

NON-STANDARD WORK ARRANGEMENTS IN HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATIONS

*Paul L. Nesbit, Macquarie University, 1 Talavera Rd, Sydney, 2109, Australia,
61-2-9850-9908, paul.nesbit@mq.edu.au*

ABSTRACT

One view of the use of non-standard work arrangement is that it provides a buffer that allows organisations to utilise more costly high performance work practices with core permanent employees. An alternate view is that high performance organisations may be less inclined to use non-standard workers since differences in work arrangements raises equity concerns. This paper reports on a study to explore these differing perspectives. Findings suggest that organisations with reputations for high-performance cultures have similar use of non-standard work arrangements to matched organisation thus the use of non-standard work arrangements, are likely to reflect strategic rather than motivational concerns.

INTRODUCTION

The employment relationship has undergone dramatic changes in recent years as organisations seek to confront an increasingly competitive environment brought about by the dynamics of globalisation and advances in technology. This paper focuses explicitly on the interplay of using work arrangements to enhance commitment and task flexibility of employees and the use of non-standard employment relationships. It investigates two perspectives. The “buffer” perspective suggests that high-performance work organisations are likely to use non-standard workers because they allow the firm to gain the benefits of numeric flexibility while also pursuing cost effectively the mobilisation of commitment among core employees. We would therefore expect to see high performance firms to be higher users of non-standard work arrangements than organisations with less attention to the issue of high performance. Another perspective is that the use of multiple employment relationships can be problematic for maximising value from employees and may destabilise the core.

To investigate these alternative perspectives this paper outlines a study that explores the interplay between high performance work cultures and the use of non-standard workers. Specifically, the study examines organisations in Australia with reputations for high performance cultures and their use of non-standard work arrangements. Using employer-of-choice organisations as a proxy for high-performance organisations, data on their use of part-time and casual/temporary work arrangements are compared with a group of organisations matched for size and industry. Details of the study are available from the author.