NEW FORMS OF WORK

Leanne Cutcher
Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies

l.cutcher@econ.usyd.edu.au

As I sit down to write this overview of the papers in the *New Forms of Work Stream* the world has just celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Moon Landing. That great leap for mankind as Armstrong named it certainly fuelled our imaginations. We envisaged a future where robots would undertake the unsavoury jobs and we would travel to work with jet packs on our backs. Perhaps not surprisingly this vision of work hasn't been realised, but, the legacy of those first steps on the moon can be seen in the ways that it has shifted the boundaries of our thinking about space and time.

The papers in this stream reflect these new ways of thinking about the spatial and temporal dimensions of work. They share a concern to adopt a more holistic view and recognise that the boundaries shaping the 'form of work' are fluid and dynamic. In the papers there is an understanding that the way that we experience our work is a result of when and where we do that work, work we have done in the past, as well as the way that our work and the work of others is regulated.

So rather than this stream being about new forms of work per se (no robots or jet packs here) the papers highlight the importance of adopting a conceptual lens that recognises the wider temporal and spatial context in which work occurs. For some of the papers in this stream this has implications for the way that we think about worker identity and agency. For others it leads the writers to argue for a much broader rendering of the employment contract, in particular the psychological contract (Rousseau 1998, 1995). This concern to adopt a more holistic understanding of the world of work has lead others in the stream to think in new ways about how work should be regulated. Finally there is a group of papers in the stream that show how country context and the shifting boundaries around work have resulted in the rise of temporary, contingent and atypical forms of work.

Reflecting the desire on the part of stream contributors to present a holistic understanding of the world of work, the stream presents a wealth of qualitative research undertaken across a variety of research sites. These include; call centres, drama theatres, manufacturing plants, visual digital effects studios, insurance companies, gymnasiums, food processing plants, construction and retail sites.

Respondents include independent contractors, creative workers, teleworkers, print and electrical contractors, older workers, temporary workers, and the self-employed.

Shifting Temporal and Spatial Boundaries of Work

Worker Identity and Agency across Time and Space

There is no doubt that 'we are made up through our work' (Hacking 1986) but work is certainly not the only site of identity construction. As **Jenkins and Delbridge** show work is just one site of identity construction and the way in which the call centre workers in their study responded to management's high performance work practices were shaped by local economic and social context, as well as the personal histories and experience of the individual call centre workers. Their paper addresses how processes of employee identifications, social constructions of identities and identity regulation influence the adoption and adaptation of management practices in the workplace. They show how the call workers responses were shaped by different orientations or identifications with the management, clients and their work team. They remind us of that workers are knowledgeable actors, capable of forming their own strategies to reinforce preferred identities. **Forseth, Håpnes and Berge** are also keen to highlight the agency of workers. Their study of customer service centres in Norway also highlights the different orientations that workers bring to their work roles and how their response to "the brave new world of sales" is shaped not only by the new work policies but also by the workers life histories and the mediating role of the economic, political and social context in which the firms operate. Perhaps more than anywhere else the work of an off-shore call centre worker reminds us of that spatial and temporal boundaries of work are being broken down. This is shown to good effect in **Bhattacharya, Rayton and Kinnie's** study of call centre work in India. In particular they show how changes to employee attitudes in these worksites which cross both geographical and temporal boundaries change over time. They also highlight the role of individual agency and how employees use their life experience to resist changes to work role boundaries.

Expanding the Boundaries of the Psychological Contract

Bhattacharya, et al's paper is one of a number in this stream that seeks to broaden our concept of the psychological contract. They build on Rousseau's (1995) concept of the psychological contract to show employee perceptions of the psychological contract change over time. Other contributors to this stream argue for a much broader rendering of the psychological contract. **Axel Haunschild** draws on ideas about social structure and agency to argue for the concept a 'social contract' that

takes us well beyond the idea of an individualised psychological contract Haunschild argues that the concept of lifestyles as social contracts is a much more useful tool for understanding the willingness of workers in the cultural and creative industries to accept flexible or contingent work relationships and why standard human resource practices and union organising strategies might not be effective with these workers. They are arguing that traditional ways of thinking about work do not account for the way in which self-identity and lifestyle shape employee responses. In a similar vein *Sappey and Maconachie* argue that if we are to understand the motivations and attitudes of workers in the fitness industry then we need to incorporate an understanding of 'psycho-social rewards' these workers gain through their employment. The workplace offers a 'production space' where in the fitness worker builds their 'physical capital'. Having the opportunity to work on and with their bodies reinforces a sense of identity and a self belief in the capacity of their efforts to change the lives of others. This production of physical capital is they argue a much greater motivator for these workers than extrinsic rewards. *McKeown, Connelly and Gallagher's* study of independent contractors also aims to look beyond single dimensional explanations and to consider both personal and contractual factors which mediate workers well being.   They show how workers motivations for pursuing a career as an independent contractor can be multiple and complex and incorporate notions of satisfaction, security and personality. They also show how contractual *and* personal factors moderate workers' reactions to the stresses that come with being an independent contractor. *Jenni Palmroos's* focus is also on the individual. She seeks to understand the phenomenon of involuntary self employment and highlight the individual level experiences through analysis of individual's self-narrative. She highlights that the way that self-employed people tell the story of their experiences has implications beyond their own individual story. She argues that the self-employed also need to be seen as part of a wider network and that identity construction as self-employed is linked to former work communities.

Changing Spaces and Times of Work

What then for workers whose labor takes place outside the workplace altogether and in their own home? How do they develop networks through which to share knowledge and to create a work identity? *Pekkola and Ylöstalo's* seek to answer these questions by exploring the case of teleworkers showing how they are able to develop networks that allow them to share knowledge despite the fact that they are not working at the same time and in the same place as their co-workers.   Their study highlights just how far the temporal and spatial boundaries of work have

shifted. These shifting spatial and temporal boundaries can have real material consequences for workers. **Richbell and Chan** discuss how the advent of the 24 hour society has resulted in a greater need for flexible working times and in many cases increased night work. They show how night work has become a common feature of a lot of service sector work, for example, banking and retail. In their case study of the wholesale/retail sector shows that there are particular problems for employees working permanent nights, most notably feelings of isolation and problems communicating with management.

Regulating Work across Time and Space

A Life Course Perspective

This recognition of the shifting temporal and spatial boundaries and its consequences for employees, both, psychological and physically has inevitably lead to new ways of thinking about the regulation of work. A recognition that boundaries between work and non-work have broken down that people do not experience work in a linear trajectory, but, that they move in and out of the workforce and that they bring to their work roles a raft of experiences from across the life cycle has caused some regulators and academics to rethink the way in which work is regulated. For example, as **Verd and Miguelez** show in recent years, 'the life course perspective' has come to play an increasingly important role in employment policies promoted by the European Union. They argue that rather than workers career trajectories being linear and stable they are characterised by high rates of discontinuity and variability and argue that only policies need to take these discontinuities into account. They draw on Sen's capability model to assess the effectiveness of social policy that aims to recognise the non-linear nature of many peoples engagement in the labour force. They argue that a capabilities approach ensures studies will take account of individual's decisions and preferences and how these shape policy outcomes. **Frazer and Sargeant's** paper focuses on workers at the end of their working lives to assess whether they are more vulnerable. Perhaps because of a failure of social policy in both the UK and Australia to adopt the life course perspective outlined by Verd and Miguelez, older workers in these countries are often engaged in precarious work. Frazer and Sargeant show how the ageing of population in both these countries coupled with a trend towards casualised, part-time work in many sectors and issues of age-discrimination have exposed a larger segment of the older workforce to precarious types of work. In a finding that will be of particular interest to Australian readers whose government has just increased in the official retirement

age, the existence of a compulsory retirement age in the UK sees workers reaching that age being 'tipped out' into fixed-term or temporary work. Frazer and Sargeant also argue that workers ability to manage well at the end of their working lives is highly dependent on the availability of social services.

Flexicurity

Frazer and Sargeant's arguments echo the central tenants of the flexicurity model and there are five papers in this stream that seek to shed light on the features, outcomes and broader applicability of the Danish flexicurity model. This is welcome because as **Bredgaard, Larsen, Madsen and Rasmussen** argue despite being somewhat of a 'celebrity' Danish flexicurity has not been well researched. In their paper they explore the impact of the flexicurity model on 'atypical' forms of work. Whilst arguing that low incidence of 'atypical' employment is the result of the flexicurity model they also show how a central tenants of this model, that is, a universalist social security system has showing some cracks and how this combined with the fact that trade unions in Denmark are 'losing ground' means that we might see the growth of 'atypical' employment embodied in recent labour market discourse of 'any job is a good job'. Their findings are supported at a more general level by **Carsten Jensen** who shows how flexicurity depends on institutional and organisational characteristics in the Danish labour market. He argues that strong labour market organisations and a historical division between the welfare and industrial relations systems have create the space within which the flexicurity model could grow. His observations raise questions about the applicability of the model in other contexts. **Ibsen and Mailand's** paper goes someway to answer these questions about context, by exploring how collective bargaining arrangements in print and electrical contracting have contributed to the development of flexicurity in three different countries, Denmark, Spain and the United Kingdom. They identify four pre-conditions for collective bargaining to make a positive contribution to flexicurity. They are; autonomy from legislation, the state as a facilitator, scope of bargaining items together with mutual trust and power parity between the social partners. They conclude that what is needed is more empirical work that investigates the realities of the construct of flexicurity. Undertaking this empirical work is important because as **Keller and Seifert** show the concept of flexicurity has become of major interest to policy makers in the European Union. They warn against a "one size fits all" approach to the adoption of flexicurity measures. The preliminary empirical evidence they present in their paper leads them to conclude that the uptake of the concept of flexicurity by EU member states will vary depending on the extent to which the

capacity for social dialogue is developed within the national system. They issue a note of warning to unions not to leave their run too late or their ability to have an impact on future European employment policy may be lost.

Back to the Future

Of course, any empirical studies about flexicurity or indeed regulation of the world of work more generally will need to take account of the effect of the recent global financial crisis. **Mitlacher and Burgess** explore the growth of the temping industry in both Germany and Australia. They show how the global financial crisis is likely to lead to greater consolidation of agency firms and has lead to a greater standardisation of temporary work and this is likely to improve outcomes for workers in this sector. However, as they point out there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to the employment conditions of many temporary agency workers. In another cross-country study **Forde, Mackenzie, Robinson, Cook, Eriksson, Larsson and Bergman** show how in the construction sector in Sweden and the United Kingdom there has been movement back and forth between direct and indirect forms of employment. They demonstrate the dynamic nature of the construction industry in both countries and show how differences can largely be attributed to different forms of regulation. **McGrath-Champ and Rosewarne** also highlight the dynamism of the construction industry, in their case in Australia. They show how the boundaries of the construction industry have shifted introducing a whole range of new players as manufacturers forward integrate and companies diversify offshore. They describe the growth of major corporations and complex pyramid structures of sub-contracting arrangements which have led to the growth of self-employment and the casualisation of work in this sector. Shifting geographical boundaries and the movement of workers from central and eastern Europe are identified by **Benjamin Hopkins** as trends affecting the growth of short term labour in low skilled manufacturing jobs in the United Kingdom. Hopkins paper makes an original contribution because he highlights the attitudes of fellow workers to these new immigrants. He also shows how the firm's policies further exacerbate divisions between migrant workers who were usually employed as agency staff and locals who were on permanent contracts. He shows how these migrant workers were victims of both formal and informal hierarchies within the workplace.

As we might expect the two papers from South Africa in this stream remind us that context matters and argue that in developing countries atypical work in the informal economy is the norm and not the exception. **Smit and Fourie** argue we also need to recognise that there should be a multi-dimensional approach to the regulation of work, including, international labour standards, local govt involvement,

increased voice and recognition of atypical workers, a rethinking of the very notion of 'employer' and 'employee' and targeted legislation that established new schemes for particular categories of workers. They draw on the ILO's concept of 'decent work' and call for a rethinking of the importance of an employment contract to a system of labour law that is flexible enough to extend protection to those most in need of such protection. Their ideas are developed against the backdrop of South Africa's labour situation where being an 'atypical' worker is the norm. **Rochelle Le Roux's** paper is also concerned with the pervasiveness of non-standard labour forms in South Africa. In a paper that takes us 'back to the future' she reminds us of the power of unitarist concepts in the employment relationship and calls for the regulation of labour brokers in South Africa.

Conclusion

Of course in writing this overview I have sought to create connections between papers and in this way preferenced my own way of seeing and understanding the world. I look forward to hearing the papers presented and having the opportunity to have my ways of seeing challenged. I am confident that the *New Forms of Work* stream will produce some lively discussion and debate because in their own way each of these papers challenges us to look beyond traditional understandings of the world of work and to adopt a more holistic conceptual lens that recognises the complexity of the way in which modern forms of work and workers are constructed and regulated across time and space.

References

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