

MIS case study - interviews.



1. Interviews.

The following interviews are with eight people from the North Eastern district of the Royal Mail. The interviews took place 12 to 18 months after the introduction of a Local Area Network (LAN) based in Newcastle. All of the interviewees were based in the Newcastle office.

2. Brief profiles of the interviewees.

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Harry Bainbridge.

Age 28
Job Title Delivery Office Manager for the West End of Newcastle City.
Role Day to day responsibility for Royal Mail operations - letter deliveries, delivery of small parcels, etc.
Level Lower/middle management.
Pen Picture Started work for the Royal Mail after leaving school and was promoted to assistant manager after completing a part time Diploma in Management at a local college. He has been in his present post for \approx 3 Years.

Christopher Bricknell.

Age 35
Job Title Technical Manager
Role Operational responsibility for development of the LAN.
Level Middle/Senior management.
Pen Picture Started work for the Royal Mail in a technical support role after completing a Degree in Engineering. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the LAN and spends much of his time promoting its use in the North East Area and has been in his present post for \approx 2 Years.

Barry Flynn.

Age 48
Job Title Delivery Services Manager
Role Responsible for all aspects of deliveries and delivery offices in the North East of England.
Level Senior management/Board level
Pen Picture Has always worked for the Royal Mail and has been involved with a number of projects to introduce new technologies to the Post Office.

John Howe.

Age 45
Job Title North East Division Resourcing Co-ordinator.
Role Responsible for appointments of senior, middle and junior level staff.
Level Senior management/Board level
Pen Picture Joined the Royal Mail through a sponsorship scheme when he was a student. Holds a degree in Business Management.

James Jobs.

Age 37
Job Title Delivery manager for the City of Newcastle.
Role Maintaining quality of service within the city area.
Level Middle/Senior management.
Pen Picture Joined the Royal Mail after leaving school as management trainee.

Stanley Mann.

Age 43
Job Title Technical Services Manager
Role Responsible for maintenance of physical assets in the North East Region.
Level Senior management/Board level
Pen Picture Joined the Royal Mail from South Eastern Electricity 3 years ago.

James O'Brian.

Age 30
Job Title Management Accountant
Role Analysis of statistics and the preparation of reports for Finance Manager.
Level Middle management
Pen Picture Joined the Royal Mail as a management trainee. Although not formally qualified as an accountant he has attended a number of courses and progressed quickly within the finance section of the North Eastern division.

Diane Wilkinson.

Age 46
Job Title Finance manager.
Role Overall responsibility for finances of North Eastern region.
Level Senior management/Board level
Pen Picture Joined the Royal Mail from the private sector 5 years ago.

2.1. HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER.

Q. Right, my first question really is to ask you to briefly tell me your job title, your level in the company and make a summary of your main duties and responsibilities please.

I. Main job title is the delivery office manager for the West of Newcastle City. Role is all the main functions to do with the operational side of Royal Mail, that's mail deliveries, letters, small packets, all items to be delivered in the NE5, NE15 postcode areas. I am involved in most things, budget for running the office, targets to reach, manpower planning, recruitment, just about anything that you would find in a unit in an inner city. Obviously, I do most things that a manager for example in a supermarket would do which are run as a main unit. Yes, I think a manager in a unit like ourselves would probably do the same no matter what the business they run, it's just making sure that the operation works well on the floor and everybody gets their pay and whatever, their entitlements, their trial reports ...

Q. That's trial as a postman?

I. Yes, as a postman, and anybody that's doing the assistant manager's job on an acting basis, we're responsible for their trials.

Q. Can I ask you many people you are therefore responsible for?

I. We've got 100, it's 97 staff, that's including cleaning staff, an assistant manager what we call a postman higher grade who looks after the caller service and the registered letters, which are higher profile mail, and driving staff as well as our normal delivery staff.

Q. And who are you responsible to?

I. I'm responsible to the area delivery manager and then above him the delivery service manager.

Q. Can you just explain to me if you can, and I realise that it's actually quite complex, how that kind of reporting structure is going to change in the new structure?

I. Well, they've taken out one level with it, the area delivery manager, which is James Jobs. He's disappearing. There are 4 area delivery managers. One who is responsible for like the North Tyneside, North area up to Morpeth down to Wallsend. We have one in the Sunderland area who does Jarrow, Peterlee, South Shields and all the other offices in Sunderland. We have my boss who is responsible for Newcastle City which is Gateshead, Forest Hall, Longbenton, Heaton and there's one in the Hexham area who does the west part of the city. They're all going to disappear and what you going to have are local delivery office managers who are going to be in charge of a cluster of offices. For example my post at the moment is going to be responsible for another 4 officers as well as his own so it's going to be a more direct reporting system where the delivery service manager will report direct to the office rather than having to go through an area delivery manager. So you'll be able to contact the man in the field really rather than having to contact somebody to contact us. It's taken out one level of communication.

Q. So you'll be responsible directly to say someone at Barry Flynn's level?

I. Yes, Barry Flynn's level.

Q. Will it be Barry Flynn or somebody else?

I. It's somebody else but at the same level.

HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER

Q. What level is your post at the moment then in the organisation, can I ask?

I. I would say its middle management at the moment.

Q. So when say someone takes on the responsibility for a cluster of offices as you explained, will that still remain a middle management post or will it be upgraded?

I. I would say it would be more high profile. At the moment we have the people in the head office at Newcastle who are involved with the community and are involved with the other businesses whereas in the future they're looking more to the delivery office manager to be Mr Royal Mail. So it's going to be a more high profile job, I would say now we're starting to move onto a higher level of authority from April.

Q. Will it be a higher salary scale?

I. No.

Q. So your job will remain ...

I. At the same as what I'm doing now.

Q. Can I ask you if you could just perhaps tell me how you make use of the system in your job?

I. I've actually had the computer system in since about August of last year, before it was all manual paperwork and it's a godsend to be honest really. To my role as a manager of the office, the time it's saving, in just records being kept on everything from discipline to actually running the office, it's a godsend. Its saved me a lot of time. It's an excellent tool.

Q. Can you just perhaps give me some examples? Maybe it would be good to do a before and after comparison.

I. Before, the paper we used to go through! Well, it was horrendous really, 4 or 5 filing cabinets with all the bits and pieces of paper that then had to be double checked by going through the paperwork to see what your past records were. Whereas on the computer, you're just pressing a button and it comes up automatically. I've got a few examples here, all the postman's information from his date of employment right through to his address, telephone numbers to be contacted, and the increments he's due for, length of service, paid numbers, what pay he's on, any discipline that we have against them, that's on the computer. Local records, the collection boxes, what time they're due to be cleared, all their duties they're due to do from the time they start to the time they finish is all on the computer. It gives them a printout that is easy to update rather than having to go through and rewrite the old duty schedule. Now we just go into the computer and alter things and it prints it out without having to send everything down to the main sorting office to the typing pool. Everything would have to be sent to the typing pool to be typed out it would have to come back and we'd have to check it, any errors and it's send back again and then to come back. Now we just do it ourselves on the computer.

Q. When you say you do yourself, you don't have any secretarial staff?

I. We don't have any secretarial support at all. Everything to do with the office is done by the office manager or his assistant, any of the paperwork. There's a lot of information gets sent down on the LAN, things that my boss requests like a daily situation report of how the office has performed, any mail irregularities, any problems we've had. Every day there's a set

HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER

programme on the computer that we send off back off to him so that he's got a view of the whole district.

Q. And you do that on the LAN?

I. That's automatic on the LAN, yes.

Q. Whereas in the past that would have again been paper?

I. Or telephone calls. Whatever you were doing you had to stop to answer the telephone whereas now it's done whenever you've got a minute to do it really.

Q. And presumably he sends stuff to you?

I. He sends stuff yes. Anybody within Royal Mail house, it doesn't matter where they're working, if they're working in the personnel department, postcodes, delivery services or our processing departments they can all contact me through the local area network.

Q. Right. So it's obviously it has saved you a lot of time.

I. Yes, it saves a lot of time. You're not waiting for phone calls or letters, you can it's all done by the computer, so it's a superb time-saver.

Q. So kind of following on from that, in terms of it saving you time, how have you filled that time that you've saved?

I. Well, I can get back to what I feel I should do, which is being involved in the operation, that's get out onto the floor and get into the field and see what the staff are doing rather than sit behind a desk. I am manager who does go out into the field and like walking out with the delivery postman, it's releasing me a little bit more time to do that. I also find my records are a bit more up to date now with the computer, it's a lot easier to keep up, a lot tidier, it's a lot easier to manage than all the paperwork. As I say it's released me more time to spend a lot more time with the staff and get a lot more involved in what's happening outside the office.

Q. What do you think are the advantages of that?

I. I think keeping your finger on the button and seeing what's happening outside really, like if somebody comes with a problem you've got to know what it's about. There's a lot of things can happen, if you don't get the information passed onto you what's actually happening out on the delivery field. So the advantage I think is tremendous, just being able to go out there and spend a bit time with them just seeing what's happening, because it's a changing business all the time the mail. It's peaks and troughs all the time, you can be stuck behind a desk and you're missing out on what's happening.

Q. Would you actually say that's improved working relations?

I. I think so yes. You can go out and have a bit talk to the staff and see what their feelings really are now whereas before you were getting feedback from an assistant who was with them, now you can actually go out there. I think it is beneficial for them because they like to see you mixing around. I think they just want somebody sometimes to have a chat with them or ear-bashing if they feel they've got a grievance so you're more approachable, I'm a little bit more approachable than I would have been if I didn't have the computer. We're also getting a lot more information coming through the LAN system that we wouldn't have normally got, people are sending a lot of stuff around that might not closely involve you but it's interesting to know, you can pick up certain things that may not affect you now but might at a later stage.

Q. So you've got a lot of information or you've got more information now than you had in the past about what's happening in other parts of the business.

I. Yes that's right, you get a bit of a feedback coming through just by checking on people, and some by people saying just for your information. There's a forward message part, they just press one button and forward it on to you, they say for your information, you might like to read this.

Q. That's interesting. So you're saying really that even though that information may not be immediately relevant it can have future relevance?

I. Yes, it could have a knock-on effect. There could be a transport problem if it doesn't get put right may end up affecting your own future.

Q. I suppose the down side of that can be that with systems like this, because it is so easy to circulate ...

I. That's right. You get a lot you don't want to read, yes.

Q. How do you cope with that then?

I. Reading through the messages and having a glance through you can pick out, straight away what's going to hit you, you can have a quick look and say that's never going to effect the delivery. You'll know by who's writing to you. When the message comes up it gives you the name of whoever wrote to you, you can tell by who's written to you whether you class that as a priority to be read now or whether it's something that maybe can wait till a later date. If I know it's come from Barry Flynn or James Jobs that it's something important to do with delivery field so I would read that one first before I would go down to say something to do with canteen facilities or something like that.

Q. So, can you archive material?

I. Yes, there's a filing system. You can open a file up for all the individuals that are writing to you, you just transfer that message into their file so in the future you can check every single message they've sent out to you. There's also a registered send, that's where there's a message sent back to the sender saying you've read it so you can't say oh no I never received that before, because they get a message back the second you've read it. If you want somebody to read something and you send it through the registered send it automatically comes back with a message saying that that gentleman opened that file at such and such a time, so you say well he's got the message now so he's ought to have read it.

Q. I was just wondering one or two managers that we've talked to, not necessarily in Royal Mail, have actually looked at this very negatively. They've thought that they're highly paid people and they're not paid to do routine secretarial tasks, which is what systems like this can lead to. I just wondered if you had any personal thoughts on that?

I. I know what they're saying. I can type it up as quick as I can hand write it, and If I had to hand-write it and to give to a secretary to type up, well, to me it's no more time wasted. I haven't had the pleasure of having someone to assist me anyway. I haven't had the luxury of the assistance anyway so to me it's a bonus, it's a bonus having the actual word processor built into the computer and as I say with me being able to type I can type that up, a report up as quickly as I can hand-write. It saves a lot of paper.

Q. At the end of the day you're saying is it gives you more control.

HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER

I. Definitely. I am more confident now with a computer than I was before with handwriting my old written records because it automatically sorts everything for me. Whichever way I want my files to be, file order, date order, when I need the information it can pull it for me, its a lot better than I could do with just a normal file. If I wanted to look at how many people have been employed starting 1971 it would automatically give me all staff employed from 1971, whereas before I'd have to go through each individual record to pull out the date they started.

Q. Do you think that using a system like this adds to a manager's skill?

I. Oh yes definitely. I had nothing to do with computers before and in 9 months, say since August last year, I've picked up a load of computer skills really. I would never have learnt how to use a computer otherwise. I did go to college to study management studies where we did the basics computer work, but it's definitely enhanced my knowledge of computers and what they can do.

Q. You're referring to hands on machine skills?

I. Yes.

Q. But are there any other areas in which you think these systems have enhanced your skill as a manager?

I. As a manager? Filing systems and all sorts of things where you can transfer from another computer to your own. We still have to have manual filing systems but the way the filing system works on the computer gives you quite a good few good ideas on how to set up a manual filing system. Yes, it definitely enhances your role and makes me a lot more confident in doing it.

Q. What about areas like decision making, or human relations, does it help in any way in those areas?

I. I don't know if it's helped me in my man management skill. They do help in giving me information on when people are starting to get close to the levels they're supposed to work to, late attendance, discipline and things like that. It gives me the information but each one of those has then got to be treated on a human scale really, so there's other factors to take into consideration apart from just facts and figures. I don't know whether I've actually changed my man management skills at all, except I've changed my skills of the actual running of the office. I've got a lot more information on the computer than I would ever have had with handwriting. I know that once I put it in the computer it's in there for life and it's not getting changed around, so I've got a lot more information now, everything is at hand, quite easy and accessible, a lot more easy and accessible. All the information I need.

Q. Would you say that your usage, because you seemed to have embraced it very enthusiastically, and seen it very positively, would you say that's typical of people during your job?

I. I think age may have something to do with it. I know colleagues who will not use the computer as much as I do. I think one or two managers have still found it a lot easier to do it the old way. They find it a lot easier doing the manual files rather than using the computer, they only use it for the basics. I know one or two of my colleagues who aren't that happy using one, they just feel uncomfortable. I'm not saying that it is age, but it seems to be the old the managers that have maybe been in the business a long time, they've been managing for the last 10, 15, 20 years and then they get a new computer banged on their desk. I don't know whether

HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER

they can adapt to a change as much as myself who has been brought up in this environment of new technology. I think that's the main problem. I think it's getting people to change their role really and change from what they used to do.

Q. Do you see that that these systems are going to have a more central role in the reorganised business then?

I. I think so. These are my own personal thoughts. I can see we've moved our headquarters from Newcastle to Leeds and I know that you can link up through the LAN system down to any office in the country that has a network in. Well, I think in the future we may see yet another tier of managers going.

Q. Do you?

I. I feel that, and this is my opinion, I think it will all be done more through computer networks rather than face to face meetings. So I think that possibly in the future they may look to take out local division managers. I'm not alone in that, there's people at that level who have said to me "my job could go in the future with the way the business is turning round with information technology".

Q. Do you see information technology as central in that process?

I. I think we're going to have to be able to have a link to our divisional headquarters. That isn't going to be telephone and letter writing really, although we're in the business of delivering text, that can be done within split seconds from a telephone line rather than wait till the next day for information. So I think this is the way that we're going to be going. Yes. I think yes the LAN and information technology is going to play a major role.

Q. OK. Are there any problem areas with the system that you would identify? I don't just mean your technical problem areas although you might want to identify some of those, more if you like, individual, social, organisational problems that might have emerged.

I. I don't know. I think the main problem is a lot of people haven't actually got to know the computer and how to use it, getting the best results from it really. I still feel that I could do with a lot more training on the computer to get full benefits. I have been self-taught or learnt from speaking to people that I know, I just say look "how do you do this?" and "how do you do that?". I would say that's my main concern, you've got to have a machine and you've got to make the full use and best use of it. So full training is what I would be looking for myself.

Q. Have you had any in-house training then?

I. About 3 hours to be honest.

Q. And who did that?

I. Our computer support group. It was 3 hours getting to know your computer. But the set up a learning package on the computer to teach ourselves, which is all well and good, but I still think it would have been worthwhile a computer course, even if it had to be at the college or something. I feel personally I can adapt to this thing and I'll have a go, but there maybe people that are just frightened to switch a computer on because they don't know what they're doing with it. So that's where I think Royal Mail has fallen down on. It's a good idea putting one in the delivery office but it's not getting full use really. I'm still not giving it full use yet, I use it as best I can as much as I can, I think I could set up my own programmes for things and save me a lot more time.

HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER

Q. So, I've got one or two questions to ask you about the wider organisation, you've touched on one or two aspects of this. In what ways has the system would you say affected your working relations with others in your office and those in other departments.

I. You're getting a lot less face to face contacts with it. Obviously at one time it would have been the case where "I need to speak to you about something" and you would get this one to one. But now with more computer, the message will be sent to you, you reply to it, and it goes back. You're not having the face to face contact that you had in the past. Which maybe saves a bit of time because you don't have to travel down to Royal Mail House. Now it just comes through the machine, which is the way it's going to go in the future. We're now more an out-station than we ever were. Since the computers come in all the information is sent down the line now.

Q. I suppose you can see good points as well as bad points?

I. Yes. There are good points, you can deal with it without having to deal with it instantly like when the telephone rings. The bad points can be you're left alone, I would say sometimes if the information's not passed on to you through the LAN then you miss out and may not find out at all. That's my only other fear, that I've been cut-off completely and only rely on the computer for my information.

Q. Right. Does that have any effects in terms of relations, working relations that is?

I. If I know somebody and I see a message from them then I can relate to what type of person they are by seeing them. You can get to know by the way that they write a letter, what type of person you are dealing with. You might not have met before but by, I think, by the way they write the note or the message you can tell who are the demanding types and who are the asking types. I don't know how to put it across really. You're losing a lot of facial contact, which at times can save you a lot of time, but you don't know who you're dealing with.

Q. I suppose there might be advantages to feeling that you don't have people breathing down your neck at a personal level.

I. Depends who they are. You can, you don't mind some people breathing down your neck, but you get some that breathe down your neck just for the sake of breathing down your neck.

Q. Tell me, how do you think those above you use the system?

I. Now it's being used more by the senior managers, Barry Flynn's level, for giving us information as he gets it from headquarters, he just gets it typed onto the LAN and sent straight out. So instead of getting, as I said before, the letter coming through the mail it's coming through on the LAN. We can print a copy off still. But what I usually do in the mornings I clear down the mail that they've sent off the previous day and as I'm supervising the floor for mail arrivals I'm also reading his messages. So I'm not waiting for the mail until 6 or 7 o'clock or something. I'm starting work at 5 before I actually read what information he's got for me. Sometimes if it's coming up for 5 o'clock in the morning when I come in I can take it out on the floor and read it, there might be something that's to do with that morning's arrivals and it's there for me. So he can send out knowing that I'm going to get it the minute I start work the next morning.

Q. Before we started the interview you were talking about redundancies and so on, can you just tell me a little bit about that, the scale of that?

HARRY BAINBRIDGE, DEPOT MANAGER

I. I think what the managing director of Royal Mail was looking for was a more direct form of communication than he had in the old system. He wanted Royal Mail to be more customer focused, that's the way they put it, where the delivery office manager would be more in line with the customers and the feedback he got from them would go direct to a senior board level rather than having to go through the middle tiers of management. I think they felt that information that was just getting passed backwards and forwards between middle management and not coming direct from where it should be coming from, which is the customers to the local managers. So I think we're looking more as a business to be involved more with the community and the customer's complaints. So that meant a tier of management had to go completely. I think they were looking to streamline the administration function really, where you'd have the same information being reported to 2 or 3 people, that bit of information might be filed by 2 or 3 different people and never seen again.

Q. And the result of that has been?

I. Well nationally its 3,500 redundancies.

Q. But in your, in this particular area?

I. I believe it was about 200 in Newcastle district, around about the 200 mark. I'm not sure exactly of the figures. But what they said was there would be no compulsory redundancies, there would be natural wastage, but getting I think most people to go if they wanted to early voluntary retirement schemes. Which has caused I think in a little bit of a drop-off in skills levels in who to turn to because all the experience seems to have disappeared in the last 2 or 3 years.

Q. Really?

I. Yes. On the operational side at one time you knew a gentleman who worked for 30 or 40 years doing that job you could turn to, now you're looking around you and thinking "well who do I turn to now to find out the information?". But I think the way the business is going we're now starting to reap more benefits of direct reporting, I can feel the benefit myself of getting my message across at Barry Flynn's level rather than having to go through somebody else.

Q. Right thanks very much.

I. You're welcome.

[end of tape]

CHRISTOPHER BRICKELL, TECHNICAL MANAGER.

2.2. CHRISTOPHER BRICKELL, TECHNICAL MANAGER.

Q. Could you tell me your job title, your level in the organisation and a brief summary of your main duties?

I. My official job title is Technical Manager but I am in charge of the Systems Development Group here in Newcastle. I guess you would class me as middle to senior management.

Q. Thanks. Now, from what I have heard from others you were responsible for setting up the original LAN. One of your colleagues has kindly done a demo for me so I have seen how it works, I also understand that you will all be going through a major restructuring soon and that this will change the way the system is used. So, perhaps we could start with that? How will the restructuring work?

I. Right. Royal Mail nationally, at the moment, comprises of 64 district offices and will be split into 9 divisions. Within the new North East division there will be the Newcastle, Darlington, York, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and Doncaster office. Now, each one of those is a MLO ...

I. Sorry, MLO?

Q. Mechanised Letter Office. You could automatically say every district has an MLO, there may be an odd exception but more or less there will be an MLO, Mechanised Letter Office, in every district. You may find an odd district where they have 2 MLOs. We went through a bout of reorganisation back in 1985, I think it was, when an office like York took over the responsibility for Hull, so now York has got a MLO in York and it's also got one in Hull but that's more the exception rather than the rule.

[Phone rings, tape paused]

Q. So, going back to where we were, when we're talking about the LAN is it a system that collects and distributes information for one MLO?

I. That's right. That is right, yes.

Q. OK, so who would use it?

I. We generally within Newcastle we'd be talking about, [interviewee pauses]. Well now, there is an MLO manager, so obviously he's the first one. Then there's a planning and services manager who's responsible for new practices, things like that, within the MLO to improve the performance within the area. Another person who would be interested would be the technical services manager who covers all sorts of engineering. A lot of the MLO work is now mechanised since postcodes were introduced. We've got banks of coding desks where people sit there all day typing postcodes in. The performance of the code desk operators is monitored quite closely so that once they are trained on the coding desks they've got certain levels that they're expected to reach after say a month or 3 months. Now, those coding desks are fully automated and that involves the technical services manager because he's also got engineers who work there just keeping the sorting machines going, but he's also very interested in the performance of those machines as well. So there's three managers straight away who are particularly interested in this together with the finance manager who is responsible for the interested in the costs for the whole office.

Q. OK. So you've got maybe 4 managers who would be using information

CHRISTOPHER BRICKELL, TECHNICAL MANAGER.

I. Yes, immediately, in some form or another, yes.

Q. Right. How do they use that information? How do they get access to that information? Is it via a terminal?

I. No. Generally it's, we are again in the process of changing things. Once the report, the weekly or monthly report or whatever was ready, and yes, it was done by paper. Well, there is a monthly report called the DPR, each month it goes down to the managing director at headquarters. Every district puts one of those in which just tells you how the office is going and that, as far as the senior managers are concerned, is one of the most important pieces of information, because it is a report month by month, how the office is faring. It has to go down to the managing director in London so that any weaknesses or failures will be highlighted. At the moment, it is in a printed form but we have recently been looking to put quite a bit of that on to the local area network so all the managers will be able to review it on their own screen, any of the key pages from the DPR.

Q. Sorry, DPR?

I. District performance report, that's the monthly document.

Q. Right. So these four managers have a terminal each?

I. Yes. All, within Newcastle there are about 9 or 10 senior managers who are our local board basically under the district head postmaster and each one of those has a terminal on our local area network.

Q. They can they extract the information they want from this?

I. What we've done for them is, well, when we put the network in last year very few of them were computer literate so, rather than trying to teach them spreadsheets or databases and things like that, we produced programmes where they would just have to hit hot keys. A single key to produce a report on the traffic statistics for that week, compare it to last year, how are you doing against target, things like that. We tried to avoid having to go through the whole rigmarole of teaching them spreadsheets and so on. Some of the more, well what can I say? Some who are perhaps, who have more time or are just more literate, anyway, they have started to get more into things themselves. Generally, if a manager wants some report from the statistics we try to get it up on screen for them so that they can just view it themselves. So they don't have to waste time playing around in spreadsheets basically. Some do but most don't, as far as I know.

Q. Can I just ask? You said 9 or 10 managers? They're all senior managers?

I. They're all senior managers yes.

Q. So will this change? Presumably it will change?

I. Quite drastically. All of those people know what they're going to be doing next year and while they're still working under their current job they've obviously got an eye to the future and looking to how they're going to create their own, how they're going to fit in next year. Officially the new structure is from April next year but there's an awful lot of preparatory work that is being done now. There's the likes of Len that I work with who hasn't been given a job yet under the new set up, but he will, in an unofficial capacity, carry on with what he's doing now until he's allocated a role and it's all supposed to blend in then. There's something I was going to say then but I've forgotten now.

CHRISTOPHER BRICKELL, TECHNICAL MANAGER.

Q. May be it will come back to you later. The system that you've spoken about, and the one that we had demonstrated, seems to be a bit like an executive information system. There are a number of programmes that exist simply to provide a range of key data that can be accessed directly by members of the district board.

I. That's right.

Q. But, from what I understand, although the information originates from several sources you pass on ownership of the programmes to access the information on the relevant departments. Is that right?

I. That's right. Once the programme's written whoever was previously responsible for producing the paper reports [interviewee pauses]. Look, all we've done is created the programme and put it on the network. We give them the programme. It's just its taken a lot of the donkey work out of those paper reports.

[Phone rings, tape paused]

Q. You said before that the LAN collects and distributes information for a MLO. Is what we saw earlier just Newcastle's LAN or does this go to Darlington and York and Bradford and Leeds as well?

I. I could give you quite a bit of information on that. Newcastle's LAN, which is like the brains of the operation, our LAN, at present, has 37 terminals of which 6 are what we call remote sites, they're not within this building or the MLO they are miles away, generally a delivery office, they access the LAN through modems on the telephone. The Newcastle LAN originally, it's still quite new, originally it was for the likes of the board members and other crucial areas, sections who report directly to their work statistics like the traffic and QE and stuff like that. We, Newcastle's LAN, are also linked to a number of other LANs nationally, not every royal mail district office has a LAN we're just one of the ones who took one on board last year, there are, I think, about 20 LANs nation-wide. There was quite a lot of money invested in LANs 18 months ago, but, when this business development was announced, lots of big major projects had to be halted until business development was implemented and things have settled down. So Royal Mail hasn't installed a network in any other office. Yes, so, for about a year now there's been no new networks installed until the reorganisation was in place, but we have managed to add a few extra users on over the last year or two.

Q. And the users of this are all senior management?

I. No, it can be anyone, it just depends on the section. Most sections now have got a terminal, our traffic section has something like 5 micros to produce different things.

Q. And do they all have access to the same things? Can somebody in traffic get a hold of information from management?

[Somebody enters room, tape paused]

I. What I was going to say before was there are a number of, that was when we started to plan for the new north east division [interviewee pauses]. There are, as I say, about 15 to 20 LANs nation-wide now and we can communicate with any one of those as easily as communicating with the finance manager here, but in the new north east division there's only Sheffield and Doncaster currently networked and North West Manchester, Crewe, and a few others

CHRISTOPHER BRICKELL, TECHNICAL MANAGER.

Q. And how is this likely to change? When you're undergoing your reorganisation all of this will be changing as well will it?

I. Well, it's undergoing changes at the moment because managers are moving around, different functions are being moved from one area into a more suitable area so we're currently having to plan new locations for people. We're already looking to see what new staff are going to be coming in. For example, there's the new MLO manager coming in, whenever it is, January, but where he currently works wasn't, where the old one who's just retired worked, wasn't considered a suitable spot so we're having to redesign part of the building. Part of business development is to try to do away with this duplication and where every office has a head postmaster and every office has a finance manager, every office has a delivery services manager, etc. What business development appeared to be originally aim for was to cut out this duplication, so, under the new north east division it would go from 7 finance managers all at senior salary levels, to 1 finance manager albeit of a higher level than the existing 7, but you're still going to have underlings who will be middle management just the same.

Q. I mean, presumably, a facility like a LAN in some sense will help that?

I. That's right, absolutely. The lad Neville who does the programming in here he's down at Leeds today doing a demonstration of how we see the future. Leeds unfortunately didn't get a LAN in, just before they were due to get one in everything was knocked on the head. Now Leeds is quite a large office, it's the only north east regional office, it's quite large but that's going to be all the senior managers and we feel it's essential that they tap into a LAN as quickly as possible. Neville, together with some of the lads from Sheffield who have the same role as myself, they're doing a presentation to the new divisional board, showing the benefits of LAN because some of these people have never used one while we have been using one for 18 months and are quite keen on it. Some of these others aren't aware of some of the benefits from it, so Neville and this other lad are doing a demonstration down at Leeds today showing what's in it for them if they're prepared to fund it. Now what I was going to say was that we're also having to do various other work in as much as we're absorbing some of the work that's done at Darlington at the moment. Darlington district, well we're all disappearing we'll all just be the North East more or less, but functions where there used to be like a purchasing and supply person in Newcastle and another in Darlington and another one somewhere else, we're combining these and we're going to take over the purchasing and supply for Darlington, similarly some work that's done at Newcastle is going to be centralised at Darlington so there's quite a lot of set-ups are going to be changed from next April, the builders are in at the moment and there's floor plans and all the rest of it so we're virtually having to redesign our building.

Q. On the technical point, I mean, is this LAN just standard commercial software modified for your own ends?

I. Oh yes, absolutely. Neville does the programming. When we put the LAN in, we said we needed someone with development skills to make the thing work. We did not want to be like some businesses that have taken LANs on board and it becomes nothing more than a glorified message system. That's when we said if they wanted to get something out of it they would have to invest in a development person, somebody who knew more about the management of systems rather than just being technical.

Q. That's yourself?

I. Yes.

Q. So has this LAN got Email as well?

I. Yes.

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e-mail: chris.kimble@chris-kimble.com

CHRISTOPHER BRICKELL, TECHNICAL MANAGER.

Q. And that's just Email within the building or is it regularly used outside?

I. You can contact any of the other districts that are on LAN, so as I say, with the likes of Sheffield, Manchester and so on, you can use it to contact any of those offices. The board members, although when we first put it in very few of the board members could be considered computer literate. We quickly gave them some crash course on just using the mail system and a few of Neville's programmes. We wanted something that was up and quick that the board members could see that was of use to them without them having to learn computer skills.

Q. And that included Email?

I. Well, Email is great for them, they love it, toys for the boys. I mean they send messages, broadcast messages and so on, but as well as that, because of the initial outlay, we needed to get something up front quickly so they would appreciate that they were getting more than just messaging for their money. You know the argument 'I can pick the telephone up, why spend a lot of money just to see a typed out message'. So we got a lot of systems up quickly for them that cut out some of the paperwork. That gave them quite a bit of confidence. Now they've all got access to things like spreadsheets, we use SuperCalc here, Harvard graphics for presentations, word processors and so on and they're all quite capable of using these things now which a year ago they weren't. What we find now, once upon a time the board used to sit back and they used to they didn't know what was possible so if we gave them something they were quite happy but now they know enough to come and ask us can you do this, can you do that or will you do that, but a year or 18 months ago everything was new to them.

Q. Just to confirm what you're saying. This LAN is something that is for more than the board members?

I. Oh yes certainly but when we put it in we identified the immediate benefits would be, well, by putting the board on and certain key people we could do it. I think initially we put 20 users on, about 9 board members, the head postmaster, ourselves and there were as I say other key people within the office. Since then we've added some of the major delivery offices in the district. The way things are going I can see LANs are going to take an increasingly important role in the business but we haven't quite got there.

Q. So, the LAN is essentially, it's a communications tool one way or another.

I. Generally yes, that's right.

Q. But it's not just electronic mail, it's for distributing information around.

I. That's right.

Q. Well thanks for your help, I can see you are busy, I may want to get back to you to clarify a few points, is that OK.

I. Sure, any time.

[End of tape]

2.3. BARRY FLYNN, DELIVERY SERVICES MANAGER.

Q. The first question I'd like to ask you is just a general one if you could please outline for me your job title, your level in the organisation and make a brief summary of your main duties and responsibilities.

I. My job title is Manager Delivery Services. I'm responsible for all the delivery postmen and the delivery offices in the North East of England, from Peterlee up to Berwick on Tweed. I'm in this district as a board member, the second level in the organisation. Our responsibilities include cost and quality control for that function and there are other side issues as well but it boils down to that.

Q. So, how many managers do you have reporting to you?

I. I have 30 odd delivery office managers in that area who report to me through area delivery managers of which there are 4. So the number of people who I would report on for their annual assessments is 6 but we're moving towards an organisation where that tier of area delivery managers is remote and I will have typically 10 people reporting to me directly who will be delivery office managers in the future.

Q. Right, and that's because you will have a smaller number of delivery officers as well will you?

I. No. We've clustered the delivery office managers so one manager will act as a parent to surrounding offices. That's in the Newcastle area, which is one of the biggest areas, I'm in fact moving to Middlesborough where there are just 9 delivery office managers who will be reporting to me and they will only have sub post offices below them.

Q. I have some details of that. Tell me, how then do you use the LAN system in relation to your job?

I. The people who have LANs in this district are the board members and some of the other functions. In terms of delivery offices I've 7 locations that have the LAN machines plus one of my area delivery managers, so one quarter of my offices are on this system and that's the City area of Newcastle upon Tyne plus their area delivery manager plus me. Now in terms of use I can use it, and do use it, for communicating to those locations. It is a bit limiting to tell the truth to have only a quarter of my offices on the system. It's got to be all or nothing for me. There are a lot of communications that go out of delivery offices, in terms of requests for information, requests for comment, actual action points for individuals and I will tend to have a mixed system of paper and electronic mail. That means that probably even the managers who have got the LAN are tending to get the general circulation stuff as well, and that is an inefficient, that's limiting the amount of use I can make from it.

Q. Why is that, why is there just a quarter?

I. Only finances. We had a plan at the beginning of the year to connect every delivery office area by area, and that has been that's been hamstrung by lack of finances. Now we are going through a reorganisation as I've indicated, albeit as part of that everybody is saying well we must have this system. They can see how good it will be if they had every delivery office on it and the business can see how good it will be but it's a question of putting the money up to do it. To me as a delivery manager communication is very important and it's very important for my delivery office managers because they don't come into this building on a regular basis, and just going around and asking people and getting information they tend to be isolated. One of my tasks is to try and overcome that isolation by giving them more information, circulating

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information. Now there's a great wad of papers and obviously that's got to be circulated through the post but it's just the little bits of information that you can send out. It's also those that have it welcome it as a receptacle of information that they're being sent and also a way of keeping office information, which is just using it as a PC. They all welcome that, they've all got their own records on it and ultimately I hope to be in the situation of being able to standardise the office records that they have to keep and also having access to that myself.

Q. But you don't have access to those records at the present time?

I. No. Because it's not worth in my view it's not worth it, getting what those 7 offices feel is the best thing to put on it when there's another 24 or so who aren't able to contribute because they haven't got the machines. There's no point in talking to them about it. My ideal was that every office would have the same information, that I would say well look let's agree to keep this information on the machine and it will be readily available to me. Now I can see the advantages I've written out in the past and said well can you send me a list of this or whatever from your office and those that have got it on the machine can return it immediately. Those that haven't have to collect the information and then send it to me by post and then I've got to get it typed and so on.

Q. It must be very frustrating, you've got two systems operating

I. Yes, it is frustrating. There is a tremendous amount to do. I have a part time typist who I rely on to do all that circulation of stuff. She finishes far earlier in the afternoon than I do, and it's quite often that I the have an emergency thing that has to go out its all hands to the pump whoever is available sticks stuff in envelopes. Now to me having that there is extremely frustrating, not only have I written the thing out, got it typed, or done it on there and got a printout, then gone and photocopied it, while that thing's there and I could get the message out instantaneously.

Q. It must be frustrating to the officers that do have it because they also get the paper based stuff. They must say I thought this was supposed to replace this on the one hand and it must be also frustrating to the other officers who don't have it who must feel the poor relation maybe in relation to the officers who do.

I. Well yes. There's a fear of the technology in some of these offices but what we're talking about in these 7 are just average types of managers who have responded to the challenge of having the thing in their office, that's what I found myself when I got the thing. I've always been responsible for introducing computerisation in various forms but never really taken the trouble to learn how to use it myself and when I got the thing I had to learn how to use it.

Q. Right I see, if we could just concentrate on your usage and I'll ask you, how has it changed your job as a manager?

I. I do get a lot of the information that I require to make decisions as a manager coming up on there automatically. In terms of we've got today, the morning report from the delivery offices is filed in here and my staff input it onto there for me. So I've got information there on how duties have been covered. Whether they've been covered on overtime or with normal staff or reserve staff or with people who would be casuals or whatever, so that's on there, things where there's been any mail delays caused by late arrivals or mis-sorted mail arrival at delivery offices is on there and that's quite useful. I've got stuff on traffic figures to do with traffic figures which is useful for me as well and also the quality measures are put on there in terms of from our quality control department. So that's there's a lot of the basic information that I take decisions on is on there automatically, so that is useful too.

Q. And you can just access that, no trouble?

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e-mail: chris.kimble@chris-kimble.com

I. Yes.

Q. When you said that information is phoned in from the offices, presumably that's from the officers who don't have a system?

I. Yes.

Q. And the offices that do use the LAN?

I. Those offices do input it directly.

Q. As far as the information that you access here from other functions you mentioned quality measures for example, how would you have got that information in the past?

I. On paper.

Q. And would that have been regular, how regular?

I. The quality control stuff comes up monthly and I get a mixture of the standard things that they are sending everybody plus the non-standard things that they send me because I've asked for a particular format. So that's quite good, that's probably the best flow of information I get. The traffic statistics as well weekly but that is district wide delivered traffic, district wide posting traffic while I'm still reliant on a computer printout that I get manually from them for the individual office statistics so that's possibly something that they could put on computer for me that would be useful. Budget-wise I get a mixture of things that are on there on a weekly basis plus there's a level of paper records as well, for one reason or another, I don't quite know why, they've never really gone out on the LAN. So it's not, I couldn't say I'm in the unfortunate situation of not being able to really say I can operate entirely on paper or operate entirely on computer even on what's being sent to me and that's probably a measure of how undemanding we've been to get stuff put on the machine.

Q. In relation to your use of the machine, did you have to develop any new areas of skill to work effectively with it as a manager?

I. It's just the discipline of switching the thing on. That is one weakness when you're sat here. You've got mail coming in, you've got the phone ringing, I have the fax and we have telex all of which have to be given a certain amount of attention because that's the silent partner, the temptation is the thing doesn't get looked at until later on in the day.

Q. And that's mainly because it's just one of a number of other systems that could replace it.

I. I hate the telephone because it's intrusive, you've got to answer it no matter how trivial the question is at the end of the line. Faxes and Telexes are a similar thing but they tend to get attention over and above the contents of what it is. Now to operate on the LAN, if everything was coming in that way, would be quite useful to me, to be able to prioritise it on there.

Q. Do you see these systems though, in any way, replacing any management skills, any areas of management skills?

I. No. In my job the real skill is the motivation of the managers, and you can't do that on a computer. The only thing that it could help me with is to slim down on the paper work and allow me more time to do that. You can only send information really, you can't put tone and emphasis very well into a short note but it does take a lot of the irk out of doing the basic

mundane things and makes the system run that much more smoothly. It doesn't get you away from the things that you've got to do, who needs to be talked to, who needs to be sent a letter, who needs coaching, who needs motivating or whatever. I rely on the managers to do so many things well, but I could rely on them just communicating to them on paper or in the machine.

Q. Right. So you see it very much as an aid to ...

I. It's just another communication system.

Q. So concentrating on the information that you do get via the LAN, what is the advantage to you as a manager of being able to access the information that way rather than in the traditional paper based way?

I. It's better, filing wise, for storing information. The main one for me is that I've got a file for every office on there and I can stick the stuff in and it's much more compact. Unfortunately, with the mixed system that we've got, I've also got all those books up there, which is bad for me. The other bad thing, I don't know whether you're going to ask me what the disadvantages are, but the other thing that I do find is that what tends to happen, in the way that the job pans out during the day, is that I tend to do a lot of work at home. Although I work until 6 o'clock most nights it tends to get to the situation where I'm printing out stuff, going to collect it from the printer, taking it home and summarising it on paper. I haven't got an access to a machine from home, which is the big weakness for me. So it means that I am limited because I can only use it when I'm at work. I don't really fancy saying, 'well I can do it on the machine if I stay here till 8 o'clock' so I get a printout and sort through it all at home. So that is a distinct weakness for me, and if there was some way, perhaps with a laptop, of taking it home or taking it on the train or whatever, that would be a big advantage to me.

Q. Technically I don't think that's a problem, it's just a question of having the money to get the right technology. The technology is fairly standard now, you could do that with no difficulty.

I. I've made tentative enquiries about it, very tentative really. It tends to be that I can't operate on that a lot I have to have all these piles of paper around. In terms of the shifting of work around and getting it farmed out to the people who are going to deal with it that is of minimal use to me, it's really information flow to me rather than something I can use to push work out to people to do. Ideally I would like the situation where I could sit down for a couple of hours and be able to say right, my delivery office manager Morpeth, here's your message, send us a reply on there.

Q. I appreciate that you've got this dual working situation that is problematical, but in relation to the information flow that comes via the LAN does that have any advantages for you over the paper based way of working?

I. If it was 100% it would be a big advantage in that people tend to be that more concise on the LAN because they've got to input it themselves. I tend to find that I can prioritise and sort things out a lot easier on the LAN than I can with the paper stuff. You can file it into the different files and keep it if necessary or wipe it. I think, at the moment, it is more of a toy than a management tool, you saw when I came in it wasn't on then. I haven't looked at the thing since last night and all I did last night was look it up to get some of the information I need print it out to take it home with me. Until we get everything on the LAN it's going to be a major weakness because there's always these piles of paper everywhere.

Q. What about in terms of working relations, insofar as you're able to use it, working relations with other departments within the organisation, has it improved that in any way?

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I. Not really. I think it is good in that it makes things that much more disciplined. I can expect to see things that much quicker on there. The internal post is not an ideal or quick way of getting things round. It is good to be able to broadcast messages and to be able to send the same message to lots of different people simultaneously, it's very good in that respect. In terms of changing the working arrangements I don't think it has done that much. It's really just being used to collect information at the moment, or to distribute statistics, a very efficient communication device.

Q. You can use it to communication with people within the building can't you? You can use it for communication within the office here, do you use it to any degree for that?

I. From time to time yes, not greatly. The messages that I tend to push out on it are really general stuff that you can type in fairly quickly. I have used it to leave messages for people to save having to write it out on a piece of paper, it's good in that respect but so much is on paper it's very difficult to make proper use of it. I've just sent things out today where I've counselled five of my managers about the reorganisation. So, there's a page that I've written up, but because they're not on the LAN I've got to get it typed, sent to them, sent back to me and then sent on to the personnel manager for recording, all that could be done on the machine if they all had access to it.

Q. Do you see it as in any way though a threat to managers at a level below yourself? What I'm getting at here is traditionally, managers at the middle and junior level have often spent a lot of time pulling information together, doing a bit of analysis and forwarding it on to some senior level manager who takes some decisions. Now if this system can do that more effectively ...

I. No, it can't. It's just the medium for communicating what they've done already. We did see that there would be a lot of scope for delivery offices inputting information directly, cutting out the middle man and sending it directly to me, but with all the information that comes in I still need a filter to have a look at it. So I still try and push down the to some intermediate level in any case. Where it does have an effect is probably on the basic clerical grades that are doing a lot of inputting and summarisation and this thing and not contributing to the interpretation. Now if the system was used to its maximum, and the networks were very good, we could cut out a tremendous amount at those grades.

Q. Who is that middle man for you?

I. It's really the area delivery managers at the moment, they are the ones at the moment. They've got a smaller number of offices taking a greater interest in what each one is doing in terms of it's spend, the way they're covering duties and the way they're controlling absence. The way I look on it is that the delivery office manager's in day to day control, he's making decisions daily on these things like how much overtime to allow, how to cover for people who are away on sick leave for instance. The area delivery managers are taking, probably weekly, a look at the offices and I'm probably taking a monthly look at the offices. I just give them guidance, more on a directional basis, and they implement it.

Q. Thank you very much. I think I'm just virtually about finished now anyway, thanks very much for your time.

I. I'll have to go anyway.

Q. Thanks very much indeed. [End of tape]

JOHN HOWE, PERSONNEL MANAGER.

2.4. JOHN HOWE, PERSONNEL MANAGER.

Q. The first question is really to open the interview. Perhaps you could just indicate for me your job title, your level in the company and give a very brief summary of your main duties and responsibilities?

I. Right. John Howe. From April I will be the area personnel centre manager based in Newcastle upon Tyne for the Northern half of our division. It will cover approximately 9,000 employees down to Hull. I will be responsible for the payment of all 20,000 odd staff in our division. Currently I have a long job title of North East Division Resourcing Co-ordinator and I am responsible for the appointment of all staff within our senior, middle and junior management structures. Is that okay?

Q. That's fine. Obviously your managerial level will be a senior manager?

I. Yes.

Q. How many people report to you?

I. On this specific function, none, but when I take over my new job in the organisation I will have 6 people reporting directly to me and a total organisation of about 30-35 bodies including all the typists and so forth. The reason there are so few is that technology has taken away the need for manual working.

Q. Could I ask you then now really about your use of the LAN system in your job?

I. The way the LAN system works, as far as I'm concerned, is that you can get special add-on programmes that are put on by our experts. For instance about our traffic systems, they're on the screen now, who our large posters are, the weekly staff position, about special busy periods like the Christmas, and so on. Right, the LAN system is then important for two reasons. One it gives me instantaneous contact to various offices throughout the Newcastle upon Tyne letter district. When the system is fully installed in every office it will give me day to day contact for the sending of messages and also for access to the statistical monitoring system. That will effectively give daily control concerning the movement of manpower across the division. For instance, we will know in the morning that someone has gone ill and that we've had to replace an individual by maybe bringing in a casual member of staff, using a reserve or something like that. That type of information is very handy for two reasons. In my day to day work as a manager it will let me know about the flows of staff. Secondly, from my board responsibilities, where you're concerned with the financial viability of the company, the statistics are automatically generated showing the financial effect of changes like this where you may for instance incur a little extra overtime cost.

Q. So before you had this system in place presumably all that information was collected and passed about manually?

I. It was collected centrally on a manual basis and was basically about two weeks out of date. We have some 55 work locations here, just compiling the overall picture, and then costing it, took some considerable time.

Q. So, how has that changed the way you work, in what ways?

I. It has developed a need for the typical personnel manager in the Royal Mail. While he still has to be aware of the human casework that comes his way, and to be able to talk about the detail of these matters, he has got to develop the skill of being able to step back. In classical terms, to have what is called the overview, but it has to be more than the overview, he has to be

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able to have the facility to dive into aspects of that overview, to be able to pull out the information that is needed, and to make a decision. Effectively if you use a computer analogy then you have your memory bank and you have your menu. The overview is a menu and you just select each item on the menu and you're immediately down into the detail.

Q. Does that mean then, in terms of what you're saying, that increasingly managers will need to have skills that are not limited to their own specialist functional area?

I. They will have to have an appreciation of skills in other functional areas, but with a view to the technology, the fear that we have for the future is that the technology is going to skip the generation of staff that we have now. For instance, if I talk about myself, I can't say I am particularly computer literate, I am a one button pusher. I'm in my 40's, computer's were really just starting when I was finishing my business studies training. I joined the Royal Mail as a student and the computers in those days were large and cumbersome. The generation of today is learning the detail of how the programmes work and how the innards of the machine work. That generation that may well have the knowledge to be able to jump from this generation of machine to the next as they become more and more powerful. The technology that we're taking from IBM at the moment fills the desk, the last generation of machinery, with the same capacity, would have filled the floor of an office block. What the next generation holds for us we just don't know. What we need to develop is a facility to be able to pull out, from that which is offered to us, what we need to know from it, and to make the best use of it. While it might be easy to pull out what we think we need from it, making the best use of it is going to be very, very difficult. It is a bit as if you take the sum knowledge of the human race. In renaissance times your renaissance man would know nearly everything, now we have specialists in such narrow areas that we are specialising in sub-specialisms within specialisms. As you go further and further down these avenues keeping the overview becomes very, very difficult.

Q. But systems like these give you the potential for having that overview don't they?

I. Well, yes ...

Q. Although you still need the training, is that the issue?

I. Oh yes, it's a training issue, and it's a development issue. The technology is useful, very useful, but we have to watch what it does to us.

Q. What do you mean when you say technology is useful but we have to watch what it does to us? What do you mean by that?

I. Well, if you take the LAN system one of the simple things it does is sends a message to other users. Senior managers are paid large sums of money, often with many noughts on the end, to turn them into typists. Do you really want to turn them into typists? That sort of technology can be very useful further down the line where our current computers have laser printing facilities and all the other things you need for contracts of employment and all the rest. Personnel clerks are starting to learn typing skills, but you have to watch where you draw the dividing line. You don't want to pay someone to do a job that's not worth doing. The line that we have taken in the Royal Mail is that we have experts like Chris and Neville who know these machines inside out, we can go to them and say "here's a specification of what we want" and they deliver it. But it still comes back to the senior manager to be able to define exactly what they want.

Q. Yes indeed. I can see that, for example, someone like yourself is going to want to use the system to get bottom line information, they're going to want to use the system to be able to inform their strategic level of thinking. But, given that, what do you think is going to happen at, say, the middle management or junior levels of management?

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e-mail: chris.kimble@chris-kimble.com

I. Difficult question. In terms of the LAN system managers are still managers whatever level they are. You can run mathematical programmes, you can run in our business an analysis of our letter business, the traffic that we handle, the number of letters, the size of letters and what it means. You've also got the day to day aspects that we've talked about. So it's very hard to say.. As a sideline on that, the one thing that we have still to crack on this is that it's very easy for a manager to leave themselves in a room looking at computer screens. Our culture and our psychology are changing. The culture we have requires a postman to be able to feel that they have the access to go to a senior manager and be able to say "look I've got a problem about this, can you help me?" Technology can get between that.

Q. Are there are areas of the job, or skills for instance, that systems like these replace? Just in your own view, either for yourself or as far as you can looking across the whole organisation.

I. Well certainly the technology makes people redundant In terms of replacement, yes, systems replace an awful lot of manual work, mainly in our finance functions and our analysis functions because machines do the work much more quickly.

Q. So in Royal Mail the introduction of this kind of technology has led you to slimming down the workforce?

I. Oh yes.

Q. What about at managerial levels, are you seeing this kind of technology displacing managers' jobs?

I. Oh yes, easily. Not just managers. If you talk about our latest reorganisation, out of an administration structure of 20,000 we've taken out 4,000 jobs. Now bits of it are moving people's jobs around and looking at different ways of doing work, but much of it is because of technology is coming in and replacing people. If I just talk about the North East division, which covers the area between Lincoln and Berwick on Tweed. Five years ago there were 19 head post offices all with their own personnel sections, ranging between 8 and 25 bodies. Now we just have 2 personnel centres, one in Newcastle and one in Sheffield both with 25-30 people, probably nearer 25, actually involved with the type of work that was done manually beforehand. That's in five years. Obviously if we don't modernise, our monopoly is nearly gone, we face competition all over the place, we'll be out of business.

Q. I can certainly see that. I'm interested in trying to understand a little bit more as far as you see it, what the link is between the technology and, in particular, managerial job losses.

I. If I take the personnel line. We have responsibilities allocated at various levels, for instance, the signing of contracts and other legal papers. The way old systems work is you can have some individuals doing recruitment interviews, then you have some people feeding in the fact that someone's applied for a job, then the fact that someone's been interviewed, then that someone's joined up, then you've got to have someone feeding in separately that Joe Soap has joined the Royal Mail on a certain date, the pay details have to be fed in separately, that he is paid on a certain grade, that he gets an increment on a certain date, that he's on trial to a certain date. Taking the current machine, it is what's called a single entry machine, you just type in the fact that Joe Soap has joined the Royal Mail on 25 February. The machine then works out everything, pay rate as appropriate for the job, when the trial periods are due, issues the paperwork at the right time right down to the letter of employment and all the monitoring systems that are required, and advises the operating manager that the person will join them on a certain day. It's a single entry system, it replaces everything along the line, including the managerial input.

JOHN HOWE, PERSONNEL MANAGER.

Q. Yes I can see a number of points you made there which refer to the technical displacement of clerical and administrative work.

I. And lower management.

Q. Lower management as well?

I. Yes. Take it at a slightly higher level and look at the manpower planning systems that we have. Generally they require someone with intelligence to be able to interpret figures, draw conclusions and say you should be doing this, that and the other at certain times of the year to keep your staffing to the right levels. A machine has replaced that person. Because part of the machine will analyse your staff, analyse your wastage patterns, the vacancies that are coming up and, with a different machine, will superimpose the level of business going through, the number of letters, and say, for instance, that in May you're going to have a lot of people going on annual leave and you need to recruit 30 additional temporary people between May and September.

Q. That would have previously been a middle management role would it?

I. Yes. Lower to middle management depending on the sophistication.

Q. And you would put that down to?

I. That is purely the technology.

Q. Just to the technology?

I. Yes. The technology alone.

Q. What then would you see as the benefits of the system in relation to your job?

I. Right. There are benefits for the business in that it is more efficient, more cost effective and quicker. For those individuals who are left in the business you get a much higher degree of work satisfaction because the territory you cover becomes much greater, you can do things better, you can look at it and analyse it. There is a downside, a human cost. As a personnel manager part of that difficulty is managing the change. Thankfully we have slimmed down our administration force by 25% by voluntary wastage and we have done it on the last couple of occasions. Most firms can't do that.

Q. I was going to ask you, you've anticipated my next question which is what do you see as the weaknesses, the drawbacks?

I. There is a human downside. People lose jobs but in the longer term you have to live with this change because if you don't, and someone else does, they undercut you and put you out of business. We would actually end up with more grief.

Q. I've got one or two questions that are to do with the use of system in the wider organisation, if I may put them to you. In what ways would you say the system has effected your working relations with others in your department, firstly, and secondly, those in other departments in your organisation?

I. What I have to watch is that I don't lock myself away in a little room and disappear. The problem that we are going to face in our business with the greater use of technology is maintaining the human culture that we have had in the past. Our "style", certainly in the personnel function, is that if anyone, at any level, wishes to see a personnel manager the manager will be available at very short notice, even if it means personal difficulty for the

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manager. That is our style, our culture, that's the way we've taken our responsibilities. It becomes a different kettle of fish altogether if you suddenly find yourself managing 9,000 people. The customer, the internal customer that is, the member of our workforce, has a right to expect that. We still have to find some way to maintain it if at all possible.

Q. So far have you seen, though the use of systems such as LAN and others, an increase in the level of communication. Has it generated a high level of integration would you say, in your own experience? I think the implication here is that these systems make it possible for departments to work more closely.

I. It helps communication, yes, but it is impersonal communication. What you've got to accept is, I think, that there are various types of communication that are needed by business. One is a transmission of data and facts on an impersonal basis, and yes it's very good for that. The other is the need for human or personal communication, and you've got to be very careful what you do with that.

Q. The implication of your comment there being that systems like the LAN are not terribly helpful?

I. It can help but it can also hinder. Imagine for instance a tactless remark going across a computer.

Q. I see what you mean. I think that should virtually be it, except perhaps just to ask you what you see, and this is speculative, what you see as the future. If you, I'm sure you do this, if you're sitting down now and looking to recruit a manager, particularly with a view to our area of interest the technology, what would you be looking for, what's high on your list of criteria for selection?

I. Well, for each job we will have a job description and a person specification. We recruit either internally or externally, depending on the type of job and what our skills analysis shows we have internally. What do you look for? Good interpersonal skills, good communication skills, specific job knowledge in the area of technology that you're looking at. We can test that by, well, test and interview, we look at our culture and the person and look at the match they will make. I suppose it's just like any other job.

Q. Right. OK. That's probably a convenient place to end. [End of tape]

JAMES JOBS, AREA DELIVERY MANAGER.

2.5. JAMES JOBS, AREA DELIVERY MANAGER.

Q. The first question I'd like to ask you is if you could just tell me your job title, your level in the company and a brief summary of your main duties and responsibilities.

I. Okay right. I'm the area delivery manager for the City of Newcastle. I control 10 delivery sections within Newcastle that's within the City area that has in the region of something about 650 staff and 20 managers. My overall responsibilities are to ensure that the quality of service, the service required by the customer, is maintained to all those deliveries. In addition to that, to oversee the managers that operate offices, to make sure that they are up to scratch and to ensure that those offices under my control operate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Q. Would you class that as a senior management position?

I. Yes.

Q. Thanks. The next question really is to focus in very much on the LAN and to ask you how you use it in your job.

I. For my own purposes, the LAN is simply a very easy and efficient letter system. If I can go back to 12 months ago to explain how I used to communicate between my managers and myself. Then it would be a case of spending a great deal of time on telephones, also writing reports and memos and information, using the internal mail service, would then go off to my managers and staff. Obviously you have to understand the situation that the delivery offices that I control operate between the hours of 5 o'clock and 1 o'clock. I myself operate at any time between 5 am and 5 pm, so obviously there's time during the afternoon where I would like to be able to converse with my managers but can't. In other words I would normally send them a letter or a memo. Obviously with introduction of the LAN I'm now in a position where I can send information to their particular office any time I like. Information, whether it's information that I'm requesting or information that I'm passing on, which is perhaps immediate and it has to be implemented on the following day, it's available when they return for work at 5 o'clock the following morning. Switch on the machine and it's there. They don't have to open any envelopes, they don't have to wait for mail arriving and they don't have to wait for the telephone to ring and say "I'd like this". The LAN means I can communicate more effectively than I could ever do in the past. I can say as a latecomer to information technology and the use of computer over the last 12 months, I would say it's been a great boon to me.

Q. So you have a lot less paperwork around the office?

I. Yes. The phrase I missed out there was, yes, very much less paperwork. Like every business I think you can create paperwork unnecessarily, you send a memo because you think "I better confirm that in writing". That may sound stupid but it does happen. I find that the use of the LAN is very much like, well I would look at it as very cheap and easy letter system. They know that I'm not always going to be in the office and available, I could be in any one office and they know that even if they can't reach me on a telephone they can send a message down the LAN. Soon as I arrive in my office I switch the machine on so they have instant access to me when I'm at my desk.

Q. Do you make any other use of the LAN? I understand it holds information as well.

I. Well, obviously because of my role as an area delivery manager, every month we get our own quality service statistics on the LAN. We use it to discuss with individual managers about the quality of service. We use it not only for local quality, traffic that's posted within the district and delivered within the district, but also nationally. I have to emphasise here I'm really only interested in the delivery aspect of the business. So it's how well we're performing at our

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delivery offices. We get fresh information every month, and obviously that gives us an idea of just how well we perform with regard to our quality of service. We have quality of service targets and there are methods of checking our quality of services, this kind of thing. Our managers have the ability to input and get that information very, very quickly so it's updated. Whereas in the past that would be conveyed in a pile of paper and they'd just say "oh yes, I'll read it at my leisure". Paper, unless you have a file for it, or you put it somewhere on your desk and you know exactly where it is and it's very easy to get hold of, can be a pain, especially if you're not a very good organiser, which, let's face it, some managers are not. So really on the LAN those measures are built into the system and managers always have them at their fingertips.

Q. And that information would presumably be available to your managers at the delivery office?

I. It is, yes. That is traffic, quality service, budget spend, this year, last year forecast, that kind of thing. Yes, it's at their fingertips, yes.

Q. Can I ask you then now about how using this system affected your job? I'm perhaps particularly interested in any new aspects of the job or any new skills that you feel you've had to develop to cope effectively with this kind of system?

I. Well, the LAN in its entirety is a very simple system. You can make out of it what you will. Technically speaking I suppose it has lots of functions. I use it as a word processor to make a letter to send off to an individual. In the past I would have to write that out in freehand, give it to the typist to do and then you would probably have to wait a couple of days for it to come back. In the role that I have as an area delivery manager I deal with an awful lot of discipline cases ...

Q. A lot of?

I. ... Discipline cases. In the past I would interview someone, write notes, and this is an example, in the past I would write up the notes of the interview when I was interviewing the individual, then, when I came back, I will write them up much more professionally. Then they would go to the typist, then I would wait for the typist, and then I would contact the individual. Now I can perhaps bang something up, like the write up of the interview, within a space of about 20-25 minutes. I've got the hard copy straight away because I press the button and get it printed somewhere. So really you could say it has speeded that aspect of the job up. When you're satisfied with the results you can transfer it to one of your files that you keep on the LAN, that only myself is privy to, no-one else can get into it. So instead of physically having files in a desk I now find that I keep an awful lot of confidential material on the LAN. I can call it up at any time and it's always there, I know it's there and I don't lose the paper, I don't leave the paper at home if I'm working at home.

Q. So, did you have to learn new skills to do this?

I. Well to a certain degree. Before I took this job up I used to do an awful lot of notes for meetings myself. I had a word processor at home so I used that. I used to find I used to do an awful lot of work there. So, learning new skills. I just transferred what I used to do at home to work, in that respect I wouldn't say I've learned any new skills. However, it has allowed me to make more effective use of what time I have at work and you could say, in a nutshell, that I feel I'm more effective now because I don't sit and bang away at paperwork all day. Okay I have to read an awful lot of paperwork but I dispensed with sending a lot of paperwork because the LAN allows you to communicate better.

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Q. I suppose what we're looking at is the extent to which you see it changing the nature of the manager's job. Do you see that it changes the nature of the manager's job in any way?

I. Oh yes. I mentioned right at the very beginning that I control 10 delivery sections. I spend a great deal of time doing early morning inspections which mean I do have to be there at 5 o'clock in the morning. I found that because I was spending a great deal more time at my desk writing messages, writing reports the fact that I can now knock something up on the LAN. Before, you would be pressurised to finish that letter before you would say "okay I'll come and see you now" because your train of thought would be broken. I find now I can bang away on the LAN a memo I might be writing and be quite confident of leaving it at that particular stage and coming back and finishing it off, it's easier to do it that way. Now you might find that strange but personally I found that a boon.

Q. Without obviously going into any confidential matters what information would you be wanting to access? Can you give me an example of that?

I. Well, let's say this, when I deal with a discipline case in a lot of instances the office manager recognises that whatever he feels about a particular case, it is at a level where I have to deal with it. Now in a lot of instances the office manager would perhaps get a photocopy of whatever decision I made or the notes of the interview. Now I have the ability, if I was at a delivery office and the manager said "well could I just have a copy of the notes", you know, perhaps the member of staff is coming back to work for him and he would like to know how they reacted during the interview. I could be at the delivery office the following morning and say "well these are the notes so far, you know I can bang them up", I shouldn't say bang them up, "get them on the screen", and print them at the delivery office. I could be at a delivery office and we could be talking about something that has affected another manager, perhaps a problem that he's had with a mail receipt, a problem he's had with a vehicle, something to do with some aspect of delivery work. It hasn't affected him but he would like to know, because he thinks "that's a good idea, I would like something on that one. I can say "well that's on my file" and I could just get in straight away and press the key and have it printed for him. In the past it would mean I would have to put a note on my little memo pad. I'll come into the office and say I must do that for John before I do anything else. Nine times out of ten the phone would ring or someone would come in and say "James you must get off to a meeting" and you would forget about it. Whereas having the LAN you have the ability to get a hold of it straight away. I find, it's only 12 months, but God knows what we did before. This may sound stupid but I just don't know how we survived before.

Q. I'm very interested in what you have to say about the extent to which you use the system and make personal use of it. I'd like to just follow that up a little bit with you because we've talked to managers who have kind of implied to us, well, it's there, and they're interested in the information, but that it is somehow demeaning to their status to use it. The argument they put to us is that's secretarial, that's administrative. I just wondered what you thought about that.

I. Well certainly from my own point of view I certainly wouldn't agree with that. I doubt very much if any of my delivery office managers would agree with that either. In the past, if they wanted a very professional document, we would have it sent in to a typist. Perhaps in a week you might get it back. Whereas now you can just do it on your own system in the office and you have something professional there and then. So managers look on the system as being of a benefit to them because now they don't have to, they wouldn't look on it as demeaning because they look on it as a benefit to their job. They look on it as something that is there and they can use it, they don't have to wait for something. So I don't find it demeaning, certainly not. I find it of great benefit. I don't wish to sound as if I'm going over the top on this. I think I'm at the age where had I was a bit older, I think we broached on this a little bit before you switched the machine on, we had quite a considerable state of flux within delivery services. I would say of managers who were in their late 50's kind of age, well, I think it would have been

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a lot different if we still had those managers today. I think they would look at this system and say “well I’d far rather write it” because I think they would be afraid of using the system rather than looking and saying “well this is the benefits, I’m going to force myself to use it”. Those managers have now gone, we’ve replaced them with people who’ve got fresh ideas, younger people who look at it and say I’m going to make full use of it, they don’t look at it in a demeaning way at all. In addition, in a delivery office, they don’t have access to a secretary but really it’s saving time, so they make full use of it.

Q. I just really wanted to ask you, you know you’ve spoken a lot about the advantages to you and in the delivery offices of the LAN. I wanted to ask you if you have experienced any drawbacks or if there have been any problems of the system?

I. Well, there is a drawback in the system as much as it’s a technical one. Because the system uses telephone lines. Information is fed in on a daily basis, obviously it is only effective if the line’s clear. Sometimes you can’t get them on the telephone because they’re using their LAN and they’re wanting to send a message down the line. It is a little bit difficult sometimes if you do want to get someone on the telephone because they might be plugged in trying to get a message to someone or their message mightn’t be able to get away so it’s like trains or buses building up, they cannot get to the stop because they cannot get past each other. That has been a problem in the past. Now I think we use it to an extent where “yes I’m going to be sending my message off to you about 8 o’clock in the morning” and somebody else sends it off at quarter past eight. That is the real busy time when lots of them are sending off information at about the same time. So it is difficult but it is a technical thing.

Q. Yes. Were there any other problems? I think you mentioned when we were talking before the interview that there is an issue of age and so on.

I. Oh I’m sorry I missed that. Early on, within delivery service, we did have a considerable number of older managers, managers who had gone through the system. Managers who are very, very good and effective at managing staff under the old system but who found it very, very difficult to take on the new technology. I’m not saying that they couldn’t, but I think generally what we’ve expected from managers within the Royal Mail are expectations of what we want from them on a day to day basis, how effective we want them to be, the amount of responsibility they have. This has changed considerably over the last 2 years and I think I’ve broached the fact about how more and more responsibilities are now going down to delivery office managers. I think we survived over the last 12 months very much because we’ve promoted an awful lot of young people who don’t have the old background. You know the sort of thing, “things weren’t like this, I use to enjoy the way things used to be, so I’m not going to accept the change”. The new guys don’t have any knowledge about how the old system worked, so when they come in they are quite willing to accept the new technology and accept the extra responsibility, they don’t know any different. The older managers that we had, and some of who just left, were finding it difficult to accept the extra responsibility. They would also have suffered greatly under using this new system because they would have been frightened by failure and I think of afraid of not being able to use the system to the full because of the very fact that they would be frightened that they would fail.

Q. What about when the system was introduced? Casting your mind back if you can to the period when the system was being implemented, how well do you feel that was handled? You know, the attention given to things like training and dealing with problems.

I. Well originally, although I didn’t have the facilities of a machine at my desk at the time, there was one at my use in the room and I remember I got about 2 hours time from someone who came from our computer services in Chesterfield. Someone had introduced it elsewhere and done it in 2 hours but I felt it wasn’t sufficient, even for me. We put it in and said “well there is your computer”, someone would go on for about an hour and say this is the basics, you

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know, “now get on” with it kind of style. I think we lost a great deal of impetus at that stage. Some office managers had the machine in their office for a couple of weeks and were frightened to use it. I think when you’re sitting alone with someone and someone’s saying man to man “this is what you have to do” kind of style, you don’t want to look a stupid idiot and say “just run that one past me again”. Whereas if you’re taken into a classroom situation, you have 10 people banging away on computers or keyboards there is always someone who’s going to be prepared to ask the question that you’re afraid to ask. So really for the first couple of weeks I think we lost a great deal of momentum. We did not make full use of the system simply because we did not have managers, they didn’t, for one reason or another, have the time, perhaps because they were on leave when the individual came, or perhaps only his deputy knew how the system worked. Yes, I think we could have handled it better and even now, thinking back we didn’t, provide sufficient training, classroom training.

Q. I suppose, you know, what is difficult to do is to distinguish between change in people’s jobs, or maybe even job loss, or voluntary redundancy or whatever, and change which results from technology. What is technology and what is change that results from just general restructuring, or in your term business development? I wonder what balance do you see?

I. Well certainly the role of a delivery office manager has changed considerably over the last couple of years. I mentioned before about more and more responsibility for the office manager, mainly I can see the situation arising whereby there will be their own little cost centres. They’ll not be answerable to someone who works in Newcastle. Now in the years gone by how we’ve differed as to what we expected ... how can I explain this better? We used to depend more on a man manager type of role for our delivery office managers, someone who can tell someone they’re not doing what they should be doing. You know, you must get there by a certain time, fill in a little bit of paperwork, say appertaining to night allowance, sickness, that kind of thing. How it’s changed is nothing to do with technology, but how it’s changed is that now we expect more of them because they’re having to keep an eye on their budget, they’re spend and their quality of service. Whereas in the past all we really wanted was for everything to arrive at the delivery office and make sure it gets delivered. Now it’s much more complex because they really control everything in a delivery office and what they don’t control now they will control shortly. So it’s a different animal. They’re responsibilities have increased but we also expect them to use the new technology. So the technology aspect hasn’t increased the actual role, the responsibility of managers has increased simply because of what we expect them to do. The technology has just been introduced to make us all a little bit more effective.

Q. One, well a couple of very quick questions. This one is really to do with the wider organisation. In what way would you say the system has affected your working relations with others, in your area of responsibility and your own department as well as within other departments within the organisation? To put it more simply, has this LAN improved communications, made them more effective, would you say?

I. I would say so, yes. If you sent a memo internally you’re hoping it gets there the following day and is read when a manager arrives for duty. The system that we have now has an option whereby you can send a memo to a manager and register it, it sends a reply to tell you that he’s received it and he’s read it. Now under the old system you would have to write him a letter, as I said you would hope that he would read it and he would reply to it but you didn’t know unless he picked the telephone up and rang you. So yes, it’s streamlined that kind of thing, yes very much so. It has been of tremendous benefit in that respect.

Q. Do you think that helps to increase the level of integration?

I. Yes I do because, okay, with the old system there used to be the postmaster in this great room upstairs, lord and master of everything he surveys, but how do I contact him? I’ll ring up his Secretary and say “can I have an appointment with Mr Scott?”, “well what is it about, well

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he may be able to fit you in between four and four fifteen next week". Now I know if I want to contact him all I have to do is send a memo and I know he's going to read it because it'll come up and say 'you have mail'.

Q. And do you do that?

I. Oh yes. Not to him. I have had reasons to do so but that's when he's contacted me about something. For instance, last Christmas we had a security problem that meant that we had to call out the boss to get into the building. He was the only one who had the key for Royal Mail House for some reason and after Christmas he sent me a thank you letter and I replied on the LAN. I know that he would have got that the morning that he sent me the letter. It gives a feeling of belonging, not belonging, but having the ability to be much, much closer to the people who manage me.

Q. So do you think it improves relations between you and people at a higher level?

I. Yes. If you send a message to the boss it doesn't matter that you may not be a very good writer, you know, you might be a terrible as far as handwriting is concerned but your content could be excellent. It doesn't matter on the LAN. His content might be excellent but his handwriting skills might be atrocious, it doesn't matter on the LAN because you build picture up of what the content is of the message. You may never ever meet the individual but you build a picture up of them in your mind based on what they have written.

STANLEY MANN - TECHNICAL SERVICES MANAGER.

2.6. STANLEY MANN - TECHNICAL SERVICES MANAGER.

Q. I would like to start by asking you if you would just tell me your job title, your level in the company and give a very brief summary of your main duties and responsibilities with Royal Mail.

I. Right. Stan Mann, technical services manager. My main duties and responsibilities are the maintenance of all the assets of Royal Mail within the Newcastle district, which runs from Berwick to Sunderland, Peterlee and across to Hexham in the West. So that's basically it's the maintenance of the assets, building and electrical, the whole lot.

Q. Can I ask you how many people you have reporting to you?

I. Reporting directly to me? There are three, that's an engineering manager, an estates manager and a cleaning services manager.

Q. Right, so in terms of level in the organisation you would be a senior ... ?

I. Senior yes, I'm on the board of the district.

Q. And the people reporting to you, what would be their level in broad terms within the organisation?

I. I would term them as higher management. Some have a budget of around and about varying really, cleaning services about £1.25 million, the estates manager about £4 million and the engineering manager about £1.25 to 1.5 million.

Q. Can I ask you the main question for us? How you make use of the LAN in relation to your job?

I. For communication mainly, which is what the LAN is very good at. In my job I use it for communicating to all my managers. It makes it very easy if you want something. If I want some information and you telephone them and they're not there all you do is you turn round to the LAN and you type it in and send it off. You know he's going to get it when he comes back in the office because there will be a little message on his screen saying there's a message for you. So in that way it saves a lot of my time, I don't have to keep ringing back and remembering to ring somebody back, you can send it straight off on the LAN. And that's its biggest bonus in saving management time is this lack of repeat calls all the time. Again I use it for word processing because it's on the LAN, because the programmes are on the LAN. They're all stand alone programmes effectively just that they happen to be on the LAN so I use it really just for that, SuperCalc you know all the normal programmes.

Q. You do your own word processing?

I. Yes, I do as it happens.

Q. Does that mean you don't have a secretary?

I. I don't have a secretary, no. I'd got used to the typists upstairs but I found by the time you've typed something in, sent it upstairs to the typist, it comes back down, you correct the errors and you send it back again I could have typed it myself quicker. So I type it myself and then I get it perfect, to my own liking. Sometimes you ignore minor changes because you think no, I'm not going to send it back upstairs to the typists. It's very easy to do on your own.

Q. So you would send out something that you were not entirely happy with?

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I. Yes.

Q. Simply because you'd rather get it out ... ?

I. Than send it all upstairs again, yes, for retyping.

Q. Have you always done your own word processing?

I. I have as it happens yes. I started off as the engineering manager so of course there you didn't have a secretary so I used to do all my own word processing then and I've just progressed. It's easier now, I find it easier really.

Q. Are there any other uses you have for the LAN?

I. I use it for sending spreadsheets across to the maintenance manager. That's about the only other use I use for it.

Q. What's the content of spreadsheets?

I. It's usually just management information, quality reports, things like that.

Q. Is there any other information available in the system that you regularly use?

I. Oh yes. Not that I regularly use. There is other information available, for instance the hours used in the operation that is a major part of the district budget is the manpower spent on actually moving the mail around, so that information is available. Since I tend to be only loosely related to that side of it I use it very little, maybe once or twice a month just to see how the budgetary side is doing rather than the man hours side.

Q. Can we just concentrate for a minute on the area that you do get information from the LAN, that is to say from the maintenance manager. I mean, prior to the system, presumably would that have been just a paper exchange?

I. Yes.

Q. Right. He would have to provide you with a regular report would he?

I. A regular report, yes. It's about that thick, but of course now I can see on the data there straight away and I ask him for graphs, although it's very rare that I'll need any.

Q. And do you find that that way of presenting information an improvement? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

I. It's advantage to me is if I don't like anything I can change it on the spreadsheet and see what effect it has. Although most of the information presented is factual some of it is his projections forward and I can change them and send it back to him with a little note. With the system we use you send a message with the spreadsheet attached. So you just send it with a note saying such and such altered which I think is a more realistic projection.

Q. And does it have any disadvantages?

I. Yes, when it's not working. I miss it. It's not on now at the moment unfortunately and I miss it.

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Q. It's got to the point where you really can't do without it?

I. Yes. I've rung three times this morning trying to get hold of them and all I can do is get hold of his assistant if you like and I find that very annoying. Where before I used to send a message and say give us a call, don't worry about ringing me.

Q. In what ways then would you say it's changed your job or to what extent has it changed your job?

I. It's less paper. Fewer little bits of paper floating around with small memos on. It improves the filing of those bits of paper as well whereas before you used to get at least half a dozen bits of paper a day and you'd shuffle them round and pick one up and throw it away thinking I've finished with that one and find that it was something you needed. So it stops that itty bitty filing thing. It's there, it's on the LAN, it's stored and you can refer back to it. So in that respect it makes that part of things a lot easier as well.

Q. Have you had to develop any new areas of skill to work with the LAN in your job?

I. I haven't no because I was just using the computer when I came in, so no. Okay I've adapted to the system but that's only a minor change. No, I was used to using computers. The hardest change is for those who are not used to using computers or who don't like them. There's this big technological block there.

Q. Are there many people like that in your estimation?

I. There are three or four senior managers who are having trouble using the system. They would prefer not to turn it on.

Q. So do they just use the old channels of getting information?

I. Yes. Which is annoying when you send them a message because they haven't logged on for about a week or so.

Q. How does that work if you're sending them messages, do you have to back everything up with paper?

I. No. I send them a message and if they haven't read it within the week then I'm usually telephoning them saying I wanted some information. Well, you shouldn't have sent me it on the LAN. Well, I wanted it urgently.

Q. What do you do in a situation like that?

I. Well now, one of them is leaving. He's the worst offender. He's leaving the business in any case, he's retiring, so that's one of them out of the way. The other two do go in about once a day and get their messages. Sometimes they don't turn it on for a week, but usually if you shout loud enough they start turning it on again.

Q. Do you find that, would you say that, the system gives you the potential to make better decisions? I mean one of the arguments often made for this kind of system is that it does provide you with the information that ...

I. In our situation quicker decisions I think rather than better ones would be a better way of putting it. It gives you the information quicker therefore you're able to make a decision earlier and sometimes that can save you a few problems later on. I think its speed rather than quality of information because it's the same information normally.

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Q. Are there any areas if you like of your job or any area of skill or any aspects of the job that the LAN in a sense makes less important, maybe even makes redundant?

I. None that I can think of no. No, nothing that I can think of off hand.

Q. So, overall, what would you say are the benefits of the LAN in relation to your job?

I. In respect to my job it saves me time because of the speed of communication and the ability to just be able to type something in. Just a quick message, not having to keep bringing things back and making notes of who you've got to ring, and, of course, I always have a copy of it as well.

Q. Do you use it in any way in the monitoring of people who report to you?

I. Only in respect that I've got a copy of the notes I send to them. So, if they haven't responded, I can refer back, in fact I can send that copy out again and say look I sent you this a week ago, you still haven't responded I asked for a response by today. So there's that aspect.

Q. What about the area you were mentioned earlier, about your maintenance manager, can you access information without that person knowing?

I. No, not at the moment. The system doesn't allow that.

Q. Would you like to be able to?

I. Oh yes. Most definitely yes, I would like to be able to do that.

Q. Why would that be?

I. It's the same thing as looking at the traffic figures and looking at the man hour usage figures, you can dip into it and you can get the relevant information, it's instantaneous and you know you're not having to disturb somebody else for the information or wait for them to respond.

Q. So are you restricted to only being able to draw on information that people give to you then?

I. Yes. It is only a message system, it is a message communication system. If he wants to send me a file he sends it, that's the only way I can get access to it.

Q. Right, OK, are there any drawbacks, tensions, associated with the LAN? I mean, I suppose you've already touched on one, it's obviously irritating if people don't turn it on.

I. Other than that no, none. In fact everyone who I talk to regularly on the LAN likes it because of the speed of communication and not having to wait for people to be in. That is very, very valuable.

Q. Just a couple of questions about the wider organisation. In what ways, if any, has the LAN affected your working relations with others firstly in your department and secondly with other departments within the organisation?

I. It's got rid of some of the frustrations from all of us because obviously none of us have secretary's, we're often not in the office for days on end or only in for short periods of the day. It's got rid of all that frustration of, you know, I've been trying to contact you for days, where

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have you been? It gets rid of all of that and you can grade the messages as they come in and say right I've got to do that now, I can respond to that immediately or I can leave that one till later.

Q. That's for your department, and for the wider organisation, that applies too, the same principle?

I. Yes, yes.

Q. I mean, do you get a better, a more timely view, of the organisation, really, right across the whole lot?

I. You don't necessarily read everything that comes to you on the LAN. You know roughly what you're expecting or if I go into say the quality figures I know which areas I'm going to look at, I go straight in there and I'll delete the previous month's because it's all included in one sheet. So in that respect it means the information I've got is always up to date.

Q. Is there any danger for managers in systems like this that because they make the provision and distribution of information much easier, you made the point earlier, and certainly more timely, that managers can be swamped with additional information? The problem for them then becomes what's relevant, selecting appropriate information, a question of information management.

I. For me it never seems as bad on the LAN. I mean you'll turn the LAN on and maybe get 20 messages, you can very quickly skim through them and discard them. Where when you get messages coming through on paper for some obscure reason, it might just be something personal, it means that you've got to open it up, take it out, glance through it it's not for me, cross it out, put it back in the envelope and address it off to the next person. And that takes longer than it does on the LAN. So it's just efficiency.

Q. What about the quality of the information?

I. The quality's really changed from what was there before. We used to send, in fact we still do send, an awful lot of information on the rounds that has usually come from other districts and that I find frustrating, as I said before it's just the letter opening stuff that ... I've forgotten, what the question was now?

Q. Quality.

I. Quality. No in that respect the quality hasn't been affected. It's just speed again. That's its major advantage, speed and its ease of use.

Q. We're pretty much coming towards the end now. Just a couple more questions. How do you see systems like the LAN, basically integrated information systems, affecting management skills? Indeed do they affect skills at all?

I. Well, at the moment information is, well, it's collected manually. It's input downstairs into one system, the manual information is sent elsewhere, input into another system, different parts of it are input into a third system elsewhere. If you could tie and integrate all those together it would mean that one person could input all the information and that would be that. Information would be available to everyone immediately to take out the pieces they need to do their thing. So if I'm collecting information in SuperCalc and somebody else is using 123 you can input the information but [pause] a direction that we should be going in is more integration. We should be getting everybody on to the system and other people should be able to dip into their information and take out what's needed. I mean there's no problem with that as long as people realise that the information once they've inputted is free for all.

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Q. And what would you expect that to mean for managers?

I. Again the speed of information. I, I don't see these things as threats. [Pause]. I don't see computerisation as a threat, I see it as an assistance to management. Again it allows you to make quicker decisions and it gives you more information on which to base those decisions.

Q. They may not be a threat to someone like yourself, a senior manager who's in the business of making more strategic decisions as opposed to more day to day operational matters, but at the middle level of management, where many managers have a job spec based on running around and bringing information together, gathering information, doing a bit of analysis on it and forwarding it on. What about them?

I. But if you don't progress, if you don't keep using the information, you all lose your jobs anyway because you become less and less efficient. Generally when new technology, it doesn't matter how it comes in, as a big bang or if it creeps in so you don't get erratic change overnight, you don't get 'Oh we're making 1,000 managers redundant because of computerisation'. It's more 'We can do away with that job, we can do away with this job' and so on. As people leave, as you get the normal turnover, that's perhaps when it starts to contract. I don't see it as a major problem.

Q. Right. Another view of course is quite different to that it says that, it picks up very much on one thing that you said earlier that you can use systems like this to claw back a lot of time. You're not on the phone, you're not trying to track people down, you're not racing around a building trying to get into personal contact with people and that gives you the potential for doing other sorts of things, you know it might be planning, thinking to the future, it might be getting to spend more time with your direct reports, you know the human relation type.

I. I think most of us are quite busy enough, it just gives us time at home. It shortens a 16 hour day to a 12 hour day!

Q. Is that true? Is that a view that people take?

I. It's true, oh yes, its true all right. I don't know if it's the view that others have but it's certainly a view I have at times.

Q. Well I know you have another meeting coming up so I will leave it there unless you have any other questions. [End of tape].

JAMES O'BRIAN- ROYAL MAIL, BUDGET/STATISTICS.

2.7. JAMES O'BRIAN- ROYAL MAIL, BUDGET/STATISTICS.

Q. If you would just tell me your job title, your level in the company and provide a very brief summary of your main duties and responsibilities.

I. Right. James O'Brian. Management Accountant I suppose is the real title although I'm in charge of the management information systems, reports and payroll. Job level is probably mid-senior management.

Q. Right. So, can I ask you James, how many people that means you've got reporting to you?

I. There's 16.

Q. 16 in total, and is that a combination of other managers and ...

I. Three managers work under me and then there's the staff under them.

Q. Right. So those are presumably junior managers or lower level managers?

I. Well yes, without going into great detail about the management structure. In the middle management structure we've got 2 or 3 grades and mine's the higher grade in that middle management structure.

Q. Right, and who would you report to?

I. I report direct to the Finance Manager who's a member of the board.

Q. Right. So my next question I think leads into that. How do you make use of the system in relation to your job?

I. Well, my main use of the system isn't really as a receiver but rather a supplier of information. Through the management accounts side of my team we build up the information into what are hopefully meaningful reports. We produce an awful lot of paper from various computer systems and we try to break down little bits of useful information and put that on to the LAN to give the board members a very quick glance at the current performance without going into too much detail.

Q. So in a sense you are really an information provider?

I. That's right.

Q. What new skills would you say, or new features of your job have you developed, or have you had to develop, to cope with, to use, this new way of handling information?

I. Well, we're fortunate in that we've got very clever computer support group, so our main skills are keyboard skills. The system is usually fairly easy, they're very user friendly and they're menu driven and they're quite easy to follow. So we don't have any problems there. Understanding the figures that go into the system is a skill that you've already got and really it's just picking the figures up from one place and keying them in to put them onto the LAN. That's really as far as the skill level goes.

Q. So how would you have done this in the past then, before you had this system, what procedures would you have used to get this information?

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I. A lot of them really would be manual although we did use basic spreadsheets. It used to be manual. We would pick from various computer printouts that we get, we produce an awful lot of paper to tell you simple things, on more than one system of course, we would then collate that information and put them onto a manual report that would go out to the board members. So we've done away with that whole thing and it all just goes into the LAN.

Q. And are there any elements of the job, any skills that you no longer use, are redundant?

I. None really because the main element of my job is analysis and I still analyse the figures regardless of which system they come from, the analysis side of the job is still there. So basically the job is still the same although we're not handling lots of bits of paper now.

Q. Right. So what you're saying there is, let me get quite clear, you're taking information of various kinds from other systems ...

I. That's right.

Q. ... and then knocking it into shape, doing some analysis on it, and then ...

I. What we really do is to produce on the LAN one liners rather than send somebody a report out that's 20 or 30 pages long, we just pick out one liners that mean something. For instance how many hours of overtime have been worked in a week rather than send them a printout that's about 6 pages long, it's just one thing that goes out the LAN.

Q. I can see what you mean when you say it does away with a lot of paper.

I. Oh that's right. We still produce paper. We still have meetings to analyse various reports. But another classic example of what we're developing at the moment, which hasn't yet gone live, is our monthly report that again is done on a separate system. It produces about 20 pieces of paper that we send out to 10 various board members every month. We now are trying to develop a download from that system that will feed directly into the LAN. Rather than send out a 10 page document or a 20 page document, or whatever it may be, through the internal mail that may take half a day to get there, they've got it in seconds. That's still being developed.

Q. Tell me, what do you think are the benefits of the system in relation to your job?

I. The main benefit is speed. One of the other jobs I had prior to the LAN was sending out letters asking for information, another one of my jobs of course was collating all the budget information, preparing reports and so on. Now that used to involve quite a lot of letter writing to various people, asking for information to be returned by a certain date and that thing. But now of course I can do that on the electronic mail system. I can write to as many people as I want in either a block of people or pick out individuals and ask them to reply within minutes really on the LAN which in the past could have taken 2 or 3 days with the mail system.

Q. So in a sense that means that you gain some time because you don't have to depend on writing those memos any more?

I. That's right. There is obviously time saved there, it means you can get on with the job that much quicker as well because in the past you would have had to send a letter out to somebody asking for information and wait until it came back, which of course could take days. You could be sitting there scratching your head thinking I wish I had that information here to get on with it. The beauty of the LAN is that you ask for it to be returned immediately, so you save quite a lot of time on it.

Q. And you generally find that people respond more quickly?

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I. Not necessarily, but that's the idea.

Q. Are there any other areas, you've mentioned things like faster response.

I. Yes. What we're talking about at the moment is the supply of political information. I've also got access to other levels and other functions that I can key into for our main business of delivering and posting letters. I can key into the section that produces these figures, which are on another floor in a different section, operational administration. I think it's probably there on the flowchart somewhere. There are other sections, quality of service, quality assurance, I can key into their statistics and see what their performance is like. Because quite often when I'm producing reports I need to know this information but rather than ask them to send me a report I just key in and the information is there.

Q. I guess that must mean then you're not again having to chase around for information.

I. Well, that's right. Quite often you might want some information and you ring up and there's nobody there or you ring up and the telephone's engaged. The LAN's never engaged, it's just a question of keying in and, apart from very very odd times when there's some kind of maintenance, you always have access to it. It's much quicker and avoids complications.

Q. So in a sense what you're saying is it makes other function's activities more visible to you, you don't have to depend on them providing the information to you?

I. That's right.

Q. So can you monitor what's going on more effectively?

I. We can monitor, we can check. What had previously has been quite out of date, not too far out of date, but we were always 3 or 4 weeks behind everybody. We monitor that directly now.

Q. What sorts of things do you mean?

I. Well, things like the cross function traffic and the quality of service, the up and down. Really my job has a lot to do with the board members, so my use of the LAN tends to be more the vertical rather than the horizontal flow.

Q. Right. Are there any drawbacks, weaknesses, tensions in the system that have become evident to you in your use of it?

I. Personally speaking, no. The only drawback, if it is a drawback, is that because the system is there, people are expected to respond too quickly, it's just getting them round to do it. So that possibly a drawback but I haven't experienced anything as such.

Q. Do you mean that people sometimes tend to expect too much?

I. That's right, we've got this facility, why can't it tell us this and why can't it tell us that? This is not enough, we've always had this, now we've got a computer system we want more. That's always a danger with computers and that could be a slight drawback with this system, but as yet I haven't experienced it. I've expected it but I haven't experienced it yet.

Q. OK. This is really a question about how you think those above you use the system. So how do you think those above you use it, do they use it?

I. Oh yes they use it. In its infancy they tended to use it mainly for electronic mail. It is very easy to write messages to one body or one message can go to all of the team members. At the moment they use the LAN on a read only basis, they're not allowed to change actual information, it's read only. At the moment you find that most of the senior team will use it quite regularly for performance reports.

Q. Right, right, and they're demanding more information as you were suggesting earlier?

I. Yes. It can lead to that. It can also sometimes lead to a demand for information that you just haven't got the bloody time to get because two days earlier than what they would normally see it they see something on screen. Well, if I see that two days earlier then they must have these two days to do something else for me. What we do is we cut a few corners to make sure they get this on the LAN earlier. So it can cause a little bit of a problem there but we haven't really experienced anything at the moment which we have found is a disadvantage, to either us or to them. If anything, it can only be good because it saves an awful lot of time. That is the main benefit, they get information probably up to 1 or 2 days earlier than they used to. Of course they can also relay it back to you through the LAN without using telephones, obviously an expense, without paper, without writing letters they can do it within seconds.

Q. Would you say that the attitude of board members, top management in the organisation, what is their general attitude would you say towards information technology generally in the organisation?

I. Very much in favour. We have only in the past 18 months installed micro computers at board level, for individual members. What you see now the finance manager has got her own PC, and all the other board members have got one, and 18 months ago nobody had one. They just expected the information coming from the various functions through their own systems on paper, computer printouts, whatever. With the advent of the LAN they've done away with a lot of that and it means that they've got information within seconds or hours and they're all becoming very, very familiar with the systems. From a position 18 months ago where most of them probably won't even know how to turn the machines on they've become very, very, very familiar with it.

Q. Any other problems, tensions, difficulties?

I. Well, I think one of the problems with the system in general is it was originally planned for board members and certain key players within the district. Now it seems to have spread so far and so wide, not so much the number of PCs in use, but the number of people who use each PC. So you can have half a dozen users and only one PC available in their work area, that can be a problem if they all want to use it at the same time. For example, in my room we've got one PC and two authorised users of it. Obviously you can't work it at the same time because we each have individual passwords.

Q. And you've only got one machine?

I. One machine, and that can be a problem.

Q. These next series of questions are really more to do with the wider organisation in a way really. We've already started to touch on that with some of the things you've said. In what way would you say the LAN system has affected your working relations with others, perhaps in your own department, perhaps those in other departments within the organisation?

I. One of the benefits that I've seen of the LAN is that it can bring you closer to people. I know you don't see them, but you somehow feel more personal if you write to them through the network. That might seem a little strange that because normally if you're on the telephone

you're person to person, yet the LAN itself somehow brings you that little bit closer, part of the family. I have found that because you tend to talk to people more informally, you can cut out a lot of the formalities in letter writing and possibly sometimes on the telephone. On the LAN itself you tend to be very informal, as if you knew everybody you were writing to, but get to the point. So I think that's a benefit.

Q. So you think that in terms of, has it had any affect on the level of integration between departments? You said earlier that you can now use it to look into other functions.

I. Yes. As far as I'm concerned it does because again my job depends on a lot of these other functions to give me information to build up a monthly report. So from my point of view, yes it has been a benefit, but I don't really know what access other people have got to my files, so I couldn't say really.

Q. Has that itself caused any kind of problems? The thing that we have come across in other organisations is people saying, well, people get a bit kind of worried about the fact that you can look into their activity.

I. Usually you've only got access to certain information. If it's not on your menu you can't have access. Normally anything to do with performance will be on the menu of all the board members but not necessarily something that just has to be relayed from one function to another at a lower level. Not everybody would have access to that. You usually find that the supplier of information will know who has access to his menu.

Q. Tell me, if I asked you what you think were the reasons for the development of this system, what would you identify?

I. Very difficult question. Have we got half an hour to think about it? I think, like all systems, you've got to advance. A lot of our systems are a little bit antiquated and I think we got a little bit bogged down with our production management reports, management information, computer printouts. We did get really bogged down. We had a situation where you had to copy things a dozen times to send them to each of your senior management team. Because of the introduction of LAN, and this was taken into account when it was being developed, we've been able to do away, we don't have to go and send somebody away for an hour at a time to photocopy these reports. We don't have to send people away to bind them and make them look nice and fancy. We've done away with all of that. I would think that was one of the major reasons for the development. All of the other things have come on the back of that which hadn't even been considered in this development. The major development was to get people involved much quicker, to get the board members, and I think, from that point of view, it's been a major success.

Q. But, is it, you hit there on an aspect that we're obviously looking at as well, these days information technology is costly. I think, at the original state of development, that this was being costed at something like £60,000, so a lot of money involved. Where are the major potential areas for cost savings?

I. It's a good question. I suppose you could ask the same question about any computer system. It's difficult to quantify I would say at this stage. How do you quantify how much savings there is on a photocopier, how do you quantify how much saving you're making on paper, how much time is saved. Very, very difficult to quantify that. I'll be perfectly honest I don't know whether anybody has tried to do it, this is the problem.

Q. Do you see any potential for saving in staff costs? Because again this is often a fear that people have about technology,

JAMES O'BRIAN- ROYAL MAIL, BUDGET/STATISTICS.

I. They don't just come along and say there's a computer. You've got to put a case forward and you've got to put your case forward to say well we can save X number of hours at so much per average hourly rate, we can save X pounds per year and it pays for itself in 5 years. The problem is I don't think it works, I don't really think you get the savings. We get the benefit of improved technology, benefit of probably better reports, quicker reports but I don't think we always get the savings that we should.

Q. But you don't see, one of the areas in this debate about management, a lot of it is it has to be said it's speculative, is that systems, integrated information systems in particular, mean that you can do with fewer managers because some of the things that managers have traditionally done can now be handled by the system.

I. Well, that's right. It could well be, as we've said before, the new reorganisation of Royal Mail cuts out layers of management, but whether you can tie the two together I doubt very much. I don't think anybody has said because we've got new technology, and we've got this and we've got that, and can do all these things with the computers, we'll take out a layer of management. I think that's purely coincidental that that has happened.

Q. Well, what do you think does lie behind that restructuring?

I. It's all customer focused. To improve the image obviously and to make the individual managers closer to the customer. I would think in our system at the moment you'll probably have 5 or 6 steps before you get onto the senior board level whereas soon you probably have a manager who's responsible for his patch and report directly to a functional line manager. There won't be anything in the middle.

Q. I've a question here about the planning and implementation of the system and your views on how you think that was handled. How long has the LAN been existence?

I. It must be close on about 18 months. June of last year I think was when we started. It was implemented very quickly. Very few teething problems that I'm aware of. Once it was decided to go ahead with it, obviously the wiring work was outside and all developed, but everything else seemed to go very, very smoothly.

Q. Right, and were you involved in that development?

I. No, no.

Q. Was anybody at user level?

I. We were all trained as users. The system was set up and ready to run and we were all given more or less a couple of hours on how to use the electronic mail and from there you really develop your own skills. As I said before they're mainly keyboard skills because it's all menu driven, you've got no major skills involved.

Q. Pick it up yourself as you go along.

I. I mean for what was available at that time it was adequate.

Q. The last question really is again an overall broad question just to get your views on how you think that the LAN system and systems like the LAN is changing the role and skills of the manager?

I. In our business we have two sets of managers. Traditionally you had your administrative manager, and you had your operations manager. The administrative manager

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would be expected to learn these new skills and just work with them but what we've seen with the introduction of LAN is a culture change in the operational type manager. Where at one time they went 'well I don't want to know, that's an administration problem', but because there's new technology, and there's a keyboard and a television screen in front of them, they're quite keen to be involved. I think it's introduced a new culture that certainly will be tapped for future use.

Q. So what you're saying is it lays a basis for better communications between the two groups of managers?

I. Well, that's right. Again coming back to our reorganisation, now I would imagine that the eventual goal is to get accountability back down towards grass roots level. With a LAN system, obviously, you've got this two way communication. I would think that performance will not just go up to the senior management team, performance will come down to the guy on the shop floor, obviously it's a culture change but I would think that because it's new technology they are quite keen to be involved.

Q. It's an interesting observation. Who are the operations managers, not obviously the names but the functions?

I. Well, if you take an office, let's say Gateshead for instance. In the past a manager would look after that office, he would make sure that the mail comes in and is delivered and basically that would be it. But of course under the new culture and the new reorganisation he's got to be accountable. It would be difficult in the past to make somebody accountable without giving them the right information, without letting him communicate back to you. But somehow with the LAN, these chaps are quite keen to sit down at the keyboard, they're quite keen to sit there for a few minutes and key in the information.

Q. That's interesting, what level would they be at, are they middle management?

I. They would be the first level of middle management, the front line managers.

Q. And administrative managers, as you described them, have taken to it relatively

I. Well, we're forever changing animals, new technology to us is just something that we accept from day to day. Someone comes along and says there's a new computer and the following day it's out of date isn't it? We just accept that sort of thing.

Q. Right well I think that's basically it. Thanks very much indeed.

I. You're quite welcome. [End of tape]

DIANE WILKINSON, FINANCE MANAGER.

2.8. DIANE WILKINSON, FINANCE MANAGER.

Q. Could you tell me your job title, your level in the organisation and a very brief summary of your main duties and responsibilities?

I. The job title is Finance Manager. The level in the organisation can probably be seen from different viewpoints. Here, within the district, I report to the District Head Post Master, so I am at board level of the district. If you go to the larger Royal Mail then there will be accountants at a higher level than me. So locally I am top level of management, nationally I'm not. OK?

Q. And in your own area, your own district and in your own function, how many managers do you have reporting to you?

I. Well, it has varied as we've revolved through various structures over the past few years. At the moment I have 5 but in reality it should be probably just 3. The reason for that is that the 3 computer men, who you've met, I treat them all as equals so they all report directly to me, although at the same time they've formed a team. I tend to use Stan Mann as the team leader although he is of equal status with the others. So on that basis I've got 5 but I've really got 3 if I take Stan Mann as team leader. So let's say I've got 3 teams.

Q. And outside of the computing function, the other 2, are they in the finance function?

I. They're in the finance aspects, management accounting and general finance.

Q. Is one of them James O'Brian?

I. One of them is James O'Brian.

Q. Yes I've met him, I'm just establishing who I've met and talked to. Right, fine thanks. The first question in the interview is how do you use the LAN system in your job?

I. I use it a lot for communication, just sending notes backwards and forwards. I also use it for typing letters because I find that by doing my own local typing here it's a faster service than sending a manuscript up to the typing pool waiting for something to happen and eventually it comes back. That to me is a slow service, even if it is the same day or within 24 hours whereas here the majority of my written communication tends to be short. I can run it off quickly, print it off, send it on its way all within almost as long as it would take to write it manually and get it often to the typing pool. So messages, that's probably the biggest usage of it. The spreadsheet facility is another important one because now I can sit down and analyse situations as I go along. By using the spreadsheet I can develop the analysis as new areas open up. A classic example is that sheet that's up on the board there, it's a little hotch potch of various tables all on one printout. There's a spine of analysis with various sub-analyses coming off and that is extremely useful to me for say budgetary or forecasting purposes.

Q. Right. How then would you say having access to information via the LAN, in relation to your own area, how has it changed your role as a senior manager within the organisation?

I. I think that we have two things happening here. One is at the same time as the LAN has been developing our whole management approach has been getting tougher. So these two things have come along together, you cannot say that one brought along the other, but LAN certainly has assisted the understanding of information by other managers. A certain amount of data was available manually before, I think there was a, in some managers, a reaction to paperwork. I think they would all to often shove things to one side, whereas now it's available to them in a format, it's available in a more interesting format, a more acceptable one, and I

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think people are now prepared to switch onto and read it. Before most of the paper would be pushed at them, with perhaps some resentment that this is still more paperwork, and they would stuff it to the side and say 'we'll get round to it sometime' unless it was particularly vital. On the other hand some managers grabbed the paperwork because they saw it as the life blood, the temperature gauge of what going on in the budgetary performance. So I think our style has changed, as well as the LAN, the two of them have run along together.

Q. And how do people feel about these changes?

I. My impression is that the managers like the way that they get the information now, they seem to be very much more information friendly, if that's the right way to put it. They seem to look forward to it now as distinct from waiting for it to arrive. There are more questions saying when is it going to be updated, when is the new week's information going to be available, whereas in the past one had none of this, it was just it came to them. In terms of management style I think, because there is more information available, I'm able to talk to managers somewhat more succinctly about aspects of their budgets. I know I can talk to them and say, if you look at line so and so or call so and so on the such and such which is on LAN, you see this developing. They can go and look at it themselves either there and then or at their leisure. Somehow or other the information seems to be much more user acceptable, whether it's because it's in colour I'm not sure. Whether it's because they can choose when to go and look at it I don't know. I certainly feel that the management reaction to getting data in this way has been good, and when other managers talk to them about the data they've been more receptive as well.

Q. That's interesting, even though they've got to negotiate the technology to get at it?

I. Yes. I'm aware of 2 managers who were slow learners, and there were others who were incredibly fast learners, but then again I think that could be related partly to their fear of computers, also partly to how heavily loaded their individual jobs were. I can think of 1 or 2 managers who probably had lighter workloads and who developed quickly as against some others who had heavy workloads and did not have the time develop the skills, except perhaps in their own time in the evenings and other occasions. Certainly the slow starters used it very little at first, and used it purely to read, not to output anything. That has changed. One of the individuals he has changed his job and somebody else is now in there, and is using it more effectively. Another one is still, at this late stage, making very little outward use of it, and when it comes to using the other facilities like Harvard or spreadsheet or database which is in there I think probably making very little use at all, but he is quite happy to receive information through the LAN. Of the senior managers I can think of 3 possibly 4 who probably make quite a lot of use of the other software that's available like spreadsheets and graphics, probably the rest of them use it purely as a memo writing system. I think they would probably like to use it more, possibly they haven't learned how to use it, but neither have they asked for training in it. I think if we were able to get more and more of the regular information on to the LAN then we would see these other managers beginning to use it more for generating their own work or for outgoing work. I think we've also got to recognise at the moment we're going through business development which is a major reorganisation of the business and that is taking up a lot of what otherwise might be time available for people to develop the skills on the LAN system.

Q. Yes and of course it's put some of the development on the back burner.

I. It has yes, well for a period of time, but not permanently.

Q. One area we're interested in is to what extent using systems like these make contribution towards improving the effectiveness of managers and management. What do you feel about this at a personal level, has it made you feel more effective as a manager?

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I. I think it has made me considerably more effective in that it's put at my fingertips two very useful tools. One of them is the fast written communication, whether I transmit it using electronic mail or whether I converge it into actual copy and send off somewhere, that to me is very useful. It cuts out an irksome typing problem. I use that probably far more than I should but it lets me communicate with other folk quickly, it lets me send things out of this building to other parts of the business very quickly and that to me has improved my ability to communicate outwardly a lot. The other thing is the spreadsheet facility. I can sit down and as I puzzle through, or think through, or analyse a problem, I can capture it on spreadsheet and manipulate it. I think I can go down much more complex routes than I could ever have attempted to do manually, and it's purely because as you can build in the arithmetic formula as you go along, that's what takes care of all the hassle. If you're doing it manually you're constantly changing bits of arithmetic and things like that. It's this type of modelling which I think has been a tremendous boon in helping to log the changes that are happening in our performance data, whether they be budget changes, actual changes, forecasts or other initiatives that are coming along the way. I think those two things have been tremendously useful to me because it has freed up my time for other aspects of management, like just managing staff. It has enabled me, I think, to reach a higher standard of modelling, or perhaps financial forecasting, than would have been possible where you had to delegate and rely on other staff to do the work. That would have taken longer and might not have followed up all the areas of exploration that I wanted looked at. So I think technically it has helped me, the communication has helped, and, by giving me time to devote to other management areas, like the staff, I think all in all it has been a very considerable boon.

Q. My next question really in a sense follows on from that. What areas of skill would you say a manager needs to develop to get the best out of working with these kinds of systems? For example, what skill have you had to develop in order to be able to start to see a payback on the LAN for yourself?

I. OK. I think the first skill the manager possibly needs is a sense of adventure. It may sound strange but I think you have to be adventurous as you approach the equipment and learn to use it. I've had no formal tuition in it, I've had support when something's gone wrong but the rest of it has been self taught, just working with it and using the little manuals that come with it. I don't claim to be expert in any way but I think you do need a sense of adventure, to go down a route just to see what's happening. I think that's just a sense of adventure. I think you've got to stick at it and say that you are going to learn how to make this thing work, so there's perseverance. I think you have also got to imagine how you can use it in your day to day work. There may be things that you're doing at the moment, there may be things that are somewhere in your vision, and you can say 'Ah here are tools that will enable me to do it', to improve the speed, or the accuracy, or the quality of output. So as well as learning how to do it I think you've got to be thinking how and what you're going to be using it for. I've gone down the adventure route, I hope, I've persevered with it, I've found things. Initially I took work that had been done manually and converted that into again a spreadsheet. I was amazed at what was a tedious irksome manual task almost became a pleasure to do. I think that first success then begins to roll out and you're looking for other things you can convert. It also opens up, as it does on this item on the wall here, an opportunity of 'yes I know I've got a whole mass of perhaps complex but inter-related data that is constantly shifting', you've got to try and keep a mental tab on how each bit shifts. If you can get it logged in a way that you can update as and when things come along, you've got an excellent application which you can share with other people and which you can now display what was up in your head before, you can now pass it round to other folk for them to really understand how things all fit together. So to me the spreadsheet bit has been tremendous. So what else?

Q. What about the area of information use?

I. The area of information use?

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e-mail: chris.kimble@chris-kimble.com

Q. Yes, information that's coming to you through people rather than spreadsheets?

I. That's right, yes. I think if people are busy they tend to leave their neighbours and perhaps get on with their own thing and hope that collectively everyone is doing enough of the right things for the whole district. This certainly was the situation some years ago. In the past 2 or 3 years we have come together very much more as a team, we feel we've got collective responsibility as well as individual responsibility.

Q. Does systems like this contribute to that development of team feeling then?

I. I think it does. I think it does because in the early days I think the top team of managers were the first who were on it and they gave them a way of establishing communication with each other that didn't exist elsewhere. All right, that began to change after 3 or 4 months and many other users came on such that the original users are now 8 out of there must be about 50 or 60 users on there now, so they're very much in the minority. I think it did have an effect in the early days, yes.

Q. Can you describe the nature of that effect as you saw it?

I. I think there was a definite increase in communication. I would think increased willingness to talk to each other either about their own activities or the other person's activities and to talk in a way which was interested rather than perhaps being critical or pleased that someone else was in difficulty and they were not in difficulty. So it was this move from perhaps individual isolation to collective thinking about things. I think people began to talk more openly, in a more friendly way and feel that can I help the other individual rather than just leave him to find his own way out of his difficulties.

Q. Which had been the situation more before?

I. No, I don't want to exaggerate. Previously it was people just got on with their own responsibilities for their own function and other folk knew you were there obviously and communicated with you but you were very much the boss of your own patch then it began to move that these bosses were all part of a team. This was all part of the changing culture of the business and the LAN came in around the same time. I think it just helped to in some way cement this ability of folk being able to communicate to each other without either having to phone or write memos which were generated through the typing pool which somehow or other puts an officialdom on it. Now, if you send a little message through here full of bad grammar, spelling mistakes all you're trying to do is communicate something, I think the other person respects that effort.

Q. That's interesting isn't it, because on the one hand you've just made the point about the effect that that way of communicating has had and yet some people might turn that on its head and say 'but surely that must mean that in fact communication becomes a little bit more impersonal?' After all it's being done by means of LAN technology, and it means that maybe you're not spending as much time getting in close contact, close proximity with another colleague and therefore it substitutes your personal contact, and that's sometimes not seen as being a very good thing.

I. I think it's augmented the contact, I don't think it's substituted for it. We still have our meetings, we still meet up each day at lunch, it's a constantly changing route but over a period of days you'll see most of the senior managers. No to me it has augmented communication rather than as a substitute for it. There's no doubt about that. I think people have approached it in a sensible way that's been not necessarily frivolous or light hearted but they've sent messages

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that get the message over without belabouring it and excessive verbosity or unusual heavy-handed writing.

Q. I've just got a couple of more questions to finish on. You've presented a very positive picture of the LAN from your point of view and, to a degree, from the point of view of the organisation. Have there been any tensions, have there been any problems with its use?

I. None whatsoever, apart from going through the learning processes, but I would call those tensions not problems. I see the LAN as a very welcome addition in my office here. If I was to come in one day and find that I had been unplugged from the LAN system I would feel very deprived. I would feel that a very significant and useful tool had gone, the communication bit is very useful to me. If I lost that it would be a great pity. If I was also taken off access to a micro so I no longer had spreadsheets then that would be a disaster area. To me the only difficulty is, it's not a problem, is getting it up and working and loaded and getting the information on to it that could be there but we just haven't got the resource to get it on to the LAN system. To me it's playing around at something like maybe 10% of its potential, I suppose we can only go as fast as the users are able to take advantage of it. I think that the folk who will really take advantage of it are probably middle management around the place. Senior management will be very much more receivers of the information, the middle managers I think will be the creators and the manipulators of the data to get it around each other or into places. Some managers will be adventurous and pick it up others will be perhaps too busy to get highly involved to begin with, others might be timorous. I think the key is the data we can get onto it. I can certainly see the new managers coming in on this divisional structure, one of whom is very keen, the opportunity to communicate with him by sending him written communication to which are attached perhaps charts from the spreadsheet, that opportunity will be very real.

Q. Can I take you back just a little bit to something you said there. What do you see as its impact on that level of middle management that you identified there? You said that you saw middle managers as being the main users. How do you think it's going to effect the role of the middle manager?

I. I think it will be an efficiency tool in that much that is happening at the moment can be done better and quicker. I think things which perhaps are not happening at the moment could start being done, items that a manager may feel that he would like to do but the resource isn't there or the time isn't there or there's some difficulty in getting it launched. I can see the managers experimenting with the reporting data and finding better ways of producing the data, either that it can be understood more easily or perhaps brings out new aspects of the way the business is performing which were not readily seen before. They may change the emphasis of how people look at some reports or some numbers. OK, we have been somewhat blind and we've always been looking at this bit whereas in fact they've been able to manipulate something, change it, show it in a different light and we realise 'Ah this is perhaps what we should be giving our attention to'. So there are often, just by experimenting, one can stumble across new levels of understanding or new appreciation. I'm trying to think of an example but none comes readily to mind. I would think efficiency would be the first thing and improved quality of output that aids understanding and getting to the crucial thing would be the second. I think the managers, again it depends on the manager, gets a lot of pressure from having such a tool available to do their work with. They feel they got something that can help them do something they like doing anyway but can do it even better. But again you'll always have the managers who want to kind of stay away but we have noticed in the past 5 years that they are getting few and far between and of the managers who are not very computer knowledgeable they recognise they are now the minority and are trying to do something to help themselves.

Q. Can I put to you one scenario that is evident in the literature and it's probably evident in the actuality of some organisations although I don't know what the position is in Royal Mail but you may be able to comment on. It's quite a pessimistic one because it says that integrated

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information systems pose a great threat to middle management because middle management has typically spent a lot of time running around bringing information together and doing a bit of analysis on it and passing it on to someone like yourself, a senior manager, who then looks at it from the point of view of a strategic decision making level. Now, to the extent that systems like this can perform that function, and even in terms of what you yourself said earlier that they can enable senior managers to have time to do their own analysis, you are beginning to say do we need this number of middle managers in the business. Now I just wonder what your observations on that would be? As I said it is one scenario and it is a very pessimistic one. How does it strike you?

I. It hasn't struck me as a danger until you mentioned it because I think we have got a lot to do before we begin to get to that area. Let us assume that we are in an area where the information systems are sufficiently well designed, that a senior manager can access something and he can see very quickly what presently is only known to a lower level manager because he's the data collector. Yes there could be an effect. There's bound to be an effect on the number of middle managers, but a senior manager can only do so much in a day. There could be a situation in which the middle manager begins to diminish. The senior manager in the short term takes over a fair chunk of that role but in the longer term I would think some kind of lesser being than a middle manager would come in as a monitor to aid the senior manager, perhaps just to monitor the data and to bring to the senior manager those areas that need his individual attention. So middle managers could diminish but be partially replaced by some type of skilled monitor who is not necessarily a manager, who is not a data collector but is perhaps more the analyst type individual. So I could see a change there in the role of the manager, I could see a change in the number of managers because I presume a monitor analyst could perhaps carry out quite a lot of work that was done by various middle managers. So I could see some evolving change there but the speed with which that would happen I wouldn't like to conjecture. I could imagine that there will be some businesses that are integrating this way and have probably gone down that route in the past 10 or 15 years. Yes I could see that the, I think it's role changing as technology comes in and as the strategy of the business or the management style or its management need change so you get changes.

Q. But even Royal Mail is presumably, like a number of other large businesses, is going down this route, in a sense it's reorganisation is to do with reducing the number of levels of management isn't it?

I. That's right, yes.

Q. So one could perhaps see that as part of a package in which technology is a part, plays a part.

I. Yes I could. Perhaps the technology contributing to a second reorganisation of Royal Mail in 5 years or 10 years time. It could be 5 years by which time we will have expanded our LAN systems considerably and we've got this integrated type of work going on. At the present moment we're running IBM machines, we're running Boroughs machines, we're running NCR machines, none of which are compatible and none of which is easy to download its data onto the LAN to make it available. So I think there's a very major IT development strategy to be put together to get to that point, I think we're quite a long way from that integration. I think we can look to it, I'd like to see it but at the same time I would hate to see a manager or senior manager accessing data at a considerably detailed level rather than at the top level although the ability is there they may have to learn to restrain the temptation to go down to the n'th level of report. You could have a manager plugged into a machine all day just seeking data and not using it to bring about change or improvement or even perhaps to recognise good work that is done. I think we tend to talk an awful lot about using data to correct problems but as we move into our new culture in Royal Mail we've also got to use data to recognise work well done and make sure that these people get some recognition.

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e-mail: chris.kimble@chris-kimble.com

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Q. Well thanks very much indeed. I said about 30 minutes and we've talked about 50 minutes so I apologise for taking longer than expected. [End of tape]