

# SOURCES AND MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT IN BLENDED ORGANIZATIONS

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Master of Arts  
in the Department of Communication Studies,  
Indiana University

August 2007

Accepted by the Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you, Beth, for your guiding hand throughout this thesis process...your oversight and knowledge made this project possible. Thank you, Ron and John, for your input and for providing the inspiration and context for much of the research I performed. Thank you, Michelle, for going above and beyond in providing access to the organization in which I performed my research and the contacts who provided the valuable information. Thank you to my wife, Kim, and my boys, Nathan and Nicholas, who patiently and encouragingly allowed me to pursue this degree.

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## Introduction

Nonstandard workers comprise upwards of 14.8 percent of total employment in the United States, representing almost 20 million people. Under its broadest estimate, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) defines such workers as persons who do not expect their jobs to last or who reported that their jobs are temporary. While many people typically limit their views of nonstandard workers to those that are employed through temporary agencies, the designation equally applies to many who are self-employed, contract workers and independent contractors. Much of the research on nonstandard workers is limited to exploring those in low-wage positions requiring limited skills and the detriments of such working arrangements. However, with advances in technology that allow working from remote locations and the desire of firms to more quickly adapt to changes in the market, the role of high-skill, high-wage nonstandard workers is steadily growing. These types of high-end nonstandard workers prefer their work arrangements to others and overwhelmingly reject typical work situations. This is in sharp contrast to the majority of low-skill, low-wage temporary workers who are in their arrangements out of necessity. Although this low-skill, low-wage group has received much attention in past research, it has little in common with the high-end nonstandard workers being considered here.

The integration of nonstandard workers into an organization is called a “blended workforce,” and such an arrangement is a breeding ground for potential conflict. Pondy (1967) proposed that conflict episodes are composed of five possible stages: latent, perceived, felt, manifest and the aftermath. Pondy’s conflict stages will provide the

framework for our consideration of conflict in blended organizations. Latent conflict occurs in an organization when there is competition for scarce resources, drives for autonomy and divergence of subunit goals. These often form the basis for and are underlying sources of organizational conflict. This latent conflict represents a potential for conflict, although whether or not it is perceived or felt or eventually manifest depends on multiple variables. A review of the literature on nonstandard workers and blended organizations provides insight into the potential areas of latent conflict in such arrangements. But, because very little literature has specifically explored conflict from the unique perspective of a high-skill, high-wage nonstandard worker, the research here will seek to identify what forms of latent conflict in blended organizations are perceived, felt and/or become manifest by such workers.

Blended organizations are not only unique in the kinds of latent conflicts inherent in this type of arrangement, but they also face unique challenges in how that conflict is to be managed. The blended workforce explored through Putnam and Stohl's (1990) description of a bona fide group provides insight into the complications of such conflict management. A blended workforce meets the bona fide group criteria in that it is, by nature, fluid, as temporary workers flow in and out of the group and is interdependent in the sense that regular and nonstandard workers all contribute to the organization's goals. The challenge, then, is managing all stages of conflict in a fluid environment where the potential for latent conflict exists. The research here will also explore what ways a blended workforce with its inherently fluid boundaries, manages the conflicts that occur. To do this, we will further explore the perspectives of high-end nonstandard workers, but will also consider the perspectives of those who manage them and work alongside them.

Nonstandard workers comprise nearly 15 percent of total employment in the United States with upwards of 93 percent of firms reporting using their services, making research into this group of great value (American Management Association, 2000). High-skill, high-wage nonstandard workers are the fastest growing group among all alternative work arrangements, making focus on this under-researched group quite appropriate. Because of the unique situations and the potential for competing goals, aims and values, blended workforces that employ such workers would appear to be a breeding ground for latent conflict and ripe for further research. Specific research into the perspectives of high-end nonstandard workers will provide insight into the applicability of past research to their unique situations. Finally, because blended workforces are interdependent yet, by nature, maintain an extremely high level of fluidity, understanding the way conflicts are managed in that context will be of great value.

Through an extensive literature review of nonstandard workers, the first goal of this research is to determine potential areas of latent conflict in blended organizations. The second goal is to determine if those areas of latent conflict move into advanced stages of conflict within blended organizations. The final goal is to determine how those conflicts that emerge from the use of a blended workforce are managed.

This research will help fill the gap of where past research on nonstandard arrangements has ended by focusing on the neglected high-end worker. Since the blended organization has a unique set of conflicts inherent in its integration of regular and nonstandard workers, this research will provide insight for those considering and involved in such arrangements. An understanding of how such conflicts are managed in

blended organizations will benefit managers of such organizations and students of communication alike.

#### Definition of Nonstandard Work

Coming to a definition of nonstandard work requires sorting through a myriad of different, and sometimes competing, ideas. It is widely believed that Audrey Freedman, while speaking at a conference on employment security in 1985, first used the term “contingent worker” to describe the practice of “employing workers only when there [is] an immediate and direct demand for their services” (Polivka, 1996, p. 3). As Kalleberg (2000) points out, terms used to describe these unique working arrangements have changed over the years from nonstandard employment relations (Goldthorpe, 1984; Casey, 1991; Green, Krahn, & Sung, 1993; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000) to alternative work arrangements (Polivka, 1996; Sherer, 1996), market-mediated arrangements (Abraham, 1990), nontraditional employment relations (Ferber & Waldfogel, 1998), flexible staffing arrangements (Abraham, 1988; Houseman, 1997), flexible working practices (Brewster, Mayne, & Tregaskia, 1997), atypical employment (Córdova, 1986; Delsen, 1995; De Grip, Hoevenberg, & Willems, 1997), vagrant or peripheral employment (Summers, 1997), vulnerable work (Tregaskis, Brewster, Mayne, & Hegewisch, 1998), precarious employment (Treu, 1992), disposable work (Gordon, 1996), new forms of employment (Bronstein, 1991) and contingent work (Belous, 1989; Polivka & Nardone, 1989). As some of these terms clearly imply, nonstandard work, for many, represents a just-in-time workforce, the human resource equivalent of just-in-time inventories (Polivka, Cohany, & Hipple, 2000). But, within a few years of its initial usage in the mid-1980s, nonstandard work was used to refer “to a wide range of employment



practices including part time work, temporary help service employment, employee leasing, self-employment, contracting out, employment in the business services sector and home-based work” (Polivka, 1996, p. 3).

The most authoritative and widely referenced source of work arrangement definitions comes from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and their Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangement supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a monthly survey of around 60,000 households that provides data on employment and unemployment in the United States. The supplement on contingent and alternative work was first issued in February 1995 and has since been conducted in February of 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2005. Under its broadest estimate, the BLS (2005) defines contingent workers as persons who do not expect their jobs to last or who reported that their jobs are temporary. Table 1 illustrates the most commonly used categorizations of nonstandard workers:

*Table 1: Categorizations of Nonstandard Workers According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics*

<p><b>Contingent:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct-hire temporaries</li> <li>• Self-employed (limited types)</li> </ul>	<p>Hired directly by a company</p> <p>Business operators performing temporary assignments</p>
<p><b>Alternative Work Arrangements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent contractors</li> <li>• On-call workers</li> <li>• Agency temporaries</li> <li>• Contract company workers</li> </ul>	<p>Includes consultants and freelance workers</p> <p>Work on an as-needed basis</p> <p>Paid by a temporary help agency</p> <p>Employed by a company that contracts out their services</p>

The definition of “contingent” refers to one main category of workers: direct-hire temporaries, as in individuals who are in temporary job assignments but are hired directly by the company rather than through a staffing intermediary (Polivka et al., 2000),

although the category also includes limited kinds of self-employment. Those under “alternative work arrangements” include four main categories of workers: independent contractors, on-call workers, temporary help agency workers and workers provided by contract firms. Independent contractors, consultants or freelance workers are often difficult to distinguish from those who are self employed, but for the purposes of this study, the self-employed are considered business operators, such as shop owners (Polivka et al., 2000). On-call workers are those hired directly by an organization but who work only on an as-needed basis when called to do so (Polivka et al., 2000). Agency temporaries are those individuals paid by a temporary help agency (Polivka et al., 2000). Individuals are classified as contract company workers if they were employed by a company that contracted out their services, if they were usually assigned to only one customer and if they generally worked at the customer’s work site (Polivka et al., 2000). Contract companies, unlike temporary help agencies, supervise their employees’ work, although to varying degrees (Kalleberg, 2000).

The combined contingent and alternative workforces are comprised of: (a) all wage and salary workers who do not expect their employment to last, except for those who planned to leave their jobs for personal reasons, (b) all self-employed (both the incorporated and unincorporated) and independent contractors who expect to be and had been in their present assignment for less than one year and (c) temporary help and contract workers who expect to work for their customers to whom they were assigned for one year or less (Cohany, Hipple, Narone, Polivka, & Stewart, 1988). The term “nonstandard work” is now widely used to include both contingent and alternative work arrangements and to clearly illustrate the difference between it and regular job

arrangements. As evidenced in the BLS's definition, the temporal boundaries or instability of the work and absence of an employer are key differences between regular and nonstandard work. Another key difference between the arrangements is a distinction between the organization that employs the worker and the one for whom the person works, as in contract work and in working for temporary help agencies (Spalter-Roth et al., 1997; Kalleberg et al., 1997).

### Nonstandard Work Quantified

Nonstandard workers comprise upwards of 14.8 percent of total employment. Representing nearly 20 million people in the United States, this group is well worth the effort of concentrated study. One might surmise that because of advances in technology that enable individuals to work from home and the trend of organizations to downsize their traditional workforce to a core few that the use of nonstandard workers has risen dramatically in the last few years. In contrast to popular perception that the nonstandard workforce is growing exponentially, statistics from the BLS show little growth from 1995 to 2005. Despite modest growth over the last few years, many believe nonstandard work will be the rule rather than the exception in the future.

The February 2005 supplement showed that *contingent workers* accounted for 1.8 to 4.1 percent of total employment. When the survey was previously conducted, in February 2001, contingent workers ranged from 1.7 to 4.0 percent. The first time the BLS conducted the survey, in February 1995, the estimates ranged from 2.2 to 4.9 percent. This contingent workforce—those who do not expect their current job to last—has grown somewhat smaller in the 10-year period, numbering 5.7 million as of February 2005.

Twenty-seven percent of contingent workers are under 25 years old, compared to 13 percent of noncontingent workers. Of these workers under 25 years old, nearly three-fifths of them were enrolled in school, compared with about two-fifths of youth with noncontingent jobs, although, overall, contingent workers were less educated. Forty-nine percent of contingent workers were women. Contingent workers were 79 percent white which is slightly less compared to noncontingent workers (83 percent) and much more likely to be Hispanic or Latino (21 percent compared with 13 percent) as compared to noncontingent workers.

Of those in *alternative work arrangements* in February 2005, there were 10.3 million independent contractors (7.4 percent of total employment), 2.5 million on-call workers (1.8 percent of total employment), 1.2 million temporary help agency workers (0.9 percent of total employment) and 813,000 workers provided by contract firms (0.6 percent of total employment). The only category that experienced growth between 2001 and 2005 was that of the independent contractor which grew from 6.4 percent to 7.4 percent over the four-year period. The proportions for the other three alternative work arrangements showed little or no change since February 2001. Independent contractors were the largest of the four alternative work arrangements, numbering about 10.3 million. Independent contractors were more likely than workers in traditional arrangements to be age 35 and over (81 versus 64 percent), male (65 versus 52 percent) and white (89 versus 82 percent). Thirty-six percent of independent contractors had at least a bachelor's degree in February 2005, compared with 33 percent of workers with traditional arrangements.

On-call workers composed the second largest group of those in alternative working arrangements totaling nearly 2.5 million workers (1.8 percent of total employed persons) in February 2005. These workers were more likely, as compared to those in traditional arrangements, to be young and to have less than a high school diploma. Twenty percent of on-call workers were 16- to 24-year olds, compared with 14 percent of traditional workers. Among on-call workers ages 25 to 64, 14 percent did not have a high school diploma, compared with 9 percent of workers in traditional arrangements.

Temporary help agency workers numbered about 1.2 million in February 2005, accounting for 0.9 percent of all employment. Fifty-three percent of temporary help agency workers were women, compared with about 48 percent of traditional workers. BLS statistics go on to point out that nearly 50 percent of temporary help agency workers were under the age of 35 compared with only 36 percent of workers in traditional arrangements. They were much more likely than workers with traditional arrangements to be black (23 versus 11 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (21 versus 13 percent). Of the help agency workers ages 25 to 64 years old, 17 percent had less than a high school diploma, compared with 9 percent of workers in traditional arrangements.

Those employed by contract companies numbered 813,000 or 0.6 percent of total employment. Almost 70 percent of contract company workers were men, compared with 52 percent of traditional workers and were more likely to be black and Hispanic or Latino. Among 25- to 64-year olds, those employed by contract companies were more likely than traditional workers to have less than a high school diploma (13 versus 9 percent); however, the group also had a higher proportion of college graduates (37 versus 33 percent).

A 1997 survey of private sector employees conducted by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research found that 78 percent of firms used at least one type of what they termed a “flexible staffing arrangement.” As many as 46 percent of the firms used temporary agency workers, 44 percent used independent contractors, 38 percent used short-term direct hires and 27 percent used on-call workers (Houseman & Erickcek, 1997). A 1999 study, conducted in cooperation with the American Management Association and the Seton Hall University Institute on Work, showed that an even greater majority (93 percent) of U.S. firms employed some type of nonstandard workers with 49 percent of surveyed firms employing more such workers than in their previous survey from 1996. Twenty-three percent of companies employed the same amount, while only 20 percent employed fewer. Fifty-five percent of the largest businesses surveyed had increased the number of nonstandard workers on staff since 1996 (American Management Association, 2000). This goes against the findings of Abraham and Taylor (1996) and their “economies of scale” argument where they contended that larger organizations were less likely to contract out work because small- or medium-sized organizations may not find it cost effective to do certain functions in house. It is widely believed that small establishments are more likely than large ones to use temporary help agencies and contract companies in order to obtain workers with special skills.

#### Why Organizations Use Nonstandard Workers

Understanding the reasons nonstandard arrangements are chosen provides helpful insight into the types of conflict to anticipate as well as clues as to how those conflicts might be managed. Much of the research on nonstandard workers has centered on the economic factors that lead organizations to use flexible staffing arrangements. Clearly

such employment is seen as a strategic response to an increasingly competitive economy marked by shorter product cycles, rapidly evolving technologies, fluctuating market demand and rising labor costs (Bradach, 1997). Most who take this economic perspective are simply concerned with the costs of employment and view the decision to use permanent or nonstandard workers as a choice between strategies of internalization and externalization (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). The economic perspective, however, does go both ways in the sense that nonstandard workers, at least those in some of the arrangements, are provided with a type of employment that affords them financial autonomy and a work situation that promotes greater control over how often they work as well as what jobs they take. If economic factors were the driving force behind the introduction of nonstandard workers into an organization, especially if those nonstandard workers are in any way replacing regular workers, the potential for conflict would presumably increase.

Reportedly, however, economic factors are only part of the motivation to use nonstandard workers. In the American Management Association (2000) survey mentioned above, 73 percent placed the need to attract “specialized talent” as either “very” or “somewhat important” rationales for their use of contingent workers. Ninety-one percent of companies surveyed cited “flexibility in staffing issues” in the same categories. Contracting arrangements are used for a variety of reasons: to meet increased demand, to provide skills that are not available in-house and to reduce costs (Holmes, 1986). Despite the historical focus on economic issues, only 63 percent of respondent companies in the survey cited “payroll deduction” as “very” or “somewhat important.” Houseman (2001) asserted that using nonstandard workers helped firms adjust their

staffing levels to fluctuations in their workload by avoiding the need to continually maintain peak workload staffing and to accommodate employees' desires for a more flexible working schedules. Additionally, flexible staffing arrangements do not require employers to provide benefits to nonstandard workers and allow the employer to screen potential workers for regular full-time positions. Presumably, if attracting specialized talent or increasing flexibility were the driving factors for using nonstandard workers, the potential for conflict would be less than if it were for economic reasons alone.

Despite the conflicting research regarding what size companies are more likely to use nonstandard workers, there is general agreement that larger organizations are more apt to use certain types of nonstandard arrangements. Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993) showed that organizations with a larger number of employees were more likely to use independent contractors, primarily because they bring specialized skills that do not interrupt the internal routines of organizations. These specialized skills, in their estimation, are especially needed in large organizations because they produce a wider range of products or services. Uzzi and Barsness (1998) went into greater detail by offering four explanations: (a) larger organizations have a greater number and more diverse jobs that can be filled by nonstandard workers; (b) larger organizations are better able to achieve lower costs in training and managing nonstandard workers; (c) larger organizations, as mentioned above, produce a broader range of products or services and are thus more likely to require expertise that might not be cost efficient to develop in house; and (d) larger organizations offer greater opportunities for permanent employment and so may be more likely to attract nonstandard workers.



While many argue that these types of staffing arrangements are used primarily to benefit the organization rather than because of the demands of employees, others hold that the growth of nonstandard employment is because of the increased number of dual-earning couples and working single parents who look to this type of arrangement to better balance work and family obligations (Spalter-Roth et al., 1997). Understanding whether nonstandard arrangements are being driven by the needs of organizations or whether organizations are simply bending to the preferences of workers, provides helpful insight into the sources of conflict in those organizations.

#### Why Workers Choose Nonstandard Arrangements

Among those that choose to be in nonstandard arrangements, a clear theme in the literature was their desire to have control over their own employment situations. They desired the freedom to choose their own work arrangements, often believing that would provide them more interesting and challenging work, flexible hours and, potentially, economic rewards. But, as expected, the degree of satisfaction is very much dependent on which nonstandard arrangement is being considered. In 1997, Polivka et al. (2000) found that 69.9 percent of agency temporaries, 52.7 percent of on-call workers and 51.5 percent of direct-hire temporaries were dissatisfied with their arrangement. In contrast, fewer than 10 percent of independent contractors or the regular self-employed said they would prefer to be in a regular arrangement. Those who were identified as independent contractors, freelancers and even some temporary workers tended to have opportunities with several clients and, therefore, had fairly steady work and earnings (Carnoy, Castells, & Brenner, 1997). They are clearly in a different situation than other temporaries who

often can find work only for a limited number of hours each week, usually at relatively low rates of pay (Carré, Ferber, Golden, & Herzberg, 2000).

A 1994 study by the National Association of Temporary and Staffing Services (Spalter-Roth et al., 1997) found that 78 percent of surveyed workers take temp jobs in order to increase their chances of getting a regular full-time job despite the fact that nonstandard work arrangements rarely become regular employment. They found that 6.8 percent of female regular full-time employees previously worked in a nonstandard work arrangement for their current employer while only 4.0 percent of male managers and professionals who are regular full-time employees previously worked in other arrangements for the same employer. Kalleberg et al. (1997) report slightly lower findings: 3.8 percent of males and 5.6 percent of females who are regular full-time employees previously worked in a nonstandard work arrangement for their current employer. Due to downsizing and corporate restructuring, Spalter-Roth et al. (1997) proposed that it is probably more common for managers and professionals to move from regular to nonstandard employment rather than the other way around. For those in the higher-level arrangements, job security and future opportunities are based not on the duration of one's current job assignment, but the network and skills to find another job. Young people and other new labor force entrants may want to gain a variety of work experiences and get a feel for a certain industry before they make a commitment to a regular position (Belman & Golden, 2000). Understanding that nonstandard workers might, therefore, be less committed to a single organization and must remain connected to a variety of organizations provides further insight into the potential for conflict in this type of arrangement.

Family issues are often cited as a reason to be in a nonstandard job arrangement. The type of job arrangement one “chooses” and gender appear to be major factors when considering family issues. Kalleberg et al. (1997) reported that few men claim family obligations as a reason for their nonstandard work choices and that women, except for those who are single and without children, are two to three times more likely than men to cite family obligations as the reason for choosing nonstandard arrangements. Polivka et al. (2000) found that independent contractors and the regular self-employed are more likely to be married than regular full-time workers. In both 1995 and 1997, around 70 percent of all independent contractors and almost 80 percent of regular self-employed workers were married, compared with about 62 percent of regular full-time workers. As expected, 60-70 percent those who are working in temporary or on-call arrangements do so for economic reasons, regardless of their family type (Kalleberg et al., 1997). Most men and women who work as independent contractors or are self-employed do so voluntarily although, in general, more men than women would prefer regular employment (Kalleberg et al., 1997). Nonstandard work, in general, could be attractive to individuals who have family responsibilities, as long as it provides them the opportunity to refuse work without consequences (Belman & Golden, 2000).

Kalleberg et al. (1997) stated that contract workers of either gender were more likely to receive high wages than regular full-time workers even though they shared similar personal characteristics. This coupling of work flexibility and higher wages is clearly a draw to embrace nonstandard arrangements. The likelihood of receiving high wages also extends to independent contractors and the self-employed. These groups of nonstandard workers believe that despite the uncertainty of their situations, their need to

often provide their own benefits, bear the cost of maintaining their expertise and the possibility of complicated and higher taxes, that their situations are still economically advantageous. As will be discussed later, however, the disparity in wages between regular and nonstandard workers is a possible point of conflict. Heckscher (2000, p. 277) saw the possibility of a much deeper conflict:

...for free agency is essentially an absence of moral obligation: everyone is expected simply to seek the best deal. Only the most die-hard or free-market ideologues—and in hundreds of interviews with managers, I have not met more than two or three of these—thinks that such pure self-interest is a good thing. (p. 277)

Although many nonstandard arrangements dangle the promise of high wages and flexibility, clearly not all see a trend toward such arrangements in a positive light.

#### High-Skill, High-Wage Nonstandard Workers

Flexible work schedules, potentially higher wages and the freedom to choose the organizations for which they work are clearly draws to many skilled professionals.

Although the early studies on nonstandard workers traditionally focused on low-skilled workers (Barnett & Miner, 1992; Greary, 1992; Nollen, 1996; Rogers, 1995), an increasing number of recent studies have focused on high-skill, high-wage workers (Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002; McKeown, 2003; Rogers, 2000).

While it is tempting to generalize and include all workers into a single type of nonstandard worker (Matusik & Hill, 1998; Parker, 1994), clearly the motives for being a nonstandard worker and the possible rewards for some nonstandard positions suggest that such generalizations are inappropriate. In fact, Connelly and Gallagher (2004) suggested that the differences between nonstandard workers and regular workers might be less significant than differences between types of nonstandard work. Some of the differences

between types of nonstandard work arrangements are quite significant. Krausz, Brandwein and Fox (1995) reported that most people working as temps are doing so involuntarily, while most who are engaged in contract work are doing so voluntarily. Temporary employees are more likely than contractors to desire regular positions and to replace permanent employees. As has been clearly illustrated elsewhere in this paper and as Kalleberg (2000) reminded us, some nonstandard jobs (such as contract work) often pay better than regular work, while other kinds of nonstandard work (especially part-time and temporary work) pay relatively poorly, furthering the gap between nonstandard types. Firms are now using nonstandard workers in high-wage, high-skill, high-impact jobs (Pearce, 1993; Slaughter & Ang, 1996) even when lesser-paid regular workers have the same characteristics (Kalleberg et al., 1997).

The skill level of the contractor-type of nonstandard worker is significantly higher than those traditionally found in temporary work situations. Among the highly skilled nonstandard workers, independent contractors, especially, tend to prefer their work arrangement to traditional employment (Cohany, 1998) and there has been a corresponding increase in the demands of their services (especially business services, engineering management, information technology and knowledge-based services) by U.S. firms since the 1970s (Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Clinton, 1997). These types of workers who are categorized as independent contractors are often called “portfolio workers” because they move from one firm to the next (Handy, 1990) or “freelance workers” because they sell their services to client organizations on a fixed-term or project basis (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Unlike regular employees, independent contractors are generally given specifications for the final product or result and they decide how best

to accomplish it (Rebitzer, 1995; Summers, 1997). Clinton (1997) reported that management and public relations services stand out in terms of their rate of nonstandard job growth, accounting for nearly 60 percent of all the jobs added by engineering and management services since 1988. The growth in management and public relations services can largely (90 percent) be attributed to management services, management consulting services and business consulting.

Advances in technology and firms' desire to be flexible and adaptable, imply that the trends of using these high-skill nonstandard employees will only increase. As the BLS reported, the only category of nonstandard workers that experienced growth between 2001 and 2005 was that of the independent contractor which grew from 6.4 percent to 7.4 percent over the four-year period. The proportions for the other three alternative work arrangements and contingent work showed little or no change since February 2001. Since this growing category of independent contractors represents the highest pay and highest skill level of all nonstandard workers and is experiencing significant growth as compared to other nonstandard arrangements, clearly this area is worthy of further attention.

As will be discussed below, the introduction of nonstandard workers into an organization is not without potential for conflict. The integration of nonstandard workers with the regular employees of an organization has created a "blended workforce" where both types work side-by-side and are often members of the same work team (Pearce, 1993; Smith, 2001). Conflict has been defined as "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive the opposition of goals, aims and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals" (Putnam & Poole, 1987, p. 552). Assumedly, there exists interdependence between regular and nonstandard

workers in a blended organization, but whether or not they truly share “goals, aims and values” is a significant area of potential conflict.

### The Question of Integration

There is much debate on how or if nonstandard and regular workers should be integrated to create a blended workforce. Some advocate that both types should fully integrate, working side-by-side in similar jobs while others contend that the two groups should have no communication between them (Kockan, Smith, Wells, & Rebitzer, 1994). Whether or not the two types are blended appears to depend, to a great extent, on the purposes behind hiring nonstandard workers. When nonstandard workers are used to enhance flexibility within the organization, they are more likely to be integrated with the regular workers and receive similar compensation, more so than when cost-saving purposes are the main motivation (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Lautsch, 2002; Olsen, 2006). Lautsch (2002) described the decision to “blend” or “separate” as based in the organization’s operational technology and performance objectives they hope to accomplish through using nonstandard workers. If an organization’s technologies require a significant amount of firm-specific knowledge, then responsibilities might be transferred to regular workers. If not, then nonstandard workers are more likely to be integrated into the regular workforce. When nonstandard workers are blended with the traditional workforce, ideas of one group being inferior to the other fade (Matusik & Hill, 1998). Kunda, Barley and Evans (2002) found that highly skilled contract workers, even in a blended workforce, have far more autonomy, options for future employment and are sometimes better paid than permanent employees. But, if the regular employee has a high skill level as well, they are more likely to earn a higher wage and are less vulnerable than

lower-wage employees to replacement by nonstandard workers (Davis-Blake et al., 2003). Although a blended workforce has in it potential areas of conflict, not integrating the two groups multiplies management problems, increases costs and makes the smooth flow of information and ideas all but impossible (Kockan et al., 1994).

The question of whether or not to blend a workforce, however, is very much based in a traditional, bureaucratic conception of work that focused on building large, stable organizations. Heckscher (2000) described an emerging way of constructing an organization, based in fluidity and strategic flexibility:

Nonstandard employment clearly makes sense within the logic of networks. There is no imperative for internal development of talent; it can be bought from the network. The stability and predictability of a group of loyal employees become liabilities when the main competitive challenges are innovation and responsiveness to change. In the abstract, the network logic even appears to make sense from the employees' point of view: it offers them a chance for variety and independence, for self-development and choice, for an escape from the "iron cage" of conformity and the overweening personal demands of large bureaucracies. And, indeed, many employees, especially younger ones with few obligations and great optimism, embrace this vision of freedom. (pp. 269-270)

In this type of scenario, even those tasks that are considered "core" may be appropriately handled by nonstandard workers (Matusik & Hill, 1998). The highly skilled nonstandard workers who would be considered for such positions in a blended environment are the focus of this paper and research.

#### Latent Conflict in a Blended Workforce

Pondy (1967) proposed that conflict episodes are composed of five possible stages: latent, perceived, felt, manifest and the aftermath. Latent conflict occurs in an organization when there is competition for scarce resources, drives for autonomy and divergence of subunit goals. These often form the basis for and are underlying sources of



organizational conflict. This latent conflict represents a potential for conflict, although whether or not it is perceived or felt or eventually manifest depends on the specific issues and parties involved. Because of the unique situations and the potential for competing goals, aims and values, blended workforces would appear to be a breeding ground for latent conflict. Through a review of the literature on nonstandard workers, the following six areas of potential latent conflict have been uncovered that occur when blending high-end nonstandard workers into an organization: task redistribution/role ambiguity, training/orientation, loyalty/organizational commitment, use of knowledge, deficient management and wage discrepancies.

#### *Task Redistribution/Role Ambiguity*

The presence of nonstandard workers in employment settings has significant implications for the task assignments of the regular employees (Pearce, 1993). It is generally assumed that those in regular, permanent employment should perform the core functions of organizations and that only periphery roles be performed by those in nonstandard arrangements (Olsen, 2006). Increasingly, however, firms are using nonstandard workers in core activities and integrated with regular workers (Gramm & Schnell, 2001; Lautsch, 2002; Smith, 2001). While there is no consistent evidence whether the nonstandard workers experience role ambiguity due to redistribution of tasks (Krausz et al., 1995; Sverke, Gallagher & Hellgren, 2000), the downsizing of regular staff and the outsourcing of other functions often results in the regular workers facing longer hours, diminished morale and greater stress (Scott, 1995).

Nonstandard workers differ from regular workers on a number of fronts. While regular employees' work is usually defined in terms of labor expended, independent

contractors are generally given specifications for the final product or result and they decide how best to accomplish it (Rebitzer, 1995; Summers, 1997). Having control over one's work is a key criterion for establishing whether someone is legally an independent contractor rather than an employee (Kalleberg, 2000). One of the potential areas for conflict, however, is that supervisors often shift interdependent tasks to the regular employees, essentially narrowing down what the nonstandard worker is allowed to do, while expanding, or at least changing, the role of the regular employees. Supervisors, for example, might assign nonstandard workers responsibilities that "need little or no organization-specific knowledge, has easily monitored output, or [are] nonrecurrent" (Pearce, 1993, p. 1085). Ang and Slaughter (2001) contended that although a narrowing of job responsibilities might positively affect nonstandard workers' attitudes, it limits their job behaviors and performance. Clearly, the nonstandard workers see themselves as the winners in this situation. Independent contractors reported themselves as taking part in significantly more extrarole behaviors than regular employees (Pearce, 1993), but this could simply be because much less is specifically required of them (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Wheeler and Buckley (2000) noted that nonstandard workers might engage in these extrarole behaviors in an attempt to secure permanent employment, although, as has been shown here, a desire for permanent employment is not prevalent in independent contractors.

The regular employees, on the other hand, find themselves facing additional job responsibilities when nonstandard workers are used and, potentially, facing greater job insecurity (Davis-Blake et al., 2003). Research by Pearce (1993), Greary (1992) and Twinaime, Humphries and Kearins (2003) all found that the workload and structure of the

duties of regular workers were negatively affected by the presence of nonstandard workers. As discussed in the next section, one of the additional tasks delegated to regular employees is the training and supervision of the nonstandard workers even when the employees normally do not have responsibilities for their peers (Greary, 1992; Smith, 1994). Smith (1994) and Pearce (1993) similarly found that, in blended workforces, supervisors required regular employees to take on the most complex tasks and held them responsible for errors made by the nonstandard workers. Not surprisingly, the regular employees' job security declined when nonstandard workers were introduced into an assembly plant (Greary, 1992). Pearce (1993) said that the presence of nonstandard workers creates job insecurity in regular employees by reminding them that the organization is at arms-length and that it has little obligation to provide continued employment. Barnett and Miner (1992) found that the use of temporary workers resulted in less promotional opportunities for regular low-end employees, but less competition for jobs on the high end.

Because the presence of nonstandard workers often leads to role ambiguity, additional responsibilities and potentially results in job insecurity, latent conflict was expected in this area.

#### *Training and Orientation*

As mentioned above, sometimes the training and orientation of nonstandard workers is delegated to regular employees who do not normally have such responsibilities. However, an additional area of potential latent conflict is that nonstandard workers, because of the temporary nature of their positions, might not have access to the training and orientation that is offered to the regular employees (Connelly &

Gallagher, 2004). Virtanen et al. (2003) contended that this is a serious issue because it may affect nonstandard workers' performance. Lowry, Simon and Kimberley (2002) pointed out that the relationship between training and performance might be further complicated by the possibility that nonstandard workers' job satisfaction and commitment may be affected by whether or not they receive training from the organization.

Managers have found ways around this problem by placing nonstandard workers in positions that do not require firm-specific knowledge or by using the same temps repeatedly through partnerships formed with a few specific agencies (Kahn, 2000). Despite methods used to avoid training, orientation and even socialization of nonstandard workers, the resulting task reallocation and role ambiguity have far-reaching negative effects on the regular staff. But, it is the nonstandard workers themselves who feel a great deal of the negative effects of lack of orientation by lowered job performance and, potentially, a lack of organizational commitment. This lack of orientation and training could not only result in substandard output, but could also be an area of latent conflict.

#### *Loyalty/Organizational Commitment*

A great deal has been written about and research performed in the area of organizational commitment and the conflicts of disloyal employees. It seems apparent that nonstandard workers, whose employment is inherently temporary, would not develop a strong sense of organizational commitment and, arguably, one might not be necessary. But, as has been shown, even the organizational commitment of regular employees is at risk with the presence of nonstandard workers. Since there is a great possibility that

temporary employees lack commitment and potentially lower the commitment of regular employees, this could be a significant source of latent conflict.

The research varies. Pearce (1993) discovered that nonstandard workers saw no significant difference in the organizational commitment of regular employees and themselves. However, employees who found themselves working with comparable contractor co-workers reported lower trust in their organization. Interestingly, using nonstandard workers is often portrayed as an effective way to protect regular employees from environmental turbulence (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Matusik & Hill, 1998), yet case studies of blended workforces suggest that using nonstandard workers reduces standard employees' loyalty and worsens relations between co-workers (Greary, 1992; Pearce, 1993; Smith, 1994). Since nonstandard workers are primarily seen as a way for a firm to more easily adapt to changes in the market, Olsen (2006) contended that commitment and loyalty are less important and firms might not even want committed nonstandard workers. The lack of commitment of nonstandard workers may be seen as a reasonable trade-off in adapting to market changes or it may even be seen as a positive among those who desire to gain and lose workers quickly.

One's stance on such matters depends to a large degree how involved nonstandard workers are in what are considered "core" functions. Many organizations purposely integrate nonstandard workers into teams in an effort to develop strong ties (Galup, Saunders, Nelson, & Cerveney, 1997) and as nonstandard workers become more integral to the functioning of many firms, the lines between "core" and "periphery" jobs become more blurred (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Olsen (2006) found that agency temporaries and contract workers are often used in vital activities, with no clear distinction between

core and nonstandard jobs. In this context, the loyalty of nonstandard workers is required for the firm to function effectively and to ensure that critical information is not lost through disloyal workers.

Despite the large amount of research dedicated to the loyalty of nonstandard workers, much of the existing research shows little or no difference between theirs and the commitment of regular employees (Pearce, 1993; Galup et al., 1997; Olsen, 2006). However, to managers in client-organizations, the issue of loyalty among nonstandard workers is often seen as an area of conflict. Managers were found to be concerned by the lack of loyalty among agency staff and contractors (Ang & Slaughter, 2001). It appears that the presence of nonstandard employees worsens the relationship between managers and employees and further decreases the loyalty of regular workers (Davis-Blake et al., 2003; Olsen, 2006).

Not surprisingly, there is a strong association between tenure and organizational commitment. Since regular employees anticipate a lengthy tenure, they have a greater organizational commitment than do nonstandard workers (Pearce, 1993). Organizational commitment among nonstandard workers also depends on their motivations for taking the assignment. Among agency temporaries, direct-hire temporaries and on-call workers, most stated that they would prefer a permanent job or one with regular hours (Houseman & Polivka, 2000). But the same is not true for independent contractors, where only a small amount are interested in securing more permanent arrangements (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Clearly, then, the extent to which one desires their current situation to be permanent impacts their level of organizational commitment.

Another interesting layer of complexity regarding the nonstandard worker is that research suggests they might show a dual commitment, that is, commitment to both their temporary agency and their client (Liden, Wayne, Kraimer, & Sparrowe, 2003). McKeown (2003) found that sometimes contractors tended to show stronger commitment to their client than their agency. This calls into question to what degree temporary workers should be committed to their agency as compared to client, and is further complicated by the presence of independent contractors who technically see themselves as self employed. Liden et al. (2003) additionally pointed out that workers' self-assessments of their commitment to their agencies were negatively related to how the managers in the client firms viewed these workers' commitment to their client organizations.

In the last few years, a great deal has been written about the “psychological contract” that nonstandard workers have concerning what obligations they have to their client organizations and vice versa (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). This is also sometimes referred to as “quasi-moral” involvement and implies the psychological commitment employees have to their employers (Pearce, 1993). Rousseau (1995) first argued that the use of nonstandard workers threatens the psychological contracts of regular employees with their organization and limits coordination, learning and shared values among coworkers. But, one of the few studies to compare the psychological contracts of nonstandard and regular employees within the same organization found that the two groups displayed no differences (McDonald & Makin, 2000).

As Hirschman (1970) first proposed, employees who perceive deterioration in their work situation can respond in one of three ways: exit, voice (an attempt to change

the conditions) or loyalty. While the dynamics of quitting a job or trying to change a work environment differ significantly between regular and nonstandard workers, the issue of loyalty has been shown to be a significant area of latent conflict.

### *Use of Knowledge*

Nonstandard workers, especially those who serve as independent contractors and expect relatively high levels of pay, are very much dependent on the marketability of their skills. Castaneda (1999) found that an independent contractors' career success is tied to how they use their social networks to secure employment as well as to gather technical and professional knowledge. Matusik and Hill (1998) asserted that contract workers, by nature of their roles, have up-to-date technical knowledge and information about outside job opportunities. While contractors might have valuable knowledge, traditional temporary workers are generally used to increase the size of the workforce, not to add new knowledge (Harrison & Kelley, 1993; Matusik & Hill, 1998). The extent to which contractors' technical knowledge and social networking is valued and shared with the regular employees in a blended workforce is a potential area of conflict. Castaneda (2003) said that while a nonstandard worker's knowledge may be valuable, it is not necessarily valued.

Olsen (2006) reported that managers sometimes described regular employees as appearing as the weaker part compared to nonstandard workers, some even describing nonstandard workers as the next generation of workers who are flexible and often grasp the technology more quickly than regular employees. Because contractors typically bring in new knowledge rather than redundant knowledge, managers are unlikely to replace regular employees with contractors (Davis-Blake et al., 2003). Regardless, a blended



workforce often creates a hostile working environment where regular workers are not apt to share information with their nonstandard peers. Firms with hostile social environments are much less likely to have sharing between organizational members (Connelly & Kelloway, 2003). Some firms, however, employ temporary workers simply to gain from their specialized knowledge. Galup et al. (1997) reported that a significant amount of knowledge is transferred from temporary workers to regular workers.

Beyond the potential jealousy issues, regular employees are reluctant to share information with nonstandard employees for fear the information will be leaked to another organization. Matusik and Hill (1998) reported that if contractors apply what they learn in one situation to another, firm-specific knowledge would become public domain. This is a significant reason that regular employees are reluctant to share information with nonstandard workers (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004) and a significant area of potential conflict.

#### *Deficient Management*

Another consistent theme in the literature about nonstandard workers is the deficiencies of management in a blended context. Frequently mentioned as a frustration to nonstandard workers was managerial incompetence. Davis-Blake et al. (2003) found that the blending of regular and nonstandard workers had the impact of worsening the relations between managers and regular employees. Employees had lower levels of trust in the organization and increased interest in leaving the organization, although this was felt more acutely when blended with temporaries than contractors. Greary (1992) found that managers devoted significant attention to managing conflicts when nonstandard and regular workers were in a blended environment. As a result, regular employees received

less informal and more irregular performance feedback, making it more difficult for them to obtain promotions. It was also reported that contract workers typically receive less supervision from managers than temporary workers (Davis-Blake et al., 2003).

To be fair, managers find themselves in complex inter-organizational employment relationships when considering a blended workforce and such relationships erect barriers to applying consistent managing (Rubery, Marilyn, Cook, Grugulis, & Earnshaw, 2004). Ward, Grimshaw, Rubery and Beynon (2001) found that the use of agency temporaries constituted a conflict with other corporate goals and when agency workers represented a large number of the total workforce, contradictions and management problems were created. Davis-Blake et al. (2003) stated:

We found that using both temporary and contract workers negatively affected manager-employee relations; this effect is consistent with case study reports that managerial decisions about how to implement workforce blending change responsibility, job security, and opportunity for standard employees. Our results suggest that standard employees hold managers accountable for these changes. (p. 482)

The introduction of temporary workers into an organization appears to have negative effects on relationships with managers in general. These findings are consistent with research by Wilhelm, Herd and Steiner (1993) who found that more conflicts occur between superiors and subordinates who maintain what they call “low-quality relationships.” The temporary nature of nonstandard workers could contribute to low-quality relationships between themselves and their managers. Whether or not managers fairly take the blame for many of the struggles in a blended workforce, regular and nonstandard employees alike often cite them as a source of conflict.

### *Wage Discrepancies*

Although nonstandard workers face the insecurity of temporary work, they assumedly bring to the client organization a specialization not found in house. But, Kalleberg et al. (1997, p. 20) pointed out that “contract workers of either gender are more likely to be paid high wages than regular full-time workers with similar personal characteristics.” There is an even greater likelihood for contract workers, independent contractors and the self-employed of either gender with similar personal job characteristics to those of regular workers to receive higher wages. Pearce (1993) said that although employee and contractor co-workers are paid differently for similar work, which perceives themselves as having the better deal is difficult to ascertain. But, either way, it is expected that regular employees will see the organization as less trustworthy than they would in the absence of contractors.

Much has been written about wage discrepancies between nonstandard and regular workers, but much of it is from the perspective of low-skill, low-wage temporary or on-call workers. As has been established, rarely do these groups take their work on a voluntary basis and are overwhelmingly in want of permanent employment. Much less has been written about the high-skill, high-wage contractor and their relationships with equally- or lesser-paid regular workers in a blended context. While some research appears to show regular workers as relieved and thankful for such workers to be added to the workforce, other studies show regular workers as much more adversarial. Although it seems intuitive to think so, the extent to which wage discrepancies is a latent conflict is yet to be seen.

## Stages of Conflict in a Blended Organization

Pondy's five stages of a conflict episode inform our research into blended organizations. While the above six areas have been uncovered as sources of latent conflict, whether or not this potential for conflict moves into more advanced stages of a conflict episode is a focus of this research. Pondy (1967) contended that "conflict may sometimes be perceived when no conditions of latent conflict exist, and latent conflict conditions may be present in a relationship without any of the participants perceiving the conflict" (p. 301). Whether or not those in blended workforces perceive any of the six sources of latent conflict as actual conflict depends a great deal on how threatening they interpret the situation to be. Mildly threatening situations are often pushed to the back of the mind and do not move into the stage of "perceived conflict." If a latent conflict is perceived, it might become personalized and move into the "felt conflict" stage. A person could, however, very well perceive a conflict without feeling the anxieties and pressures of this stage. But, once a conflict is personalized, or felt, there is great potential for that conflict to escalate and even become dysfunctional.

Although a review of the literature on high-end nonstandard workers and blended organizations points to six potential areas of latent conflict, the first research question focuses on clarifying, via feedback from high-end nonstandard workers, their managers and regular employees, whether they perceive and/or feel these as conflicts. This leads to the first research question:

*RQ1: To what extent are any of the six sources of conflict regarded as perceived and as felt within blended organizations?*

Pondy's next stage in a conflict episode is the manifest stage. In this stage the behavior of one or more of the parties frustrates the goals of the other parties. This behavior may be done in order to deliberately frustrate the goals of another or may simply be done knowingly, in spite of its consequences. Either way, the party knowingly frustrates the goals of another. It would *not* be considered conflict, per this definition, if goals were being unknowingly frustrated. Felt or perceived conflicts may very well not become manifest because one or more parties suppress the conflict or simply because the situation is dealt with before it is manifest. This leads to the second research question:

*RQ2: How do perceived and felt conflicts become manifest in blended organizations?*

Discovering which latent conflicts identified in the literature regarding blended organizations are perceived or felt and those that eventually become manifest contributes significantly to our understanding of the unique concerns of those in such arrangements. Pondy's final stage is concerned with the aftermath of the conflict episode. The legacy a conflict leaves behind becomes the latent conflict that might eventually become another manifest conflict. How the conflict is managed is of utmost importance, yet is further complicated by the dynamics of a blended workforce. The next area of research, then, was to explore in what ways a blended workforce with its inherently complex dynamics, manages conflict. This required further exploration of the perspectives of high-end nonstandard workers, but also closely considered the perspectives of those who manage them.

*RQ3: How are conflicts that emerge from the use of a blended workforce managed?*

If blended organizations are indeed breeding grounds of latent conflict, then understanding which conflicts are felt, perceived and even manifest among workers and managers is of utmost importance. Because blended workforces are interdependent yet maintain an extremely high level of fluidity, understanding the way conflicts are managed in that context is of great value.

## Methods

### *Research Setting*

The setting for the research was a multiplatform publisher representing over 130 of the most popular magazine titles in the world. The workforce of the company, including bureaus around the world, totaled well over 10,000 people. Data were collected from February to April 2007 in three distinct divisions housed in their headquarters in New York City. At the time of the research, the company was undergoing a significant number of layoffs and the closure of several of its bureaus in response to a decline in print revenue and increased competition from the Internet. The company had always used nonstandard workers in the specialized areas of design and marketing, but was increasing the number as they worked through the details of restructuring and made efforts to increase their efficiencies. The company also relied on the services of a type of internal temp agency called “Shared Services” which had historically provided clerical assistance to other departments throughout the company. In the last couple of years, however, the services provided by Shared Services had expanded to include many of the high-skill roles being considered in this research, such as those involved in information technology and design professionals. Although those in Shared Services were employed by the larger company and received benefits through it, they faced many of the same struggles as

traditional temporary workers. Interviews via telephone, email and instant messaging were conducted with managers, regular employees and nonstandard workers in three distinct departments: a brand marketing department for a popular Spanish-language magazine; the payroll team of the finance department; and, a political affairs research department. These three departments were chosen, in part, because they performed significantly different tasks using different types of nonstandard workers yet functioned under the umbrella of a single organization. Uncovering the sources and management of conflict in these diverse yet related departments allowed for helpful contrasts and comparisons to be made.

The Brand Marketing Department: This department consisted of six staff members including a manager, two regular employees and three freelancers. Interviews were conducted with all six staff members, or a 100 percent response rate. The three freelancers were contracted through an outside agency that had provided freelance help for several years. Interestingly, one of the freelancers had been in the department longer than any of the regular staff members, including the department manager. Interviews indicated that freelancers were often used in the company as a way to assess them for permanent employment. However, none of the current regular staff members of this department had secured a permanent position by those means.

Payroll Team: The Finance Department consisted of 208 regular employees plus 20 to 40 additional nonstandard workers used during the three months of research. In order to focus on a group comparable in size to the other two departments being studied, interviews were conducted with the Payroll Team within the Finance Department. Because the research was conducted during tax season, a team of three outside auditors

was working with the Payroll Team in assessing how new tax laws were affecting payroll issues. Because it was a busy time of the year for the Finance Department and due to the numerous complications of the corporate restructuring, only five out of the 15 members of the Payroll Team consented to the interviews, including the manager, three regular employees and one nonstandard worker (33 percent response rate). The Payroll Team rarely used Shared Services, but were frequent users of outside consultants, most of whom were supplied from the accounting firm with whom the company contracted.

Political Affairs Research Department: The company had several research-related departments that checked the accuracy of and provided editorial content for various magazines. This department of 11 focused specifically on political affairs and worked almost exclusively with one particular magazine. The staff included a manager, four regular staff members, two temporary workers provided by Shared Services and four interns. One permanent employee declined to participate in the research and the manager asked that the four interns be excluded from the research, resulting in a response rate of 54 percent. The two temporary workers provided by Shared Services both had backgrounds in journalism and had been brought in to help clear the backlog of unfinished work. Both temporary workers had been brought in about the same time the research began and were scheduled to continue work another three months after the research concluded.

### *Selection of Participants*

The research questions were explored using data collected from multiple interviews conducted within a single company over a three-month period. The chosen company was one that regularly employs high-end nonstandard workers and integrates



them, to varying degrees, into the regular workforce. Since the perspectives of nonstandard workers, regular workers and managers were all considered, research into a single company provided a more consistent context from which to work. Because comparisons between companies would need to factor in variations in size, culture and a number of other factors, this research focused on three distinct departments within a single, albeit large, company. High-end nonstandard workers were selected based on the following criteria: (a) they regarded their current assignment as temporary; (b) they were currently working as temporaries because of a demand for their services to fill an immediate need; (c) they had completed some college-level education in their discipline; and (d) they interacted to some degree with the regular employees of the organization. Managers were chosen if they operated as organizational members who provided direct oversight to both regular employees and nonstandard workers within the organization. Regular employees were chosen if they had interaction with and experienced a work-related interdependence with nonstandard workers within the organization.

After each respondent was screened for the above qualifications, simple demographic questions were asked (age, gender, tenure, education) and the respondent was categorized as a nonstandard worker, regular worker or manager. Out of the 32 potential respondents, 17 chose to participate, resulting in a response rate of 53 percent. Of the 17, three were managers, eight were regular employees and six were nonstandard workers.

#### *Method of Analysis*

The interview guide (Appendix) consisted of a series of questions intended to measure the applicability and management of each of the six sources of potential conflict.

The guide started with general questions regarding the integration of nonstandard workers into the workforce and became progressively targeted toward the six conflict areas as necessary. The interview data were first divided into categories of nonstandard worker, regular worker or manager and according to one of the three departments represented. Then data were analyzed using thematic content analysis with the six latent conflict categories serving as themes emerging through the interviews. Because each semantic unit often fit multiple categories, thematic content analysis allowed for flexibility in coding and not the rigid categorizations of other analytic methods. Thematic content analysis was well suited for this verbal story-like material (Smith, 1992) that, in this instance, was rather straightforward rather than symbolic or disguised, meaning that inferences were largely limited to the words that were used.

## Results

### *Task Redistribution/Role Ambiguity*

Literature on nonstandard workers indicated that many companies use nonstandard workers in core activities and integrated with regular workers (Gramm & Schnell, 2001; Lautsch, 2002; Smith, 2001) and such was certainly the case within the Brand Marketing Department. The three freelancers were integral members of the department to a degree that it was difficult to distinguish them from the regular employees. They often served as project managers on assignments and, as indicated earlier, had tenures that matched or exceeded those of the regular employees. As one regular employee indicated, “We don’t really see them as any different. The more the merrier.” The freelancers worked side-by-side with the regular workers sharing equally in

core tasks. It was clear to the department members, however, that their arrangement was not the norm and, according to the manager, could even appear strange:

I suppose it looks strange to others who see that [one of the freelancers] has been with the department longer than I have. They probably would think it even stranger if they knew that he practically trained me when I started. I don't know what to say, but it works for us. No one on our staff, that I'm aware of at least, is confused about the way we work together.

The respondents were well aware that the tenure and integration of the freelancers was out of the ordinary, and several also commented that although the situation worked well for them, they were aware that such an arrangement might not work as well in other departments. Clearly, the Brand Marketing staff were aware of—perceived—that the potential for latent conflict was present, although they overwhelmingly claimed that conflict due to the integration of the freelancers with the regular staff did not occur. Only one regular employee indicated having questioned the arrangement:

There were a couple of times when I knew I could do the work and had time and saw it was a waste to have a freelancer do it and suggested to not do so. But once management decided to do so, I was fine collaborating with them, just a little frustrated at the waste of budget especially when the final product was sub par...but tried to work as a team.

That the regular employee was “frustrated” implies that the conflict, for her, had moved into the felt stage. Pondy (1967) contended that a conflict was defined as such only if one party knowingly frustrated the goals of another. Although there was no indication that the freelancer was ever aware that the regular employee felt this way, the employee did discuss it with the manager who decided to continue to use the freelancer on the project. In this sense, the manager was responsible for frustrating the goals of the employee and the fact that they discussed the situation indicates that the conflict became manifest. The meeting helped the regular employee understand the reasons for not being put on the

particular project, but she remained dissatisfied with the results of the project: “We talked and I understand why [the manager] wanted to save me for another project, but I still think if I could have done it better, I should have been given the priority.” That she believed she should have been given priority to work on the project was, according to her, not just a matter of her design abilities, but her perceived higher status as a regular employee. Overall, although the Brand Marketing Department perceived that their arrangement provided a potential for conflict, this was the single conflict incident that moved from the perceived to the felt and manifest stages.

While the Brand Marketing Department overwhelmingly saw the nonstandard workers as equal partners, the Payroll Team viewed their nonstandard workers as experts from which to learn. The nonstandard workers in this instance were auditors supplied by the company’s accounting firm, brought in to train the regular employees on new tax laws that would significantly change their daily work. One regular worker explained the relationship:

The only way to really do this is to bring in the auditors. We would spend way too much time learning about all of these new tax laws and they already know all about it. We definitely have to change the way we do things as a result of them being here, but that’s the government’s fault, not theirs. We generally see the auditors as the experts and they educate us.

While the regular staff members of the Payroll Team did experience a significant amount of role ambiguity, they viewed their nonstandard counterparts as “saviors” from the ambiguity and not the cause of the ambiguity. All of the regular employees responded similarly in that they regarded the auditors as key players in reducing the work-related ambiguity that already existed.

However, because the company as a whole was undergoing layoffs and restructuring, the regular Payroll Team staff expressed a heightened concern that their duties within the company could be outsourced. The manager explained the concerns:

The staff is well aware that many companies outsource payroll functions, and, to a large degree, we already do so. And, they are well aware that [the company] is taking steps to be as financially efficient as possible.... I believe that the payroll staff we have here is essential and will stay in tact, and I've tried to convey that to them, but they see what is happening.

While the Payroll Team experienced little conflict due to the integration of the auditors, most regular employees expressed trepidation that their functions could be absorbed by similar outside companies. This fact, in itself, indicates a great potential for latent conflict, some of which could be directed at those nonstandard workers most closely associated with the team.

The two Shared Services workers contracted to the Political Affairs Research Department expressed significant confusion over roles. In the year before this research was conducted, the department was restructured, resulting in the loss of two full-time workers. At the time of this research, two workers from Shared Services had been contracted to work in the department for a total of six months to, according to one regular staff member, "clean up the mess." The four regular staff members and manager all expressed degrees of anger over the loss of the two full-time employees. The manager expressed his anger this way:

So, we lose [the two employees], but we don't lose any of the work we do. My staff is all working at capacity, so I bring in two from S.S. [Shared Services] to do the work of the two we lose and Human Resources has no problem with that. I understand they are paid somewhat less, but I don't think the savings justify the upheaval that has to be dealt with.

Even though the regular staff members felt the effects of losing co-workers, they all expressed that their roles had not significantly changed, but as one staff member said, “We’re just getting less assignments completed and it’s taking us longer. We’re still doing the same things, just slower.” Like the Payroll Team, they expressed concern that their work could be outsourced, if only to Shared Services employees. In general, many of the conflicts were experienced more with decisions made by upper management than internally within the department. Unresolved issues with upper management became a consistent theme across departments. The two from Shared Services simply took on the department’s pending projects and experienced very little interdependence with the rest of the staff, often working from a Shared Services workspace on another floor rather than in the workspace occupied by the research departments.

The Shared Services temporaries experienced a significant amount of role ambiguity regarding their assignments within the Political Affairs Research Department. One of them expressed their confusion:

Sometimes we come in and it’s a bit of a crapshoot. When they [Shared Services management] place me they sometimes have very little information about the type of work I will be doing and I’m not even sure some departments know what they want me to do when they make the request for help. Sometimes I think I know and then my work has changed before I show up. I get the impression Research is figuring it out as they go along. They know they are behind and need help but they don’t know how they want helped.

One Shared Services worker, when asked how she dealt with the role ambiguities, indicated that she “didn’t even bother going to [the Research department manager]” and, instead, went to another Shared Services co-worker with experience working in research departments. Both Shared Services workers indicated that they purposefully gave no

indication to anyone in the department that they were confused or concerned about their roles. According to one, her goal as a temporary is “to fit in and get my work done without making matters worse.”

Scott (1995) reported that the downsizing of regular staff and the outsourcing of other functions often result in the regular workers facing longer hours, diminished morale and greater stress. While the company was experiencing downsizing and the perceived potential for more outsourcing, that this resulted in conflicts related to task redistribution and role ambiguity received weak support in the Brand Marketing Department and Payroll Team, as both largely viewed the integration of nonstandard workers as positive and even necessary. Both departments perceived that the working arrangement had the potential for conflict, but only one incident indicated that a conflict had been felt and then manifest. The manifestation and management of the single conflict incident noted was simply the request for and occurrence of a meeting between a manager and regular employee, who came to an understanding, although not necessarily an agreement, about roles.

Conflict due to the integration of regular and nonstandard workers within the Research Department, as it relates specifically to role ambiguity and task redistribution, received only marginal support. The manager of the department clearly perceived and felt that Human Relations was at least partly to blame for the need to bring in Shared Services workers and the resulting “upheaval.” The regular department members claimed that the type and volume of their work did not change, but that simply the backlog of unfinished work grew. The regular employees did, however, express trepidation that contract or Shared Services workers could replace them. While the regular workers claimed no role-

related conflicts, the Shared Services workers both claimed that although it is inherent in their roles to experience ambiguity that this particular assignment contained more than most. While they perceived the conflict, there was no indication that it moved to the felt stage or that other Research Department members were aware of their concerns.

### *Training and Orientation*

An additional area of potential latent conflict is that nonstandard workers, because of the temporary nature of their positions, might not have access to the training and orientation that is offered to the regular employees (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Kahn (2000) contended, however, that managers have found ways around this problem by placing nonstandard workers in positions that do not require firm-specific knowledge or by using the same temps repeatedly through partnerships formed with a few specific agencies. The Brand Marketing Department appeared to be a working demonstration of Kahn's ideas. One of the department's freelancers explained why having firm-specific knowledge was not as necessary for the type of work she does:

The design world basically works from a set of standards. I'm primarily a print designer and we all work with pretty much the same computer programs; we have lingo and processes that are pretty well standard. So, I come in here and if the copy [text] is ready to go on a piece, I can fit right in. Once you figure out who the players on a project are and who you need to include, you're pretty much ready to go.

Such a comment demonstrates that firm-specific training and orientation might be less necessary for those in roles, like design, that are more transferable from company to company. Despite the apparent lack of orientation within the Brand Marketing Department, the manager explained that orientation does happen, but perhaps in a different way:



This is a piece we did for one of our advertisers. I decide who is going to be involved in the project and we all get together and discuss the details of the piece—the timeframe, benchmarks, what the advertiser is going for, what the product is about, the feel, who is doing what. So, we talk about this kind of stuff with every project and no one knows more than anyone else. We probably talk about our work as a group a lot more than other types of departments.

The manager further explained that their department’s role is to represent outside advertisers in the company’s magazines and that “You have to know the advertisers, but you don’t have to know a hell of a lot about [the company]...just be able to function in it.”

The need for firm-specific orientation and training in the setting of the Brand Marketing Department was also lessened because of the long-standing relationship between the department and the agency that provides its freelancers. The agency had been providing freelancers to the department before any of the current workers had begun and, as one freelancer explained, the agency “completely lets you know what to expect when you come and the type of work you’ll be doing.” Because of the transferability of the skills of the regular and nonstandard workers in the Brand Marketing Department and because of the long-standing relationship with the agency providing freelancers to the department, no conflicts were discovered due to lack of firm-specific orientation or training.

Similarly, the nonstandard worker on the Payroll Team reported having had no orientation and that such was not necessary. The auditor viewed himself as a “teacher” brought in to educate the regular staff members about current payroll-related topics and trends. Because of this unique relationship, the auditor and the regular staff members felt that little firm-specific orientation was needed. The auditor explained his unique position:

I need to understand the basic type of organization I'm going into ahead of time so that I can assemble the information that will be most appropriate for them to know. But, as a general statement, I have been consulting for so long now that you could drop me into any organization and I will figure out what I need to know. Most of the other consultants with whom I work are the same. I cannot imagine sitting through a general orientation of an organization...it would be kind of insulting, not to mention very expensive for the company. They would be paying a lot of money for that orientation.

Further evidence that firm-specific orientation for these auditors might be inappropriate was supplied by the manager when he said, "These guys are supplied by our accounting firm—they know everything about us before they step foot in here." That conflicts arose in the Payroll Team due to lack of firm-specific training or orientation was, therefore, not supported. One interesting potential scenario for latent conflict might be if high-end consultants, such as the auditors in the Payroll Team, *were* subjected to firm-specific orientation that they considered "insulting" and an inappropriate use of their time and company funds.

Because the Political Affairs Research Department had brought in temporary workers through Shared Services to offset the loss of two of their regular employees to downsizing, the climate suffered and satisfaction with their training and orientation was minimal. The manager claimed that he believed all Shared Services workers should be adequately prepared to serve in any department and that department-specific orientation or training should not be necessary. Likewise, none of the participating regular staff members reported being involved in the training or orientation of the Shared Services workers. One of the regular workers said, "I wasn't involved in training them. I assume someone was." One of the Shared Services employees had a different idea of how and if training should occur:

The training at the parent company seems to be better in that everyone gets the same general training and then each individual is supposed to receive specific training by someone in the department that they are assigned to. This training may be by a permanent employee or another Shared Services. I don't believe the training for a department is any different for the Shared Services workers than the permanent employees.

Another Shared Services worker expanded on her lack of training within the Research Department:

The general training by the company is very adequate but the specific training depends upon the area you are assigned to. Overall, I think the training has been adequate but there have definitely been some instances, like this one, where this was not the case. Both of us [from Shared services] feel we were not adequately trained in this area. When I was moved to this new area I immediately saw that it is lacking in communication and organization. I definitely have not had adequate training in this area and my goals and assignments are not clearly indicated. I have no idea if they are happy with my contribution or not. I'm not going to say this to the manager; his staff has been downsized and I don't think he is going to be happy no matter what. If I complain to him that I don't feel my training in this department was adequate, he would just call Shared Services and have me replaced. I'm not better off and neither is the department, so I just hope I'm doing my job well and move on.

Although both Shared Services workers perceived and felt that their department-specific training was not adequate, neither reported that their concerns were made manifest within the department. One reported having commented to management in Shared Services regarding the lack of training, but was "not sure what they [management] did with the information." Although both nonstandard workers reported a significant discontent with their lack of orientation and training, neither indicated that the conflict became manifest or that the matter was ever managed. Again, the pattern is repeated of

the conflict being framed as one with upper management, not one with coworkers with the department.

### *Loyalty/Organizational Commitment*

Loyalty and organizational commitment very much depend on how involved nonstandard workers are in what are considered “core” functions. Olsen (2006) found that agency temporaries and contract workers are often used in vital activities, with no clear distinction between core and nonstandard jobs. Nowhere is this distinction more difficult to identify than in the Brand Marketing Department. Just as many organizations purposely integrate nonstandard workers into teams in an effort to develop strong ties (Galup, Saunders, Nelson, & Cerveny, 1997), the manager of the department firmly believed that their success was due to their purposeful attempts to involve all staff members equally. The manager described her attempt to rid the department of one of the last differences between the regular and nonstandard employees:

Our email addresses, of course, say, “whoever at [the company] dot com.” Well, our freelancers’ email addresses say, “Whoever at non-[company] dot com.” So, every time they are sending an email it says this is from a non-[company] person. It’s stupid. I don’t even know what the point is. I’m trying all of the time to make sure everyone feels like part of the team and here’s a blatant reminder that, hey, I’m not really one of you. The Brand staff knows it’s just corporate B.S., but it’s still got to have an affect whether you vocalize it or not. And, it’s got to say something to other people that receive the email. It’s like it doesn’t hold the same weight. I’ve talked to Administration about it, I’ve talked to I.T. about it, I’ve talked to Human Resources about it and I get nowhere.

One of the freelancer’s responded to the email issue:

I wasn’t really embarrassed about the email address at the beginning. I was thinking that I was a freelancer and not really a part of the company. But now that I’ve been here over a year—a lot longer than a lot of permanent employees—I’m embarrassed more now than I was before. And, it’s not about the department—we all work like a team—it’s that I don’t really feel part of the larger company. I feel like part of the department, but not the company. It’s not just about the email address. It’s

like you are recognized as an employee by everyone else except the company. I know, that doesn't really make sense, but that's the way it feels.

The freelancer went on to say that the email issue is an occasional topic of discussion within the department and that her manager "frequently complains to whoever will listen." As the literature on loyalty consistently indicates, there is a strong association between tenure and organizational commitment. Pearce (1993) contended that since regular employees anticipate a lengthy tenure, they have a greater organizational commitment than do nonstandard workers. But, as indicated by the freelancer's comments, when the tenure of a nonstandard worker equals or exceeds that of many of the permanent employees, issues of organizational commitment become complicated. Although all three of the Brand Department's freelancers expressed a great deal of loyalty to the department, they all expressed that they were significantly more committed to the department than the company as a whole.

Describing the email issue as "B.S." and "embarrassing" clearly indicates that the conflict was both perceived and felt among the members of the department. That the topic had been frequently discussed among the department staff and that the manager had pursued the issue outside of the department clearly indicates the conflict was manifest. Interestingly, the manager appeared to be so sympathetic to the freelancers on this issue that it might have resulted in the freelancers further distancing themselves from the company while they continued being integrated into the department.

Another area of concern within the Brand Marketing Department was the constant rumors that the company's administration was considering outsourcing the entire department. The manager claimed that this rumor had no merit and that she had "never

heard word one about any real discussions” regarding the matter. However, since the company was obviously experiencing downsizing and restructuring, the possibility of the department’s outsourcing became an occasional topic of conversation. One of the regular employees expressed their reservations about an entirely outsourced department:

I heard the rumor that it was being considered that our department could be handled completely by the outside agency. I think moving to a higher and higher percentage of contract workers at a company will prove harmful to the parent company. If contractors run the majority of the company, then that means the majority of the workers have no loyalty to the company. How can this be a positive thing for the parent company? This will result in higher turnover rates, which will slow down productivity, causing the company to lose more money than it saves. It also means you have more of a segmented group since most parent companies use several different contracting companies. You will have several individuals working together in the same area but none of them belonging together as a group. Not to mention, contract positions are often short term, so you will have the majority of your workers all looking for their next job instead of focusing on their current assignment.

This regular employee’s assumption was that if the company was run by a majority of nonstandard workers, the majority of employees would have no loyalty, implying that she equates, at least to a degree, nonstandard workers with less loyalty than regular employees. She additionally states that this would lead to higher turnover rates. When asked if loyalty and turnover rates were a concern in the Brand Marketing Department, she replied, “No. But we are the exception, rather than the rule.”

It was evident that the staff of the Brand Marketing Department was aware that loyalty and organizational commitment is generally an issue within a company integrating nonstandard workers, but denied that specific issues existed within the department. There was strong support, however, that organizational commitment suffered in relation to the company as a whole, as demonstrated by the email issue. There was

further evidence that the issue of outsourcing the entire department could lead to significant source of future latent conflict.

Because the nonstandard worker associated with the Payroll Team was not significantly integrated into the department and because he often served as a contractor to multiple departments, he experienced more loyalty to the company as a whole than he did to any specific department or team. The auditor explained what “loyalty” meant to him:

I’m loyal in the sense that I’m going to be here every day of my contract and I’m going to give them the best information I can and help them with their processes. I’m not even sure what other kind of loyalty would be necessary. I go to other companies and perform the same duties, but I keep them separated and don’t say anything confidential, or *anything* about the company for that matter.

For this auditor, loyalty was appropriate only inasmuch as his duties demanded it; further loyalty seemed unnecessary. Regular staff members confirmed that the organizational commitment of the auditors was a non-issue as long as they performed the duties they were contracted to perform. While the auditor felt that his level of commitment to the company was appropriate, he expressed concern that contractors are often not loyal to their sending agency and vice versa:

Our [the sending agency’s] turnover rate has been very high and I believe it is due, at least in part, to individuals not feeling a loyalty in a contracting position. It takes a proactive approach and extra effort from the sending agency to make a contract employee feel like they are valued and that they are part of a team and not just a hired gun. This is especially true because we are out of the office most of the time. Unfortunately, the agency does not try to foster a sense of belonging with its employees. It would seem more important to do so since we [contractors] do not really belong to any organization.

Although the auditor and regular Payroll Team staff claimed that loyalty to the organization was not necessary for nonstandard workers, clearly the auditor’s ideas of “belonging” were closely associated with his ideas of organizational loyalty.

Much like the Payroll Team, the Political Affairs Research Department staff contended that Shared Services workers did not need to be loyal to the department to which they were temporarily assigned but that, according to one regular employee, they simply “get the work done.” Responding to whether she felt more or less loyal to the company after her experiences with Shared Services, one of the temporary workers said:

Oh, there’s no question. Less. Much less. I was sent to take over for a person on maternity leave and that kind of assignment is great. But, most often, especially this last year, I’m getting sent to places like this department that is buried in work and are mad about it. They don’t blame me, but they don’t see me as the solution they want, either. And, I see things they don’t see; I see stuff like this all over the company.

When asked how she expresses her frustrations, she responded:

I don’t. I talk to my co-workers in Shared Services, but the only thing complaining to someone else is going to accomplish is making it harder for me to get placed. If I’m complaining I’m just making it worse for departments and myself. If I do the work and keep my feelings to myself, departments will request me, and that puts me in a good position.

In the same way the Shared Services workers experienced lessened organizational commitment because of the nature of their work, they were reluctant to share their concerns because of the nature of their work. One of the regular employees of the Research Department experienced no such reluctance to share his frustrations about the company:

Are you kidding me? We bitch about it all the time. I’m not angry with anyone from Shared Services. My experiences with them have pretty well been good. I guess I’m mad that they even have to be here; that the situation is that it’s necessary for them to be here.

The regular workers’ frustrations with the loss of their two co-workers and the general direction of the company were almost exclusively made manifest within the department and not with those who had made those decisions. To broach the topic with



upper management, according to one regular employee, would have been equivalent to “handing in your resignation.” The manager had, on multiple occasions, “fought” upper management’s decision to downsize his staff. Although the initial decision still took place, the manager felt his battles had some positive outcomes:

I probably said too much at the time, but I was frustrated and no one was talking to me about what was going on. But, at least I got my point of view out on the table. They had no question were I stood. And now, because we had to bring in S.S. [Shared Services], I feel a little vindicated...like I told them there was too much work and now they know. I’m still mad about it all, but I feel like maybe they [upper management] understand better that, hey, we do have a clue down here of what’s going on.

While everyone in the department perceived and felt the downsizing issue deeply, only the manager manifested the conflict in a setting with those directly frustrating the department’s goals. Although the potential for future conflict in this area is significant, the manager believes some progress was made.

#### *Use of Knowledge*

Regular employees are most often reluctant to share information with nonstandard workers because they feel threatened that they will lose their position or because they fear firm-specific knowledge could become public domain (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004).

Despite the fact that the company was downsizing and restructuring, the Brand Marketing Department expressed belief that their group was sharing knowledge in an open and honest fashion. The department manager expressed this belief:

I think workers in general don't share information well, but I think that the distinction of someone as a contract worker and a regular worker is not the issue...people have the same problems with contract workers as they would have with new hired employees. It's just lack of experience working together. This is not a problem here...we meet and talk about everything. You could not function in this department if you did not talk things through—that’s just our culture.

The rest of the respondents echoed that the department had an identifiable culture of knowledge sharing. One of the freelancers commented on why this might be so:

We don't really think of any one person as *the* person to go to. Even the manager is more of a teammate than a manager. A different person will serve as team leader for each project and everyone on the team of that project will discuss it with the team leader, if not with the whole team. So, if you're not talking to the team, you're making the team break down.

The department's focus on being a team, including the full integration of the nonstandard workers, requires, in the minds of the Brand staff, a commitment to the sharing of knowledge. No conflicts, either perceived or felt, surfaced in the Brand Marketing Department.

Galup et al. (1997) reported that a significant amount of knowledge is transferred from temporary workers to regular workers and that, in fact, was the assumed role of the auditor on the Payroll Team. Very little information was transferred from the regular workers to the auditor, but such was the natural flow of their relationship as teacher and students. The auditor did, however, express some concern that he was unable to share all of the knowledge he wished:

At the companies where I am a contractor, it is not about individuals being reluctant to share information; rather, it is about specific policies that are in place by the companies, which do not allow certain information to be shared. I believe the individuals—contractors and permanent employees alike—find this frustrating and oftentimes ridiculous, but there isn't anything either one can do about it. It's not bad here, but even here I am restricted who I talk to. So, I train people who then go train the actual people who do the work. I'd rather talk directly with those closest to the work, but the policies of the company prohibit this.

Despite company policies in place prohibiting the exchange of information between certain individuals, the regular Payroll Team staff and the auditor all claimed a willingness to share information and that conflicts had not occurred because of the

withholding of knowledge. Conflicts due to knowledge not being shared were not perceived or felt in the Payroll Team.

Connelly & Kelloway (2003) asserted that firms with hostile social environments are much less likely to have sharing between organizational members. Such was the case between the regular staff members of the Political Affairs Research Department and the Shared Services workers. Because of the difficult circumstances within the department, the two groups had very little contact with each other and, therefore, exchanged very little information. One of the regular staff members commented, “It’s not our role to answer their [Shared Services’] questions about projects. If that needs to happen, it’s through the manager.” Yet, even the manager admitted that there was very little exchange of information between him and the Shared Services workers:

I give them their assignments through email and I don’t really hear from them until they send me their drafts. If it needs additional work done, I mark it with a comment and send it back or make the corrections here. If they have questions about an assignment they email me back... which doesn’t happen very much.

When asked if there was a significant difference of work-related communication between he and his regular staff and he and his temporary staff, the manager contended that, “Yes, but not much of it is necessary; we just talk because we are in the same area. Shared Services is on a different floor.” A Shared Services worker had a different perspective on why so little information was shared between them and the department:

I have seen it countless times that when the security of one’s position is threatened, even if it is simply an imagined threat, or other times when it became a real possibility, there is a real resentment toward Shared Services. We are viewed as a threat and many choose to not work efficiently with us. “Why should I help them succeed?” is the mindset.

The other Shared Services worker concurred with this assessment and added:

I think if there is job security and a healthy environment overall—healthy workers—there is no reluctance working with us. This didn't happen with this department, but I've seen some co-workers that knowingly did not intercept the mistake of a S.S. [Shared Services] worker. They felt threatened and simply did not welcome the help.

Castaneda (2003) said that while a nonstandard worker's knowledge may be valuable, it is not necessarily valued. While the department acknowledged their need for assistance, the environment was not conducive for the sharing of knowledge. But, as with other conflicts within the Research department, the regular workers felt little responsibility to address the issue and the Shared Services workers felt it would be counterproductive for them to do so. Therefore, conflicts due to knowledge not being shared were both perceived and felt in the Political Affairs Research Department, but never manifest or managed.

#### *Deficient Management*

Incompetent management is a consistent theme in the literature regarding nonstandard workers in a blended context. Although Davis-Blake et al. (2003) found that the blending of regular and nonstandard workers had the impact of worsening the relations between managers and regular employees, such was not the case in any of the three groups researched here. To the contrary, in two of the groups, relationships between regular workers and their managers seemed to be strengthened due to the presence of nonstandard workers, although for very different reasons.

The Brand Marketing Department staff reported a great deal of satisfaction in their dealings with the manager. Only one regular worker had questioned an issue related to the nonstandard workers:

I did ask her, when I first started, why she had freelancers here that had been here over a year—why not hire them? She didn't really have an answer except to say that it had been that way for several years and seemed to be working. I think it does work, although I don't particularly understand it.

Beyond this initial questioning of the philosophy behind the use of the freelancers, the staff agreed that the manager had handled the arrangement very well. Although one regular staff member perceived the potential for some conflict regarding management of nonstandard workers, no conflicts due to deficient management appeared to be felt in this department.

While the Payroll Team reported no issues with the management of their blended staff, the auditor identified an issue unique to his status as a contractor:

One of the potential problems is that [the company] will not manage contractors. We have to have a site supervisor from our own firm to manage all of our own employees. This does not work well for either company since the supervisor is stuck between making the [the company] happy and making our own firm happy. There are no guidelines set for this by [the company] because they do not want to take any actions that would appear as if the contractor were being treated like one of their permanent employees. So, any H.R. issues such as: timesheets, benefits, tardiness, absenteeism, employee reviews, etcetera, must be dealt with by the firm.

This "site supervisor," according to the auditor, was responsible for all of the contract workers from their firm, which at one point in this research totaled around 40 contractors in just one finance department. The auditor contended that this arrangement presented multiple problems:

This presents problems with giving and receiving reviews that are fair, accurate and constructive since the contractors are in many different areas and there is no procedure in place to ensure that the supervisor and the employees receive feedback from the individuals that they are actually working with on a daily basis. It is almost impossible for us to receive adequate feedback to recognize our specific contributions, areas of

strength and weakness and goals for the upcoming year. So, when it is time for your performance review, you are being reviewed by an individual who you may rarely see on a daily basis—may be located in a completely different building—who does not observe your work, who does not do anything with your work or data that you produce and who may not even have a clear idea of your daily job responsibilities. There is no policy in place to ensure that feedback is received from individuals that work with the contract employee. This is because [the company] does not want to do anything that would look like the contract employee is being treated like a permanent employee. It is only by chance that the supervisor may get some feedback [from a department manager] that is specific enough to be of any value. Oftentimes they only get a vague statement letting them know that things are going fine with the contract employee.

The Payroll Team manager admitted that the system was “cumbersome,” but that he was “willing to give feedback directly to the auditors” if he were asked to do so. Once again, it appeared that the policies of the company were prohibiting “adequate feedback” rather than the willingness of the manager to provide that feedback. However, the auditor felt that management being provided through only his agency’s site supervisor could, and had, led to unethical behaviors in some nonstandard workers:

The other problem with managing contract employees is that there is very little accountability. If our sponsor from the company likes someone then they can get away with unethical behaviors that should be grounds for termination. However, if they do not like someone, then they will find an excuse to have them removed. To make matters worse, some site supervisors are more than happy to ignore and even encourage unethical behavior by his employees as long as he gets paid. We had a specific incident with this recently. An employee was caught falsifying her timesheet, having chronic tardiness and poor work performance. However, the site supervisor did not want her to suffer any consequences because our sponsor claimed she was doing a good job and that he had no problems with her. The site supervisor did nothing to stop her behavior and even stated that he was okay with it as long as she was recording 40 hours on her time sheet—no matter if she only worked 30—so that he was getting paid his money. Many of the other contractors were aware of the situation and it affected some of their attitudes and performances since our boss and sponsor would not do anything about the situation.

While there was no indication within the Payroll Team that relations between management and regular staff had suffered due to the integration of the auditors, clearly the management (or lack thereof) of nonstandard workers could lead to conflict issues involving feedback and accountability.

The Shared Services workers that had joined the Political Affairs Research Department simply claimed that they were *not* managed within the department, despite that being the company standard. One Shared Services worker explained the normal process:

The management of Shared Services—if you can even call them that—is basically there to take the requests of the various departments and assign you to a department, and they provide ongoing training. Once a year you meet and discuss the comments various departments have made about you, although I don't think there is an official system...they just collect the feedback they've been given. So, the real management takes place within the department you've been assigned to. You're just like any other department staff at that point. This situation [with the Political Affairs Department] is different than typical...we are not really being supervised, just doing projects and turning them in.

Unlike their Shared Services co-workers, the rest of the Political Affairs staff felt that their relations with the department manager had become better as a result of the events of the last year. One staff member commented: “After losing [the two regular staff members] we became a much tighter group, partly because we knew that [the manager] was fighting for us.” According to the manager, even the introduction of the Shared Services workers into the department appeared to have unified the department:

Obviously, I did not want to lose our guys and was not pleased with the need to bring in S.S. [Shared Services], but I will say that, in a way, it has made the department stronger. It's something about binding together in times of adversity. It's made me a stronger leader and I think the staff is more responsive to me as a leader.

Overall, deficient management due to the introduction of nonstandard workers into these departments was weakly perceived by the regular staff members, and did not appear to be felt. Some nonstandard workers, however, reported several issues regarding their lack of management, although no specific manifestations of those conflicts with the department managers were noted.

### *Wage Discrepancies*

The literature regarding high-skill temporary workers, such as independent contractors and freelancers, assumes that such a nonstandard worker receives a higher salary, is with an organization for a limited time and that they do not receive benefits from that company. Only one scenario researched here—the auditors’ role in the Payroll Team—met all three of these criteria.

The freelancers in the Brand Marketing Department had tenures of significant length compared to an average temporary worker and they received full benefits, although through their agency and not the company. According to one regular staff member, whether or not the freelancers made a higher salary than the regular workers had been a source of some contention with a past employee:

I know this person [a past regular employee] was trying to find out how much one of the freelancers made. I heard that they even called up the agency and tried to fish for some information asking how much a person with her experience might make. The manager, at the time, heard about it and basically said it was none of her concern and that everyone, whether they worked for the company or the agency made equivalent salaries based on experience. I’ve heard our manager say that as well—that both keep their salaries on the same basic scale.

The Brand Marketing manager commented that she had heard the same story, but that she had had no similar incidents. According to her, “We really don’t highlight the differences



between the freelancers and rest of the staff and issues simply don't arise." The rest of the staff likewise reported no current conflicts.

The auditors on the Payroll Team were typical of other high-end nonstandard workers: they demanded higher salaries than regular workers on the Payroll Team; they had short tenures, only working two to three weeks at a time in the department; and they received no benefits through the company. However, no conflicts due to wage discrepancies were perceived or felt among the Payroll group. The auditor believed that the staff "views us at an elevated status and probably expects us to be paid accordingly." He further noted that the auditors and the regular staff "have completely different roles and should expect to be paid differently."

The Shared Services staff did not meet the typical criteria of a nonstandard worker in that they were regular, benefited employees of the company and had tenures similar to other permanent employees, although the length of each work assignment varied. According to one of the Shared Services workers, the pay scale, even among the Shared Services employees, varied widely:

Pay completely depends on how long you have been with the company, your skill set and how many different areas you are trained for. Some people are trained to go almost anywhere in the company and are proficient in several programs and demand a higher salary. So, you could go to the same area with another Shared employee and be making more per hour than they do...it just depends on the individual.

Despite the variances in salaries among Shared Services workers, the departments in which they work pay a flat fee for each worker they use. According to the Research manager, the fee is not "exorbitant," but neither is it "a good long-term solution" to staffing needs. The discrepancies in wages between the regular and Shared Services workers appeared to be insignificant and all of the staff reported having no real

knowledge of the differences. Therefore, no conflicts due to wage discrepancies were perceived or felt in this department.

### Discussion

The first research question asked: To what extent are any of the six sources of conflict regarded as perceived and as felt within blended organizations? The results varied significantly based on two fundamental criteria: the type of nonstandard worker and the type of department/work group.

*The demonstrated stages of conflict depended, to a great extent, on the type of nonstandard worker being examined.* To say, for example, that the lack of firm-specific orientation of nonstandard workers leads to conflict in blended organizations implies that the organizational members being studied are consistent in regard to type and arrangements. As demonstrated in this research, such is not the case, especially as it relates to high-end nonstandard workers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) those in contingent or alternative work arrangements include direct-hire temporaries, independent contractors, on-call workers, temporary help agency workers, some self-employed and workers provided by contract firms. This variety reinforces Connelly and Gallagher's (2004) contention that the differences between nonstandard workers and regular workers may be less significant than differences between types of nonstandard work. Some of the differences between types of nonstandard work arrangements studied here were quite significant. The freelancers in the Brand Marketing Department performed job responsibilities that were very much similar to their regular co-workers and were integrated into the staff to the degree that, functionally, they were difficult to discern.

Their tenure and participation within the department stands in contrast to the other nonstandard workers interviewed. The auditors on the Payroll Team, however, were brought in as experts on short-term assignment with no intention of integrating them into the team. They brought to the team skills and knowledge not available in-house and, therefore, experienced little overlap with regular workers' job functions. The Shared Services workers in the Political Affairs Research Department—although this research would classify them as high-end nonstandard workers—functioned most like temporary help agency workers. Despite the fact that they performed job responsibilities identical to the department's regular workers, were desperately needed in the department and essentially worked for the same company, there were no attempts made to integrate them into the group. Arguably, they were purposely excluded from the group.

Using the example of potential conflict due to lack of firm-specific orientation illustrates the important differences between these nonstandard workers. The ongoing partnership of the agency providing freelancers to the Brand Marketing Department and the extended tenure of these “temporary” workers significantly lessened the need for orientation. The auditors were, essentially, providing training to the regular workers and considered the idea of them being subjected to firm-specific training and orientation as “insulting.” Those from Shared Services expressed a desire to receive training from the Research Department, but were offered none.

Therefore, the extent to which conflicts were perceived or felt by the nonstandard workers varied significantly according to the type of nonstandard worker being researched. Because the literature on nonstandard workers consistently emphasized the six potential areas of conflict within a blended organization, one might surmise that these

areas of conflict are more applicable to those in low-wage, limited-skill temporary positions than the high-end workers being studied here. The Shared Services workers most closely resembled these often-studied limited-skill workers and experienced more of the expected conflicts, while the auditors, who typify the high-end nonstandard worker, experienced very few of the conflicts.

*The demonstrated stages of conflict depended, to a great extent, on the type of department being examined.* It appeared that certain types of groups were more suitable, or at least more accustomed, to working in a blended context. This was best illustrated through the integration of regular and nonstandard workers in the Brand Marketing Department. When asked why the department was able to function well in a blended context, one of the freelancers responded:

I think it's because we are a design-based department and the design world is very much used to incorporating contractors into the work. I have been a part of agency environments and corporate environments and agencies are set up to involve contractors because they revolve around the project. The people are part of the project as long as they are contributing to it, but when their work is done, they move on to another project. People in corporate environments stay on whether they are contributing or have a role or not.

A blended workforce of regular and nonstandard workers might be aptly illustrated by Putnam and Stohl's (1990) description of a bona fide group with its emphasis on fluid but stable boundaries and interdependence within contexts. A blended workforce is, by nature, fluid, as temporary workers flow in and out of the group and is interdependent in the sense that regular and nonstandard workers all contribute to the organization's goals.

Those groups that experienced a greater fluidity and interdependence demonstrated less conflict than those who did not. While the tenure of the freelancers

within the Brand Marketing Department exceeded common perceptions of temporary work, this simply illustrated that the boundaries of their department were stable in relation to tenure, yet fluid in relation to their blended arrangement. This department also best illustrated interdependence by the degree to which all members functioned as equal partners. This is in contrast to the Political Affairs Research Department that resisted fluidity by fighting to keep their permanent employees and resisted interdependence by isolating the Shared Services workers, both functionally and geographically.

Because the Brand Marketing Department was designed to function as a bona fide group, they perceived and felt less conflict than the Political Affairs group that was designed, and accustomed to functioning, as a permanent work group.

So, what are the implications for a blended organization? Having only one model of integrating high-end nonstandard workers into a company is inadequate for it does not account for the diversity of nonstandard workers, the positions they fill and the type of department in which they work. One type of nonstandard worker will require little training while another will require more hands-on management. One type of department will make an easier transition into a blended context than will another. Since the capacity of nonstandard workers and the functionality of departments vary dramatically, blended organizations need to use multiple methods of integrating nonstandard workers into the workforce. It would seem logical that those regular workers most familiar with the tasks and the conditions under which the tasks must be performed would be those with the greatest insight into effective integration methods. Involving regular workers depends, of course, on the degree to which it is desirable to integrate nonstandard workers into the workforce and involve them in core tasks.

The second research question asked: How do perceived and felt conflicts become manifest in blended organizations? Interestingly, very few conflicts that were perceived and felt became manifest in these situations. No conflicts between regular co-workers, due to the integration of nonstandard workers, were reported. Very few conflicts between regular workers and their managers were reported. Even when the individuals felt the conflict quite deeply, rarely was the conflict manifest between the two parties with whom the conflict existed. There were several reasons why this could be.

The company had a rather rigid hierarchical system with clearly defined lines of communication. Therefore, most exchanges regarding conflict were expected to be discussed between managers and subordinates, even though the conflicts rarely directly involved those parties. A consistent theme in this organization was that conflicts were deferred away from the department to upper management, yet very few of the conflicts were dealt with at that level. The culture of the organization appeared to stress a hierarchy that resulted in strong affiliation within departments, but significantly less loyalty and satisfaction with upper management and the organization as a whole. Many of the latent conflicts were based on decisions made by upper management, which further reinforced the solidarity of individual departments and decreased the ability to address those conflicts beyond the departmental level.

Some of the nonstandard workers did not have direct lines of communication to company management at all. Although the Shared Services workers should have had greater access to the Political Affairs Research Department manager, they did not and any conflicts they had were manifest to others in Shared Services. The regular workers in this department had no access to their Shared Services co-workers, nor did they pursue access

to management beyond their department. The auditors, due to policy guidelines, were to bring issues to their site supervisor and not the manager of the Payroll Team or directly to regular co-workers. Only the freelancers in the Brand Marketing Department were allowed direct access to the department manager or regular co-workers to discuss conflicts.

Some nonstandard workers were reluctant to manifest conflict for fear it would affect their ability to secure future placement. The Shared Services workers, especially, contended that making a conflict manifest would simply result in them being removed from that particular assignment and decrease their chances of securing placements in the future. The auditor on the Payroll Team stressed the importance of being liked by the site supervisor in order to remain on his current assignment.

The next step, after bringing an issue to a manager, was to bring the issue to a Human Resources representative. However, the company's downsizing and restructuring made employees tentative to complain to anyone but their direct manager. The Research Department manager had discussed "fighting" with Human Resources over the downsizing of his staff, clearly implying that Human Resources played a key role in that decision. The role of Human Resources in the restructuring of the company resulted in a significant amount of perceived and felt conflict, but also stifled the manifestation of the conflict by blocking the designated lines of communication. So, while the potential for latent conflict was strong, very little was manifest.

The final research question asked: How are conflicts that emerge from the use of a blended workforce managed? Many of the conflicts that were perceived or felt were due to issues that had not been adequately addressed by management. Deficient management

as a conflict area was only partially supported, but all departments provided examples of conflicts that could have been deescalated through better management. Even though the Brand Marketing Department appeared to be a successful model of an integrated group, the manager was never able to fully articulate the reasons for the department being blended. Although the arrangement had been established before the manager began, the specific benefits of the arrangement had not been discussed, or fully understood, by the staff. But, because very few conflicts due to the integration were felt or perceived, very few conflicts needed to be managed.

Davis-Blake et al. (2003) found that the blending of regular and nonstandard workers had the impact of worsening the relations between managers and regular employees. However, the regular employees of the Political Affairs Research Department reported increased loyalty and satisfaction with their manager due to his handling of downsizing and integration issues and the other departments expressed steady satisfaction with management. The nonstandard workers appeared to be the losers as far as management was concerned. While the regular workers reported being largely satisfied with management's handling of conflicts, the nonstandard workers cited concerns with improper management. Since the hierarchy and policies of the company stressed the role of management rather than direct confrontation of fellow workers, then how and if the conflicts were handled depended largely on the managers.

Many of the company's policies appeared to be in place to maintain a hierarchical flow of information. However, the downsizing and restructuring of the company demonstrated an intention to increase its use of nonstandard workers and to outsource core functions. The company's intention to increase use of nonstandard workers appears



to be at odds with many of its current policies regarding “appropriate” exchanges of information and the role of management. If nonstandard workers are to be fully integrated into the structure of the company, consistent access to and equitable treatment by department-level management will be key.

### Conclusion

Nearly 20 million Americans are in nonstandard work arrangements and upwards of 93 percent of U.S. firms use such workers, with the majority of growth occurring from the utilization of high-end independent contractors and freelancers. Despite the prevalence of such arrangements, blended organizations are potential breeding grounds of conflict and provide a unique set of challenges for these high-end nonstandard workers.

Overall, this research points to several important lessons for managers, nonstandard workers and students of communication. While low-skill, low-wage temporary workers might be more apt to share similar characteristics in regard to potential areas of conflict, the diversity among high-skill, high-wage nonstandard workers makes similar assumptions inappropriate. The stages of conflict perceived, felt and manifest among the nonstandard workers studied here varied widely based on type of work performed. When integrating nonstandard workers into a group, more emphasis should be placed on the type of work being performed than merely the person’s temporary status. Along the same vein, a department’s ability to cope in a blended context depends, to a great extent, to what degree its core functions can be performed in a fluid context. Some core functions are more easily adaptable to blended contexts, while some require a consistency and in-depth organizational knowledge not attainable in an overly fluid context. The decision to blend a group based largely on financial

considerations ignores the fact that some contexts are more suitable for blending than others.

The success an organization will have in creating a blended workforce will depend, to a great extent, on how much the policies and practices of the organization ensure open lines of communication to and from nonstandard workers. Open communication implies opportunities for nonstandard workers to ask clarifying questions regarding their assignment, consistent feedback from those most familiar with the assignment and an outlet to voice concerns to a receptive audience. Nonstandard workers who do not have access to their regular co-workers or the department manager face significantly more conflicts than those with more open lines of communication. Likewise, open communication implies that regular workers understand the reasoning for using the nonstandard workers and have access to and interaction with them to the extent doing so results in greater efficiency and trust.

Advances in technology have made it possible for workers to choose increasingly diverse work arrangements. Global competition has made companies redefine what their core functions are and reevaluate the staffing arrangements required to perform those functions. At the same time, rigid hierarchies are slowly being replaced with self-directed work teams and a lifelong commitment to a single organization is being replaced with workers committed to mastering a skill and applying that skill to number of different work contexts. The lessons we learn today from studying high-end nonstandard workers integrated into a blended context has implications for what, in the future, might be the rule rather than the exception.

## Appendix

### *Interview Schedule*

#### Criteria to be met:

- High-end nonstandard workers:
  - Regarded their current assignment as temporary
  - Currently working as temporaries because of a demand for their services to fill an immediate need
  - Completed some college-level education in their discipline
  - Interacted to some degree with the regular employees of the organization.
  
- Managers:
  - Operated as organizational members who provided direct oversight to both regular employees and nonstandard workers within the organization
  
- Regular employees:
  - Interaction with and experienced a work-related interdependence with nonstandard workers within the organization

#### Demographic information needed:

- Age, gender, tenure, education.

#### General questions:

- Age, gender, tenure, education.
  
- How long have you been with the organization (and, if applicable, how long have you been a contract/freelance worker)?
  
- Tell me about your education.
  
- What is it like working in an organization that uses contractor and freelancers?
  
- Have you been aware of conflicts that have occurred because of the integration of regular workers and contract/freelance workers? What happened?
  
- How was that conflict handled?

#### Specific questions (as necessary):

- Task redistribution/role ambiguity
  - Have you been aware of conflicts that have occurred because tasks or roles were changed due to the presence of contractors/freelancers?

- Lack of training/orientation
  - Do you think the training and orientation of contractors/freelancers is adequate?
- Lack of loyalty/organizational commitment
  - Do you think loyalty to the organization suffers due to the presence of contractors/freelancers?
- Reluctance to share knowledge
  - Do you think regular and temporary workers here are reluctant to share information or knowledge with each other?
- Deficient management
  - Do you think the combination of regular and temporary workers has been managed well?
- Discrepancies in wages
  - Are you aware of conflicts that have arisen due to wage discrepancies between regular and temporary workers?
- What other issues do you think might come up in the future?

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### **Education**

#### ***Graduate Student***

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, Communication Studies Dept., Indianapolis, IN

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Earned an M.A. in applied communication from Indiana University, specializing in organizational communication. The program focused quite intentionally on applied learning in the areas of corporate communication, effective media strategies, group communication and conflict management.

#### ***Undergraduate Student***

Kentucky Christian University, Grayson, KY

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Received B.A. in intercultural studies, graduating with honors, in 1990. Worked in the communications office where I directed the creative staff and served as editor for several publications.

### **Employment**

#### ***Director of Media Services***

CMF International, Indianapolis, IN

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Member of the nine-person Leadership Team who directs the organization and its 232 workers and hundreds of additional national staff members. CMF is an organization doing faith-based humanitarian work in 18 countries on four continents. Responsible to formulate, implement and evaluate communication and marketing strategies that will further the mission of the organization and ensure a consistent message. Initiate, evaluate, track and manage all projects for print, multimedia, web and public relations events. Provide leadership to the Media Services staff and manage the use of numerous outside vendors, media partners, agencies and freelancers. Consult other departments and international personnel in communication strategies and options and train new recruits and staff in effective communication strategies and appropriate uses of the organization's resources. Set budgets and track costs for all current communications programs and plan for future advancements in personnel and technology.



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CMF International, Indianapolis, IN

*February 1991 – November 1999*

Managed the creative staff and all projects for print including setting and maintaining project schedules, communicating with vendors, coordinating mailing services and budget oversight.

**Memberships and Interests**

Member of the Central States Communication Association and presenter at the 2006 annual convention.

Member of the International Association of Business Communicators, Indianapolis division.

Consultant to several Indianapolis, Indiana non-profit agencies including Gleaner's Food Bank and Wheeler Mission Ministries.

Contributing freelance writer to several online and print publications.