THE WORK OF WORK-RELATED LEARNING:
AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

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By
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ABSTRACT

This is a study of how texts shape and determine what employees think and do as they work to meet employer expectations about the way in which and the extent to which they are to participate in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as a requirement of their jobs. The study’s problematic arose out of the everyday experiences of employees as they do the “work of work-related learning” associated with the texts that are integral to the administration of employee development planning as a work process embedded in a widely used type of performance management system known as the balanced scorecard.

Institutional ethnography is the method of inquiry used to explicate how employees’ knowledge of the work they do as participants in the work process is socially organized through their participation in text-mediated relations of ruling in which and through which they come to know how their employer expects them to understand and conduct themselves as work-related learners. Revealed by the analysis of interview transcripts and company texts are the ways in which the work process organizes and mobilizes employees to align their consciousnesses and actions with company expectations. Employees who align their consciousnesses and actions with company expectations implicate themselves in a project by which their employer advances its interest to cope with and capitalize on the conditions of contemporary commerce by managing their employees’ work-related learning as an inescapable form of labour at the heart of on-the-job activity (Zuboff, 1988). The study traces how the alignment of employees’
consciousnesses and actions happens; what the alignment accomplishes; and what are the implications of the alignment for employees, their employer, and the theory and practice of human resource development (HRD).
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I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the key people who helped me do the work needed to complete this dissertation. I start with my study`s informants. Thank you for the time you took to talk with me about the work of work-related learning that you do.

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Finally, to Dr. Alison Griffith, the member of my PhD committee affiliated with York University. I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me. I am proud to call you my mentor and, with your permission, my friend as well.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family and particularly, my husband Ray and son Brady. Thank you for believing that I could do this. I love you for that and ever so much more.
POST DEFENSE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. Marjorie DeVault of Syracuse University for agreeing to serve as the external examiner of my dissertation. Dr. DeVault is a long-standing member of the community of institutional ethnographers who have taken up and advanced the method of inquiry that Dorothy E. Smith pioneered. In my view, this community of researchers continues to grow not only because of its members’ shared interest in exploring problematics of the everyday world but because people like Dr. DeVault go out of their way to help newcomers to the community. Dr. DeVault, I sincerely appreciate the interest you have shown in my work ever since we first had a chance to talk about it back in Boston.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POST DEFENSE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The theme of learning in HRD as a New Economy phenomenon | 7
1.2 Adopting a standpoint for inquiry | 9
1.3 Establishing the problematic and finding a point of entry | 15
1.4 Study design, purpose, and questions | 19
1.5 Significance of the study | 24
1.6 Conclusion to Chapter 1 | 25
1.7 Outline of the remaining chapters | 27

### CHAPTER 2: REORIENTING TO KEY TOPICS IN THE HRD LITERATURE

2.1 How we see the social world | 32
2.2 The purpose of producing knowledge | 35
2.3 Engaging with concepts | 38
2.4 The presence of employees | 41
2.5 Levels of analysis | 45
2.6 The matter of false consciousness | 47
2.7 Conclusion to Chapter 2 | 49

### CHAPTER 3: TEXTS AND THE RESEARCH PRACTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY (IE)

3.1 The properties of texts | 52
3.2 The mechanics of text mediation | 55
3.2.1 Activating texts in text-reader-conversations | 55
3.2.2 Activated texts as social organizers of knowledge | 57
3.2.3 Texts and ruling | 58
3.2.4 The textualization of work | 59
3.2.5 Texts and accountability circuits | 60
CHAPTER 4: DOING IE

4.1 Two main rounds of data gathering 64
4.2 Profile of informants 65
4.3 Informant identification and recruitment 66
4.4 Data gathering 69
  4.4.1 Using interviews in IE 69
  4.4.2 Gathering texts in IE 74
4.5 Analyzing the data 75
  4.5.1 Initial analysis 76
  4.5.2 Deciding on analytic processes 76
  4.5.3 In-depth data analysis 80
  4.5.4 Writing up my discoveries 83
4.6 Ethical considerations 87
4.7 Producing a faithful account 89
4.8 Limitations and delimitations of the study 90
  4.8.1 Limitations 90
  4.8.2 Delimitations 94
4.9 Conclusion to Chapter 4 97

CHAPTER 5: WORK-RELATED LEARNING AND THE REGULATORY TEXT OF THE BALANCED SCORECARD

5.1 Coming to know company expectations: Making a personal connection with the balanced scorecard 103
5.2 The consequences of coming to know company expectations: Employees respond to a changed pattern of visibility 110
5.3 Conclusion to Chapter 5 123

CHAPTER 6: BUILDING AND NAVIGATING AN ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCUIT FOR WORK-RELATED LEARNING

6.1 Preparing employee development plans: Participating in the building of an accountability circuit 129
6.2 A closer look at the inscriptive practices of preparing employee development plans 136
6.3 Navigating the accountability circuit: The inscriptive practices of implementing employee development plans 142
6.4 Conclusion to Chapter 6 155

CHAPTER 7: COMPLETING THE ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCUIT FOR WORK-RELATED LEARNING

7.1 Performance rating as a precursor to performance reviews 159
### CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary of the study’s discoveries 185
8.2 Drawing implications from the study’s discoveries 192
  8.2.1 The level of penetration into the lifeworld of employees 192
  8.2.2 Suggestions for interventions into the relations of ruling 198
  8.2.3 Contributions to the theory and practice of HRD 203
8.3 Personal reflections on the learning organization ideal 206

### LIST OF REFERENCES

### APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter of Consent Form 235
APPENDIX B: Topics to Guide Interviews 237
APPENDIX C: York University Research Ethics Approval Letter 238
APPENDIX D: University of Regina Research Ethics Approval Letter 239
LIST OF TABLES

4.1  Profile of informants 65
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Phases in the work of data analysis</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The balanced scorecard’s four perspectives on performance management</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The intertextual hierarchy</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>The social organization of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

If there is a single theme that has widened and transformed the idea of HRD in recent years...it is the theme of learning. (Bratton & Gold, 2007, p. 339)

Uncertainty, complexity, and constant change are widely reputed to be characteristic of the conditions of contemporary capitalism. The theme of learning in HRD\(^1\) encapsulates the idea that a positive relationship exists between employees’ continuous or lifelong work-related learning\(^2\) and the capacity of the companies for which they work to cope with and capitalize on these conditions.

This dissertation takes up the theme of learning from the standpoint of employees whose employers are responding to the conditions of contemporary capitalism by intervening in their everyday work lives in order to manage their performance\(^3\) as work-related learners. Employers justify their intervention\(^4\) on the strength of dual beliefs. First, that employees’ continuous or lifelong work-related learning is key to company progress, competitiveness and even survival (Ashton & Felstead, 2001; Bratton, Helms Mills, Pyrch, & Sawchuk, 2004; Bratton & Gold, 2007; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; Rainbird, Fuller, & Munro, 2004).

\(^1\) In this dissertation, *HRD* refers generally to adult education in the workplace (Merriam & Brockett, 1997) and specifically to the applied academic discipline named for its dedication to the development of employees as “human resources” in all kinds of private sector and public sector organizations.

\(^2\) The term *continuous or lifelong work-related learning* used throughout this dissertation refers to learning “undertaken at work or directly for the purposes of work” (Zarco Mera, 2005, p. 669) on an ongoing rather than episodic basis throughout the working life of an employee.

\(^3\) Later in this dissertation, I will critique the concept of performance on grounds that it suppresses and suspends the presence of employees as actual subjects (Smith, D.E., 1990b). For now, I invite readers to think of performance as Wheelen and Hunger (2000) do, in other words, as the end result of employees’ on-the-job activities.

\(^4\) The notion of intervening deliberately, purposely, and actively in the natural process of human learning is well established in the theory and practice of HRD (Stewart, 1998).
Second, that employees’ continuous or lifelong work-related learning enables them to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date for and relevant to the market for their labour (Armstrong, 2003; Bratton & Gold, 2007; Cardy, 2004; Thijssen, Van der Heijden, & Rocco, 2008).

Of primary empirical interest in this dissertation is employee development planning, a work process that managers and human resource developers administer on behalf of their employers and by which employees’ continuous or lifelong work-related learning is officially\(^5\) planned, implemented, reviewed and rewarded. Employers’ interest in having managers and human resource developers administer the work process extends from a need to shift the orientation of their companies from training to learning\(^6\) (Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1995; Garavan, Heraty, & Barnicle, 1999; Grieves & Redman, 1999; McGoldrick, Stewart, & Watson 2001, 2002; Poell, Van Dam, & Van Den Berg, 2004).

Employers needing to shift their companies’ orientation – or as Leonard Holmes (2004, 2007) has put it, needing to make a “learning turn” in their approach to adult education in the workplace – often continue to do as they have traditionally.

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\(^5\) The use of this adjective is deliberate and noteworthy for two reasons. The first is that employees learn in a number of ways in, at, and through their experience of paid work, not all of which can be accounted for by the work process of employee development planning. Thus, some of their work-related learning is unofficial. The second reason extends from the first. Since it is not possible to account for all of employees’ work-related learning, the adjective limits the meaning of work-related learning in this dissertation to that which is accounted for by the work process of employee development planning.

\(^6\) The shift marks the evolution from “old school” to “new school” HRD (Hytonen, Poell & Chivers, 2002). Practitioners of old school HRD focus mainly on delivering training. Practitioners of new school HRD strive to help their companies cope with and capitalize on the conditions of contemporary capitalism by facilitating employees’ continuous or lifelong work-related learning in a number of ways in addition to training. Please see the next footnote for a definition of training.
In other words, they periodically put their employees through training\(^7\) that is deliberately planned for them and that typically requires them to take time out and away from the local settings of their paid work in order to participate (Blanchard & Thacker, 1999; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

However, periodic training offered as an adjunct to employees’ on-the-job activity is an insufficient corporate response to the conditions of contemporary capitalism (Boud, 1998). From employers’ standpoint, continuous or lifelong work-related learning in, at, and through the experience of paid work should be managed as a “new form of labour” (Zuboff, 1988, p. 395) at the heart of on-the-job activity and something from which few employees can escape (Matthews & Candy, 1999).

The conventional wisdom is that employees must be individually responsible and accountable to participate in a wide range of formal and informal work-related learning activities throughout their careers (Werner & DeSimone, 2006) in order to produce the kind of capital best suited to helping the companies for which they work succeed. In other words, while companies previously depended mainly on physical and financial forms of capital for their success, they now increasingly depend on employees’ knowledge and skills recognized as a form of “human capital” (Aliaga, 2001; Smith & Sadler-Smith, 2006; Stewart, 1997) that can be generated by work processes such as employee development planning.

The study reported here is an institutional ethnography that investigates employee development planning as one among the dynamic work processes of

\(^7\) Training is typically defined as a mode of instruction to provide employees with knowledge and skills they can immediately use to enhance their on-the-job performance (Anthony, Perrewè, & Kacmar, 1996; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Werner & DeSimone, 2006).
knowledge and skills enhancement and renewal that employers introduce in accordance with the theme of learning in HRD and administer through company systems of performance management. In all sectors of industry and commerce, systems of performance management are commonplace (Bititci, Garengo, Dorfler, & Nudurupati, 2011). Such systems provide employers with a key tool (Buchner, 2007; Hansen, 2000) for holding employees individually responsible and accountable for: (a) their on-the-job performance; (b) their readiness, willingness, and ability to improve their performance through continuous or lifelong work-related learning; and (c) the extent to which their on-the-job performance contributes to the successful implementation of their company’s business strategy (Aguinis, 2009; Bratton & Gold, 2007; Houldsworth & Jirasinghe, 2006; Mabey & Salaman, 1995; Maycunich Gilley & Drake, 2003).

Chapters 5 to 7 explore the operation and accomplishments of a work process of employee development planning embedded in a very popular type of performance management system. The performance management system, known as the balanced scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1992, 1993, 1996a, b and c, 2001a and b), is in widespread use by companies in Canada, elsewhere in North America and around the world (Kaplan, 2009). By analyzing the practical activities of employees working with, working from and/or working to produce various documents or texts, I was able to discover ways in which the theme of learning in HRD, operationalized through the work process of employee

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8 The use of the balanced scorecard system of performance management is, however, definitely not limited to companies in the private sector. It is also used extensively by organizations in the public and non-profit sectors.
development planning, shapes and determines employees’ experiences of having their performance managed. My discoveries support the following arguments.

In this dissertation, I argue the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management draws employees into text-mediated relations of ruling (Smith, D.E., 1987). These text-mediated relations of ruling align employees’ consciousnesses and actions with employer expectations about the ways in which and the extent to which they should demonstrate their individual responsibility and accountability to perform as work-related learners. I claim neither that these text-mediated relations of ruling automatically produce standard patterns of thought and activity among employees nor that employees automatically demonstrate their individual responsibility and accountability to perform as work-related learners as their employer expects. Rather, I argue that through their participation in these text-mediated relations of ruling, employees come to know how it is their employer expects them to understand and conduct themselves as work-related learners.

I further argue that the ways of knowing warranted by the text-mediated relations of ruling articulate employees to the extra-local corporate world in which it is in their employers’ interest to cope with and capitalize on the conditions of contemporary commerce by managing their employees’ work-related learning as an inescapable form of labour at the heart of on-the-job activity. While it is
possible for employees to pursue their own interests with respect to work-related learning, such pursuits must fit within, and be shown by them to fit within, the curricular and procedural boundaries established by the work process. It is within these boundaries that employees have the opportunity to construct themselves as "employees of choice", in other words, employees who, because they have accepted work-related learning as a job requirement and something for which they will be held individually responsible and accountable, are more valuable to and valued by their employer than employees who have not.

Finally, I argue that employees’ participation in text-mediated relations of ruling not only produces the human capital that employers put to competitive use but also the evidence to claim the status of an “employer of choice” in a labour market in which the demand for skilled and knowledgeable employees is believed to outstrip supply. Employers of choice are able to distinguish themselves from other employers by touting employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as a unique aspect of the employment experience and something that gives them an advantage over other employers who are also seeking to attract and retain skilled and knowledgeable employees to carry out company business.

The remainder of this introductory chapter provides further background information on and an overview of the study reported in this dissertation. After situating the theme of learning in HRD in relation to the emergence of the so-
called New Economy, I identify the standpoint I adopted to guide my inquiry and explain how I came to adopt it. I then describe the student experiences that led me to hone in on the problematic of and find a point of entry for the research I conducted using institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. A brief overview of institutional ethnography (with more details in subsequent chapters) precedes an outline of the study’s purpose, questions and significance. Finally, the conclusion summarizes this introductory chapter and sketches out what the remaining ones cover.

1.1 The theme of learning in HRD as a New Economy phenomenon

The “New Economy” is a phrase that refers to the reorganization of the ensemble of activities and processes that make up the economy according to the tenets of neo-liberalism (DeVault, 2008). Neo-liberalism, or what is variously described as a philosophy, paradigm, theory, meta-narrative or meta-discourse that stresses the paramount significance of free markets to the organization of human life and the general prosperity of society (DeVault, 2008; Smith, D.E., 2005) has gained prominence in virtually all Western industrialized nations (Harvey, 2005; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006) over the last 30 years. To wit, it is deemed better for human life to be organized and the prosperity of society to depend on the operation of free markets and the exercise, by individuals, of increased responsibility and accountability for their own welfare than it is to rely on governments to provide for that welfare (Hake, 1999; Hyslop-Margison & Welsh, 2003; Martin, I., 2003).
The operation of free markets is not antithetical to liberalism as the philosophy, paradigm, theory, meta-narrative or meta-discourse prominent in Western industrialized nations from the end of World War II through the 1970s. However, in the so-called “Old Economy”, a phrase that refers to the organization of the economy’s ensemble of activities and processes according to the tenets of liberalism, governments did not hesitate to constrain free markets. They often intervened directly (McBride, 1998) in order to strike a balance between meeting the needs of their nations’ economies and their moral and social responsibility to meet citizens’ basic needs (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006).

It is against the backdrop of the changeover from an economy operating according to the tenets of liberalism (the Old Economy) to an economy operating according to the tenets of neo-liberalism (the New Economy) that the theme of learning has emerged to widen and transform the idea of HRD in recent years. With paid work that employees do now demanding new and higher levels of knowledge and skills than were required in the past (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2012; DeVault, 2008; Human Resources Development Canada, 2002), the tenets of neo-liberalism exhort employers to make HRD a priority (Youngman, 2000) and employees to take responsibility for their own learning (Kessels, 2004). While training endures, the boundaries of HRD extend beyond it. Within these extended boundaries, many employers endorse the theme of learning in HRD with a “neo-liberal conviction” (Ng & Shan, 2010, p. 169) that they back up by introducing performance management systems within which

1.2 Adopting a standpoint for inquiry

The study upon which this dissertation is based made the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management a matter of empirical inquiry from a standpoint that is often overlooked (Collin, 2002a; Grant & Shields, 2002; Guest, 2002) by HRD researchers. The standpoint to which I am referring is the standpoint of employees.

An institutional ethnographer uses standpoint as a “methodological device” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 206) for referring to “the location of an ‘embodied subject’ in a specific, local historical setting” (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, para. 5). The device helps her “explicitly note the place from which she looks” (Campbell & Manicom, 1995, p. 7) and “identify ‘whose side she is on’” (ibid, p. 7). My research is located at the embodied moments of employees’ participation in the work process of employee development planning and I declare myself to be on the side of employees.

The choice I made to adopt employees’ standpoint did not come easily to me. Early in my PhD program, I was quick to embrace as a good thing the HRD literature’s representations of the link between employees’ continuous or lifelong
work-related learning and the success of the companies for which they worked. I was excited about the connections I was making between the representations I was reading and prior master’s program learning about an idealized type of company – the so-called learning organization. Companies of this idealized type were popularized by Peter Senge (1990) in his “deeply influential” (Charles, 2009, p. 6) book: The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. Definitions of what is a learning organization vary (see, for example, Bratton & Gold, 2007; Noe, 1999; Senge, 1990 or Watkins & Marsick, 1993). In this dissertation, I take up the term as a metaphor (Garavan, 1997), conceptual catchall (Kiechel, 1990) or form of shorthand (Mabey & Salaman, 1995) for a company that thrives in the New Economy in part because of the priority it attaches to employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning. In learning organizations, continuous, lifelong work-related learning becomes a core and commonplace rather than peripheral and intermittent activity (Knights & Willmott, 2007; Mabey & Salaman, 1995). Indeed, mutual benefits flow to both employers and employees when participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning runs parallel to the activities of everyday work life (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996).

For employers, employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning represents a source of competitive advantage (Garavan, 1997; Kontoghiorghes, Awbrey, & Feurig, 2005; Senge, 1990) in that it provides means to the ends of individual and hence corporate performance improvement (Kaiser
& Holton, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 1999; Toracco & Swanson, 1995). In the New Economy, companies focused on performance improvement are deemed better able to cope with and capitalize on the conditions of contemporary capitalism than companies that are not. Accordingly, and by extension, it is important for companies that are striving to be learning organizations to discover how to tap into employees' commitment and capacity to learn (Senge, 1990). Work processes designed to foster continuous or lifelong work-related learning are purported to be useful in engendering such commitment and providing such capacity (Swanson & Holton, 2009; Werner & DeSimone, 2006) because they help employees perform better in their jobs and, in turn, help the companies for which they work perform better as well (Torraco & Swanson, 1995).

For employees, there is considerable appeal in the holistic and expansionary view of employee development that learning organizations promote (Fenwick, 1998). Learning organizations are reputed to be growth-oriented workplaces in which employees are empowered to meet their own personal goals for development at the same time as they contribute to meeting the goals of the company that employs them (Fenwick, 1998; Driver 2002). In a learning organization, there is no separation between continuous or lifelong work-related learning for individual and corporate performance improvement and continuous or lifelong work-related learning for the personal fulfillment of employees (Walker, 2001). Both are expected “outcomes” of employees' “investments” in continuous or lifelong work-related learning. An added benefit for employees who participate
in the continuous or lifelong work-related learning that learning organizations support, encourage and reward is employability. Employability is a trait that career-resilient (Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994) employees possess – employees who are able to “survive” in the turbulent labour market of the New Economy either by maintaining their current employment or by getting a different job with another company (Baruch, 2001; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Because of turbulence in the labour market, New Economy employers can no longer promise job security and offer advancement along clear, stable and upwardly mobile career paths (Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Hirsch & Naquin, 2001). Accordingly, they focus instead on creating opportunities for employees to take care of themselves (Ehrlich, 1994), promoting their participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as an attractive New Economy alternative to a “job for life”. In other words, employees can enhance their employability by assuming greater personal responsibility for their own continuous of lifelong work-related learning (Ellinger, 2004, Fenwick, 2006).

As I started to work towards my PhD, I found myself motivated to learn more about how to turn the learning organization ideal into a working reality (Mabey & Salaman, 1995). I was far from sure where my studies might lead me. Nonetheless, I found a sense of purpose in treating my studies as preparation for a time when I might seek employment with a company in which an important function of the people in the HR department was to help their company become a learning organization.
About half way through my PhD course work, my interests changed. The change started with a course on the epistemological foundations of education facilitated by Dr. Carol Schick. My experience of the course put me in an uncomfortable yet intriguing space of trying on for size a range of critical perspectives that caused me to begin to question the unquestioning way in which I had studied HRD up to that point. I became fascinated with the idea that HRD and the work processes administered in its name might not lead to empowerment and fulfillment for employees but, rather, as Fenwick (2004) puts it: “the subjugation of [employees’] knowledge, skills, relationships and education to [corporate] aims that are primarily economic or instrumental” (p. 198). The course marked a turning point, causing me to adopt a more critical stance in the papers I wrote for my remaining PhD courses.

After completing my PhD courses, I moved on to the first draft of my dissertation research proposal. The cycles of deliberation (Piantanida & Garman, 1999) I went through to prepare the first draft helped me advance my thinking and writing to a point where I saw an opportunity to study companies’ shift away from a training to a learning orientation in two novel ways. The first is employee-centred. HRD studies that attend to or are motivated by a concern with the interests and perspectives of employees are much harder to find (Collin, 2002b; Livingstone, 2001; Sambrook, 2004) than studies attentive to the interests and perspectives of employers (Belcourt & Wright, 1996; Reid & Barrington, 1997).

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9 Those who consider themselves critical HRD scholars are concerned about the subjugation to which Fenwick refers.
The second is context-sensitive. HRD researchers routinely justify the need for employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning in terms of what is going on in the extra-corporate world (Contu, Grey, & Ortenblad, 2003). Nevertheless, intra-corporate concerns about how work-related learning occurs, what is being learned, what internal factors influence work-related learning and how work-related learning can be made more effective (Boud, 1998; Streumer & Kho, 2004; Valentin, 2006) are the ones that typically give rise to questions that guide HRD research.

While excited by the prospect of studying companies’ shift from a training to learning orientation by attending to the interests and perspectives of employees as well as the wider context in which the shift they were experiencing was taking place, I did not yet have any sense of how to conduct such a study. As I began to consult a host of research textbooks and handbooks in the hope of finding a way to explore the domain I had opened up and saw as ripe for inquiry, I first learned about institutional ethnography.

Institutional ethnography (Smith, D.E., 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006) provides researchers with the empirical resources to link, or build an empirical bridge (Luken & Vaughn, 2005) between, the micro-level of everyday experiences and the macro-level influences that are shaping those experiences from beyond the local settings in which they occur (Babbie, 2001). As institutional ethnographers make their way across this bridge, metaphorically
speaking, they discover and make visible how people’s experiences at the micro-level of the everyday social world are shaped and determined by the macro-level influences that enter into their everyday lives (Smith, D.E., 2005). The goal is not simply to mount a macro-level argument to explain, typically with the aid of theory, discoveries at the micro-level. Rather, institutional ethnographers work to open up the macro-level ethnographically rather than theoretically (Smith, D.E., 2005) and thereby to explicate how the things that happen to people and that link them together as they go about the activities of their everyday lives are organized to happen the way they do.

While the way in which I first learned about institutional ethnography was almost happenstance, my efforts to learn more about it would not be. In the waning months of 2006, I decided it was time for me to go to school to learn more about institutional ethnography.

1.3 Establishing the problematic and finding a point of entry

For the first semester of 2007, I enrolled as a special student of York University in order to take, thanks to the wonders of webcasting, a course on institutional ethnography. The York University course professor was Dr. Alison I. Griffith, a long-time colleague and friend of Dorothy E. Smith. For the capstone assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an assignment of the course, students collected and analyzed data for an

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10 The course would not end my association with Dr. Griffith. She continued to support my learning about institutional ethnography after the York University course, initially by reading early draft chapters of this dissertation and later as a member of my PhD committee along with Drs. Bockarie, Ito, Khalideen, and Schick.
institutional ethnography and produced a research paper documenting what they did and found out. With the support of Dr. Griffith, I adapted the requirements of the research paper to complete a second draft of my dissertation proposal.

More than a year earlier, during the cycles of deliberation leading to the first draft of my dissertation proposal, I contacted a woman with whom I used to work. I knew she had gone on to work in the human resources (HR) department of a company in the same business sector as the one in which I had first met her. I asked if I could meet with her to talk about my research interests. My colleague agreed to meet. When we did, she told me she believed her company was shifting from a training to learning orientation and backed up what she had to say by sharing copies of the form employees used to prepare their employee development plans and the accompanying HR department guidelines showing categories of work-related learning that the company recognized and rewarded. These categories included but were not limited to training. I thought I might have found a company in which the shift that I had been reading about in the HRD literature was actually occurring. I made sure to ask my colleague if I could be in touch again when I was a little closer to beginning my research.

The occasion to get in touch again arose during the course I took from York University. Gearing up for the capstone assignment, I asked Dr. Griffith to read the first draft of my dissertation proposal. When I followed up by phone to get feedback, one of the things Dr. Griffith said was: “you can’t assume people
will know there’s a shift [from training to learning] going on”. After hearing those words, it dawned on me that taking up the text of the employee development plan form and HR department guidelines that my former colleague had shared with me might be the way to establish a problematic and find a point of entry for my dissertation research. We had focused much of our course discussions on texts – recognized in institutional ethnography as “actual presences in people’s activities and in how activities are coordinated” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 104) – for particular ends. I was glad the significance of these course discussions had not been lost on me.

I did not wait long after my phone conversation with Dr. Griffith to call my former colleague for permission to do preliminary fieldwork at her company. Doing this preliminary fieldwork I experienced a disjuncture, or feeling of disconnect, that provided me with the point of entry for the research I would ultimately propose in the final draft of my dissertation proposal. The disjuncture occurred as I listened to people who volunteered to participate as informants in the preliminary fieldwork talk about their employee development plans. I got a sense early on that, in these informants’ experience, there was flexibility under the balanced scorecard system of performance management to choose forms of work-related learning other than training in order to accomplish the learning and development objectives they were required to set for themselves. What I didn’t expect was how many times informants mentioned standardized steps in the work process that seemed to guide them to make employee development
choices that fit with the company's definitions of what constituted appropriate work-related learning. The employee development plan form and HR department guidelines were starting to look like texts that did not provide employees with as much flexibility in their work-related learning as I initially thought. They were starting to look like texts that framed and governed (Smith, D.E., 2005) their choices about how to develop themselves as employees.¹¹

Thus, my problematic¹² (i.e. area of investigation) arose out of the everyday experiences of employees engaging in the work of work-related learning associated with the texts that are integral to the administration of the performance management system and the work process of employee development planning embedded in it. The term work as it is used here is defined generously (Smith, D.E., 1987) and expanded beyond ordinary usage (Smith, D.E., 2006). In institutional ethnography, work does not refer to paid employment (although employee development planning is part of employees’ everyday experience of paid employment) but to anything and everything “people do that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that involves some acquired competence” (Smith, D.E., 1987, p. 165). In this study, work refers both

¹¹ The disjuncture I experienced thus stemmed from what Townsend (1998) describes as a contradiction between what I understood to be intended by the work process of employee development planning (the "vision") and what actually happens (the "reality" as it appeared to me while talking to informants during preliminary fieldwork).

¹² In institutional ethnography, a problematic guides and grounds the research that is undertaken. It "sets out a project of research and discovery" (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 227) as it will be taken up from a particular standpoint i.e. in my case, the standpoint of employees who are the people who know the situation of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management because they have lived it (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Since I have not lived the situation, I could not generate a research problematic from personal experience like many other institutional ethnographers have done. Instead, I defined the standpoint for my inquiry by what I had learned by talking with others (Smith, D.E., 2005) during preliminary fieldwork.
to what employees do and to the consciousness that goes along with what they do (Smith, D.E., 2002) when they participate in the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of management.

1.4 Study design, purpose, and questions

The study reported in this dissertation was designed to: (a) describe what employees know of their experiences as participants in the work process of employee development planning; (b) take into account the broader context in which employees participate in the work process; and (c) explicate what is influencing employees’ knowledge of their experiences of the work process yet is located beyond the local settings in which they participate in it. As indicated in the previous section, HRD researchers rarely address these issues.

To carry out the study, I paid particular attention to examining: (a) the activities in which employees, managers and human developers participate as the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management unfolds; (b) the text the company provides for employees to fill in to prepare and implement their employee development plan; and (c) other company texts that have an influence either on the text of the employee development plan or the activities associated with it. Through this three-part examination, I explicate how employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning is socially organized.
Knowledge that is socially organized (Smith, D.E., 1987, 1990a, 1990b) does not exist separate and apart from people living in the everyday world. Rather, people construct knowledge through social interaction. Institutional ethnographers problematize knowledge constructed through social interaction from the standpoint of people who may not be aware that they cannot fully understand the actualities of their lives from where they are located as embodied human beings (Smith, D.E., 1987). As Dorothy E. Smith (2001) puts it:

- Our directly-known worlds are not self-contained or self-explicating despite the intimacy of our knowledge of them. They are organized by and coordinated with what people, mostly unknown and never to be known by us, are doing elsewhere and at different times. (pp. 160-161)

Of particular empirical interest to me in this institutional ethnography is how the actualities of employees' lives as work-related learners in the local settings of their work are organized and coordinated in sequences of text-mediated activities in which they and others participate. This interest reflects my belief in an organization to the world that exists before anyone participates in it (Smith, D.E., 1990b). In other words, there are influences “beyond any one individual’s experience” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 1) that organize and coordinate that individual’s experience and the knowledge they construct as a result.

In Chapter 3, I will say much more about institutional ethnographic understandings about how knowledge is socially organized when people work
with, work from and/or work to produce various texts. It is enough to say here that institutional ethnography enabled my exploration of the part that texts play in relations of ruling into which employees are drawn and which they help to sustain when they participate in the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management. The notion of relations of ruling is similar to but more specific than (DeVault, 2008) the notion of social relations formulated to help institutional ethnographers explore how the local actualities of people’s lives are organized and coordinated as a result of decisions and actions that others have taken translocally or at a distance (Kallinikos, 1995) from them.

The relations of ruling are essentially text-mediated forms of organizing everyday life and people’s knowledge of it that have emerged and become dominant over the last 200 years\(^\text{13}\) to form “a complex field of coordinated activities…based in technologies of print, and increasingly in computer technologies. They are activities in and in relation to texts, and texts coordinate them as relations [of ruling],” (Smith, D.E., 1999, p. 79). Institutional ethnographers understand text-mediated relations of ruling to be ever-present in people’s lives, just like the “water that fish swim in” (Campbell, 1998, p. 70).

\(^\text{13}\) Smith (1987, 1999, 2005) traces the historical trajectory of the relations of ruling in parallel with the development of corporate capitalism. Along the trajectory is a move away from a mode of economic production dependent on direct and personal relations between owners and their business enterprises and towards a mode in which a hierarchy of managers using written rules, administrative practices and systems of data collection permit owners to be at arm’s length from their business enterprises. In the last 200 years, the relations of ruling have become more comprehensive and complex as “a distinctive mode of organizing society” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 13) that includes, but is not limited to, the part of society associated with the functioning of companies.
Texts that are so integral to and ubiquitous in our on-the-job activities (Smith, D.E., 2001, 2005) characteristically have the capacity to organize what we think and do whenever and wherever we engage with them. Texts include any material and replicable form of document on paper, drawings, photographs, film, TV, audio, video, computer files and screens. A replicable text is one that is stored, transferred, copied, produced and distributed in bulk, allowing people at different times and in different places to see, hear or watch them (DeVault & McCoy, 2002) and yet appear as the same text at each moment that people interact with them. In a company setting, memos, letters, procedure manuals, emails and forms such as the one used in the work process of employee development planning are all examples of texts.

Institutional ethnographers view texts as operative at the intersection between the local actualities of peoples’ lives and the relations of ruling that organize, coordinate and regulate those local actualities (Smith, D.E., 1987, 1990a, 1999). In contemporary society, “what the business world calls management” (Smith, D.E., 1990a, p. 14) depends on relations of ruling mediated by texts. Within these relations, to rule is to rely on knowledge constructed through various textual forms of reporting, accounting for, recording and/or otherwise taking note of particular aspects of peoples’ lives (Smith, D.E., 1990b). The way in which knowledge constructed in texts functions as a form of ruling is linked to the text’s capacity to subsume peoples’ own experiences in the everyday world to “documentary forms of knowledge that construct in texts the
objectives of managerial...decision-making” (McCoy, 1998, p. 415). Thus, Smith’s formulation of the notion of the relations of ruling for institutional ethnography directs empirical attention to fields of socially organized activity that are “vested in and mediated by texts…and constituted externally to particular individuals” (Smith, D.E., 1987, p. 3). With attention so directed, institutional ethnographers can begin to explore “the construction of the world as texts, whether on paper or in computer, and the creation of a world in texts as a site of action” (Smith, D.E., 1987, p. 3).

The world as/in texts that is of interest to me is the one in which employees, managers, and human resource developers participate in the work process of employee development planning. The local setting of this world is the company at which informants in my study worked and in which they engage with the texts associated with the work process. My goal is to reveal the “organizing power” (DeVault, 2006, p. 295) of texts and through this revelation to explicate just how employees are “brought under [their] jurisdiction” (DeVault, 2006, p. 297) in ways that align their consciousnesses and actions with company expectations.

Questions consistent with the design and purpose of my study and that, therefore, framed the institutional ethnography I conducted are as follows:

- What activities do employees actually engage in to do the work of work-related learning?
• What work-based and text-mediated social relations are shaping employees' knowledge of the work of work-related learning?

• How is employees' knowledge of the work of work-related learning socially organized?

• What are the implications of explicating the social organization of employees' knowledge of the work of work-related learning for HRD theory and practice?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study upon which I base this dissertation is significant for several reasons. The first, which I have already discussed, is that I conducted it from the standpoint of employees. Second, it illuminates the positions constructed for employees as participants in the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management as well as the opportunities and constraints provided by those positions (DeVault, 1995). Third, it further opens up a promising and developing area of research examining how texts shape work-related learning (Fenwick, 2006, 2008). I came across four studies in this area (none of which were reported in official HRD journals\textsuperscript{14}). Two of them draw on institutional ethnographic notions without making explicit whether its research practices were used (Farrell, 2001; Hamilton, 2009) and only one is a full-fledged institutional ethnography that Grace (2005) completed to explicate the regulation of the

\textsuperscript{14} The journals are all published by the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD). The AHRD (www.ahrd.org) is an international organization of HRD scholars and practitioners. AHRD journals include: Human Resource Development Quarterly, Advances in Developing Human Resources, Human Resource Development International and Human Resource Development Review.
professional practice of Australian vocational educators by a hierarchy of
government (as opposed to company) texts. Fourth, it responds to the call for
other ways of researching HRD that break with the positivist research tradition
within the discipline (Bierema & D'Abundo, 2004; Elliott & Turnbull, 2002;
Garavan, Gunnigle, & Morley, 2000; Lynham, 2000; Valentin, 2006). More
specifically, and despite the case that has been made for the relevance of
institutional ethnography to HRD (Wright, 2003; Wright & Rocco, 2007), it does
not appear researchers in the discipline have taken it up as their method of
inquiry. Finally, the study is significant because it helped me to fulfill a desire to
do more than enrich the body of knowledge of the discipline of HRD. Here I am
referring to the potential of empirical work to expand the knowledge of and,
therefore, become a resource for those whose standpoint I have adopted. Very
appealing to me is the prospect that my discoveries could motivate employees to
take steps towards changing the conditions of their everyday lives (DeVault,
1999; Smith D.E., 2005) because of knowledge from their standpoint that I have
been able to produce.

1.6 Conclusion to Chapter 1

In this chapter, I introduced the study upon which I base my dissertation.
The study is set against a backdrop of changeover from the Old Economy
organized according to the tenets of liberalism to the New Economy organized
according to the tenets of neo-liberalism. The tenets of neo-liberalism invite
employers to make HRD a priority, not only to help them cope with and capitalize
on the conditions of contemporary capitalism but also to help their employees assume individual responsibility and accountability for keeping their knowledge and skills up-to-date for and relevant to a turbulent labour market.

The study itself investigates employee development planning as a work process that managers and human resource developers administer on behalf of their employers and by which employees' performance as work-related learners is officially planned, implemented, reviewed and rewarded. The arguments of this dissertation were formulated on the basis of my analysis of the practical activities of employees working with, working from and/or working to produce various documents or texts that are integral to the administration of the work process and hence to the balanced scorecard system of performance management in which it is embedded. I discuss the workings and accomplishments of these practical activities in later chapters.

Chapter 1 also presented me with the opportunity to recount the school experiences that sparked my empirical interest in the study that I conducted and report on in this dissertation. It was these experiences that lead me to establish the purpose and problematic of the study and the research questions that guided its conduct. After outlining these, I listed five reasons the study reported is significant. Key among them is the use of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry that allows for the production of knowledge from a different standpoint and for a different purpose than is the norm in HRD.
1.7 Outline of the remaining chapters

Seven chapters follow this introductory one. An outline of each follows.

In Chapter 2, I delineate my stance as an institutional ethnographer in relation to six key topics in the HRD literature. A discussion of how each of these key topics is typically and generally understood is followed by a discussion of how institutional ethnography helps me understand them differently. By drawing attention to these differences in understanding I expand upon the brief introduction to institutional ethnography that I have given so far in order to highlight the uniqueness of the method of inquiry for investigating employee development planning as an HRD work process.

In Chapter 3, I discuss various institutional ethnographic notions related to texts and the part they play in the research practice of institutional ethnography. While texts are not a key topic in the HRD literature, the part they play in the text-mediated social organization of knowledge makes them central to my investigation. As a result, I devote an entire chapter to texts in institutional ethnography.

In Chapter 4, I describe the methods and procedures I used to conduct and to write up the study upon which this dissertation is based. The methodological account lets readers in on how I went about addressing the research questions that guided my research. In addition to describing the two
rounds of data gathering and four analytic processes culminating in the write-up of my research, I canvas the ethical considerations important to the conduct of my study as well as its limitations and delimitations.

In Chapters 5 to 7, I share the discoveries that support the arguments I made in this chapter. Discussion and analysis of various company texts associated with the work process of employee development planning as well as the inscriptive practices of working with, working from and/or working to produce them unfolds across Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Together, the three chapters trace the social organization of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning in relations of ruling mediated by the texts upon which the administration of the work process depends.

More specifically, in Chapter 5, I explicate how employees are drawn into text-mediated relations of ruling as corporate expectations about the way in which and the extent to which they are to perform as work-related learners become visible and known to them. The relationship between two company texts is explored to illuminate how company expectations are rendered individually relevant to and actionable by employees who are required by the work process to make sense of one text in relation to the other.

In Chapter 6, I focus on how employees drawn in to participating in text-mediated relations of ruling prepare and implement their employee development
plans. The discussion and analysis of preparation activities show the ways in which employees fit themselves into the conceptual frames their employer has established to define the elements of a proper instance of an employee development plan. Chapter 6 also discusses and analyzes the activities in which employees become involved as they implement the plans they inscribe. What comes into view from the discussion and analysis of implementation activities is what more there is for employees to do than simply get on with the work-related learning they propose to do under the auspices of their employee development plans. The part these “extra-curricular doings” play in facilitating the administration of the work process is revealed.

In Chapter 7, I explore dimensions of the text-mediated relations of ruling by which managers evaluate the extent to which employees are deemed to have met company expectations of their performance as work-related learners. This evaluation depends on the inscriptive practices of managers who are required by the work process both to rate employees’ performance as work-related learners as well as to arrive at performance scores for determining the rewards they will receive for their performance. Performance scores differentiate the extent to which employees have or have not met corporate expectations. To round out Chapter 7, I explore the implications of this differentiation.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I link the discoveries reported in the three chapters previous to it to a broader discussion of the HRD work process of employee
development planning and the context in which companies are coping with and capitalizing on the conditions of contemporary commerce by rendering employees’ work-related learning an object of management. Some scholars contend that discourses of work-related learning, of which the theme of learning in HRD is a part, “may represent an unparalleled level of penetration by the relations of ruling into the lifeworld\textsuperscript{15} of human communities” (Bratton et al., 2004, p. 165-166). In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I explain how my study supports the contention that the theme of learning in HRD penetrates the everyday work lives of employees as a locally operationalized manifestation of the extra-local discourses of work-related learning circulating in the New Economy. In addition, I draw a number of implications from my discoveries, suggest several interventions that I believe are necessary because of them and conclude with some personal reflections on so-called learning organizations.

\textsuperscript{15} I use this term in a manner similar to Collins (1990) and Welton (1995). Both draw on the work of Habermas (1984, 1986) in critiques of the influence of capitalism on adult education (a discipline closely related to HRD). More specifically, Collins and Welton draw on Habermas’ famous metaphor (Gouthro, 1999) – “the colonization of the lifeworld”. The lifeworld is “a place where people interact in the everyday, sharing ideas and communicatively shaping values and beliefs” (Gouthro, 2002) at home, in organizations and the community. “Colonization” refers to the appropriation or takeover of the values and beliefs of people in the lifeworld by the “system”, another Habermasian term referring to the structures of power such as government and the marketplace and to the means of power such as money and knowledge (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). There are parallels between the Habermasian-inspired critiques of Collins and Welton and the tenor of my discussion of the implications I draw from my institutional ethnographic discoveries in Chapter 8.
2. REORIENTING TO KEY TOPICS IN THE HRD LITERATURE

Is it possible that I cannot count as high as the number of times I turned to the literature while I was conducting and writing up the study that I outlined in Chapter 1? I think so. As I moved from writing my dissertation proposal to seeking ethics approval and from that point in the research process on to two rounds of data gathering and four phases of data analysis (Chapter 4), the literature was omnipresent. It sat on my desk, filled boxes on the floor of my home office, stood in stacks on my bookshelves, waited to be called up from flash drives, and dotted my computer desktop as downloads from many library databases. From attending to small details like checking citations to the bigger tasks of embracing topics to which my research introduced me, the literature was a constant companion on my doctoral journey.

Clearly, I am not unique in my experience of immersion in the literature. I wonder though how many other students have shared the experience of putting off writing their literature review until near the end of their research. The literature review included in this dissertation was the next to last chapter I wrote. For me, the reason for waiting to write it was partly the emergent nature of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. Since institutional ethnographies are “rarely planned out fully in advance” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 755), I did not know for sure at the outset just what parts of the vast body of literature on HRD I would want or need to review. It was also partly because as my wants and needs to read the literature changed, so did the print and
electronic resources to which I turned. Sometimes I used the literature strictly as an information source. Other times I treated the literature as data (Griffith, 2006) in efforts to understand the difference in standpoint reflected in it as compared to the standpoint of employees that I adopted. At all times, however, I had a sense I best not put finger to keyboard until I was ready to delineate my research stance as an institutional ethnographer in relation to key topics in the HRD literature (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).

To indicate my position as a researcher in relation to the HRD literature, I first introduce readers to the key topics I have chosen to review and then, on a topic-by-topic basis, articulate how I construe them because of what I have learned about institutional ethnography. The topics I cover in this chapter are not the only ones to which the HRD literature repeatedly returns. Over time, however, they became the ones that increasingly stood out for me because of the points of contrast I could make between them and my understanding of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry.

2.1 How we see the social world

Early in their textbook on research methods, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) remind their readers that research is not simply a technical exercise but an exercise “informed by how we view our [social world], what we take understanding to be and what we see as the purposes of understanding” (p. 3).
While there is “no single lens for viewing HRD research” (McGoldrick, Stewart, & Watson, 2002, p. 4), there is, as I indicated in Chapter 1, a positivist tradition within the discipline. According to Short and Kuchinke (2002), those who research in this tradition hold three core beliefs.

First, that the social world under investigation exists independently from the researcher...Second, that there exists in the social world general laws and principles that explain human behaviour and make prediction possible. And third, that the research process in itself is value free and neutral. (p. 206)

Through research that produces knowledge of the way things are, positivist researchers aim to converge on an understanding of the true state of affairs in the social world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Since researchers in the positivist tradition regard phenomena of the social world as existing out there, just waiting to be discovered, they are concerned to use (mainly quantitative) research methods that will as precisely and as objectively as possible yield data for analysis (Silverman, 2006). To the positivist researcher, maintaining independence from the research setting and the people in it are vital concerns.

In contrast, institutional ethnographers do not believe the social world can “be explored from some disinterested neutral place” (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006, p. 5). Indeed, the notion of standpoint presupposes there is no such position from which to conduct research (Ng &
Mirchandani, 2008). Accordingly, in this institutional ethnography, I take a position as “an interested and invested knower, rather than a disinterested, neutral and ‘objective’ one” (Ng, 2006, p. 179).

As an interested and invested knower, I undertake to figure out how people’s knowledge is organized by the social world in which they participate in real time and place. It is what people do – not as individuals but as individuals in interaction with others and with the texts that they work with, work from and work to produce – that makes the social world recognizable to others and visible in empirical terms.

To the institutional ethnographer, to understand is to come to know how the relations of ruling “both rely on and determine [people’s] everyday activities” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 44). Coming to know is an empirical matter of mapping or tracing connections between lived experiences and the influences that shape and determine those experiences from beyond them. What institutional ethnographers come to know is “not already prejudged by a conceptual framework that regulates how data will be interpreted” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 50). While guided by a problematic, my institutional ethnography is not under the direction or conceptual control (Luken, 2008) of any particular framework. My project is one of exploration and discovery from the location of the people whose standpoint anchors the research (DeVault, 2008).
2.2 The purpose of producing knowledge

One of the most frequently discussed topics in the HRD literature is the importance of the coming together of theory and practice (Swanson, 2005; Toracco, 2004). Ideally, “the river flows both ways” (Yorks, 2005, p. 111) – human resource developers will be just as interested in improving their practice through the application of theoretical research as they will be in developing new theory from research on innovations in practice. Realistically, however, because HRD is an applied discipline, the tension that exists between HRD scholars and practitioners (Jacobs, 1997; Lynham, 2000; Ruona, 1999; Toracco, 1997) means that knowledge making “is judged primarily in terms of its usefulness to practice” (Lynham, 2000, p. 163). In its devotion to issues of applying research to practice, HRD has followed the pattern of traditional management disciplines (Lynham, 2002; Sambrook & Hatcher, 2006) such as accounting, finance, operations management and organizational behaviour.

There is something pragmatically appealing to me about HRD’s abiding interest in applying research to practice. The problem I have, however, is with the main purpose of HRD practice.

In the main, the purpose of practicing HRD is to improve the performance of employees and hence the performance of the companies for which they work (Bierema, 2000, 2002, 2009; Bierema & D’Abundo, 2004; Elliott & Turnbull, 2002; Fenwick, 2004; Holton, 1999; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007;
Swanson, 1995; Swanson & Arnold, 1996; Trehan & Rigg, 2011). With the purpose of performance improvement guiding a great deal of practice, HRD is considered useful to the extent that work processes administered in its name ultimately enhance company performance and in so doing, make a positive contribution to the bottom line (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; O'Donnell, McGuire, & Cross, 2006). At the margins, there is disciplinary movement away from a straightforward focus on performance improvement (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008). Scholars who are part of this movement believe the performance improvement focus of HRD practice is too narrow (Bierema, 2000, 2002). Furthermore, “connotations associated with seeing people merely as assets or resources contributing to increased [company] performance” (Walton, 2003, p. 321) are a source of considerable concern. As Bouchard (2006) puts it:

the value of work and employment for people reaches far beyond the value of commercial exchange. The workplace is a locus of human interaction that touches on all spheres of society, including the way we organize our family life and run our communities. (pp. 170-171)

In light of concerns that “corporate interests prevail over human ones” (Bierema & D'Abundo, 2004, p. 445) and claims that “social well-being is as relevant to HRD practice as economic well-being” (O'Donnell, Gubbins, McGuire, Jorgensen, Henriksen, & Garavan, 2007, p. 413), social justice is being advocated as an alternative guide for HRD practice. While there are various conceptualizations of what comprises social justice in the various organizational
contexts in which HRD is practiced, notions of democracy, equality, social consciousness and responsibility are often part of them (Bierema & D’Abundo, 2004; Fenwick & Bierema, 2008, Hatcher, 2004; Sambrook, 2004). Unfortunately, although social justice is advocated as an alternative purpose for HRD practice and it is expected that the contribution of HRD scholarship to social justice will increase as the discipline continues to mature, now in short supply is empirical HRD literature informed by concerns for social justice (Bierema, 2000; Fenwick & Bierema, 2008; Hatcher, 2004; Sambrook, 2004). In terms of work-related learning, the goal of “putting the development of humans [emphasis in original] back in the HRD equation” (Bierema & D’Abundo, 2004, p. 444) has been used as an example of the way in which concerns for social justice can give rise to research.

By taking up institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, I avail myself of the opportunity to advance social justice in HRD practice. Institutional ethnographies “contribute to a social justice agenda by making knowledge from the standpoints of people’s everyday lives, seeking to demystify relations of ruling, and pointing to possible interventions in ruling relations” (DeVault, 2011, online). Research towards these ends can be “translated into people’s everyday work knowledge” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 1). Once people know how things work and how they happen the way they do, they no longer have to “struggle in the dark” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 33). Made visible for them are possibilities for change they can make within the local settings of their work. “Like the map of the
underground mall, with its arrow pointing to a particular spot accompanied by the words YOU ARE HERE! institutional ethnographers...enable people to relate the locus of their experience to where they may want to go" (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 51). When people know where they may want to go, they are in a much better position to get there.

2.3 Engaging with concepts

With performance improvement the main purpose of HRD practice, it is hardly surprising that the concept of performance organizes a great deal of the literature that I read while doing my research and writing up this dissertation (Bierema, 2002; Fenwick, 2004; Garavan, Heraty, & Barnicle, 1999; O'Donnell, McGuire, & Cross, 2006; Rigg, Stewart, & Trehan, 2007; Sambrook & Hatcher, 2006). The literature reflects three interrelated and influential ideas about performance, all of which fall under the umbrella of the theme of learning in HRD (Chapter 1). The first idea (and one already introduced) is that the primary purpose of HRD is to improve the performance of employees and hence the performance of the companies for which they work. The second idea is that the participation of employees in continuous or lifelong work-related learning positively influences company performance (Jacobs & Washington, 2003) and the third idea is that the work process most likely to result in improved company performance is performance management (Guest, 2007). One typical way in which companies put these ideas into practice is to embed work processes designed to encourage the continuous or lifelong work-related learning of
employees (of which employee development planning is a prominent example) into their systems of performance management (Armstrong, 2000; Houldsworth & Burkinshaw, 2008; Jacobs & Washington, 2003). The company at which my informants worked puts these ideas into practice in just such a way. At the heart of Chapters 5 to 7 are analyses of the manner in which it is doing so and what doing so accomplishes. In this section, I discuss the incorporation of the concept of performance in the mainstream HRD research agenda.

For more than 20 years, researchers have been infatuated with and preoccupied by the quest to understand how the deployment of work processes designed to improve employees’ performance can concomitantly help companies achieve their strategic goals (Guest, 2011; Pauwwe, 2009). High on the priority list has been quantitative and statistical research (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2010) to prove a causal relationship between the administration of these work processes and company performance. By and large, researchers have done so (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006). However, concerns about the quality of empirical work have sparked debate about how causal the relationship can be claimed to be (Gerhart, Wright, McMahan, & Snell, 2000; Gerhart, Wright, & McMahan, 2000; Godard, 2004; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005) if indeed causality can be claimed at all (Guest, Michie, Conway, & Sheehan, 2003; Purcell, Kinnie, Swart, Rayton, & Hutchinson, 2009; Wall & Wood, 2005).
While there is a consensus among researchers who have reported evidence of causality that the relationship flows from the work processes through employees to performance (Ramsay, Scholarios, & Harley, 2000), the presence of employees as the people who actually do the performing is suppressed and suspended (Smith, D.E., 1990b) in the literature. This suppression and suspension is not idiosyncratic but rather characteristic of the way the literature conceptualizes performance “as the property of the employer and...[defines it] not from the location of those who need to do it, but for the purposes of those who want to manage and control it” (Jackson, 1994, p. 349). The concept of performance is specialist jargon (Neuman, 2000) for the ultimate outcome variable of HRD (Swanson & Holton, 2009). HRD researchers use this jargon to communicate with each other about the physical and mental work that employees do to meet the requirements of their job. Use of the jargon imposes distance between the local actualities of employees’ everyday work lives and the concept that is widely used to account for them (Smith, D.E., 1990b, 2005). Putting it another way, employees and their actual on-the-job activities all but disappear when the abstract concept of performance is substituted to take their place.

The foregoing is not to say that concepts are alien to institutional ethnography. Rather, my intent is to emphasize that my focus is to explore and discover concepts as they are actually encountered when I engage with the social world. Essential to doing my institutional ethnography is my “commitment to learning from actualities as they are experienced and spoken or written by
those actively involved in them” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 50). My goal is to explicate people’s experiences from their standpoint rather than the standpoint of disciplinary authorities (Campbell & Gregor, 2002) who look for and see things in certain conceptual ways.

2.4 The presence of employees

The large body of literature on the relationship between the administration of work processes designed to improve employees’ performance and the improvement of company performance neglects employees (Grant & Shields, 2002; Guest, 1999, 2002, 2007; Janssens & Steyaert, 2009; Paauwe, 2009). The scholarly attention that is given to employees as the people who participate in the work processes is mostly incidental rather than fundamental (Gibb, 2001; Grant & Shields, 2002) even though the benefits that are purported to flow to them from the administration of the work processes in which they participate are widely discussed (Garavan, McGuire, & O’Donnell, 2004). With respect to HRD work processes in particular, employees usually go unheard (Bjorkquist & Lewis, 1994; Fenwick, 2004; Valentin, 2006). Their perspectives “are either ignored or viewed quite instrumentally” (Poell, 1998, p. 5) and their activities deemed to be reactions to the activities of others (Easterby-Smith, 1997), notably managers and human resource developers. Employees cast in the role of silent followers are expected to passively and unquestioningly conform to and support the prevailing HRD agenda (Bramming, 2004; Grant & Shields, 2002; O’Donnell, McGuire, & Cross, 2006). As Guest (2007) puts it:
the focus is first and foremost on fully utilizing the key asset, the human resources, without much consideration for their views and without paying more than lip service to the possibility that [employees] are active participants within a complex system. Questions about possible exploitation of [employees] and concerns about providing them with an independent voice are rarely considered to be a relevant part of the agenda. (pp. 54-55)

Scholars who contribute to the mainstream literature are not, however, the only ones whose work is taken to task for its inattention to and resultant silencing of the voices of employees. The work of scholars adopting a range of critical perspectives – defined simply as those in opposition or in the alternative to the mainstream – is similarly critiqued for failing to take employees’ points of view into account (Guest, 2007, Grant & Shields, 2002).

The literature on performance management echoes the general concern I am raising here about the lack of employees’ presence in both the mainstream and critical literature. This literature consistently presents performance management as something done to employees (Buchner, 2007, Winstanley, 2000). The decidedly top-down orientation (Molleman & Timmerman, 2003) of most of the literature on performance management is often justified in terms of strengthening HRD’s strategic role, in other words, “how HRD links to and supports the goals and objectives of the [company]” (Werner & DeSimone, 2006,
Human resource developers toiling in the New Economy are expected to administer work processes that align with company strategies, to shape and not just support strategy implementation as well as to demonstrate the value HRD adds, in economic terms, to strategy implementation (Garavan, 1991, 2007; Garavan, Costine, & Heraty, 1995; O’Donnell, McGuire, & Cross, 2006; Torracco & Swanson, 1995). Related expectations are to gear work processes such as employee development planning to support employees’ efforts to learn continuously in, at and through their experience of paid work (Armstrong, 2003; Gardiner, Leat, & Sadler-Smith, 2001; Harrison & Kessels, 2004).

While the literature calls for more research from the perspective of employees as those responsible and accountable for performing, such calls are not made with a view to expanding their knowledge in aid of motivating them to change the conditions of their everyday work lives. Rather, the purpose is to expand the knowledge of human resource developers in aid of unleashing “the performance potential of employees” (Buchner, 2007, p. 71) for the benefit of the company.

I agree with the need to bring employees centre-stage in analyses of work processes administered in the name of HRD. However, it is also important to point out the three things I find troubling about the literature that advocates such a position. First, reminiscent of the discussion in the previous section, studies designed to take employees into account also often invoke concepts –
organizational justice and the psychological contract\textsuperscript{16} – being examples among them. Like performance, these concepts are abstractions that privilege employers’ interests to manage employees’ perceptions in the corporate interest despite claims about their employee-centredness (Grant & Shields, 2002).

Second, while sharing a common concern about the tendency of mainstream researchers to represent employees as controllable means to company ends\textsuperscript{17}, critical researchers have not been particularly successful in saving subjects from the clutches of HR technologies (Steyaert & Janssens, 1999). In this regard, Grant and Shields (2002) note that

where workers are allowed a voice, it is only by proxy. All too often the job of the critical analyst becomes one of projecting their own opinion onto [employees] as objects. We are therefore only told what [employees] would say...if they were treated as subjects and not because critical studies...do treat them as subjects. (p. 323)

Third, calls that are made for research into the impact of various HRD work processes on employees or their attitudes, behaviours and reactions in response to their deployment is not the same as research from their standpoint. Impacts, attitudes, behaviours and reactions are empirical phenomena that researchers typically make inferences about based on stories people tell about their experiences. While to do my institutional ethnography I gathered stories that

\textsuperscript{16} The concept of organizational justice refers to employees’ perceptions of fair treatment by their employers (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). The concept of the psychological contract refers to reciprocal obligations and promises between employees and employers (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006).

\textsuperscript{17} Summing up the small body of critical research, Grant and Shields (2002) write that HRD technologies are typically construed as “being no more than sophisticated control mechanisms...designed both to reinforce [employer] prerogative and enhance [company] performance” (p. 321).
employees told me about their experiences, the nature of my inquiry into them illustrates how institutional ethnography is a “personal experience method” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) of a much different kind\textsuperscript{18}. My aim as an institutional ethnographer is to explore how the conditions of peoples’ experience come to be and “not merely to uncover or give testimony about [people’s] experience” (DeVault, 1996, p. 39).

2.5 Levels of analysis

Deciding upon what level or levels to focus data analysis is important for many researchers. An often-cited framework in HRD suggests individual, company and community-societal levels of data analysis (Garavan, McGuire, & O’Donnell, 2004). HRD researchers have predominantly made their empirical contributions at the individual and company levels of analysis. At the former level, studies are framed by questions considered important to explaining people’s participation in HRD activities; while at the latter level, studies are framed by questions of resource maximization, productivity enhancement and realizing the full potential of employees in pursuit of company goals (Garavan, McGuire, & O’Donnell, 2004). There are signs that researchers are moving to more macro-level analyses (Kuchinke, 2010) to address, for example, questions about the influences of differences in national cultures on the practice of HRD around the world (e.g. McLean, 2004; Lynham, Paprock, & Cunningham, 2006).

\textsuperscript{18} While an institutional ethnography starts with personal experiences, the focus does not remain on them but rather on “exploring and describing the various social and institutional forces that shape, limit and otherwise organize” (Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002, p. 10) those experiences.
However, compared to the individual and company levels of analysis which are closer to the micro- than macro- ends of the levels of analysis framework that is being used as an example in this section, the community-societal level of analysis “remains underresearched” (Garavan, McGuire, & O’Donnell, 2004, p. 425).

Several commentators have been critical of this empirical state of affairs. Notable among them is Russ Vince (2003) who, on a soapbox about the future of HRD, laments that the discipline has largely ignored “the wider politics of organizing in which HRD exists and can have an impact” (p. 55). In a similar vein, calls for empirical work to take into account the broader social, political and economic context in which employees are positioned on the receiving end of HR practices are seemingly being ignored (Bratton et al., 2004; Howell, 2001; Sheehan, 2004). The focus on the study of work processes expressly designed to improve individual and hence company performance is reportedly so sharp that opportunities to question such work processes on broader moral, social or political grounds are all but excluded (Janssens & Steyaert, 2009).

The lack of multi-level research is also a barrier to the advancement of HRD theory-building (Upton & Egan, 2010). Indeed, it took nearly 20 years from the time Leonard Nadler (1970) coined the phrase “human resource development” for the importance of theory-building to the maturation of the discipline to be widely recognized (Lynham, 2000). While theoretical discussions
within HRD “have grown in scope, depth and frequency” (Torraco, 2004, p. 177) since then, it appears that “exhaustive assertions” (Upton & Egan, 2010, p. 336) about the importance of multi-level HRD research have largely been neglected. This neglect is puzzling if not paradoxical given the considerable support expressed in the literature for research that connects the dots between levels of analysis (Klein, Tosi, & Cannella, 1999, Upton & Egan, 2010).

I share an empirical concern to connect the dots but my approach to doing so is neither couched in terms of theory-building nor in terms of the need to explore relationships between various levels of analysis. To reiterate a point made earlier, theory building is not the analytic goal of institutional ethnography (DeVault, 2006). Rather, it is to explicate how people align their consciousnesses and actions with relevancies produced, circulated and sustained within text-mediated relations of ruling that hook them up as participants. Furthermore, and as indicated in Chapter 1, as an institutional ethnographer, I do not seek to mount a macro-level argument to explain what is going on at the micro-level of people’s everyday experiences. Instead, I seek to “collapse the dichotomy of micro and macro, to find the latter in the former, in people’s doings” (Diamond, 2006, p. 61).

2.6 The matter of false consciousness

There is a propensity among scholars who are critical of HRD to advance the false consciousness argument (Legge, 1998). The false consciousness
argument implies that employees are merely cultural dopes or dupes (Guest, 2001; Legge, 2000) who passively accept that part of their lot in company life is to acquiesce to participating in HRD work processes. While my affinity clearly lies more with critical than mainstream researchers, I take this opportunity to highlight alternative insights that institutional ethnography brings to bear on the argument from the critical literature that I have honed in on here.

As an institutional ethnographer, I am neither concerned to show whether consciousness is true or false nor to show how informants can move from false to correct consciousness. Rather, my concern is to raise consciousness about what the informants whose standpoint I have taken up are usually not conscious of—the relations and forces external to their experiences of the everyday world that shape and determine those experiences (Smith, D.E., 1987). Text-mediated relations of ruling create forms of consciousness that are properties of social organization rather than of individual people (Smith, D.E., 1987). It is my job to explicate the social organization of people’s consciousnesses, in other words, how it is that people’s knowledge of what goes on in their everyday worlds is “knitted into” (Smith, D.E. 1987, p. 110) the relations of ruling by the texts that they routinely work with, work from and work to produce.

With respect to the argument that employees passively accept their lot in company life, Smith (1987) makes it clear that people’s unconsciousness of how their everyday world is shaped and determined by relations and forces external to
them does not mean they are "dopes or dupes" (p. 110). To make such a meaning is to fail to understand that institutional ethnography is not a method of inquiry for exploring the authenticity of personal experience (or conversely the perversion of personal experience by larger forces and structures in capitalist society). Rather, it is a method based on the understanding that people are “active and knowledgeable expert practitioners of their everyday lives” (Smith, D.E. & Griffith, 2005, p. 3). Their experiences have taught them a lot about living in the everyday world and it is these that provide a point of entry for institutional ethnographic research. Thus, my empirical destination is not the place where I interpret people’s experience or explain behaviour. Instead, I want to map or trace the connections between people’s experiences of their everyday world and the text-mediated relations of ruling that organize those experiences. As Campbell (1998) puts it, my analysis is to begin in experience and return to it “having explicated how the experience came to happen as it did” (p. 47).

2.7 Conclusion to Chapter 2

In this chapter, I reoriented readers to my institutional ethnographic understandings of six key topics in the HRD literature. As an interested and invested knower guided by a problematic, my project is to explore and discover the social organization of knowledge in and by text-mediated relations of ruling. By not predetermining a conceptual framework that would constrain what I see when I engage with the social world for research purposes, I open up an empirical pathway to produce knowledge from a standpoint other than that of
disciplinary authorities. By making knowledge from the standpoint of employees and the actualities of their everyday work lives, I can aim to raise their consciousnesses about the organization of the social world and their knowledge of it. This consciousness-raising depends on my learning about the actualities of employees’ everyday work lives and then connecting the dots between their experiences of those actualities and the text-mediated relations of ruling that shape and determine those actualities from beyond employees’ experiences of them. The discoveries that it is possible for me to make by attending to these two-fold tasks will make visible to the employees whose standpoint I have adopted just how the conditions of their experience came to be. Once employees know (i.e. can see), how the conditions of their experience came to be, the possibility exists for them to change those conditions from within the local settings of their work.
3. TEXTS AND THE RESEARCH PRACTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY (IE)

In the previous chapter, I reoriented readers to six key topics in the HRD literature in order to highlight the uniqueness of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry in relation to those topics. While research into the shaping of work-related learning by written texts has been identified as a promising and developing area of investigation (Chapter 1), I could not claim that the incorporation of texts into research practice is a key topic in the HRD literature and, therefore, did not include it in Chapter 2. However, because the incorporation of texts into research practice is very much a key topic in institutional ethnography, I devote this chapter to building readers’ understanding of the role that texts play as constituents of the relations of ruling within which and through which people’s knowledge of their everyday worlds is socially organized.

The chapter includes two sections. In the first, I describe four characteristic properties of texts as institutional ethnographers understand them and how these properties support investigations into the social organization of knowledge. In the second, I describe the mechanics of textual mediation, in other words, how texts that operate and are operated as constituents of the relations of ruling accomplish the social organization of knowledge.
3.1 The properties of texts

What are four characteristic properties of texts as institutional ethnographers understand them and how do these properties support inquiries into the social organization of knowledge? I address this two-part question in what follows.

First, texts are replicable. This means they “can be read, heard, and watched by more than one individual, in different places, and at different times” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 165). To the institutional ethnographer, texts have a “magical” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 66) rather than mundane character because of their replicability. Replicability permits “the standardizing of work activities across time and translocally” (Smith, D.E., 2001, p. 174) and affords texts the capacity to “perform at [the] key juncture between the local settings of people’s everyday worlds and the [relations of ruling]” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 101).

At the same time as a text is read, heard or watched in a local setting, it hooks up the consciousness of the person reading it into translocal relations of ruling (Smith, D.E., 2006). In providing the foundation for relations of ruling (Smith, D.E., 2005), texts serve as conduits for the social organization of knowledge. “Discovering, then, how texts articulate our local doings to the translocally organized forms [of knowledge] that coordinate our consciousnesses [and actions] with those of others elsewhere and at other times is the objective” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 66) of the institutional ethnographer.
Second, texts are recognized as “occurring in particular local settings of people’s activities” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 65). They are materially located in the same world as people exist in their bodies and embedded in what goes on in and goes forward from that setting. The recognition of texts as occurring helps to make them observable as part of people’s ongoing on-the-job activities rather than in an inert form (Smith, D.E., 2005, 2006). It is “recognizing texts as in action [emphasis added] that is key” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 86) in institutional ethnography because discovering social organization depends on investigating knowledge as actually arising in people’s activities and how those activities are coordinated within relations of ruling.

Third, texts are recognized as “the foundational media of coordinating people’s work activities” (Smith, D.E., 2001, p. 175). The textual coordination of people’s work activities occurs in two ways: “one as [texts] enter into how the course of action in which they occur is coordinated and the other as coordinators of a local and particular courses of action [within relations of ruling] extending both temporally and spatially beyond the text” (Smith, D.E. & Schryer, C.F. 2008, p. 121). Recognizing texts and their capacity for two-way coordination directs the attention of institutional ethnographers to sequences of activities in which people participate when their work ties into texts and texts tie into their work (Smith, D.E., 2005). With attention so directed, the objective of the institutional ethnographer is to trace how people’s activities in one place and time are connected to the activities of other people elsewhere and at other times through
the texts with which they engage as part of their work activities. These connections are traceable as relations of ruling and provide empirical clues pointing to the social organization of knowledge.

Fourth, texts are “the primary coordinator of people's consciousnesses” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 76). The capacity of texts to coordinate people's consciousnesses arises from the institutional ethnographic understanding that language “plays the essential role of storing and remembering social organization” (Smith, D.E., 1987, p. 126). Institutional ethnographers take on phenomena of the mind as “phenomena in language…since it is in language that people’s ideas, concepts, theories, beliefs, and so on become integral to the ongoing coordinating of people’s doings” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 76). In their research, institutional ethnographers pull phenomena of the mind “out of the region of people’s heads” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 94) and into action in order to investigate the ways in which their consciousnesses are brought “into an active relationship with intentions originating beyond the local” (Smith, D.E., 2001, p. 164). Intentions originating beyond the local that are inserted into local settings in the material form of texts that people activate in doing their work are the stuff of relations of ruling in which and through which people’s knowledge is socially organized.
3.2 The mechanics of text mediation

Five things about the way in which texts operate and are operated will be explained in this section. The first is how people take up or activate texts (McCoy, 1995) in text-reader-conversations. The second is how activated texts provide an interface between people’s activities in a local setting and the social organization of knowledge that originates beyond it. The third is how texts play a part in coordinating the relations of ruling through which the social organization of knowledge is accomplished. The fourth is how textualization, or the act of putting messages into texts, organizes and mobilizes employees to become participants in and sustainers of the relations of ruling. Finally, the fifth is how texts that people activate while engaged in on-the-job activities bring their consciousnesses and actions into alignment with corporate expectations through a form of textual coordination known as an accountability circuit (McCoy, 1999; Smith, D.E., 2005). I say more about each of these things in the following subsections.

3.2.1 Activating texts in text-reader-conversations

In institutional ethnography, the notion of activation expresses “the human involvement in the capacity of texts to coordinate action and get things done in specific ways” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 33). People activate texts in text-reader-conversations. Text-reader-conversations are special kinds of conversations embedded in and organizing local work settings (Smith, D.E., 2001). In text-reader-conversations, the reading of a text is “an actual
interchange between a reader’s activating of the text and her or his responses to it” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 228). To use the institutional ethnographic notion of a text-reader-conversation is to acknowledge the “significant control” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 108) that the language of a text exerts over the reader’s responses, interpretations and actions. In other words, as people activate texts in text-reader-conversations, “socially organizing grammar” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 110) tells them “what features of [the social] world to find and orient to” (Turner, 2003, p. 89).

While one party to the text-reader-conversation (the text) is fixed\(^1\), the other party (the reader) is not (even as the text is disembodied while the reader is always located in her body somewhere and some time). In fixing one party to the text-reader conversation, “the terms of all conversations with the ‘same’ text are standardized” (Smith, D.E., 2001, p. 176). Thus, people who “handle and process the same texts…find their [consciousnesses] and actions coordinated by the requirements of working with [that] text” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 32). In a sense, then, the reader of a text becomes its voice, its proxy and its agent as she responds to it, interprets it and acts upon it in ways that are relevant to the work she is doing (Smith, D.E., 1990b, 1999, 2005). In my study, the text-reader-conversations of primary interest were those that employees, managers or human resource developers participated in when they activated texts associated with the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management. Whenever these texts

\(^1\) This fixing is a condition owing to the replicability of texts as earlier discussed.
are activated, so too is their capacity to socially organize what it is that readers of them think and do.

### 3.2.2 Activated texts as social organizers of knowledge

Institutional ethnography makes it possible to examine how the social organization of knowledge comes alive (Mykhalovskiy, 2001) as texts are activated and read by people in text-reader-conversations. When readers are caught up in text-reader-conversations, standardized company message(s) that the texts carry (in the form of words crystallized and preserved in whatever form in which the texts have been printed or produced electronically) “remains as a constant point of reference against which any particular interpretation can be checked” (Smith, D.E., 2001, p. 175). Thus, texts produced and used to carry out work processes like employee development planning enter “a standardized component into every setting in which the same text is read/viewed” (Smith, D.E., 2002, p. 45). This standardized component has a structuring effect on readers’ interpretations of the text (Smith, D.E., 1990b), ensuring that a similar understanding of what is read about is brought to all those who read the same text (Bell & Campbell, 2003). It is in the production and perpetuation of these similar understandings in relations of ruling that the social organization of knowledge is accomplished.
3.2.3 Texts and ruling

As indicated in Chapter 1, the particular world as/in texts that I am interested to explore is the one that employees, managers, and human resource developers know as participants in the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management. In orienting my institutional ethnography to the texts used in the work process, I enable myself to explore the power of texts to coordinate the relations of ruling in which employees participate and through which the social organization of their knowledge of the work of work-related learning is accomplished.

According to Campbell and Manicom (1995), institutional ethnographers interested in the operation of management as among the text-mediated relations of ruling pay particular attention to work processes that rely on distinctively organized ways of knowing those aspects of the world that are to be ruled. Not only does ruling rely on [emphasis in original] specialized knowledge, but a central task of ruling is to organize and generate knowledge in a form that is useful for ruling [emphasis in original]. (p. 9)

Useful for ruling are forms of knowledge that are “packaged in texts and then replicated either electronically or in hard-copy format in multiple locations as

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20 Other worlds as/in texts that institutional ethnographers have explored include those constructed by: policy documents (Eastwood, 2005; Ng, 1995; Stooke, 2003), funding proposals and planning documents (Grahame, 1998; Turner, 2001), accounting records (McCoy, 1998; Mykhalovskyi, 2001) and the charts and records which document professional/client relations in health care, social work and educational settings (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Parada, 2002; Rankin, 2001).
a means of regulating local activities and organizing [and coordinating] the [ruling relations] among people” (DeVeau, 2008, p. 9). These forms of knowledge sever the direct relation between knowers and their experiential knowledge. The direct relation is replaced with abstract and generalized representations, or text-based “virtual realities”, that offer a version of what actually happened/what is (Smith, D.E., 1990a) in terms that are corporately rather than individually relevant. In the transposition of corporate over individual relevancies within relations of ruling, the social organization of knowledge is accomplished.

### 3.2.4 The textualization of work

Textualization refers to the act of putting a message into text. It is a term the dimensions and implications of which both Jackson (2000) and Darville (1995, 1999) have taken up in their efforts to understand matters of literacy in contemporary workplaces. In contemporary workplaces, Jackson (2000a) asserts employees are experiencing increased demands that they document and record their own work. Front line workers fulfill these new requirements under circumstances mostly not of their own choosing, and often have little control over what is done with the ‘data’ they create, though its main purpose is to set standards, assess, and monitor their work. (p. 14)

The text-mediated processes of work control into which employees are drawn are part of a phenomenon Darville (1998) has described as the “textualization of work”. The textualization of work is a generalized form of
governance through which texts mediate people’s knowing and acting (Darville, 1998). Through the textualization of work, employees are “being increasingly organized and mobilized as self-disciplining practitioners of the very mechanisms of regulation often used against them” (Jackson, 2000, p. 7). The practitioners to whom Jackson refers use the “organizational literacy” they have developed in order to discipline themselves (Darville, 1995). Organizational literacy is “concerned with effecting organizational process” (Darville, 1995, p. 254). With organizational literacy, “what counts is how matters can be written up (to be entered into the work process) not how they can be written down (to relate actual experiences or to aid memory)” (1995, p. 254). As employees are drawn into and become skilled at writing up rather than writing down, they become “daily practitioners of workplace relations that reflect someone else’s power” (Jackson, 2000, p. 16). In other words, by exercising organizational literacy employees enter themselves into text-mediated relations of ruling “in which they are most often ‘subject to’ but not ‘subjects of’ the workplace texts they help to create” (Jackson, 2000, p. 7).

### 3.2.5 Texts and accountability circuits

Drawing on the doctoral work of McCoy (1999), Smith (2005) formulated the notion of accountability circuits when referring to text-mediated forms of coordinating people’s work that bring it and them into alignment with company expectations. McCoy’s work reveals how texts that administrators of a community college required instructors to use to represent aspects of their work
made them accountable within a new system of financial management introduced in response to federal policies of privatization and fiscal restraint. The new system “produced the observability of organizational work processes in ways that fitted them to the new interpretive frame of ‘efficiency’ and ‘customer orientation’” (McCoy, 1999, p. iii.). This frame is more conducive to the college’s successful participation in the market relations of adult vocational training than the frame based on student enrolment that preceded it. Its operation, in and through texts activated by administrators and instructors, conformed the work of both groups of people to the new system of financial management (Smith, D.E., 2005).

While working on this dissertation, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Lauri Grace of Deakin University and Christina Sinding of McMaster University in writing a book chapter21 (Grace, Zurawski, & Sinding, forthcoming) that explores the operation of accountability circuits in different contexts. My context is the one about which I write throughout this dissertation while Lauri’s context is the Australian vocational education and training sector and Christina’s context is cancer care. The forthcoming book chapter draws on the discussion and analysis in Chapters 6 and 7.

21 The chapter was written for a volume being edited by Alison Griffith and Dorothy E. Smith and to be published by the University of Toronto Press. The volume, tentatively titled: Governance and the Frontline, will explore what one of the book’s co-editors describes as “the rapidly developing forms of governing that operate across institutional boundaries” (Griffith, 2009, p. 3).
3.3 Conclusion to Chapter 3

The centrality of texts to my study warranted a stand-alone chapter on: (a) how the characteristic properties of texts support investigations into the social organization of knowledge; and (b) how texts accomplish the social organization of knowledge as constituents of the relations of ruling. As part of the next chapter, I discuss the specific methods and procedures I followed to gather and analyze company texts. To conclude this one, I review in more general terms what is made possible when texts are incorporated into the research practice of institutional ethnography.

Institutional ethnography provides empirical resources for discovering how texts upon which the administration of the work process of employee development planning depends are active in coordinating employees’ consciousnesses and actions in line with corporate expectations about the way in which and the extent to which they are to perform as work-related learners. For example, by tracing how employees’ on-the-job activities in one time and place are connected to the activities of managers and human resource developers at other times and in other places through the inscriptive work that goes on with texts, I am able to investigate how employees are drawn into the relations of ruling in which and through which the social organization of their knowledge of the work of work-related learning is accomplished.
In actual investigation, it is important to pay attention to what happens when employees, managers, and human resource developers work with, work from and/or work to produce various texts associated with administration of the work process. These happenings occur in text-reader-conversations – special kinds of conversations in which standardized company messages fixed in texts are activated with structuring effects on readers’ interpretations of them. The power of texts to coordinate the relations of ruling in which and through which the social organization of knowledge is accomplished stems from text-reader-conversations in which similar understandings of what is read are brought to all those who read the same text.

It is not only standardized company messages that get fixed in texts. By paying attention to what happens when employees fix messages into texts on their own, it is possible to explicate the ways in which the activities by which they document and record information about their work-related learning draws them further into relations of ruling mediated by the very texts that they help to create. In this regard, the notion of an accountability circuit is useful to an exploration of the ways in which employees’ consciousnesses and actions are brought into alignment with company expectations through the activation of texts.
4. DOING IE

There is no one way to do institutional ethnography. While establishing a problematic (Chapter 1) is vital to setting a direction for the research, institutional ethnographers are not wedded to any sort of methodological template or recipe (McCoy, 2008) for how to gather and analyze data.

In this chapter, I let my readers in on the methods I used and the procedures I followed to do the institutional ethnography reported in this dissertation. In particular, I describe my approaches to data gathering, the people who informed my study, informant identification and recruitment, processes of data analysis, ways in which I took care to conduct and report my institutional ethnography in an ethical manner, and the limitations and delimitations of my study.

4.1 Two main rounds of data gathering

I gathered data mainly in two rounds. The first round took place in February and March of 2007 as part of a course on institutional ethnography that I took from York University. As discussed in Chapter 1, this course allowed me to establish a problematic and find a point of entry for my institutional ethnography as well as to begin to gather data for it. The second round of data gathering took place from February to June 2008.
4.2 Profile of informants

People from whom data is gathered for an institutional ethnography “know how they go about doing things” (Smith, D.E., 2002, p. 21). It is because of this knowledge that institutional ethnographers typically refer to them as research informants rather than subjects or participants. The table below provides a profile of my informants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Gathering Round</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Human Resource Developers</th>
<th>Other (e.g. External Consultant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Round 2</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All but one informant belonged to one of three groups of people employed by the company which provided the setting for my research and to which I hereafter refer as ABC Company (a pseudonym). The first group of people included 15 employees and the second group of people consisted of seven managers. As participants in the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management, all members of these two groups had expertise in doing the work of work-related learning. The third group of people included five members of ABC Company whose jobs in the HR department involved them in administering various aspects of the work process. While members of this group also had expertise in doing the work of work-related learning from their location as ABC Company employees, it was with respect to their roles as human resource
developers that I was interested in involving them as informants in my study. In addition, I also identified and recruited a representative of an HR consulting firm that advised ABC Company on performance management. Of the 28 informants who contributed to my study, I identified and recruited six during Round 1 of data gathering. I identified and recruited all but one of the remainder during Round 2. The informant who was the exception was the former colleague whom I initially contacted when I was searching for my research direction (Chapter 1). I decided to recruit her as an informant after the second round of data gathering to help me clarify my understanding of an aspect of the work process that had been changed by ABC Company between data gathering rounds.

4.3 Informant identification and recruitment

In both rounds of data gathering, a representative of ABC Company assisted in identifying potential informants to me. The involvement of these representatives in identifying (but not recruiting) informants was not a methodological concern for me since my focus was neither on informants as individuals nor on ABC Company itself, but rather on influences on individuals’ experiences at ABC Company that originated beyond ABC Company. In Round 1, the former colleague whom I initially contacted when I was searching for a direction in which to take my dissertation offered to assist in identifying people willing to volunteer as informants. I accepted the offer she made in a telephone conversation during which I asked for permission to do preliminary fieldwork at her company. We mutually agreed that identifying two employee volunteers, two
manager volunteers, and two human resource developers was reasonable given my need to complete Round 1 before the end of my York University course and the operational demands of ABC Company. While pre-determining a quota of participants is atypical in institutional ethnography (DeVault & McCoy, 2002), it was practical given course time constraints. I received the names, titles, and work locations of the Round 1 volunteers by email. I then used email to recruit these volunteers.

In Round 2, the manager of the former colleague who helped me identify volunteer informants for Round 1 assisted me by compiling a list of additional potential informants. Four criteria for the list were set out in my Application for Approval of Research Procedures approved by the University Regina Research Ethics Board on December 3, 2007. The first criterion was that each additional potential participant had to be an employee or manager who had participated in the work process of employee development planning. The second criterion was that additional potential informants had to consent to be on the list. The third criterion, set in the interest of establishing a diverse (but not representative) pool of additional potential informants from which to recruit, was that both male and female informants working in different jobs in different parts of ABC Company and employed on either a part-time or full-time basis be listed. To facilitate the mechanics of recruitment, the fourth criterion was that the name, job title, and email address of each additional potential informant be included on the list.
From the list of 32 potential informants, I followed a two-step procedure to recruit 18\textsuperscript{22} informants. Initial contact was made with an email letter of invitation and letter of consent form in which I outlined, among other things, the steps I would take to keep anonymous informants’ identity and confidential the information they contributed as data (please see Appendix A for a copy of the letter of consent form and section 4.6 for other ethical considerations taken into account as part of my research). A week after sending the invitation, I followed up, again by email, to confirm the volunteer informants’ willingness to participate as informants in my study. All of the 18 Round 2 informants worked full-time. Seven of them were male; 11 were female.

In keeping with the emergent nature of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, informants may provide “pointers” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 764) to other people involved in activities, roles or organizations that are relevant to the problematic. Informants in Round 1 and Round 2 pointed me to five potential informants. I could not recruit two of these because of their work schedules. Of the other three that I recruited, two were human resource developers and the other was an external consultant who advised ABC Company on performance management. I used the same two-step recruitment procedure – making contact with an email letter of invitation and consent form and then following up on it a week later to confirm willingness to participate – to recruit informants to whom other informants had pointed me. To recruit my former

\textsuperscript{22} Eighteen was the number of informants my supervisory committee suggested I recruit in Round 2 to supplement the data I had already gathered from the six informants in Round 1.
colleague (who I decided I wanted to interview in order to clarify a change in an aspect of the employee development planning process made by ABC Company between data gathering rounds), I simply sent an email and followed up a few days later (as she responded to my email within hours) with a letter of consent form.

4.4 Data gathering

Institutional ethnographers gather data by various methods (Smith, D.E., 1987). In both Round 1 and Round 2, I conducted interviews with informants and collected company texts.

4.4.1 Using interviews in IE

Social organization is implicit and present (Smith, D.E., 2005) in the language people use to share what they know about their experiences of everyday work life. Choosing interviews as one of my two methods of data gathering enabled me to learn from informants’ work knowledge or what people know of and in their work and how the work they do is coordinated with the work of others (Smith, D.E., 2005). Each time I listened to informants talk about their particular moments of participation in the work process (Smith, D.E., 2002) their work knowledge became an empirical resource for me.

My overall approach to Round 1 and 2 interviews reflects two important aspects of institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry. First, what is brought
under empirical scrutiny “unfolds as the research is pursued” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 34). Second, what a researcher learns in one interview informs the next one she conducts.

In Round 1, I took an approach other institutional ethnographers have used when their problematic prompts the need to talk about texts (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). The strategy was to elicit stories and descriptions about:

- the text of the employee development planning form,
- what informants do with the form, in other words, how they fill in, handle or otherwise process the form itself, and
- what informants need to know and do to participate in the work process and the filling in, handling or processing of the form.

I interviewed employees and managers before human resource developers. This sequencing allowed data gathered from people on the front line to direct the interviewing of human resource developers (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). Employee and manager informants and I moved through and discussed the pages of the employee development plan form after I initially set the stage for discussion by asking the informant to imagine I was someone encountering the form for the first time and needing to learn how to go about filling it in. I changed my approach slightly with the first human resource developer interviewed because I recognized she could also share her expertise as someone involved in administering the work process at ABC Company. With this human resource
developer, I still used the text of the employee development planning form to orient the interview but did not rely on it as heavily. With the last informant in Round 1, also a human resource developer, I referred more selectively to pages of the form since I had reached my quota of informants and wanted to check the knowledge I had developed (DeVault & McCoy, 2002) about the work process over the course of the interviews I had conducted up to that point.

I audio taped all interviews. Audio taping is standard practice in institutional ethnography. Transcripts produced by playing back the audio tapes serve as important texts for analysis in their own right (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). To supplement audio tapes, I also made raw field notes in a journal to keep track of new topics to discuss with informants recruited but not interviewed as well as names of potential additional informants to whom informants already interviewed had pointed me.

I loosely structured interviews around topics that I shared with informants in advance (see Appendix B). The preamble to the list of topics indicated that I could raise additional topics for discussion as the interview unfolded. I raised additional topics to better understand informants’ experience from their particular position in relation to the employee development planning process (i.e., as an

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21 This journal was also used to outline my recruitment procedures in a step-by-step fashion for ease and consistency of administration, to record hunches and intuitions that popped into my head during or after interviews, to note personal reactions to informants’ talk or actions and to write down reflections on my data gathering experiences.
employee, manager or human resource developer) as well as the activities the informant participated in because of their position in relation to the process. I scheduled each Round 1 interview for 90 minutes and conducted them on a date and at a time convenient for the informant and me in either the informants’ office or a meeting room on ABC Company premises.

My approach to Round 2 interviews was similar to that for my Round 1 interviews in terms of their location, length, advance provision of a topics list, audio taping, note taking, and the pattern of interviewing employees and managers before human resource developers. I conducted all Round 2 interviews except one face-to-face. I conducted the interview that was the exception (i.e. the one conducted with the external consultant to ABC Company) over the telephone because he lived and worked in a different city than me.

Round 2 interviews generally followed the same strategy as Round 1 interviews in allowing for co-investigation in a dialogic way (DeVault & McCoy, 2002; Smith, D.E., 2005). However, having gained from Round 1 a basic understanding of: (a) how the text of the employee development planning form comes to informants and where it goes after they are done with it; and (b) what informants do with, for, and on account of the form (DeVault & McCoy, 2002), I approached my Round 2 interviews a little differently. During them I paid more attention to checking and extending my developing understanding of how employees were active in their work with the text of the employee development
planning form, figuring out how to interpret it, how to fill it in and how to frame their everyday work activities to fit with the form’s requirements. In particular, I wanted to get into more detail about the activities that go on at the various “processing interchanges” (Pence, 1996). Processing interchanges are points in the work process where the employee or manager enters information into the form before they pass it on to for further processing and so on and so on until the employee development planning process is complete. In this regard, I was trying to position myself as a third party to text-reader-conversations (Chapter 3) that employees had with the texts they filled in or consulted to move themselves through the processing interchanges of the work process.

The work that goes on at processing interchanges was not the only topic of discussion during Round 2 interviews. Additional topics emerged from my reading of Round 1 interview transcripts and the literature that I became interested in having read them. Reading literature after collecting some data also helped me search for clues about social organization in the literature’s official accounts.

Topics for the over-the-phone interview with the external consultant were quite different from the topics discussed with other informants and were determined mainly because of my reflections on what I had heard informants describe as his role in advising ABC Company on performance management.
As I began to analyze the data I had gathered through interviews with informants (details follow in section 4.5), I identified a few topics about which I still had some questions. To get these questions answered, I requested short follow-up interviews with four informants. These follow-up interviews were also audio taped and transcribed.

4.4.2 Gathering texts in IE

When interviewed, informants often referred to texts other than the employee development planning form. During Round 1, I gathered some of these from informants on the spot. If an informant could not provide a copy on the spot, I made a note of what they called it and/or how they described it. Then, towards the end of Round 1 of data gathering, I sent an email to one of the human resource developers I interviewed to ask for copies of the texts I had noted. She provided them. In all, during Round 1, I gathered a dozen texts in addition to the employee development planning form.

In Round 2, many informants referred to texts that I had already gathered in Round 1. This gave me confidence that I was gathering texts that would be useful to analyze. I gathered three additional texts in Round 2 bringing to 15 the total number of company texts gathered as data.
4.5 Analyzing the data

This section of Chapter 4 accounts for the analytic work I did after I transcribed the interviews and placed the texts I collected in a file folder. In starting a new section to help with breaking up all that I have to say about my approach to doing institutional ethnography into smaller chunks, I do not want readers to think I drew a hard and fast line between data gathering and analysis. In institutional ethnography, like in various forms of qualitative research, these empirical tasks are emergent and recursive (Willis, 2007). Similarly, while I did not plan in detail “a sequential, linear pattern” (Willis, 2007, p. 201) for data analysis as quantitative researchers traditionally do, to imply there was no pattern whatsoever to my analytic work would not be right either. What follows, therefore, is an account of the phases, or the major, distinguishable intellectual tasks (Baptiste, 2001) that I completed to analyze my data. These phases became recognizable and distinguishable when I looked back at the many months I spent working with and through my data intent on making some particular meaning from it (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). While I describe each phase in turn, the actual doing of the major intellectual tasks that mark each phase was not as neat and tidy as the pages to follow may make it seem. In my experience, data analysis was as messy, ambiguous, and time-consuming as it was creative, fascinating (Marshall & Rossman, 1990), and sometimes frustrating.
4.5.1 Initial analysis

Since I have never liked reading from a computer screen for long periods, I geared up to make some particular meaning from the interview data by printing each of the transcripts. I placed the transcripts in a large binder in the order in which I conducted the interviews with informants. I made multiple horizontal passes through the binder, reading each transcript from beginning to end. Reading the transcripts in this way helped me begin to see the data holistically. In transcribing each interview, I deepened my understanding of the work process and individual informants’ experiences of it. However, the task of detecting influences beyond any individual informants’ experience that organize that experience and the knowledge constructed as a result of it (i.e. influences that socially organize knowledge as described in Chapters 1 and 3) was initially approached by reading repeatedly through the entire collection of transcripts.

Since I read the texts I gathered shortly after each one of them was given or sent to me, I did not spend much time on them in the initial analysis phase because I knew I would return to the transcripts of my interviews and the company’s texts as my analysis progressed.

4.5.2 Deciding on analytic processes

The initial phase in my data analysis was followed by one in which I sorted out which analytic processes I would use to address, in a more in-depth way, the research questions that framed my study. “Just as [institutional ethnographic
research] projects have different shapes, institutional ethnographers aim toward different kinds of analyses” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 769). Accordingly, the question that I addressed in this phase was:  

What kind of analysis will I aim toward?

Having gathered data about the work that employees, managers, and human resource developers do with texts associated with the work process of employee development planning, I knew I needed to aim my analysis towards discovering how the work organized the consciousnesses and actions of employees to align with company expectations of their performance as work-related learners. With this need in mind, I gravitated easily towards one among the analytic options outlined by DeVault and McCoy (2002), namely, to explicate the “mechanics of text-based forms of knowledge” (p. 769). While the objective for my analysis became clear to me quickly, it would take me longer to find the analytic processes suited to helping me meet it.

In my search for analytic processes, I turned to the institutional ethnographic texts, journal articles and thesis/dissertations that I had steadily been amassing over time. I figured that reviewing how others had done their data analysis would help me decide how to do it myself. As part of this review, I read some works of Townsend (1996, 1998) who completed an institutional ethnography exploring the operation of the concept of empowerment in the practice of occupational therapists. The three analytic processes that Townsend
used seemed applicable to my study. The first analytic process lead Townsend to describe “the everyday world of occupational therapy” (Townsend, 1998, p. 19). I could see myself doing something similar to address my first research question: *What activities do employees actually engage in to do the work of work-related learning?* The second analytic process lead Townsend to “trace the social processes that connect the work being studied with the work of others…and the documentation [read texts] and other processes that govern that work” (Townsend, 1998, p. 21). Again, I could see myself doing something similar to address my second research question: *What work-based and text-mediated social relations are shaping employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning?* The third analytic process was to examine the ways that “occupational therapists and the people with whom occupational therapists work are conceptualized and categorized…and then coordinated and controlled through textual facts about these categories” (Townsend, 1998, p. 24). With the text-mediated social organization of knowledge being of particular interest to me, and the work process I was exploring being one that is text-mediated, I could also see picking up on Townsend’s third analytic process to address my third research question: *How is employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning socially organized?* (I was not concerned that I did not find a description of the process by which Townsend arrived at conclusions to her study, or, what for me would be the task of addressing the fourth research question: *What are the implications of explicating the social organization of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning for HRD theory and practice?* With respect to this
question, I was comfortable to wait until I finished writing my dissertation before considering what the implications of my discoveries might be. This is what I did after writing up my master’s research project and I thought, as I mulled over modelling my analysis after that of Townsend, that I would use it again for my dissertation).

After deciding to model my analytic processes after those of Townsend, I thought I was ready to delve deeper into my data – what I refer to now as the in-depth phase of my data analysis. I did not delve deeper right away, however, because the binder full of transcripts that helped me begin to see the data holistically in my initial phase of data analysis suddenly seemed unwieldy. I felt I needed a way to break up the binder’s contents into parts that I could physically handle more easily without adopting a procedure of data management that could lead me to construct artificial categories (Campbell & Gregor, 2002) when I organized my interview data for further analysis.

Since I housed the ABC Company texts I collected for data analysis in a file folder, it was convenient to use file folders again, this time to house simple groupings (DeVault & McCoy, 2002) of excerpts of informants’ talk that I cut out of a second set of hard copy transcripts printed from my computer. As examples, I created file folders to group transcript excerpts of informants’ talk:

- about filling in each page of the employee development planning form (i.e. the work at each processing interchange),
• in response to the list of topics I took into each interview (Appendix B),
• in response to topics that I did not initially list but that I started to ask informants about because of what I had learned in prior interviews,
• about topics that otherwise recurred in interviews and that I recalled or had noted during the initial analytical phase I went through, and
• about ABC Company texts other than the employee development planning form and HR department guidelines (both of which I already had in my possession when data gathering began).

With excerpts of informants' talk grouped and placed in file folders, I was ready to move on to the in-depth analysis phase.

4.5.3 In-depth data analysis

My approach to in-depth data analysis combined immersion and crystallization (Borkan, 1999; Miller & Crabtree, 1999) with writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I chose immersion and crystallization because, as a method that is more engaged, intuitive and fluid than others which incorporate more formal analytic schemes or the use of computer programs (Borkan, 1999), it is compatible with institutional ethnography as an emergent method of inquiry. My approach to immersion and crystallization engaged me in further cycles of data analysis whereby I made multiple vertical passes through the excerpts of transcripts I had grouped into file folders, reading, rereading, and highlighting certain passages in one file before moving on to the

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24 Recursivity is important in institutional ethnography. It “shows a pattern in the world” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 69) pointing to social organization.
next. Passages I highlighted were those that I had a hunch would be useful to analyze further because they made me aware of a connection pointing to social organization (Campbell & Gregor, 2002) or that otherwise jumped off the page at me because of the richness and/or clarity of the informants’ transcribed talk. An example of passages I highlighted because they made me aware of a connection pointing to social organization were those that contained informants’ explanations of the relationship between the balanced scorecard as a textual representation of ABC Company’s business strategy and the text of the employee development planning form. It was in coming to understand this relationship and the considerable influence my informants recognized it as having on the work process of employee development planning in which they participated (Chapter 6 provides details) that the relations of ruling that give rise to the arguments I made in Chapter 1 started to become visible to me. The explanation Monique gave me in response to an interview question about why work-related learning is important to ABC Company provides an example of a passage that jumped off the page at me. “...it’s just good business to have the best, smartest people working for you,” she said. That Monique used words that I read as resonating with the theme of learning in HRD sensitized me to be on the look-out for other instances in which informants’ talk revealed that a way of knowing widely shared among employers and widely circulated in the literature had entered into the personal spaces of their work lives (McCoy, 2006). I credit Michelle for helping me understand what institutional ethnographers mean when they describe as their analytic challenge the need to explicate how local understandings and explanations “are brought
into being” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 90) such that they can be recognized as instances of the social organization of knowledge.

Periods of reflection followed the vertical passes that I made through the file folders. These periods allowed “intuitive crystallizations” (Borkan, 1999, p. 180) or insights about the data and its significance in terms of addressing the research questions to emerge. Insights emerged by reflecting on traces of the social organization of knowledge that I picked out of transcript excerpts of informants’ descriptions about “their work and the work processes of other people they gear into” (McCoy, 2006, p. 111) as well as their explanations about how and why they do their work in the way they described it to me.

Initially when an intuition crystallized in my mind, I would jot it down on the inside flap of the file folder that I was reading (or rereading) at the time. I also tried memo-writing (Charmaz, 2006) as a technique for transferring crystallized intuitions from my head into written form but abandoned it (and returned to jotted notes on the inside flaps of file folders) when I started to feel like I was distancing myself from the actual words informants used to express their work knowledge.

To get from intuitive crystallizations to “reportable interpretations” (Borkan, 1999, p. 180), I began to write. I treated writing not just as an activity that researchers engage in when they move on from data analysis to report what they
have to say but “a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis” (Richardson, 1994, p. 516) – in and of itself.

Before concluding this chapter section, I discuss how I worked with company texts during the in-depth phase of data analysis. Dorothy E. Smith (1990b) describes textual analysis as follows:

The text is analyzed for its characteristically textual form of participation in [relations of ruling]. The interest is in the social organization of those relations and in penetrating them, discovering them, opening them up from within, through the text. The text enters the laboratory then, so to speak, carrying the threads and shreds of [relations of ruling] it is organized by and organizes. The text before the analyst, then, is not used as a specimen or sample, but as a means of access, a direct line to the [relations of ruling] it organizes. (p. 4)

To access the relations of ruling organized by the texts I had gathered I set out to learn a number of things from them. These included: (a) what informants needed to know to use the texts; (b) what informants do with, for and on account of the texts; (c) how the texts intersect with and depend on other texts as sources of information, generators of frames and authorizers of the doing of the work of work-related learning in particular ways (i.e. ways intended by ABC Company); and/or (d) the conceptual framework that organizes the texts and the competent reading of them (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). To learn these things, I regularly returned to the interview transcripts of informants’ talk about the
particular company text I was analyzing at the time. Going back and forth between informants’ references to a particular company text and the actual text to which they were referring helped me remain mindful of the importance to an institutional ethnographic analysis of seeing texts, their activation and the responses of people to the texts they activate as embedded in relations of ruling (Smith, D.E., 2005). Putting it another way, my textual analysis was aided because I did not decontextualize (Taber, 2010) informants’ stories and descriptions in relation to a text from the text to which the stories and descriptions related.

The texts that enter directly into the work process of employee development planning as it was experienced by my informants are the ones of which particular mention is made in Chapters 5 to 7. My analytic goal was to discover how these texts structured readers’ interpretations and, in turn, how their structured interpretations entered into succeeding phases of the relations of ruling of which the texts are a part. I met this goal by following the “simple [institutional ethnographic] rule that texts should not be analyzed in abstraction from how they enter into and coordinate sequences of action” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 67). In this regard, it was useful to rely once again on Pence’s (1996) notion of processing interchanges. Earlier in this chapter, I explained how this notion helped in my approach to Round 2 interviews. In the in-depth phase of my data analytic work, I employed the notion of processing interchanges a second time to help me focus on “the significance of texts and the processing of texts in the
sequential organizing of people’s work” (Smith, D.E., 2002, p. 38). Establishing this analytic focus proved useful as I crystallized and re-crystallized intuitions about what actually happens when: (a) employees produce and implement their employee development plans; and (b) managers evaluate the extent to which employees have met company expectations through their efforts to prepare and implement their employee development plans.

4.5.4 Writing up my discoveries

Two tasks were involved in applying writing as a method of inquiry. First was to make a rudimentary outline of Chapters 5 to 7. I did this: (a) by referring to the questions I had matched up with the analytic processes I decided upon; (b) linking these up with crystallized intuitions I had jotted down in the file folders and that pointed me in the direction of “answers” to the various questions; and then (c) organizing the crystallized intuitions into an outline for each of the three chapters.

Not only did preparing a rudimentary outline prompt me “to relate more deeply and complexly” (Richardson, 1994, p. 524) to transcript excerpts that I had been treating as significant (with some new intuitions crystallizing and some earlier intuitions taking on different shapes as a result) it also helped me reduce the number of file folders in which I would immerse myself to write the chapters I had outlined. In addition, and unlike Richardson who wrote about feeling “constrained and bored” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960) when she used outlines, I found organizing my intuitive crystallizations invigorating. As the skeletal framework of my chapters took shape, I gained confidence that I was rising to the analytic challenge of assembling the work knowledge of the informants I interviewed into an account of how employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning is socially organized.

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The second task was to write draft chapters using the outline I had prepared as a guide. To complete the chapter-writing task required not only further data gathering – not from informants but from the literature I read to further pursue the traces of social organization of knowledge that informants’ talk had tuned me into – but also additional cycles of immersion in the file folders. “Thought happened in the writing” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970) and the rewriting I did to satisfy myself that I had addressed the research questions framing my study and remained faithful to the actualities of informants’ lives as they had experienced and come to know them.

Before moving on to a chapter section on ethical considerations I took into account while doing my research, I conclude this one with a figure that depicts the data analytic phases of my research.

26 While the outline provided a direction for my writing, the continuing cycles of immersion and crystallization in combination with the discoveries I made while writing caused me to change editorial direction from time to time. To extend the skeleton metaphor (supra note 25), putting editorial meat on the bones was a creative and iterative process grounded in ongoing rereading and rereading of transcript excerpts and crystallized intuitions. Once again this illustrates the emergent and recursive nature of data analysis and the application of writing as a method of inquiry.
4.6 Ethical considerations

Dr. Alison Griffith reviewed and approved for compliance with research ethics protocols the preliminary fieldwork I conducted as a special student of York University (Round 1 data gathering). Appendix C includes the letter from Dr. Griffith to this effect. As part of the process of seeking informed consent, I advised informants I might also use data gathered for my course in my dissertation. Appendix D includes the memorandum indicating ethics approval from the University of Regina Research Ethics Board (Round 2 data gathering). The University of Regina Research Ethics Board received a copy of the letter from Dr. Griffith as part of the application I submitted for its approval.
Since ABC Company representatives were involved in identifying (but not recruiting) potential informants, it was especially important to assure those I was seeking to recruit of confidentiality and anonymity. Accordingly, I took a number of precautions. While each ABC Company representative knew whom they had identified to me as potential informants and, therefore, who could potentially be recruited to contribute data in Rounds 1 and 2, I did not communicate to them or anyone else the name of any informant who was actually recruited. Similarly, there was no communication by me to anyone of the identity of any additional informant to whom another informant had pointed me and whom I subsequently recruited as an informant in my study.

Again, in the interest of anonymity and confidentiality, I did not use the real names of informants and the real name of ABC Company in interview transcripts, during data analysis or this dissertation. With respect to informants, pseudonyms and/or generic references to them as employee(s), manager(s) or human resource developer(s) are used. While I excerpt direct quotes from interview transcripts, I was careful not to include information that could identify either ABC Company or an individual informant.

To confirm data accuracy, I gave informants an opportunity to take part in a transcript review process prior to my use of the transcript in data analysis. The process involved sending the transcript as an attachment to an email that informed the informant of their opportunity to take a month to review the
transcript of their interview with me and to make any deletions, additions or changes to it. Three informants took advantage of this opportunity but only one requested a change to correct a mistake I made because I did not hear the audio tape properly.

Provisions were made for the secure storage of audio tapes, transcripts, and all texts gathered as well as for destroying same once a three-year period following the date upon which this dissertation was accepted by the University of Regina had elapsed.

4.7 Producing a faithful account

To write up this institutional ethnography, I assembled the work knowledge of people situated in and contributing differently to the work process of employee development planning (Smith, D.E., 2005) in order to explicate how employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning is socially organized. I built up the explication from my analysis of interview transcripts and company texts. I strived to remain faithful to the actualities of informants’ lives as they told me about them. While the institutional ethnographer shares other researchers’ concerns to describe her empirical phenomena of interest in ways that are careful and detailed (Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002), concerns about validity and generalizability do not arise for her in the same way. Institutional ethnographers do not treat the data they gather and analyze as if it opens windows on informants’ inner experience or subjective states of mind for reframing as a
factual or essential description of employees’ experience (Campbell, 1998). Rather, it is used to “trace and describe analytically the connected work producing the [relations of ruling] that shape local experience and organize particular social phenomena” (Turner, 2003, p. 77). Institutional ethnographers elicit descriptions of what is actually going on and treat them as clues pointing to the social organization of knowledge. Working from the actualities of peoples’ lives supports the search for “connections, links, hookups” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 143) between what people do in a local setting, how their doings are coordinated with the doings of others and how their knowledge of their doings is socially organized.

4.8 Limitations and delimitations of the study

Before concluding Chapter 4, I comment on potential deficiencies in the study’s design (limitations) as well as factors that narrowed the scope of the study upon which this dissertation is based (delimitations). The inclusion of this chapter section fulfills an important researcher obligation, namely, to point out the boundaries within which her study may be considered and interpreted. Some of the limitations and delimitations I discuss here are qualified with a view to highlighting characteristics of institutional ethnography that are unique in comparison to other methods of inquiry. These qualifications make this part of my dissertation longer than it might otherwise be but I feel discussing them further builds readers’ understanding of institutional ethnography. I deal with limitations and delimitations, qualified as necessary, in turn.
4.8.1 Limitations

Some scholars consider the reliance on experience as data and as a basis of knowing as a limitation of institutional ethnography (Butler & Scott, 1992; Scott, 1992). IE’s reliance on experience is based on the belief that the social organization of knowledge is built in to the language people use when they talk to researchers about their experiences of the everyday world (Smith, D.E., 2002, 2005). Challengers of this belief claim that researcher’s cannot take people’s stories and descriptions of their experience as “a pure representation of some original” (Smith, D.E. 2005, p. 125) because of the “constructed nature of experience” (Scott, 1992, p. 25) represented in language.

Smith (1999) shares her challengers’ belief that researchers cannot produce objective accounts of peoples’ experience because of the “structuring effects” (p. 124) of language on what people recount as their experience. However, she does not believe “making an account faithful to the world of which it speaks” (Campbell, 2003, p. 19) is an impossible task. That is because the goal of analysis in institutional ethnography is not to translate tales of the experiential into factual or essential explanations of peoples’ experience (Campbell, 1998) but rather to elicit descriptions of what is actually going on for use in exploring how the conditions of peoples’ experience come to be. In Smith’s (2005) words, institutional ethnographers are not using people’s experiences as a basis for making statements about them, about populations of individuals, or about events or states of affairs described from the point of view of individuals. For IE, the speaking
or writing of experience is essential to realizing the project of working from the actualities of people’s lives as the people know them. (p. 125)

Working from the actualities of people’s lives supports the search for links and connections between what people do in a local setting, the coordination of their doings with others’ doings and how people’s knowledge of their doings is socially organized (Smith, D.E., 2005).

The second limitation is the risk of capture during interviewing. In institutional ethnography, the risk of capture is associated with the problem that arises when informants’ draw on the company’s rationale to describe the work they are doing, thereby subsuming or displacing work descriptions that are based in their own experience (Smith, D.E., 2005). Again, knowing about the potential for this problem to arise helped me perk up my ears when I thought during any interview in progress that I was hearing informants use language that sounded like the company was talking. When this happened, I acted on the advice of others (e.g. Campbell & Gregor, 2002; DeVault & McCoy, 2002; Smith, D.E., 2005; McCoy, 2006) who have written about capture and interviewing in the interest of reducing the risk of it. This advice motivates institutional ethnographers to listen for instances when informants may be speaking about the work they are doing as their company does or might do rather than revealing what is actually happening when the work is being done (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). In these instances, asking informants to elaborate on points they made and probing for further details and/or personal examples was very helpful.
The third limitation arises because of the emergent nature of institutional ethnography and the dynamic nature of the social organization of knowledge. This dissertation does not provide a complete account of all relations of ruling involved in work-related learning. According to Smith (1987), each researcher’s efforts sheds more light on the relations of ruling that are of interest to her at the same time as they lead to new questions to explore through further research (please see Chapter 8). Putting it another way, institutional ethnographers are like blind scholars exploring the parts of an elephant (Smith, D.E., 1999). They can become familiar with the part of “the beast” (Smith, D.E., 1999, p. 228) they are holding – in this instance, employee development planning – but not other parts of it, for example, self-managed work teams as another type of employer intervention into the everyday work lives of employees that is also aimed at building learning organizations (Senge, 1990).

The fourth limitation arises for those looking for either an objective or subjective account of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning. Institutional ethnography is a materialist method of inquiry (as opposed to an objectivist or subjectivist one) that supports discovery and analysis of “what people actually do in the physical, social, and other conditions of real life” (Townsend, 1998, p. 18). Thus, the institutional ethnography reported in this dissertation “does not stand independently of the actuality of which it speaks” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 160). Rather, “it refers back to an actuality that those who are active in it also know” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 160). While the account is
authoritative (Smith, D.E., 2005) and corrigible (DeVault & McCoy, 2002) because it is based on the actual experiences of employees as participants in the work process of employee development planning, it is not based on some objective standard or measure. With respect to subjectivity, institutional ethnography is different from other methods of inquiry that seek to discover the meaning informants make of their experiences (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Informants’ experience provides an institutional ethnographic starting point but the ending point is where those experiences are embedded in relations of ruling in which and through which the social organization of knowledge is accomplished.

4.8.2 Delimitations

Employee development planning is one approach that companies can take to managing employees’ performance as work-related learners within systems of performance management like the balanced scorecard. However, companies often take more than one approach to performance management. When they do, their systems are described as mixed, hybrid or combined (Dessler, Cole, & Sutherland, 2005; Miner & Crane, 1995, Illes; 2001).

ABC Company combines the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management with competency development planning (although it is not so embedded). Employees participating in the work process of competency
development planning are expected to create and implement a second development plan based on competencies. The company defines competencies as behaviours critical for employees to demonstrate in order to perform up to employer expectations. While employees use one form for both work processes, the form consists of two parts. In addition, while the steps in each work process span a calendar year, employees complete the steps at different times during the year. I interviewed informants about both parts of the form and about the steps in each process but decided as I began to analyze the data to focus only on the part of the form and the steps in the process that pertained to employee development planning. The reasons for my decision were two-fold. First, I collected a voluminous amount of data, more than I felt I could use in a single dissertation (DeVault & McCoy, 2002). Second, I knew at least two other institutional ethnographers – Jackson (1988) and Grace (2005) – who have done studies that included an examination of the use and operation of competencies in, respectively, curriculum reform in the community college system in Canada and the vocational education and training sector in Australia. While deeply interested in their work, I wanted to go down a path they had not taken – to explore a different part of the beast, if you will.

Another delimitation results from my decision to gather data from informants all but one of whom worked at ABC Company. Institutional ethnographers treat the matter of research location differently than other researchers using methods such as a case study, for example. Case studies
allow for “intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 108). While intensive description and analysis are also goals of mine, concerns about generalizability (i.e., whether the findings of my study apply beyond ABC Company) do not arise for me as they might for someone doing or reading a case study. Institutional ethnographies focus on influences on individuals’ experience that originate beyond them and how these influences operate as “generalizers of actual local experience” (Smith, D.E., 1987, p. 154). Considered in this light, generalizability is a fundamental feature of institutional ethnography because its goal is to discover and explicate translocal influences that organize local experience and the knowledge that people construct as a result (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Townsend, 1996).

Two additional delimitations related to the recruitment and identification of informants are worthy of note. The first concerns predetermining a quota of informants for Round 1 data gathering and recruiting a target number of informants from a larger pool of potential informants for Round 2 data gathering. As noted earlier in this chapter, I limited myself to meeting the quota in Round 1 but interviewed several additional informants above the target number in Round 2. Thus, while my method of identifying and recruiting informants for my institutional ethnography was not “open-ended” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 764), it was not closed-ended either. I believe the notes I took in my research journal to capture my reflections on one interview prior to conducting the next also helped me fill in gaps in questioning that I could recognize in the time in
between. Thus, I gave myself confidence that I was gathering stories and descriptions of informants’ experience that would be useful in addressing the research questions provoked by my problematic.

The last delimitation relates to informants’ status as full-time employees. At ABC Company, both full-time and part-time employees are required to participate in the work process of employee development planning. ABC Company representatives identified no part-time employees for potential recruitment. Similarly, and because they too are not required to participate in the employee development planning process, temporary employees were excluded as potential informants. I raise this delimitation hesitantly because of the significant qualification that I attach to it. Since institutional ethnographers are not “oriented to descriptive reporting on a population” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 764), they are not concerned as other researchers might be in drawing a sample “that meets the criterion of representativeness for a particular study” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 57). The concern of the institutional ethnographer is to analyze “the ways in which organizational processes produce a generalized way of living in the everyday world, regardless of differences in particular individuals and circumstances” (Townsend, 1998, p. 18).

4.9 Conclusion to Chapter 4

This chapter covered the methods I used and the procedures I followed to complete the institutional ethnography reported in this dissertation – from the
identification and recruitment of informants through to the identification and discussion of the limitations and delimitations of my study. All but one of my informants was an employee, manager or human resource developer employed at ABC Company. The exception was an external consultant employed by a company elsewhere. ABC Company texts as well as informants’ audio taped talk during interviews were gathered in two rounds. I analyzed data in phases to address the research questions framing the study. To round out the chapter, I identified, discussed and qualified as necessary the boundaries of my study so that I could highlight unique characteristics of institutional ethnography.
5. WORK-RELATED LEARNING AND THE REGULATORY TEXT OF THE BALANCED SCORECARD

When I began to conduct interviews as part of my approach to data gathering (Chapter 4), I quickly learned about the significance of ABC Company’s balanced scorecard in establishing the overarching framework within which and against which employees’ performance as work-related learners is managed. The balanced scorecard’s significance became clear right from my first interview in the first round of data gathering. In that interview, Gillian, a manager, referred to the balanced scorecard as a statement of “where the company is going and what they [a reference to the board of directors of ABC Company] expect of the organization as a whole.” Naomi, an employee reporting to Gillian, was another among the many informants who commented on the importance of the balanced scorecard. “I know everything pertains to the balanced scorecard,” Naomi says. In similar terms, Shelby, another employee, notes that everything that goes on at ABC Company flows from and back to the balanced scorecard. Subsequent textual analysis reinforced what informants told me about the significance of the balanced scorecard as an expectation-setting text that represents ABC Company’s business strategy. Analysis of what my informants said, and the texts I closely read, led to my discovery that ABC Company’s balanced scorecard is a regulatory text authoritative in its statement of what the company anticipates the collective achievements of employees in a given calendar year to be.
In institutional ethnography, regulatory texts are “interpretable as expressions of…a higher source of organization, independent of particular people” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 82) that “enter directly into the organization of work in multiple local settings” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 79). At ABC Company, a higher source of organization independent of particular people is the board of directors. The board of directors has a legal mandate to direct the management of the business and affairs of ABC Company. In exercising its legal mandate on behalf of ABC Company, an important board activity (in conjunction with senior management) is to author and authorize a balanced scorecard.

Balanced scorecards are used to manage employees’ performance against expectations articulated from four perspectives or ways of knowing about performance that are deemed to be relevant to every company (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). The first of these is the financial perspective. Employers have traditionally gauged company performance from this perspective using measures such as return on assets as an indicator of how profitable a company’s assets (such as cash, product inventory, computers, and other equipment) are in generating revenue. Performance measures such as return on assets have roots in the management discipline of accounting. In the 1980s and early 1990s, accounting generally and performance management systems based on financial measures specifically were critiqued as inadequate to provide relevant information for corporate decision-making in the New Economy (Bourne, Mills, Wilcox, Neely, & Platts, 2000; Johnson & Kaplan, 1987; Kaplan, 1994).
Balanced scorecards remedy this perceived inadequacy, allowing employers to "balance" the use of financial measures of company performance with measures from other perspectives including the customer perspective, the internal operations perspective and the learning and growth perspective. From the customer perspective, an example of a performance measure is customer satisfaction. From the internal operations perspective, an example of a performance measure is efficiency. From the learning and growth perspective, an example of a performance measure is employees’ participation in work-related learning.

In the following analogy, Gumbus (2005) points out the problem employers may encounter if they persist in gauging company performance using financial measures alone.

Organizations that focus solely on financial measures can be compared to a race car driver that only monitors their speed during a race. Suppose you are a race car driver at the Indy 500 and are monitoring your car by looking at the RPM (revolutions of the engine per minute) gauge on your dashboard. You are not noticing the MPG (miles per gallon of gas), nor the MPH (miles per hour or speed your car is travelling), nor the temperature gauge. You might win the race, but you are also putting yourself and your car at risk by not monitoring these other gauges and focusing exclusively on the RPM dial. You might run out of gas, overheat
the engine, crash another car in your lane and make other errors in navigating your course. (p. 620)

Companies adopt balanced scorecards not only to continue the tradition of using financial measures to manage performance but also to extend the boundaries (Otley, 2001; Ittner & Larcker, 2009) of their performance management systems to include measures for gauging company performance from three additional perspectives. Figure 5.1 below depicts the four perspectives from which companies typically gauge performance using a balanced scorecard system of performance management.

Figure 5.1
The balanced scorecard’s four perspectives on performance management

The figure’s quadrant for the learning and growth perspective is shaded with arrows pointing to quadrants representing the other three perspectives. These typographical treatments distinguish the learning and growth perspective from the other perspectives on performance made manageable by balanced scorecards for it is the one that provides the “infrastructure to enable ambitious objectives in the other three perspectives to be achieved” (Kaplan & Norton, 1996b, p. 126). The knowledge and skills or human capital that employees bring to bear in their
on-the-job performance is a key part of this infrastructure singled out as an “intangible asset” for employers to “exploit” (Kaplan & Norton, 1996c).

Now that readers have some basic background information on the balanced scorecard system of performance management and the prominence of the learning and growth perspective within it, the stage is set for discussion and analysis of ABC Company’s balanced scorecard.

5.1 Coming to know company expectations: Making a personal connection with the balanced scorecard

This chapter section starts with a composite narrative account written as a conversation between two employees – one who is new to the work process of employee development planning and one experienced with it. The conversation is all about the constitution of ABC Company’s balanced scorecard and how, once constituted, it reaches with regulatory force and effect into the local settings (Smith, D.E., 2006) where employees begin to participate in the work process. While the conversation between the two employees never actually occurred, the composite narrative account is not a work of fiction. Rather, I wrote it up by following the institutional ethnographic strategy of building up a description “from multiple sources: people’s explanations, documents, and so on” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 770). Knowledge that I gleaned from interviewing informants and reading company texts is “rolled together” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 770)

27 In this dissertation, I also use the other general institutional ethnographic writing strategy of using quotes from interviews to punctuate the presentation of my findings (DeVault & McCoy, 2002).
into the composite narrative account. As you read, I invite you\textsuperscript{28} to put yourself on the side and in the position (Smith, D.E., 1987) of the new employee who is soon to become a first-time participant in the work process of employee development planning and has the opportunity to learn about it from an experienced co-worker who has been through it several times before. That is what I did when I wrote the account. It was a task that I undertook to convey informants’ work knowledge of the balanced scorecard and its relationship to the initial step in the work process of employee development planning in a more informative and interesting way than I felt was allowed by the third person writing approaches that I tried out but eventually abandoned.

The topic of conversation below is all about the balanced scorecard – what company expectations it conveys and how the conveyed expectations become individually relevant to and actionable by employees in the local settings of their work. To set the conversation apart from the rest of the chapter, I put a set of asterisks at its beginning and end and reduce the spacing between lines.

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**Experienced Employee:** So, when you open up the form on your computer, the page about the company’s balanced scorecard is the first one you will see.

\textsuperscript{28}That is just what I asked a few informants, former colleagues and friends to do when they accepted an invitation to read and give feedback on the first draft of my composite narrative account. As Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) point out, feedback helps researchers see how “accessible and meaningful” (p. 235) their writing is to others. Reviewers who gave me feedback: (a) knew about or had participated in work processes like the one examined in this dissertation; (b) had a knack for the written word, in my opinion; and/or (c) were people I trusted to give me honest feedback that I could use to strengthen the account.
**New Employee:** What is a balanced scorecard?

**Experienced Employee:** The balanced scorecard is the system of performance management that the board of directors uses to keep score on how well the company does each year.

**New Employee:** You mean the board of directors keeps score on the company?

**Experienced Employee:** Yes, they do, from their perspective on four categories of performance. The category we are focusing on today makes work-related learning part of our jobs.

**New Employee:** I see.

**Experienced Employee:** So, each year, in the learning and development category, the board of directors decides what we should aim for, in other words, what our strategic objective for learning and development will be. They also specify the key initiative to accomplish the strategic objective and a performance target we have to try to meet.

**New Employee:** The learning and development category includes a strategic objective, key initiative and performance target.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right. The strategic objective in the learning and development category is that ABC Company wants to employ people who are skilled and knowledgeable. A key initiative to accomplish the strategic objective is for everyone to have an employee development plan.

**New Employee:** So, to meet the strategic objective of employing skilled and knowledgeable people, the board of directors wants everyone to have an employee development plan.
**Experienced Employee:** Right again. The board of directors has decided that learning and development is integral to the way we do business. That is why there is a learning and development category on our balanced scorecard in the first place. The board figures the more knowledge and skills employees get, the better they will be at making sales and the more sales that employees make, the more profitable the company will be. So, I’ve touched on the strategic objective for learning and development and the key initiative that is related to it. Where the measurement comes in is through the performance target that is set each year for the number of hours of learning and development the board of directors expects us to put in.

**New Employee:** What’s the target?

**Experienced Employee:** The target varies from year to year. This year, we are responsible and accountable to put in 20 hours of learning and development.

**New Employee:** What do you mean by responsible and accountable?

**Experienced Employee:** I’ll get in to the details in a minute but if you don’t meet the target, you won’t get as big a raise in the middle and end of the year. Plus, since individual performance factors into company performance, missing the target could also affect bonuses.

**New Employee:** How?

**Experienced Employee:** Well, bonuses depend on meeting the performance target. If the performance target in the learning and development category isn’t met, we may get a lower bonus or, in the worst case, no bonus at all.

**New Employee:** I see. So if we don’t do our part as individuals, our raises will be lower and there will be less for the company to pay out in bonuses.
**Experienced Employee:** Yes. If we perform, the company pays. In this case, if you by put in 20 hours of learning and development during the year you are in line to be paid.

**New Employee:** Performance leads to pay.

**Experienced Employee:** Exactly. Now, before we move on, I want to point out the repetition of the strategic objective for learning and development from the balanced scorecard on the first page of the employee development plan form.

**New Employee:** Why is the strategic objective repeated on the form?

**Experienced Employee:** Before we put together our employee development plans, we are supposed to make a link between the strategic objective for learning and development that the board of directors has set for everyone in the company and our own jobs.

**New Employee:** How do we do that?

**Experienced Employee:** Well, beside the strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people, there should be some words filled in under the heading of “what this means in my job”. When HR made up template forms for us to use, they went ahead and filled in that blank for most of the jobs in the company. If you think the blank HR has filled in on your template reflects how you see your job fitting into the big picture according to the balanced scorecard, there is nothing more for you to do. If it doesn’t, you have to change the template to fit your job. If there is no template for your job, it is up to you to come up with something to fill in the blank.

**New Employee:** I hope there is a template for my job.
**Experienced Employee:** There probably is but, no matter what, the idea behind the first page of the form is for you to connect what you do in your job to what the board of directors expects of the company as a whole.

**New Employee:** How did you make the connection? I mean, what is filled in on the “what this means in my job” blank on your form?

**Experienced Employee:** Let me read it to you: “I will actively pursue lifelong learning so that I can keep up with the requirements of my job and developments in the industry. In this way, I can work towards becoming a well-rounded and knowledgeable employee.”

**New Employee:** I see. Having an example is helpful.

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The conversation presented above reveals much about the operation of the regulatory text of the balanced scorecard in relation to the work process of employee development planning generally and the first page of the employee development plan form specifically. By following along, readers share in the knowledge that an employee who has been through the work process several times before is able to pass on to a new employee who is about to go through it for the first time. Made clear by the experienced employee in talking with the new employee about the rationale for and make-up of the balanced scorecard is the importance of employees’ work-related learning to the business strategy of ABC Company. From the board of directors’ perspective, ABC Company depends on employing skilled and knowledgeable people. Under the auspices of an employee development plan, employees are to take the initiative to put in the
prescribed number of hours of work-related learning for which their employer will hold them responsible and accountable in a given calendar year\textsuperscript{29}. The regulatory text of the balanced scorecard requires employees to have such a plan.

Also brought to the forefront during the conversation is ABC Company’s concern to encourage individual employees to perform in line with company expectations as the board of directors has textualized them. This concern manifests itself in two ways. The first is on the first page of the employee development plan form that imposes a textual requirement for employees to interpret the balanced scorecard’s strategic objective for learning and development in light of their own jobs. This is a prerequisite to participating in the rest of the work process of employee development planning. The second is by making employees’ pay contingent on performance. From the conversation, we learn that employees of ABC Company are held responsible and accountable to perform in line with company expectations. If their individual performance falls below company expectations, the amount paid out in salary increases and bonuses will be less than if their individual performance met company expectations.

\textsuperscript{29}This is a “hard” performance target, meaning it is quantitative and objectively measurable i.e. by a count of the number of hours put in. ABC Company’s board of directors did not specify, at least on its 2005 balanced scorecard, “soft”, qualitative and, therefore, indirectly measurable targets for employees’ performance as work-related learners. It is interesting to note that accounting for how much work-related learning is done appears to be of more concern to the board of directors than whether, for example, work-related learning had its intended effect either on individual employees (e.g. it met their aspirations) or the company (e.g. it met the goal of individual and hence corporate performance improvement).
5.2 The consequences of coming to know: Employees respond to a changed pattern of visibility

In 2005, the board of directors first textualized company expectations of employees’ performance as work-related learners on ABC Company’s balanced scorecard. This textualization marked a change in the “pattern of visibility” (McCoy, 1998, p. 397) constructed through ABC Company’s 2005 balanced scorecard in comparison to balanced scorecards of previous years. In using this phrase, McCoy draws on Hopwood (1990), one among a group of critical accounting theorists (e.g. Hopper & Armstrong, 1991; Miller, 1994; Robson, 1992 and more recently Potter, 2005) who have explored accounting as a social practice. These theorists do not work with the same ontology as institutional ethnographers (McCoy, 1999). Nonetheless, like McCoy, I find resonances between their work and my own. Unlike McCoy, it is important to note, however, that I draw on these theorists’ descriptions in aid of my analysis of the non-financial domain into which the accounting eye (Hopwood, 1987) is penetrating in order to construct employees’ work-related learning as an object of performance management using a balanced scorecard as a regulatory text.

By making employees’ participation in work-related learning a relevance on the balanced scorecard, establishing a requirement for employees to prepare and implement an employee development plan and specifying a performance target, the board of directors makes known what employees need to do in order to contribute, as individuals, to the successful implementation of their company’s business strategy i.e. balanced scorecard. In the following passage, Gina, a
human resource developer in a senior position within the company, talks about
the time before the pattern of visibility changed.

Gina: We always used to have the expectation. We babbled about it. We did not have any [balanced] scorecard to measure it with.

CZ: Okay.

Gina: We talked about it. I remember when I was, oh, years ago, talking about it with my other bosses. We talked about it then. Oh, what a resistance we had to that. Oh, oh, oh. I remember talking to [reference to employees in a particular type of job] if we should be learning how to analyze a financial statement, things like that. You would have thought we were talking about the end of the world. Like come on guys. But, all that stuff, it’s an evolution...Now we’ve got it on the [balanced] scorecard and now we can see, okay, I guess we’ve got to learn.

Employees’ knowledge of the requirement to participate in work-related learning became readily apparent when I asked them why learning and development is one of the perspectives on performance included on ABC Company’s balanced scorecard. Naomi, for instance, put it this way: “I think why they [the board of directors] put that in there is because they feel that they want to provide us with any avenue to pursue education…We become a better asset to them if we’re knowledgeable in what we do”. For Deanna, the balanced scorecard reflects the importance ABC Company attaches to work-related learning.

CZ: [The balanced scorecard] says something organizationally about the importance attached to learning?

Deanna: Yup…right. It says that ABC Company as a whole wants to see that learning isn’t forgotten…

CZ: Why is it significant that it not be forgotten?
Deanna: Because things don’t stop moving. Things aren’t the same today as they were 20 years ago and they won’t be the same as they are 20 years from now. So if you stop learning, it’s harder to catch up in the future. Like if you just stick with what you know today and don’t learn anything ever then it becomes difficult to keep up with things or grow with things.

Shelly echoes Deanna’s sentiments.

Shelly: …the industry is evolving all the time. To stay current, you have to keep learning. And as you learn, you grow…So whether it’s a formal learning experience or an informal learning experience, I think we have to be learning all the time and be open to learning all the time.

CZ: What would happen to ABC Company if its employees did not learn all the time and its employees weren’t open to learning all the time?

Shelly: I don’t think we’d evolve. ABC Company wouldn’t be able to keep pace with the rest of the industry.

Through these interview excerpts, we become privy to employees’ knowledge of the change in the pattern of visibility the board of directors made when it textualized company expectations of employees’ performance as work-related learners on ABC Company’s balanced scorecard for the first time. Naomi, Deanna and Shelly know there is a connection between their employer’s efforts to manage their performance as work-related learners and ABC Company’s capacity to keep pace with other companies doing business in its industry sector. They are also aware there is a personal and corporate risk in not recognizing how vital participation in work-related learning is to keeping pace in the New Economy.
To ensure no breaks in the (changed) pattern of visibility, the HR department followed through to provide for the textual reach of the balanced scorecard into the local settings of employees’ work (Smith, D.E., 2006) in the design of the first page of the employee development plan form. This page replicates ABC Company’s strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people. The replication of a passage from one text on to another illustrates the interdependence or intertextuality (Smith, D.E., 2005) of the texts of the balanced scorecard and employee development plan form (Smith, D.E., 2005). In other words, the text of the balanced scorecard does not “stand alone” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 226) from the text of the form – to make sense of the latter requires sense to be made of the former. Later on, I say more about this sense making in relation to the first page of the form. Here I want to highlight that the arrangement of sense making (one text in relation to the other) is hierarchical.

In institutional ethnography, the notion of intertextual hierarchy opens up for scrutiny a key dimension of the social organization of knowledge that is mediated by texts, namely, how “texts regulate other texts” (Smith, D.E., 2006, p. 79). In this instance, a positional relation (Smith, D.E., 2005) is established by the balanced scorecard as a textual representation of the company’s business strategy. ABC Company employees are to orient to this business strategy as they begin to participate in the work process of employee development planning. The figure on the next page depicts the intertextual hierarchy of the text of the
balanced scorecard and the text of the first page of the employee development plan form.

**Figure 5.2**
The intertextual hierarchy

The first page of the form asks employees to consider the strategic objective for learning and development in light of their own jobs. So, as we learned from the conversation between the new and experienced employee presented in the previous chapter section, beside ABC Company’s strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people there is space for a “what this means in my job” statement. It is not by chance that this space appears before the spaces provided later in the form. In other words, it is intended that employees will pay attention to the “what this means in my job” space beside the strategic objective that has been set for learning and development before proceeding very far along in the work process.

The “what this means in my job” space invites employees to engage in a text-reader-conversation in which fixed for their reading and response is the
strategic objective for learning and development at ABC Company. It this text-reader-conversation, employees translate the knowledge that their company wants to employ skilled and knowledgeable people into personal terms. Gina, a human resource developer, explains that the “what this means in my job” part of the form helps employees see how “their roles are linked to the [balanced] scorecard”. She elaborates:

there has to be a line of sight…and they [employees] have got to see that, they've got to connect to it. So what better way than to throw it in their face [than] with the [form]? Here's the [balanced scorecard] you guys, here's how you contribute.

Gina’s references to “line of sight” and making employees face up to the balanced scorecard’s strategic objective for learning and development when they activate the first page of the employee development plan form warrants further analysis. In the literature, line of sight is defined as employees’ understanding of their employer’s strategic objectives and how they can contribute to meeting them (Boswell, 2000, 2006; Boswell & Boudreau, 2001). The notion has particular currency in the literature that explores the use of HRD work processes to support the implementation of corporate strategic plans (Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1999; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; Wright & McMahon, 1992). The premise underlying the notion of line of sight is that employees will perform better if they know how doing their jobs contributes to meeting their company’s strategic objectives (Boswell, 2000; Boswell, Bingham, & Colvin, 2006).
From Gina’s work knowledge of the reason behind the “what this means in my job" part of the employee development plan form, we learn of the importance ABC Company attaches to employees being able to make a connection between what they do on-the-job every day and what the company is aiming to accomplish through its business strategy for the year. With a line of sight from the local settings of their work to the balanced scorecard, it is more likely that employees' knowledge of company expectations will remain top-of-mind as they move from the first page of the form on to the textual requirements of subsequent pages. Doris describes her knowledge of the connection between her job and the strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people as follows:

**Doris:** …the feeling of it is that we’re encouraged to do lifelong learning. In the long run, it’s beneficial to us and to [ABC Company].

**CZ:** So, that’s sort of the flavour…the recognition of the mutual benefit for you as well as the company?

**Doris:** Yeah, and I guess it [lifelong learning] is strongly recommended. It’s strongly encouraged. It’s presented that it’s not really an option. This is something that you need to really look at pursuing.

In the passage above, Doris reveals she knows her company regards its employees’ participation in work-related learning (which she refers to as lifelong learning) as an important job requirement. Joan draws on similar knowledge when she explains how she has interpreted the strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people in light of her job.

I’m not just doing this [work-related learning] because they say I need to do this. There is something that I will glean from this and gain from this because if I am committed to personal and professional development
my lifelong time then I’m being molded and changed and gleaning information and being able to exchange with that information and I’m being able to pull out some of those things for me to bring into my day-to-day tasks to be able to present to my customers.

For Deanna, the strategic objective means work-related learning is part of what my job is about. It’s not just sitting behind a desk meeting people every day. Part of what I do and part of what I’m measured on is learning, right, which means to keep up with things, to learn new things or even to be able to assist in the learning of others…

Thus, the change in the pattern of visibility is extended in the design of the first page of the employee development plan form by the inclusion of a text-based interrogatory device (Smith, D.E., 2005) that asks employees to answer the “what this means in my job” question. Interrogatory devices “set out as fields the equivalent of questions to which [employees] must respond, transposing aspects of their everyday worlds into shapes that fit the topic-assigned spaces provided” (Smith, D.E., 2005, p. 226). In this instance, the interrogatory device provides the textual platform for employees to scaffold (or build upon) their knowledge of the strategic objective the board of directors has set for their learning and development. In the topic-assigned space, employees are to make sense of the strategic objective in light of their knowledge of their own job. In sense making, the strategic objective the board of directors textualized on the balanced scorecard for the company as a whole becomes individually relevant to and actionable by employees in local settings where they begin to participate in the work process of employee development planning.
Whereas activating the form’s first page enables employees to scaffold their knowledge of the company’s strategic objective for learning and development in light of their own jobs, knowledge of how the operation of the balanced scorecard intersects with pay administration helps keep their lines of sight trained on the company’s performance expectations. The experienced employee passed on her knowledge of how the performance management system intersects with the pay administration system as part of the conversation with the new employee presented in the previous chapter section. The source of this knowledge is traceable to an announcement the HR department made to follow-up the board of directors’ change in the balanced scorecard’s pattern of visibility. In the announcement, Beverly, a human resource developer, informed ABC Company managers that to assist employees with "integrating" work-related learning into their job, 10 per cent of their annual salary increases and bonus payments would be linked to their performance as work-related learners. According to Beverly, this was a "big deal" because ABC Company was "basically telling... people they have to develop or give up 10 per cent of their pay."

For the purposes of my analysis, ABC Company’s “big deal” is noteworthy as an instance of the application of various theories of behaviour motivation (Deckop, Mangel, & Cirka, 1999; Henderson, 1997; Long, 2006) to the design of pay administration systems. Pay administration systems based on motivation theories are often referred to as pay for performance, performance-contingent,
variable pay or at-risk pay systems (Long, 2006). The central assumption underpinning these types of systems is that money is a powerful motivator of performance (Rynes, Gerhart & Parks, 2005), so powerful that “no other incentive or motivational technique comes even close...with respect to its instrumental value” (Locke, Feren, McCaleb, Shaw & Denny, 1980, p. 379). Again, an analogy provided by Summers (2005) underscores the point as it is typically and normatively expressed in the literature.

Imagine performance management as a car: It is the vehicle that can get you from where you are to where you want to be. However, it can’t get very far without gas. Compensation is the gas: It provides the motivational ‘oomph’ that gives the spark of life to performance management. Performance management, as we conceive of it in its broadest incarnation is the means by which companies execute strategies through their people: It’s the car that gets companies where they want to go. Pointed in the right direction and kept on course through ongoing management, companies can use compensation as the primary means of energizing everyone to push in the right direction. (pp. 19-20).

Giving raises and bonuses to employees who perform as they know their employer expects them to and withholding them from employees who do not is a carrot-and-stick approach to pay administration. In the following passage Gina, a senior human resource developer, reveals her knowledge of why ABC Company takes such an approach.
**Gina:** Well, pay for performance, you should always have, in my own mind, pay for performance. Like why should we just pay people just because they are here without them performing? Over the years, I’ve seen over the years, you know, before we started this, is the fact that we paid people; we gave them increases every year, just because they were here. They were poor performers and we still gave them an increase.

**CZ:** Because a year has gone by and that’s what happens?

**Gina:** Yeah, and you’re here for another year. It’s that entitlement mentality. I’m here for a year; I don’t have to work hard. And the voice of the employees has said too, we work really hard and yet we know this other person didn’t achieve any goals or do anything extra and yet we worked harder. How come this happens and why are they getting the same pay?

The strong language Gina uses to express her view that it is both appropriate and preferable to pay employees for their job performance as opposed to their continuing employment by the company resonates with “the most powerful argument” (Armstrong & Murlis, 2007, p. 304) in favour of pay for performance systems. As Armstrong and Murlis (2007) unequivocally state, “it is right and proper to recognize achievement with a tangible (financial) reward rather than just paying people for ‘being there’” (p. 304). More specifically, and of particular interest in this chapter, is the offering of pay as an incentive for employees to align their actions with their knowledge of company expectations — a condition employers believe is necessary to the achievement of strategic objectives (Gomez-Mejia, 1993; Lawler, 1990; Smith, I., 1992; Schuster & Zingheim, 1992).
The extent to which pay actually induces “strategically oriented employee behaviour” (Boswell, Bingham, & Colvin, 2006, p. 505) is believed to be greater when employees “recognize a direct relationship between activities performed, results achieved and rewards gained” (Henderson, 1997, p. 409). Employees of ABC Company recognize such a relationship. While several of them spoke of co-workers who were close to retirement, not interested in career advancement or unable to participate in work-related learning because of other job demands or after-hours commitments, they said most (themselves included) found ways “to get it done” (Naomi’s words) because work-related learning “is part of what you’re paid for” (Deanna’s words). The activities that are involved in getting it done (Chapter 7), were typically regarded as a routine and required albeit time consuming and not particularly enjoyable part of the job. As Nolan puts it, work-related learning: “…is just part of your job and I just try and think of it as, well, it’s something I’ve got to do. It is what it is.” What it is to Doris is a “monkey on her back”, something that she feels “forced into doing” if she wants to earn pay for performance. Says Doris:

...basically it’s put in your hands to get the skills you need to do your job properly. It’s really up to you. You’ve just got to find ways to do it. It’s a bonus if you can do it and if you can’t, you’re penalized’ [a reference to pay forfeited for non-performance].

Tammy echoes Doris’s displeasure, alluding to the motivation to perform an activity strictly for reward. If there was no pay for performance at ABC Company, Tammy says there would be no incentive to do work-related learning. “That’s
what bugs me is that you have to do something to earn money but that’s just, you’re in a corporate organization, that’s what’s going to happen.”

In finding ways to get the work done in order to pave the way for an exchange of pay for performance, employees seem to know they are making a trade-off. Naomi shares her knowledge this way.

…I think it’s just a hand-in-hand thing. Here [are] the tools to do your job. You can do it or not, it’s up to you, but then don’t cry if you didn’t get a raise because you’ve been given the opportunity.

Nigel echoes Naomi’s knowledge of a trade-off with this comment: “if they [ABC Company] are going to scratch your back, you have to return the favour”. He goes on to express what, in addition to pay for performance, he hopes to get out of returning the favour:

I don’t want to say it’s all about money because I mean you have to like what you do too. But I’d be lying if I didn’t say that was a big part of it for me. I want to be successful as I can in the shortest amount of time so that, you know, down the road when I am 55… can I throw in the towel and move out to my farm I want to live on and get out of the city. So that is my bigger goal.

Overall, at the intersection between ABC Company’s performance management and pay administration systems, employees align their actions with what they have come to know about company expectations of their performance as work-related learners. Most employees respond to the change in the pattern of visibility in the way the board of directors expects. Therefore, they accept responsibility and accountability to work towards the target number of hours of work-related learning that the board of directors has prescribed in order to
receive that portion of their pay that is contingent on their performance. Those employees who do not align their actions with what they know about company expectations also know there are consequences for their pay.

5.3 Conclusion to Chapter 5

This chapter discusses and analyzes: (a) how employees come to know company expectations of their performance as work-related learners when they first begin to participate in the work process of employee development planning; and (b) the consequences of this coming to know. The discussion and analysis revolve around two company texts – the balanced scorecard and the first page of the employee development plan form. The relation of these texts is one to the other in an intertextual hierarchy. As a higher order regulatory text authored and authorized by the board of directors, the balanced scorecard provides the overarching framework within which and against which to manage employees’ performance as work-related learners. The overarching framework takes shape when the board of directors textualizes company expectations of employees’ performance as work-related learners as a strategic objective, key initiative and performance target under the balanced scorecard’s learning and development category of performance. The textualization of company expectations of employees’ performance as work-related learners marks a change in the pattern of visibility of work-related learning at ABC Company. Change in the pattern of visibility makes work-related learning a job requirement, in other words,
something for which employees are to be held individually responsible and accountable.

Employees reveal their knowledge of the requirement to participate in work-related learning in what they have to say about the balanced scorecard. The risk (personal and/or corporate) of not being able to keep up to date as the industry in which ABC Company does business evolves is understood by employees as sufficient warrant for the board of directors to make work-related learning integral to the way employees conduct the business of ABC Company.

Employees come to know how to respond to the changed pattern of visibility of work-related learning at ABC Company when they activate the first page of the employee development planning form. The form’s first page invites employees to translate their knowledge that their company wants to employee skilled and knowledgeable people into personal terms. In translation, the company’s strategic objective becomes individually relevant to and actionable by employees in the local settings of participation in the work process of employee development planning.

The intersection of the balanced scorecard system of performance management with the pay administration system backs up the changed pattern of visibility of work-related learning at ABC Company. Knowledge that pay is contingent on performance encourages employees to keep company
expectations top-of-mind as they move from meeting the textual requirements of the first page of the form on to meeting the textual requirements of the form’s subsequent pages. The next chapter explicates how the textual requirements beyond the first page of the employee development planning form are met and what the meeting of these requirements accomplishes. To conclude this one, I sum up the accomplishments of the two texts that have been the focus of discussion and analysis in this chapter vis-à-vis employees’ knowledge of company expectations of their performance as work-related learners.

The text of the balanced scorecard and the text of the first page of the employee development planning form coordinate what employees come to know of company expectations of their performance as work-related learners. It is knowledge that employees are to draw upon as they move on from the initial step of the work process of employee development planning to complete the remaining steps.

Most employees have an interest to align their knowledge of corporate expectations with their actions if for no other reason than they do not want to forfeit pay for performance. Accordingly, they act on the recognition that work-related learning is part of what they get paid for and find ways to fit themselves into the overarching framework within which and against which their performance as work-related learners is managed. Those employees who do not and/or
choose not to fit themselves into the overarching framework know they pay a price for not performing in line with company expectations.
6. BUILDING AND NAVIGATING AN ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCUIT FOR WORK-RELATED LEARNING

In institutional ethnography, an accountability circuit (McCoy, 1999; Smith, 2005) is a form of textual coordination that brings employees’ consciousnesses and actions into alignment with company expectations. At ABC Company, the board of directors conveys its expectations to draw more heavily on employees’ collective intelligence (Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2002) as a means to the end of achieving company objectives via the regulatory text of the balanced scorecard. In turn, the regulatory text of the balanced scorecard reaches into the local settings of employees’ work via the first page of the employee development form. It is on the form’s first page that ABC Company’s strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people becomes individually relevant to and actionable by employees in the local settings of their work.

In this chapter, I begin to apply the notion of an accountability circuit\(^{30}\) to explicate how employees prepare and implement employee development plans that are in keeping with the requirements of the balanced scorecard. Two sets of inscriptive practices – those practices of working with, working from and/or working to produce various texts associated with the work process – are discussed and analyzed. The first set is routinely followed in the preparation step of the work process. To complete this step, employees fit themselves in to the conceptual frames that are textualized on a page of the form used to manage

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\(^{30}\) My application of the institutional ethnographic notion of an accountability circuit continues in Chapter 7 but there I focus on the reviewing and rewarding steps in the work process as opposed to the planning and implementation steps that are of concern here.
their performance as work-related learners. On this page of the form, employees are to state: (a) what they are setting out to accomplish by participating in work-related learning; and (b) what work-related learning they propose to do. In other words, by fitting their learning and development objectives and action plans into the form's conceptual frames, employees participate in the building of the core component of an accountability circuit that they subsequently navigate in order to demonstrate the way in which and the extent to which their performance as work-related learners meets company expectations. This chapter canvasses how employees participate in the building of this accountability circuit. It also canvasses how the second set of inscriptive practices routinely followed in the implementation step of the work process aids employees’ navigation through the accountability circuit they participated in building with the preparation of their employee development plan. To navigate the accountability circuit employees: (a) do the work-related learning they planned; b) keep track of the work-related learning they do; and (c) keep on track with implementing their plan.

Inscriptive practices that employees follow in the implementation step of the work process, like the inscriptive practices they follow in the preparation step, depend on a level of organizational literacy (Chapter 3) or proficiency in effecting the work process. Readers of this chapter will learn how employees rely on their organizational literacy to school themselves in aligning the work-related learning they propose to undertake and then go on to do with the reporting requirements imposed on them by the accountability circuit (Smith, D.E., 1990b).
With the terrain of this carved out, I continue the composite narrative account written as a conversation between two employees – one new to and one experienced in the work process of employee development planning. This conversation started in the previous chapter on the topic of ABC Company’s balanced scorecard. In this chapter, the conversation continues on two topics – the first is how to prepare an employee development plan and the second is how to implement it. In the next two chapter sections, I present the conversation about each topic and then follow it with analysis of the inscriptive practices involved.

6.1 Preparing employee development plans: Participating in the building of an accountability circuit

Having learned how ABC Company’s balanced scorecard reaches with regulatory force and effect into the local settings where employees begin to participate in the work process of employee development planning (Chapter 5), the new employee is ready to talk further with the experienced employee about how to prepare her employee development plan. The requirement to prepare an employee development plan is a key initiative that ABC Company’s board of directors has included on the balanced scorecard to accomplish what it has set as a strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people. In the segment of conversation that follows, the experienced employee explains to the new employee how employee development plans are prepared.
Experienced Employee: Okay, so, the pages after the balanced scorecard page of the form relate to key results areas, or KRAs, that pertain to your job. A KRA is an area in which you have to deliver results.

New Employee: A KRA is an area of performance pertaining to my job in which I have to deliver results.

Experienced Employee: Yes. Some KRAs vary by job. For example, all employees on the retail side of the business have a KRA related to sales. All managers, whether they are on the retail side of the business or not, have a KRA related to managing their people. Regardless of your job or rank, one KRA that appears on everyone’s form is the learning and development KRA. We really have no option but to continue to learn in relation to our work at ABC Company.

New Employee: Why is that?

Experienced Employee: We all are supposed to be committed to work-related learning both to ensure we have the knowledge and skills to do our jobs as well as to ensure we continually upgrade our knowledge and skills to keep pace with the industry. The size of our raises and bonuses depends whether we put in the number of hours of learning and development the board of directors expects us to put in according to the balanced scorecard.

New Employee: Right, that is the pay for performance side of things.

Experienced Employee: Yes, we talked about that earlier. Now, attached to the learning and development KRA are performance standards, or the standards you have to meet in delivering deliver results under your learning and development KRA.
**New Employee:** Can you give me an example of a performance standard?

**Experienced Employee:** Yes. One of my performance standards under the learning and development KRA is for me to have a comprehensive knowledge of the features and benefits of our products and services. I met that standard by taking seminars put on by the HR department when I joined the company and began implementing my very first employee development plan. The HR department's template forms typically include the performance standards attached to your learning and development KRA. They can be a bit generic though so talk with your manager if you think they need to be tweaked to fit the specifics of your job.

**New Employee:** Okay, I will.

**Experienced Employee:** Now, as far as putting together your employee development plan goes, your work begins on the page of the form for the learning and development KRA. On this page, you are supposed to come up with an objective for your learning and development objective and an action plan for how to meet it.

**New Employee:** My employee development plan is made up of a learning and development objective and an action plan.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right. So, on your form, there is a blank for you to fill in information about the courses, training programs or other kinds of work-related learning you plan to do. An employee development plan is like a road map. It lays out what you are going to do from the first to the middle of the year and then from the middle to the end of the year to meet the objective you set for yourself under the learning and development KRA.
New Employee: An employee development plan is like a road map for my learning and development.

Experienced Employee: Yes, and twice a year, your manager will formally evaluate whether you are getting to where you want to go when performance reviews are conducted in June and then again in December. Now I don’t want to get ahead of myself because there is a step before putting your road map together that we need to talk more about.

New Employee: Oh?

Experienced Employee: What you have to do before you prepare your action plan is come up with an objective for your learning and development. That is basically a one or two sentence statement about what you want to accomplish. The trick is to make sure your learning and development objective is SMART. SMART stands for: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based. You typically review your SMART objective with your manager the first couple of times you go through the process.

New Employee: Why?

Experienced Employee: It is much easier for you to keep track of how you are doing and for your manager to coach you along the way if your plan is SMART. We will talk more about tracking and coaching in a little while but now that I have gone over learning and development objectives, we can get back to action plans.

New Employee: What kinds of things go into action plans?

Experienced Employee: The spectrum of work-related learning that you can do is broad. ABC Company is very good about letting you do what you want under your learning and development KRA. Under other KRAs like sales, there isn’t as
much opportunity to chart your own course – you either make your sales or you don’t. Under the learning and development KRA, as long as what you want to do is work-related, you can pretty much go your own way.

**New Employee:** So we have more latitude to do what we want under the learning and development KRA than our other KRAs.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right. You aren’t limited to work-related learning that will help with the job you do now. You also have the option to do work-related learning that will put you in the running other for jobs within the company.

**New Employee:** Right now, I’m focused on my current job but that might change down the road.

**Experienced Employee:** You certainly have the opportunity to go in more than one direction here. For some employees, the direction they go in is cut and dry. For example, there will be a certain education level expected for certain jobs. Employees who aren’t at the required level might use their action plan to fill in the gaps in their education. Other employees, like me, will be working towards a degree. Our action plans would typically include the next course we need to take to meet degree requirements.

**New Employee:** I see.

**Experienced Employee:** For other employees, seminars or training programs organized by the company for employees to take during the workday might be the best bet. There are online and off site options as well. That reminds me of something.

**New Employee:** What is that?
Experienced Employee: Have you seen the HR department’s guidelines on the kinds of work-related learning that the company recognizes and how many hours each kind is worth towards your balanced scorecard target?

New Employee: No, not yet.

Experienced Employee: Well, the HR department has spelled out our options in a set of guidelines that are good to know about when you prepare your employee development plan.

New Employee: Why is it good to know about the HR department’s guidelines?

Experienced Employee: Well, when it comes time for performance reviews, the guidelines determine how many hours you will get credit for towards your balanced scorecard target. Exactly how that works is not something we are going to talk about right now. We will leave that until we talk about the performance review step in the work process. The important thing to remember as far as the preparation step is concerned is that you should plan to do work-related learning that falls under the guidelines. It’s just easier that way.

New Employee: Are you saying that I will only get credit for work-related learning that falls under the guidelines?

Experienced Employee: Basically, yes. There is less of a hassle all around if what you plan to do clearly falls under the guidelines. If in doubt, talk to your manager before you put something into your action plan that might not fall under the guidelines.

New Employee: Okay, I will.

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In the foregoing segment of conversation, the experienced employee shares with the new employee her knowledge about how to prepare an employee development plan. Provision for this step of the work process is made on the page of the employee development plan form on which the company message that work-related learning will be an important aspect of every employee’s job is textualized as a “key result area” or KRA. The textualization of this KRA for application company-wide makes the individual responsibility and accountability to perform as work-related learners up to generic performance standards inherent to the work of all employees. Readers also learn the form is prescriptive. Employees are to deliver work-related learning results under the auspices of a plan with two common elements, namely, a learning and development objective (i.e. a statement of what the employee hopes to accomplish under the learning and development KRA) and accompanying action plan (i.e. a statement of how employees intend to accomplish their objective). The employee development plan that employees constitute for themselves when they inscribe their learning and development objective and action plan serves as a personal road map for learning and development, guiding their efforts to align their performance as work-related learners with company expectations.

Also in conversation, the experienced employee shares her knowledge about properly inscribing an employee development plan. With respect to the learning and development objective, the proper way is “SMART”. A SMART learning and development objective precisely expresses what employees wish to
accomplish through their participation in work-related learning. This precision also facilitates the work of managers who have responsibilities to coach employees as they work to meet their learning and development objective. With respect to the action plan, it is proper to follow the HR department guidelines. While the forms of work-related learning that ABC Company recognizes towards the balanced scored target are many, the conversation reveals there are curricular boundaries within which it is prudent for employees to remain.

6.2 A closer look at the inscriptive practices of preparing employee development plans

In the preparation step of the work process, employees fill in the blank on their employee development plan form that is reserved for their learning and development objective and action plan. The blank is equivalent to a question that employees must answer in order to prepare an employee development plan that meets company requirements. Unlike other interrogatory devices (Smith, D.E., 2005) of interest to institutional ethnographers for the work they call upon employees to do in transposing already experienced actualities into text, the work employees do in the preparation step of the work process is prospective. In other words, it calls upon employees to enter the actualities of work-related learning they propose to experience, actualities waiting to happen if you will, under the auspices of their employee development plan. Naomi, an employee informant, explains: “people have the ability under this program to be able to designate what they want to learn and how they’re going to do it”. In responding to the form's requirement, employees participate in building a core component of the
accountability circuit that operates to coordinate their consciousnesses and actions with corporate expectations of the way in which and the extent to which their performance as work-related learners is to be demonstrated.

At ABC Company, employee development plans are to be based on a learning and development objective that is SMART. SMART, is a mnemonic, or device for remembering, the criteria that a proper instance of a learning and development objective is to meet\(^{31}\). A learning and development objective must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based. The SMART mnemonic appears prominently at the top of the employee development plan form and in other texts such as various employee communication materials about the balanced scorecard performance management system at ABC Company. Reference to the mnemonic was also frequently made by employees in their descriptions of how they schooled themselves in putting together their employee development plans. To these employees, the mnemonic serves as the standard against which to self-assess the learning and development objective they formulate to enter into the blank reserved for it on the employee development plan form. To meet the standard, to be SMART, means to mind the mnemonic’s assembly instructions (Smith, D.E., 1990b). Kelly, for instance, comments on how she makes sure her learning and development objective is SMART: “I just basically…write out exactly what I want to do for each of those letters. So like [I] put in how much time I’m going to spend on it, what the exact results are going to

\(^{31}\) The SMART mnemonic is widely accepted as a device for employees to use in objective setting (Armstrong & Murlis, 2007; Houldsworth & Jirasinghe, 2006; Maycunich Gilley & Drake, 2003).
be from it,” she says. Deanna explains using a hypothetical example of a course she might want to take.

So you can pick a course…then you would put that you’re wanting to complete that course by June 30 of this year and the exam will be written on such and such a date and then a reason behind why you’re going to take that, where’s it’s going to take you, what it’s going to help you accomplish.

When employees like Kelly and Deanna respond to the assembly instructions provided by the SMART mnemonic, they become self-schooling in assessing the propriety of their learning and development objectives against criteria that are not of their own making. The mnemonic does not permit them to judge for themselves and with reference only to their own aspirations what work-related learning it would be worthwhile to set out to do. Rather, it imposes a standard judged by the company to be worthwhile for them to attend to as they inscribe what they hope to accomplish from their participation in the work process of employee development planning.

Similarly, in inscribing an action plan to meet their learning and development objective, employees who attend to what the company judges to be a suitable work-related learning curriculum give themselves a measure of certainty that the work-related learning they eventually go on to do will earn credit towards their balanced scorecard target at performance review time. The HR department guidelines constitute the work-related learning curriculum, spelling
out the work-related learning options\textsuperscript{32} it is good for employees involved in the preparation step of the work process to know about. The HR department promulgated the guidelines not long after the board of directors textualized the 2005 balanced scorecard to change the pattern of visibility of work-related learning at ABC Company\textsuperscript{33}. The purpose of the guidelines, according to a company email sent by Beverly, a human resource developer acting in her capacity as manager of employee development, is to assist employees with integrating work-related learning into their on-the-job performance. For employees integrating work-related learning into their on-the-job performance, the guidelines operate as a textual filter (Smith, D.E., 2006; Wilson & Pence, 2006). With knowledge of the forms of work-related learning that ABC Company recognizes as worthy of receiving credit, employees can pay particular attention to planning to do those forms that will easily pass through the HR department’s guidelines when performance reviews roll around.

Overall, employees regard the HR department guidelines as employee-friendly, operating to make the balanced scorecard performance target easier to meet. Shelby’s knowledge of the breadth of the guidelines gave her confidence that every form of work-related learning that she does “is falling into a category somewhere”. Deanna speaks in a similar vein about the breadth of the guidelines when she notes that ABC Company “doesn’t say that you have to go

\textsuperscript{32} Options include formal work-related education, product and technical skills training and involvement in a professional association or company committee.

\textsuperscript{33} Subsequent refinements to the work-related learning options spelled out by the guidelines and changes to the number of credit hours that each option can earn an employee have not altered their prescriptive character.
out and spend eight hours a night in class in order to achieve your credits. Like there’s a wide variety of options as to how you achieve that”. For Naomi, the opportunity to be “acknowledged” for work-related learning other than from a textbook was a good thing. “Maybe taking a class isn’t an option in your life at a certain point. At least you can try and get your credit hours in different ways,” she says in reference to the guidelines. The flexibility to choose from a broad range of work-related learning options was also a plus for Kelly who says there is room to fit just about any form of work-related learning within the guidelines. She gave the example of borrowing a book to read from the HR department’s library as one of the “little things” that employees like her could do to earn a few credit hours. Nolan compares what he perceives as the rigidity of university curricula to the flexibility of the HR department’s guidelines. As he put it, ABC Company does not have a rigid structure where they say you must take this class. It’s not like university where they hand you the courses and say you’ve got a few electives but at the end of the day, you pretty much have to take all of this, this and this. Whereas here, I think they are a bit more flexible and they give you credit for learning on your own time, for anything that’s online.

An important empirical discovery arises from my analysis of the positive way in which employees speak about the HR department’s guidelines as an aid to preparing their employee development plans. Employees’ knowledge that there are several options they can pursue in order to later receive credit for integrating work-related learning into their performance helps them coordinate what they inscribe as their employee development plan with and within the curricular
boundaries established by the HR department’s guidelines. The interest of ABC Company to spell out what work-related learning options it is best for employees to pursue in their efforts to meet the balanced scorecard target appears to align with employees’ own interest to have the flexibility to inscribe an employee development plan that is most likely to earn them credit hours towards the balanced scorecard target. This alignment of interests reinforces the curricular boundaries established by the HR department’s guidelines at the same time as it encourages employees to follow inscriptive practices that will enable them to keep within them.

Before leaving the preparation step of the work process, I share Doris’ recollection of the time when ABC Company periodically intervened in her everyday work life in order to train her rather than to enlist her participation in a work process designed to foster her continuous or lifelong work-related learning. Says Doris:

   In the past they would identify a weakness and then put you on training. Now it is the other way around. The accountability is in your hands. Basically, it’s put in your hands to get the skills you need to do your job properly. It’s really up to you.

Doris’ recollection provides evidence of a shift in responsibility for work-related learning from the company level to the employee level as she experienced it. In analyzing the implementation step of the work process, I pay particular attention to the work that employees do because of the responsibility and accountability to participate in the work process of employee development planning that has been
put in their hands. To set up the analysis, I continue the pattern of providing a
composite narrative account of a conversation between a new and experienced
employee who now turn to the topic of what happens in the work process after an
employee development plan has been prepared.

6.3 Navigating the accountability circuit: The inscriptive practices of
implementing employee development plans

With a development plan prepared, employees are ready to begin to
implement it. The topic of the segment of conversation that begins below is what
happens during the implementation step of the work process of employee
development planning. The implementation step is completed in two cycles of
activity – one during the first half of the year and the other during the second half
of the year.

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Experienced Employee: We have already covered preparing your employee
development plan. What comes next is implementing your plan in two stages,
the first leading up to your interim performance review in June and the second
leading up to your annual performance review in December.

New Employee: I imagine implementation means doing the work-related
learning you planned to do.

Experienced Employee: Basically, yes, but there is some additional paperwork
and some tracking you also need to do. Let’s start with the paperwork.

New Employee: You mean paperwork in addition to the employee development
plan form?
**Experienced Employee:** Yes, there is more paperwork than just filling in your employee development plan form. The HR department has a course request form we use to get approval for the company to pay when some work-related learning you plan to do costs money. The form asks for a bunch of information. It asks for basic things like the course name, who is offering it, start and end dates, the number of hours you will be away from work to take the course, if that applies, the cost of the course itself as well as any textbooks, exam fees or other expenses like travel that might be associated with it. You add up the costs and put the total on the course request form. Beyond those basics, there is also space to fill in the course’s learning objective and what benefits you expect to get from the course if are approved to take it. Think of it as an objective that is more specific than, but complementary to, the objective you set for your plan as a whole.

**New Employee:** What you are saying is that I need to be able to explain why I want to take a particular course and how taking that course will help me accomplish the learning and development objective I set for my employee development plan.

**Experienced Employee:** Yes, you have to have a reason for it related to the overall objective you set for your learning and development. After you have filled in all that information, you sign and date the form. The space for your signature and date appears below a statement that asks you to confirm that you will pursue the course you are requesting approval to take faithfully and that you will provide HR with proof of completion afterwards.

**New Employee:** Sounds a bit like taking an oath.

**Experienced Employee:** It is sort of like that. Since approval, means the company will spend money on your work-related learning, I think of it as providing
assurance that you will do your best to finish the work-related learning that you are asking for approval to do.

**New Employee:** Oh, I see. The company doesn’t want to pay for my work-related learning without some indication that I am serious about doing it.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right. If the company is going to cover the cost, they want to know you’re serious.

**New Employee:** Now what does HR need as proof of completion?

**Experienced Employee:** HR needs a copy of a statement of grade or certificate of completion – whatever you get when you have done the work-related learning that can serve as a record that you have done it.

**New Employee:** I see. So I just give a copy of whatever that is to the HR department.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right.

**New Employee:** So, once I have signed and dated the form, what happens next?

**Experienced Employee:** You pass the form on to your manager. She also has to sign it to indicate that she recommends you take the course.

**New Employee:** Is the recommendation automatic?

**Experienced Employee:** My manager has never had a problem with a recommendation but I would not say it is automatic. There is some discretion involved. For example, your manager might not be prepared to recommend to
HR that you take the course if the benefits to you in doing your job are not clear. On the other hand, let us say the course would mean you had to be out of the office at a time when your department is short-staffed or tied up with a special project. Your manager might not think the time is right for you to take the course.

**New Employee:** So, if my manager has the discretion to recommend, then who approves?

**Experienced Employee:** Ultimately, it’s the HR department.

**New Employee:** So, the HR department has the final say. Do they ever say no?

**Experienced Employee:** Again, I have never had a problem but I have heard of cases when the HR department has suggested another option they think will better help someone meet their learning and development objective. That’s usually a matter of them being more aware about who is out there offering a particular kind of work-related learning. I have also heard of cases when the number of employees approved to go on a course that costs a lot has to be limited because the company’s budget is not big enough to go around. For the most part, though, I would say that you have a good chance of getting approval if you make a good case for what you want to do and why you want to do it on your course request form.

**New Employee:** I see.

**Experienced Employee:** So far, we’ve talked about the course request form as some extra paperwork needed to implement your employee development plan. I think we are ready to move on to talk about keeping track of your work-related learning.

**New Employee:** What do I need to know about keeping track?
**Experienced Employee:** Well, it’s up to you to keep track of the work-related learning you do. You want to be ready when your manager asks you to fill in the blank on the form for the results you achieved. Unless you have a good memory, it’s best to keep track as you go.

**New Employee:** So how do I do that?

**Experienced Employee:** You do that by making a point of keeping track of the work-related learning that you have done. I just call up my form and enter the information online. My friend Doris doesn’t use her computer. She makes notes in her day timer and then refers to them when filling in her results. It doesn’t really matter what system you use. What is important is keeping track of your work-related learning so you have proof of what you did to earn hours towards your balanced scorecard target in the first half of the year and then again in the second half of the year.

**New Employee:** I’ll try to come up with a system for keeping track.

**Experienced Employee:** Good, now, we should be able to pick up the pace a little now because what goes on in the second half of the year is more or less the same as what goes on in the first half of the year.

**New Employee:** So, that means I continue with implementing the action plan I laid out at the beginning of the year.

**Experienced Employee:** Basically, yes. At interim review, you could make changes to your employee development plan for any one of a number of reasons. I do not want to be sidetracked talking about that now. Let us assume you are dealing with the same plan in the second half of the year as you were in the first half of the year.
New Employee: Okay.

Experienced Employee: If you need course request forms, you fill them in. If you complete some learning and development covered by an approved course request form, you would send HR your statement of grade or certificate of completion. In addition, if you follow my advice, you would use whatever system works for you to keep track of the learning and development hours that you put in so you can be ready for your annual review in December.

New Employee: I see.

Experienced Employee: There is one more thing we should cover before we leave the topic of implementing your employee development plan.

New Employee: What’s that?

Experienced Employee: The topic is coaching. The idea behind coaching is that there should be ongoing communication between you and your manager about your performance all year long, not just when it’s time for performance reviews. Some managers have periodic meetings with their employees to talk about how things are going. Other managers prefer to coach their employees as part of day-to-day activity. I have been around so long my manager does not worry about coaching me routinely but she’s there if I need her.

New Employee: So coaching is supposed to be part of my manager's job.

Experienced Employee: Managers definitely have a key role to play, but coaching isn't a one-way-street.

New Employee: What do you mean?
Experienced Employee: You do not need to sit back and wait for coaching. If there’s something you think is getting in the way of implementing your employee development plan, you should talk to your manager about it.

New Employee: What would I talk to my manager about?

Experienced Employee: Well, you might give your manager an update on how many hours you think you have put in so far. If you have not put in very many hours, you would probably talk about why and what to do about it. I know in some parts of the company work-related learning can fall by the wayside when people are super busy. You want to avoid a penalty on your pay for not meeting the performance target so if it looks like you are behind, you should talk with your manager about ways to make up lost ground.

New Employee: So coaching helps me stay on track or get back on course, whatever the case may be.

Experienced Employee: That’s the idea.

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From the conversation presented above, we learn employees participate in three main activities to implement their employee development plans. The first is doing the learning and development they have planned. The second is keeping track of the learning and development they have done. The third is seeking or accepting feedback on implementing their employee development plan from managers who have responsibility to assist their employees in a coaching role.
With respect to the first activity, we learn from the conversation about a text known as a course request form. Employees fill in this form in order to have the cost of their participation in work-related learning (when there is such a cost)\textsuperscript{34} covered by the annual budget which ABC Company’s board of directors sets aside to pay for employees’ learning and development. The form calls upon employees: (a) to justify the learning and development they would like to do in relation to their job; (b) to warrant that they intend to follow through to do the learning and development for which they are seeking approval; and (c) to undertake to eventually provide proof of completing the learning and development in return for any company expenditure made on their behalf.

The course request form speaks to employees about the textual requirements they have to meet before company expenditure on their work-related learning. Subjecting requests that represent a potential cost to the company to two levels of scrutiny prior to approval was widely regarded by employees as a formality as long as they were able to justify their request. The following exchange with Kelly is illustrative.

**Kelly:** Yeah, there are so many courses, and the fact that we [a reference to ABC Company] basically allow employees to take almost anything that can be somehow beneficial to them in their role, in their job.

**CZ:** And they have to justify that...They have to kind of make the case.

\textsuperscript{34} Training programs delivered by HR department staff or offered online are examples of work-related learning that do not represent a direct cost to ABC Company in the same way as work-related learning for which a fee such as tuition is typically charged.
Kelly: Exactly. So people can pretty much take anything they want and get the full credit hours without any trouble.

For Naomi, passing the test of job-relatedness was not troublesome. “Unless it [the course being requested] is really out there, they will probably let you take it”, she says. In a similar vein, Deanna considers the prospect of approval of a request to take basket weaving (a course that is arguably “out there”).

If you could...make a case for it, fair enough. If you can explain how basket weaving is going to make you a better employee, okay, give it a go. Go for it. But do they have the right to decline it? Yeah I would say so. They are financially responsible for that. They are offering to make that payment, [to] pay for your education.

There is a relative procedural ease to getting a course request form approved. With limited exceptions, as long as employees meet the textual requirements of the course request form, managers and the HR department give them their approval to proceed. The inscriptive practices involved in activating the course request form and advancing it through two levels of approval accomplish a two-way coordination that is conducive to the operation of the accountability circuit.

One way is associated with the local courses of action through which employees who fill in a course request form advance their employee development plan from a statement of actualities waiting to happen to a point in the sequence of their implementation activities when some results-producing work-related learning can actually occur. The other way is associated with the coordination of employees' local course of action with the courses of action of those who have job responsibilities to administer the work process. Managers and staff of the HR
department, who have the authority to give or withhold approval, are located in a position within the sequence of employees’ implementation activities where the probity of course requests must first be assessed before work-related learning that will cost ABC Company can proceed. Probity is assessed in financial terms. That is to say, the suitability of the course requested must be warranted – managerially and administratively – before a drawdown can be made on the budget the company has set aside to pay for employees' work-related learning.

The second of the three main activities in which employees participate to implement their employee development plans is keeping track of the learning and development they have done. Employees generally see having some way to document results as they are achieved as preferable to waiting to recall them when management requires an official account. In the following passage, Doris talks about what she understands to be the responsibilities of employees in this regard.

Well, to summarize, our responsibility is to keep track of the things that we are doing so that you can fill out your [form] with some actual information that is beneficial for your manager because in the end, your manager needs to send this to HR and they look at it and need to see something that they are expecting to see. So I guess I look at it like I’m not going to make this difficult for my manager. I’m going to put in the things, the proper things, the trackable things. And I know that it’s to my benefit to meet all my goals so I’m going to put goals in there that are meetable. I’m not going to go crazy with that either because I know what I’m capable of and I know how much time I’m prepared to give...That’s just the way it is. This is what we do now so there’s no point in fighting it or making a big fuss about it. That is just not what I’ll do.
From Doris we get a sense of what is involved for employees in navigating the accountability circuit they helped to construct when they prepared their employee development plan. Doris understands employees’ responsibilities in terms that reveal to us a concern with how others will read and act upon the form.

Managers and human resource developers have their own work to do in relation to Doris and the accountability circuit she is navigating. While these will be more fully described and analyzed in the next chapter, here Doris lets us in on navigational strategies she uses to make easier her own and others’ work. One of them is to set out to do what she knows she can accomplish and has time for (a strategy in keeping with the SMART mnemonic discussed earlier). Two additional strategies depend on her knowing how to provide information that is beneficial to her manager (because it accounts for the work-related learning she has done) and that human resource developers expect to see (accounts of work-related learning that show employees meeting their balanced scorecard targets).

Rather than fight or make a fuss, Doris explains how she facilitates the operation of the accountability circuit (and her navigation through it) by providing a textual trail that others will later be able to follow in doing the work the accountability circuit requires of them. For employees like Doris, the purpose served by keeping track of learning and development has little to do with taking a moment to take pride in personal accomplishments. From tracking arises employees’ ability to respond more easily to bi-annual requests to offer up results for managerial evaluation. In this sense, the tracking work of employees is
coordinated with the evaluation work of managers and ultimately the administrative work of human resource developers.

The third of the three main activities in which employees participate to implement their employee development plans is coaching. Through coaching, employees receive formative feedback on their performance. Nolan says he appreciates coaching by his manager and describes his meetings with her as follows:

It's half an hour. So it's how are things going, are you having any frustrations, are you having any successes, is there anything...you need from me, anything? You know nine times out of ten, or ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it's like no, everything's good, but it's good to kind of have that forum too...If you need something or if you think you're falling off track you can at least kind of go to someone to get back on, to get the ship righted if you will.

Other managers do not meet with their employees at set times, preferring to coach as and when either the employee or manager feels there is a performance issue to be addressed. Shelby's manager usually takes the initiative to coach. “As [name of manager] sees something where I need to improve, he'll mention it”, she says. In Joan’s experience, the employee or manager may take the initiative. As she puts it: "if I'm having trouble with something I can bring that to her attention [with “her” referring to Joan’s manager] or if she thinks I've having trouble, she can bring it to my attention”. Yet another group of managers takes a "no news is good news” approach to coaching. As Kelly describes it:

I've had managers that have said things like if you don't hear from me, it's good news but unfortunately, they don't see that no matter how experienced the employee
is, no matter how long they’ve been doing their job, even if they do fantastic they still want to hear, you know, what they’re doing well on too. And also, everyone can improve. There’s rarely going to be someone who is perfect in every way.

Upon first reading, the passages of employees’ talk brought forward from the data I gathered may simply appear to convey messages about the diversity of ABC Company employees’ experiences with coaching. Yet also discernible across the passages is employees’ awareness that the feedback their managers give when they act as coaches and not just bosses (Gilley, Boughton, & Hoekstra, 2003) can help them with the work of keeping their performance on track. Nolan’s apparent lack of need for regular coaching suggests he is a competent navigator of the accountability circuit. However, if ever in need of help to keep his metaphorical learning and development ship upright, Nolan knows he can get it. Shelby’s manager takes the initiative to prompt course corrections by pointing out where there is room for her to improve. It does not matter to Joan who takes the initiative to prompt course corrections as long as any problems she may encounter while navigating the accountability circuit are solved. For Kelly, the purpose of coaching should not always be to make course corrections since, in her view, it is also important for managers to give employees feedback on what they are doing well. That said, her knowledge of the rarity of perfect performance engenders scepticism about the “no news is good news” approach to coaching that some managers take.
Elsewhere, Fenwick (1998) writes that employees enlisted by their employers to participate in continuous or lifelong work-related learning are constructed as “learners-in-deficit” (p. 145) never grounded by a sense of expertise or stability and always needing to learn more, better and faster. Extending this line of critical thinking, I argue that coaching is a learning deficit reduction strategy that both managers and employees are involved in executing. For the accountability circuit that employees participated in building to operate at its peak, any shorts in the circuit caused by employees’ learning deficits must be patched up. Coaching thus serves preventive and reparative purposes. It supports the coordination of any remedial work that either managers or employees deem necessary so keep the implementation of employee development plans on track.

6.4 Conclusion to Chapter 6

In this chapter, I applied the notion of an accountability circuit to the preparing and implementation steps of the work process of employee development planning. Two sets of inscriptive practices – the first associated with the preparation step and the second associated with the implementation step – are described and analyzed.

With respect to the preparation step, I show how employees participate in the building of an accountability circuit when they inscribe learning and development objectives and action plans to constitute their employee
development plans. The plan so inscribed serves as employees' personal road map for delivering work-related learning results that will count towards their balanced scorecard target.

The form used for inscribing employee development plans demands organizational literacy. In this chapter, we learn from a segment of conversation that employees intent on integrating work-related learning into their on-the-job performance need to know how: (a) to mind the SMART mnemonic’s instructions for assembling their learning and development objective; and (b) to filter the forms of work-related learning they intend to do (i.e. their action plan) through the HR department’s guidelines. In applying this knowledge, employees school themselves to measure up to a company-imposed standard for proper learning and development objectives as well as to remain within the limits of company-imposed curricular boundaries for proper action plans.

In the implementation step of the work process, we also learn there is more involved for employees navigating the accountability circuit than simply getting on to do the work-related learning they propose to do under the auspices of their employee development plans. Successful navigation depends on three activities, all of which also demand organizational literacy. The first is inscribing a course request form with a view to securing two levels of approval to do work-related learning at the company’s expense. The second is keeping track of work-related learning that is actually done through some self-designed system of
inscription that employees use to ready themselves for the bi-annual managerial call to produce a textual record of their results. The third is engaging managers to act in their role as coaches whenever it appears there is something getting in the way of employees’ progress in implementing their employee development plans. Each of these activities, mediated directly or indirectly by texts, facilitates the operation of the accountability circuit. Course request forms accomplish a two-way coordination, moving employees forward with implementing their plans while at the same time subjecting moves forward to managerial and administrative scrutiny that could lead to a tripping of the circuit when the suitability of the request is not confirmed. By tracking their results, employees coordinate the work of building up a textual record of their work-related learning accomplishments with the evaluation work that will later be required of managers when the time comes for bi-annual performance reviews. Finally, coaching coordinates the remedial work to put anyone who may have fallen off the implementation track back onto it.

In the next chapter, I turn to the reviewing and rewarding steps of the work process and an explication of the part the inscriptive practices associated with them play in the operation of the accountability circuit that employees co-construct and navigate in the preparing and implementation steps.
7. COMPLETING THE ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCUIT FOR WORK-RELATED LEARNING

The inscriptive practices associated with the preparation and implementation steps of the work process of employee development planning (Chapter 6) are different from the inscriptive practices associated with the reviewing and rewarding steps. In the preparation and implementation steps, employees set themselves up to perform as work-related learners on the page of the employee development plan form where it is specified that work-related learning will be a key result area or KRA in which they are to achieve results. The employee development plan that employees inscribe on this page guides them in their efforts to align their performance as work-related learners with company expectations as textualized by the board of directors on the balanced scorecard. These efforts include seeking managerial and HR department approval to proceed with taking a course the cost of which the company is being requested to bear. In the reviewing and rewarding steps, employees set themselves up for managerial evaluation of the results they have achieved in implementing their employee development plans. This managerial evaluation triggers subsequent determinations of pay for performance or the salary increases and bonuses that employees may receive as rewards for their work-related learning.

In this chapter, I continue to apply the notion of an accountability circuit, defined in Chapter 6 as a form of textual coordination that brings employees’ consciousnesses and actions into alignment with company expectations. The chapter begins by focusing readers’ attention on the inscriptive practices that
employees follow to document the work-related learning they have done. Employees’ inscriptions of their results mobilize and organize managers to do what the accountability circuit requires of them. It is the responsibility of managers to subject employees’ inscriptions of their results to evaluation using text-based procedures for performance rating and scoring established by the HR department. I also describe and analyze these procedures to reveal: (a) the knowledge of employees’ performance produced when managers follow the procedures; and (b) the way in which the knowledge that managers produce is subsequently used.

Once again, I return to the composite narrative account written as a conversation between an employee new to and an employee experienced in the work process of employee development planning. It is through this conversation, presented in two segments in this chapter, that readers learn how the reviewing and rewarding steps of the work process unfold. Following the pattern established in the last two chapters, I follow each segment of conversation with analysis of the inscriptive practices involved.

7.1 Performance rating as a precursor to performance reviews

In the segment of conversation that begins on the next page, the experienced employee explains to the new employee what goes on in the run-up to bi-annual performance reviews. The first of these is the interim review, typically held in June. At interim review, managers evaluate employees’ performance in implementing their employee development plans for the first half of the year. The
second of these is the annual review, typically held in December. At annual review, managers evaluate employees' performance in implementing their employee development plans for the second half of the year. As readers will learn by following the segment of conversation along, a lot of inscriptive work goes on before performance reviews take place.

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**Experienced Employee:** So, let’s talk about getting ready for performance reviews.

**New Employee:** Sounds good to me.

**Experienced Employee:** The interim performance review is your official opportunity to report to your manager on the results you achieved for the first six months of the year.

**New Employee:** How do I report on my results?

**Experienced Employee:** As June approaches, your manager will ask you to list all the courses, workshops and seminars you took and any other work-related learning you did in the first six months of the year. If you have been keeping track as you go, that is easy to do.

**New Employee:** Go on.

**Experienced Employee:** Once you’ve listed the things you’ve done, you send your form to your manager. She looks it over and may enter in some comments in response to your list. Then she rates your performance, maybe also entering in a reason why she rated you that way. After that, your manager sends the form back
to you so you can see your performance evaluation before the two of you get
together for your interim performance review meeting.

New Employee: I find out how I have been evaluated before my interim
performance review?

Experienced Employee: Typically, yes. The HR department want us to have a
“no surprises” approach to performance reviews. The idea behind that is that if
there’s ongoing communication between you and your manager throughout the
year and not just when it comes time for performance reviews, you will already
know what is going well and what is not. Performance reviews are not supposed
to be the time to find out.

New Employee: I see. I guess coaching ties in to that.

Experienced Employee: Yes, it does. As we discussed before, coaching keeps
you on track with implementing your employee development plan.

New Employee: Do you mind if we talk a bit more about performance rating?

Experienced Employee: Not at all.

New Employee: Great. How do managers come up with them?

Experienced Employee: There are two parts to performance rating. In the first
part, managers apply the HR department’s guidelines on the areas of learning and
development the company recognizes and rewards to the results listed on their
employees’ forms. I can give you an example.

New Employee: Okay, good.
**Experienced Employee:** Well, over the last six months I took an accounting course at the university and an in-house seminar on one of our new products. To gear up for my interim review, I would enter these into the “results achieved” blank on my employee development plan form. When my manager sees that I completed an accounting course and an in-house seminar, she would apply the HR department’s guidelines and allocate 32 credit hours to me.

**New Employee:** Why would she allocate 32 hours?

**Experienced Employee:** Thirty is the number of credit hours that a course falling into the Education category of the guidelines is worth. The Education category is for courses the company pays for you to take from a college, university or other educational institution. An in-house seminar on a new product falls into the Product and Technical Training category and is worth two credit hours. Thirty credit hours plus two credit hours equals 32 credit hours.

**New Employee:** So, in the first part of performance rating, your manager adds up how many credit hours that you earned according to the category of work-related learning in which she has put each of the results that you listed on your form.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right.

**New Employee:** What is the second part of the rating?

**Experienced Employee:** In the second part, my manager equates the grand total number of credit hours I earned into a rating on a scale of 1 to 4 using the HR department’s performance rating key.

**New Employee:** Is a 4 better than a 1?
Experienced Employee: Yes it is. The higher your performance is rated, the better. Sticking with the example of the accounting course and in-house seminar that I took, 32 credit hours equates to a performance rating of 3.

New Employee: A 3 out of 4 is not bad.

Experienced Employee: No, it’s not. A 3 means I am meeting the company’s expectations. A 4 means I am exceeding them. If I were to get a 1, I would not be meeting the company’s expectations while if I were to get a 2, I would have been rated as working towards meeting the company’s expectations.

New Employee: I see. I was wondering what those numbers meant.

Experienced Employee: Since the rating of 3 that I would get for the accounting course and in-house seminar applies to my interim performance review, we have a way to go before knowing whether I will actually meet the balanced scorecard target by the time my annual review rolls around in December.

New Employee: Still, a performance rating of 3 is a good sign.

Experienced Employee: Yes it is. It shows that I am making progress towards meeting the balanced scorecard target by the end of the year.

New Employee: Now that you have explained the interim performance review to me, I want to see if I can explain to you what goes on at the annual performance review.

Experienced Employee: Okay.

New Employee: As year-end approaches, your manager will ask you to fill in your results achieved for the second half of the year. Once you have entered your
results you send the form to your manager. She will read the results you entered and may enter in some comments in reply. She will also use the HR department’s guidelines to figure out how many credit hours each of your results is worth and the performance rating key to equate the total number of credit hours that she added up for you to a performance rating between 1 and 4.

**Experienced Employee:** You’ve got it.

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The topic of the next segment of conversation I present in this chapter is performance review meetings. Here I break in with discussion and analysis of the inscriptive practices that pave the way for them.

Employees set themselves up for managerial evaluation through inscriptive practices that make the results they have achieved in their efforts to perform as work-related learners textually visible (McCoy, 1998). Textual visibility is a notion that McCoy imported from the work of critical accounting scholars (e.g. Hopwood, 1990; Miller, 1994) for application in her institutional ethnography of “how accounting texts mediate the reshaping of managerial practice in the educational sector” (p. 395). It is a notion that I similarly import into this institutional ethnography to draw attention to the way the “results achieved” blank on the employee development plan form establishes the terms in which employees are to make the work-related learning they have done managerially known so that it can, in turn, be managerially evaluated.
No other term has the conceptual currency (Smith, D.E., 1990b) – or value in relating employees' work-related learning to the requirements of the accountability circuit in a manner that facilitates its operation – as “results achieved”. The term simultaneously stands in for as well as obscures the wide range of employees’ actual experiences of participating in work-related learning to implement their employee development plans. Sam, who is taking courses towards a professional designation, spoke enthusiastically about the progress he is making all the while working full-time. Similarly, Shelly, who participates in Toastmasters International™ meetings over lunch, told me she is glad to be putting in time to become a better public speaker. There is no place on the employee development form, however, for employees like Sam and Shelly to account for their experiences of work-related learning in terms like those that they did with me. The employee development plan form imposes on Sam, Shelly and all other participants in the work process of employee development planning the accountability to inscribe the work-related learning they have done in terms of “results achieved” (Smith, D.E., 2005). Putting it another way, the problem of how work-related learning is to be entered into the accountability circuit so that managers will recognize it as evidence of employees’ performance is solved by the “results achieved” blank on the employee development plan form. Employees are interrogated to make textually visible and, therefore, real (Jackson, 1993) for the purposes of managerial evaluation a view of their work-related learning that is limited to “results achieved”. In facilitating the textual visibility of, and, therefore, managers’ assignment of reality to inscriptions of ‘results achieved’, employees
set their managers up to follow established performance rating and scoring procedures. Managers follow these procedures once employees provide textual evidence of their performance in the manner in which it has been prescribed that it is to be seen and known. Provision of this textual evidence completes the core component of the accountability circuit which employees had a hand in building, thereby setting managers and human resource developers up for what it is they have to do to complete the rest of the accountability circuit.

In the segment of conversation presented above, we also learn about performance rating from the examples of the accounting course and in-house seminar that the experienced employee shared with the new employee. The experienced employee explains the part that company texts (two in particular) play in coordinating sequences of actions by which her manager reduces inscriptions of ‘results achieved’ to a quantitative indicator of performance referred to as a performance rating.

The first text is the same one that employees refer to in the implementation step of the work process in order to satisfy themselves that the work-related learning they plan to do falls within the curricular boundaries the company has established (Chapter 6). In the reviewing step, a filtering effect is also discernible when managers refer to the HR department’s guidelines in two coordinated sequences of action. In the first sequence, managers filter employees’ “results achieved” through the HR department’s guidelines in order to fit them into
established categories of work-related learning in which the HR department has determined employees can earn credit hours towards their balanced scorecard target. Using the experienced employee’s examples, the manager filters the accounting course into the Education category and the in-house seminar into the Product and Technical Training category. In the second coordinated sequence of action, managers allocate a predetermined number of credit hours specified for each category of work-related learning to each “result achieved”. After each categorized result is allocated its corresponding number of credit hours, managers add up the total number of credit hours of work-related learning that the employee has earned towards their balanced scorecard target. Again, using the accounting course and in-house seminar as examples filtered respectively into the Education and Product and Technical Training categories, the total number of allocable credit hours is 32.

Once the total number of credit hours has been added up, another text, referred to as a performance rating key, comes into play as a coordinator of a third sequence of managerial actions. The performance rating key provides the interpretive schema (Smith, D.E., 1990a) or means of assembling and providing coherence to the array of accounts of employees’ work-related learning that managers across ABC Company are required by the accountability circuit to work up in the run-up to performance reviews. Using the performance rating key, managers equate the total number of credit hours their employees have to a rating on an ascending scale of 1 to 4. The textually coordinated sequence of actions by
which managers arrive at a performance rating paves the way for interim and annual performance review meetings. During performance review meetings (which the new and experienced employee talk about next), two additional textually coordinated sequences of managerial action lead to the production of two performance scores. The first of these scores makes it possible to complete the accountability circuit for work-related learning on an individual basis and the second makes it possible to complete the accountability circuit for work-related learning on a corporate basis.

7.2 Performance scorekeeping and the conduct of performance reviews

Interim and annual performance reviews are important milestones in the work process of employee development planning. They mark two occasions during the year when employees formally check in with their managers on how well they have performed in implementing their employee development plans. In the segment of conversation that begins below, readers learn about performance scorekeeping. Performance scorekeeping is done in textually coordinated sequences of action (the fourth and fifth to be analyzed in this chapter) in which managers participate as the reviewing step of the work process converges with the rewarding step. As informants talked with me about what goes on at performance review meetings, top-of-mind for them was the need to know about rewards for their efforts to perform as work-related learners. The conversational segment that follows reflects this need to know.
**Experienced Employee:** Performance reviews give you a chance to talk with your manager about where you are in implementing your employee development plan.

**New Employee:** Do I find out about my raise at the same time?

**Experienced Employee:** What you find out is your overall score on the learning development KRA and the other KRAs that pertain to your job.

**New Employee:** You mean my performance rating?

**Experienced Employee:** No, your performance rating factors into your performance score but it is not the same thing.

**New Employee:** Okay, so what is the score?

**Experienced Employee:** Let us go back to the examples of the accounting course and in-house seminar.

**New Employee:** Okay.

**Experienced Employee:** We already discussed how being able to list those on my employee development plan form would lead my manager to allocate 32 credit hours to me and then to equate that 32 hours to a 3 according to the performance rating key.

**New Employee:** Right.
Experienced Employee: Well, to calculate a score for my performance against the learning and development KRA, my manager would once again refer to the performance rating key and do some simple math.

New Employee: What do you mean?

Experienced Employee: She would multiply my performance rating of 3 by the weight attached to the KRA, which is a standard 10 per cent for everyone, to give me a score of 30 points. She would do the same with my performance ratings for the other KRAs that pertain to my job.

New Employee: So you multiply each performance rating by its corresponding weight and then add up an overall performance score.

Experienced Employee: Right. Your manager then sends your overall performance score to the HR department for entering mid-year and year-end salary increases into the payroll.

New Employee: What about our bonuses at year-end?

Experienced Employee: They are only payable at year-end, after the board of directors finds out the company’s overall score for its performance against the targets on the balanced scorecard.

New Employee: How does the board of directors score the company?

Experienced Employee: It scores the company with the help of information the HR department provides. After annual performance reviews, you and your manager are to sign off on your employee development plan form and send a copy of it to the HR department. The HR department uses the forms to figure out the average number of credit hours put in by the workforce as a whole. This
average is the score for the company’s overall performance against the learning and development KRA of the balanced scorecard.

**New Employee:** So the company score is what determines bonuses.

**Experienced Employee:** Yes, for salary increases, your individual score matters; for bonuses, the company’s score matters.

**New Employee:** I see. Okay. Is there anything else about performance review meetings that you want to tell me?

**Experienced Employee:** There’s just one more thing. Once annual reviews are completed, the whole process starts over again with the board of directors deciding on what ABC Company’s strategic objectives, key initiatives and targets for the next year will be in the four major categories of performance covered by our balanced scorecard. The setting of the performance target for learning and development brings us right back to square one, preparing our employee development plans for the next year.

**New Employee:** One year’s cycle of employee development planning ends and the next one begins.

**Experienced Employee:** That’s right.

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The foregoing segment of conversation draws attention to managers’ participation in performance scorekeeping. The experienced employee explains to the new employee that the single-digit performance rating that managers gave
their employees in preparation for performance review meetings is used to calculate individual performance scores at performance review meetings. Individual performance scores are the product of a simple mathematical equation (\( \text{performance rating} \times \text{standardized weight of the learning and development KRA} = \text{score for performing as a work-related learner} \)). In the equation, the reductionist logic that makes it possible for employees’ performance to be made known in the objectified (i.e. quantified) terms of a performance rating in the reviewing step of the work process is extended to the rewarding step. Performance scores kept during performance review meetings are then submitted to the HR department so that due and payable salary increases can be reflected in ABC Company’s payroll.

The managerial activity of arriving at individual performance scores in the rewarding step of the work process also marks the completion of the component of the accountability circuit that employees helped to build when they prepared their employee development plans in the first place. That is to say, the textually coordinated sequence of actions to arrive at individual performance scores allows managers to produce knowledge that is useful in differentiating employees who have met or exceeded corporate expectations from those who have not.

When it comes to completing the accountability circuit on a corporate as opposed to individual basis, the HR department relies on evidence that the collective workforce has met company expectations as the board of directors textualized them on the balanced scorecard. The HR department draws this
evidence from the completed and signed-off employee development plan forms that managers submit after annual performance reviews and involves calculating an average number of credit hours of work-related learning that all ABC Company employees put in during the year.

Whether on an individual or corporate basis, performance scorekeeping produces knowledge that triggers pay for performance. Here, I can connect the point of analysis I am making about the effect of performance scorekeeping in triggering pay for performance to a point of analysis that I made in a previous chapter. In other words, whereas knowledge of the prospect of pay for performance helps keep employees’ lines of sight trained on the balanced scorecard’s performance expectations (Chapter 5), performance scores provide a measure of how focused their vision is warranted to have been.

Up to this point in Chapter 7, I have discussed and analyzed the text-based performance rating and scorekeeping procedures that managers follow to complete the accountability circuit for work-related learning on an individual and corporate basis. Before concluding this chapter, I offer one more section in which I explore the general ways in which the interests of ABC Company and its employees align in relations of ruling (Grace, Zurawski, & Sinding, forthcoming) which sustain employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as an effect of performance scorekeeping.
7.3 The ruling effects of performance scorekeeping: Deciphering the speech genres of employee of choice and employer of choice

The general ways in which the interests of ABC Company and its employees align in relations of ruling which sustain employees' participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning stems from the knowledge produced by performance scores. Performance scores numerically represent the extent to which employees have met, individually and collectively, company expectations of their performance as work-related learners. Higher performance scores trigger more pay for performance than lower performance scores. They also strengthen the arrangement of two “configurations of meaning” (Smith, D.E., 1999, p. 120) or speech genres that have emerged in the sphere of activity associated with the work process of employee development planning to socially organize knowledge about a particular kind of employee and a particular kind of employer. The first speech genre, employee of choice, organizes and standardizes the idea that an employee willing and able to meet or exceed company expectations of their participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning is more valuable to and valued by ABC Company than an employee who is not\textsuperscript{35}. The second speech genre, employer of choice, organizes and standardizes the idea that a company which makes its employees' participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning a priority is one that people looking for a job want to work for and one at which people it already employs want to stay.

\textsuperscript{35} This connotation of the speech genre is of empirical interest to me. There are other connotations circulating in spheres of activity not associated with the work process (e.g. the sphere of activity in which reducing employee absenteeism is a managerial objective) that should be noted insofar as they organize and standardize other ideas about ABC Company employees of choice.
In this section, I decipher the speech genres starting with the meaning that employee informants make of them. The purpose of deciphering the speech genres is to reveal the ruling effects of their circulation as configurations of meaning that have emerged in the sphere of activity associated with the work process of employee development planning.

According to Deanna, ABC Company “is looking for employees of choice, so people that are knowledgeable and that are willing to continue to learn and continue to know new things.” In a similar vein, Kelly comments that employees of choice “work hard, want to learn [and] want to develop.” They are the kind of employees she says her employer wants to attract and retain because they accept participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as part of their jobs. This acceptance comes naturally to Kelly who reflects on her first two years with ABC Company as follows:

When I came here initially…there were certain courses that I had to take essentially to meet the requirements of my job. So I started right away taking a course, and then I took another course, so I probably took four classes within the first two years at [ABC Company]. That never bothered me, I always felt like it was part of my job to take the classes and…it could only help me in the long run to do my job better.

Employees who do not accept participation in work-related learning as part of their jobs are problematic for Kelly.

I don’t necessarily see [ABC Company] as owing me a career for the rest of my life…I think that’s something you to have to earn, that career. And I think people who have the mindset where they come in and just assume well I can just stay in my job and work here
forever and never have to grow or change or really meet the expectations of my job, that’s where you’ll run into problems.

To Nolan, an employee of choice is someone “who kind of embraces a similar value” to that which ABC Company attaches to work-related learning. As he puts it:

> Obviously they’ve said in their [employee development plan form] that we value professional development. Well, I think they would appreciate far more an employee that comes in and is energetic about that than someone who comes in and finds it blatantly appalling.

Like Nolan, Monique also points to the employee development form as an “obvious way” in which ABC Company gets the message across that an employee of choice is “someone willing to learn”. It is a message she says she gets “over and over” because the importance of employees’ participation in work-related learning is “talked about all the time” at ABC Company.

Being able to display what Tom acknowledges as a “can-do” attitude towards continuous or lifelong work-related learning is an attribute of an employee of choice. The reward for “taking some personal ownership”, “showing initiative” or more colloquially “taking the bull by the horns” (to use other employee informants’ descriptions of what having a can-do attitude can incline them to do) are more than pay for performance. Other employees echoed the earlier-quoted comments of Kelly in connecting a willingness to conduct themselves as employees of choice to the prospect of advancing in their career either inside or outside ABC Company. Shelby recalls being “blown away” by the job
opportunities for which the HR department intimated she could put herself in the running if she allowed one course that she was seeking approval to take to lead to another, and another and then another. Dana also sees nearly infinite opportunities to advance in her career by being willing to put in the time and effort to do work-related learning that the regulatory text of the balanced scorecard requires. “It’s almost like the sky is the limit,” she says. Deanna, although less effusive than Dana, nonetheless echoes her sentiment about career prospects for the employee of choice. Work-related learning gives employees the opportunity “to work their way up,” Deanna says. “You can do [it], especially if you are willing to participate in lifelong learning. There’s no reason that you can’t.” On this point, one last quote from Sam is illustrative. As an ABC Company employee, Sam says he has “learned that the more I can learn and get knowledge, the better I am going to be in my job, and not just my job here…If I had to go somewhere else, it would be an easier transition.”

In sum, an employee of choice is disposed to participating in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as a routine part of their job. The choice that employees make to participate is made not only with recognition of the strategic importance that their employer attaches to work-related learning but also with recognition that participation in work-related learning is good for career advancement.
In contrast, an employer of choice is one endeavouring to stand out from others waging the so-called “war for talent” by promoting itself as a learning organization (Chapter 1). The term was coined in 1997 by researchers with McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm. Since then, the term has “reverberated throughout the business world” (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001; p. 1) echoing a widespread view that New Economy employers will have to fight to attract and retain employees with the knowledge and skills they need to be competitive because the demand for such employees outstrips supply. In touting opportunities for employees to routinely participate in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as something different and desirable about the employment experience it offers as compared to the employment experience other employers offer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2004), ABC Company is endeavouring to make advances in the war for talent.

Employee informants know that ABC Company wants to be and to be seen as an employer of choice. The company has an image it wants to portray says Monique. It wants a workforce made up of “educated employees”. To Shelby, an employer of choice is one that supports her “desire to learn”. One of the things she looks for in a prospective employer is whether it will provide such support. Nolan says he “knows ABC Company always wants to be the employer of choice” and that support for employee development is “a big part” of what it takes to be one.
Informants who are managers and human resource developers link ABC Company’s efforts at image building to the war for talent in terms that are more explicit. According to Rhonda, a manager in charge of one of ABC Company’s branches, offering an “awesome” benefits package that includes employer-supported learning and development is part of what defines an employer of choice. After commenting that ABC Company “is challenged finding the right people for some positions”, Peter, a manager working at head office, says that obtaining the status of an employer of choice means “the workforce will see us as the best employer to work for in the province.” Peter also echoes what Rhonda had to say about the importance of including “education, development and training” as “part of the package that’s going to attract more people to remain with us.” Another branch manager, John, says he is “sold on” what ABC Company is doing to distinguish itself as an employer of choice. In his words:

I guess employer of choice to me would mean a company that can find the employee of choice and move them on through their, well, learning and development is a key thing. Like I believe in it for others and I believe in it for myself as well.

While manager informants indicate they know that employer-supported learning and development as part of the company’s benefits package is one of the things that distinguishes ABC Company from other employers and thereby gives it a leg up in the war for talent, informants who are human resource developers were more declarative. Ivana, for instance, was “adamant” about ABC Company’s need for skilled and knowledgeable people to “drive” the company’s performance in line with expectations the board of directors textualized on the balanced
scorecard. In her words:

We want our employees to be the very best they can be and we want to invest in them...That’s going to drive all the other results that we want. That’s going to help us to continue, or hopefully continue to be, an employer of choice because we’re looked upon as investing in our people.

Beverly, another human resource developer, also sees ABC Company’s investments in the work-related learning of its employees as an attraction and retention strategy. “Oh my god, the fight for talent, we’re already seeing that” says Beverly. That is why she says it is “critical” for ABC Company to be an employer of choice. On what being an employer of choice means, Beverly says:

We want people to see ABC Company and say I want to work there. I’ve heard good things about that organization. I want to work there. We want to be able to attract and retain our employees. We also want our employees to be very valuable so people say, oh, previous[ly] ABC Company hired her, she’s got to be good...We want our employees to be well-trained and marketable and we tell them, you learn, we pay, and you’re going to be marketable. We may not be able to say you’re going to be employed until you’re 60 here but you know what, they’ll be employed somewhere. That’s our promise.

There are four points that I want to make about the above quote. First, Beverly reinforces what employee and manager informants had to say about the employer of choice image that ABC Company is cultivating. Second, Beverly indicates her employer’s strategy to attract and retain employees includes making a promise of employability in return for employees’ (paid) performance as a work-related learner. Employees whose performance scores differentiate them as employees of choice are more likely to see this promise fulfilled than employees whose
performance scores do not so differentiate them. Third, Beverly does not see losing employees to other companies as a knock against her employer’s strategy to attract and retain employees. In her view, even if a current employee decides to go out and look for another job, other employers’ recognition that ABC Company employees are well-trained turns what might otherwise be construed as a negative reflection on the company’s image into a positive one. Fourth, it appears there is a substitute for the promise of long-term, full-time employment with a single employer as a feature of the so-called standard employment relationship of the Old Economy (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1996). The substitute promise is of employability (Chapter 1) under new terms that ABC Company has established as a New Economy employer faced with the challenges of coping with and capitalizing on the conditions of contemporary capitalism. In this regard, the terms of employment in the New Economy provide mutual benefit but of a different kind than the terms of employment in the Old Economy. The difference lies in the stake employees are expected to take in their own and their company’s future competitiveness in the markets for their company’s products and services as well as the market for their labour by conducting themselves as employees of choice. For its part, ABC Company, as a combatant in the war for talent, singles itself out as an employer of choice on the basis of the priority it attaches to employees’ participation in continuous lifelong work-related learning as a routine requirement of the job. Evidence to help cultivate the image is provided by performance scores produced as outcomes of the completion of the accountability circuit and in order to substantiate the
respective returns on investment that employees of choice and their employer of choice are making in continuous or lifelong work-related learning.

7.4 Conclusion to Chapter 7

In this chapter, I apply the notion of an accountability circuit introduced in Chapter 6 to the reviewing and rewarding steps of the work process of employee development planning rather than the preparing and implementing steps. With respect to the reviewing step in the work process, I first discussed and analyzed what goes on in the run-up to bi-annual performance reviews and then the conduct of performance reviews themselves.

In the run-up to performance reviews, employees are required to inscribe on their employee development form the work-related learning they have done in the manner in which it has been determined it should be made textually visible to their managers – as results achieved. Managers are thus set up to follow the HR department’s performance rating and scoring procedures.

The HR department’s performance scoring and rating procedures organize and mobilize managers to complete the accountability circuit for work-related learning. There are two parts to completing the accountability circuit. In the first part, or the reviewing step in the work process, managers produce a quantitative indicator of employees’ performance in text-mediated and coordinated sequences of actions by which employees’ inscriptions of their results achieved are reduced.
to a numerical performance rating. Managerial production of this numerical way of knowing paves the way for performance review meetings as the two formal occasions during the year when ABC Company employees check-in with their managers about implementation of their employee development plans. In the second part, or the rewarding step in the work process, managers participate in additional text-mediated and coordinated sequences of actions that support them in following established procedures that lead to the keeping of two performance scores – one that completes the accountability circuit on an individual basis and the other that completes the accountability circuit on a corporate basis.

Performance scores do more than mark the completion of the accountability circuit for work-related learning on an individual and corporate basis. In Chapter 7, I also traced the utility of performance scores in strengthening the speech genres of employee of choice and employer of choice. Both speech genres have emerged in the sphere of activity associated with the work process of employee development planning to socially organize knowledge about a particular kind of employee and a particular kind of employer. By deciphering the usage of each of the speech genres, I discovered an alignment of employee and employer interests in sustaining employees' participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning. This alignment is a ruling effect of the derivation of performance scores as numerical representations of the extent to which employees individually and collectively meet company expectations of their performance as work-related learners.
8. CONCLUSION

There is a lot of work to the work of work-related learning. In this dissertation, I explored what this work involves with special attention to explicating the part that texts play in coordinating the activities by which the continuous or lifelong work-related learning of employees is officially planned, implemented, reviewed and rewarded in the administration of the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management.

I reported the discoveries that support the arguments I made in Chapter 1 in a general pattern. Readers followed along a conversation in which an experienced employee of ABC Company explained the work process to a new employee about to go through it for the first time. I presented the conversation in segments in Chapters to 5 to 7 with subsequent discussion and analysis on a segment-by-segment basis.

My aims in this final chapter are three-fold. First, I want to summarize the discoveries I reported in relation to the arguments I made about the social organization of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning. This aim will be fulfilled in the first section of this chapter in which I provide a straightforward recap of Chapters 5 to 7. Second, I want to draw implications from my discoveries. I fulfill this aim in the second section of this chapter by discussing: (a) the work process of employee development planning as a level of
penetration into the lifeworld (see supra note 15 for a discussion of this term) of employees; (b) make suggestions about how to reform the work process in democratizing ways; and (c) outline the contributions of my study to the theory and practice of HRD. Finally, I want to offer some personal reflections on the idealized type of companies known as learning organizations. The third and final section of this chapter and of this dissertation fulfills this aim.

8.1 Summary of the study’s discoveries

Relations of ruling mediated by a complex of texts upon which the administration of the work process of employee development planning depends accomplish the social organization of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning. The seminal regulatory text is the balanced scorecard. In changing the pattern of visibility of work-related learning at ABC Company, the balanced scorecard establishes the overarching framework within which and against which employees’ performance as work-related learners is managed. Within this overarching framework, work-related learning becomes visible and known to employees as a requirement of their jobs.

The employee development planning form that the HR department of ABC Company provides is vital to the organization and coordination of the activities in which employees are to participate as they respond to the job requirement that the balanced scorecard makes visible and known to them. Via the first page of the form, the balanced scorecard reaches with regulatory force and effect into the
local settings of work where employees begin to participate in the work process. On this page and as a prerequisite to taking the first step in the work process, employees respond to the invitation to translate the company’s strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people into personal terms. In the translation, the company’s strategic objective becomes individually relevant to and actionable by employees. Moreover, knowing that the balanced scorecard system of performance management is backed up by a pay administration system that offers a financial incentive to perform in expected way, helps employees keep the company’s strategic objective to employ skilled and knowledgeable people top of mind.

After activating the form’s first page, employees move on to the one on which the company message that work-related learning will be a job requirement appears as a key result area or KRA attached to which are generic performance standards. This page of the form provides for the preparation of employee development plans with two common elements – a learning and development objective and action plan. Employee development plans with these elements serve as personal road maps for delivering work-related learning results that will count towards the target number of hours of work-related learning that employees are expected to put in during the year according to the balanced scorecard. To prepare their employee development plans, employees follow inscriptive practices designed to ensure they mind: (a) the instructions the form page gives for how to assemble a proper learning and development objective; and (b) the boundaries of
the work-related learning curriculum within which their action plans are to remain.

The step of the work process that follows the preparation step is the implementation step. Implementation involves employees in the activities of navigating the accountability circuit they helped to build. These include: (a) actually doing the work-related learning they planned; (b) keeping track of the work-related learning they have done; and (c) keeping on track with implementation activities. These activities, mediated directly or indirectly by texts, facilitate employees’ navigation through the accountability circuit by coordinating their doings with the doings of managers and human resource developers who have their own responsibilities to support the operation of the accountability circuit. More specifically, course request forms accomplish a two-way coordination that moves employees forward with implementing their plans while at the same time subjecting their moves forward to scrutiny by managers and human resource developers. Similarly, by tracking results achieved, employees coordinate the work they do to build up a textual record of their work-related learning accomplishments with the evaluation work that managers and the administrative work that human resource developers will later be required to do. Finally, through seeking out or otherwise participating in coaching, managers and employees together coordinate remedial work that employees who have fallen off the implementation track may need to back on to it.

The extent to which employees have kept on track with implementing their
employee development plans is determined in the reviewing and rewarding steps of the work process. There is a significant difference between the inscriptive practices associated with these steps and the inscriptive practices associated with the preparation and implementation steps. Whereas in the preparation and implementation steps, employees are setting themselves up to perform as work-related learners, in the reviewing and rewarding steps they are setting themselves up for managerial evaluation of the results they have achieved from their efforts to perform.

Twice a year, in the run-up to performance reviews, managers ask their employees to fill in a blank on their employee development plan form reserved for them to inscribe their results. It is in these terms, and only these terms, that employees’ work-related learning is to be managerially known so that it can, in turn, be managerially evaluated.

Employees’ inscriptions of their results organize and mobilize managers to subject the results that employees have inscribed as their work-related learning achievements to evaluation using text-based procedures for performance rating and scoring established by the HR department. Managers rate employees’ results in three coordinating sequences of action. In the first of these, managers filter employees’ results through the HR department guidelines that establish the boundaries of the company’s work-related learning curriculum in order to determine in which category each one fits. In the second of these, managers
allocate a predetermined number of credit hours assigned to work-related learning that employees have done in each category recognized by the company’s curriculum to each result so that a total number of credit hours earned towards their balanced scorecard during the period under review can be added up. In the third of these, managers activate a performance rating key to equate the total number of credit hours each of their employees earned to a performance rating an ascending scale of 1 to 4.

Once managers rate their employees’ performance, it is time for performance review meetings. In these meetings, managers initiate two additional sequences of action coordinated by texts that are used in keeping two performance scores – one that completes the accountability circuit for work-related on an individual basis and the other that produces the evidence the HR department needs to complete the accountability circuit for work-related learning on a corporate basis. Performance scores trigger pay for performance in the form of bi-annual salary increases and annual bonuses that employees who have aligned their consciousnesses and actions to perform as the company expects may receive as rewards for their work-related learning.

Performance scores also produce knowledge that is useful in differentiating employees who have met or exceeded corporate expectations from those who have not. Higher performance scores not only trigger more pay for performance than lower performance scores, they also strengthen two speech genres that have
emerged and are circulating in the sphere of activities associated with the work process of employee development planning. These speech genres socially organize knowledge about a particular kind of employee (i.e. an employee of choice) and a particular kind of employer (i.e. an employer of choice). An employee of choice is disposed to participating in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as a routine part of their job. An employer of choice promotes employees’ routine participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as a unique aspect of the employment experience. In deciphering the usage of each of the speech genres, I revealed their ruling effects. In other words, the speech genres strengthen the alignment of employees’ and employers’ interests in sustaining employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning because of the respective returns on investment that sustained participation brings. Figure 8.1 on the next page concludes this section. The figure depicts the social organization of employees’ knowledge of the work of work-related learning.
Figure 8.1
The social organization of employees' knowledge of the work of work-related learning

The ‘New Economy’
Theme of Learning in HRD

Balanced Scorecard

Employee Development Plan Form
Employees’ Inscriptions
What the Balanced Scorecard Means in My Job
Objective and Action Plan
Results Achieved

Performance Reviews

Sequences of Managerial Actions
Filtering results into categories
Assigning credit hours
Rating performance
Keeping individual performance scores
Keeping corporate performance score
8.2 Drawing implications drawn from the study’s discoveries

In this section, I discuss the implications of the discoveries I made by investigating the operationalization of the theme of learning in HRD through the work process of employee development planning. In particular, I: (a) discuss the distinctive level of penetration into the lifeworld of employees that the theme of learning in HRD represents; (b) suggest interventions into the relations of ruling demystified by my study with the goal of advancing the social justice agenda of HRD; (c) outline the contributions of my study to HRD theory and practice; and (d) share my personal reflections on learning organizations.

8.2.1 The level of penetration into the lifeworld of employees

The contention that discourses of work-related learning, of which the theme of learning in HRD is a part, “may represent an unparalleled [emphasis added] level of penetration by the relations of ruling into the lifeworld of human communities” (Bratton et al., 2004, p. 165-166) is a bold one. The four scholars who make it do so near the end of a critical text they wrote as an alternative to those which “tend to be detached from the lived experiences of working people, and uncritical of human resource development (HRD) views of learning in the workplace” (Bratton et al., 2004, p. 8). While the four scholars stop short of contending that the level of penetration actually is unparalleled, their “discussions of perhaps the broadest range of literatures to be collected in one place on the field of workplace learning” (Martin, D., 2003, p. xi) persuasively build the case that it is of a distinctive kind and quality. In this subsection, I explain why I believe my study’s discoveries further strengthen the four scholars’ case.
The work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management represents a level of penetration into the lifeworld of employees that is of a *distinctive kind* because the ruling ideas of the particular neo-liberal moment in the history of corporate capitalism during which it is being reached are reflected in its design and administration. The work process exemplifies the transformation that employees of companies making a learning turn in their approach to adult education in the workplace are currently living through. As part of this transformation, the powers and machinery of ruling (DeVault, 2011, online) have elevated work-related learning to new heights. At this elevation, work-related learning is no longer known as something packaged up mainly as training offered periodically by employers to employees. Instead, work-related learning is, as an employee informant I quoted earlier (Chapter 4) put it, “the way of the world” in which “it’s just good business to have the best, smartest people working for you”.

The social organization of employees’ knowledge of the world in which it is just good business for companies to have the best and smartest people working for them is accomplished in text-mediated relations of ruling deeply informed by employers’ belief in the need to shift the dynamics of capital accumulation (Smith, D.E., 1999b, 2005). The shift in dynamics is away from a heavy reliance on the accumulation of physical and financial forms of capital to a greater reliance on the accumulation of human forms of capital (i.e. employees’ knowledge and skills) as a source of competitive advantage in an economy reorganizing according to the
tenets of neo-liberalism. Readers will recall from Chapter 1 that in recent years the theme of learning has emerged as part of this reorganization to widen and transform the idea of HRD as a core and commonplace rather than peripheral and intermittent part of employees’ on-the-job activities. Rather than study the theme of learning in HRD in the abstract, or detached from the lived experience of working people, I used institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry for entering directly into the lifeworld of employees. Their experiences provided me with the micro-level entry point to explore how the theme of learning in HRD as a macro-level ruling idea manifests itself in the local settings where the work of work-related learning gets done.

The work of work-related learning draws employees into text-mediated relations of ruling permitting their employer to reach a distinctive level of penetration into their lifeworld. From the start of the work process when company expectations of employees’ performance as work-related learners become individually relevant to and actionable by them (Chapter 5) to the end when employees’ individual activities are rendered corporately relevant as performance scores (Chapter 7), employees are active in sustaining the relations of ruling into which they are drawn. Pay for performance provides an incentive for them to comply with company expectations. However, beyond the promise of financial rewards, employability and career advancement are further benefits realizable by employees whose performance differentiates them as employees of choice with the right disposition towards meeting the work-related learning requirements of
their jobs. To employers interested in attracting and retaining employees of choice, financial rewards are a small price to pay for the opportunity to earn further returns on investment from the cultivation of an image as an employer of choice known for making employees’ routine participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning a company priority. Employers of choice are purported to be in a better position to successfully attract and retain the skilled and knowledgeable employees they need to conduct business in the New Economy than other employers.

Thus, it is the alignment of employer and employee interests in employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning (for different but intersecting reasons) that gives the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management its distinctive quality. The distinctiveness arises from the accomplishments of employees’ involvement with the texts upon which the administration of the work process depends. While imposed from the top, down in the local settings where the work of work-related learning gets done, employees demonstrate the organizational literacy to school themselves in following the inscriptive practices that keep them within the curricular and procedural boundaries of the work process. The circumstances of this schooling work are not entirely of their choosing but most employees choose to do it rather than suffer the consequences to which those who do not align their consciousnesses and actions with company expectations expose themselves. In this regard, my study
resonates with the explorations that both Jackson and Darville (Chapter 3) have made into the dimensions and implications of the textualization of work in contemporary workplaces. In enacting the work process in the manner in which their employer intends, employees demonstrate their organizational literacy to comply with the requirements of a work process that stands over and against them (Darville, 1995) to organize and mobilize their participation in work-related learning on terms they did not establish but to which they are held responsible and accountable. Putting it another way, the degree to which employees of choice really can choose what and how to learn in relation to their work is called into question by my discoveries. Accordingly, I believe my study adds a new and nuanced layer of understanding to the critiques of work processes such as the one I investigated for this dissertation. These critiques are mainly concerned with the problems of employer control over employees and the contributions of performance management towards ensuring employees conduct themselves in line with their employers’ objectives (Bach, 2005). I certainly do not discount these problems. However, to see them as inevitable consequences of the instrumental exploitation by which the interests of capital continue to triumph over those of labour would be to deny what my study has illuminated. An ostensibly softer and gentler form of control has emerged to draw employees into relations of ruling that they are motivated to sustain because of the apparent alignment of company interests with their own personal wishes to do what is necessary to receive pay for their performance as work-related learners (Grace, Zurawski, & Sinding, forthcoming).
Seemingly, as participants in the work process, employees have the flexibility to chart their own work-related learning course in return for taking on the individual responsibility and accountability to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to do their New Economy jobs properly (Chapter 6). Along the way, however, they encounter procedural and curricular boundaries that school them to manoeuvre in ways that render them answerable to the requirements of the complex of texts upon which the administration of the work process depends. This complex of texts privileges employers’ interests in human capital generation over employees’ own aspirations for what continuous or lifelong learning they might wish to pursue in relation to their work. While succumbing to the allure of financial rewards, employability and career advancement may be pragmatic and strategic things for employees of the New Economy to do, doing these things puts the flexibility they told me they welcomed and appreciated at serious risk. While the work process offers employees many work-related learning options, corporately, they can exercise them only if they acquire and then rely upon their organizational literacy to effect the work process in employer-defined ways.

In the main, employees choose not to resist the softer and gentler form of control to which they become parties because they are instrumentally motivated by their interest in pay for performance, employability and career advancement to do the work of work-related learning as their employer intends it to be done. Thus, in so far as the work process appeals to these instrumental interests, thereby providing the impetus for employees to align their consciousnesses and actions
with company expectations, it can be said the theme of learning in HRD has widened and transformed the scope of employees’ responsibility to participate in continuous or lifelong work-related learning as a condition of employment in the New Economy. From the standpoint of employees, however, to be employed in the New Economy is to take on the widened and transformed scope of responsibility without the freedom to choose how to exercise it.

### 8.2.2 Suggestions for interventions into the relations of ruling

In Chapter 2, I introduced social justice as an alternative guiding force behind research efforts to produce knowledge for improving HRD practice. Support for this alternative has been growing among scholars and practitioners who believe that humans are getting lost in companies’ “global rush to dominate commerce and maximize performance” (Bierema & D’Abundo, 2004, p. 215). The recent financial crisis and the recessions it sparked in countries around the world (including the one into which Canada slid just a few months after I finished data gathering) have once again raised questions about “whether the world can sustain organizational practices that do not incorporate wider social responsibilities” (Trehan & Rigg, 2011, p. 280). These questions linger even as prominent business associations renew their calls for more employees with the knowledge and skills needed for Canada to compete and prosper in the New Economy (e.g. Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2012).

In this subsection, I point to a set of interventions into the relations of ruling
that my study demystifies.

One possible intervention is to channel the disciplinary interest in the ethics of HRD to the practices of employee development deployed in its name. Employee development practices such as the one I investigated are the least likely to come under ethical scrutiny (Woodall & Douglas, 1999; 2000) because it is assumed that the work-related learning made possible when such practices are deployed is intrinsically and unassailably a good thing (Contu, Grey, & Ortenblad, 2003). Furthermore, it is often inferred that companies that provide the means for employee development are “acting virtuously” (Woodall & Douglas, 1999, p. 249). Employees certainly can and do benefit from participating in continuous or lifelong work-related learning. However, empirically investigating employee development practices through an ethical lens might lead to more fulsome critiques of the virtuosity of employers committed to HRD because they recognize the embodied knowledge and skills that employees can further develop as a source of competitive advantage in New Economy markets for products and services as well as labour. Under a system “made to measure” employees’ performance as work-related learners in accordance with company expectations, justifications for employees’ participation in continuous or lifelong work-related learning based on bottom-line considerations hold sway over other considerations that cannot in some way also be interpreted as means to competitive ends. As an effect of the operationalization of the work process of employee development planning in accordance with the theme of learning in HRD, the “democratic project” of giving
primacy to meeting employees’ needs directly is sidelined by the “competitiveness project” which gives primacy to using employees’ knowledge and skills within the ruling relations of contemporary capitalism (Darville, 1999). The ethics of this sidelining beg further empirical investigation.

Another possible intervention is to reform work processes such as employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management by making more space for considerations other than the bottom-line. I am not so naive as to suggest outright abandonment of HRD’s economic purposes and aims. Capitalism as a mode of economic production has proven remarkably resilient over the last 200 years and there is no sign the main business of profit accumulation (Frampton, Kinsmen, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006) is being eclipsed by an alternative mode. That said, I rely on my study’s discoveries to sound a loud note of caution about the current neo-liberal moment in the history of corporate capitalism in which employers are making HRD a priority for aims and purposes that are primarily, if not exclusively, economic. In this moment, HRD is grounded in a view of employees as *homo economicus*, in other words, “a human who is primarily an instrument for economic aims” (Kincheloe, 1995, p. 5). All but stripped from the terrain of HRD is a view of employees as social, aesthetic, cultural and sexual beings (Cunningham, 2004) whose role in society extends beyond their company membership to include membership in families, communities and society as a whole. What possibilities might open up for employees if their employers pursued more holistic approaches
to employee development, in other words, approaches that allowed for the merging of the competitiveness and democratic projects with terms of reference that expressly acknowledge employees’ desire for greater workplace control so that they can make fuller use of their knowledge and skills (Livingstone, 1999)? How might embracing anew the original formulation of lifelong learning that incorporated personal and social development along with economic development as forces to promote democracy, equal opportunity and self-fulfillment for all change HRD (Faure, Kaddoura, Lloppos, Petrovsky, Rahnema, & Ward, 1972)? These are questions my research has raised for me and that I pose for HRD scholars to consider. In the search for answers to such questions, I am confident that new problematics and points of entry for institutional ethnographic research of HRD phenomena will be found.

In a related vein, I suggest that interventions directed at shifting the top-down orientation of performance management systems such as the one in which the work process I investigated are embedded to a bottom-up orientation can help democratize the distribution of gains from employees’ participation in continuous of lifelong work-related learning. In this regard, I am referring to gains from “reorganizing work to enable more people to apply in legitimate and sustainable ways the knowledge and skills they already possess” (Livingstone, 1999, p. 182). For more than a decade, David Livingstone, an active Canadian researcher, has been sounding alarm bells about the persistent private and public sector appeals for Canadians to participate in more continuous or lifelong work-related learning.
He refers to these appeals as being redundant and missing the point in the face of “growing evidence of a surplus of educational attainments in relation to job requirements” (Livingstone, 2010, p. 207). Rather than continue to evade or ignore evidence contradicting the view of employees as learners-in-deficit (Chapter 6), I join in the call to reform work processes (Livingstone & Pankhurst, 2009) such as the one I studied so that employees, are enabled rather than constrained to draw on their rich reserves of knowledge and skills in working to their fullest potential. Steps to encourage an alignment of interests around “improving labour utilization” (Livingstone & Pankhurst, 2009, p. 315) is needed to counteract the ruling effects of HRD practices that, while deployed with the intention of translating the learning organization ideal into working reality (Chapter 1) actually “function to depersonalize, organize, control, and often constrain workforce development” (Bierema, 1996, p. 25).

I suggest one last intervention, also with a view to shifting the top-down orientation of performance management systems to a bottom-up orientation. Rather than continue to permit the conceptualization and definition of performance as employers’ property to manage and control (Chapter 2), HRD scholars should adopt an activist stance. From this stance, HRD scholars should take steps to change the disciplinary agenda according to which usage of specialist jargon referring to what employees embody the knowledge and skills that their employers abstractly treat as human capital is perpetuated. The language of performance and human capital is productive; it suppresses and suspends the presence of the
very employees upon whom employers rely to do business. There is, in my view, an urgent need to adopt more inclusive language to express the idea encapsulated by theme of learning in HRD because the coordinative effects accomplished by the way in which it is typically and normatively expressed in the mainstream HRD literature privileges the interests of capital over labour. Putting it another way, more democratic expressions of the idea encapsulated by the theme of learning in HRD are urgently needed to inspire the coordination of scholarly subjectivities in new directions (Smith, D.E., 2005).

8.2.3 Contributions to the theory and practice of HRD

The greatest contributions of my study are to a stream of scholarship that is gaining a tenuous foothold in the discipline of HRD (Callahan, 2007). The stream of scholarship is critical HRD.

Critical HRD “is a multi-perspectival construct” (Rigg, Stewart, & Trehan, 2007, p. 240) encompassing diverse points of view. However, in general, researchers contributing to the development of critical HRD as a stream of disciplinary scholarship unite with a commitment to challenging what mainstream HRD takes for granted.

In mainstream HRD, performance improvement (Chapter 2) is taken for granted as the discipline’s raison d’être. Performance improvement is such a preoccupation (Bierema, 2000) of those in mainstream HRD that those who
advocate development of the discipline’s theory and practice along critical and socially conscious lines run up against what Laura Bierema refers to as “inside the box” thinking that makes it “every more difficult...to behave ethically, sustainably, or creatively” (Bierema, 2009, p. 69). There are several reasons to commend institutional ethnography as a way for critically and socially minded scholars to overcome their difficulty and in so doing to become more active in challenging what mainstream HRD takes for granted.

First, institutional ethnography offers critically and socially minded scholars the opportunity to make empirical discoveries from the social location where employees, as embodied human beings, are experiencing HRD as interventions into their everyday work lives. This is not the social location from which HRD researchers are accustomed to doing research (Chapter 2). It is, however, a location to which I believe they should move in order to put the development of human beings as opposed to human resources back in the HRD equation.

Second, institutional ethnography offers critically and socially minded scholars the opportunity to make their empirical goal explication rather than explanation. With the empirical goal of explication in mind, the actualities of people’s lives as they experience them become the focus of investigation. The ontological shift required to make the actualities of people’s lives the focus of investigation distinguishes institutional ethnography from other methods of inquiry that HRD researchers might employ. Moreover, it helps to democratize
knowledge production by lodging understanding not “in a generalized world of conceptual and theoretical explanations [but in] the concrete, sensuous world of people’s actual practices and activities” (Smith, G.W., 1990, p. 633). Similarly, institutional ethnography is distinguishable by the epistemological shift researchers make in their refusal to privilege objectified knowledge constructed in and integral to the relations of ruling. Knowledge that matters to institutional ethnographers is knowledge produced outside the relations of ruling. This too is a more democratic form of knowledge production because preserved by it is the “presence of [employees] as knowers and as actors” (Smith, D.E., 1987, p. 105).

Third, institutional ethnography offers critically and socially minded scholars the opportunity to investigate the power dynamics of HRD (Bierema, 2009) – a topic that mainstream scholars seldom discuss – by incorporating texts into their research practice in a novel way. Since texts are foundational to the relations of ruling, institutional ethnographers do not analyze them merely as by-products of the interactions and communications of company members – (Forster, 1994) but as “phenomena in their own right” (Smith, D.E., 1990a, p. 120). The particular interest of institutional ethnographers is in how texts enter into, organize and coordinate what people think and do for this is what allows them to reach beyond any one individual’s local experience to trace the extralocal connections that otherwise tend to escape the empirical attention of mainstream HRD researchers.
8.3 Personal reflections on the learning organization ideal

The learning organization ideal (Chapter 1) no longer appeals to me like it once did. The knowledge that I have been able to produce from the standpoint of employees is the reason why this is the case.

So normalized has the idea encapsulated by the theme of learning in HRD become that employees do not question the necessity to participate in the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management. The light I have shone on the activities that go on as employees do the work that is required to meet their company’s expectations of their performance as work-related learners may disorient employees who accept that participation in the work process is just “how it is” and just “how it should be” (Ng, 1995). That is not a bad thing because, in adulthood, that which disorients us is often a resource for profound learning about how to reformulate the meaning and conditions of our experience. I urge employees to recognize the potential for reformulation through questioning the unquestioning ways in which they are passively conforming to and supporting the prevailing HRD agenda (Chapter 2) at companies such as those at which my informants worked. Passive conformity plays right into the hands of employers who, in penetrating the lifeworld of human communities, concomitantly endeavour to shape and determine what employees think and do so that their mental labour becomes just as much a factor of economic production as their physical labour.

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36 As noted in Chapter 5, even those informants who mildly protested the requirement to participate in the work process went along with it.
Furthermore, I hope my discoveries provide as rich a resource for the learning of employees as they have done for me. Specifically, I hope employees have learned that the texts they routinely work with, work from and/or work to produce have the power to organize what they think and do. I also hope employees have learned that the texts associated with the work process of employee development planning embedded in the balanced scorecard system of performance management are not merely the inscriptive means to instrumental ends. In following the inscriptive practices of the work process, employees actively hook themselves up into the competitiveness project that frames and governs the development choices that it is possible for them to make in the context of the workplace. In this hooking up, the rhetoric claiming learning organizations to be growth-oriented workplaces in which employees meet their personal goals for development at the same time as they contribute to meeting their company’s goals does not clearly reflect reality. Job 1 is unleashing human expertise (Swanson & Holton, 2009) in ways that orient employees to fulfilling the terms of reference of the competitiveness project. It is difficult for employees to conceive of let alone orient to a democratic project when the texts upon which the administration of the work process depends preclude its terms of reference.

My study’s discoveries do not offer employees a prescription for how to get a democratic project off the ground. “No map tells people how to move, but only how here and there are related on the ground should they want to get from one to the other” (Smith, D.E., 1993, p. 188). However, on the basis of the knowledge
about the here and there that I have produced from a standpoint other than that of employers, I invite employees who can now see themselves locked in to narrow ways of knowing and of being to consider how to widen and transform these ways from their own standpoint. My wish, expressed in as fervent terms as I can muster, is that my discoveries will motivate employees first to critically reflect upon and then to interrogate the ideas organized and standardized by the speech genres of employee of choice and employer of choice (Chapter 7). If, as a result, employees reclaim the freedom to choose whether to accept or to resist their employers’ conception of the particular kind of employee they should be, then a movement to change the conditions of their everyday lives will be well and truly underway.
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APPENDIX A: Letter of Consent Form

Research Project Title: The work of work-related learning: An institutional ethnography

Introduction: Employee development plans are integral parts of many organizations' performance management systems and critical documents used in human resource development (HRD) to organize and coordinate employees' work-related learning in order to improve individual and organizational performance. The purpose of the research project is to explore the process of employee development planning, the nature of the activities engaged in as part of the process, the context in which the process unfolds and how the form used to create employee development plans organizes and coordinates work-related learning in organizations.

Procedure: I am being asked to participate in an, unstructured, face-to-face interview that will take 60 to 90 minutes of my time. The topics that will be used to guide the questions to be asked during the interview will be provided to me by email at least three days in advance of the interview. The interview will be audio-taped and notes will also be taken during the interview. The audio-tape of my interview data will be transcribed. The transcript will be sent to me by email to give me an opportunity to confirm data accuracy. I can take up to a month from the time I receive the interview transcript by email to make any changes, additions or deletions I feel are necessary. If, after a month, I do not inform the researcher of any changes, additions or deletions, the interview as transcribed will be used in data analysis.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks involved in my participation in this research project. The only cost to me will be the time it takes for the interview and the time I choose to spend reviewing the interview transcript.

Confidentiality: Since the focus of the research project is not on individuals or the organization but on influences on individuals' experiences that originate beyond the organization, I understand there is no need to identify me or my organization during data analysis, in the research report or any subsequent publication, for example, an article in an academic journal. I am also aware the researcher will not communicate to anyone the names of participants in the research project or the name of the organization for which I work. Any information supplied by me through my participation in the research project will be stored and treated confidentially by the researcher. If the researcher quotes my responses to the topics discussed during the interview in the research report or any subsequent publication, no information that could identify me personally or the organization for which I work will be used. I understand the researcher may use generic position titles and references to participants as an ‘employee’, or ‘manager’ to differentiate participants from one another. A pseudonym will be used in place of the real name of my organization.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary. I further understand that in the researcher’s opinion this research creates no potential risk to me. I may refuse to participate without any negative consequences. If I consent to participate, I am free to subsequently withdraw participation at any time without penalty. I may also refuse to respond to any topics of discussion raised during my interview with the researcher.
Ethics Approval: This research project was approved by the Research Ethics Board, University of Regina. If I have any questions or concerns about my rights or treatment as a research participant, I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board at (306) 585-4775 or by e-mail at research.ethics@uregina.ca.

Research Personnel and Contact Information: This study is being conducted by Cheryl Zurawski, a graduate student in the Doctor of Human Resource Development Program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. If I have any questions about the research project's purpose or procedures, I should feel free to contact Cheryl. Her contact information is below. In addition I can contact Dr. Abu Bockarie, who is Cheryl's research supervisor, if I have any questions about the research project's purpose or procedures. His contact information is also provided below.

Cheryl Zurawski

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306-585-5601

Consent Statement

I have read this research consent form and agree to participate in the research project. I also acknowledge that I have received a copy of this research consent form for my records.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

__________________________________________________________
Signature of Researcher

__________________________________________________________
Date

Your participation is this research project is greatly appreciated.
APPENDIX B: Topics to Guide Interviews

Topics to Guide Interviews with Employees and Managers

- Filling in the employee development plan
- Applying the employee development plan guidelines
  - Requirement for employee development plans
  - Accountability for work-related learning
  - Work-related learning and the concept of ‘employee of choice’
  - Work-related learning and the concept of ‘employer of choice’
- Roles and responsibilities for work-related learning
  - Employees
  - Managers
  - HR department
- Importance of work-related learning to the organization
- Importance of work-related learning to you
- Organizational support for employee learning

Topics to Guide Interviews with Human Resource Developers

- General
  - Importance of work-related learning to the organization
  - Risks of not encouraging/supporting employees’ learning
  - Benefits of encouraging/supporting employees’ learning
  - Work-related learning and the concepts of ‘employer of choice’ and ‘employee of choice’
- Balanced Scorecard (organizational performance management system)
  - Purpose and rationale for using a balanced scorecard
  - Process for determining what the balanced scorecard measures
  - Purpose of the staff learning and growth quadrant
  - Staff learning and growth measures for 2008
- Roles and responsibilities for work-related learning
  - Board of Directors
  - CEO
  - HR department
  - Managers
  - Employees
- HR policy
  - Spirit and intent of the policy on training, education and professional development
  - Spirit and intent of the policy on education leave
APPENDIX C: York University Research Ethics Approval Letter

June 1, 2007

Dr. Abu Bockarie
Associate Professor
Adult Education and Human Resource Development Program
Faculty of Education
University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4S 0A2

Dear Dr. Bockarie:

I am writing to you in your capacity as Cheryl Zurawski’s doctoral program supervisor. This letter is to confirm that the research project Cheryl conducted while enrolled as a special student at York University in the Winter 2007 semester was reviewed by me and approved for compliance on research ethics.

As you know, informants who participated in the research project, conducted as part of the EDUC 5200 Qualitative Research Methods course that I facilitate, were aware data Cheryl collected might also be used as part of a dissertation that will partially meet the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree program in Education (Human Resource Development) at the University of Regina.

At the request of Dr. Warren Wessel, Chair of Graduate Programs in Education, this letter is sent with the intention it become an appendix in her dissertation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Alison I. Griffith

cc. Cheryl Zurawski
APPENDIX D: University of Regina Research Ethics Approval Letter

DATE: December 3, 2007

TO: Cheryl Zurawski
    Education

FROM: Bruce Plouffe
    Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: The Work of Work-related Learning: An Institutional Ethnography (26S0708)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☒ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F), ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS. Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Bruce Plouffe

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (AH 505) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca