

The Contributory Role of Professionalism in Shaping Contingent Workers' OCB

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ABSTRACT

Based on social exchange and psychological contract theories, Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is anchored on the presumption of an established, long-term relationship between an employer and employees. Thus one could conclude that contingent workers lack OCB. This study demonstrates that adding a "professionalism" construct provides correspondence in the literature that previously did not exist. Given that in advancing economies professionalism will be present in a variety of degrees in all occupations, inclusion of such a dimension can significantly strengthen and illuminate OCB studies.

Keywords: *organizational citizenship behavior, contingent workers, professionalism, temporary workers*

INTRODUCTION

Contingent or temporary workers are those without explicit or implicit contracts for long-term employment, or with alternative employment arrangements with the expectation that the employment will not last. Temps or temporary workers are twice as likely to be under 25 years old and more likely to have less than a high school diploma as compared to workers with traditional jobs, and two-fifths work less than 35 hours per week (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005).

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) observations have already been validated by empirical work. For example, Cohany (1996) found a significant correlation between these demographic characteristics and workers in a low-quality temporary market. Thus, temp and contingency became a version of "underclass" workers forced into the secondary labor market associated with low skills, a high rate of unemployment, and rapid job turnover (Segal and Sullivan, 1995). Many temp market studies that ensued focused primarily on low-skill service and industrial jobs (McAlester, 1998; Smith, 1998), with the general belief that temps cannot expect a steady work schedule and are not regularly considered for promotion (Cappelli, 1995; Chew and Chew, 1996).

The presumption of economic rewards as the principal determinant of the scope of OCB for temporary employees was challenged in two major disciplines. First in human resource management, basing instances of OCB on social exchange theory. In this setting, altruistic behavior is a result of the exchange of information and support between workers and managers. Second is manpower planning and psychological contract, where OCB is a result of unwritten mutual promises and perceived expectations among work groups (Schein 1988). Empirical work by Moorman and Harland (2002) and Liden *et al.* (2003) supports the idea that information exchange and psychological expectations within a work group can cause OCB for temp workers.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the OCB performance of professional and non-professional contingent workers.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is highly correlated with organizational commitment. Individuals engaging in discretionary behavior beyond the requirements specified for a particular job, are considered good citizens and advantageous to the organization (Bateman & Organ, 1983). Cooperation with peers, personal initiatives, and performing extra duties without complaint are examples of OCB (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ & Konovsky, 1989; Smith *et al.*, 1983). Other examples are punctuality, helping others, volunteering (Organ, 1988), innovation, using time

efficiently (Smith *et al.*, 1983), not wasting resources, sharing ideas, and representing the organization favorably (Van Dyne *et al.*, 1994).

Several studies focus on the link between OCB and performance. For example, studies by Podsakoff, Ahearne, and MacKenzie (1997); Turnipseed and Murkison (2000a); Walz and Niehoff (2000), Rassuli (2005) and Turnipseed and Rassuli (2005) investigated OCB dimensions with regard to organizational performance. The general conclusion of these studies is that citizenship behaviors are positive for organizations; they simultaneously benefit employee performance, and managerial efficiencies.

The market for professional contingent workers (PCW) consists of client firms on the demand side, PCW on the supply side, with staffing companies as intermediaries. In general, flexible firms maintain a small core of full time employees with a large group of contingent workers performing a variety of peripheral tasks (Cooper, 1999). Hill and Matusik (1998) present detailed analyses of how firms use professionals and skilled contractors in response to the call for needed flexibility. The demand for PCW comes from their ability to embrace new technology and provide needed professional expertise that would be costly to maintain in-house.

On the supply side, research has focused on why workers join the contingent market. The social structure and occupational profile of contingent workers as varied as those workers in the permanent job market (Kunda *et al.*, 2002). Many are willing to forego long-term benefits of traditional employment for higher wages in the contingent market. Others may accept lower pay in the contingent market in exchange for flexibility (Morris and Vekker, 2001). The corporate need for flexible, skilled labor has created many opportunities for professionals seeking autonomy and work flexibility. Indeed, Davis and Meyer (1998) suggest that the free agency is an opportunity for self-actualization for highly skilled PCW.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF DATA

The data for this study were contingent workers employed by staffing agencies and working for client firms in the Western U.S.A. Two categories of contingent workers – professional contingent workers (PCW) and non-professional contingent workers (NPCW) are included in the study. Names of 120 client firms that hire contingent workers were obtained from staffing agencies listed in the American Staffing Association member directory. One thousand five hundred copies of a questionnaire were sent to the human resource managers, asking them to distribute the survey instruments to contingent workers and their project managers. Contingent workers were instructed to complete the questionnaire, evaluating OCB of members of their work group on a five-point, Likert-type scale. The project managers were asked to assess the performance of the contingent workers on a 10-point scale, with 10 indicating the highest level of performance. Managers were requested to distribute the questionnaire only to contingent workers in teams for the duration of a project. Central to this study is the fact that these workers work teams on behalf of the staffing firms. Since team members among contingent workers is not permanent and groups rotate within projects, over time they become familiar with their peers and thus are qualified to judge their OCB.

DISCUSSION AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Table 1 produces descriptive statistics of 181 PCW and 177 NPCW respondents. The majority of PCW had college degrees, and their occupations were primarily engineers, computer software programmers, and hardware designers. The mean PCW was married men with a mean age of 40 and median annual earnings of approximately \$50,000. The sample of NPCW was comprised of younger workers with a mean age of 36 years; almost half were female with mean annual earnings of \$36,000. The NPCW occupational distribution was primarily office, catering, cleaning, and security services, light assembly, and housing.

Tables 2 and 3 provide the opinions of PCW and NPCW respectively. The items with the highest percentage of Agree or Strongly Agree indicate that PCW groups demonstrate special professional deference to the client firm. For example, 92% show loyalty, 89% do not criticize the firm, and 88% work in the most beneficial manner for the client firm. In addition, about three-quarters of respondents demonstrate innovation, find ways to help the client firm adapt to

new technologies, and to help orient new employees. Correlation coefficients among study items also appear in Tables 2 and 3.

Tables 4 and 5 provide factor analysis results for PCW and NPCW respectively. For each dimension, five items derived from Van Dyne *et al.*'s (1994) OCB instrument which are pertinent to contingent workers were selected to capture the latent roots. The relationship of the PCW with the client firm is multifaceted. The criteria used for selection of these items are derived from this relationship. Items are included to assess PCW contribution to the client firm and its permanent employees. For example *Receptive to new projects* and *Shares expertise with permanent employees* contribute to the institution and its permanent employees respectively.

Equally important is the inclusion of NPCW. Non-professional sample can provide a bench mark for comparison and analysis of PCW organizational citizenship behavior. The similarities and differences between OCB constructs of professionals and non-professionals are interesting. For professional workers a new dimension appears that will be otherwise unsubstantiated for workers that lack professional persona (Table 2).

Exploratory factor analysis produced five emerging OCB factors for PCW and five for NPCW. All factors have an eigenvalue of greater than one. Together for PCW they explain 65 percent of the variance and 58% for NPCW. All are listed in order of their relative explanatory power. These factors are interpreted using corresponding latent roots with factor loadings greater than 0.50. However, Factor V for PCW cannot be interpreted because the two items loaded are not congruent with a theoretical explanation. Moreover, the reliability measure (Cronbach's alpha) is only 0.32 and not acceptable for this factor. Also Conscientiousness factor for NPCW has a reliability of only 56% and is not acceptable. For all other emerging factors internal reliability coefficients range from 0.72 to 0.90 and are satisfactory.

Most interesting about the results in Table 4 is the differences between emerging factors (professionalism, helping behavior with client firm, loyalty to client firm, conscientiousness, and uninterpretable factor) for the two groups. For NPCW emerging factors are among the traditional OCB factors as they appear in numerous empirical studies. From the vantage point of NPCW, these factors indicate that temp workers are aware of their added value to the client firm through lending a helping hand to coworkers and supervisors with loyalty and in compliance with project directives and in conformity with proscribed rules of engagement. Similarly, PCW envisage themselves as loyal helpers, but contrary to NPCW, their sense of altruism diverts from this point onward.

The items loading on the *Professionalism* factor indicate that PCW understand that to be recalled by client firms for new projects requires them to produce value beyond the contractual agreement. However, they exhibit altruism differently than traditional permanent employees. PCW revitalize their skills by staying up-to-date and finding ways to be innovative in adapting to new technologies. As professionals, they value autonomy and are not threatened by sharing their expertise with permanent employees. The *Helping* factor illustrates the special help they provide. PCW directly help managers and workers, and go the "extra mile" by being receptive to new projects and cooperative with the firm.

The items loading on the *Loyalty* and *Conscientiousness* factors suggest that PCW intend to leave an excellent impression with the client firm. Their service is similar to that of a devoted employee seeking promotion through close alliance with the organization and its mission. Knowing that impression management will be of no avail, they support the organization by working in a manner most beneficial for the client and creating a good name for the firm. The organization benefits as PCW perform as role models for permanent employees by optimally managing resources, making sound decisions, and delivering top-quality work.

CONCLUSIONS

In the temporary workers' market, professionalism has a prominent role as the principle commodity being traded. Unable to maintain a large core of permanent employees, client firms seek the technical and professional assistance of temps, who are attracted by flexibility and financial autonomy. Both sides benefit and attempt to sustain the symbiotic institution by rewarding each other beyond the contractual agreements. The client firm will rehire temps for new project contracts and be a source of positive referral. Temps will in return provide the client firm with OCB, helping managers with propagating the technical know-how they lack.

The role of professionalism in OCB is not restricted to PCW. It applies to less skilled temp workers as well as permanent employees. As job sophistication and skill components of all occupations have increased over time, varying degrees of professionalism are instilled in workers. Managers should understand the potential power of professionalism to trigger altruism, independent of the organization. The challenge for researchers is to validate a professionalism construct, and for managers, to develop and adopt policies to harvest the rewards.

Table 1: Contingent Workers' Summary of Organizational Behavior Survey Professionals (N= 181)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (Std. Dev.) or Percentage</i>	<i>Selected Distributive Indicators</i>
Age	40 (11)	minimum 23 / maximum 72
Annual Earnings	\$55-65,000 range	Median \$45-55,000
Gender	72% male	
Marital Status	62% married	
Education	47% bachelor	19% masters / 12% doctorate
Contingent by Choice	49% volunteer	26% at least twice contingent

Stated Reasons for Contingency Status (percent of top 5 reasons)

Rank	Economics	Flexible Time	Refurbish Skill	Tired of Politics	More Autonomy
1	29	18	11	6	9
2	20	16	14	18	6
3	16	15	22	14	5
4	12	10	14	16	11
5	7	7	3	9	7

Non-Professionals (N= 177)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean (Std. Dev.) or Percentage</i>	<i>Selected Distributive Indicators</i>
Age	36 (9)	minimum 23 / maximum 72
Annual Earnings	\$15-25,000 range	Median \$25-35,000
Gender	55% male	
Marital Status	67% married	
Education	48% bachelor	31% H.S. diploma + certificate
Contingent by Choice	30% volunteer	61% at least twice contingent

Stated Reasons for Contingency Status (percent of top 5 reasons)

Rank	Only Job	Road to Perm	Attend Family	Refurbish Skill	Flexible Time
1	33	20	15	9	14
2	3	25	10	22	21
3	21	9	3	15	13
4	6	9	8	14	14
5	5	5	8	9	11

**Table 2 : Professional Contingent Workers (PCW) Summary of Organizational Behavior Survey (Selected Items)
Descriptive and Correlation¹ (N = 181)**

Opinion about Members in Your Work Group	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1.	72																		
2. Share expertise with permanent employees	67	.84																	
3. Work independently	67	.73	.77																
4. Find ways to improve performance	74	.67	.66	.68															
5. Innovative	77	.65	.55	.53	.71														
6. Keep skills and training up-to-date	60	.45	.39	.35	.39	.40													
7. Make helpful suggestions to managers	71	.13	.15	.04	.10	.17	.14												
8. Respond to firm's requests	72	.10	.08	.04	.05	.21	.14	.72											
9. Receptive to new projects	74	.03	.08	.02	.02	.07	.16	.76	.66										
10. Help orient new employees	81	.02	.02	.04	.02	.07	.18	.49	.58	.41									
11. Loyal to the firm	92	.05	.04	.07	.12	.08	.10	.06	.09	.01	.01								
12. Do not criticize the firm	89	.04	.02	.10	.11	.11	.09	.10	.05	.01	.01	.47							
13. Work in most firm-beneficial manner	88	.07	.03	.02	.03	.10	.11	.04	.05	.01	.01	.40	.26						
14. Do not waste resources	86	.13	.10	.12	.09	.12	.12	.10	.03	.01	.07	.43	.26	.28					
15. Deliver top-quality work	73	.11	.07	.10	.08	.05	.06	.07	.04	.08	.02	.06	.10	.08	.06				
16. Most conscientious	69	.02	.02	.01	.02	.11	.14	.12	.01	.12	.13	.11	.06	.10	.07	.55			
17. Make sound decisions	51	.12	.01	.04	.08	.09	.06	.02	.09	.01	.07	.07	.01	.06	.02	.49	.37		
18. Intervene to stop dysfunctional conflicts	34	.11	.12	.06	.12	.10	.02	.06	.06	.01	.01	.02	.04	.01	.05	.04	.01	.15	
19. Aware of firm's rules	80	.10	.04	.09	.05	.12	.06	.11	.09	.01	.03	.16	.09	.04	.12	.05	.06	.04	.21

¹Correlation coefficients 0.15 or above are significant at 0.05 level or better.

**Table 3: Non-Professional Contingent Workers (NPCW) Summary of Organizational Behavior Survey
(Selected Items) Descriptive and Correlation¹ (N = 177)**

Opinion about Members in Your Work Group	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
1. Respond cooperatively to requests	79																		
2. Help orient new employees	71	.77																	
3. Make helpful suggestions to managers	74	.63	.65																
4. Receptive to new projects	79	.77	.68	.64															
5. Do not criticize the firm	66	.19	.22	.11	.18														
6. Do not waste resources	60	.23	.25	.11	.23	.63													
7. Go the 'extra mile' for the firm	67	.26	.21	.17	.19	.65	.62												
8. Loyal to the organization	66	.21	.27	.08	.13	.62	.54	.42											
9. Positive attitude at work	61	.08	.13	.11	.10	.18	.07	.12	.22										
10. Do not complain	66	.05	.04	.01	.01	.03	.01	.01	.08	.59									
11. Cover for absent coworkers	63	.11	.09	.04	.07	.10	.10	.13	.16	.35	.57								
12. Ready to lend a helping hand	75	.13	.02	.05	.05	.08	.01	.02	.15	.33	.41	.30							
13. Follow written procedures	55	.02	.03	.03	.02	.18	.02	.05	.10	.17	.05	.12	.03						
14. Respect authorities	67	.09	.14	.08	.10	.19	.05	.10	.10	.07	.03	.08	.03	.65					
15. Aware of firm's rules	85	.06	.12	.12	.12	.15	.01	.12	.08	.19	.08	.11	.06	.47	.67				
16. Make sound decisions	28	.12	.08	.02	.02	.07	.04	.01	.14	.03	.02	.06	.17	.25	.07	.13			
17. Work independently	43	.16	.20	.09	.11	.09	.12	.16	.20	.11	.08	.15	.13	.16	.01	.13	.30		
18. Among most conscientious workers	42	.09	.03	.04	.04	.11	.21	.18	.15	.04	.05	.01	.02	.09	.02	.05	.36	.24	

¹Correlation coefficients 0.145 or above are significant at 0.05 level or better.

Table 4: Factor Analysis — Professional Contingent Workers' Groups with Client Firms (N = 181)

<i>Traditional OCB Constructs</i>	<i>Emerging OCB Factors¹ for PCW</i>	Factor		% of Variance	
		<i>Loading</i>	<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>Explained</i>	<i>Reliability²</i>
I. Helping Behavior with Client Firm	I. Professionalism		4.1	21	0.90
1. Make helpful suggestions to managers	1. Help firm adapt to new technology	0.90			
2. Receptive to new projects	2. Share expertise with permanent employees	0.87			
3. Respond cooperatively to requests	3. Work independently	0.84			
4. Help orient new employees	4. Find new ways to improve performance	0.83			
5. Help firm adapt to new technology	5. Innovative	0.79			
	6. Keep skills up-to-date	0.60			
II. Loyalty to Client Firm	II. Helping Behavior with Client Firm		2.9	15	0.86
1. Loyal to the organization	1. Make helpful suggestions to managers	0.89			
2. Do not waste resources	2. Respond cooperatively to requests	0.88			
3. Go the 'extra mile' for the firm	3. Receptive to new projects	0.84			
4. Share expertise with permanent employees	4. Help orient new employees	0.72			
5. Do not criticize the firm					
III. Conscientiousness	III. Loyalty to Client Firm		2.1	11	0.68
1. Make sound decisions	1. Loyal to the organization	0.81			
2. Work independently	2. Do not criticize the firm	0.70			
3. Among most conscientious workers	3. Work in most firm-beneficial manner	0.69			
4. Work is of top quality	4. Do not waste resources	0.63			
5. Find new ways to improve performance					
IV. Self-Development	IV. Conscientiousness		2.0	11	0.72
1. Demonstrate excellent abilities	1. Work is of top quality	0.84			
2. Stay current with new technology	2. Some of the most conscientious workers	0.79			
3. Innovative	3. Make sound decisions	0.75			
4. Keep skills up-to-date					
5. Flexible in meeting job challenges					
V. Organizational Compliance	V. Uninterpretable Factor		1.2	7	0.32
1. Intervene to stop dysfunctional conflicts	1. Intervene to stop dysfunctional conflicts	0.77			
2. Respect authorities	2. Aware of firm's rules	0.70			
3. Follow written procedures					
4. Aware of firm's rules					
5. Work in most firm-beneficial manner					
VI. Sportsmanship					
1. Positive attitude at work					
2. Do not complain					
3. Cover for absent employees					
4. Encourage better performance					
5. Ready to lend a helping hand					

¹Only items with factor loading > 0.50 appear here.²Reliability is Cronbach's alpha**Table 5 : Factor Analysis—Non-Professional Contingent Workers' Groups with Client Firms (N=177)**

<i>Traditional OCB Constructs</i>	<i>Emerging OCB Factors¹ for NPCW</i>	Factor		% of Variance	
		<i>Loading</i>	<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>Explained</i>	<i>Reliability²</i>
I. Helping Behavior with Client Firm	I. Helping Behavior with Client Firm		4.0	17	0.90
1. Make helpful suggestions to managers	1. Respond cooperatively to requests	0.89			
2. Receptive to new projects	2. Receptive to new projects	0.87			
3. Respond cooperatively to requests	3. Help orient new employees	0.86			
4. Help orient new employees	4. Make helpful suggestions to managers	0.83			
5. Help firm adapt to new technology					
II. Loyalty to Client Firm	II. Loyalty to Client Firm		2.5	16	0.85
1. Loyal to the organization	1. Do not criticize the firm	0.87			
2. Do not waste resources	2. Do not waste resources	0.84			
3. Go the 'extra mile' for the firm	3. Go the 'extra mile' for the firm	0.80			
4. Share expertise with permanent employees	4. Loyal to the organization	0.73			
5. Do not criticize the firm					
III. Conscientiousness	III. Sportsmanship		2.1	14	0.75
1. Make sound decisions	1. Do not complain	0.86			
2. Work independently	2. Positive attitude at work	0.74			
3. Among most conscientious workers	3. Cover for absent employees	0.73			
4. Work is of top quality	4. Ready to lend a helping hand	0.65			

5. Find new ways to improve performance				
IV. Self-Development	IV. Organizational Compliance		2.0	12
1. Demonstrate excellent abilities	1. Respect authorities	0.91		
2. Stay current with new technology	2. Aware of firm's rules	0.82		
3. Innovative	3. Follow written procedures	0.81		
4. Keep skills up-to-date				
5. Flexible in meeting job challenges				
V. Organizational Compliance	V. Conscientiousness		1.5	9
1. Intervene to stop dysfunctional conflicts	1. Make sound decisions	0.79		
2. Respect authorities	2. Among most conscientious workers	0.71		
3. Follow written procedures	3. Work independently	0.65		
4. Aware of firm's rules				
5. Work in most firm-beneficial manner				
VI. Sportsmanship				
1. Positive attitude at work				
2. Do not complain				
3. Cover for absent employees				
4. Encourage better performance				
5. Ready to lend a helping hand				

¹Only items with factor loading > 0.50 appear here.

²Reliability is Cronbach's alpha.

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