

# The Logic of Contingent Work and Overwork

## La lógica del trabajo eventual y trabajo excesivo

### La logique du travail temporaire et du surtemps

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#### Résumé de l'article

Dans cet essai, je fais un emprunt à la théorie institutionnelle pour soutenir que la logique d'un marché macro-social, associé à des changements structurels particuliers, est en train de façonner notre compréhension et notre expérience des tendances dans le monde du travail eu égard au travail en sus des heures régulières et au travail temporaire ou occasionnel. Ce dernier représente en général une forme d'emploi atypique qui est de courte période, instable et qui dépend des besoins changeants des employeurs (Kalleberg, 2000; Connelly et Gallagher, 2004). Le surtemps se traduit habituellement en termes de salariés travaillant au-delà de 40 heures par semaine (e.g., Bunting, 2004) dans des formes d'emplois standards ou non. Les deux aménagements de travail ont été conçus et analysés en termes de pressions économiques associées à la mobilité du capital et à la mondialisation (Becker et Gerhart, 1996), là où les pressions de la concurrence à laquelle les entreprises font face se sont produites sur le lieu du travail, contribuant ainsi à la montée du travail temporaire ou du surtemps. Encore que notre compréhension de ces tendances a été façonnée par ce cadrage économique, qui survient quand ces enjeux sont analysés à travers la lentille d'une logique macro-sociale.

Les raisonnements institutionnels sont faits de croyances, de normes et de valeurs qui guident la réflexion, les décisions et le comportement (Thornton et Ocasio, 2008; Greenwood et Hinings, 2006; Lounsbury, 2007; Reay et Hinings, 2005). Ces logiques peuvent entrer en conflit les unes avec les autres ou encore se contredirent et elles peuvent être envisagées selon une hiérarchie institutionnelle, où des institutions de second ordre et des raisonnements sont logés dans des institutions et des logiques de premier ordre. Dans les sociétés occidentales développées, les institutions macro-sociales et les logiques représentent le sommet de la hiérarchie institutionnelle. Friedland et Alford (1991) ont identifié les institutions de haut niveau de l'occident contemporain capitaliste comme étant le marché libre, l'état bureaucratique, la démocratie, la famille nucléaire et la religion judéo-chrétienne. Pour ma part, je vais plus loin en définissant la logique macro-sociale du marché comme une logique d'un marché capitaliste caractérisée par une vision économique néo-libérale. Une preuve abondante laisse croire que la logique macro-sociale du marché est inhérente à un large éventail de secteurs (par exemple, les publications, la justice, les soins de santé, etc.), ce qui signifie que des logiques de niveau secondaire finissent par trouver leur empreinte dans une logique macro-sociale du marché et perdent ainsi leur caractère distinctif. Je soutiens qu'une logique macro-sociale du marché a également été assimilée à un nombre d'enjeux au plan de l'emploi, incluant les tendances du travail temporaire et du surtemps.

Au même moment, les effets associés à ces deux tendances du travail sont façonnés par une convergence d'événements qui ont restructuré un environnement social plus vaste au cours des décennies récentes. Par exemple, l'effet du travail occasionnel et du travail en surtemps sur la personne se retrouve en grande partie dans le conflit travail-famille. Quand ces deux formes de travail ont pu dans le passé être conciliées avec des exigences familiales (par exemple, le soin des enfants, le soin des plus âgés, l'entretien du ménage et l'attention accordée aux relations sociales), ces dernières étaient accaparées par les femmes ne faisant pas partie de la main-d'œuvre active, alors qu'aujourd'hui les femmes participent en grand nombre au marché du travail. Cependant, ces types d'emploi continuent à être ainsi qualifiés comme si quelqu'un à la maison devait s'occuper de ce côté familial de la vie (Bailyn, Drago et Kochan, 2002), en dépit de l'augmentation du nombre de couples poursuivant une double carrière, des unions entre personnes qui doivent vivre séparément à cause de leur travail ou qui doivent effectuer un long trajet pour s'y rendre, et en dépit de la sous-traitance de certains travaux domestiques.

Et parce que les logiques macro-sociales en viennent à structurer nos définitions même des problèmes et des opportunités, une logique du marché qualifie des manières d'agir et des résultats de « bons » ou de « mauvais » à la lumière de croyances, de normes et de valeurs associées au concept de marché. En ce qui concerne le travail temporaire et le surtemps, d'une manière paradoxale, la logique du marché peut être retenue pour soutenir l'une ou l'autre de ces formes, là où le travail temporaire et le surtemps deviennent des problèmes organisationnels qui doivent trouver une solution ou encore des occasions qui doivent être saisies en tant qu'ils facilitent ou qu'ils empêchent la réalisation d'objectifs organisationnels. Par exemple, selon la logique du marché, le travail en surtemps peut être une de ces occasions : la production de biens ou de services peut être accrue tout en utilisant moins de ressources et il peut être moins onéreux pour une entreprise d'accroître les heures de travail de personnes à son emploi que d'engager du personnel additionnel. Encore que selon cette logique du marché, on s'attend aussi à ce qu'un salarié soit efficace et productif (un argument contre le surtemps puisque ce dernier peut contribuer au stress et à l'épuisement professionnel, ce qui en retour diminue l'efficacité et la productivité). En ce qui concerne le travail temporaire, selon la logique du marché, les pertes peuvent être minimisées (un argument en faveur du travail temporaire, qui permettrait d'éliminer une relâche des activités par un recours à une main-d'œuvre flexible, laquelle augmenterait la flexibilité de l'organisation et permettrait à cette dernière d'être concurrentielle dans un marché mondial). Également, quoique le conflit travail-famille puisse s'accroître avec le recours au travail temporaire et au surtemps, selon la logique du marché, il est typiquement perçu comme un problème individuel plutôt que de groupe ou d'unité, laissant aux travailleurs le soin de régler leurs propres problèmes.

Cependant, lorsque la logique du marché appliquée aux enjeux tels que le travail temporaire et le surtemps devient attrayante en termes d'hypothèses simplifiées, elle devient aussi problématique pour la même raison. Le fait d'encadrer ces tendances dans les paramètres d'une logique du marché fait en sorte qu'un glissement se produit : ce qui dans le passé prenait une valeur intrinsèque prend aujourd'hui une valeur extrinsèque; la logique du marché déplace les valeurs non mercantiles : ce qui auparavant était reconnu comme une fin en soi (par exemple, la santé des travailleurs) devient un moyen pour l'atteinte d'une nouvelle fin en termes d'avantage concurrentiel. Une logique du marché limite alors notre capacité de saisir, d'apprécier et d'analyser les effets du travail temporaire et du surtemps dans des termes qui ne renvoient pas au marché, là où justement se trouvent les effets les plus étendus. Tel que Kalleberg (1995 : 1211) le résume, « le danger... se présente quand des idées à caractère économique sont partagées sans faire l'objet d'une critique par des chercheurs; le point vue de l'économie ne fait pas seulement ajouter une perspective aux questions posées (notre recherche), mais encore il vient effectivement redéfinir ces questions... et ainsi supplante des questions posées auparavant par des chercheurs ».

# *The Logic of Contingent Work and Overwork*

FLORA STORMER

*In this article, I draw on institutional theory to propose that a macro-societal market logic is shaping our understanding of the workplace trends of contingent work and overwork. This logic, in combination with specific societal changes, affects how workers experience such trends. Yet paradoxically, the market logic can be used to both support and oppose the trends, resulting in a conceptual stalemate. Research implications are discussed.*

Labour trends that have captured the attention of researchers and the general public in recent years include the rise of contingent work (Connelly and Gallagher, 2004; Winson and Leach, 2002; Van Dyne and Ang, 1998), and the escalation of overwork (Bunting, 2004; Schor, 1991). Both trends have been framed and discussed in the context of economic pressures related to capital mobility and globalization (Becker and Gerhart, 1996); organizations have been perceived as experiencing increased competitive pressures due to external forces, and these competitive pressures have in turn been realized in the workplace, contributing to the rise of contingent work and overwork.

Yet our very understanding of contingent work and overwork is being shaped by this economic framing, which occurs when these trends are understood through the lens of a macro-societal market logic. Winson and Leach (2002: 22) note that in regards to contingent work, “the content of [the imperatives of competitiveness and efficiency, two characteristics of a market logic] is rarely examined which is what makes them crucial in shaping public discourse.” Moreover, Kalleberg (1995) suggests that

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when economic ideas are uncritically adopted by researchers, our research questions are effectively redefined.

At a basic level then, the adoption of a market logic in regards to contingent work and overwork has important consequences for how these trends are evaluated and addressed by researchers and policy makers, and for how workers themselves experience contingent work and overwork. In this paper, I use institutional theory to outline the general characteristics of a macro-societal market logic based on the concept of institutional logics. Second, I explore the concepts of contingent work and overwork, examining the changing context in which these trends are embedded. I conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of applying a market logic to the trends of contingent work and overwork.

### ***THEORETICAL CONTEXT***

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Institutional theory asks how institutions originate and change, and how institutions affect individual behaviour (Hall and Taylor, 1996). According to the theory, organizations become similar by following social rules in lieu of functional blueprints in order to be accepted as legitimate by others in the environment (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Deephouse, 1996). Institutions are linked to action through institutional logics—the cultural beliefs, norms, and values that guide cognition, decisions, and behaviour (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008; Greenwood and Hinings, 2006; Lounsbury, 2007; Reay and Hinings, 2005). Logics are similar to interpretive schemes, which map our experience of the world. Shared interpretive schemes draw people together, create commitment and a sense of belonging, and shape how problems are defined (Bartunek, 1984). Institutional logics, like interpretive schemes, involve shared fundamental assumptions about why things happen the way they do (Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood, 1980).

Each institution has a corresponding institutional logic, and these logics can compete with and/or contradict each other. Many different kinds and “sizes” of institutions and logics cover a multitude of behaviours and social rules. This range in what “counts” as an institution can be thought of as an institutional hierarchy, where lower-order institutions and logics are nested in higher-order institutions and logics. For advanced Western societies, macro-societal institutions and logics represent the top of the institutional hierarchy. That is, though institutions and their logics appear from micro-interpersonal to macro-societal levels of analysis (Dacin, Goodstein and Scott, 2002), logics ultimately stem from the higher-order institutional orders identified in Friedland and Alford’s (1991) inter-institutional system (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Friedland and Alford (1991) conceptualized

society as an inter-institutional system constructed through multiple institutional logics, defining institutions as “both supraorganizational patterns of activity by which individuals and organizations produce and reproduce their material subsistence and organize time and space [as well as] symbolic systems, ways of ordering reality, thereby rendering experience of time and space meaningful” (1991: 243). In other words, institutions restrict the means and ends of behaviour, giving actors their identities as well as vocabularies to explain their motives.

This hierarchical nature of institutions is revealed in organizational research, where lower-order institutions (such as organizational practices) are nested in higher-order institutions (organizations), which in turn are nested in even higher-order institutions (industries). In the same way, lower-order institutional logics are nested in successively higher-order logics. Lower-order institutions and logics are more amenable to change than higher-order institutions and logics because they are more accessible, circumscribed, and explicit; macro-societal institutions and logics at the top of the hierarchy tend to be so all-encompassing and taken for granted that they are almost invisible. Though these macro-societal institutions and logics represent fundamental cognitive categories and associated value sets based on relatively abstract ideas (the market, the family, etc.), they are accepted as basic realities in our daily lives. For example, we regularly participate in markets and count ourselves as members of families—yet we rarely ask *why* markets are structured as they are, or *why* we recreate the family structure from generation to generation. As Hegel noted, “Generally, the familiar, precisely because it is familiar, is not known.”

Friedland and Alford (1991) identified the top-level institutions or institutional orders of the contemporary capitalist West as the capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, the nuclear family, and the Christian religion. All other institutions and logics of the contemporary capitalist West are nested within these macro-societal institutional orders. Friedland and Alford (1991: 256) maintained that the macro-societal institutions are contradictory but interdependent, and reasoned that a key task of social analysis is to understand the contradictions between these macro-societal institutions and to “specify the conditions under which they shape organizational and individual action.”

A considerable number of organizational scholars are reporting broadly similar findings at the analytic level of organizational fields. (Fields exist one level of analysis down from the macro-societal level, and are “sets of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute an area of institutional life; key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 64-65). These fields take shape through

mutual awareness and interaction among actors in the field, which creates patterns of organizational hierarchy and alliance.) For example, in the U.S. publishing industry, Thornton (2004) documented a shift in publishing-house focus from being author-and-editor driven to being profit-driven. In the legal profession, Wallace (1999: 801) reported concern about the profit-driven focus associated with the practice of law, “characterized by a shift away from a focus of helping clients as a service profession with collegial relations among lawyers, to an emphasis on competition among lawyers, maximized billing of clients and, in short, making profit.” Cooper et al. (1996: 625) documented a shift among Canadian law firms from a Professional Partnership archetype to a Managerial Professional Business archetype, where the latter is “based on a set of values which are becoming organized into a coherent interpretive scheme about the professional service firm as a business.” In the health care sector, Ruef and Scott (1998) reported that the dominant logic in hospitals has shifted from “providing collective goods” to “profit maximization”, while in Alberta, Reay and Hinings (2005) reported a shift from “medical professionalism” to “business-like health care”. In the U.S. mutual fund industry, Lounsbury and Leblebici (2004: 68) explained that where the trustee logic valued “fiduciary responsibility and a conservative orientation towards wealth preservation” through personal service to shareholders, “...over time, this conceptualization of mutual funds as a service eroded and was replaced by the notion that they were products to be bought and sold in an anonymous marketplace.”

These broadly similar findings suggest that a macro-societal market logic is being assimilated across a wide range of organizational fields. Market logic assimilation occurs when institutional logics associated with lower levels of analysis (the organizational field, the organization, its units and its members) take on the flavour of the macro-societal logic of the market, losing their distinctiveness. Yet how assimilation plays out at different levels of analysis is specific to the institutional structures that exist at each level of analysis (e.g., Giaimo and Manow, 1999).

Friedland and Alford (1991) identified the macro-societal institution of the market in advanced Western societies as the *capitalist* market and its logic as *accumulation and the commodification of human activity*. Though competing perspectives on the characteristics of capitalism exist (two, for example, are Keynesian economics versus neoclassical economics), neoclassical economic theory is widely understood to be dominant in capitalist thought (Granovetter, 1985; Lee, 2004; Kalleberg, 1995). I therefore define the macro-societal logic of the market as a capitalist market logic characterized by a neoclassical economic perspective.

Neoclassical economic theory represents a set of ideas based largely on Adam Smith’s work in *The Wealth of Nations*. These ideas and

corresponding assumptions comprise a macro-societal market logic and have been expanded on by Perrow (1986) and Galbraith (1987) as follows: The individual, rather than the group, structure, or culture, is the unit of analysis. Individuals are motivated by self-interest, and following one's self-interest serves the common interest. Individuals try to rationally obtain the most of what they value in light of their self-interest (maximizing utility). The market consists of many small firms competing with each other for buyers. These small firms are unable to influence market prices. Buyers choose whether or not to enter or exit the market. Workers choose whether or not to work in the market. A buyer's choice of seller depends on the availability of high quality information about sellers and their products and/or services. A worker's choice of employer depends on the availability of high quality information about employers and their policies. The market system is regulated by competition among sellers. Prices for goods and services are set through competition. Because the market is regulated by competition, little government regulation is required. Both competition and the market system should be as widespread as possible (an argument for free trade). Both individuals and organizations value efficiency. Efficiency is realized through rising productivity (making more with less) and evidenced by rising profits. Market equilibrium (the balance between supply and demand) is achieved through maximum efficiency. Efficiency benefits society because few resources are wasted. Market relationships are impersonal, anonymous, and transactional; relationships that exist are those between buyers and sellers. Finally, the market has power; it—not people—sets wages and prices.

Having identified these broad characteristics of a macro-societal market logic, we can now explore contingent work and overwork in preparation for an examination of how a macro-societal market logic is being applied to these trends.

### ***CONTINGENT WORK AND OVERWORK***

In the twentieth century, standard work was understood to mean fulltime employment—work that continued indefinitely at an employer's place of business under an employer's direction (Kalleberg, 2000). In recent years, non-standard employment, which includes "contingent" or "fixed-term contract" work, has been gaining ground in North America, Europe and Asia. Still, an accepted definition of contingent work remains elusive. Kalleberg (2000: 354) related contingent work to short-term, unstable employment and acknowledged its first use by economist Audrey Freedman who used the term to refer to work arrangements that depended on employers' changing labour needs and that therefore lacked an employer-worker attachment.

Connelly and Gallagher (2004) identified four employment groupings that fit the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' definition of contingent work as "any job in which an individual does not have an explicit or implicit contract for long-term employment or one in which the minimum hours worked can vary in a nonsystematic manner": (1) temporary help workers from temporary staffing agencies, (2) independent contractors or freelance workers, (3) direct-hire temporary workers, and (4) seasonal workers.

In short, contingent work is not a homogenous concept. Its prevalence in the workplace correspondingly depends on which definition is referenced. For example, in Canada, the incidence of temporary work is much higher than it is in the U.S. (13 percent versus 4 percent). Canada also has a higher rate of involuntary part-time employment compared to its neighbour (26 percent versus 7 percent) (Brisebois, 2003). In early 1995, as few as 2.7 million and as many as 6 million U.S. workers were identified as contingent workers; these were more likely than non-contingent workers to be female, black, under 25 years of age, enrolled in school and employed in services and construction industries (Polivka, 1996). But despite this definitional ambiguity, Kalleberg (1995: 358) notes that "there is substantial agreement... that nonstandard work arrangements are associated with a lack of health insurance, pensions, and other fringe benefits. This is particularly problematic in the United States since employment is the main source of these benefits." Contingent work can also lead to a loss of overall income. In order to make up lost wages, individuals may take multiple jobs, foregoing time with family, friends, and the community. In a study of the effects of contingent work on rural communities, Winson and Leach (2002: 178) reported "real signs of social *disintegration*, a weakening of the social fabric of these individuals' lives" (emphasis in original).

The phenomenon of overwork also eludes conclusive definition, but is generally understood in terms of employees spending more than 40 hours per week on the job (Bunting, 2004) regardless of whether those hours are related to standard or non-standard employment. Americans work more hours annually than Canadians (1,821 versus 1,790 hours), and are more likely to work over 40 hours per week (77 percent versus 54 percent). While some workers undoubtedly welcome the opportunity to work more, these circumstances may not be entirely desirable; only 47 percent of U.S. workers and 40 percent of Canadian workers report being "very satisfied" with working conditions in their main paid job (Brisebois, 2003). In addition, a report on job quality indicators for the U.S., Canada, and 15 European countries revealed that North American workers report the highest incidence of working at a high speed "all the time", which can be related to stress and burnout (Brisebois, 2003).

When considered in a societal context, it becomes clear that the impact of both contingent work and overwork is shaped by a confluence of events that has restructured the larger social environment over the past few decades. The effects of contingent work and overwork on individuals are at least partially realized in work/family conflict, which occurs when work demands make it difficult to meet home demands or vice versa. Home demands encompass everything from childcare to eldercare, attention to household tasks, and the maintenance of friendships and spousal relationships. Overloaded workers who put work ahead of family often face consequences at home, reporting lower family satisfaction and a higher tendency to miss family activities because of work. This work-to-family conflict is more frequently experienced by men, and these workers are more likely to say that they have had fewer children or have remained childless because of work demands (Duxbury and Higgins, 2001). These workers also spend significantly less time in activities linked with positive parenting. On the other hand, family-to-work conflict, which occurs when family demands such as a sick child or parent interfere with work demands, is more commonly experienced by women (Duxbury and Higgins, 2001).

In past decades, the impacts of contingent work and overwork may have been easier to absorb in that pressing domestic tasks tended to be met by women who were not in the workforce. Today, however, women participate in the workforce in record numbers. In 1966, 35 percent of married women in the U.S. worked for pay; by 1994, that figure had risen to 61 percent. Over the same period, the workforce participation rate for married women with children rose from 21 to 60 percent (Winkler, 1998), and as of 2000, over 75 percent of U.S. mothers with children (married or not) were part of the paid labour force (Council of Economic Advisors, 2000). Regardless of marital status, in late 2002, 56 percent of American women were employed (Council of Economic Advisors, 2003). Of those women employed in 1998, 72 percent were working fulltime (Cohen and Bianchi, 1999); quality part-time jobs can be rare, and good wages, benefits and pensions are generally associated with fulltime positions. What's more, as of mid 2001, almost 6 percent of all American workers held more than one job (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

With more women in the workforce, it makes sense that working parents have also become more common. From 1970 to 1993, dual-earner couples in the U.S. rose from 39 percent to 61 percent of all married couples (Winkler, 1998). The percentage of U.S. children living with both parents working fulltime year round has almost doubled, rising from 20 percent to 37 percent (Johnson, 2000). And in 2000, single-parent families accounted for 10 percent of all U.S. households (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002). Simply put, the traditional breadwinner/homemaker model of the family,



where the husband works outside the home and the wife works without pay inside the home now accounts for less than a quarter of American families (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002). Furthermore, as of 1997, it was estimated that over 22 million U.S. households were involved in providing unpaid care to people aged 50 or more; by the year 2007, as many as 39 million households could be providing such care (AARP, 1997). Yet though most workers have family responsibilities (regardless of whether or not they have children), jobs continue to be designed as though someone is still at home to look after the domestic side of life (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002). Today, that simply isn't the case.

Though work/family conflict can be expected to increase with overwork, in the U.S. such conflict continues to be viewed as more of an individual problem than an organizational one. This is so despite the fact that career paths are still largely aimed toward the worker who is able to devote forty uninterrupted years to a career (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002). In line with this viewpoint, many companies simply do not take a stance on work-family issues. In 1995, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that across all medium and large public companies, any type of flexible workplace arrangement was available to only 2 percent of workers (Meyer, Mukerjee and Sestero, 2001). In 1995–96, private companies fared only slightly better, offering childcare benefits to 4 percent of employees, whether through employer-managed facilities on or off the worksite, or by making direct payments to other care providers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998).

Organizations that do offer family-friendly policies tend to uphold one of two broad types. The first makes it easier for employees to experience fewer interruptions at work. Here, an employer might provide daycare, meals, or dry-cleaning services. The second style of family-friendly policy makes it easier for an employee to control work hours to accommodate family responsibilities. Here, workers might be allowed to telecommute, create flexible schedules, or take more sick days with children (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002). Yet several studies show that employees of companies with family-friendly policies often fail to make use of the benefits available to them (Kossek, Noe and DeMarr, 1999). Some surmise that a given organizational culture may not be family-friendly *in spite of* official corporate policy, as the ideal corporate worker is still thought of as someone who has uninterrupted hours available for work—more than fulltime hours in some cases. In these situations, employees may forgo family-friendly policies due to fears of reprisal, and evidence suggests these fears may be justified. Judiesch and Lyness (1999) found that U.S. workers who took family and medical leaves received fewer promotions and smaller wage increases in following years. In addition, a study conducted by the

Women's Bar Association of Boston found that "while over 90 percent of the leading firms in the area allowed associates and partners to work part time, fewer than 4 percent have chosen to do so and among those who do, turnover is higher and about one-third report their careers have suffered for having taken up this option" (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002: 19).

Furthermore, some workers may not even realize what their options are. For example, the Family and Medical Leave Act signed by President Clinton in 1993 mandated that corporations with 50 or more employees provide 12 weeks of unpaid leave to workers for family caregiving purposes. Yet according to Department of Labor reports, six years after the act was passed, over 40 percent of employees didn't even know the act existed (Bailyn, Drago and Kochan, 2002). Others may be unable to take up those options; according to the International Labour Organization, 64 percent of U.S. employees with family responsibilities that required time off did not take unpaid leave because they couldn't afford to do so (ILO, 2003).

If work/family issues are considered an individual problem rather than an organizational or social one, what are workers doing on their own initiative to deal with conflict caused by contingent work and overwork? Reports suggest that some dual-earner couples choose to become "neotraditional": a working man maintains his career path while a working woman cuts back her hours and aspirations to devote more time to household maintenance and childcare (Moen and Yu, 2000). Becker and Moen (1999) reported that scaling back from a 60-plus hour managerial or professional workweek was often combined with scaling back in other areas of life: respondents reduced social obligations and community work, lowered personal expectations for housework, and limited the size of their families. Among all of the reasons people give for having fewer children, including religion, ideology and lifestyle preference (Paul, 2001), one of them continues to be "time famine" (Hochschild, 1997), particularly in single parent and dual-earner families. Moreover, the prime years of career building overlap the prime years of childbearing. Becker and Moen (1999) report, "A language of time management is being applied to the home. There is a professionalization of the discourse surrounding family life. The ideal family, respondents told us, is one of teamwork, partnership, and fairness where both partners can be challenged and fulfilled. This is remarkably similar to the way in which these managers and professionals talk about their work, emphasizing many of the same aspects that they value in their careers."

Those reluctant to scale back career aspirations may join the growing ranks of couples in commuter marriages, where partners live apart during the week to pursue careers in different cities, electing to maintain their relationships via telephone or through weekend flights "home". Dual-earner couples that find work in the same city might outsource domestic jobs such

as childcare, housecleaning, yard work and tax preparation in order to maintain work schedules, as almost all dual-earner respondents who split housework and childcare equally reported limited career opportunities for both parties (Deutsch, 1999).

Given these larger contextual changes in the social environment that influence workers' experience of contingent work and overwork, we can now examine what characteristics of a market logic are implicit in how these workplace trends are understood and evaluated.

### ***APPLYING A MARKET LOGIC TO CONTINGENT WORK AND OVERWORK***

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Macro-societal logics structure our definitions of problems and opportunities. A market logic defines problems or opportunities, and “good” and “bad” behaviour in light of its values and assumptions. As it turns out, a market logic is often invoked in issues related to employment. For example, the development of favourable psychological work environments is encouraged—not for mental health reasons, but because a positive psychological work environment results in superior organizational performance (Gelade and Ivery, 2003). Work/family programs are introduced in organizations—not in an attempt to address work/family conflict but in an attempt to increase organizational commitment in high performance workplaces (Osterman, 1995). Worker wellness programs are established—not because wellness is a desirable end in itself, but because employer medicare costs must be reduced (Green and Baker, 1991). The very concept of health, commonly held to have intrinsic value (“without your health you haven’t got anything”) has itself been re-equated to productivity, where healthy workers are productive workers; researchers in this area seek answers to such questions as “What strategic interventions result in changes in costs? What is the time period before savings can be expected... What is the optimal method of resource allocation for maximum results?” (Edington, 2001: 348).

In regards to contingent work and overwork, a market logic can paradoxically be used to argue either for or against each trend, resulting in a conceptual stalemate. Under a market logic, contingent work and overwork are organizational problems to be solved or opportunities to be seized only insofar as they prevent or permit organizational goals. Under a market logic, overwork is potentially an opportunity: more output can be realized from less input, and it can be less expensive for an organization to increase the working hours of current employees than to hire additional ones. Yet under a market logic, an employee is also expected to be efficient and productive (an argument *against* overwork since overwork can contribute to stress and

burnout, which in turn decreases organizational efficiency and productivity). In regards to contingent work, under a market logic waste should be minimized (an argument *for* contingent work, where slack is eliminated via a flexible labour force, as organizations are more flexible the less tied they are to a labour force; since labour represents a major organizational cost, that flexibility allows organizations to remain competitive in a global context.) A market logic therefore encourages the use of contingent workers as downsizing and restructuring eliminate standard jobs while presenting increased flexibility as an opportunity for employees; this is generally illustrative of conditions in the U.S. (Van Dyne and Ang, 1998).

Simply put, a market logic assimilates traditionally non-market values (mental health, work/family balance, worker wellness, employee health, etc.) in market terms, making what was once intrinsically valued a means to an end of competitive advantage. But a market logic is a double-edged sword: if we can't make a market logic case for an important employment issue, does the issue become invisible? Should we not, for example, encourage mentally healthy work environments because of the intrinsic benefits of mental health, regardless of whether or not such an environment can be related to better organizational performance? Put another way, are mentally *unhealthy* work environments that result in superior organizational performance justified? Do any values other than those encompassed by a market logic supersede that logic?

Finally, a market logic applied to employment issues such as contingent work and overwork, while attractive in terms of simplified assumptions, is problematic for the same reason. Neoclassical economic theory concentrates on what should be rather than what is and has been criticized for failing to approximate reality (Hosseini, 1990). Granovetter (1985) suggested that a more solid economic stance would incorporate three classic sociological assumptions: (1) the pursuit of economic goals tends to be accompanied by the pursuit of non-economic goals; (2) economic action, similar to all action, is socially situated and embedded in a network of personal relations; and (3) economic institutions are not inevitable, but are socially constructed. Yet in spite of the benefits of a more solid economic stance, at the same time a "reliance on economics...directs attention away from questions about meaning, perceptions, legitimacy, power, and influence" (Kalleberg, 1995)—questions that have traditionally been of concern to researchers.

Under a market logic, the trends of overwork and contingent work are defined within the framework of that logic—as individual rather than structural problems, and as problems of means rather than ends. Though choices made in the workplace reverberate through lives outside the workplace, a market logic can only see the individual *as an individual*—not as a member of a group. As such, a market logic views non-economic

impacts associated with contingent work and overwork as problems to be solved by that individual rather than as structural problems to be addressed through how we choose to organize ourselves—even though a firm’s human resource policies directly shape workers’ experience of contingent work and overwork as managers decide how to structure employment. A market logic therefore limits our ability to grasp, evaluate and discuss the impact of contingent work and overwork in non-market terms, which is exactly where the largest impacts may lie. Framing such issues in market logic terms shifts what was once intrinsically valued to something extrinsically valued; a market logic supplants other institutional logics as what was once recognized as an end in itself becomes a means to a new end. Though an explanation of how that process occurs is beyond the scope of this article, a market logic leads us to increasingly argue that what we value is important to the extent that it supports market logic values such as competitiveness, efficiency or productivity. And as Kalleberg (1995: 1211) summarizes, “The danger...is that when economic ideas are adopted uncritically by [researchers], the economic insights do not simply add a perspective to [our research] questions, but effectively redefine those questions...and thereby supplant questions previously addressed by [researchers].”

### CONCLUSION

Contingent work and overwork are recognized as new realities of the workplace. These trends have typically been discussed in the context of increased capital mobility, amplified competitive pressures, and globalization—in short, couched within the framework of a macro-societal market logic. Yet the impacts of contingent work and overwork are felt outside the boundaries of a market logic, affected in part by the rise of women in the workforce, dual-career couples, the prevalence of eldercare, and a market logic insistence on the individual rather than the group which makes work/family conflict an individual problem rather than a structural one.

In evaluating the trends of contingent work and overwork, a market logic frames what is defined as a problem or an opportunity from a market perspective. In a market context, both trends can be understood as problems or opportunities, resulting in a conceptual stalemate. Moreover, by using a market logic to frame and discuss contingent work and overwork, we make simplified assumptions about a complex reality. Yet these assumptions appear to shape much current analyses of work and organizations. In sum, economic insights are redefining the questions traditionally posed by researchers (Kalleberg, 1995).

In their research on contingent work, Winson and Leach (2002) call for scholars to deconstruct the imperatives of competitiveness and efficiency

in order to better examine how public discourse around workplace issues is shaped; this article is intended to make an initial contribution in that regard. Future research might attempt to verify this theoretical framework by empirically examining how the discourse surrounding contingent work and overwork has changed over time, and what the trends of contingent work and overwork look like outside of a market logic in terms of equality, equity and power, where workers are understood as group members with group responsibilities that cannot be ignored, and where the structural aspects of such trends are examined. Simply put, future research might return to a more sociologically-based and less economically-based approach to issues of the workplace.

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