relations' (Gospel, 1983) aspect of that relationship. Gospel's concept of the area of 'employment relations' closely maps onto the practices identified in the 'cycle of HRM' approach (see main text and Frenkel *et al.*, 1999, p. 14), which in turn corresponds to the HRM practices prescribed by the new service management school (see Chapter 2). This is essentially a *descriptive* definition. An *analytical* approach to the meaning of HRM in service work is offered in Chapter 4, and is briefly outlined in the final section of this chapter as well.

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