

TIME AS A WAY OF RECONCILING CONFLICT AND COOPERATION IN THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP: A VIEW WITH SPECIAL APPLICATION TO NEW EMPLOYMENT FORMS

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ABSTRACT

Explanations of the coexistence of conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship are often vague and-or misleading. Authors have frequently failed to distinguish between institutional bases for cooperation and the ideological orientations of employers and employees. Previous theorizing has typically presented cross-sectional views where the employment relationship is presented outside of its temporal context. Here it is argued that the extent and nature of conflict and cooperation between employers and their workforce should be understood through appreciating that interest alignment changes as an employment relationship moves from a short to a long term. In practice, the institutional basis for conflict mostly exists in the short and long term and cooperation in the long term exclusively. Using survey data obtained from fast food workers, the theoretical and strategic consequences of this view are explored in relation to new employment forms which have a modified concept of a long term.

The employment relationship is a bedrock institution in capitalist market economies. However, bosses and their workforces are bound together in an association which has an appearance of fragility and a conspicuous potential for frequent, and perhaps irresolvable, conflict. The origins of this vulnerability appear to arise from certain elements where capital and labour have opposing interests. Such elements may include: control over the way tasks are performed, employee pay rates and non-pay related benefits and, motivation and incentive provisions. In spite of corrosive influences such as these, the employment relationship exists in perpetuity and bosses mostly maintain a productive and cooperative association with their workforce.

In this article it is argued that the coexistence of conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship can be better understood if elapsed time is seen as causing reasons for greater cooperation between bosses and their workforces. For current purposes, a time-based view will be defined as a perspective which emphasizes that elements which give rise to conflict and cooperation between capital and labour do not reveal themselves simultaneously. For example, a worker commencing a job may have little interest in whether their employing entity still exists in ten years time but will probably be concerned about their initial pay cheque and the extent to which their boss is inclined to watch over their shoulder. In these circumstances, the differing interests of each party seem especially prominent. On the other hand, months or years later, the same worker may be concerned about their employing entity's ongoing existence, an issue which will also be important to the employer. A time based view of the employment relationship cannot exist without a hypothetical understanding of the short and long term. These concepts imply that, for each job, employers and their employees have a shared implicit understanding that there will be a period in the immediate future when reciprocal obligations and responsibilities are to be fulfilled. This period, the short-term, is not necessarily discussed but implicitly forms part of a psychological contract between the parties. It may be weeks or months. Beyond the short-term is the long-term.

A time-based perspective of conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship develops static or cross-sectional views which are widespread in scholarly literature (e.g., Purcell and Sisson, 1983; Deaton, 1985, Purcell, 1986; Purcell, 1987; Sisson, 1989; Marchington and Parker, 1990; McLoughlin and Gourlay, 1992; Bacon and Storey, 1993; Belanger and Edwards, 2007). Such established theory typically implies that employers and employees exist in harmony because the bases for cooperation are more numerous and/or more important than the bases for non-cooperation. Static views may also imply that employees cooperate with their boss because it is the "least unattractive" option for them. Even though workers may resent having to subjugate certain of their interests, they need their job and compete for employment in a labour market on the basis of potential and actual compliance, amongst other things. In this context, fulfillment of contractual obligations evolves into beyond-contract style cooperation. Although such reasoning, henceforth referred to as the static perspective, is intuitively appealing, a theory based on elapsed time has a specific contemporary application. For example, it is possible to use a "time-based" view to examine whether there is diminished employee cooperation in new and/or non-standard employment forms. Such work can be considered to have either no long-term; and/or a more abstract long-term; and/or compressed short and long-term time horizons. If non-standard employment is associated with diminished cooperation then, when employers offer these jobs, they make a trade-off between having labour flexibility and beyond contract commitment

from employees. Underlying both the static perspective and a time-based view of the employment relationship is the notion of interest alignment. Interest alignment emphasizes that employers and employees each have a set of interests. Certain of these, the aligned interests, are the same or similar for each party, and others, the misaligned interests, are different and may be at odds.

This article is in three parts. First, an overview of static/cross-sectional theory about conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship is presented. This discussion highlights two generic weaknesses and presents an alternative view – focusing on time – as a proposed remedy. Second, evidence is presented that the industrial-age model of the employment relationship has partially splintered into a spectrum of new employment forms (atypical work) which either eliminate or modify conceptions of the long-term. Third, data is presented which suggests that, in the case of teenaged casual fast food workers, conceptions of the long-term are altered in a way that has foreseeable consequences for conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship. Throughout the article the terms static view, time-based view, conflict, cooperation, interest alignment, and short and long-term will be used regularly. These terms have been defined broadly in this section, the introduction, but will be redefined more narrowly when the need arises.

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP IN CAPITALIST MARKET ECONOMIES

Conflict and cooperation are key objects of analysis in employment relations (Kochan, 1998, p. 37). Fox's *Beyond Contract* (1974) and his conception of pluralism have influenced this research focus. Pluralism arose in Western countries in the 1930s as a management philosophy which aimed to change the role of unions from rivals to partners (Fox, 1974, p. 256). More recently, it has become an umbrella-term for perspectives of the employment relationship which view employee challenge of management prerogative as legitimate, inevitable but, nonetheless, manageable (for example, see Purcell's 1987 conception labour management strategy which draws on the idea of pluralism). The term is inextricably linked with the notion of conflict between employers and employees. If a manager regards themselves – or at least operates – as a pluralist, they will approach labour management with a spirit of compromise on the basis that employee demands are sometimes justifiable even when they are at odds with employer interests. In the modern era, there are practical and ethical reasons why Western managers are inclined to be pluralists. For example, in most jurisdictions, unions are constituted as legal entities and employees have rights which are not necessarily compatible with employer requirements. Indeed, a management orientation towards pluralism is a baseline assumption of much theory about conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship; including

theory which implies that certain managers may be anti-union or may oppose employees having partnership status (e.g., Purcell, 1987).¹

Post-Fox theory in the pluralist *genre* has emerged which distinguishes between circumstances promoting mere employee compliance and which foster commitment and dedication. There are two kinds of conceptual frameworks in this literature: those addressing employer strategy and planning (e.g., Storey and Bacon, 1993 pp. 665-683; Purcell, 1987 pp. 533-548); and those that are theoretical/analytical and without an obvious implication for competitive advantage (e.g., Bain and Clegg, 1974 p. 98).

Irrespective of whether a particular conceptualization is appropriately classified as mostly strategic or mostly analytic in its focus, *Post-Foxian* pluralist models have two primary characteristics. First, they portray conflict as arising from a misalignment of interests between employers and employees. In so doing, they typically depict certain of the overall benefits of the employment relationship as being zero-sum in nature. This means that—with respect to the benefits in question—one party is advantaged at the expense of the other. Such elements include apportionment of profit; control over work methods; and investment in motivation systems and strategies (Keenoy and Kelly, 1999 pp. 63-84). For example, in many work settings, an employee can only be paid more from a surplus which would otherwise belong to an employer; employers retain a workforce because they cannot do everything themselves and, to the chagrin of employees, are inclined to control how tasks are performed; and, employers invest resources in non-pecuniary incentive schemes.² The second characteristic of *post-Foxian* models is that they conceive of cooperation as occurring in relation to a limited range of aspects of work where there is alignment of employer and employee interests. The benefits of these elements are inherently positive-sum in nature. Hence, insofar as pursuit of certain goals is concerned, each party can simultaneously create advantage for themselves and their counterpart. For example, it could be argued that if either an employer or employee acted in a way that tended to ensure the long-term existence of the employing enterprise, such behaviour would be in the other party's interests. Also, if an employee has the prospect of a career within an organization, it may be in that employee's interests to increase the probability of realizing such an opportunity. The worker's actions arising from this motivation could incidentally be compatible with their employer's interests.

Strategy and theory oriented scholarship addressing conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship may pursue either or both of two objectives. The first of these concerns establishing elements where parties have aligned interests. Although the debate about what is best viewed as the basis of convergent interests has spawned long-standing disagreement, the task itself is easy to appreciate. It can be encapsulated in two questions. How should a job be deconstructed into its constituent parts? Which of these give rise to aligned

employer/employee interests? Difference of opinion concerning answers to these questions has been an influence on the emergence of distinct industrial relations and human resources perspectives of the employment relationship (Alexander and Lewer, 2004 p. 21). In the contested terrain of aligned versus misaligned interests, proponents of HRM see greater convergence and/or develop narratives which recast divergent elements as convergent. An example of this recasting process would be to suggest that employee remuneration is not an element where there is misalignment of interests because higher pay rates compromise the viability of an employing entity, a condition that is in neither party's interests. The second objective of *post-Fox* literature, and the focus of this article, concerns how conflict and cooperation can coexist in an ongoing employment relationship. This matter, henceforth referred to as the coexistence problem, is often obscured by related concerns which address optimization of the benefits of the employment relationship for either or both of its parties. These other concerns include: how can conflicting interests be resolved (e.g., Kochan, 1998 p. 38); how can inherently ambiguous employment contracts influence compromise (e.g., Smith, 2006 pp. 389-402); and, what are the optimal conditions for capital and labour to work with each other (e.g., Wright, 2004 pp. 957-1002). The coexistence problem is difficult to present as a closed research question.³ The nature of the issue can be understood through asking an open-ended question: how is it that, in spite of seemingly overwhelming reasons for conflict between its two parties, the employment relationship can exist in perpetuity whereas other kinds of voluntary human relationships require mostly cooperation?

Existing commentary about the coexistence problem tends to be plagued by two kinds of related weakness. The first of these is that it often glosses over the dilemma of the simultaneous existence of conflict and cooperation with glib or ambiguous assertions. For example the British Prime Minister, in his foreword to the nation's Department of Trade and Industry White Paper (1998) addressing Fairness at Work said:

This (initiative) is part of the government's program to replace the notion of conflict between employers and employees [and] goes far beyond legal changes and is nothing less than a change to a culture of better relations in and at work.

When Mr. Blair made this speech he appeared to assume that, if conflict can be reduced or eliminated, workers will be more productive and perhaps happier. It is not clear whether this is the case. For example, labour process theory has revealed that it is possible for firms to be profitable despite substantial conflict between bosses and their workforces (e.g., Burawoy, 1979). On the other hand, there has been an ongoing preoccupation with reducing conflict in the employment relationship, particularly from those who practice human resource management (Storey, 1995). Before this issue can be confidently tackled, there

are at least two more preliminary matters to consider. First, why do conflict and cooperation seem to be side-by-side in the employment relationship? Second, are there ways that managers or policy makers can manipulate understanding of the employment relationship to reduce conflict? In his forward, the Prime Minister jumped straight to the second of these matters. Without a solid theoretical base, it is hard to have confidence that his ideas will reduce conflict and increase cooperation. The opposite problem is seen in the work of Ackers and Payne (1998). These authors do not say how to achieve greater cooperation and less conflict between managers and employees but list many reasons why it is unlikely to occur in a relationship that they view as inherently adversarial and perhaps fatally flawed.

Aside from politicians, scholars have had difficulty being precise about why conflict and cooperation can coexist in perpetuity in the employer/employee relationship. For example, Smith (2006 pp. 389-400) explores how the indeterminate nature of the employment contract tends to make each party emphasis misaligned interests. In practice, where an employee is unsure about their rights or responsibilities, they are more inclined to ensure that they are not exploited and that they get what they can from their employer. This view may help to lessen conflict or, at least make it less likely to be obvious in the short term. However, the conception only says that conflict is increased when expectations are not clear, a somewhat tangential consideration when it comes to understanding why the employment relationship exists in perpetuity when there appear to be reasons why this should be the case.

The second kind of weakness in certain coexistence problem theory is that it is inclined to offer complex explanations of how and why conflict and cooperation may occur together and presents models which obscure underlying processes. A key element of this limitation is failure to differentiate between institutional bases for cooperation between workers and their bosses and the attitudes and ideological orientations of the parties themselves. For example, Belanger and Edwards (2006 pp. 713-734) describe control and developmental concerns⁴ as each being independently varying for capital and labour. This conceptualization suggests the theoretical possibility that employers always have high control concerns but that such concerns may be either high or low for employees. Although the Belanger and Edwards article provides case-study evidence of employees with low-control concerns, an alternative interpretation of their findings would be that some employees have these needs to a lesser extent than others.⁵ If this is so, the overall formulation simplifies to a state-of-affairs where employers always want to control the way work is done and so do employees. Hence, control of the execution of tasks at work is fundamentally a feature of employment where parties have misaligned interests, a point already made by Keenoy and Kelly (1999 pp. 68-74). On the other hand, the second of Belanger and Edwards variables – development concerns – is depicted as able to

take on either high or low values for both employers and employees. The data they present about this matter may belie the presence of another phenomenon. An employee cannot have high dedicated⁶ development concerns unless and until they decide, or it seems likely, that they will remain in their job. Therefore, such a concern will mostly be identified and manifest in the long term. In summary, when viewed purely as a device for understanding employee objective-motivation⁷ for going “beyond contract”, the Belanger/Edwards model defaults to a less complicated conceptualization: employers and employees both want to control the way the job is done whereas development is always the concern of the employer but only becomes relevant to certain employees in the long term. Although—as Belanger and Edwards have done—it is possible to obtain findings suggesting other combinations⁸, such other results do not seem especially relevant to understanding systemic employer/employee interest alignment and say little about institutional pressures for conflict and cooperation. These other combinations are possibly artefacts of workplace culture and/or the attitudes and ideological orientations of parties to the employment relationship. In this article it is suggested that complex explanations of the coexistence problem often portray the simultaneous presence of conflict and cooperation in a way that obscures the fundamental nature of the phenomenon. A reason for this is that models frequently attempt to reconcile pertinent causal influences using a cross-sectional or static paradigm. However, a variable that is implicit in the Belanger and Edwards conceptualization is time. This factor is critical to understanding the simultaneous presence of conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship and is the focus of the remainder of this section.

The employment relationship exists in time; a notion which implies, for present purposes, that the association between each of its parties has a short and long term. This application of the idea of time is an outgrowth of Urry’s (2000, pp. 105-135) conceptualization which distinguishes between instantaneous time and clock time. According to this view, instantaneous time operates in the present. It can be considered as a person’s reflections on what has happened and what is likely to happen. It embodies the ideas of subjectivity and salience. An example of instantaneous time would be important milestones in a person’s career. By contrast, clock time is independent of a person’s personal reflections and can be defined by preset regulations which dictate what is important and/or salient. An example of clock time would be the inauguration dates of American Presidents. Insofar as the present study is concerned, the notion of short/long-term will be considered as a special case of instantaneous time because, rather than being merely a personal reflection, it is a reflection that is shared by parties to the employment relationship. Henceforth, reference to short and long-term will imply that bosses and their workforce see their future relationship as

consisting of two distinct sets of expectations, obligations and problems to be solved; those pertaining to the near and distant future.

Appreciation of the time dimension enables a better understanding of the development of conflict and cooperation; the coexistence problem. Time is, at least, as relevant to analyzing how the employment relationship functions as economic, social and legal considerations; dimensions that are routinely considered to provide the entire context for formulating understanding of the capitalist market employer/employee association (Keenoy and Kelly, 1999 pp. 372-379).

The argument presented here about the impact of time on the employment relationship is based on six tenets. Table 1 lists these and provides relevant examples and/or further explanation.

Table 1:
The Six Tenets of a Time-based View of Conflict and Cooperation in the Employment Relationship

| Tenet of the Theory | Example and/or Further Explanation |
|--|--|
| 1. Elements that give rise to conflict between employers and their workforce exist in the short and long term. | Conflict about apportionment of an entity's operating benefits (in practice an issue which is mostly about pay rates) is always present; that is, it exists in the short and the long term. |
| 2. Elements that have potential to give rise to cooperation between the two parties exist in the long term only. | Cooperation over an employing entity's ongoing existence occurs mostly (or exclusively) in the long term. From an employee standpoint, cooperation can only be manifest from the point when a worker has made a decision to stay and they believe that they will be able to stay. |
| 3. The employment relationship is between a single employer and an employee and not between a group of employers and an employee (i.e., it is not between an employee and the more abstract notion of an industry). ⁹ | Examples and/or further explanations are not necessary. |
| 4. The definitions of short term and long term vary according to job type. | For some jobs, such as those involving teenaged fast food workers, parties may conceive of the short term as being days or weeks. In other instances, for example in the case of university lecturers, the short term may be years. These parameters are influenced by custom and practice, service/product delivery life cycles; and job training requirements. A job will have an extended "short-term" time horizon if both parties have an expectation of a lengthy relationship; services/products take more time to develop and deliver; and, employee training requirements are more extensive. |
| 5. For a given employment relationship, the definitions of short and long term are implicitly agreed | Examples and/or further explanations are not necessary. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>upon and/or understood by each party. Such definitions are not usually discussed by either employers or employees.</p> | |
| <p>6. In certain circumstances, alignment of employer and employee interests requires parties to make an investment when they are still in the short term phase of their relationship.</p> | <p>In the case of employer sponsored training, employers invest in training their workforce so that employees can do their jobs better and/or undertake more complex tasks following the training regime. While the investment is being made, there is a misalignment of employer and employee interests because resources are being diverted to employee development. When the investment is completed and delivering a return, the misalignment of interests is replaced with relatively more alignment; the employee is doing a more interesting and sophisticated job and the boss is benefiting from this arrangement.</p> |

The six tenets presented in Table 1 allow for elements of work which have hitherto been the subject of “interest alignment” analysis to be organized according to a new principle, time. Underlying this view is the idea – which is not new – that conflict is not necessarily overt but, when predominantly present, is habitually manifest as mere employee compliance (Kenoy and Kelly, 1999 p. 373). In a case where the employment relationship is mostly plagued by conflict as opposed to cooperation, each of its parties has short-term motivations maintaining the association. For employees in these circumstances the motivation is primarily economic. In practice, they continue to do what they have to do to receive their next pay cheque. For employers in heightened conflict with their employees, the motivation is the imperative to achieve short-term worker compliance and low labour cost. They may pursue this objective through punitive human resources-related measures. An example of this state-of-affairs would be a boss who has a policy of firing employees who fail to show up for work.¹⁰

Aside from being a classification mechanism, the six tenet conceptualization implies that capitalist market economies optimize employee benefits only in the long term, a notion largely overlooked in previous theorizing. This is because workers receive their greatest advantages from the employment relationship when their interests are maximally aligned with those of their employer. Until this point is reached, workers must defer to employer prerogative and, in the process, partially subjugate their interests. There are two kinds of causes impacting the possibility of long term alignment of interests between capital and labour: contrived and incidental. An example of contrived alignment is the case of employer sponsored training. In relation to this element, as previously discussed, both parties are overtly planning for congruency of needs. Incidental alignment is mostly unplanned. An example of unplanned incidental alignment would be the fact that both parties have an interest in the employing entity existing in perpetuity. In reflecting on congruence of objectives, tenet number

two is reiterated. This is the most important and says: whether it be planned or incidental, interest alignment typically occurs in the long term and therefore enhanced cooperation should be expected to also. The six tenet time-based model is a partial remedy for the two problems which beset literature addressing the coexistence problem: namely, “glossing over”, and “undue complication”.

As with *Post-Fox* pluralist theory in the static/cross-sectional tradition, a time-based view of conflict and cooperation in the employment relationship could be used to develop hypotheses about industrial-age jobs. These jobs have the following characteristics: relatively long lasting employment relationships coupled with the prospect of careers based on length of service; continuous engagement in one physical setting with standardized hours, conditions, entitlements and benefits; tasks based around manufacturing or a related notion of physical production of goods; and, widely recognized sources of interest misalignment between capital and labour which are held in check through adoption of industrial relations-related institutions such as unions (Kalleberg, 2000 p. 341). Somewhat unlike *Post-Fox* pluralist theory in the static/cross-sectional tradition, it may be that a time-based view has special relevance to new employment forms. Such jobs are variously described as atypical/non-standard/contingent/alternative work arrangements/market-mediated arrangements (Kalleberg, 2000 p. 341). Due to its modular short/long term focus, a time-based view can be used to appreciate how these new employment forms are potentially undermining the prospect of alignment of interests and making cooperation between employers and their workforce more difficult. The next section explores how the new economy has seen the industrial age model of the employment relationship partially splinter into forms of atypical work.

NEW EMPLOYMENT FORMS AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE LONG-TERM

The industrial age model of the employment relationship has partially splintered into non-standard employment forms. Such arrangements include regular part-timers, casual or temporary workers, agency employees, the self-employed and independent contractors. The “splintering thesis” is well established and supported by empirical evidence. For example in the United States, the ratio of temporary full-time equivalent workers to the total labour force increased from one percent in 1992 to two percent in 2002 (Mishel, Bernstein, Shierholz, 2009 p. 255).¹¹ In Great Britain, the proportion of workplaces with part-time workers increased sporadically through the 1990s. It rose from 17 percent in 1998 to 21 percent in 2004 (Kersley, Alpin, Forth, Bryson, Bewley, Dix and Oxenbridge, 2006 p. 78). This project revealed a trend, at least in Great Britain, towards use of fixed or limited tenure contracts to supply labour for core workplace functions. Such a result does not support the core/periphery model of

workforce management which predicts that spikes in demand for labour are met with non-standard employment contracts (Cully, Woodland, Riley and Dix, 1999 pp.38-39). Rather, it seems that alternative work contracts in certain labour market sectors are being used increasingly to fulfill basic functions.

Because non-standard work forms are generally of shorter duration than industrial-age model employment, aggregate measures of the mean number of years within the same job provides a useful general measure of its growth rate. For example, in 2006, United States workers aged between 35 and 44 had an average of 6.6 years in the same job. In 1973 this figure was 7.5 (Mishel, *et al*, 2009 p. 253). Although such a result may seem trivial, when the same analysis is carried out on one segment of the labour market, for example United States workers aged 25-34 with no tertiary education, the disparity is more pronounced: 4.3 years in 1973 and 3.6 years in 2006 (Mishel, *et al*, 2009 p.253).

Notwithstanding factors such as fluctuations in workforce participation and unemployment rates, it appears that, in the years since the 1970s, there has been an overall increase in job and employer “switching” and a specific growth in non-standard work. There are supply and demand-related reasons for the proliferation of new employment forms. Employees may want to achieve a better work life balance and accommodate their job commitments whilst pursuing a multifaceted lifestyle. On the other hand, employers frequently cite efficiency and flexibility considerations as rationale for creating new employment forms (Mishel, *et al*, 2009 p.252). Insofar as the present analysis is concerned, one issue in particular is pertinent: what happens to the conception of a job’s long-term in non-standard employment forms? This is relevant to conflict and cooperation because, as suggested in the six tenet conceptualization, employer/employee interests are optimally aligned in the long term only. If this is so, another more controversial question is suggested: can there be any prospect of beyond contract-style cooperation in non-standard work?

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION IN JOBS WITHOUT A LONG TERM

In the previous section evidence was presented that the industrial age manifestation of the employment relationship has partially splintered into new employment forms. It was noted that these offshoots typically involve employers and their workforce in conventional associations of shorter duration than was once the case. In this section, the six tenet theory is used to test hypotheses about conflict and cooperation between fast food workers and their employer. Although the fast food industry has existed for almost 60 years, its outlet jobs are widely viewed as a new employment form because of who does them, their employment contractual arrangements, and the tasks which they entail (Leidner, 1993 pp. 30-80). In the Western world, the sector uses casual and part-time workers; has a service oriented culture; and, has large numbers of female crew

(Bamber, Park, Lee, Ross and Broadbent, 2000 p. 27). Workers are typically young, poorly informed about their rights and have high rates of turnover (Gould, 2009, pp. 376-79). Fast food employers typically organise work according to principles of scientific management (Royle, 2000 pp. 2-8). It is alleged that they misuse such principles in an effort to manipulate and control employee emotions and style of interacting with co-workers and customers (Leidner, 1993 pp. 30-80). In these latter respects, fast food work has the worst characteristics of low-skilled atypical employment (Kalleberg, 2000 p. 341).

Often fast food workers are teenagers who may not expect or want to have a career in the industry. On the other hand, data suggests that a large minority of teenaged fast food workers do want and/or expect to have a career in the sector (Gould, 2009 p. 376). This finding has utility for the present analysis because, although fast work may be considered a new employment form, some employees make it a career and the majority of fast food managers and executives once worked behind a counter (e.g., Gould, 2010, in print).

Table 2 presents data obtained from casual teenaged fast food (non-management) workers employed at suburban McDonald's outlets throughout Australia. These employees were asked to respond to Likert-Scale survey items focusing on cooperative behaviour and job perceptions. Participant responses are disaggregated by desire to have a career at McDonald's specifically and, more generally, in the fast food industry.¹² Findings are further disaggregated by length of service.¹³ Approximately equal numbers of male and female teenaged participants took part in the survey.

If a trend towards atypical work characteristically involves a job that was previously done by a single employee over months or years now being done by several employees over days or weeks, the question arises: what has happened to the concept of the "long-term"? There are potentially three answers to this question which can be presented as hypotheses. First, it does not exist in new employment forms (hypothesis A). Second, it has been replaced with a more abstract notion (hypothesis B). Third, its definition has changed (hypothesis C). Each hypothesis has different implications for alignment of employer and employee interests and hence for conflict and cooperation. Hypotheses will be discussed with reference to Table 2's data.¹⁴

Hypothesis A says that, in certain new employment forms, both employers and employees have implicit awareness that they are in a relationship which is configured to exist in the short term only. The six tenet representation suggests that, without a long-term, there can be no realistic prospect of genuine cooperation. Such a state would mostly predict employee compliance due to institutional conflict being held in check through punitive human resources-related practices (the "you're fired" – syndrome) and employee economic necessity (need for a paycheque).

Table 2:
Perceptions of Work and Career by McDonald’s Employees

| | Sample of McDonald’s Workers at Suburban Australian Outlets Who Indicate a Preference about Wanting to Work in the Fast Food Industry in Five Years Time(i.e., “do” or “do not” want to work in the fast food industry in five years time) (n=655)* | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | Crew Who Want to Have a Career in the Fast Food Industry (n=293)* | | | | Crew Who Do Not Want to Have a Career in the Fast Food Industry (including at McD’s) (n=362)* | |
| | At McDs (specifically) (n=261) | | In the FF Industry (including McD’s) (n=293) | | Who have worked in the job for less than more than two years (n=304) (n=58) | |
| | Who have worked in the job for less than two years (n=199) | Who have worked in the job for more than two years (n=62) | Who have worked in the job for less than two years (n= 207) | Who have worked in the job for more than two years (n=86) | Who have worked in the job for less than two years (n=304) | Who have worked in the job for more than two years (n=58) |
| 1. When a problem occurs at work I would prefer to deal with it without asking my manager (m=3.07) | m=2.96 | m=3.41 | m=3.01 | m=3.56 | m=2.96 | m=2.98 |
| 2. I enjoy the challenge of dealing with unusual situations at work (m=3.71) | m=3.69 | m=3.74 | m=3.68 | m=3.76 | m=3.66 | m=3.70 |
| 3. When I minor problem occurs at work, I deal with it without taking it to my manager (m=3.33) | m=3.33 | m=3.56 | m=3.32 | m=3.59 | m=3.09 | m=3.08 |
| 4. I am paid according to my individual work performance (m=2.56) | m=2.61 | m=2.69 | m=2.63 | m=2.71 | m=2.41 | m=2.38 |
| 5. If I do a good job I will be offered more hours of work (m=3.07) | m=3.07 | m=3.31 | m=3.09 | m=3.36 | m=2.97 | m=2.94 |
| 6. Managers at McDonald’s know how to make work fun (m=3.68) | m=3.89 | m=3.90 | m=4.10 | m=4.21 | m=3.07 | m=2.91 |

Note: Likert Scale: 1(SD) 5(SA)

At some point, before the short-term turns into the long-term, employees either leave their job voluntarily; or, inadvertently and/or carelessly breach a rule and are unable to continue their employment relationship (for example, they don't turn-up for work). Hypothesis A raises the possibility of other phenomena including: employers will not invest in training those for whom there is no concept of a long-term; employers will not communicate their organizational development objectives to employees with whom they have a short-term relationship only; and, employers will not view short-termers as worthy of careers. It seems likely that, in accepting employees who merely comply, employers gain the advantage of increased labour flexibility. From a strategic management perspective, employers who offer jobs without a long-term make a trade-off between cooperation (beyond contract) and labour-flexibility.

In relation to hypothesis A, Table 2 provides evidence that in cases where fast food workers do not conceive of themselves as having a career in the industry, they are less inclined to have a "beyond contract" commitment. For example, employees who indicate that they are not going to have a career indicate lower means for survey items 1, 2 and 3. Hence, compared to their peers who do want a career, employees who do not (or who do not expect to have one), show less initiative, are less comfortable dealing with unusual situations, and are less inclined to address minor problems autonomously. These findings hold irrespective of how long employees have been employed. However, in two out of the three survey items being considered, non-career employees who have been employed for longer than two years are slightly more inclined to show beyond contract style commitment than non-career employees who have been employed for less than two years. According to the six tenet conceptualization, this pattern of results could be interpreted as worker absence of a perception of a long term until they can see for themselves that the job will continue to be part of their life. Of course it is likely that certain employees— of their own volition— have no interest in working in the fast food industry in perpetuity. However, the fact that longer-term non-career employees seem to be more conscientious suggests an overall tendency for a perception/anticipation of an enduring employment relationship to be instrumental in generating employee cooperation.

Hypothesis B suggests that, when considering new employment forms, notions of the long term are more abstract. This view suggests that employees in atypical jobs may, in certain circumstances, substitute anticipation of a long-term employment relationship with a more abstract conception; an employment relationship with an industry group. In such cases, these employees realize that they could have an affiliation into the long-term but it will be with several employers who may be associates or inclined to communicate with each other. If this is so, a more intangible relationship emerges which still figuratively retains social, economic and legal dimensions. The idea of an abstract employment relationship between an employee and an employing sector is an outgrowth of

recent theorizing by Cool, Henderson, and Abate (2005 pp. 1-15) who discuss the contemporary relevance of industry restructuring. Specifically, they argue that firms should not necessarily strive to remain viable and that, even from the perspective of a particular entity's stakeholders, it is not necessarily desirable for that entity to continue in perpetuity.

Data in Table 2 provide support for hypothesis B. Results presented in the first four columns about survey items 1, 2 and 3 suggest that employees with a broad desire to work in the fast food industry typically indicate greater cooperative behaviour than their peers who indicate a narrower commitment to McDonald's work only. This pattern implies that, if an employee sees their future within the industry where they are currently working rather than exclusively with a particular employer, they will be inclined to exhibit beyond contract-style conduct. Such a phenomenon could be interpreted as evidence of a more abstract perception of the employment relationship on the part of certain industry-committed workers.

Hypothesis C is about changing definitions. In certain circumstances, notions of short and long term are truncated or redefined by employers of atypical workers. Such a strategy is likely to be implemented as a human resource management function. For example, the following management options could be interpreted as employer attempts to compel employees to condense their perception of the long-term: performance-based remuneration; short-duration employee training and development initiatives; formation of teams; and promotion and appointment based on merit rather than seniority. In each of these cases, advantages which would have once accrued only in the long term (in the industrial-age employment relationship) are potentially offered to employees more rapidly. In some cases the perception of advantage may be illusory. In these circumstances, it may be concluded that the human resource function centers on creating an impression of shorter timeframes rather than actually compressing short and long-terms.

Table 2 presents evidence of human resource-related efforts to make timeframes shorter. Survey items 4, 5, and 6 indicate the possibility that benefits which, in the industrial-age relationship could only be obtained in the long-term, being experienced by those with less than two years of service. In particular, employees who want a career – or conceive of their job as having a long-term – are more inclined to consider that they are paid according to their individual work performance than employees who do not want a fast food career. This could be interpreted as these employees having a “compressed” perception of the short and long term. In Australia, the Fast Food Industry Award stipulates pay and terms and conditions for crew – and employers are disinclined to pay their workforce on the basis of individual performance (Gould, 2010, in print). However, perceptions of remuneration seem to be affected by an inclination to want to have a career – a phenomenon which could be influenced by human

resource-related strategy and rhetoric. A similar argument could be made about being offered more hours of work. Although employees who want careers may be generally better in the job— and therefore more likely to be offered work— the phenomena revealed in this survey item is about a general perception that good performance leads to more work. Employees who want careers perceive themselves as being able to control their access to work through better on the job performance. This inclination is enhanced for those who want a career and have more time in the job. Such a tendency is consistent with interest alignment increasing with time. Human resource managers who develop strategies to inculcate perceptions of interest alignment more quickly could be argued to be engaging in compression of short and long-term timeframes.

CONCLUSION

The fact that the employment relationship exists in time has been largely overlooked in theorizing about the coexistence of conflict and cooperation. When notions of a job's short and long term are used as a basis for understanding how interest alignment can be optimized, it is possible to better appreciate how an industrial-age employment relationship is sustainable. In the context of such an association, employees commence in a job in which they have non-aligned interests with their employer. At this stage, each party is held in check by compliance-related rules and regulations (for employees) and possibly unions (for employers). During the short term phase of the employment relationship there is no institutional pressure for beyond-contract-style cooperation on the part of employees and, where cooperation is observed, it arises because of the attitudes and/or ideological orientations of actors in the process. However, in time, greater alignment of interests arises. This occurs when it becomes clear that employees will continue the relationship they have with their employer and the mutual benefits of the association are manifest. At this point, an institutional basis for beyond-contract employee performance emerges. In practice, such a state may seldom exist; a phenomenon which makes the prospect of cooperation somewhat elusive. However it may be seen in a case where employees work hard to allow a firm to remain solvent and ultimately have the opportunity to see a link between their efforts and their job's continued existence.

The idea of time has special utility when it comes to analyzing new employment forms; forms which often entail a more limited conception of the long-term. For example, this study has presented data suggesting that there is an increase in cooperative behaviour when fast food workers perceive themselves to be in a long-term employment relationship. Such a tendency is more pronounced when workers conceive of themselves as having a relationship with an industry of employers rather than an individual employer. Evidence of this kind supports the six-tenet theory and, in particular, points to the possibility that interest-

alignment optimizes over time. It was also suggested that human resource intervention may be considered as a device to manipulate conceptions of time and, in so doing, to create greater interest alignment – or at least the impression of interest alignment on the part of workers.

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NOTES

- ¹ In these circumstances, modern theory typically implies that such employers are still pluralist but view conflict in the employment relationship as best managed using human-resources-type interventions.
- ² Sometimes this investment may merely be words of encouragement or acceptable treatment.
- ³ In the first issue discussed, the object of analysis is readily amenable to a closed research question which was previously identified as «*what are the elements over which employers and employees have misaligned interests?* »
- ⁴ Concerns in this context equate to the notion of interests.
- ⁵ A more elaborate view would be that employees differ with respect to the range and scope of elements that they want to control but that this difference is one of intensity. This would mean that, for a facet of a job affecting the employee who is doing that job, need for control will range from moderate to high – but will never be low.
- ⁶ Here we are distinguishing dedicated development concerns from general development concerns. Dedicated development enables one to do a specific job whereas a general development enables one to perform better in a range of jobs.
- ⁷ As opposed to being a framework for understanding the attitudes and strategic orientations of parties to the employment relationship.
- ⁸ Such as overall high employee development concerns and overall low employer control concerns.
- ⁹ This tenet is especially relevant in the second part of the article where it is proposed that, in contemporary work situations, it is not always present.
- ¹⁰ The act of arriving at work would be an example of compliance.
- ¹¹ Temporary work, like other forms of non-standard employment, shows peaks and troughs in demand which roughly match the economic cycle. In times of recession, such jobs are the first to be abolished. However, there is a long-term overall trend towards increased use of temporary workers.
- ¹² The item used for disaggregation is “*in five years time I would still like to be employed at McDonald's/the fast food industry*” (strongly agree....strongly disagree) recoded to a binary/dichotomous variable.
- ¹³ Based on response to survey item “*how long have you worked at McDonald's?*” recoded to a binary/dichotomous variable.

- ¹⁴ The analyses done to test hypotheses are mostly based on comparison of means. Although t-tests were carried out on these comparisons, to maintain the flow of the argument, these results are not reported. The testing of hypotheses via a comparison of means is not intended to be a detailed analysis but rather is intended to provide rudimentary evidence for the six-tenet time-based conceptualization.

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