



**THE "NEW DIVISION OF LABOUR" DEBATE AND WOMEN'S JOBS:  
RESULTS FROM A SURVEY CONDUCTED IN CANADA  
FROM A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE**

by  
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## Biographical note

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**Note 1** : this is a version of a paper written in 1998 and presented at the SUNY (State University of New York ) Conference on Braverman and Abroad. It was published in the proceedings under this title : Tremblay, Diane-Gabrielle (1998). The New Division of Labour and Women's jobs: a Complex Picture from a Research conducted in Québec. Dans Braverman and Beyond.Work, Difference and Social Change, Actes du colloque du même nom tenu à la State University of New York at Binghamton. Sous la direction de Phil Kraft. pp. 420-433.

**Note 2** : More recent work on women's work and work-family balancing can be found in the bibliography, amongst which many research reports and articles done since 2000.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years there has been much discussion on the questions of High Performance Work Organization, new forms of organization of work, end of the division of labour, etc. (Kern and Schumann, 1989). Often associated with technological innovations, organizational changes are considered by many scholars to be essential in the search for business competitiveness and the debate is thus important in many disciplines, from economics, to sociology and management.

However, few studies include gender as a variable in their analysis and this was the point of departure of our study.<sup>1</sup> These issues are most often discussed in terms of the "worker", which in fact is the "male worker", although this is not explicitly said. We are therefore justified in asking if the "promises" of new models of production, such as the "end of the division of labour" (Kern and Schumann, 1989), job enrichment, the effort to make better use of workers' competencies and capabilities, the intensification of training, and a focus on treating workers as individuals, are relevant in the case of female jobs, even following technological and organizational changes. As most of the research done on these issues was done in male occupations in the manufacturing sector (paper, steel, auto industry), it appeared to us that some research should be done which would include female occupations, and ideally men and women in similar positions.<sup>2</sup>

Are women and men equally affected by the type of flexibility that involves removal of barriers between job categories, the disappearance of traditional hierarchies and supervision, as well as by multi-skilling of the labour force? Similarly, are the new skill requirements and training related to the new forms of work organisation and the use of computer technologies the same for both sexes? The aim of this study, which was carried out from 1993 to 1995, is to provide some answers to these questions. Such questions, we would argue, are fundamental, not least because the issues currently being raised in relation to the degradation of work associated with Taylorist work organization can affect both women and men. Both men and women are affected by contemporary transformations of the labour process and production, but little research is done in a comparative perspective. To address these questions, this paper presents the results of a study which is exploratory in nature and was conducted in ten Quebec firms on the theme of human resources management (HRM) and training, and more particularly on the gendered division of labour, and its evolution in a context of technological and organizational change.

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, the various articles by Appay, Kergoat, and Schneider in the bibliography; they are among the few to use a gendered perspective on the question of the evolution of the division of labour.

<sup>2</sup>We say "similar" because it is difficult to find men and women in exactly the same positions in employment, as employment data indicate and as our research confirmed.



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## 2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

We mentioned previously that the majority of research done on new work organisations is based on male sectors, generally manufacturing sectors, and more precisely on male jobs (as there are women's jobs in manufacturing...but these seem less often the object of attention in these studies. The research is often done in capital intensive - and male intensive ! - industries such as paper, steel, and the auto industry. It can be questioned whether it is realistic to talk about "new methods of human resource management" and "new norms of work organization" in a context where a Taylorist conception of work and mechanisms generating discrimination persist, while some mal jobs do evolve towards more autonomous forms. As was pointed out previously, few researchers have considered gender differences as a relevant variable in studies of new forms of work organization. Our review of the literature indicates that a few authors only have dealt with this subject. They are few, but all the more interesting to consider.

According to Ellen Ruth Schneider, who studied German cases for example, a first phase of workplace change ("job control" and a greater control of work organization) can prove to be positive for women since it provides an opportunity to learn new tasks (maintenance, repairs, loading and changing programs, etc.; see Schneider, 1991). However, this positive impact will not necessarily last since this phase is often only transitory. As she goes on to say, "...the room for manoeuvre related to the integration of tasks will decrease with the following stage of technical evolution" (1991: 7). Thus, men are given the new operations in automated manufacturing systems, jobs which confer greater responsibilities and autonomy in the work carried out. Women are only given work of lesser importance (auxiliary and operational tasks) in mechanized or partially automated manufacturing workshops. The changing forms of the gendered division of labour are thus rapidly overshadowed by their enduring forms, that is, a reinforcement of the position of skilled male workers and a concentration of female workers in the least skilled jobs and at the lowest levels of the job hierarchy. As our own research will show, two key terms - enduring forms and changing forms of the gendered division of labour - in our view currently paint an accurate portrait of the many workplaces that have undergone a variety of forms of technological change.

Based on similar observations in France, Danièle Kergoat argues that the claim that the flexible model of work and production will improve the reality of work is a myth (Kergoat, 1992). She notes that in fact men are given new forms of cooperative autonomy while women only have access to training that is directly related to the job, a weaker form of multi-skilling (that is, *horizontal*<sup>3</sup>) including frequent mobility and limited-term contracts. Thus, for women, the Multiskilling, New Forms of Work Organization and the "new widening of skills" mean little more than the addition of new tasks to old tasks at the same level. In this way, female workers do not become real multi-skilled workers, nor do they benefit from accompanying advantages, i.e. a significant wage increase and the real possibility of promotion (Kergoat 1992). This further example demonstrates the way in which traditional forms of the gendered division of labour can be superimposed on its new forms.

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<sup>3</sup>Emphasis added.



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Of the three forms of work flexibility distinguished by Béatrice Appay, the first concerns new needs related to jobs and training modules, which are expressed in terms of Multiskilling or "multiple skills". In this case, men are both supervisors and workers (qualified and multi-skilled) with knowledge of the entire work process and, in a way, represent the central core of the work force in the firm and thus enjoy employment stability (Appay, 1993). The second form links professional identity and precariousness. This occurs when new trades and occupations are involved. In this case, specific training modules further the learning of new functions; however, since the tasks in question do not constitute the core of the work process, the jobs are therefore marked by a certain precariousness. Finally, in the third form, the multiple skills of employees are simply not recognized or even developed; it is just an addition of tasks of the same level, with no increase in qualification or responsibility. According to Appay, these three dimensions of flexibility, part of a larger move towards greater flexibility of production, result in new forms of subordination and precariousness for both male and female workers, although the trajectory of these forms varies (Appay 1993, 88). Some years earlier, Helena Hirata found that retraining activity did not have the same scope, impact or significance for women and men. Indeed, in this regard, training is "...the very place where women's technical incompetence is constructed." (Hirata, 1991).

The physiological and cultural dimensions frequently used to explain the devaluation of women's work also influences enduring forms of the traditional gendered division of labour. Thus, according to Nicole Gadrey, occupations with very specific characteristics such as "construction worker", "middle-level manager or supervisor" as well as "blacksmith, pipefitter and boilermaker" appear to be "non-feminizable".<sup>4</sup> As we will see further on, we found a similar situation in poultry transformation.

Women's access to certain jobs is therefore limited in a "physical" or cultural sense (both being entwined at times) , added with a second limitation of an intellectual nature (limited knowledge and access to operation, control and repair of equipment). However, another limitation also exists, involving the barriers to women's upward mobility. For example, in office jobs, since women tend to occupy the least skilled jobs (with little participation in decision making), which are characterized by a narrow range of computer applications (preparing invoices, processing various files, data input), they in fact have fewer opportunities for career advancement. On the other hand, men carrying out highly skilled tasks (processing complex data, problem-solving, designing plans) are more likely to have their skills recognized by management and to advance within the hierarchy. (Volst and Wagner, 1988 ; Tremblay, 1988).

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<sup>4</sup> See Nicole Gadrey, (1992). Moreover, the use of highly technological equipment (digital control machine tools) remains the prerogative of men. Many female jobs will be eliminated following the creation of skilled machine control jobs. Thus, are women not being recruited to fill the newly skilled jobs? See: Danièle Kergoat, "Ouvrier = ouvrières? Propositions pour une articulation théorique de deux variables: sexe et classe sociale," *Critique de l'économie politique* (1978); see also Héléna Hirata and Chantal Rogerat (1988).



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All of these findings on the division between female and male tasks attest to the persistence of traditional forms of the gendered division of labour in a context of technological change. The de-skilling/re-skilling dynamic does not appear to work in the same way for women and men, making it a relevant subject of research. Considering little research had been done on this specific issue in Québec, we oriented our own research on this subject.

Thus, two contrasting propositions concerning the impact of new technologies and new production models on skills and work can be identified. Since the first approach, often referred to as the "High Performance Work Organization", which does not take gender into account, is dominant, we wanted to test these hypotheses in more detail by analyzing the experience of ten Quebec firms.<sup>5</sup> This research process is all the more relevant since, as was previously observed, to our knowledge, the majority if not all studies that take gender into account from this precise analytical perspective on the "end of the division of labour" are European, and they are very few. Since situations may vary according to sociological, economic or institutional factors (state of industrial relations, employment equity legislation, etc.), research on Quebec/Canada is particularly relevant.

### 3. THE QUEBEC EXPERIENCE

Our research is based on quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to try to obtain simultaneously some breadth as well as some depth and understanding of processes. We thus conducted interviews with a number of women (43) and men (35) in the 10 firms studied and also had questionnaires of a more quantitative nature filled by women (118) and men (66) in the same firms; the persons interviewed also filled the questionnaire, so that their numbers are included in the second. Both enduring and changing forms of the gendered division of labour in a context of technological and organizational change were observed in the Quebec firms studied. Four specific sets of themes were covered in the research in order to demonstrate that both enduring forms of and innovations in the gendered division of labour clearly do exist. We examined firstly, the job content of women and men's work in these firms; secondly, women and men's use of technologies in the workplace; thirdly, the effects of technological changes on their job content; and finally, training within the firm, since it can affect the possibilities of "benefiting"

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<sup>5</sup>The survey was carried out between May 1994 and January 1995. It was conducted in ten Quebec firms, with women and men within similar occupations involved in a process of change (new technologies, new work methods, upgrading of existing equipment, work reorganization, quality circles, entry of women into non-traditional occupations, etc.). The research method used involved two main stages. During the first, qualitative stage, interviews were carried out with 43 women and 35 men concerning the diverse technological and other changes experienced in their work. In the second stage, to complete the data collection, a standardized questionnaire was distributed to a larger sample. Overall, 118 women and 66 men responded to the questionnaire. These respondents were distributed among four manufacturing firms and six service-sector firms. It should be noted that the study sample was not made up of equal numbers of women and men. This can be explained by two factors. First, employers themselves imposed limits on the number of people that could be contacted (interviews and surveys). Secondly, it was difficult to construct a study sample including the same number of women and men in comparable occupational situations. However, the study sample may be considered representative of the firms studied according to precise selection criteria, that is, the firm had to be involved in a process of change and we had to be able to compare men's jobs and women's jobs in relatively similar situations.



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from new technologies (*cf.* Hirata 1991). In this paper, we will concentrate on this issue of the gendered division of labour, on its evolution in the context of technological and organizational change; we will also look into training possibilities, given their impact on multi-skilling, upward mobility and therefore on possible changes in the gendered division of labour.

## 3.1 THE FIRMS STUDIED

Of the ten firms that make up the study sample, four are in the manufacturing sector, identified here by the letters, A, B, C and D. Firms A, B and C are in the food sector, while Firm D is in the pulp and paper sector. Among these firms, two from the food sector are highly innovative in work and production organization as well as in technology. Moreover, their high business volume ranks them among the largest firms and they experience few economic difficulties. The other two firms are managing to stay in the market despite certain economic problems.

The other six firms studied are in the service sector, identified here by the letters E, F, G, H, I and J. Firms E and F are in the restaurant and financial sectors respectively, while the four other firms \_ G, H, I and J \_ are in the communications sector. Of the six service-sector firms, four are performing well in general while two of the firms in the communications sector are experiencing some economic difficulties.

Manufacturing	Interviews		Questionnaires	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
A. Food - Fruit Juice	8	6	11	8
B. Food - Poultry Cutting	7	4	19	9
C. Food - Dairy Products	3	3	6	4
D. Pulp and Paper	5	5	9	8
Total	23	18	45	29
Grand Total: 41 interviews conducted 74 questionnaires distributed				



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Services	Interviews		Questionnaires	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
E. - Restaurant	1		19	4
F. Finance - (Credit Union)	7	3	22	4
G. Communications - Television	1	7	1	7
H. Communications - Cable TV	3	3	9	9
I. Communications - Press	7	4	15	9
J. Communications - Press	1		7	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>37</b>
Grand Total: 37 interviews conducted 110 questionnaires distributed				
Grand Total: Manufacturing and Services 78 interviews conducted and 184 questionnaires distributed				

### 3.2 SOCIOLOGICAL PROFILE OF FEMALE AND MALE RESPONDENTS

Although the sociological profile of female and male respondents does not differ much between the manufacturing firms and the service-sector firms, there are nonetheless slight differences. In the manufacturing firms, the average age of women is 42 and men 36.5. In the service-sector firms, the average age of women (35.4) is lower than the average age of men (40). The seniority of employees within the service-sector firms is also lower than the seniority of respondents in the manufacturing firms, a reflection of both greater discontinuity of women's career paths and greater rigidity of internal markets in the manufacturing sector.<sup>6</sup> Women's seniority rises to 12.05 years in the service-sector firms and 19 years in the manufacturing firms. In these two categories of firms, men's seniority reaches 12.4 and 15 years respectively. The number of years in the labour market (as opposed to in the firm) is slightly higher but does not exceed 25 years (see Table 2).

Several differences in educational levels can be observed between the two categories of firms, differences largely attributable to occupational differences between the two types of work forces. Thus, the educational level of women and men in the manufacturing firms is lower than that of respondents in the service-sector firms. On average, the educational level of respondents in the manufacturing firms does not go beyond high school (in Quebec, Secondary V). In these firms, individuals occupy positions of temporary workers, labourers, mechanics and fork-lift truck drivers, which basically require a high school education. In service-sector firms, the educational level of respondents would appear to be more diversified. Some individuals have high school, but others have college and sometimes even

<sup>6</sup>With regard to internal labour markets, see D.-G. Tremblay (2nd edition, 1997), Chapter 11.



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university education. It must be said that in these firms, the range of occupations (including waitresses, cashiers, office workers, technicians and journalists) is also more diversified.

TABLE 2

Sociological Profile of Female and Male Respondents in Manufacturing and Service-Sector Firms

	Manufacturing Firms		Service-Sector Firms	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Average Age	42 years	36.5 years	35.4 years	40 years
Jobs	*factory and office	*factory and office	**office	**office
Seniority in the Firm	19 years	15 years	12.05 years	12.4 years
Seniority in the Labour Market	23 years	21 years	17.1 years	16.08 years
No. of jobs held in the labour market	3 jobs	4 jobs	3 jobs	4 jobs
Educational Level	Secondary V***	Secondary V*** or less	Secondary IV and V*** CEGEP**** and university courses	Secondary IV and V; CEGEP**** - university
N =	45 Women	29 Men	73 Women	37 Men

The respondents in our study therefore constitute a relatively young work force who still have many years of labour market activity ahead of them before reaching retirement. This underlines the importance of analyzing the internal job market of these firms, the adjustment of workers in a context of technological and organizational changes, as well as their perceptions in this regard, since the educational profile of the work forces reflects the composition of the labour pool on the contemporary labour market.

### 3.3 CHANGES IN WORK

During the last twenty years, the majority of respondents (both women and men) within the firms studied have experienced many changes in their work, such as the introduction of new technologies and the reorganization of their tasks, the two often being related. Table 3 shows the changes observed in the various firms. Some 70 % experienced technological change and 50-58 % experienced organizational change.



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TABLE 3  
Overview of Change in Manufacturing and Service-Sector Firms

\* Non-discrete responses

Type of Change	Years	Manufacturing Firms				Service-Sector Firms				
		Women		Men		Women		Men		
		N=	%	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%	
Introduction of technologies	1973-1994	31	69%	21	72,4%	1976-1994	49	67,1%	24	64,9%
New Work Organization	1973-1994	22	49%	17	58,6%	1979-1994	48	66,0%	16	43,2%
Quality Circles	1973-1993	12	27%	6	20,6%	1976-1994	22	30,1%	12	32,4%
Work Teams	1973-1993	19	42%	8	27,6%	1976-1994	26	36,0%	15	40,6%
Others	1989-1993	2	4.4%	4	8,9%	1976-1994	1	1,4%	5	13,5%
N =	45 women			29 Men		73 Women			37 Men	

The results show that the most significant change in work involves the introduction of new technologies, followed closely by work reorganization. In the case of manufacturing firms, 69% of the female respondents and 72.4% of the male respondents have been affected by the introduction of new technologies. In these same firms, the reorganization of work affected 49% of the female respondents and 58.6% of the male respondents.

In the service-sector firms, 67.1% of female respondents and 64.9% of male respondents have been affected by technological changes. The proportion of women and men affected by work reorganization reached 66% and 43.2% respectively, again out of total respondents of each gender in these firms. There were more women in the service sector (66 %) and more men in the manufacturing sector (58 %) who experienced organizational change, while percentages are closer for technological change.

Both the manufacturing and service-sector firms also established quality circles and work teams, however these changes are clearly of less importance than those mentioned previously. Moreover, in some of the firms, quality circles and work teams had been introduced in the past but had disappeared by the time of the study. Attention should be drawn to two characteristic features of both the manufacturing and the service-sector firms. First, in the majority of these firms, technological change is accompanied by work reorganization or by a new distribution of tasks. Secondly, most of the firms also eliminated jobs, which was associated with work reorganization.



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Multi-skilling is a rationalization measure that is often pursued in order to reduce labour costs. This was the case for one of the manufacturing firms, Firm D, which introduced multi-skilling as a result of the elimination of jobs following technological changes (new production lines, new paper machine, a "stacker", packer, etc.). The firm was thus able to economize on labour costs without decreasing the volume of work carried out.

The reorganization of work often implies not only a new way of working, but increasingly, a greater commitment of workers to their work. This explains the fact that a good number of firms studied had established continuous improvement or quality committees in order to increase the involvement and participation of the work force in the work and production processes. These aspects of work reorganization are, of course, an integral part of the new human resource management theories related to High Performance Work Organizations.

In our case studies, the importance, the role, the content of meetings and the way in which autonomous committees work vary according to the firms studied. In the manufacturing firms, there may be occasional meetings between supervisors and employees, at which the latter make various suggestions (safety, team spirit, etc.) to solve specific work problems (Firm A). Such meetings also provide the opportunity for supervisory staff to appreciate the importance of employees and for reinforcing this recognition through the process of joint problem-solving (Firm B). Finally, the committees represent a preferred tool for finding solutions to major problems, or any other aspect of work organization that needs improvement. (Firms C and D). This is the case in all four manufacturing firms, but the degree of participation and the influence on decisions vary according to sector; there also seems to be more responsibility and influence of these committees where men are concerned.

Much the same approach to committees, though in the context of a different perspective on work reorganization, was found in one of the service-sector firms that had established a semi-autonomous work team. The change was an integral part of new management practices in the firm. Two departments were merged, and multi-skilling and job rotation were introduced, but this represents a small percentage of the firm's workers. With the establishment of a semi-autonomous work team, employees' new jobs included some tasks usually carried out by managers, in particular, certain types of decisions, the organization of the work day, and the determination of the daily work load.

This overview of changes in technology and work organization has allowed us to identify elements of both change and continuity in the division of labour in the firms studied. In the next section, it will be shown that the effect of the changes, which in theory involve both gender groups, can vary and that there are particular differences between women and men.



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## 4. WOMEN AND MEN: CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES WITH TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Before examining the ways in which the gendered division of labour has or has not changed, we will describe the tasks carried out by men and women in order to draw a picture of the overall gendered division of labour.

### 4.1 OVERVIEW OF THE GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR: THE TASK

We turn first therefore to an examination of the nature of respondents' tasks in order to bring out characteristic elements of the gendered division of labour. As was pointed out above, the introduction of new technologies and the reorganization of work are the two most significant changes within the firms studied. Nevertheless, not all of the groups of employees studied necessarily use technologies to carry out their daily tasks.

Types of Tasks	Manufacturing Firms				Service-Sector Firms			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%
Related to the use of a technology	17	37,8%	13	44,8%	53	72,6%	22	59,4%
Manual	34	75,5%	27	93,1%	47	64,4%	21	56,7%
Handling	24	53,3%	20	69,0%	28	38,4%	16	43,2%
Intellectual	3	6,7%	10	34,5%	42	57,5%	22	59,4%
Office and administrative	6	13,3%	2	6,9%	35	47,9%	12	32,4%
Management	2	4,4%	1	3,4%	4	5,5%	4	10,8%
Research	4	8,9%	4	13,8%	15	20,5%	17	45,9%
Reception and communication	6	13,3%	9	31,0%	17	23,3%	17	45,9%
Other	3	6,7%	1	3,4%	1	1,4%	4	10,8%
N =	45 Women		29 Men		73 Women		37 Men	

\*Totals may add to more than 100% since respondents could choose more than one response.



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In the manufacturing firms, the majority of female and male respondents perform manual tasks. However, this applies to a much higher proportion of men (93.1%) than women (75.5%). Slightly more than half of the women (53.5%) carry out handling tasks, and again, the proportion of men is higher (69%). Slightly more than a third of the women (37.8%) make use of a technology in carrying out their work, compared to almost half of the men studied (44.8%). Women (37.8%) mainly carry out testing with the help of technologies. This is also the case for men (44.8%), who carry out machine control as well (41.4%); the percentage is only 20 % for women.

In service-sector firms, the majority of female and male respondents perform tasks related to the use of a technology, however this applies to proportionately more women (72.6%) than men (59.4%). Compared to men (43.2%), a higher proportion of women (58.9%) say that they carry out data input with the help of technologies. They also perform correction of operations and errors (56.2%) as well as testing (42.5%). A much greater proportion of men (67.6%) are engaged in testing; for women the percentage is only 42,5 % . Finally, these workers also do other tasks such as word processing, archiving, filing, as well as a variety of technical operations.

These results indicate several differences between women and men, but also some similarities. For example, in manufacturing firms, women mainly perform manual tasks and the proportion of women doing so is higher than the proportion of women carrying out manual tasks in service-sector firms, but this is also true for men. Handling work (the physical moving of objects) ranks second for women, but this is also the case for men.

In the service-sector firms, similarities in the type of tasks accomplished are slightly less apparent, but nevertheless, some do exist. Thus, tasks related to the use of a technology are at the top of the list of responses of both female and male respondents. However, the proportion of men (32.4%) carrying out diverse technical operations is higher than the proportion of women (23.3%) performing this type of work. Moreover, intellectual tasks occupy a greater place in both gender groups. Nevertheless, tasks of an "administrative" nature (administration, planning, accounting) and technical tasks (control, technical operations) show higher percentages for men.

Are the similarities observed between the work of men and women the product of transformations of the gendered division of labour, or are they the same as they have always been? Our research results, which indicate some change in jobs, tasks and the gendered division of labour, provide some answers to these questions; of course these have to be considered preliminary as our survey does not cover the whole population of Quebec firms and is therefore not fully representative, although union representatives and workers do feel they represent quite well the general situation which they perceive.

While 60% of women in the manufacturing firms state that the distribution of work between women and men has changed, 48.3% of the male respondents are of the same opinion. Changes can be observed in terms of women's access to non-traditional occupations. According to 33% of female respondents, a greater number of women now



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occupy traditionally male jobs (in Firms A and D in particular; i.e. food and pulp and paper firms). This opinion was shared by 37.9% of men.

Changes can also be observed in terms of the entry of men into traditionally female jobs: 60% of women and 41.4% of men indicate a greater presence of men in female occupations. Moreover, according to 33.3% of women and 41.4% of men, the distribution of work between the sexes has become more equitable.

TABLE 5

Typical Aspects of Transformations of the Gendered Division of Labour

\* Non-discrete responses

Elements of Change	Manufacturing Firms				Service-Sector Firms			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%
Women in men's jobs	15	33.3%	11	37.9%	10	13.6%	3	8.1%
Men in women's jobs	27	0,6	12	41.4%	14	19.2%	2	.05%
More equitable work	15	33.3%	2	41.4%	14	19.2%	4	10.%
Women in management jobs	4	8.9%	2	6.9%	7	9.6%	0	0,0%
Autres	4	8.9%	2	6.9%	0	0	2	5.4%
N =	45 Women 29 Men				73 Women 37 Men			

Our research also indicates that certain forms of the vertical gendered division of labour have persisted in the manufacturing firms, for only 8.9% of women and 6.9% of men agreed that women have easier access to managerial jobs.

Compared to the manufacturing firms, considerably lower proportions of female and male respondents in the service-sector firms report changes in the gendered division of labour. Only 13.6% of female respondents indicate that there are more women in non-traditional occupations (for example, see Firms E and H). Similarly, few women (19.2%) note a greater presence of men in female jobs, while only 8.1% of men perceive an increase in the number of women occupying male jobs. An even lower proportion of men (0.05%) believe that there has been an increase in the number of men in female jobs. None of the male respondents feel that women have developed easier access to managerial positions, compared to 9.6% of women. Finally, relatively low proportions of women (19.2%) and men (10%) indicate that the distribution of work between the two sexes has become more equitable. In sum, the gendered division of labour persists in service-sector firms.



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Although certain similarities between the content of female tasks and male tasks can be observed, any conclusion that a transformation of the gendered division of labour is taking place must be approached very cautiously for the following reasons. First, the factors changing the gendered division of labour do not affect all female and male respondents. Less than half of the female and male respondents attest to such change.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the changes in the gendered division of labour do not affect all categories of workers in the same way. In general, only some segments of the work process are affected by such transformations. In Firm A, for example, lightening the physical demands of certain jobs encouraged women's entry into some male jobs. However, it seems that management continues to identify certain jobs as being "men's jobs". When a mechanic's job is involved, occupational requirements tend to increase for the women who wish to practise this trade. In Firm D, the entry of women into non-traditional occupations is largely restricted to the jobs of operator and fork-lift truck driver and much less to mechanics. Thirdly, even if the response rates of female and male respondents sometimes tend to be similar, it remains that women perform certain tasks (such as data entry, correction of operations and errors) more often than men, and that men are more involved in the execution of other types of tasks such as machine control and testing.<sup>8</sup> Given these circumstances, discussion of both *changing* and *enduring* forms of the gendered division of labour gives a more accurate portrait of the reality of the firms studied. Hence, the title of this article. This paradox will be further illustrated by the data presented below.

### 4.2 EFFECTS OF CHANGES ON WORK

By studying the effects of changes in work on skills, autonomy, creativity, responsibility and other elements, the way in which certain components of the gendered division of labour both change and persist can be observed. This is revealed quite clearly in Table 6.

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<sup>7</sup>In this regard, Firm B's situation is very revealing. The sexual division of labour is very striking, particularly in the case of personnel working the day shift where there seem to be greater barriers between job categories, as compared to the night shift.

<sup>8</sup>Moreover, within jobs defined identically, in certain firms women and men will sometimes refuse to carry out some tasks that they associate with the "opposite sex". For example, in Firm B some women take care of filling their basin themselves while others refuse to do it. Some men do not feel any more at ease in certain jobs or tasks that they describe as "women's work". The risk that they may be laughed at by their co-workers if they are seen doing "women's work" heightens this uneasiness.



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TABLE 6  
Effects of Technological and Organizational Change on Work in General

\* Non-discrete responses

Effects of Change	Manufacturing Firms				Service-Sector Firms			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%	N=	
More collaboration	28	62.2%	18	62.1%	37	50.7%	20	
Task improvement	22	49%	19	65.5%	46	63.01%	18	
More multi-skilling	27	60%	23	79.3%	46	63.01%	25	
Increased skills	12	26.6%	18	62.1%	26	35.6%	20	
Increased tech.	14	31.1%	17	58.6%	44	60.3%	23	
Greater autonomy	21	47%	15	51.7%	28	38.4%	23	
Greater creativity	13	29%	14	48.2%	17	23.3%	21	
More employment possibilities	19	42.2%	13	44.8%	20	27.4%	9	
Greater workload	17	37.7%	16	55.1%	30	41.1%	15	
Faster work pace	19	42.2%	10	34.5%	29	39.7%	24	
More routine	15	33.3%	7	24.1%	24	32.9%	14	
More responsibilities	21	47%	16	55.2%	20	27.4%	19	
Other	5	11.1%	6	20.7%	1	1.4%	1	
N =	45 Women		29 Men		73 Women		37 Men	

The effects of changes in work on occupational skills, multi-skilling of tasks and occupational mobility of female and male respondents are particularly interesting in a context of technological and organizational change. In manufacturing firms, while only 26.6% of women respondents indicate that they have experienced an increase in their skill levels, 60% of them indicate greater multi-tasking in the work. Thus, the so-called "multi-skilling" that they have experienced in their work is mainly *horizontal*, that is, the addition of tasks at the same level, not an increase in responsibilities or skills associated with the task and should therefore be called "multi-tasking". It is mainly related to jobs for which tasks are noticeably similar and at the same skill level. This finding corresponds to the situation observed by Danièle Kergoat (1992) for the case of France.



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Moreover, less than half of the respondents (42.2%) mention that these changes increase the possibility of being employed in other jobs. In contrast, the situation of men is completely different. Some 62.1% of men (compared to 26.6% of women, as was seen above) have experienced an increase in their occupational skills following changes in their work. As in the case of women, these changes also bring about greater multi-skilling, but for men the proportion is higher (79.3%). Thus, the question is whether men, as opposed to women, have experienced greater multi-skilling of a "vertical" nature. The results of the study indicate a small trend in this direction since a slightly higher proportion of men (44.8%) experienced an increase in employment possibilities in other jobs. Moreover, the skills that they use on the job have increased more. In our interviews, the perception was that men did benefit from increase in skills and also somewhat more mobility, which is often associated to skills.

To summarize, in the manufacturing firms women and men have experienced an increase in their occupational skills, in multi-tasking or multi-tasking, and in access to other positions. However, the positive effects on skills and mobility have been proportionately greater for men, making the nature of their multi-skilling appear more "skill-enhancing". In light of these research results, it appears that in a context of technological change men seem to be more often directed preferentially to the more skilled jobs, while women benefit from a weaker form of multi-skilling which should be called "multi-tasking" (*cf.* D. Kergoat). As will be shown below, similar findings can be observed in the service-sector firms.

In service-sector firms, the increase in occupational skills and multi-skilling of tasks has been proportionately greater for men. Only 35.6% of women, compared to 54.1% of men, indicate that changes in work have translated into an increase in their occupational skills. In terms of the multi-skilling of tasks, the proportions are more comparable between women (63.01%) and men (67.6%) despite a slight advance for the latter. Since proportionately fewer women have experienced an increase in their occupational skills, they tend to experience a much more horizontal multi-skilling. These results resemble those presented above for the manufacturing firms.

Nevertheless, these results must be considered with a degree of caution since in the service-sector firms, a slightly lower proportion of men (24.3%) than women (27.4%) indicate an increase in access to other jobs following technological and organizational changes. This situation can be attributed to the negative effect of certain economic factors on service-sector firms (Firms H and J in particular). In these firms, a certain limit on expansion has been reached in terms of organization, structure, promotion and hiring. In Firms H and J, more than two-thirds of women (72.6%) and of men (78.4%) indicate a lack of opportunities for promotion. Similarly, more than half of the women (60%) and of the men (62.1%) within manufacturing firms indicate that opportunities for promotion are unfavourable.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Our research data show that the socio-economic environment of the firms studied is different from that of past years. For most, there is little hiring. For example, a few years ago Firm B employed as many as 600 employees, whereas now it employs only 300. At Firm C, because of free trade, people no longer feel secure. The decrease in hiring in these firms has been further affected by job cuts.



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### 4.3 MAKING THE LABOUR FORCE MORE FLEXIBLE: A PLACE FOR CHANGE ?

The growth in multi-skilling involves a policy of flexible production mainly based on the search for a certain adjustment and flexibility of the labour force. By encouraging mobility between certain jobs, the aim of firms is not so much to transform the traditional places of women and men in the division of labour, as to use less staff in the work and production process. Thus, we can talk about use of "numerical" or "quantitative" flexibility rather than one of a more "techno-organizational" nature, which would associate new technologies and the development of workers' qualifications in the context of a new, so-called "skill-enhancing" work organization.<sup>10</sup>

As was noted above, this multi-skilling sometimes constitutes a port of entry for women into non-traditional occupations following diverse technological and organizational changes (Firm D), thus changing the division of labour.<sup>11</sup> However, it should be recalled that traditional forms of the gendered division of labour persist, since female respondents in both manufacturing and service-sector firms indicate an increase in their occupational skills in lesser proportions than men. Hence, the persistence of a vertical division of tasks in which women remain in less skilled jobs. In Firm A, very few women carry out skilled tasks with the new German technology. Rather, they perform unskilled work (including operational tasks related to spouts or even case loading). The jobs of operators are mainly carried out by men and very few women occupy the position of assistant operator. In Firm D, the jobs related to the paper machine are not carried out by women because it appears that the corresponding tasks are too physically demanding. However, it is known that many jobs considered difficult by women are often considered difficult by men, but men hesitate to admit this so as not to be seen as physically inferior.

## 5. TRAINING WITHIN THE FIRM

Technological and organizational changes have led most of the firms studied to establish training programs. As training is often crucial in terms of multi-skilling and access to other jobs, we will present a few highlights on this issue. Our analysis of the firms' training practices reveals many similarities between manufacturing and service-sector firms. Both women and men receive practical training or on-the-job training mainly within the firm: 62.2% of women and 69.9% of men in manufacturing firms, and 71.2% of women and 64.9% of men in service-sector firms, receive practical training. Nevertheless, a greater proportion of men than women receive theoretical training. The differences between the sexes in this regard are quite pronounced in manufacturing firms, with 41.4% of men receiving theoretical training compared to only 17.8% of women. In service-sector firms, this type of training is given to 56.7% of men and 47.9% of women. It should

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<sup>10</sup>Consider the Japanese model of organization of production, which combines skill development, decentralization of quality control, reinforcement of the internal market and job rotation. Although this model also has certain limitations, it appears to have advantages in terms of the "skill-enhancing" work organization and the development of workers' responsibilities. However, it should be noted that women are not greatly affected by this model of organization in Japanese firms. On the Japanese model and its hybridization in Canadian firms and Japanese transplants in Canada, see Tremblay, D.-G. and D. Rolland (1996, 1996a, 1996b).

<sup>11</sup>As was already mentioned, Firm D illustrates this situation well. Elimination of jobs did not result in a decrease in the volume of work to be accomplished since employees carry out tasks that previously corresponded to three jobs.



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be underlined that in general, the proportion of women and men receiving off-the-job training remains quite low.

TABLE 7  
Characteristics of Firm-Level Training  
Non-discrete responses

Type of Training	Manufacturing Firms				Service-Sector Firms			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%	N=	%
Practical	28	62.2%	20	69%	52	71.2%	24	64.9%
Theoretical	8	17.8%	12	41.4%	35	47.9%	21	56.7%
External	4	8.9%	7	24.1%	9	12.3%	11	9.7%
N =	45 Women		29 Men		73 Women		37 Men	

It should also be noted that one of the major criticisms of training made by respondents relates to its brevity. One female respondent noted the lack of training in routine maintenance. She felt the need for training in mechanics and adjustment, but had only practical training limited to directly related tasks (Firm D). It appears that not only is training support not sufficiently long, but mastering the technological system is also difficult. In general, the average length of both practical and theoretical training rarely exceeds two weeks. Often, it can even be as short as a few hours. Table 8 provides an overview of the principal sources of dissatisfaction with training expressed by male and female respondents.



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TABLE 8  
Main Reasons for Dissatisfaction with Firm-Level Training

\* Non-discrete responses

Reasons for Dissatisfaction	Manufacturing Firms				Service-Sector Firms			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	N=	%	N =	%	N=	%	N=	%
Theory too short	13	28,9%	11	37,9%	30	41,1%	16	43,2%
Practice too short	11	24,4%	12	41,4%	32	43,8%	15	40,5%
Insufficient documentation	7	15,5%	9	31,0%	17	23,3%	13	35,1%
Inadequacy - task	5	11,1%	8	27,6%	10	13,7%	6	16,2%
Other	5	11,1%	3	10,3%	7	9,6%	3	8,1%
N =	45 Women		29 Men		73 Women		37 Men	

As was previously noted, women receive less theoretical training than men. If this observation is added to the fact that their work activities have been increasingly automated and have become more repetitive as opposed to that of men, should it be concluded that training within the firm does not easily allow them to gain access to more skilled jobs, which is the case to a lesser degree for male respondents? The research results appear to indicate such a trend. Thus, certain enduring forms of the gendered division of labour within manufacturing and service-sector firms can be observed across the different technological and organizational changes even if, as was previously noted, men also confront limits to their degree of mobility.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of our research was to examine the reskilling and "end of the division of labour" thesis (the latter from Kern and Schumann's book) in terms of gender. This actually brought us to highlight a situation of simultaneous *change and continuity* in the gendered division of labour observed in a context of technological and organizational changes. To this end, the results of a study of women and men occupying relatively similar positions within ten Quebec firms were analyzed.

Based on specific elements, changing forms of the gendered division of labour were identified. Findings indicate that, confronted with the same technological and organizational upheavals, both women and men obviously must adjust to the new realities of their work. This occurs in a very similar way, through multi-skilling or multi-tasking, firm-level training, etc. Certain similarities in the content of their tasks related to the use of technologies were



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noted, and in certain firms it was observed that women gradually enter non-traditional occupations (in particular, Firms A, D, E and H).

On the other hand, beyond the changing elements that tend to bring the situation of men and women closer together, it was also found that for men, there are frequently slight discrepancies (just that "little bit more" or that "little bit less") that allow differences between the sexes to persist, or even increase. In a context of technological and organizational changes, men have seen their occupational skills grow. Their tasks have been automated and have become more repetitive, however proportionately less so as compared to women. Moreover, women have had slightly less theoretical training as opposed to men, which may limit their upward mobility and access to skill-enhancing jobs to a greater extent.

Thus, it appears pertinent to call into question the theses on "the end of the division of labour", which are based principally on the Kern and Schumann book cited above. Indeed, there is a need to examine in a more subtle way assertions that there has been a decentralization of control and responsibility, *re-skilling* of jobs in the context of new technologies and new productive models, and, consequently, a challenge to the traditional division of labour. Changes in the places assigned to women and men are often dependent on a series of transformations of the work process within firms, and these are not necessarily - if ever - aimed at the search for greater employment equity. As was seen above, practices aimed at increasing work force flexibility are an example of this. In some firms, the introduction of multi-skilling has been a port of entry for women into non-traditional occupations, while in other firms women remain confined to tasks of the same type. In one of the service-sector firms studied, the adoption of a new approach to customer service gave rise to changes in the distribution of work according to sex. While women more often occupy male jobs in kitchens, men are gradually invading the area of serving at tables. These changes are not based so much on a willingness to modify the places traditionally given to women and men, as on a specific human resource management strategy aimed at other objectives, such as the rationalization or reduction of the costs of production activities.

Thus, changing forms of the gendered division of labour are the consequence of both technological and organizational changes and of more general managerial strategies. In this study, it was observed that processes of re-skilling and multi-skilling tend to reflect concerns that are different from those of employment equity, and that the latter are rarely - if ever - considered in times of technological and organizational changes. While such technological and organizational changes could represent an ideal occasion to change the division of labour according to gender, it seems it is not often considered even. Thus, it can be concluded that ideas and hypotheses about "the end of the division of labour" should be re-examined in light of the reality experienced by women in the workplace. We hope that the research results presented in this paper will contribute to questioning the end of the division of labour hypothesis, and particularly to show its limited validity in the case of women's jobs, and female-intensive sectors.



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