

RELATIONSHIPS OF WORK: RETAINING & SUSTAINING THE CONTRACT WORKER

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Abstract

The advent of globalisation and decreasing government labour market involvement within the Western World has wreaked havoc with the concept of what was thought of as traditional employment. As work becomes increasingly casual, part-time and temporary, an increasingly dynamic and fluid workforce is created and these features provide an increasingly complex Human Resource Management (HRM) challenge for organisations. This paper investigates some of these challenges within the professional contractor workforce, a working relationship that encapsulates many of the key features of the moves away from the traditional and ongoing employer/employee relationship. Implications for the individual contractor, the employing organisation and organisational HRM strategies are discussed.

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RELATIONSHIPS OF WORK: RETAINING & SUSTAINING THE CONTRACT WORKER

INTRODUCTION

In an era characterised by ever increasing change, a key feature within the changing world of work is the increasing number of workers falling outside of the standard view of a worker as a male in a full-time, stable job of indefinite duration (Campbell and Burgess 1993; Collins 1990). Non-standard work arrangements are increasingly becoming the norm - and within these, the professional contract workforce has been identified as a particularly significant area of growth (see for example Bridges 1995; Handy 1996; Rifkin 1995).

While most peripheral work arrangements, and the consequences associated with them are not new developments, the growth in terms of absolute numbers and as a proportion of the overall workforce is. This is particularly true in Australia, where the degree of workforce change, especially the degree of job casualisation which has occurred, makes it notable amongst other OECD nations (ABS, 2003). For nearly a decade now, over twenty percent of Australian workers have been in positions which, by definition, are associated with a lack of job security and lack of access to standard employment entitlements and protection (Long 1996:11). It is predicted that by the year 2020, Australia's peripheral workforce will consist of casual and subcontract workers who are less skilled and educated, ununionized and with poorer pay and conditions (HRSCLTS, 1995). It is an issue which raises concerns of dual standards and equity as well as the potential to undermine government labour and social security systems. Overall, it is themes of marginalisation and disadvantage which dominate the literature on peripheral employment. However, as will be shown below, a different view emerges when we examine the professional contractor.

Firstly however, we must acknowledge that there is very little research on the contract workforce, and in particular, the professional contractor and this is at odds with predictions of increased demand for professional workers. There is another perspective to this apparent neglect. In his retirement speech as head of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2001, Bryan Noakes, said there are a "million and one problems" arising from the trend to people contracting their services rather than working as employees, problems that have so far proved too big even for the ILO (Crown, 2001:5). Further, while ever-increasing numbers of workers are entering contract employment, there is still considerable debate over why these moves are occurring and who benefits from them. The question of 'why' is not an esoteric one as the answer makes explicit the relationship between individual work performance and organisational outcomes. The key dilemma for employing organisations is that, while contract workers may not be 'employees' in the legal sense, the very issues of choice and control in the traditional employment relationship, lie at the heart of organisations' ability to manage the contract workforce.

The traditional basis of contracting is the guarantee of competent work that carries liability for performance. While Scott (1993) believes this can be managed through a clear contract in writing, there is also a problem for the organisation in using contractors. Jacobs (1994:3) sums this up as:

In an age in which behavioral scientists are crying out for empowerment, contracting is one of the most decentralized, disbursed, and delegated authorities given to any supervisor. The problem is that few managers and supervisors have a basis for evaluating

The complication of professionals in contract employment is afforded some insight in the sociological literature on the professions which has concentrated on aspects such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction. In a study of lawyers, Gunz and Gunz (1994) found this occupation was highly mobile and that career paths play an important role in fostering attachment to an organisation. There are however, questions as to the ability or even the desire of an organisation to offer security and career paths in their work on research and development workers. These findings are consistent with an alternative theory which appears particularly apt for professionals in contract employment - that of the Prima Donna and Grunt workforces (Lozano

1989). In line with Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model, this theory proposes that employers consciously decide not to bring a group of workers into the core as their high skill also equates with an uncontrollable and aberrant workforce. This view clearly suggests that the professional in peripheral employment is different and should be subject to a different set of HRM rules. Contrary to the common perception of the professional operating from a position of advantage, the prima donna/grunt theory suggests social isolation and separation are likely and, for the organisation at least, even desirable. In such situations, disadvantage to the worker is clearly possible. Evidence for this has been found in a number of traditional areas of employer obligations related to hours of work, particularly overwork and ill health and workers compensation, especially in high tech areas such as Silicon Valley (Bremner, 2002; Lozano, 1989; Smith, 1999). Returning to the Australian context, there are limited studies of contracting but, the few available support the contention of disadvantage (see James, 1993; Mayhew, 1996; Makkai, 1992; Probert & Wajcman, 1991).

THE PROFESSIONAL CONTRACTOR & THE PERIPHERAL WORKFORCE

The privileged position of the professional within the changing world of work has remained relatively unquestioned (see McKeown 2003, 2005 for more details on this argument) and thus, while studies of the growth in non-traditional work arrangements raise important issues of marginalisation and uncertainty, there is very little research that addresses these within the context of the professional workforce. The discrepancy between the theoretical literature on the future of work, and the more general research on non-standard work as substandard seems to be based on two untested assumptions. The first is that professionals occupy a privileged labour market position and secondly, that professionals have a strong and well developed sense of a 'career' (Atkinson et al, 1996; Goffee & Scase, 1995). It is certainly a view widely accepted in Australia (Crean, 1995; EPAC, 1996; Jones, 1995). Essentially then, professionals are seen as being 'pulled' into non-standard work arrangements such as contracting because of opportunity – rather than being 'pushed' because of constraints such as redundancy and unemployment.

Given this background, the paper presented here is the third in a series which details research into the professional contractor workforce (see McKeown, 2003, 2005). Through reducing common themes from studies of the broader peripheral workforce, a number of specific variables have been identified which have been used to examine the professional contractor in detail. These range from:

- reasons for employers' use of contractors;
- voluntary/involuntary participation in contract employment;
- characteristics of the contract workforce;
- relationships between peripheral and 'core' workers and the employing organisation.

The overall aim of this research is to explore each of these themes and then, to synthesise this information in terms of the implications for the relationship between employer and peripheral/core workforces. This synthesis is reflected in the results presented here investigating the relationship between the characteristics of the professional contractor workforce and their satisfaction with a variety of key aspects of contracting. These are interpreted in the discussion in terms of the implications of organisations to retain, maintain and sustain a professional contract workforce.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the analysis of a survey of 240 professionals in contract employment arrangements and using a tool specifically designed for this research project, the Push/Pull Matrix, the study looks at why individuals first entered contracting. These results are then compared with the reasons they have remained working as a contractor. This comparative focus allows an examination of the wider issue of the changing nature of 'contract of work' and the implications this has for the way in which organisations can manage this workforce.

Investigating the Professional Contractor Workforce

The study's focus on the professional contractor would appear to capture both individuals who have made an active and positive career choice and, who also operate at the 'high end' of the peripheral or non-standard labour market. The push versus pull theories of employment, with their origins in the classic economic theories of 'career' (Knight, 1933) versus 'default' (Schumpeter, 1934), are clearly appropriate to this workforce. The decision for the professional is essentially a self-employment/paid-employment choice based on the individual identifying the opportunities and constraints associated with each.

A more detailed discussion of the rationale behind the Matrix illustrated in Table 1 is available in McKeown (2005) but, overall, the push/pull dichotomy has been enhanced to provide a framework for an investigation of the professional contractor. It integrates a number of studies of self-employment.

Table 1: The Push/Pull Matrix

	Left Prior Work Arrangement <i>To Become a Contractor</i>	Left Prior Work Arrangement & <i>Later Became a Contractor</i>
Contractor By Choice	PULL	DEFAULT1
Contractor Not by Choice	DEFAULT2	PUSH

Structuring responses on the issues of choice and the timing of the move into contracting provides the basis for examining how and why in both the traditional economic language, such as money and advancement, as well as through the psychological and sociological notions of choice and satisfaction. The next stage is to desegregate these four options into the key areas of reasoning for moving into peripheral work identified from the literature. The resulting items are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: The Push/Pull Matrix Translated into Survey Items

	Left Prior Work Arrangement <i>To Become a Contractor</i>	Left Prior Work Arrangement & <i>Later Became a Contractor</i>
Contractor by Choice	PULL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prefer be own boss • set up own business • set up business with others • more money • always wanted to • flexible lifestyle 	DEFAULT*1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • best option available • normal in my profession • balances work & family • voluntary redundancy
Contractor Not by Choice	DEFAULT*2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • best option available • normal in my profession • balances work & family • voluntary redundancy 	PUSH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involuntary redundancy • employer request • no/few career prospects

NB: Default *1 and *2 options share the same items at this stage

The discrepancy between the empirical literature on non-standard or atypical work and the theoretical literature on professional contractors is highlighted by the dual placement of the same items in both 'Default' quadrants. The Matrix provides a structured framework of the reasons professionals become contractors and uses this as the basis for investigating the relationship between satisfaction with key aspects of contract work assists in the sustainability of a contracting career. This provides for a conclusion focussed on the relationship between the organisation and the peripheral workforce.

RESULTS

The analysis draws on data from 240 surveys returned from 500 that were distributed to contractors registered with one of three large professional contracting agencies within the city of Melbourne in Australia. The results presented are from the second section of a seven part survey designed to investigate the relationship between the initial reasons for entering contracting and those for remaining in contracting. The hypothesis under investigation is that –

Satisfaction with a contracting career is positively related to the initial 'pull' factors associated with the move into contracting and subsequently, assists in enabling the individual to work as a contractor.

Results from the seven items which comprised this section of the survey focussed on the individual professional's current view of contracting as a way of work and are presented below.

1. Current Work Arrangements

Ten employment options were offered in to ascertain current working status. As Table 3 shows, the options range from the traditional employment arrangement of full-time permanent work through to unemployment and, overall, 77 (32 per cent) of individuals nominated both a primary and secondary employment status. One reason may be the need to ensure that financial and other commitments can be met and means that dual employment acts as a safety net. Alternatively, it may be indicative of a transition between arrangements or, evidence of the entrepreneurial spirit suggested by writers such as Bridges (1995) and Hakim (1994). Furthermore, comments made on a number of surveys revealed that the second option selected may not indicate another employment status but rather clarification of the basis on which individuals were contracting. The contractors made distinctions such as being self-employed and permanent full-time, as an important feature of the contracting.

Table 3 translates employment status into the matrix. While the dominance of contracting is clearly demonstrated, no significant differences emerge when comparing matrix sectors to each other. However, secondary employment status was significantly linked to the pull and delayed entry but, individual comments on the surveys indicated very different reasons for the selection of a second status. In the pull sector, the second status was an explanation of the type of contract being undertaken, such as part-time permanent. In the delayed entry sector, respondent comments support earlier indications where the second option indicated dual employment and was undertaken for financial security.

The desire for security was further evidenced when examining unemployment, clearly and significantly linked to delayed entry. It seems that these individuals move into contracting as a result of a lack of other employment options and indicates that contracting can be associated with ongoing job insecurity. This also raises the issue of the choice individuals have over the decision to remain contracting.

Table 3: The Push/Pull Matrix by Current Work Status

	Left Prior Work Arrangement To Become a Contractor (N = 22)		Left Prior Work Arrangement & Later Became a Contractor (N = 13)		Totals	
Contractor By Choice N = 20	PULL (N = 66)		DEFAULT 1 (N = 38)			
	Status 1	Status 2	Status 1	Status 2	Status 1	Status 2
	Contracting	63	2	Contracting	119	2
	Full-time perm.	3	6	Full-time perm.	3	8
	Full-time casual		1	Full-time casual		1
	Part-time temp.		1	Part-time temp.		2
	Self-employed		4	Part-time casual		5
	Other		2	Self-employed		7
	TOTALS	66	*16/82	TOTALS	124	29/153
Contractor Not by Choice N = 18	DEFAULT 2 (N = 11)		PUSH (N = 46)		No Choice (N = 75)	
	Status 1	Status 2	Status 1	Status 2	Status 1	Status 2
	Contracting	11	45	Contracting	72	
	Full-time casual		6	Full-time temp.		8
	TOTALS	11	2/13	Full-time casual	1	6
			4	Part-time temp.		2
			2	Part-time perm.		3
			1	Part-time casual		4
			4	Self-employed	2	2
Totals	Direct Entry (N = 99)		Delayed Entry (N = 97)		TOTALS	
	Status 1	Status 2	Status 1	Status 2	75	29/104
	Contracting	96	6	Contracting	94	
	Full-time perm.	3	6	Full-time temp.		7
	Full-time casual		8	Full-time perm.		1
	Part-time temp.		1	Full-time casual	1	4
	Self-employed		6	Part-time temp.		2
	Other		3	Part-time perm.		2
	TOTALS	99	**30/129	Part-time casual		6
				Self-employed		5
				Unemployed	2	*6
				TOTALS	97	33/130

**Item significant at the .005 level *Item significant at the .05 level

2. Preferred Work Arrangements

The employment options offered in 1 above were repeated again but the focus was preferred rather than present employment status. The results shown in Table 4 provide a very different perspective on contracting. While those categorised in the pull and the two default options are still significantly dominated by a preference for contracting ($p < 0.05$), the push option reveals a preference for traditional full-time permanent and part-time permanent employment.

Overall, this result is exemplified in the 'not by choice' option. In contrast, a significant proportion of those who entered contracting by choice or via direct entry expressed a primary preference for self-employment. Overall, the matrix framework clearly reveals that preference for contracting is significantly stronger for those who initially entered by choice while those pushed or not contracting by choice retain a strong desire for permanent employment. This polarisation accords with the seminal theories of self-employment so that contracting thus emerges as a career option for the most able and ambitions, as well as being a default option.

While the former group actively enters non-traditional employment because of perceived benefits, the latter are there because traditional employment is denied to them. The consequences of these different routes into contracting are dealt with in the next item from the survey.

3. Current Views on Contracting

The matrix's ability to explain why professionals remain in contracting is enhanced by examining the items that underlie each of the main quadrants. The options presented ranged from pull factors such as the desire 'To Be your Own Boss' and 'More Money, through to the push of 'Unable to Find Other Work' and being the 'Best Option Available'. The results presented in Table 5 continue to mirror the initial push/pull nature of the original move into contracting. The strength of the push/pull polarisation was further illustrated through the Pearson correlation matrix results which revealed distinct clusters of items in the Push and Pull sectors. Furthermore, the relationships between the items in the push and pull clusters were significantly negative.

This latter result enhances the view of what being a contractor today means for respondents, namely that individuals in the 'Push' quadrant are not contracting from choice or to make more money. In contrast, those initially 'Pulled' into contracting have remained for these very reasons, not due to a perceived lack of career prospects or see contracting as the best option amongst a limited range of choices. Instead, these reasons apply to respondents who were initially pushed into contracting.

Table 4: The Push/Pull Matrix by Preferred Work Status

	Left Prior Work Arrangement To Become a Contractor (N = 22)			Left Prior Work Arrangement & Later Became a Contractor (N = 13)			Totals		
Contractor By Choice N = 20	PULL (N = 66)			DEFAULT 1 (N = 38)					
	Status 1	Status 2		Status 1	Status 2		Status 1	Status 2	
	Contracting	47*	-	Contracting	21*	2	Contracting	80*	2
	Full-time perm.	5	2	Full-time perm.	6	4	Full-time temp.	2	1
	Full-time temp.	-	1	Full-time casual	1	3	Full-time perm.	13	6
	Part-time perm.	2	2	Part-time perm.	4	3	Full-time casual	1	3
	Part-time casual	-	1	Part-time casual	1	-	Part-time perm.	6	6
	Self-employed	12	7	Self-employed	5	4	Part-time casual	1	1
	TOTALS	66	13	TOTALS	38	10	Self-employed	21*	12*
							TOTALS	124	31
Contractor Not by Choice N = 18	DEFAULT 2 (N = 11)			PUSH (N = 46)			No Choice (N = 75)		
	Status 1	Status 2		Status 1	Status 2		Status 1	Status 2	
	Contracting	8*	-	Contracting	5	4	Contracting	18	4
	Full-time perm.	1	1	Full-time temp.	1	1	Full-time temp.	1	1
	Part-time perm.	-	1	Full-time perm.	16*	-	Full-time perm.	24*	3
	Self-employed	2	-	Part-time temp.	2	-	Part-time temp.	2	1
	TOTALS	11	2	Part-time perm.	12*	-	Part-time perm.	17*	1
				Part-time casual	5	-	Part-time casual	5	4
				Self-employed	5	5	Self-employed	8	9
				TOTALS	46	10	Caring for Depdts.	-	2
							TOTALS	75	25
Totals	Direct Entry (N = 99)			Delayed Entry (N = 97)					
	Status 1	Status 2		Status 1	Status 2				
	Contracting	70*	-	Contracting	32	6			
	Full-time temp.	-	1	Full-time temp.	1	-			
	Full-time perm.	8	4	Full-time perm.	22*	13*			
	Full-time casual.	2	-	Full-time casual	1	3			
	Part-time perm.	2	7	Part-time temp.	2	1			
	Part-time casual	-	1	Part-time perm.	16	3			
	Self-employed	17*	9*	Part-time casual	6	-			
	TOTALS	99	22	Self-employed	12	9			
				TOTALS	97	35/132			

*Item significant at the .05 level

The results presented in Table 5 supports the distinction made between ‘inability to find work’ and ‘best option available’ as separate options. The latter proved to be significantly linked to the options of Default 1 and, to a lesser extent Default 2, while the former was linked to Default 2 and Push options. It seems that individuals who remain contracting because it is the best option available in fact view this quite positively - perhaps indicative of a perceived short-term career opportunity rather than the lack of it. This was further confirmed in cross correlations where it was significantly *negatively* related to the Push factors of lack of career prospects.

Table 5: The Push/Pull Matrix & Current Views on Contracting

	Left Prior Work Arrangement To Become a Contractor	Left Prior Work Arrangement & Later Became a Contractor	
Contractor by Choice	PULL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be Own Boss*** (N=33) • More Money*** (N=57) • Enjoy Contracting*** (N=52) • Better Career*** (N=41) • More Stimulating Work*** (N=36) 	DEFAULT 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance Work & Family*** (N=13) • More Money* (N=16) • Enjoy Contracting* (N=25) • More Stimulating Work* (N=7) • Other*** (N=8) 	BY CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be Own Boss*** (N=48) • More Money*** (N=88) • Enjoy Contracting*** (N=90) • Better Career*** (N=54) • More Stimulating Work*** (N=53) • Flexible Lifestyle* (N=60)
Contractor Not by Choice	DEFAULT 2 <p>No one reason explains the move – But combinations do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer Requires It & Business with others* (N=7) 	PUSH <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable Find Other Work*** (N=37) • Best Option Available*** (N=34) 	NO CHOICE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable Find Other Work*** (N=48) • Best Option*** (N=51)
	PULL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be Own Boss*** (N=38) • More Money*** (N=82) • Enjoy Contracting*** (N=70) • Better Career*** (N=50) • More Stimulating Work*** (N=50) • Business with Others** (N=13) 	DELAYED ENTRY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable Find Other Work*** (N=48) • Best Option Available* (N=58) • Other* (N=11) 	

***Item significant at the .001 level. **Item significant at the .005 level. *Item significant at the .05 level.

Overall, the items in the Pull quadrant above support the portrayal by writers of the future of work of the professional contractor as entrepreneurial, individualistic and self-motivated individuals. Conversely, the items that have emerged as significant within the Push quadrant conform to Schumpeter's (1934) Default explanation of self-employment. Just as there are well acknowledged benefits of contracting, there also appear to be some less well known costs and disadvantages.

4. Negative Aspects of Contracting

The abstract developed the argument that a key feature of much of the literature on the future of work is that it ascribes positive benefits to changes occurring within work to professionals while studies of peripheral workers, such as temporaries and casuals raise concerns over marginalisation and disadvantage. However, the results of this research study have already produced evidence that professional contractors are not immune from the issues of job insecurity and financial disadvantage. The aim of the next item of the survey is to examine in detail key features of what can be termed “the downside’ of professional contracting. To this end, fourteen of the most commonly identified negative features of peripheral work were translated into the language of contracting. The options ranged from long hours of work to lack of co-operation from a clients employee workforce and, as Table 6 shows, both the number and the spread of options varied across the matrix

Table 6: Negative Aspects of Contracting

	Left Prior Work Arrangement To Become a Contractor	Left Prior Work Arrangement & Later Became a Contractor	
Contractor by Choice	PULL Long Hours*** (N=20)	DEFAULT 1	BY CHOICE Long Hours*** (N=26)
Contractor Not by Choice	DEFAULT 2 Bookkeeping/legal requirements* (N=6)	PUSH Irregular Work* (N=14) Erratic Lifestyle*** (N=17) Loneliness*** (N=15) Unable to Find Other Work*** (N=23) Inadequate Pay*** (N=6) Co-operation of Clients Employees* (N=18)	NO CHOICE Irregular Work* (N=22) Erratic Lifestyle** (N=20) Loneliness*** (N=22) Unable to Find Other Work*** (N=29) Inadequate Pay*** (N=9) Search for Next Contract* (N=46)
	DIRECT ENTRY Long Hours*** (N=27)	DELAYED ENTRY Irregular Work* (N=20) Erratic Lifestyle*** (N=25) Loneliness* (N=23) Lack of Friends* (N=27) Unable to Find Other Work*** (N=34) Search for Next Contract*** (N=64) Co-operation of Clients Employees** (N=30)	

***Item significant at the .001 level. ** Item significant at the .005 level. *Item significant at the .05 level

The Push sector accounts for the greatest number of negative aspects while the Delayed and Not By Choice sectors reveal very similar item loadings. As with the previous section, a very clear polarisation is revealed within the push and pull quadrants. The picture that emerges for those initially pushed into contracting is one of an unpredictable work and personal life that is exacerbated by poor pay and difficulties in working with the employees of clients.

Against this very negative result, the only significant negative item for the Pull/Choice/Direct Entry segments were the long hours of work. This result also reflects a more recent concern where the

overpaid and overworked are also acknowledged as having serious work issues. Just how serious the negative aspects can be for those either pushed or pulled into contracting can be gauged by the next section which deals with the issue of an ongoing affiliation to the arrangement of contracting.

5. Changes since Initial Entry

The notion of a lack of individual attachment to one specific work arrangement is frequently cited as a key feature of the changing world of work. It is a view which provides a useful counterpoint to the results above on work arrangement preferences, particularly as those pushed into contracting revealed a distinct desire for traditional permanent employment whereas those pulled preferred contracting work. The next item of the survey thus establishes the patterns of flows out of and back into contracting since initial entry.

The results shown in Table 7 reveal that, in terms of the number of moves from contracting into other work arrangements and then back into contracting; the maximum number recorded by respondents was three.

Table 7: Flows Into and Out of Contracting

Movements	First Move	%	Second Move	%	Third Move	%	Total
No response to item	6	2.5	191	79.6	213	88.8	-
Contracted whole Time	179	74.6	-	-	-	-	179
Left Contracting	17	7.1	-	-	-	-	17
Became Part-time casual	5	2.1	1	0.4	-	-	6
Became Full-time casual	-	-	5	2.1	-	-	5
Became Full-time permanent	9	3.8	9	3.8	-	-	18
Became Self-employed	9	3.8	3	1.3	5	2.1	17
Left to care for depdts	5	2.1	3	1.3	1	0.4	9
Unemployed	5	2.1	3	1.3	-	-	9
Changed occup/profession	4	1.7	2	0.8	1	0.4	7
Moved back into contracting	-	-	23	9.6	17	7.1	40
Other	1	0.4					1
TOTAL	240		240		238		

Table 7 shows only 24 (10 per cent) have made three moves. Overall, the majority have remained contracting since initial entry – a result that either provides strong evidence of either an ongoing affiliation to contracting as a way of work or, of being trapped. The two key arrangements associated with the move from contracting were standard employment (full-time permanent) and self-employment. Placing this into the matrix revealed the greatest movement in the Push quadrant and was male dominated but, overall, the small numbers in the flow options were insufficient to provide statistically significant results (and thus no results are tabled). The key result from this item then is the demonstration of an ongoing attachment to contracting once an individual has entered. What is unclear is whether this ongoing employment as a contractor was by choice and whether contracting is sustainable or, an inescapable trap. However, there are indications that those pushed into contracting have tried to move out and this result is supported by the results above where the inability to find other work was a significant reason for remaining contracting.

6. Plans to Remain Contracting

Some resolution to the issue of contracting as a bridge or a trap can be gained by viewing another aspect of affiliation, that of future plans to remain working as a contractor. Overall, the majority (nearly 77 per cent) of those currently contracting intend to persist with this arrangement for the next year. However, over longer time periods were suggested the rates decrease dramatically.

Even among those ‘extremely unlikely’ to leave contracting, the numbers who intend to remain decline with time. Looking 3 years into the future sees the level drop to just fewer than 32 per cent and is down to nearly 16 per cent after three years.

Incorporating the time periods into the matrix framework, illustrated in Table 8, reveals that longer-term attachment to contracting clearly falls in the Pull and Direct Entry segments and lack of ongoing attachment falls in the Push, No Choice and Delayed Entry sectors.

Table 8: The Likelihood of Leaving Contracting*

	Left Prior Work Arrangement To Become a Contractor	Left Prior Work Arrangement & Later Became a Contractor	
Contractor by Choice	PULL 1 year – Very Unlikely 2 years – Quite Unlikely 3 years – Very Unlikely 3+ years – Quite Unlikely	DEFAULT 1 3 years – Quite Likely 3+ years – Very Likely	CHOICE 1 year – Very Unlikely 2 years – Extremely Unlikely 3 years – Very Unlikely 3+ years – Very Likely
Contractor Not by Choice	DEFAULT 2	PUSH 1 year – 50/50 2 years – Quite Likely 3 years – Very Likely 3+ years – Unsure	NO CHOICE 1 year – Very Likely 2 years – Quite Likely 3 years – Unsure 3+ years – Unsure
	DIRECT ENTRY 1 year - Very Unlikely 2 to 3+ years – Quite Unlikely	DELAYED ENTRY 1 year – Quite Likely 2 years to 3+ years – Very Likely	

*All results significant at the .001 level

Overall, the results for the Pull sector confirm the indications of an attachment to contracting but they now suggest that this affiliation is subject to quite short term, as in less than 3 years, review. Even more clear now is the lack of long term attachment to contracting within the Push sector. When combined with the results on movement into other work arrangements and the negatives of contracting from above, it appears that for those pushed, contracting is either perceived as an unsustainable work/lifestyle or, that the current attachment is the result of short-term labour market opportunity.

SUMMARY

In terms of focussing on the concept of satisfaction and the pull into contracting, it is clear that those initially Pulled into contracting, and to a lesser extent, most of those who entered by choice appear significantly more satisfied with their contracting career than those who were Pushed into it. The positive factors of contracting, especially those of ‘more money’, the ability to ‘balance work & family’ and to have a ‘flexible lifestyle’ emerge as important motivators in sustaining individuals in contracting. conversely, negative factors such as ‘irregular work’, the ‘erratic lifestyle’, ‘loneliness’ and ‘inadequate pay’ are all significant features of contracting for those who initially did not enter contracting by choice. These same factors also appear important for those participants who expressed a desire to leave contracting – a move, however, they currently perceived as being unlikely due to ‘inability to find other work’. As a result, for these individuals contracting is not only the ‘best option available’ but probably, the only option. This was most clearly reflected in the last

item illustrated in Table 8 where the attachment to contracting emerged as very weak for individuals in the Push and No Choice sectors compared to those in the Pull and Choice segments.

Overall, analysis of the data from this part of the Survey supports the Hypothesis. Satisfaction, measured firstly in terms of current reasons for contracting is positively related to the initial 'Pull' factors associated with the move into contracting. So too was the second measure of satisfaction, intent to remain with a contracting career. The results continue to reaffirm previous indications (see McKeown 2003 & 2005), that professional contracting arrangements vary from being:

- A transitional form of employment - on the road to more permanent employment arrangements for some, to being
- A trap associated with job insecurity, low earnings and periods of unemployment with entry a defensive move against unemployment through to
- A career option for the most able and ambitious.

These difference profiles appear to have important implications for the employing organisations which utilise their services.

CONCLUSION

This paper has applied the Matrix framework developed within a larger scale research project to test the question as to how professional contractors' satisfaction with their work arrangements affects the sustainability of contracting as a life as well as a work style. Evidence of the widely cited 'elite' professional was found, but so were the low paid and insecure that typify the literature on the marginalisation of non-standard workers. The results clearly indicate that lack of opportunity and disadvantage are as relevant to professionals in contracting as they are to any worker moving out of traditional employment. There are clearly costs involved in contracting - even where individuals appear to be highly paid and rewarded for their labour. Those stepping outside the bounds of traditional work face ongoing challenges in ensuring their own 'employability'. While the challenges of redundancy, changing labour markets and changing expectations of work have created new opportunities where some individuals adapt and flourish, others clearly do not.

The notion that the professional worker is somehow more adept or proficient at negotiating their way within is very clearly not supported by this research. Instead, there seems to be clear indications that professionals are as much in need of assistance, especially in terms of protection from income fluctuation and protection as any other peripheral worker. These results indicate that there is an opportunity for employers to provide some of the HRM services more traditionally associated with employees to this workforce - especially in cases where they want to maintain and retain such workers. The fact is that the professional in the peripheral workforce can be just as vulnerable as any other worker and the issues of access to training and development and protection are just as relevant. The challenge for the employing organisation is identical to that they face with any other worker - firstly finding those that meet their needs and secondly, maintaining their services for the length of time they are needed. It seems a challenge worth considering given that the forces of globalization which have brought about the increase in the professional contractor workforce and the increasing demand for their services seem to be part of the foreseeable future of work.

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