



# Questioning the assumption that contingent work arrangements reshape organizations and relationships

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this editorial is two-fold: first, to provide an overview of team-related issues in the particular realm of contingent work arrangements, and second, to introduce the collection of articles encompassing this special issue.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The editorial is a general literature review that provides the readers of this special issue with a broader scholarly literature framework. The editorial also provides a historical context of the field. First, the phenomenon of contingent work arrangements is discussed. Second, attention is given to identification of major strategic factors, which have been contributing to the growth of contingent work arrangements. Third, team-related issues of differentiation, integration, and cooperation are discussed.

**Findings** – The overview of research in the area of contingent work arrangements demonstrates that such work arrangements are diverse in their contractual structure. The rationale for which organizations use contingent work arrangements are diverse, as are the reasons why employees undertake such work outside the scope of the traditional employment model. Research in this area has grown primarily with the focus on economic, legal, and social factors influencing the expansion of non-standard work arrangements. Less research is found in the area of individual, managerial, and organizational consequences of this expansion.

**Originality/value** – This editorial – and the special issue in particular – gives attention to understanding the array of experiences associated with contingent workers with the purpose of accumulating theoretical knowledge in this field, but also – and perhaps more importantly – to add to the transition from evidence-based knowledge to practical advice.

**Keywords** Contingent work arrangements, Cooperation, Differentiation, Integration, Leadership, Strategy

**Paper type** Literature review



Contingent or non-standard work arrangements are becoming an increasing part of the employment landscape, most notably within the service sector, such as in retail, financial services, and hospitality. Whereas the basic bargain at the center of work used to be employees giving loyalty in exchange for employment security, this bargain is now broken (Pink, 2001). The stereotypical image of employment as full-time, on-going, and under one employer's direction or supervision is challenged by what could be argued to be a continuum between traditional and non-traditional work arrangements which captures level and nature of attachment between the organization and its employees (Gallagher and Connelly, 2008). This continuum comprises diverse and distinct categories of employees. They range from highly paid management

consultants, who have voluntarily chosen their work arrangements, to low-paid service sector workers who receive no benefits and would rather prefer non-contingent full-time permanent jobs.

Research shows that contingent and part-time workers are disproportionately female, young, less skilled, and from poor families (Hipple and Stewart, 1996). Moreover, contingent work arrangements are more prevalent in regional and remote areas than in cities. Studies also reveal that contingent workers typically earn 20 to 30 percent less on average than standard full-time workers and are less likely to receive health insurance and other benefits through work (Blank, 1998; Hipple, 2001). Although the vast majority of contingent workers are employed in low-quality, low-paying jobs, the number of contingent workers in professional positions is steadily increasing. This increase in professional contingent knowledge workers is both encouraging and concerning for organizations. Critical questions when managing teams composed of both contingent and non-contingent knowledge workers are how to balance differentiation and fairness and how to integrate teams and promote cooperation while keeping clear psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau, 2005).

The purpose of this introduction to the special issue of *Team Performance Management* on “Team identity, emotion and development in non-standard work arrangements” is to provide an overview of team related issues in the particular realm of contingent or non-standard work arrangements. First, the phenomenon of contingent work arrangements will be discussed. Second, attention will briefly be given to identification of major strategic factors, which have been contributing to the growth of non-standard work arrangements from both the demand and the supply side. Third, team related issues of differentiation, integration, and cooperation will be discussed in brief, and finally, the collection of articles encompassing this special issue is introduced.

### **The phenomenon of non-standard work arrangements**

The increasing number of employees engaged in work arrangements outside the traditional or standard employment relationship represents a modern form of “day laborers”, where labor is hired and paid if not by the day then by the assignment. Employees hired under this new pattern of employment are most commonly known as contingent or non-traditional workers, but the group is also known by a variety of other labels – such as for example “free agents”, “freelancers”, “non-standards” (Green *et al.*, 1993; Kalleberg *et al.*, 2000), “flexible/alternative staffing arrangements” (Abraham, 1988; Brewster *et al.*, 1997; Houseman, 2001), “solo practitioners”, “independent contractors” (Rainbird, 1991; Rebitzer, 1995; Summers, 1997), and “home-based business operators”.

The term “contingent” was first coined by Audrey Freedman at a conference in 1985 on employment security to describe the impermanent nature of certain work arrangements, such as the practice of hiring workers only when there is an immediate and limited demand for their services, without any offer of permanent or even long-term employment (Polivka, 1996a,b,c). Later the term contingent has been expanded to include work arrangements with more variable or less predictable hours, as well as arrangements that reflect a change in the traditional rights of workers and the benefits offered to them. To some, the term applies to any work arrangement that

might differ from the commonly perceived norm of a long-term, year-round, full-time wage and salary job with a single employer. This includes temporary help service employment, employee leasing, contracting out, and home-based work. This all inclusive and sloppy conceptual specification has, however, led to misclassification of many workers and has caused confusion among researchers as to what exactly is being studied (Polivka, 1996a,b,c).

Despite the confusion and overlap between the concepts of standard and non-standard work arrangements, they are not identical. Consequentially organizations need to address the implications of hiring a knowledge-based workforce composed of both contingent and non-contingent employees. On the one hand, organizations' rising need for organizational flexibility is leading firms to establish diverse employment arrangements to cope with fluctuations in organizational production capacity. On the other hand, parts of the workforce place more emphasis on employability than loyalty, which is putting pressure on traditional work arrangements. Whereas in the beginning the concept "contingent workers" was used with a negative connotation, today it is increasingly also used for workers holding temporary jobs for personal reasons and as a voluntary choice (Hipple, 2001).

### **Strategic factors which have been contributing to the growth**

From a demand-side perspective, this increase in contingent work arrangements is driven by efforts to maximize a competitive advantage by increasing flexibility in both number and in types of workers hired on an "as needed" basis (Nollen and Axel, 1995). Organizations simply strive to become more nimble and cut costs. They want to boost or cut staffing to accommodate fluctuations in demand; deploy workers with specialized skills for short-term projects, particularly in the area of information technology; fill temporary absences also at managerial level; meet employees' requests for part-time hours; and screen workers for permanent positions among other reasons. By increasing the ability to achieve greater numerical labor flexibility, organizations are able to adjust the size of the workforce more easily in response to changes in demand. Also, the increase in the number of contingent works has provided organizations with greater functional flexibility. Hereby, the organization has the ability to adjust the types of skills employed without adding to the long-term cost of retaining the specific skills (Pollert, 1988; Legge, 1995; Dyer, 1998; Kalleberg and Marsden, 2005). Critiques, however, would contend that employers use contingent workers for other reasons, such as to avoid paying benefits, reduce their workers' compensation costs, prevent workers' attempts to unionize, or allow them to lay off workers more easily, as termination is less costly due to the absence of direct severance costs and the reduced probability of litigation.

From a strategic management perspective, the growth of non-standard employment arrangements has been articulated as a way for organizations to stay close to their core competencies (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Nesheim, 2003). Using contingent workers to perform routine maintenance and administrative tasks allows employers to reduce their permanent work forces to those employees engaged in the employers' main businesses, or core competencies. Basically focusing on core competencies allows management to invest more strategically in the development of the business, and to respond efficiently to customer needs and market fluctuations. Those (for example Mangum *et al.*, 1985; Harrison and Kelley, 1993; Davis-Blake and Uzzi, 1993) who

explicitly or implicitly adopt this perspective concern themselves with both the direct and the transaction costs of employment (Williamson, 1980) viewing the decision between traditional and non-traditional employees as a choice between strategies of internalization and externalization (Pfeffer and Baron, 1988). Moreover, strategists have argued that contingent employees enable organizations to manage the flow of knowledge more effectively (Handy, 1989). In particular, organizations in markets characterized by rapid technological change should actively employ contingent employees because such individuals are likely to bring useful knowledge to the organization.

Finally from the leadership perspective, employing contingent workers is convenient, particularly from the standpoint of the busy line manager who wants to hire employees to a project quickly and with a minimum of bureaucratic disturbance. Top managers tend to focus primarily on profit goals, whereas line managers often have pressing production deadlines that demand most of their time and energy. Often, the profit goals of top managers are in tension with the production goals of line management, and in such cases, line managers often resort to contingents simply because it is the “path of least resistance.” By hiring a contingent worker, the line manager avoids becoming enmeshed in the organization’s human resources bureaucracy. Since the new employer does not become part of the company’s permanent head count, there is no red flag to draw the attention of top managers (Grossman, 1998; Forster, 2001).

### **Working as a contingent worker**

From the supply-side perspective, a growing number of knowledge workers prefer to work as freelance contractors or contingent workers in non-standard work arrangements. To them, working as contingent workers represents a deliberate career choice (Pink, 2001; Marler *et al.*, 2002). A powerful argument in favor of flexible employment arrangements is that temporary work allows people to exercise greater choice over their working lives. Particularly among younger and more highly skilled workers, the traditional permanent employment paradigm may not be perceived as viable or even desirable; contingent work offers more choice, more opportunity to learn new skills, and the variety needed to establish a network of professional contacts (Forster, 2001; Jakobsen and Rasmussen, 2009).

Some contingent workers are individuals who have made a personal choice of wanting autonomy, flexibility, and self-control over work processes and time. Often they have not been able to settle in a traditional wage-and-salary job. They have a high level of self-efficacy. They want to be their own bosses (Cohany, 1998), and they take charge of their own careers as they move across organizations (Pink, 2001; Bridges, 1994). Employees craving job related variety are also attracted to contingent employment, because even routine administrative tasks become more challenging and varied when the setting in which they are performed varies (Forster, 2001; Jakobsen and Rasmussen, 2009; Strandvad, 2009). Often their mobility is high, as they have more focus on job content than on status in the organization. They have a high need for achievement, and they highly value direct feedback on their performances.

For workers with skills that are high in demand, non-standard work arrangements can represent a financially lucrative career path that also potentially increases personal control over work schedules (Connelly and Gallagher, 2004, 2006). For others, such

work arrangements may be a viable strategy for attaining diverse workplace experience and/or a port of entry into a more traditional form of employment (Gallagher, 2002). The “stepping stone” hypothesis holds that by acquiring skills and experiences the chances of achieving a standard work arrangement is better (Chalmers and Kalb, 2001). Still others simply might not be able to secure a more traditional job given the conditions of the labor market (Appelbaum, 1992). The trap, however, of working under non-traditional working conditions is, as many critiques emphasize, that a traditional work arrangement cannot be achieved after a period of non-traditional work due to lack of training and promotion opportunities and/or due to permanent effects of irregular work.

### **Differentiation, integration and cooperation**

Full-time employment is still considered the most prevalent type of employment. However, given the increase in the number of contingent workers and combined with their special characteristics, creating teams composed of both traditional and contingent workers is increasingly believed to be challenging for organizations. One of the critical questions, which are often posed in the breath of response to traditional versus non-traditional work arrangements is whether it is possible to balance differentiation and fairness in working teams composed of both traditional and non-traditional employees. Another critical question is how to integrate teams and promote cooperation while keeping clear psychological contracts.

In accordance with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Constant and Zimmermann, 2004) and reciprocity norms (Gouldner, 1960), researchers have assumed that contingent workers, due to the nature of their employment contract, are less committed to the firm, less satisfied, and less likely to exhibit extra-role behaviors. But the empirical evidence is inconclusive. Beard and Edwards (1995), for example, found that job insecurity and lack of control has a negative impact on job satisfaction and commitment among contingent workers. In contrast, Lee and Johnson (1991), in a study of workers in the US National Park Service, found that contingent workers had significantly higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment than the permanent workers. Kidder (1996) compared the differentiation between full-time nurses and contingent nurses and found no differences in satisfaction and commitment. The only clear evidence was that contingent nurses tended to demonstrate fewer extra-role behaviors than full-time nurses. Jakobsen and Rasmussen (2009) also investigated nurses employed in public hospitals. They found that contingent nurses were able to combine a satisfying and challenging job with more control over their work-life balance situation mainly due to their limited responsibility towards the workplace along with their strong profession, and various legal rights. Despite the contingent nurses’ limited responsibility, Jakobsen and Rasmussen (2009) found no reason to claim that the contingent nurses were less integrated or willing to cooperate. In the same vein, Pearce (1993, 1998) and others (Kidder, 1998; Van Dyne and Ang, 1998; Moorman and Harland, 2002) found that formal contracts of employment, whether traditional or non-traditional, simply do not determine employee attitudes and behaviors.

The question, however, is whether the assumption that an increase in the level of contingent work arrangements might actually reshape organizations and team relationships. First and foremost, the baseline assumption of traditional versus

non-traditional work arrangements needs to be addressed. The baseline assumption in the debate is often that of homogeneity of the group of core staff and of the group of non-traditional staff. This is, however, not an accurate reflection of reality. Whether focus is on the group of traditional workers, the group of non-traditional workers, or a combination of the two social identification constitutes the psychological process that makes team behavior possible (Turner, 1982). Social identity facilitates cooperation, but social identity also determines how employees cooperate and what they cooperate on (for elaborate reviews see for example Turner *et al.*, 1987; Haslam, 2001; Van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003; Lemmergaard, 2004). In the process of becoming a group, its' members engage in a process of self-stereotyping by ascertaining the terms of the group definition and by seeking to conform to the norms of the group. This development of a shared sense of "us" becomes the basis for a model of influence and of leadership.

In the case presented by Jakobsen and Rasmussen (2009), who investigated nurses employed in public hospitals, the contingent nurses already shared a common social identity with the non-contingent nurses that allowed them to work together and coordinate their efforts. The argument therefore is that to view traditional and non-traditional workers as occupying positions in separate parts of the organization is to neglect considering ways in which these groups of workers may work together within the same department. Traditional and non-traditional workers may perform the same core services within an organization (Atkinson, 1984; Pollert, 1991; Kalleberg, 2001). Non-traditional workers in some areas, such as retailing and hospitality industries, may even make up the core rather than the periphery and as such they are essential to the organization.

Hiring non-traditional workers might, however, cause resistance among the group of traditional workers leading to both negative and positive outcomes, most notably in a short-term perspective when the organization is not accustomed to using non-traditional workers. Reduction in integration, solidarity, emergence of subcultures, and the redrawing of conventional career and internal labor market patterns might be the outcome of intensifying the use of non-traditional workers (Gordon *et al.*, 1982). This argumentation leans on the substantial body of literature (see for example Brewer and Brown, 1998; Dovidio *et al.*, 2000) that has found that in-group bias and out-group discrimination are a fundamental dynamic present in all human groups that organizations should be aware of and try to mitigate. However, combining the workforce with both traditional and non-traditional workers does not necessarily lead to negative effects for the organization providing that the workers develop a psychological contract with socio-emotional components (Chambel and Castanheira, 2006). Moreover, as argued by Dovidio *et al.* (2000), one way of mitigating the in-group bias effect is to develop a larger shared goal that serves to focus employees' attention on their common or shared identity as for example is the case with the groups of nurses investigated in the study by Jakobsen and Rasmussen (2009).

As this brief overview of research in the area of non-traditional workers has demonstrated, non-standard work arrangements are diverse in their contractual structure. The rationale for which organizations use non-traditional work arrangements are diverse, as are the reasons why employees undertake such work outside the scope of the traditional employment model. Research in this area has grown primarily with the focus on economic, legal, and social factors influencing the

expansion of non-standard work arrangements. Less research is found in the area of individual, managerial, and organizational consequences of this expansion. Answering the quest from Gallagher and Connelly (2008) this special issue gives attention to understanding the array of experiences associated with non-traditional workers with the purpose of accumulating theoretical knowledge in this field, but also – and perhaps more importantly – to add to the transition from evidence-based knowledge to practical advice.

### Introducing the articles

In this special issue, the authors approach contingent work arrangements by weaving interdisciplinary pathways. The four papers that have been selected competitively following the usual *Team Performance Management* reviewing process are:

- (1) Elfi Furtmueller, University of Twente, School of Management and Governance, Rolf van Dick, Goethe-University Frankfurt, and Celeste P.M. Wilderom, University of Twente: “On the illusion of organizational commitment among finance professionals”;
- (2) Ozgur Ekmekci, The George Washington University, School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Clinical Research and Leadership and Andrea Casey, The George Washington University: “Computer simulation exploring organizational identification for contingent workers”;
- (3) Søren Voxted, University of Southern Denmark, Department of Leadership and Strategy: “Traditional and non-traditional employees in production teams”;
- (4) Vlad Vaiman, Reykjavik University, Jeanette Lemmergaard, University of Southern Denmark, and Ana Azevedo, Athabasca University: “Contingent workers: needs, personality characteristics, and work motivation”.

These four papers together respond perfectly to the theme of the issue: Team Identity, Emotion and Development in Non-Standard Work Arrangements which aims to examine what makes a good team, composed of both traditional and non-traditional workers. The first paper by Elfi Furtmueller, Rolf van Dick, and Celeste P.M. Wilderom discusses the relevance of organizational, customer, and professional commitment for effectively managing financial service firms. In particular, they study differences between employed and self-employed finance professionals. Ozgur Ekmekci and Andrea J. Casey examine how contingent workers identify with organizations by emphasizing the social construction of time in and from memory throughout the process of organizational identification. The third paper by Søren Voxted investigates team-work effectiveness in self-managing teams consisting of both traditional and non-traditional team members. Finally, Vlad Vaiman, Jeanette Lemmergaard, and Ana Azevedo challenge the theoretical claim that traditional and non-traditional employees differ significantly in terms of their needs, personality characteristics, and work motivation patterns, by surveying management consultants in Canada.

### Closing remarks

This collection of papers offers an array of theoretical, empirical and methodological resources as possible routes for understanding contingent work arrangements. It is my hope that this special issue will point to the future of evidence and theoretical

perspectives on contingent work with particular emphasis on how best to advance the arguments, methods, and effectiveness of such work arrangements. I hope that these papers will point our academic and professional colleagues in fruitful directions, and generate dialogue and further research on this issue.

I am grateful to the authors of the papers included in this special issue, who put up with me through rounds of reviewing and rewriting requests. I would also like to thank all those who submitted papers, which I have not been able to incorporate. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, as this special issue would never have materialized without their help.

I hope you will enjoy reading the articles as much as we have enjoyed writing them.

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#### About the Guest Editor

Jeanette Lemmergaard is Associate Professor of Human Resource Management and Internal Communication at University of Southern Denmark. She has a long-standing interest in the role of values in management and organization studies. Her current research focuses on the human in contemporary workplaces and leadership. Her most recent works have been published in, for example, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Service Industries Journal*, *Employee Relations*, *European Journal of International Management* and *Philosophy of Management*. Currently Jeanette Lemmergaard is working on a edited book *Critical Perspectives on Leadership – Emotion, Toxicity and Dysfunction* to be published by Edward Elgar. Jeanette Lemmergaard can be contacted at: [jla@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:jla@sam.sdu.dk)

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