NAVIGATING THE INSIDER-OUTSIDER DIVIDE:
UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES OF CONTRACT
WORKERS

By

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ABSTRACT

CHELSEA BEVERIDGE. Navigating the Insider-Outsider Divide: Understanding the Socialization Experiences of Contract Workers. (Under the direction of DR. LORIL GOSSETT)

Contractors have unique employment arrangements, but previous research has often grouped them into samples with other contingent workers. As such, research specific to contract workers is relatively sparse and focused on This dissertation focused upon contract workers and the ways in which this type of employment may differ from other contingent and permanent staffing arrangements. Using organizational socialization as a theoretical framework, this project sought to understand how contractors make sense of their experiences and organizational identity within the contemporary work environment. Using a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 contractors. The results suggest contractors should be differentiated from standard employees as well as other contingent workers in both research and practice. Even within contract arrangements, important nuances should be recognized and considered related to terminology, independent or agency roles, part-time or full-time work, and other important demographics. Further, the socialization experiences of contractors may be like that of full-time employees, but the most important features of their experiences are those that are unique. Specifically, contractors' socialization is influenced by its purpose, speed, content, sources, and their previous professional socialization. The results have important implications for questioning and extending socialization theory as well as informing the management and socialization of contract workers.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In the early to mid-twentieth century, the traditional career reigned supreme. For many, it was not uncommon to spend one's entire career in a single organization (e.g., the "Organization Man" – Whyte, 1956), and for the organization to provide reasonable security, commitment, and protection. In the 1970s and 1980s, organizations faced a period of growing complexity – characterized by growing competition, expanding business horizons through globalization, more rapid advances in technology (e.g., computers), and a changing workforce. Organizational leaders reacted with mergers, downsizing, and flattening hierarchies (Baruch, 2001). Companies became increasingly concerned with flexibility – the ability to react to organizational and human capital needs with agility and speed – and the core-periphery staffing model (e.g., organizational theory – Thompson, 1967) emerged (see *Figure 1*). This model portrays an organization's structure as consisting of a central and permanent group of necessary, skilled workers (the "core") and a halo of nonstandard, low-skilled, and expendable workers (the "periphery"). Thus, the contingent workforce expanded greatly and the roles of temporary, part-time, and contract workers became more commonplace in organizations.

Organizations and their employees have been impacted by the drastic alterations to the labor market, marked by constant, rapid changes spurred by global competition, technological advancements, and changing markets (Callea, Urbini, Ingusci, & Chirumbolo, 2016; Marković, 2008; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). Uncertainty, pressure

for greater profits, slow economic growth, unemployment, workforce demographics, and new labor laws have caused employers difficulty with reducing costs and adhering to regulations (Cappelli et al., 1997; Lee, 1996). Consequently, there has been strong interest from academics and the popular press in flexibility and new work arrangements.
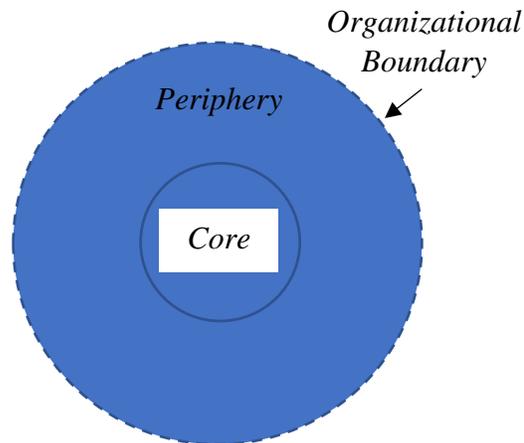
Figure 1. The Core-Periphery Model

1.1 The Flexibility Debate

Despite the prevalence of flexibility in organizations and its popularity among business leaders, scholars have debated the pros and cons of flexible organizations for years. In part, this debate may be fueled by the multiple definitions of "flexibility" (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017), and the inconsistent findings across flexible work research (e.g., satisfaction, performance). A variety of processes, experiences, and arrangements fit under the umbrella of flexibility, ranging from the macro-economic (i.e., institutional and regulatory changes – Kalleberg, 2011), to the micro (i.e., changes to the timing, scheduling, location, and status of employment – Sweet, Bessen, & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2014). Casey, Keep, and Mayhew (1999) present a typology of labor flexibility, defining

four types of microeconomic labor flexibility: numerical/external, functional/internal, working time/temporal, and pay/financial. *Numerical flexibility* entails the organization's ability to vary the size of its workforce quickly and easily (e.g., outsourcing, contingent workers) (*ibid*). *Functional flexibility*, on the other hand, involves the ability to move employees between tasks, projects, and jobs within a single organization (e.g., team work, job rotation – *ibid*). *Flexibility of working time* involves the ability to adjust the hours during which employees work (e.g., flexi-time, part-time, overtime – *ibid*), and finally, *pay flexibility* is the ability to adjust pay based on performance and often includes the removal of fixed pay (e.g., bonuses, performance-based pay – *ibid*). Importantly, organizations may use pay flexibility not only to match employment costs to external supply and demand, but also to support the use of numerical or functional flexibility through altered pay systems (Atkinson, 1984). The focus of the proposed study is on *numerical flexibility* (e.g., De Cuyper et al., 2008; Kalleberg, 2000).

For individuals, flexible work is an option for the retired (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2010; Atkinson & Sandiford, 2016), and can offer entry into a difficult labor market for the young (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017). Flexibility enables employees to control their work time, location of work, or schedule, which can lead to higher commitment and increased retention (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2010), greater motivation and performance among employees (Eaton, 2003; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), and helps employees adapt to workplace demands (Bernhardt & Krause, 2014). Finally, flexibility has been associated with economic benefits, including lower rates of unemployment through more job availability during times of labor market recession

(DiTella & MacCulloch, 1998), high financial growth (Ghosh, Willinger, & Ghosh, 2009), and greater firm performance (Lepak, Takeuchi, & Snell, 2003; Ortega, 2009).

Scholars critical of flexible work practices have largely focused on issues of insecurity, underemployment, and risk faced by workers in these arrangements. Numerical flexibility may be more beneficial to employers and may even harm certain demographic groups (Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). Further, flexibility in organizations can create rigidities and may be unsustainable when used beyond the short-term (Bryson & Blackwell, 2006; Geary, 1992; Walby, 1989). However, a more neutral point of view does exist, such that the effects of flexibility are viewed as a complex and context-dependent phenomenon, with both pros and cons.

As a consequence of organizational and labor market changes, focus has moved from life-long employment in a single organization toward sustained employment through continual, lateral movements across jobs and organizations. Traditionally, careers were defined by several key components: advancement, professional status, and stability (Greenhaus et al., 2000). Contemporary careers may not include these features, often featuring more piecemeal career paths, and greater movement between roles, organizations, and professions. As a result of changes to employment structures, boundaries, and numerical flexibility, nonstandard workers now play a vital role in the labor market.

1.2 Nonstandard Work

Nonstandard work is an umbrella term for many types of employment arrangements, including workers designated as temporary agency workers, direct-hire temporaries, part-timers, seasonal, on-call, consultants, and contractors (Wiens-Tuers &

Hill, 2002). To add to the complexity, "nonstandard work" has been called by many names: nonstandard employment relations (Casey, 1991; Goldthorpe, 1984; Green et al, 1993; Kalleberg et al., 2000), alternative work arrangements (Polivka, 1996; Sherer, 1996), disposable work (Gordon, 1996), nontraditional employment relations (Ferber & Waldfogel, 1998), flexible staffing arrangements (Abraham, 1988; Houseman, 1997), flexible working practices (Brewster et al., 1997), atypical employment (Cordova, 1986; De Grip et al., 1997; Delsen, 1995), vagrant or peripheral employment (Summers, 1997), vulnerable work (Tregaskis et al., 1998), precarious employment (Treu, 1992), and new forms of employment (Bronstein, 1991).

In addition to the many terms for nonstandard work, there are also multiple definitions. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics characterizes nonstandard employment 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" (Polivka & Nardone, 1989, p.11). More simplistically, other scholars (e.g., Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000) have defined nonstandard work as anything that is not traditional, full-time employment. Standard work involves an employee working on-site, under management's full control, at a single organization, and is based on the expectation of continuous employment (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000); any employment that does not fit these categories is considered nonstandard (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003).

As changes have occurred in the labor market and workforce composition, workers have increasingly used nonstandard arrangements to suit their career and lifestyle needs for balance, autonomy, and pursuit of personal passions outside their

traditional jobs (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007). Older workers and workers with dependents have especially benefited from these new employment arrangements (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). Further, the increase of women entering and men leaving the workforce has heightened demands for variable scheduling and maternity/paternity leave (Litano & Major, 2016; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002).

1.3 New Employment Arrangements

In addition, terms such as "boundaryless" careers "protean" careers, "freelancer," and more recently, "gig economy" and "uberization" have emerged to redefine what people consider work in the twenty-first century (see *Appendix A* for terminology and definitions). Daniel Pink's *Free Agent Nation* (2001) lauded the new era of work, in which the "Organization Man" was disappearing to be replaced by a workforce of "Free Agents." He writes:

> They are free from the bonds of a large institution, and agents of their own
> fortunes. They are the new archetypes of work in America. Today, in the shadow
> of another economic boom, America's new economic emblem is the footloose,
> independent worker – the tech-savvy, self-reliant, path-charting micropreneur.
> (Pink, 2001, p. 10-11)

As Pink (2001), and others (e.g., Mallon & Duberley, 2000; Smith, 2001) saw it, contingent work was the way of the future. Some even claimed the traditional "career is dead" (Hall, 1996, p.15), and those workers who had the chutzpah to pursue their own paths were going to have a bright future.

Today a term often used for such employment arrangements is *contingent workers* – defined as "people who do not expect their jobs to last or who reported that their jobs are temporary. They do not have an implicit or explicit contract for ongoing employment" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, as cited in Bernasek & Kinnear, 1999). Contingent work contains multiple forms, including temporary workers, seasonal workers, and contractors – the focal group in the proposed research project.

Although research has since portrayed a much more complicated array of contingent worker experiences, attitudes, attributes, and career paths, Pink correctly predicted that the presence of free agents (also referred to as independent contractors or freelancers) would rise in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005), independent contractors represented 7.4% of total employment (10.3 million), on-call workers represented 1.8% of total employment (2.5 million), temporary help agency workers represented 0.9% of total employment (1.2 million), and contract agency workers represented 0.6% of total employment (813,000 workers). Together, contingent workers equaled 10.7% of total employment for that year.

Particularly as the contingent workforce has continued to grow, work itself has become more fluid and inconsistent (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; King, 2004), and organizations require increasingly agile talent (Hesketh & Neal, 1999; van den Beukel & Molleman, 1998), understanding how to socialize, support, develop, attract, engage, and generally manage these workers will be an ever-present challenge for all organizations. In seeking to manage contingent workers, research and practice have largely relied on best practices and theories developed based on the standard workforce; however, it is possible

that a different type of worker may have a different employment experience, which these practices, models, and theories may or may not fully capture.

The proposed study seeks to understand the expectations, experiences, and needs of a specific group of contingent workers – contractors – as they navigate their relationships with different organizations and pursue unique career paths. By focusing on how contractors perceive and navigate their relationships with organizations, we can begin to better understand how to manage and support this growing segment of the workforce. As noted above, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other research outlets consider contractors to be a distinct sub-set within the larger contingent labor force. However, we have only limited knowledge about the distinct nature and experiences of employment in this context. Additional research is needed to provide conceptual and theoretical clarity for understanding the experiences of contractors, and to provide scholars and practitioners with the information and tools necessary to inform practice.

To that end, this dissertation will focus upon contract workers and the ways in which this type of employment may differ from other contingent and permanent staffing arrangements. Using organizational socialization as a theoretical framework, this project seeks to understand how contractors make sense of their experiences and organizational identity within the contemporary work environment. The results of this study may inform both research (e.g., new models and theories, important relationships to test), and practice (e.g., onboarding, employability) for contract workers.

1.4 Organization of Dissertation Proposal

Chapter one provides an overview of the research project, to be described in more detail in later chapters. This section presents the rationale for conducting the proposed study, the pri*mary* research focus, and potential contributions to theory and practice.

Chapter two provides a review of the contract worker literature grounding this research proposal. It describes the nature and prevalence of contingent labor arrangements, defines and contrasts multiple forms of contingent work, and discusses the research issues of central concern to contract workers.

Chapter three situates contractors in the theoretical framework of assimilation and socialization. It highlights key aspects of organizational socialization theory and explains how these issues are particularly relevant to the study of contractors. The section concludes with the proposition of the guiding research question.

Chapter four offers a description of the study's research methodology. This section identifies the project's research participants, recruitment tactics, data collection materials, and strategies for data analysis. The recruitment documents, interview guide, and consent form are provided in Appendices C-E.

Chapter five provides a detailed sum*mary* of the results. Themes are provided to answer each part of the research question and focus on defining contract workers and understanding their socialization experiences.

Chapter six discusses the importance and implications of the results for research and practice. Further, it acknowledges limitations of the project and poses ideas for future research.

CHAPTER II: CONTRACTOR LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the breadth of arrangements and experiences within contingent work, the proposed research project will focus on one type of worker: contractors. Prior to providing an in-depth review, two other forms of contingent work will be briefly reviewed to provide context and comparison for contract working arrangements within the broader contingent literature: temporary workers and seasonal workers. For each type of contingent worker, the following will be provided: a definition and demographic description, organizational reasons for use, individual reasons for choosing the arrangement, and a discussion of employment experiences (e.g., time, motivation, relationships). The discussions for temporary and seasonal workers will be brief and the contractor discussion will be more in-depth.

2.1 The Rise of the Contingent Worker

In 1985, Audrey Freedman coined the term "contingent work" at a conference on employment security to describe "work arrangements that were conditional on employers' needs for labor and thus lacked an attachment between employer and worker" (Freedman, 1996 as cited in Kalleberg, 2000, p.354). Contingent work is characterized as short-term, unstable, lacking long-term commitment, and variable (e.g., hours worked) (Polivka & Nardone, 1989). Although the term contingent work has been used interchangeably with nonstandard work (e.g., Belous, 1989; Blank, 1998), they are in fact

two distinct work types, as nonstandard work may include security and does not necessitate temporal features (Kalleberg, 2000; Kalleberg et al., 1997).

In the United States and Europe, the growth of contingent workers has been vast in recent decades, spurred on by employers' needs (De Grip et al., 1997), workers' desires (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988), and third parties (e.g., agencies) (Ofstead, 1999). In fact, alternative work arrangements were the source of all employment growth in the U.S. from 2005 to 2015 (Katz & Krueger, 2016). According to Hall (2006), the pri*mary* reasons for contingent worker use are numerical flexibility, reduction in costs, recruitment and selection, access to specific skills, and risk management. While some organizations use contingent workers as a quick-fix, many use contingents in their competitive strategies (Atkinson, 1985; Burgess & Connell, 2006; Hunter & MacInnes, 1991).

Types of Contingent Work

Importantly, contingent employment comes in many forms. These workers are driven by a multitude of motivations and are employed by varying agencies and companies, resulting in a diversity of experiences and attitudes (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003; Hall, 2006). Researchers (e.g., Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Gallagher, 2002) have generally agreed there are four types of contingent work arrangements: temporary agency workers, direct-hire temporary workers, seasonal workers (e.g., resorts, tourism), and independent contractors or freelancers (see *Figure 2,* or *Appendix A* for detailed terminology and definitions). Finegold, Levenson, and Van Buren (2005) depict contingent work as a form of "medieval guild," wherein workers can develop and be paid for a specialized skillset through a series of jobs at different organizations.

Notably, time is an important factor across all types contingent work. Ballard and Gossett (2007) present a typology of nonstandard work relationships which examines the intersection of membership negotiation (Permanent – Temporary) and activity coordination (Flexible – Fixed). In this typology, standard workers are classified as "real" members, while contingent workers are classified as "guest" members (Ballard & Gossett, 2007). This classification demonstrates both the peripheral status of contingent workers, as well as the vital importance of time to their ongoing employment and their organizational memberships. From this, one might question how organizations consider their temporally-dependent workers in terms of management practices, as well as how the temporal elements of membership shape contingent workers' approaches to ongoing employment, performance, identification, and so on.

Nonstandard Workers		**Contractors** (Independent or Agency)
Consultants	**Contingent Workers**	**Temporary workers** (Direct Hire or Agency)
Volunteers	Self-employed	**Seasonal workers**
Part-time workers		
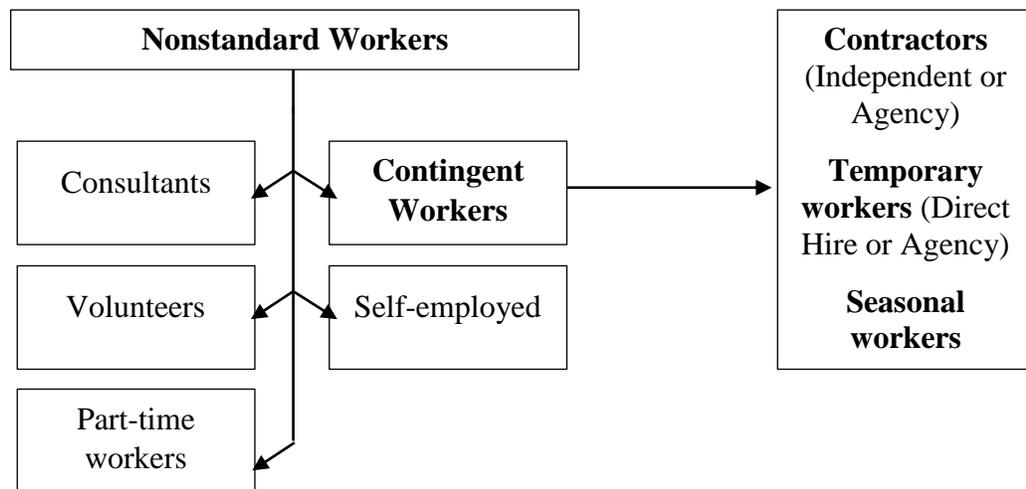
Figure 2. Types of Nonstandard Workers

With the continued growth of the contingent workforce, researchers have noted many reasons for their use, as well as related trends. However, before moving into a more

detailed discussion of key issues in contingent work research, it is important to highlight

the rampant issue with terminology in this research area. Despite the fact that

"contingent" is an umbrella term for distinct types of workers, researchers often treat

workers as synonymous within their samples. See *Appendix A* for a list of work

arrangement terminology and definitions.

Prevalence and Organizational Reasons for Contingent Worker Use

In the past few decades, challenges have emerged with the contingent workforce

due to labor union interest, equal employment opportunity laws, expanded legislative

protection, stricter limitations on the use and classification of independent contractors,

and broader use of codes of conduct for temporary agencies (Allan, 2002). The result is

increased worker costs, greater liability concerns, legal guidelines that may discourage

employers, and promotion of workers receiving higher wages and more benefits (Allan,

2002). These trends have changed how both workers and organizations navigate

contingent employment arrangements.

Major factors driving contingent worker use include cyclical seasonal demands,

filling roles for special projects, and covering for absent permanent employees (e.g.,

maternity leave, sick leave; Atkinson et al., 1996; Cully et al., 1999; Davis-Blake & Uzzi,

1993; Houseman, 1997; McGregor & Sproull, 1992). Organizational size can also

influence contingent worker employment. For instance, larger, global organizations are

more likely to employ contingent workers, and hire independent contractors over

temporary workers, than smaller organizations (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Forde &

Slater, 2006). Technology can also be an important feature as organizations with greater

levels of technological innovation are more likely to use contingent labor as part of a dual

labor strategy (Coutrot, 2000). Finally, organizations may use contingent labor because they are unable to change permanent staffing levels, they need a highly skilled core workforce and a disposable contingent workforce as support (Coutrot, 2000), or in an effort to facilitate other forms of flexibility (Atkinson, 1985). In some situations, organizations may hire the same workers on multiple occasions (e.g., seasonal workers, contractors) (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). In summary, organizations can be strategic about which types of workers they use based on their fluctuating strategic, operational, and economic needs (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003).

Although the organizational benefits of contingent workers may be obvious (e.g., flexibility, reduction in costs), organizations and workers may face disadvantages through these employment arrangements. Organizations may suffer in the long-term because of workers' learning curves (Allan, 2002; Stratman, Roth, & Gilland, 2004), investments in training (Allan, 2002), additional managerial workloads (e.g., adjusting headcount based on demand) (Henricks, 1997), and leaking private knowledge to external sources (Kalleberg, 2000). Contingent workers are often used to reduce employment-related expenses yet hiring contingent workers may not always reduce labor costs. In fact, contingent workers may have higher wages and cause financial loss through lost productivity while they are learning the job (Allan, 2002; Kandel & Pearson, 2001; Stratman et al., 2004). The risks may also be due to worker characteristics as they are more likely to be young, inexperienced, and less trained (Kalleberg, 2000). This varies by worker type, however, as contractors skew older (81% over age 35) and more educated (36% obtained at least a bachelor's degree) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). A final

issue lies in the inability or disinterest of management to adopt structures for reducing risk (Kalleberg, 2000) and develop effective, contingent-specific management practices.

Some scholars (e.g., Van Dyne & Ang, 1998) have suggested that contingent work is often pursued involuntarily, and many workers would prefer permanent employment. Booth, Francesconi, and Frank (2002) analyzed data from the British Household Panel Survey and found support for the perception that temporary jobs are undesirable, including lower levels of job satisfaction, less training, and poorer pay checks. Yet they also found support for fixed-term contracts acting as "stepping stones" to full-time, permanent jobs (Booth, Francesconi & Frank, 2002). Their findings suggest an important takeaway: different types of work arrangements lead to varying experiences and outcomes (Jos, 2006). Nevertheless, research and practice often do not treat different worker types differently or make assumptions without relevant evidence.

Why Enter Contingent Arrangements

While organizations' motivations for entering flexible arrangements are numerous, contingent workers also have varying reasons for entering flexible work arrangements. The workforce includes people working contingently out of necessity (Golden, 1996), and workers with a preference for temporary work (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2016). Many of the same factors driving organizations' decisions to seek numerical flexibility – technology, competition, the knowledge economy – have also encouraged more professional, managerial, and highly-skilled workers to seek contingent employment (Albert & Bradley, 1997; Leadbeater, 2000).

In fact, a "push/pull" framework has been developed and analyzed by scholars seeking to understand how workers get pushed into contingent employment or feel the

pull and enter willingly (e.g., Cohen & Bianchi, 1999; Golden & Applebaum, 1992; Golden, 1996; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). One strong push factor is economic need, wherein low income and welfare are strongly correlated with entry into contingent working arrangements out of necessity (Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). On the other hand, the desire for autonomy or possession of high-demand skills may act as pull factors, encouraging workers to seek contingent opportunities. However, disagreement exists among scholars regarding their interpretation of factors like role change from permanent to temporary, marital status change, and having children (Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). In certain contexts, these factors may act as either a push or pull toward contingent work.

Over time, workers have increasingly sought more protean (Hall, 1996) and boundaryless (Arthur, 1994) careers, wherein they are afforded autonomy and flexibility, seek to enhance their marketability, and pursue short-term contracts. Marler, Barringer, and Milkovich (2002) argue for the possibility of a broader shift toward boundarylessness, for individuals and organizations, driven by a labor market that is well-suited to contingent high-skill workers. In opposition to these predictions, contracts and employment prospects (e.g., pay, benefits) may be less advantageous for contingent workers than standard, full-time employees (Kalleberg, 2003; 2011). Issues of underwork, instability, and schedule fragmentation have become widespread concerns, especially for temporary, part-time, and hourly workers (Alexander & Hayle-Lock, 2015; Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Rubery, Grimshaw, Hebson, & Ugarte, 2015). Further, tensions may develop between permanent and contingent employees, such that permanent employees may dislike or feel threatened by contingent workers, which can lead to

negative attitudes towards the organization, and necessitate additional managerial oversight (Pearce, 1993; Ward et al., 2001).

2.2 Temporary Workers

The temporary help industry began in the U.S. in the 1920s in Chicago where the original temporary agencies supplied calculating machine operators (Kalleberg, 2000). Since the temporary boom in the 1970s, temporary agencies have experienced a growth of approximately 11% annually (Kalleberg, 2000). Temporary workers now represent a sizable portion of the U.S. workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005), and Europe has experienced similar growth (Bronstein, 1991; Kalleberg, 2000). Temporary work is a term that encapsulates fixed-term, on call, and temporary agency employment (Burgess & Connell, 2006; Campbell & Burgess, 2001).

Temporary workers are characterized by employment in organizations for indefinite but short periods of time (i.e., hours, months, or years), and employment lengths are specified by the organization (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Also, temporary work is generally designated as low-skilled, low status, and clerical (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). von Hippel et al. (1997) identified two types of temporary employees: "temporary temporaries," those searching for permanent employment, and "permanent temporaries," those choosing temporary employment over permanent options. The authors found that both groups generally enjoyed the variety of their work and appreciated the quality of their job assignments; however, temporary temporaries were more likely than permanent temporaries to test out a company prior to making a commitment, network on the job, and identify new job leads (von Hippel et al., 1997). Permanent temporaries, on the other

hand, generally valued the flexibility of their work. Similarly, Hensen (1996) sorted workers into categories based on their motivations.

The organizational relationship is a feature which can help distinguish types of contingent workers. Temporary workers may fall into two categories – dyadic or triadic (*Figure 3*) – depending on whether an agency is involved in the arrangement. Dyadic relationships are fairly straight-forward, involving direct employment with an organization. Triadic relationships, however, adds difficulty to these arrangements as workers must answer to two separate organizations who may have competing priorities and expectations.

Client Organization		Client Organization

Dyadic Organizational Relationship

Triadic Organizational Relationship
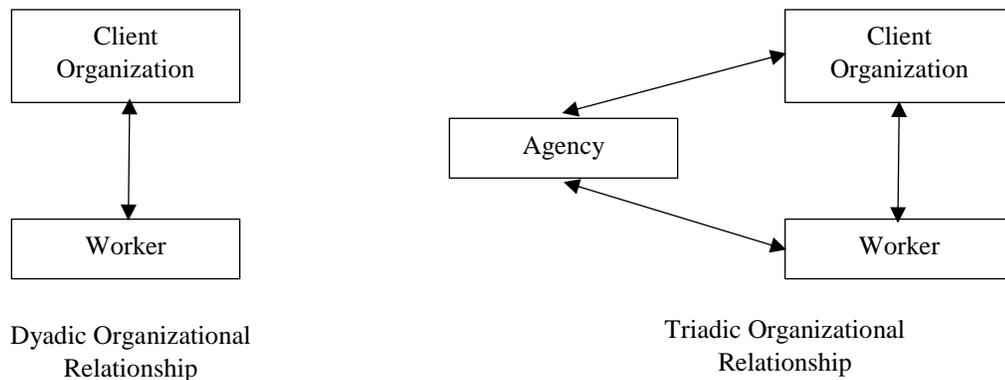
Figure 3. Contingent Worker-Organization Relationships

For organizations, temporary help agencies represent a modern "reserve labor army" (Kalleberg, 2000, p. 347), such that workers can be called in or dismissed based on variable needs quickly and efficiently. Particularly in retail-based industries, where the business cycles cause drastic changes in demands for products and labor, temporary employees can ease the transitions between cycles and avoid the nasty consequences of permanent employee layoffs or time reductions (von Hippel et al., 1997).

Yet negative organizational effects related to temporary worker use are possible. Even for organizations using temporary agencies, recruitment and hiring practices may need to be extended to non-permanent workers, adding to employment costs and pulling employees away from daily activities. One study found only 42 percent of agencies checked previous employment, while merely 25 percent performed background checks (Allen et al., 2002). Further, the cost-savings for using temporaries may not be cut-and-dry, as temporary workers may have lower productivity than permanent employees (e.g., Nollen, 1996; Nollen & Axel, 1996) and training for temporary workers requires added time and resources (Kalleberg, 2000). The presence of temporary workers can also cause conflict with permanent employees (Geary, 1992) and negatively impact permanent employee mobility (Barnett & Miner, 1992).

Critics of temporary employment arrangements often cite issues of volition, wage and benefit inequality, and the precariousness of this work form (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). Temporary work is often depicted as marginalized, polarized, and an inferior form of employment which creates structures that trap workers in a cycle of precariousness (Hall, 2006; Kalleberg, 2012). Further, these workers arrangements are not guaranteed beyond the current workday and they rarely have explicit contracts for termination dates. Temporary workers possess little temporal control, unlike other contingent workers (e.g., contractors).

The concept of volition involves whether a worker chooses to enter temporary employment, or they are forced into it out of necessity. While some groups are more likely to choose temporary arrangements (e.g., students) (CIETT, 2000; European Commission, 2002), many others enter temporary assignments involuntarily (Peck &

Theodore, 1998). Additionally, the reported benefits of temporary work are anything but guaranteed (e.g., Delsen, 1995). Temporary workers frequently do not have access to training, career development, job security and benefits, and become trapped in temporary roles (e.g., "permatemps") (Burgess & Connell, 2006; Cole, 1999). For many, however, temporary work is preferable to being unemployed (Lenz, 1996; Segal & Sullivan, 1997).

For some workers, however, temporary employment may act as a stepping stone to permanent jobs (Guest, 2004; Morris & Vekker, 2001). Some positions enable a "temp-to-perm" conversion (Carey & Hazelbaker, 1986) within the same organization, while other transitions may occur more indirectly, as workers may become more employable through new skill development and contact with numerous potential employers (Kalleberg, 2000). Despite the wide array of research conducted on temporary workers, scholars still do not have conclusive evidence to suggest temporary work is either good or bad for workers and organizations. Yet, other forms of contingent work, such as seasonal workers, have even less evidence to share.

2.3 Seasonal Workers

Like other contingent workers, seasonal workers are hired by organizations for a set period of time; as the name suggests, their employment is tied to a season. Resorts, tourism, and retail are industries where seasonal workers are most frequently hired (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004), to meet the demand of busy seasons (e.g., summer time at resorts) as well as slow seasons (e.g., winter time at resorts). Unlike many other contingent workers, seasonal workers maintain a dyadic relationship with employing organizations, being hired directly by a company (*Figure 3*). Although many types of seasonal work fit the characteristics of contingent work, some scholars (e.g., McDonald

& Makin, 2000) have argued that seasonal work may at times be viewed in terms of potential future employment, such as when the worker may be hired back the following season, or when the job is turned into permanent employment. In such cases, seasonal work is not necessarily "contingent" as it has been defined, further demonstrating the breadth and variability within each type of contingent work. Yet others still argue seasonal work is most frequently contingent (Aronsson, Gustafsson & Dallner, 2002).

Seasonal workers are the most understudied type of contingent work, with a small body of literature focusing on these workers and research is frequently conducted without identifying or differentiating seasonal workers from other "contingents" (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). There are, however, some exceptions. For instance, some research has differentiated their participants by type of worker by asking whether their role was intended to be temporary, seasonal, or permanent (e.g., Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993), allowing their results to be understood by specific contingent form. However, even when able to separate seasonal workers from temporary, research often fails to do so, masking unique differences that may be found. Barling and Gallagher (1996) suggested the dearth of research on seasonal workers may be explained by lack of interest, or the classification of seasonal workers as direct-hires or part-time workers.

At least demographically, seasonal workers can be distinguished from contract workers. Like temporary workers, it is reported that seasonal workers tend to be either young or older, and this work often involves lower skill (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993), making them distinct from contract workers who tend to be more experienced, more educated, and work more highly skilled jobs. Further, the nature of their contracts, which are necessarily tied to seasons, segregate seasonal workers from other contingents, whose

roles may be affected by busy seasons but are not inherently defined by them. Seasonal workers may have a form of control in terms of time and employment motivations which distinguish them from temporary and contract workers. Like contract workers, the beginnings and ends their arrangements are clearly specified since they are tied to a season, but they can often predict future employment, unlike other contingent forms. Additionally, seasonal workers are often young workers, students, and people who do not desire long-term employment. As such, they may not be motivated by the prospect of continued future employment, like temporary workers (e.g., permanent position), and are unlikely to cause conflict with permanent employees because they are non-threatening and expected. Aside from highlighting the differences between seasonal and contract workers, seasonal workers will not be a focus of this review.

2.4 Contract Workers

Although contract workers are receiving more attention in recent years from academics and practitioners, findings remain narrowly focused on several key themes, including: organizational use and outcomes, individual experiences and outcomes, temporal control and constraints, motivations, and relationships with permanent employees. Each of these themes will be reviewed following a discussion of contractors' history and defining characteristics.

History and Definition

Since the turn of the century, many practitioners and scholars have often perceived contract workers as a sort of "elite" form of nonstandard work, characterized by autonomy, control, and expertise. This perspective has been supported by the assertions of mass-produced literary phenomena, such as Pink's (2001) *Free Agent*

Nation, and articles published in *Harvard Business Review* (e.g., Drucker, 2002) and

Forbes (e.g., Bowen, 2017), praising contract arrangements. Further, a body of scholarly

research provides additional evidence to the prestige and desirability of contract working

arrangements. The next section provides a review of the key themes that have driven the

perseverance of this view, as well as the features of contracting which are well-supported

by empirical research. However, another perspective of contracting will be presented for

comparison, one which problematizes the literature on contractors by arguing contracting

is not necessarily desirable, and such optimistic assumptions fail to capture the complex

and varied experiences of these workers.

Despite being one of the fastest growing types of nonstandard work in the U.S.

and other countries around the world (Ashford, George and Blatt 2007; Davidov 2004),

the body of research on contract workers is sparse. Like other types of contingent work,

contractors provide services to a client for a pre-determined time period or project

(Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003). Once the contract expires, the contractor is free to

pursue jobs with other organizations. The label "contract worker" has been used to

describe a variety of work arrangements, not all of which are contingent forms of

employment. For example, low-skilled temporary agency employees and entrepreneurs

are sometimes misclassified as "contractors" in organizational research (McKeown,

2005). Like temporary workers, however, contractors often must maintain a triadic

relationship with both their contracting agency and their various client organizations

(Gossett, 2006). This relationship represents a distinct differentiator between agency and

independent contractors, who have dyadic employment relationships akin to seasonal or

direct-hire workers (*Figure 3*). This may also result in greater variance in workers'

experiences, career paths, attitudes, and behaviors.

Likewise, independent contract workers are also generally less supervised by

client organizations than temporary workers (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003), often

being provided the specifications for the final product or result, deciding how best to

accomplish it based on their knowledge, skills, and experience (Rebitzer, 1995;

Summers, 1997). To be legally defined as an independent contractor, a worker must be

self-employed, but not all self-employed individuals are independent contractors

(Kalleberg, 2000). Independent contractors do not have consistent employers or long-

term contracts, and their livelihood depends on selling their own materials, tools, or

expertise repeatedly to employing organizations (Rainbird, 1991). These contractors

control their own work, are solely responsible for their own employment, and manage

their own taxes (Kalleberg, 2000). DiTomaso (2001) described independent contractors'

structural arrangements as loosely coupled systems, characterized as webs, networks, or

alliances, wherein highly skilled workers can use their contacts to move from

organization to organization for work filling needs based on demand, seasons, or projects.

Organizational Reasons for Contractor Use

Contractors can be used for numerous reasons, including to meet increased

demand, to offer specialized skills, and to decrease costs (Holmes, 1986). Organizational

factors can also impact the use of contractors, as their employment is more likely for

firms' size, average wage levels, location, occupational and product diversity, and

industry cycles (e.g., Abraham & Taylor, 1990; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Harrison &

Kelley, 1991). Contractors are rarely used for the same tasks or roles as temporary

workers, instead offering unique skills and expertise, preventing organizations from needing to develop or hire such skills and knowledge in-house. However, contractors may be used to perform technical and complex tasks once reserved for permanent employees (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Slaughter & Ang, 1996). Many organizations have realized the many possibilities for contractors, including the number of services that can be completed by contractors and the potential to achieve these offerings more cheaply and efficiently (Abraham & Taylor, 1996). Relatedly, one of the greatest benefits of contractor use for organizations is the lack of liability for independent contractors (Rebitzer, 1995), such that organizations do not need to pay unemployment, social security, workman's compensation, or benefits. Yet some organizations (e.g., Microsoft) have misused the term "independent worker" or "contractor," intentionally misclassifying workers to avoid paying appropriate salaries and benefits for standard workers (duRivage, 1992). Such evidence suggests the experience of being a contract worker can vary greatly depending on your organizational context.

For organizations, contract workers offer an important source of gaining and creating valuable knowledge, and thus producing competitive advantage (Matusik & Hill, 1998; Storey et al., 2002). In today's market, competitive advantage necessitates that organizations not only create knowledge internally, but also seek knowledge outside their boundaries, remaining open to new ideas, innovations, and technological advancements (Leonard-Barton, 1995; Matusik & Hill, 1998). Organizations can utilize contingent workers in facilitating knowledge creation but must be careful to limit knowledge leaks and consider how to encourage high-quality knowledge transfer within the organizational and contractual contexts (Matusik & Hill, 1998). Further, strategy may play an important

role: organizations that plan for and strategically use contract (and other contingent) workers are more likely to reap the benefits of efficiency and cost-savings than organizations that enter these relationships with no strategy or process for managing change (Peel & Boxall, 2005).

In contrast, there are also potential negative consequences for organizations hiring contractors. Like all nonstandard employment arrangements, the management of contractors presents unique challenges for the organization's permanent workforce. For instance, there can be confusion over the control, supervision, hiring, and firing of these workers (Kalleberg, 2000). Training can also be a problem among independent contractors as they are solely responsible for refreshing their skills and expertise, unlike permanent employees, and expertise is the crux of their continued employment, unlike temporary and seasonal workers (Barley & Kunda, 2006). Without concerted effort at staying relevant, contractors' skills may become outdated, their employability may suffer, and organizations will not get the results they desired. Additional issues may include more negative attitudes toward the organization among permanent workers (e.g., low trust, low commitment), and potential tensions between standard, temporary, and contract workers (Kochan, Smith, & Rebitzer, 1994).

Sometimes the benefits of contracting are great, but when used for the wrong projects (e.g., involve valuable intellectual property, high degree of interdependence) the costs can also be very high, and organizations may shy away from using contractors (Gulati & Singh, 1998; Mayer & Nickerson, 2005). Organizations often struggle to define the boundary between permanent and contingent workers, recognizing the need for a flexible workforce but failing to incorporate them in a strategic plan (Peel & Boxall,

2005). In short, the organization can suffer in poorly managed and weakly understood contract working arrangements.

Why Enter Contract Arrangements

With the advent of the new employment contract, the popularity of boundaryless careers, and the growth of the nonstandard workforce, workers have increasingly chosen to enter contingent work arrangements, and for many contracting is particularly appealing; however, the reality may not live up to the hype. The opportunities to earn higher wages, pursue work that is highly skilled and personally interesting, and the autonomy contracting offers has led many workers to prefer these arrangements to traditional employment (Cohany, 1998; Kalleberg, 2000). Many high-status professionals may be found in this employment arrangement: high level executives, accountants, information technology specialists, educators, translators, scientists, and attorneys (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Fraser & Gold, 2001; Kirkpatrick & Hoque, 2006). Professionals continue to enter contracting, yet there remains uncertainty about why people are transitioning to these arrangements at such a rapid pace and who (or what entity) truly experiences the benefits (McKeown & Hanley, 2009).

Volition – whether a worker enters contingent working arrangements by choice or out of necessity and is related to a worker's motivations for entering a certain type of employment – is a key construct within contingent work research (e.g., DiNatale, 2001; Feldman et al., 1995; Hardy &Walker, 2003; Isaksson & Bellagh, 2002; Krausz, Sagie & Biderman, 2000). Yet the majority of support has focused on temporary workers, for whom employment choices may vary depending on skill development (Marler, Barringer

& Milkovich, 2002), supplemental income (Bernasek & Kinnear, 1999), or a desire for entry into a permanent position (Feldman et al., 1995; Hardy & Walker, 2003).

For contractors, on the other hand, there is only limited evidence about the relationship between volition and their resulting job attitudes (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). From what we do know about the differences between temporary and contract workers, far more temporary workers (agency or direct-hires) would prefer permanent employment arrangements (Hardy & Walker, 2003; Isaksson & Bellagh, 2002; Polivka & Nardone, 1989), while few contractors are interested in permanent contractual arrangements (DiNatale, 2001). There is evidence that differences exist in the personal characteristics of workers who would prefer full-time employment and those who would not. Bernasek & Kinnear (1999) found that those workers who would prefer permanent employment are less likely to be Caucasian, and more likely to be married, educated, have higher incomes, and work contingently for economic, rather than work-life or personal, reasons. As such, volition may be a key variable in understanding contractors' attitudes and behaviors as well, but more research is needed.

Similarly, contracting choice plays an important role in the subsequent experiences of workers, and may be influenced by both personality and situational factors (Peel & Boxal, 2005). A person may be more drawn to contracting when they have a high degree of tolerance for change and uncertainty, or if they are less concerned with involvement through an organization (Peel & Boxal, 2005). Workers are more likely to contract when they have greater expertise and specialized skills, and when they have experienced involuntary separation in a recent job (e.g., fired, laid off) (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009). Such evidence suggests a divide between those workers who pursue more

boundaryless or protean careers, versus those who seek contract work out of desperation or in reaction to negative circumstances. Further, workers are more likely to enter contracting during their early or late career stages, with the latter committing to the contract career path for the long-term (*ibid*). Financial, family, and labor market conditions also act as strong situational factors (Peel & Boxal, 2005). For men, personal lives often act as a deterrent to contracting as they are less likely to pursue contract work when their family responsibilities are greater, matching traditional male stereotypes and social pressures characterized as the role of the "bread winner," or "the provider" (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009). It follows that contracting work arrangements may entail a level of precariousness unacceptable for men who either feel they must fulfill traditional gender roles or are sole family providers out of necessity.

While there are definite benefits for success in these arrangements, contractors are not necessarily high-status, privileged workers. Despite the potential for greater financial gains, contractors rarely receive health insurance or benefits, having to purchase those out-of-pocket (Kalleberg et al., 1997; Kalleberg et al., 2000; Hipple & Stewart, 1996). Further contractors do not receive other benefits of more traditional employment, such as training and job security (Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009), and may be given lower performance ratings by their managers (Ang & Slaughter, 2001). Contractors are influenced by the same push/pull factors and labor market fluctuations as any contingent worker, resulting in a more dynamic, fragmented, and insecure career path than many may suspect (McKeown, 2005; McKeown & Hanley, 2009). In fact, many contractors may move between standard and contract work as they see necessary or advantageous (McKeown, 2005). Contracting has been depicted as acting either as a bridge or a trap,

wherein some people enter contracting by choice (pulled) while others do not (pushed), and some have positive experiences and other do not, emphasizing the importance of motivations (e.g., volition) for entering these relationships in the first place (McKeown, 2005). Further, new career forms are not black and white, and feelings of freedom or loss within new work forms may vary based on an individual's perception of their work as liberating or marginalizing (Cohen & Mallon, 1999).

Relatedly, visa workers represent a sizable proportion of contract workers in the U.S., yet a lot of research has not acknowledged the role that visa status may play in this work arrangement, or even reported if study participants hold visa status. More specifically, H-1B visas are provided to foreign workers to be temporarily employed in the U.S. in "specialty occupations," such as biotechnology, chemistry, architecture, computer science, or engineering (Legal Information Institute). In 2014, 162,239 H-1B and H1B-1 visas were issued by the State Department (United States Department of State, 2015). Issues have always existed for these workers around their duration of stay, taxes, salary, obtaining lottery positions and renewals, and adapting to cultural differences, but proposed changes to work-related legislation, such as the "Protect and Grow American Jobs Act," may cause further complications and perhaps a decrease in their employment prevalence in American businesses (Lippman, 2017). Although visa workers will not be focus of the proposed study, they represent an important and understudied group within contract working arrangements and thus needed to be acknowledged in this review.

The challenges associated with redundancy, changing labor markets, and new employment contracts have facilitated opportunities for workers wherein some workers

flourish, and others struggle. Even at higher levels of an organization, contractors in management and professional positions can experience marginalization through lack of training opportunities and consultation in the workplace, and these effects are exacerbated for women (Hoque, 2003). Marginalization and disadvantage offer the same looming threats to many contractors and other contingent workers alike (McKeown, 2005). Cohen and Mallon (1999) suggest the *new career* may, in fact, exist somewhere between complete freedom and traditional organizational boundaries, as contractors seek to refine both structural and ideological boundaries, but struggle to exist outside of organizations and strive to revise their own views about work. Like all contingent arrangements, organizations may exacerbate challenges to contracting through management practices, such as harboring or even promoting feelings of social isolation and efforts to keep workers segregated from employees (Lozano, 1989). This can be particularly harmful with contractors as they are often involved with high-touch and higher stakes projects. In reaction, scholars have called for organizations to provide more help in the form of human resource management practices (McKeown & Hanley, 2009).

Temporal Control and Constraints

Several notable studies have examined temporal control and constraints for contract workers. Schedule control is one of the features for which contract work is frequently praised, as contractors are viewed as principally in charge of their own schedules. In fact, for all contingent workers, time is an inherent guiding characteristic for the definition and communication of work (e.g., Ballard & Seibold, 2003; Schein, 1992), and also acts as a source of freedom or challenge in all nonstandard employment arrangements (Ballard & Gossett, 2007).

Nevertheless, previous research paints a mixed picture of contractors' time, capturing both instances of control and constraint. In an ethnographic study of NYC taxi cab drivers, Occhiuto (2017) found that drivers made sense of their work through temporal control, and this control acted as a foundation for drivers' investment and continued interest in independent contracting. Similarly, Osnowitz and Henson (2016) studied how contractors (i.e., nurses, writers, IT/engineers) navigate and perceive their time, specifically in terms of boundary setting. They found that both shift (e.g., nurses) and project-based (e.g., IT) contract workers use wages to leverage boundaries for the time they work, affording autonomy and control. Specifically, this study found that contractors actively negotiate their schedules using pay systems, outsider status, and occupational networks to avoid working over-time and taking on extra work, while reinforcing the boundaries between themselves and permanent workers. The structure of contract work enables contractors the autonomy they desire for the sake of personal ambitions and non-work factors through the control of their work schedules (Occhiuto, 2017).

However, not all findings about the temporal control of contractors have been as consistent. In a two-and-a-half-year ethnographic study of technical contractors (i.e., IT, software developers, engineers, technical writers), Evans, Kunda, and Barley (2004) found that contractors generally perceive greater flexibility but may not actually use it. In other words, contractors must still answer to the needs and deadlines of clients and feel the ongoing pressures of securing perpetual employment in a competitive labor market. In their study, some contractors were able to find greater control over their schedules and commitments, taking time off as desired and showing little concern about finding future

work, but this was not the norm (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004). Notably, these results raise important questions about what it means to be a *free agent*, and the amount of autonomy and control experienced by most contractors.

These studies depict a varied image of the temporality of contractors' work, suggesting that some contractors may experience greater control and less worry over their schedules than others. While some workers are able to embrace "beach time," "bridge time," and enjoy temporal control, others fear "down time" or work beyond their designated hours to meet client needs and enhance future employability (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004; Osnowitz & Henson, 2016). Again, inconsistent findings suggest that contract work is not as clear-cut and inherently positive as was once purported and emphasizes the potential for organizations to provide contractors with additional help in navigating careers.

Commitment versus Employability

Unlike temporary workers, who are motivated by potential for permanent employment, and seasonal workers, who have expectations for short-term employment only, contractors may be motivated by other factors such as employability. Relatedly, scholars have debated if the growing use of contingent labor more in general eliminates the necessity for employment commitment. The short-term, transitory, and lower touch nature of contingent arrangements has led some (e.g., Van Dyne & Ang, 1998) to believe that these workers typically have lower levels of attachment and identification with work organizations.

Research on the temporary help industry suggests these workers have low loyalty, pride, organizational identification, or desire to remain within the firms in which they are

working (e.g., Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005; Gossett, 2006; Guest, 2005; Pedulla, 2005). However, George's (2005) study of contract workers, found that these workers may identify with their agency, their client organization, or both, depending on salient characteristics. Additionally, Ang and Slaughter (2001) found that contractors report more positive job attitudes (e.g., commitment, satisfaction) than permanent employees. Taken together, these findings emphasize the importance of studying contingent workers as different types of labor, with distinctive attitudes, behaviors, and experiences.

Instead of commitment and security, organizations may seek to attract workers with a new offer: employability. Employability has been defined as the "possibility of attaining a new job" (Chambel & Sobral, 2011, p.162). It entails an implicit career development contract: an organization invests in the skill and competency development of contingent workers, improving their chances for future employment, and in return the organization seeks greater worker commitment and longer-term retention (Finegold, 1998; Finegold, Levenson, & Van Buren, 2005; McDonald & Hite, 2005). In theory, promoting employability helps reconcile the contingent workers' needs and interests (e.g., continued employment, relevant skills) with organizational needs and interests (e.g., flexibility, productivity; McDonald & Hite, 2005). In addition to client organizations, agencies also serve as a resource to help workers develop transferrable skills by providing training (Autor, 2001; Finegold, Levenson, & Van Buren, 2005), a practice that can greatly enhance employability (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

Scholars critical of this move toward *employability* point to human capital theory, which suggests that due to the insecure and peripheral nature of their roles, employers will not be motivated to invest in contingent workers of any kind (e.g., Becker, 1964;

Finegold, Levenson, & Van Buren, 2005; Polivka, 1996). Further, providing general skills training may make these workers more attractive to other companies and lead to turnover before the contract ends, which would be an unappealing prospect for employing organizations (Becker, 1964). Although not explicitly discussed in the literature, this may be of particular concern with highly-skilled knowledge workers, such as contractors.

To the contrary, research on other forms of contingent workers (e.g., temporary workers) suggests that the necessity of low commitment is a misconception, even arguing for organizations to demonstrate greater commitment to their workers: "If the organization values affective commitment on the part of the temporary worker, then the organization itself should demonstrate its commitment towards temporary workers" (Chambel & Sobral, 2011, p.162). Organizations cannot offer nothing and expect hard work and high performance in return. McLean-Parks and Kidder (1994) claim the price of external labor is that these workers are less likely to internalize organizational values and may be less productive. Organizations often do not invest in external workers, and workers cannot be expected to reciprocate what they are not given (Lapalme et al., 2009), no matter which type of worker they may be.

Relationships with Permanent Employees

Although the core-periphery model and general conceptions of contingent work would have scholars and practitioners alike viewing contract workers as separate from permanent workers within an organization, the reality is that these workers often work alongside one another, either being physically located near one another or working on

shared projects. Workplace integration refers to the extent to which permanent and contingent workers are "blended" within the organization (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004).

Without much distinction between employment forms, some research has found that workforce integration can exacerbate the decrease in permanents workers' job attitudes (e.g., commitment, satisfaction), and also have a dysfunctional impact on relationships between managers and permanent employees (Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003). Evidence suggests temporary worker use is related to decreased trust and commitment (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001; George, 2003), lower loyalty and intent to stay (Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003), greater perceptions of job security (Geary, 1992; Pearce, 1993; Smith, 1997), and lower attraction and altruism in work groups (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001). As such, some scholars argue employees' reactions to temporary workers are not clear-cut, and they could be positive or negative depending on the context (e.g., Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003; von Hippel, Mangum, Greenberger, Heneman, & Skoglind, 1997).

Comparatively, the research on contract worker and permanent employee integration is sparse and divided. When an organization is using contractors to enhance flexibility rather than trying to minimize costs, and its core and peripheral workforces are integrated, contractors may experience positive outcomes, such as compensation and benefits similar to those of permanent workers (Lautsch, 2002; Lautsch, 2003). Whether workers receive benefits is influenced by internal labor market rules and spillover effects (i.e., when regulatory requirements extend the same benefits provided to permanent employees to contingent workers) (Lautsch, 2003). In addition, when integrated, contract workers have been shown to score higher than permanent employees on motivation

potential and job security (Allan & Sienko, 1997), and do not feel the same negative

reactions demonstrated by permanent workers in mixed work teams (Ang & Slaughter,

2001). The goals around which managers design work arrangements have important

outcomes, such that when managers who seek to use contingent workers to assist in

achieving the same goals as regular employees, workers are more likely to be integrated

into the workforce and receive benefits than when they are employed with the goal of

attaining performance objectives an organization cannot achieve with its permanent

workforce (Lautsch, 2003).

Some evidence suggests, unlike temporary workers, contract workers have little

or no effect on the attitudes and behaviors of permanent employees (e.g., Connelly &

Gallagher, 2004; Pedulla, 2013). Other research has indicated the potential for negative

manager-employee relationships (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003), less organizational

trust (Pearce, 1993), poor teamwork and relationships (Peel & Boxall, 2005), and the

assignment of additional work to permanent employees (Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Pearce,

1993), which may exacerbate negative attitudes. As a result, permanent employee–

contractor relationships are only marginally understood, which is surprising because of

the huge impact these relationships can have in an organization in terms of productivity,

communication, conflict, team building, and so on.

Contract work has been portrayed as a "liberation from organizational

employment," providing the professional freedom, opportunity, and accommodations for

various needs not provided through membership within organizations (Cohen & Mallon,

1999, p. 346). Following this line of thought, much of our understanding of contractor

human resource management practices is dictated similarly, illustrating contracting as an

elite contingent arrangement, embodied with freedom and boundarylessness, which people enter by choice, seeking to avoid organizational control, long-term membership, and traditional careers, instead pursuing purely transaction psychological contracts and self-sufficient career development. Over the years scholars have identified more ambiguous findings, wherein contracting is both characterized by positive experiences – feelings of freedom and control, having more fun and experiencing more variety in work, greater degree of work-life balance – and negative – insecurity, financial burdens (Cohen & Mallon, 1999). In contracting, each benefit is met by a consequence; increased work variety is met by the loss of deep attachment, more opportunities to develop are met by greater difficulty to do so outside organizations, and the ability to choose work is challenged by additional financial strain (Cohen & Mallon, 1999). In sum, the divided body of literature presented here suggests we do not possess the level of knowledge needed to understand the employment experiences of contract workers.

CHAPTER III: Situating Contract Work within the Socialization Framework

In this chapter, popular theories used to examine organizational membership will be proposed as a useful addition to contractor research. Socialization will be defined, both conceptually and theoretically, and particular frameworks will be examined as they may relate to contract workers. Finally, the guiding research questions will be presented.

In order to gain greater insight into the unique nature of contract work arrangements, this study will draw upon organizational socialization theory. This theoretical framework focuses attention on the process by which contractors are brought into organization settings and establish their roles within it. While socialization is a *Rich* and interdisciplinary area of study, there has been scant attention paid to the onboarding and socialization processes used for contingent workers in general or contractors specifically. As such, this study allows researchers to examine the extent to which the socialization experiences of contractors differ from more traditional employment arrangements or other types of contingent labor. Accordingly, a brief review of the relevant socialization research is reviewed below. Socialization seems especially relevant and important for contractors, yet this area remains poorly understood. The available research for each practice is reviewed below.

3.1 The Onboarding and Socialization of Contract Workers

Notably, the majority of previous contractor research has been guided by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and its off-shoots (e.g., human capital theory), which argue that in relationships, individuals act and react on the basis of exchange or reciprocity. In

the context of contingent work, this exchange has been observed through psychological contracts, wherein an individual develops expectations for their employing organization's role and will behave according to how well they meet those expectations (Rousseau, 1995). Similarly, human capital theory has been used to support the argument that organizations do not want to invest in contingent workers because they do not receive a return for this investment (Parks, Kidder, & Gallagher, 1998). Social exchange theory has provided interesting insights into contingent work forms, yet the inconsistency of findings and wide range of worker experiences suggest that considering additional theories in the contractor context may be fruitful.

Broadly, many organizations view a "good" contingent worker as someone who quickly assimilates (Druker & Stanworth, 2004), yet few take the necessary steps to assist with this process. When using temporary workers, a possible organizational advantage involves the transition of daily management practices (e.g., payroll, administration) to agencies (Forde, 2001); however, onboarding is an essential practice that often cannot be provided by external agents (e.g., Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Feldman, Doerpinghaus, & Turnley, 1994; Feldman, Doerpinghaus, & Turnley, 1995; Foote & Folta, 2002; Koh & Yer, 2000; Ward et al., 2001). Even internally, socialization and onboarding practices can be the sources of additional problems. When using various forms of contingent workers, many organizations shift the responsibility of activities like socialization, training, and supervision of contingent workers to standard employees, regardless of whether these tasks are in their usual job description (Beveridge, 2016; Geary, 1992; Smith, 1994). Similarly, agency workers often do not receive instruction about their job or assigned

tasks prior to entry (Feldman et al., 1995), which can negatively impact productivity and satisfaction (Foote & Folta, 2002). Taken together, it is clear that research and theory are needed to provide guidance for the socialization of contingent workers in all forms.

3.2 Existing Contractor Socialization Research

Most of what is known about contract workers' socialization experiences comes from a single, cross-sectional survey of multiple types of contingent workers (Benzinger, 2006). This study found that temporary workers were more likely to experience individualized socialization tactics, rather than the highly institutionalized tactics experienced by longer-term and permanent employees. Further, the longer the employment contract, the more likely contingent employees were to experience more structured socialization processes. Benzinger (2006) also found that all types of contingent workers were less likely to demonstrate proactive and information seeking behaviors than permanent employees. Fixed-term (i.e., contract) workers perceived higher institutionalized socialization tactics and information seeking behaviors initially, but these decreased over time. In contrast, temporary agency employees reported lower initial amounts of institutionalized tactics and information seeking behavior, but both increased as their contracts were extended. These findings suggest organizations socialize contingent workers differently than permanent employees, even when using these temporary employees in strategically-valuable roles. However, the investments in permanent and long-term contingent workers may not differ as drastically as scholars (e.g., Lepak & Snell, 1999) previously suggested (Benzinger, 2006).

Motivations for information seeking may be driven by a worker's perception of the likelihood of the offer of full-time employment (Benzinger, 2006; Sias, Kramer, &

Jenkins, 1997). For contingent workers of all kinds, it is probable that the experience of entering a new organization is a familiar experience, as they will likely have been newcomers many times over. This may help explain these newcomers' relatively low levels of proactivity during entry. Nevertheless, Benzinger (2006) suggests contingent workers may miss opportunities for social acceptance and obtaining permanent employment if they do not behave proactively.

Organizational socialization involves more than learning the tasks of a job, but includes the behaviors, norms, and social aspects of being in an organization. As organizations differ in occupation, industry, and society, so too will the culture, symbols, and member expectations (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). While short-term contracts are often used as "probationary" or trial periods, and may lead to extended contracts or full-time employment, long-term, fixed contracts are often tied to projects and finite funding: once the project ends or resources run out, the contract ends (Benzinger, 2006). Such employment outcomes may explain workers' motivations for information seeking and other proactive behaviors over time. Benzinger (2006) argues simple jobs that are not centered on learning and collaboration should be assigned to temporary agency workers, while highly skilled and interactive jobs should be filled by workers with longer-term assignments (e.g., long-term contracts) to motivate workers to seek information.

By definition, contractors do not fit within many of our traditional conceptual and theoretical understandings of organizational socialization – the process through which a person learns "the values, norms, and required behaviors that allow them to participate as members of organizations" (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 27). When contractors are viewed as

temporary and external, organizational socialization may not be perceived as important

because the organization and worker alike do not expect them to become a full

organizational member. More broadly, descriptions of contingent workers as

"disposable" and "peripheral" demonstrate the extent to which these workers are

frequently conceptualized and treated as outside and unimportant. Yet contractors are

increasingly performing complex, vital tasks for organizations, participating on project

teams with permanent employees, and being considered part of larger talent strategies in

organizations. Can contractors adequately perform their work, produce relevant results,

and work with full organizational members without obtaining a level of organizational

understanding about behaviors, norms, and people? Alternatively, based on the

importance of reputation and informal networks in contract working arrangements, would

it not be in contractors' best interests to connect with members and build relationships

with client organizations? Our current body of research cannot address or inform these

questions, and the practices involved in contractor employment remain in need of

guidance. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the socialization theory may fit contract

workers' employment experiences better than others. The proposed research project will

be situated in the assimilation framework while acknowledging the possibility for

contributions from related theories, including: organizational and individual socialization

strategies, chains of socialization, and sensemaking.

3.3 The Assimilation Framework

The stage model frameworks (e.g., Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1982; Jablin, 2001) can

offer a baseline understanding of how contractors fit within a standard employee

framework of socialization. Within the Jablin's (1982; 2001) assimilation model, one

might argue that contractors are perpetually in the entry phase (e.g., onboarding) –

seeking to learn the ropes, understand norms and expectations, and work with new peers

to accomplish a goal. Certainly, there is variation here to match the wide array of

contracting arrangements. While some contractors may work at one organization for

years, having received multiple renewed contracts and experiencing assimilation, other

contactors may pursue careers comprised of sequential short-term contracts lasting only a

few months. Still others may move between contracting and full-time permanent

employment, representing another option for the experience of socialization.

Nevertheless, findings from previous contractor research suggest several aspects

of contract arrangements mirror our more traditional understanding of organizational

socialization. For instance, social networks may be especially important for contractors.

Many of their contracts are found through personal and professional connections, and

they also may work for the same organization during multiple contracts. As such, they

may (or should) be more inclined to learn, socialize, and build relationships with both

people and organizations more broadly. Enabling social connections within

organizational memberships may be a crucial tactic for finding success as a contractor.

To that end, the psychological contracts formed by contractors may differ greatly from

other types of contingent labor. For example, research on temporary workers found that

they develop primarily transactional, exchange-based expectations toward work

(McLean-Parks & Kidder, 1994). As Scott and Myers (2010) explain, socialization

involves the mutual negotiation of relationships between organizational members, which

can be both enabled and constrained by communication. Contractors may in fact build

relationships and develop expectations in a more relational manner to facilitate future

opportunities and boost their reputation. As such, we may need to more carefully

consider the relational aspect of contractor employment arrangements rather than

examine these workers through a transactional view.

3.4 Strategies for Socialization

Previous research has defined socialization strategies for both organizations and

individuals. Key research and theory will be reviewed for each level and specific

connections to contractors will be considered.

Organizational Strategies

The manner in which organizations approach contractors as organizational

newcomers may be affected by specific socialization tactics used by the client firm or

supervising agency. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) identified two approaches to

orienting workers, defined by six polarized socialization tactics: institutionalized and

individualized (*Appendix B*). The institutionalized approach is a structured program

focused on development and adjustment (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007). The

institutionalized approach helps reduce workers' uncertainty and anxiety, while also

reproducing the status quo and developing a custodial role orientation (Jones, 1986).

These workers accept their role as is and stick to traditional practices (Van Maanen &

Schein, 1979). Institutionalization involves collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial,

and investiture tactics (Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Conversely,

individualization lacks structure and forces newcomers to "sink or swim" (Ashforth,

Sluss, & Saks, 2007). This approach encourages workers to challenge the status quo and

adopt their own approaches to their roles (e.g., innovative role orientation) (Jones, 1986).

These workers may seek to be innovative, in terms of their job content (e.g., seek new

knowledge) or the role itself (e.g., reject or redefine practices). Individualization involves individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics (Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

When an organization wants to encourage members to be innovative and creative, individualized socialization tactics may be preferable. However, when an organization wants to maintain its existing rules, values, and ways of working institutional socialization tactics would be preferred. This framework may suggest that organization would be more likely to use institutional tactics to socialize contingent workers, so that these temporary employees do not disrupt the larger system. However, managers may instead find individualized tactics to be preferable or even better suited to the socialization of contractor workers, who are often hired to perform innovative or highly skilled roles in a client organization.

For many organizations, contractor socialization may not even be on HR's radar, leaving individual supervisors and permanent employees to make case-by-case decisions on what contractors need to know. In support, evidence suggests that organizations are more prone to use individualized tactics for contractors (e.g., Benzinger, 2006), indicating both a lack of strategic consideration by HR and the potential for vast discrepancies in the socialization experiences of contractors. Generally, we have little understanding of the frequency or impact of organizational socialization tactics for contractors, or whether other tactics are more applicable to the needs of contractors.

Individual Strategies

As new entrants into an organizational context, it likely contractors will share many of the same feelings (e.g., shock, anxiety, uncertainty) and exhibit similar

behaviors as a more traditional newcomer, such as information seeking and attempting to reduce uncertainty. As such, uncertainty reduction theory (e.g., Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Lester, 1987) may provide additional insight into the experiences of contractors within organizations. Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) describes how newcomers experience high levels of uncertainty upon entry, and they are motivated to reduce these negative feelings to achieve a more predictable and understandable work environment. One of the key ways in which employees seek to reduce uncertainty is through information seeking (e.g., Morrison, 1993; Teboul, 1994), using other organizational members (e.g., supervisors, peers) and artifacts (e.g., mission, policies) to better understand their environment. Additional proactive behaviors, such as testing limits and observation, also help facilitate knowledge gathering and uncertainty reduction (Miller & Jablin, 1991). By reducing uncertainty, URT says employees experience higher job satisfaction, lower intent to turnover, and become more skilled at performing job tasks (Morrison, 1993).

Socialization programs and onboarding strategies can help new members alleviate uncertainty by providing opportunities for acquiring organizational information and feedback. Like all new employees, contractors enter a new and unfamiliar environment and must quickly come to understand the context in which they will be working. It follows that information seeking and other proactive behaviors may be performed by contractors to reduce uncertainty upon entering a new contract.

3.5 Chains of Socialization

Van Maanen (1984) coined the term "socialization chain" to depict how a person may learn something in one context which then affects how they behave in future

settings. Learning is cumulative, and as knowledge is either confirmed or challenged a person can adjust their schemas for how to think and behave in certain situations. This concept has not been heavily explored in any employment setting, let alone with contingent arrangements. For contractors, chains of socialization may be an especially relevant concept as they navigate a series of short-term employment arrangements, learning and adjusting as they proceed in their career. Frequently foregoing the experience of organizational assimilation or metamorphosis (e.g., Jablin, 2001), instead adopting the status of "guest" (Ballard & Gossett, 2007), contract workers may rely even more on past scripts and schemas to guide their work behaviors than workers with long-term employment contracts. Through qualitative inquiry, the proposed study will seek to understand the applicability of the underutilized chains of socialization concept.

3.6 Sensemaking Theories

Theories of organizational sensemaking (e.g., Louis, 1980; Weick, 1993) provide an additional lens with which to understand how contractors are socialized into the work environment. The varying experiences of contractors, and the normalization of their "swift socialization" experiences (Ashforth, 2012; Bauer et al., 1998), might suggest that contractors experience this process in a different form than more traditional workers. Louis (1980) developed a theory of what newcomers' experience upon organizational entry and how they cope with their experiences and adapt to the new environment. Sensemaking theory proposes that newcomers experience entry as a time of "reality shock," involving disorientation and sensory overload (ibid). Further, it is inevitable for newcomers to have unmet expectations, meaning their initial expectations do not match

the actual job experience. As a result, learning about one's role and the organization's culture become vital to developing a scheme for interpreting events.

It is unclear if contractors cognitively assess and understand their work environment through a different context than permanent workers. Like any other new member, they enter the organization and immediately experience change, contrast, and surprise. When previous sensemaking scripts fail in a new environment the worker must develop alternative explanations for why certain outcomes occurred and not others. From here, they can attribute meaning and then select behavioral responses while simultaneously revising their expectations and view of the environment. While contractors may experience entry similar to that described in the existing sensemaking model, their resulting cognitive scripts and maps, and associated behaviors may be impacted by their temporary status and thus might differ from those of traditional workers.

The Research Project

Taken together, the inconsistency in arrangements among contractors suggests that traditional understandings of organizational membership may or may not apply to this body of workers; however, certain socialization theories may be more relevant and illuminating than others. Whether aspects of the theoretical basis for socialization fit this population or not, it is theoretically interesting. The question of whether existing theories developed using standard workers can fully capture the experiences of contractors is an important one, which this research project will examine. The previously mentioned theoretical frameworks were used to guide this project, with the understanding that these frameworks may or may not be fully applicable to contractors. In fact, by using data to

challenge these frameworks, the current study helps refine existing theories to better understand the phenomenon of interest and provide practical insights.

If contractors are not long-term, permanent employees, why should organizations invest in their socialization? The short answer: it matters for relationship development and for their bottom-line. As noted above, contractors come at a higher price tag, but under ideal conditions, they provide immense value-add for the cost. However, contractors are often hired for short periods with limited understanding of the rules, norms, behaviors, and goals of the organization. Further, they may have low commitment, engagement, and motivation perform at their best or contribute beyond expectations. When this is the case, organizations will receive fewer benefits from these relationships, and contractors may have unmet expectations.

The guiding framework for this study is theories of organizational assimilation (Jablin, 1984; Jablin, 2001) and new member socialization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), but the project allowed the researcher to remain open to theories of organizational sensemaking (Louis, 1980) and URT (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Teboul, 1994). As such, this research project aimed to answer the following research questions to inform theory and practice:

>*Research Question***:** How do contractors understand their employment experiences and relationships in the context of organizational socialization?

>*Sub-question 1a***:** How do contract workers understand the nature of their employment arrangements as it relates to their motivation (i.e., preferences, opportunities, challenges)?

Sub-question 1b: What onboarding/ socialization processes are currently used for contract workers?

Sub-question 1c: How do contractors' employment experiences fit within existing socialization theory?

Each research sub-question connects to a specific section of the interview guide: question 1a will be probed in interview guide section 1, question 1b will be probed in section 2, and question 1c will be probed in the third and final section. Collectively, the sub-questions will help answer the larger research question. The following chapter provides a detailed outline of the methodology for the proposed research study, including descriptions of the participants, procedure, materials, and analysis.

CHAPTER IV: METHODS

The present study used an interpretive qualitative methodology to understand contract workers' unique experiences. Study participants included contractors from a variety of organizational sources and data was collected using semi-structured interviews. By using a qualitative methodology, the study sought to capture a rich and contextual perspective of contract work from the workers themselves. Using an emic, inductive approach, the researcher explored contractors' perceptions and experiences by moving from the data to larger themes and observations, while ensuring the participants' perspectives and specific contexts were the main drivers of identifying meaning in the field of study. However, etic codes were introduced was open codes indicated the relevance of existing terms from previous research and theory.

Mirroring the methods observed during the review of the literature, contingent work research has been plagued by several issues, including: unclear terminology and definitions, lack of multidisciplinary discussion, inadequate measures, and limited comparative research, (e.g., Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Kalleberg, 2000). In addition, a vast number of studies on contingent workers provide evidence based on old, secondary datasets (e.g., Forde & Slater, 2006; Houseman, 2001), and have ignored changes to the work context that may have influenced contractor experiences (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Hipp, Bernhardt, & Allmendinger, 2015). The importance of context within contractor research has been overlooked in many studies, which may in part explain some

inconsistencies observed across this body of research. By using an interpretive approach, self-reflexivity, and other methods to increase qualitative rigor (see section *Criteria for High-Quality Qualitative Research*), this project was guided by contractors' perceptions and experiences to produce insightful, high-quality research.

4.1 Participants and Recruitment

Due to the variety of employment arrangements and experiences that exist within the category of contract work, the study examined the perspectives of a diverse group of workers, including professionals in engineering, IT, marketing, and human resources. Nevertheless, the lack of distinct terminology used in both research and practice necessitated the use of specific criteria for recruiting participants. The criteria to be considered a contractor in this study included employment that was 1) in short or limited-term contracts, 2) not specific or committed to one organization long-term (with the exception agency membership), 3) a role as a knowledge worker (e.g., hired for specialized knowledge and skills), and 4) a white-collar position. Both workers that are employed through agencies and those employed independently were included, without the assumption that their employment experiences are necessarily the same. The study explored both similarities and differences. Recruitment focused on active contractors but also included former contractors as they also offer important insights about their experiences and why they left contracting. While visa workers are not the focus of the study, they do represent a sizable group within contract workers and as such, visa status will be examined as an important potential characteristic if encountered. Importantly, the study aimed to add to this list of criteria to better carve out the space for contractors to be easily identified and considered a distinct contingent work form.

Guided by these criteria, participants were recruited from several sources, including a large public university, a contracting agency, and the researcher's professional network. After obtaining the permission and assistance of key stakeholders in each organization (i.e., HR, leadership), contractors were invited to participate in interviews via email. Despite being offered, the participating organizations chose not to include additional questions. Recruitment sources provided a contact list to the researcher after notifying the workers about the study. Participating contractors were also asked for recommendations of other contractors to contact (i.e., snowball sampling). The purpose of using multiple sources of recruitment, rather than a single organization, was to gain a broader perspective of contractor experiences since there is a lot of variety in these employment arrangements. Nevertheless, there were common threads through contract employment experiences that helped to demarcate these workers as a distinct contingent work group. While recruitment was more akin to a convenience sample, the use of multiple recruitment sources, as well as snowballing, enabled the collection of a wide range of views in a relatively short period of time. For the purpose of identifying initial themes and situating contract workers in the socialization context, generalization and probability sampling were not major concerns; future research should be used to test the applicability and breadth of the themes identified in this study. Instead, using a method which enables many contractor voices to speak was a more focal goal of this study, and the chosen method accomplished this task by recruiting contractors from multiple organizations, fields, and industries.

A total of 30 participants were interviewed over a four-month period to capture a broad variety contractor voices and develop themes more applicable to a wider array of

contractors. Although previous research that focused on a single profession, such as IT (e.g., Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Ho, Ang, & Straub, 2003; Mayer & Nickerson, 2005), has been informative, a multitude of contractor studies have focused on only a handful of professions, despite the wide array of professionals entering such positions. Participant demographics were similar to national trends for gender (65% male) among contractors (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). However, interviewing a variety of contractors in terms of profession, contractor tenure, and organizational membership was prioritized over sampling a nationally representative sample; contextual and experiential richness were more important to the goals of the study than generalizability of the results.

4.2 Interview Process and Materials

Prior to developing the interview guide, the researcher conducted informal interviews with three human resource managers to serve as sensitizing concepts (e.g., Charmaz, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which were used to provide a starting point for the study and to inform design and analysis decisions. The interviews included topics such as the prevalence and type of contractors used in their current or previous organizations, how their organizations conceptualize and treat contractors, and the manner in which human resources practices were applied (or not) to these workers (e.g., orientation, placement in organization, conversion to permanent roles). Several themes emerged in these interviews, including 1) contract workers as a timely, relevant topic in many organizations based on their prevalence, legal issues, and unusual management practices related to their employment, 2) the management of contract workers (as well as other contingent workers) is often poorly understood and/or not really thought about by employees who are not directly involved in their management, 3) there is great variability

in the types and nature of contract work, and 4) there is hesitancy surrounding independent contractors, especially, due to more recent legal issues surrounding 1099 tax status and the misclassification of employees. These themes aligned with previous research and suggested potential avenues for the rationale and design of the study.

Following the sensitizing interviews and a thorough review of the literature, the research question and interview guide (see *Appendix D*) were developed. To further refine the research question and guide, the first several interviews were treated as sensitizing interviews to provide further direction and specificity to the questions be asked. After the researcher gained a richer understanding of the contractor experience, the research questions and interview guide were refined to better direct the remainder of the study.

All semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or over the phone, based on the availability and needs of the participants. Once the interview was scheduled, the researcher followed up with the participant via email requesting some background information (see *Appendix C*). The goal of this step was to help the researcher better understand the participants prior to the interview and to suggest whether a variety of contractors are being successfully recruited. If the participant did not feel comfortable answering any questions, s/he may skip questions, as noted in the email instructions. The majority of participants completed the questions prior to the interview. On average, interviews lasted 52 minutes and were recorded with participants' permission. Transcription was partially conducted by the researcher and partially outsourced to a paid transcription service. For the purposes of quality control, the researcher hired a professional transcription service and verified the credentials of the transcribers. The

researcher then spot-checked sections of the transcripts by comparing them to the interview recordings. Finally, when presenting the results, pseudonyms are provided to protect participants' anonymity (see *Appendix D*).

4.3 Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews resulted in 525 pages of single-spaced text and were uploaded in NVivo software for analysis, which served to organize the codes throughout analysis. The data were analyzed line by line using the constant comparative method developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967). However, both emic and etic codes were used in the analysis. Due to the nature of the research questions, it was necessary to examine the prevalence of certain existing theoretical concepts in the data, such as "institutionalized organization tactics" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and "uncertainty reduction" (Teboul, 1994) while still allowing the organic development of new codes, such as "isolated" or "entrepreneurial mindset." Thus, consistent with an iterative approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994), throughout collection and analysis, the researcher shifted between theory and the data.

The reading and analysis of data began while interviews were still being conducted, being used to both identify key themes and indicate when theoretical saturation (i.e., new themes no longer emerge from the data) had been reached. The data was analyzed inductively using open coding, which involved labeling each line of data with a descriptive code that captures its theme and using *in vivo* codes (i.e., the participants' own words) whenever feasible. Simultaneously, open codes were used to consider similarities and differences across the entire data set (emic), and to draw connections to previous research and theory (etic). When necessary, new codes were

added and the data were recoded to capture new themes. Importantly, etic codes were also used as the open codes began revealing potential themes around existing terminology and theory. For example, "institutionalized tactics" became a higher-level code when open codes like "orientation" and "structured onboarding" indicated this existing term could be an important theme. Other etic codes that were used include "uncertainty reduction," "sensemaking," and "encounter." Examples of emic codes include "identify as consultant" and "my own boss."

Open coding produced 848 initial codes, including "a lot of risks," "acting like an insider," and "cautious at first," which were condensed to 120 unique thematic codes, such as "changes to employment context" and "uncertainty reduction." After analyzing the data a second time, the open codes were revised to create 51 higher order codes, in which fewer categories were created to capture meaningful themes in the data, as guided by the researcher's interpretations, socialization theory, and previous research. *Appendix G* provides several examples of the 51 master coding categories used in the current study's analysis. This list is neither exhaustive nor hierarchical. The final results are based on the most salient categories developed through this analysis. Notably, some codes identified in open coding were excluded from further analysis (e.g., "relationship with mentor," "formal performance review") to better focus the analysis for the project but may be used in future projects.

4.4 Criteria for High-Quality Qualitative Research

Several steps were taken for the sake of conducting high-quality qualitative research, guided by Tracy's (2013) "big tent" criteria and Johnson's (1999) review of validity in qualitative research. A thorough review of both the scholarly and popular press

literatures was conducted to identify themes and gaps to provide evidence of the relevance, significance, and importance of studying contract workers in the context of socialization. As described in Chapter 2: *Literature Review*, this is an important topic to study in contemporary organizations both practically and theoretically. In addition, the use of several compatible theories within socialization (e.g., assimilation, URT, sensemaking) helped delve into different dimensions of the phenomenon when interpreting the data.

To demonstrate the credibility of the study's findings, the researcher relied on thick description and concrete detail to show the results through the participants' voices rather than telling. For example, several *in vivo* codes became important in the final coding scheme, including "expertise" and "loyalty." Further, the researcher sought reflexivity by using critical self-reflection and maintaining awareness of her own biases to avoid over-influence on the research process and conclusions. In particular, a round of coding was spent identifying whether the researcher or the participants introduced themes. This provided the researcher insight into themes like the contractors' common use of "loyalty" without being prompted and also highlighted the use of etic, rather than emic codes, which drew from previous research and theory.

In the coding process, negative case analysis was also used to question assumptions by which the researcher examined the data for cases that offer evidence contrary to the themes previously identified, allowing the researcher to find further nuance in the data. Specifically, the case of *Mary* suggested that not all participants fit every component of the proposed definition of "contract worker," and provided insight into how a worker could be designated as "contract" but not share all the same features or

experiences. Finally, an executive summary of the high-level findings will be provided to participants, agencies, or employing organizations if requested. The summary may be used to gather additional feedback about the relevance and consistency of the findings.

The design was chosen carefully based on both the strengths (e.g., exemplars like Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004) and weaknesses of previous research (e.g., terminology issues, poor data sources). The research study provides theoretical and practical insights into contract work in contemporary organizations. Further, the results of the study have produced implications for contract workers and organizations alike and may be used to guide future research and practice.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

The current study explored how contractors understand their employment experiences and relationships in the context of organizational socialization. In this section, a description of contractors is extended beyond previous definitions and their experiences are illustrated through the lens of socialization theory. By being organized around the three sub-questions, the results help answer the broader research question: *How do contractors understand their employment experiences in the context of organizational socialization?* First, the results help further define contract workers by highlighting key differences within this population of workers, and expanding upon previous research examining the preferences, opportunities, and challenges in contract work. Then, results describing the current socialization practices contract workers experience are discussed from the agency and independent contractor perspectives. Finally, this chapter examines how well contract work fits into existing socialization theories and provides additional onboarding insights specific to contract workers. The results suggest that contractors do experience some typical features of socialization. However, the data indicate that contractors' socialization experiences differ from our current understanding of socialization theory in several areas: purpose, speed, content, sources, and reliance on past experience. Exemplars are presented to support each category defined and presented in the results. Pseudonyms are used for all participants

and further information is provided in *Appendix F* and a list of master codes is presented in *Appendix G.* Finally, throughout the results section, percentages are used to describe the prevalence and salience of codes across participants. Importantly, they are not intended to draw conclusions about the broader population of contract workers.

5.1 Defining "Contract Work"

Contract labor arrangements comprise a range of work experiences, giving the term "contractor" different meanings depending on the legal, practical, or theoretical context. As discussed in the literature review, contractors have often been grouped together with other contingent workers in previous research (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017) despite differences between worker types such as motivations for pursuing their work (e.g., Cohany, 1998; Kalleberg, 2000) and relationships with permanent employees (e.g., Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003). In this study, contract work is generally defined as a form of contingent work, characterized by autonomy, control, and expertise, in which a worker performs highly-skilled or specialized work for a specified project or period of time (see *Appendix A*). As a requirement for this study, participants had to fit a related set of criteria, namely employment that was 1) in short or limited-term contracts, 2) not specific or committed to one organization long-term (with the exception agency membership), 3) a role as a knowledge worker (e.g., hired for specialized knowledge and skills), and 4) a white-collar position.

By providing insight into contractor terminology and identifying key motivations to enter contract work, this project sought to answer research sub-question 1a, *How do contract workers understand the nature of their employment arrangements as it relates to their motivation?* It is important to note that the use of "motivation" in this research

question refers to the preferences, opportunities and challenges that push or pull workers toward contract work, rather than motivation as defined by motivation theories (e.g., Vroom), which view motivation in the context of needs, rewards, consequences, and expectancies leading to behaviors. Further, this section discusses contractors as related to common terms, including consultants, independent versus agency, and part- or full-time.

Terminology

Although participants were screened using the criteria-based definition provided above, contractors sometimes defined themselves differently during the interviews, highlighting the complicated nature of definitions of contract work for both practitioners and scholars. Without a common language, it makes the research-practice divide even more challenging to bridge. A common term used by independent contractors was "consultant." When considering their roles and scope of work, consultants and contractors were quite similar. Out of the thirty participants in this study, eight contractors referred to themselves as "consultants" at some point during the interview. A review of existing literature did not reveal clear definitional distinctions between contractors and consultants. However, data from the current study suggest a distinction does exist, but it is a subtle one.

According to the contractors interviewed in this study, two things may determine the label used: (a) perception of status and (b) the nature of one's work. For example, *Eden*, an independent marketing contractor who participated in this study, best described the status distinction between the employment labels, explaining: "People like the word consultant better . . . Clients and people in general. That is definitely what I'm doing. I always have to exude confidence in that I know what I'm doing, and that is where I feel

like I'm different from a contractor in the normal sense." For *Eden* and other contractors, consultants are awarded higher status simply by using a different label. Adopting a higher status identity is consistent with the elite goals of contract work and focus on expertise previously established in the literature (e.g., Lepak & Snell, 1999; Rainbird, 1991; Slaughter & Ang, 1996). Consultants are aligned with confidence and know-how, but the murkiness of the term "contractor" indicates that workers that identify as contractors may not be associated with the same prestige. As such, independent contractors may be particularly enticed to identify as more respected and elite workers, like consultants, because their continued employment relies on their own reputation. By claiming to be a "consultant" rather than a "contractor," workers sought to elevate their organizational status through rhetoric. Additionally, the term "consultant" may further establish the worker as an outsider or "Free Agent," allowing them to maintain greater independence, autonomy, and control (e.g., Osnowitz & Henson, 2016; Pink, 2001).

Referring to the nature of her work, *Eden* further explained the label distinction as follows: "I guess the typical contractor is someone who's assigned to do something that's been scoped out, whereas I'm scoping things out as I go and dictating." Many other consultants provided similar descriptions of task distinctions, including *Heidi*, a grant writer, "A contractor comes in with a particular job to do, whereas a consultant comes in to tell you what to do and then leaves," and *Janet*, a nonprofit contractor, "consultants aren't supposed to do the work, they're supposed to direct the work." Their descriptions suggest that consultants are advisors (workers that tell the organization what to do) while contractors are executors (workers who actually perform tasks in the organization). The scope of the work, and features like level of integration and time spent in the

organization, may encourage a to contractor adopt one identity over the other. The nature

of the work is a key influence on how a contractor identifies him or herself, rather than

many employees who may identify with their team, department, or organization. Outsider

status enables contractors to have more fluidity in their personal and professional

identities than may be possible inside an organization.

However, some participants indicated that the use of these two terms is often

interchangeable. *Briana*, a school evaluation contractor, suggested she moves back and

forward between terms: "I usually consider myself as a contractor, but again, I will

sometimes say, 'I'll consult with you'." Importantly, fluidity was based more on the

nature of the work than on the perception of one's status. Other participants also

demonstrated a fluidity of self-labeling, like *Rich*, who said, "It's very close. I'm still a

consultant that does contract work." Despite the similarity in work, Rich chose to identify

as a consultant, which may indicate a greater emphasis on status than work type. One

contractor, *Joseph*, even admitted he did not know the difference: "I really don't quite

know what the difference is . . . I call myself a consultant, but the university probably

calls me a contractor." His confusion further demonstrates that terminology was often

used to emphasize status rather than describe the nature of the work. Finally, these results

suggest that consultants and contractors may be synonymous employment labels,

depending on the context and the user (e.g., organizations, legal, contractors).

Independent versus Agency Workers

Legally, independent contractors are a clearly distinguished group due to issues

with employee status, benefits, and taxes (Kalleberg, 2000), and misclassification

(duRivage, 1992). Nevertheless, they share many features and experiences with agency

contractors, including specialized skills and projects (e.g., Rebitzer, 1995; Summers, 1997), contracts defined by time (e.g., Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003), and atypical organizational relationships (Kalleberg, 2000). In the current study, 20 participants were recently independent contractors and 10 were recently agency contractors; however, 5 had previous experience in both contract types. This section will provide some important descriptions of independent and agency workers' motivations related to preference for arrangement and high-level depictions of their experiences.

Many contractors explained that they used agencies because they provide fast, easy access to organizations. *David*, a graphics contractor, explained, "So I think the benefit of [working as an agency contractor] was just how simple it was compared to getting hired by some really complex organizations, like federal agencies, or I'm sure some other types of businesses are probably really hard to get through their HR." In some cases, however, contractors wondered if agencies provide easier access for less qualified workers. For example, *Ted*, an IT contractor, questioned the low bar for interviewing for his most recent agency position and suggested that sometimes a "contract [through an agency] gives more opportunities for people who are actually weaker." However, independent contractors did not express the same concern, which indicates that underqualified contractors gaining organizational access is an agency contractor concern. Importantly, while agency contractors have their agencies to vouch for them and provide easy access, independent contractors must rely solely on their reputation and expertise (Barley & Kunda, 2006). As such, underqualified independent contractors are likely to be weeded out early.

The level of connection or commitment to an organization varied for both types of contractor, largely dependent on time in their role, amount of time spent onsite, and the relationships developed through the contract. For many, like *Abby*, a design contractor, "commitment doesn't matter." While agency workers do have a triadic relationship involving both an agency and an organization, many agencies are often hands-off once a contractor is placed. As such, the experience once a worker enters the client organization can often be similar to independent contractors. When asked about his relationship with his agency, one IT contractor, *Luke*, abruptly laughed before explaining further: "I talked with one person [from the agency] specifically for onboarding. He referred me to two other people to get my paperwork done and I didn't talk to anybody for six months." Other contractors had similar experiences, like *Mary*, an HR contractor, who had to reach out to her agency to tell them her contract was about to end: "So, I called him and left him a message that said, 'Hey, just so you know, they told me that my last day's going to be done at, you know, February 28th, so, I don't know who your contact is,' . . . I said, 'I guess you need to work that out,' basically to do his job, but I didn't say it that way." Despite checking in with her regularly at the start of her role, the agency had all but disappeared over time, leaving her to navigate the experience without them. Like independent contractors, agency workers must often fend for themselves.

Another reason to use an agency was to have help with more administrative features of work, like taxes and billing, as suggested in previous research (e.g., Forde, 2001). *Tabitha*, a legal contractor, expressed her positive experiences with this side of agency work: "There's an ease to agency work that is great . . . It's so cut and dry. You think of how you're turning in your timesheet Friday afternoon at 5:30 to an agency.

There's such a . . . I would just call it a boundary setting, cut and dry." Notably, the agency helps set boundaries for the worker. While independent contractors are responsible for their own billing, scheduling, and taxes, agency workers are generally considered W-2 employees, which alleviates the administrative burden, for workers and organizations, and may even include benefits, health insurance, or paid time off (PTO) policies.

There were some notable exceptions wherein the agency remained involved with a worker throughout their contract. For instance, *William* shared how his most recent agency experience had been more positive than his previous relationships: "[my current agency] has been the best one that I have been at. My other two basically placed me and I just never heard from them again. [My agency] follows up, I probably hear from them every other week or so, maybe . . . yeah, once or twice here so far. And then they'll also, they take me to lunch every month, and they're very thorough, and they seem to care more." By simply checking in and making sure he was still satisfied in his role, William's agency positively influenced his experience. However, this treatment did not change his level of loyalty: "I don't feel like I owe them something, or something, you know?" Another contractor, *Tabitha*, described agencies as a potential mediator: "I guess the agencies play a mediation role sometimes of organization, you have to pay our contractors this much money or you have to go through us if there's some issue or any of that. I think perhaps they're trying to balance keeping both sides happy, but also keeping themselves in that middle position." The experiences of agency participants in this study suggest contracting agencies vary greatly in their treatment and relationship building with

workers, ranging from the transactional role of hiring and placement to the relational role of mediator and support system.

Independent contractors, on the other hand, have a direct relationship with the organizations where they work and must navigate the hiring process, contract negotiations, administrative tasks, and ongoing employment for themselves. All independent contractors in the study knowingly accepted this role, even if it is difficult to manage when starting to contract: "I had a day last week when I was waiting for things on a bunch of projects and couldn't move them forward. So I had a day where I worked like an hour and that's weird. It's kind of hard to get used to that and I know that it happens, but it's just a weird mental space to get into when that happens, and I think I'll get used it" (*Kat*). They did not seem to desire third party involvement or mediation, particularly as it would mean lower pay and less control over their employment arrangements. Overall, independent and agency contractors are legally distinct, have different rationale for their employment preferences, and experience different organizational relationships, but they all perform time-contingent, high-skill work with a lot of flexibility and little organizational commitment. Despite their differences, both fit under the broader umbrella "contractor." Throughout the results section, differences between independent and agency workers will be described when relevant.

In the interviews, agency contractors did not express any commitment or loyalty for their particular agencies. When asked if they had a connection or commitment to their agency, agency relationships were described as highly transactional. As an engineering contractor, *Steven,* shared, "I have no loyalty to any house really. Basically, you go to whoever gives you the best benefits and the best, highest rate." In fact, contractors would

frequently change agencies to find the best options, like *Rachel*, an IT contractor, who was with a staffing agency for two years before switching: "I'm moving because I got a better offer from the other agency, paid leave, more money" (*Rachel*). *Ted* also described his agency choice as based on quality over loyalty: "I would probably try to use the same agency, but it wouldn't be out of a sense of loyalty. It would be more out of a sense that they were better at what they did than the other agencies that I interacted with." Although agencies can provide valuable access and services to contractors, these workers have many choices for agencies and are able to shop around for the best options available to them.

Importantly, the use of the word "loyalty" was common among agency contractors, despite being unprompted in the interview questions. Contractors do not necessarily feel compelled to demonstrate loyalty to agencies, as loyalty implies a deep, often emotional connection and two-way commitment that would not be reciprocated. As discussed in the literature review, organizations may offer contingent workers employability – "possibility of attaining a new job"– instead of commitment (Chambel & Sobral, 2011, p.162). For agencies, employability is the key component of contractor relationships. Agencies act to keep workers engaged in a series of short-term jobs but if one agency offers better employment options (i.e., superior employability), a contractor has no other reason to be committed and will leave for the better option.

Many participants saw independent contracting as more advantageous. *Callie* explained why she has preferred independent work over agency roles: "I think it is more advantageous to be an independent contractor than to be a contractor who is working through an employment agency for obvious reasons. Freedom and better income." Other

agency contractors, like *Eric*, an engineer, suggested a preference for independent

contracting, even though it was not possible in his situation due to industry norms: "I

wish I could be an independent contractor. But, unfortunately, most companies . . . [have]

a list of contract houses that have been proven." In contrast, none of the independent

contractors expressed a preference for agency work over independent work. However, the

feast or famine work cycle was a less glamorous aspect of the job: "in keeping that

constant flow of work coming in is the problem because you get all those peaks and then

you get a lot of shallows and saying what's going to happen tomorrow?" (*Rich*). While

agencies help contractors balance their access to work and lessen some sense of

instability, independent contractors must be prepared to deal with these shifts on their

own.

Although many features of employment were similar for agency and independent

contractors (e.g., flexibility, expertise), there were some differences in their experiences.

In addition to sometimes identifying themselves as consultants, a review of the coded

data revealed that independent contractors were also more likely than agency contractors

to express an entrepreneurial mindset and comfort with instability. Further, independent

contractors are more likely to work remotely, as discussed in the next section. As

evidenced in the master codes in *Appendix G*, entrepreneurial mindset refers to wanting

to be your own boss or brand and maintaining independence through control over how

you work. The majority of independent contractors in this study (17 out of 20)

demonstrated an entrepreneurial mindset, while only two of the agency contractors shared

these facets of contracting. As *Samantha*, an HR contractor, described, she enjoyed

independent contracting because it meant "being my own boss." Similarly, Didi strove

for independence by building a business around her own expertise: "Then in 2009-2008 I peeled off and decided to go into business for myself, so really have been building it since then" (Didi). Independent contractors often saw their work as a personal brand or a business, whereas agency workers were not as inclined to do so. Independent workers are often afforded great independence and distance from organizations that agency workers do not as onsite workers and agency employees. These ties prevent agency contractors from adopting an entrepreneurial mindset.

The temporal and changing nature of contract work was well understood among contractors in this study. Similar to previous research (e.g., Peel & Boxal, 2005), participants who preferred contract work – independent or agency – demonstrated a high tolerance for change and uncertainty. For example, *Janet*, explained the need to define your own position and work process as a contractor: "I think there's a greater sense of, a greater comfort with independence and autonomy and with both giving and receiving direction that is expected of contract workers than might be expected of employees who are hired through a normal process with a normal job description and goals for their position." Organizations are not going to give contractors the same structure and guidance they give employees (Kalleberg, 2000; Lozano, 1989), so contractors must learn to create their own through ambiguity and change. *Samantha* shared Janet's preference for contract work, stating, "I like change and I like the uncertainty and I'm not risk adverse and I think you can't be 100% risk adverse in the contract world. I know a lot of people like job security. That's probably understandable, but you have to be willing to take on risk." Even agency workers who preferred contract work, like *Steven*, had adapted to the constant uncertainty and change inherent to their jobs: "I mean I got up

and moved. I didn't have to. I just got up and left. I was in Little Rock, I'm in Georgia right now. I just picked up and moved." Like many temporary, part-time, and hourly workers, contractors faced instability, underwork, and schedule fragmentation (e.g., Alexander & Hayle-Lock, 2015; Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017); however, for workers who preferred contracting, the opportunities to earn higher wages, gain autonomy, and pursue highly skilled and personally interesting work outweighed the concerns for instability (Cohany, 1998; Kalleberg, 2000).

In contrast, participants who preferred standard, full-time employment most frequently cited insecurity and instability as the greatest reasons why they did not prefer contracting: "you basically are living a day job. I don't think there is a concept of job security over here" (*Gregory*), and "You know going to work every day that it could be your last day with no notice and no severance" (*Ted*). The possibility of being let go any day was more stressful for some contractors than others. Even in a right to work state, like North Carolina, some participants found more comfort in permanent employment over contracting.

Beyond the labels of independent versus agency, the contractor experience was more greatly influenced by the location of work (i.e., remote or onsite) and part-time or full-time status. In fact, future research and practice may find examining contract work through these lenses more meaningful than comparing independent and agency workers. Nevertheless, it is important to note that independent contracting was highly correlated with remote work and part-time status, while agency contracting was highly correlated with onsite and full-time.

Remote versus Onsite Work

Study participants provided evidence that working onsite or remote both had their benefits and challenges. Of the participants in this study, 63% (18 independent, 1 agency) worked remotely on a regular basis. Notably, most independent contractors worked remotely, and most agency workers worked onsite. There were instances in which those arrangements were switched, but remote work was highly associated with independent work and presented unique challenges.

Even for remote workers, onsite visits were an important feature for most contract workers. Many made a point of being onsite at regular intervals, like *Callie*, who flew to a different state to work at the organization: "I was traveling down there twice a month for a week at a time" (*Callie*). Even for work that could be completed individually, contractors still emphasized the importance of both onsite and off-site time. *Sarah's* experience with a team of remote contractors working a client organization illustrated this dynamic: "this work doesn't require that we're onsite and we can actually see each other, which is to our benefit in the teams that we're consulting with . . . There will be some in person trainings, but again, we have done many different tasks where we've commuted or made different trips to support the ask." While the team could accomplish many tasks when distributed, they also found times to meet face-to-face with each other and the organization.

Although only one agency contractor in the study currently worked remotely on a regular basis, others had opportunities for remote work in previous roles and they reflected on these experiences. For agency workers, remote work was largely dictated by company culture. If full-time employees are permitted to work remotely, or the

organization is broadly distributed across locations, then contractors are more likely to take advantage of remote work too. For several agency participants, remote work was common in their employing organization, like *Callie*, "But a lot of people are working from home. Some of my design team members don't need to interface with other because they are production artists and designers, and so a lot of them work from home as well." *William*, an IT contractor, shared a similar experience: "But [the company] and this team is super flexible and really great to work with. I was able to be remote most of the time from [my previous company]. as well. I think I went in once or twice a week at the end there, but I was only being remote a lot." Nevertheless, only two of the agency participants worked remotely on a regularly basis in their contract roles. For some the nature of their work necessitated being onsite. Despite having a completely dispersed team, *Luke* chose to work onsite to be near his equipment: "Right because I liked to be able to get up and be able to go look at a piece of gear when I want to see what it's doing." For him, working remotely would have been more of a challenge than a perk.

For many, however, remote work was a benefit of contracting. *William,* the only remote agency contractor, shared the time savings he gained through working remotely at his own rented office: "And that just opened up, obviously, a lot of time, because my office is like 12 minutes from my house instead of an hour of commuting into [the city]. So, it's pretty nice, pretty great." Contract work offers a uniquely easy opportunity for remote work, as contractors are already outsiders, use boundary setting, and do not get fully integrated into the organization anyway. Nevertheless, not all contractors could work remotely depending on their role or their organization's or team's culture. For independent contractors, remote work is helpful in avoiding any appearance of co-

employment or misclassification (e.g., diRuvage, 1992), but agency workers are less likely to be given the choice.

For some workers, the choice of contract work was even partly driven by the desire for remote work. *Eden* shared her preference for remote work over being onsite: "It's never because I don't want to be seen as an internal contractor. It's because I'm lazy. I'm very introverted and I love remote work with a passion, so I just don't want to drive." Contractors may be resistant to working onsite but will do so when required by the company they work with, like *Janet*, who worked onsite at a nonprofit as an interim development director: "For this one I had to agree be on site. Most of my contract work is remote, which I like because that's the highest flexibility." Although willing to be onsite to meet the organization's needs, she explained a challenge she faced with onsite work: "This is where you get into some of this hourly mindset, even if you're not, I'm not paid by the hour there, but you know, like driving to work. Well, that's time away from something" (*Janet*). In addition to flexibility and preferences for work space, remote work also plays into the idea that "time is money." For contractors, who generally work at an hourly rate, every hour of the day not spent working is time when money cannot be earned.

Some contractors did not have the same luxury of working offsite, even if their teams were remote. *Gregory*, an IT agency contractor, discussed the dynamic of his dispersed team: "Yeah, it was a mixture of full-time and contractors. They were not all contractors, they were not all full-time. But it was a mixture of both of them. Unfortunately, there was no one out of the same location as I was based out of. They were in different locations." Even though his team members were in different locations

across the country, the company expected him to work onsite. *Chris*, who worked on a team comprised of transient contract workers, was often the one of the only onsite workers since he lived locally: "the office was like a ghost town on Friday. Because all these contract employees would leave." As members of a different agency with longer term contracts, the other contractors had remote Fridays built into their contracted schedules, but *Chris*, who had a different contract and was still in a newer, perhaps probationary period (Benzinger, 2006), did not have the same luxury. While he was not included in this remote routine, *Chris* did not seem bothered by the inconsistency.

The importance of being onsite may depend in part on the relational aspects of one's role. *Tabitha* described the difference between onsite and remote work based on the nature the role: "[I've had roles] where you felt like you were meant to be more a part of the team, so it was more about knowing the people versus in certain contracting situations like this one where it's more about knowing the material and the work. It really is not about the people at all. They're expecting me to do the work at home right now." If the project is highly collaborative or team-oriented, onsite work may be more common and necessary. For more independent tasks and projects, remote work may be a non-issue.

Finally, working onsite may also influence one's level of connection with the organization and its employees through relationship building. *Tabitha* described this concept: "I feel connected when I've worked onsite, when it's been a situation where, whether it was contract or contract-to-hire, where they needed me to be onsite and connect with the people, I have felt connected and committed." Although other contractors emphasized relationships as key to connection, even highly relationship-oriented remote work may not have the same effect. One participant, *Tom*, described his

connection as complex: "To some degree I feel connected because I know most of the employees, but then there is a disconnect because I really don't have an office space there. I don't have my own little cubicle or a place to go to so there's always a reminder that hey, this isn't home for you, which I don't want. This is just a place you come and meet and get your business taken care of." Physical presence and physical space can be influential in how a company signals a worker's place in organization. Often, "real" employees are onsite and have their own space. Contractors and other non-traditional arrangements, such as remote work, are a transition away from this standard indicator of connection and belonging. These experiences suggest that the prevalence of remote work in standard employment experiences does not necessarily extend to all contract roles and largely depends on contractors' preferences, the needs of the role, the company culture, and the organization's treatment of contractors. However, research on remote work may be highly informative about the experiences of independent contractors and should be further considered in future research.

Part-time versus Full-time

The current study included both part-time (N = 11) and full-time contractors (N = 19). Notably, all part-time contractors were independent, and it was unclear if or how often agencies offer access to part-time contract work. Participants were largely pulled, rather than pushed (e.g., Cohen & Bianchi, 1999; Gruden & Applebaum, 1992), toward part-time work for purposes of work-life balance, meaningful work, and extra money. In fact, 64% of the part-time contractors in this study worked full-time jobs at the same time they were working as contractors. They contracted part-time because they were drawn to the type of work contracting offered or needed extra money. While many participants in

the study were parents, only mothers cited work-life balance as a reason to engage in contract work. *Janet* shared why she left permanent employment in the first place: "About four years ago, I left my position and wanted to have more flexibility and more, flexibility for me was around scheduling, around time with my family, I have children." She found a new balance by controlling her own work hours, which fluctuated between part- and full-time. Similarly, *Samantha* transitioned to part-time contract work when she had her first kid: "I didn't want to stop working, but I didn't work full-time either . . . I found it was like the perfect situation to be in because I can take jobs when I want or not. I can still be a stay at home mom and take projects and get that fulfillment as well" (*Samantha*). Part-time contract work allowed her to continue as an active member of the workforce, while better balancing her needs as a mother.

One soon-to-be mother was anxious about balancing her contract work with motherhood: "It means that I'm taking maternity leave myself and then I don't know what happens next with my little business" (*Eden*). Despite her already flexible schedule as an independent contractor, *Eden* was concerned about losing her full-time work, evidencing her entrepreneurial mindset, and had not yet figured out her new schedule. She was concerned about stepping away from her contract work because she would miss doing the work she enjoyed and feared losing the client relationships she had developed over several years. Unlike a permanent employee, contract work did not provide any promise of continued employment upon her return. Importantly, the three contractors who cited parenthood as a reason to prefer contract work were women who were independent contractors with husbands who worked full-time. As such, the same work arrangement may not meet the same needs of single mothers, or even fathers, but demonstrates how

having children may act as a pull into contract work rather than a push. Previous research (Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002) suggests certain factors, such as having children and getting married, were not consistently defined as either push or pull factors for contracting. This study's findings support motherhood as a pull factor, as the participants made this career choice. Nevertheless, the same trend was not identified in fathers, who may experience children as more of a push factor than women.

Opportunities to do meaningful or interesting work to make extra money enticed many participants contract. For some, part-time contract work provided interesting work outside one's full-time job. For *Abby*, her part-time work was her "passion" and fulfilled her creative needs in a way her full-time job did not. Her full-time job paid the bills in a way her part-time work may not, and she was not willing to risk the instability. Using evenings and weekends, she found time to do both. For others, like *David* and *Maureen*, contract work offered opportunities for money while in graduate school. As *David* said, "extra money was definitely a big plus," and part-time contracting offered a fruitful opportunity. While many part-time contractors had full-time employment elsewhere (N = 7), contract work offered options to do different work with a variety of other organizations. Finally, many pursued part-time contracting for multiple reasons: "My first role was an area of interest, opportunity for more experience and I could make a little money from it" (*Sarah*). Participants who preferred full-time permanent positions with part-time contract work were not dissatisfied with their full-time work but wanted to pursue other interests and supplement their incomes, mirroring previous research (e.g., Bernasek & Kinnear, 1999).

Notably, 50% of the agency contractors and 55% of independent contractors preferred standard, full-time employment over contracting and cited job security as the major reason for this preference. Of the independent contractors who preferred standard employment, all were part-time contractors and 64% had full-time employment elsewhere. In contrast, all full-time independent contractors preferred contract work. Participants' varying perspectives challenge the previous findings (e.g., DiNatale, 2001) that contractors are not interested in finding more standard, full-time employment, and further demonstrate how nuanced contract work experiences can be. The findings from this study are not necessarily generalizable to all contract workers; however, they do call into question some claims made in previous research. Despite the draw of flexibility, autonomy, skilled work, and the other benefits of contract work (Cohany, 1998; Kalleberg, 2000), the contract employment arrangements were not appealing to everyone. Overall, instability was the largest driver of full-time work preference. Relatedly, the results mirror the drastic growth in part-time, rather than full-time, contract work over the past decade, as part-time contractors now represent approximately half of the contract workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Opportunities in Contract Work

As described in the literature review, much previous research has focused on the opportunities and benefits of doing contract work. The participants' experiences in this study support and expand many of the previous findings regarding the greatest opportunities in contract work. A key driver of contract preference was the potential for more money, like *Kat*, "It worked out for me because I'm working 30, 35 hours a week and actually making more money than I was," and *Steven*, "It was about triple my pay as

an entry level." As previous research (Cohany, 1998; Kalleberg, 2000) suggests, independent contractors often make more money than permanent employees. Many were also drawn by the pursuit of highly skilled and personally interesting work, like *Janet*, "And I want to make a difference. I mean I want to solve problems," and *Sarah*, "I've learned a lot about myself in the process. It would just be finding relationships that work and doing the meaningful job that you aim to." Many do part-time work in addition to full-time role because they seek to do meaningful work, including participants *Briana* and *Howard*. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Kalleberg 2000), autonomy was also a key reason to pursue contract work, as described by multiple contractors: "I control the quality of the content. It's more work, but I know start to finish that this is exactly what they need" (*Didi*) and "I think it's the autonomy and it's the ability to gather experiences, like I'm a firm believer in that you should . . . that's what you should covet, is experiences as you go through life" (*Heidi*). Autonomy often supported the pursuit of other goals, such as meaningful work, a specialized focus, and flexible scheduling.

Interestingly, involuntary separation was an impetus for some workers to enter contracting. This finding supports previous research (e.g., Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009), but also adds that this experience was particularly common among younger contractors. *Eden* described a series of layoffs when she worked a permanent full-time role that caused her great frustration: "We got a round of layoffs and I was cut, and then I went to another job and the entire marketing department was cut, and that kept happening like two or three times, and I was like, 'I hate this. I never have insurance on my own. I don't have a 401K built. I don't have any of these things'." The stress of always looking for work, and the lack of loyalty from employers was draining. Her frustration was further exacerbated

when she compared her own career to her dad's career: "Like my dad works with *Food Retailer* for 45, 46 years . . . and I just kept getting laid off, and I was like, 'This is stupid,' so what I decided to do was to start consulting and start getting feelers for what this would be like." Eden's negative experiences with permanent employment coupled with the stark contrast between traditional organizational membership and more contemporary employment trends inspired her transition to contracting. As a contractor, she had greater control and knew what to expect.

Other participants had similar stories, including *Kat*, who also experienced layoffs and suspicious corporate behavior: "Yeah, I was laid-off on March 1st. From there, I'd had a meeting . . . actually the day before with one of the investors in the company that I was working for. He wanted to hire me freelance for a project so it kind of just was a really smooth transition. I'm not convinced that he didn't have something to do with my being laid-off." Changes to standard, full-time employment arrangements, often in the form of layoffs and disloyal employers, were a motivator for several participants to become contractors. This disenchantment fueled their desire to seek alternative arrangements. As organizations continue to move away from traditional employment structures (e.g., lifelong security, two-way commitment), it is very possible contracting will become increasingly attractive to fed-up workers. Although contract work comes with no commitments, this is explicitly understood by both parties from the start, whereas terminations from standard employment arrangements may still be perceived as contract breaches (e.g., Bidwell & Briscoe, 2009; Rousseau, 1995). Both independent and agency contractors in the study had experienced layoffs from previous employers, but the effects of layoffs were particularly strong for younger contractors. These workers, particularly

those earlier in their career, were more likely to prefer contract work and perceive the appeal of new career forms (e.g., Arthur, 1994; Hall, 1996).

For some, the prevalence of contractors in their industry influenced their pursuit of this form of employment. In particular, industry norms were influential for engineers and IT professionals. The two engineers in the study described contract work as a common career decision for many in their field: "Contracting, as far as I know, has been super-duper common for a long time. When I started, these guys were contracting - they were contracting since the late seventies, early eighties" (*Eric*), and "That's what basically everybody says. 'Get your five years in and go contracting'" (*Steven*). For both, the industry norms as well as the potential to earn more money were key motivators for choosing contract work arrangements. IT contractors also described how common contract work is in their field, as *William* put it, "You know, the contracting is basically how they hire now. There's not . . . it's not like I chose to do it or not do it, it's just how they hire." For many large corporations, IT needs fluctuate and being able to add or subtract from IT headcount quickly is key to maintaining a lean organization while also hitting project deadlines. For engineers, contracting appears to be more of an employment choice whereas for IT, contracting may sometimes be the only choice.

Importantly, IT is the only field in which participants suggested contracting may be more necessity rather than choice, and it may stem from the long history of contracting in the field or from the specific needs and strategies of IT departments. Over time, contract work can become normalized and part of the organization strategy (e.g., Atkinson, 1985; Burgess & Connell, 2006). Industries that are newer to contract worker use may be behind IT and engineering in terms of normalizing contract roles, but the

same trend could occur over time. In fact, organizations that plan for and strategically use contractors are more likely to reap the benefits, such as efficiency and cost savings (Peel & Boxal, 2005); therefore, industries that have normalized contract work may experiencing better outcomes. Future research is needed to further examine this issue.

Challenges of Contract Work

In addition to opportunities, contractors voiced many of the challenges in their work. These themes demonstrated both consistencies and addition to previous research. Specifically, participants experienced challenges with benefits and finances, scheduling, and communication.

Benefits and Finances

Similar to previous findings (duRivage, 1992; Rebitzer, 1995), participants reported challenges with benefits and the financial components of contract employment. As one contractor, *Callie*, said, "The big con is lack of employee benefits." While agency workers were more likely to receive some level of benefits as W2 workers for agencies, benefits were a common source of stress for independent contractors. Other contractors, like *Janet*, also shared their concerns: "I will say one of the things I did not like about not working and then still don't like about being a contract worker and that's the lack of a retirement plan." Lack of benefits and retirement planning were known challenges for people entering contract work, but nevertheless could be a source of stress. For some, the administrative and financial challenges of contract work were a motivating reason for some to choose agency work over independent. Other financial burdens were shared, as when *Eden* explained her troubles with qualifying for a mortgage: "You cannot buy a house within like . . . You have to keep doing it for like six or seven years consistently

before a bank will consider you, but if you get a full-time job, you only have to show two to three months of pay stubs, and then you're good and they never check again." Despite making decent money, her atypical employment status was an obstacle to aspects of her personal life.

A final financial challenge was understanding the cost of one's work. For both independent and agency workers, defining the ideal salary package was difficult. For independent workers, who generally bill by the hour or deliverable, billing was a new phenomenon requiring them to monetize their value and time. *Samantha* described this experience in the following way: "One of the challenges I had at first was billing my time and estimating how much time. Because I'm the kind of contractor that bills out time, knowing okay how long is this project going to take me? How much do I want to bill for it? All the materials and cost, and stuff that's a pretty decent learning curve." Other contractors shared her experience, like *Briana*, who even experienced guilt when invoicing her work at the start of her contract career: "I felt guilty when I invoiced people. I felt guilty asking for the money for my work, because when you're working in a job and you just get paid every two weeks or every month, that just happens. But all of a sudden, 'Oh, I have to invoice these people'." While billing and salary were larger challenges for independent contractors, who often had greater control over these aspects of work, some agency workers also faced challenges. For example, *Ted* shared his frustration with understanding what a job offer included: "So, one of the bigger challenges was figuring out the finances of the offer, because you had to figure out what was included and what was excluded and what was different about the contract." For agency workers, the frustration came more from understanding what the package

included (e.g., benefits, PTO) rather than negotiating its contents. Independent

contractors, on the other hand, were concerned with negotiating their hourly pay and

being paid on time, which were issues regulated by agencies for agency workers. Many

participants shared their frustrations over the financial burdens of contracting.

Scheduling

      Contractors in this study provided support for previous research (e.g., Ballard &

Seibold, 2003; Osnowitz & Henson, 2016) on the role of time in contract work, as well as

the challenges inherent to a time-based employment contract. Finding the right balance of

working hours proved a challenge for many contractors. As discussed in previous

research (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017), schedule fragmentation and underwork were major

challenges. Too much work was exhausting and could lead to burnout, "But, you know, I

had to work sixty hours a week, that was really exhausting" (*Eric*), but too little could

produce an equal amount of stress: "I would not be very happy with just working with

these other companies because I'd have months of almost no income, and then other

months when I'd be just gonzo crazy" (*Jacob*). Fragmentation and underwork especially

problematic for independent contractors who were wholly responsible for navigating their

work schedules, whereas agency workers received support from agencies in job hunting.

Finding the right balance of work was key.

      Reminiscent of Evans, Kunda, and Barley's (2004) work, there were themes

around how contractors perceive and use their time. Independent contractors had

additional trouble enjoying downtime due to their sole responsibility for their work

schedules. Like *Tom*, a contract manufacturer's representative, stated: "I hardly ever take

vacation. It's really difficult for me, and I'm not complaining. It's really difficult for me to

take one or two weeks off and be completely away from the business." *Tom*, like many

contractors, had great flexibility in his schedule and yet struggled to find or enjoy

"downtime" (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004). Others had struck the right balance

between work and play, like *Jacob* who prioritized downtime in his schedule: "I would

not feel good about being 100% [with one company] because I'm used to a more

adventurous, traveling lifestyle." *Jacob* was able to work enough without sacrificing his

preferred lifestyle.

Some contractors suggested tactics they had developed for balancing their

schedules. For *Tabitha*, the key was "setting boundaries" between work and family life.

She relied on a supportive husband and a stable of babysitters, as well as clear personal

boundaries between work and home to balance motherhood with contract work. For

Eden, the key to balance was knowing how much work was too much: "What's been

hardest and most useful for me this time around has been saying no to things." During her

previous attempt at contract work, she took taken on too much and burned herself out.

This time around, *Eden* found greater balance by recognizing her limits and setting

boundaries, similar to previous research (Occhiutto, 2017; Osnowitz & Henson, 2016)

that suggest contractors are able to reinforce boundaries and practice temporal control to

achieve autonomy.

For participants, uncertainty about sustaining employment also played a major

role in scheduling, despite being inherent to their work: "That's probably another

challenge is, sometimes there's some uncertainty" (*Briana*). However, some contractors

found the ongoing consideration of finding the next job more daunting than others. For

Eric, an agency engineer, the possibility of being let go was an ever-present challenge:

"It's also a little bit higher risk. You could have a job offer and I know people that have had this, where they have been hired somewhere, they quit their job, start driving to the new contract job and then all of the sudden, it's taken away like that." The temporary nature of contract work makes the end of a contract a challenge, even when the contract is completed in its entirety. *Chris*, an agency communications contractor, shared the contractor's dilemma of finding the next gig: "that is one of the challenges that if you're a contract employee you're not full time. So, even though you got hired you're not really hired because you're still on the grind trying to look for a full-time job." Even for more experienced contractors, like *Rich*, find the right balance of work can be a source of concern: "You look at your future, and you say I've only got a horizon addition of about 30 days of work, 35 days. I don't know what's going to happen. There's a lot of uncertainty." For many contractors, finding and maintaining the right amount of work was an ever-present consideration.

Communication

Contractors often faced challenges with communication, specifically related to infrequent communication and limited channels (e.g., few organizational contacts). Further, remote work was the source of many of these issues, demonstrating its broad impact. *Joseph* expressed difficulties with communication as a remote worker: "So I'm not local. So, I operate remotely, and I think always when you're operating remotely maintaining communication is the challenge." Technology mediates many issues with remote work, for contractors and standard employees alike: "But the digital age we live in today, with instant messaging, definitely helps keep continuous conversations going. Of course, it's not exactly the same, not being, like I said, right there. But we do use

Google as a platform, and that is very helpful" (*Callie*). Yet technology cannot bridge all communication divides, particularly when the organization creates further obstacles. While an onsite employee could walk over to someone to ask questions or request information or attend meetings, remote workers did not have this opportunity. As *Callie* describes, "Well, a difficulty being remote again was that I couldn't be included in town hall meetings and things like that, where there's a very, very large group, let's say, in an auditorium, for example, when the president spoke, and I was dependent on my employees to tell me what was going on, that put a really awkward spin on things." Despite being a manager of a team, *Callie* was not a primary source of communication between the company and her team and was often excluded from key information exchanges. Another contractor, *Kat*, shared her complications with remote work: "I know that I can't expect a huge amount of communication from them, but even on the outside it's a little more frustrating because I can't just walk up to somebody and say, 'Hey I need this from you, I'm going to stand here while you do it'." Being physically removed limits the number of communication channels one can use to gather information or check project progress.

The themes presented in this section help further define what it means to be a contract worker. However, negative case analysis raised questions about the definitional fit of one participant, *Mary*. Although *Mary* had a graduate level education and shared a similar experience to other participants, several features of her employment experience suggest she may be better defined as a temporary employee than a contractor. Specifically, the nature of her work shared similarities more akin to temporary than contract workers, characterized by employment in organizations for indefinite but short

periods of time (i.e., hours, months, or years), with employment lengths are specified by the organization (Kalleberg et al., 2000), and doing work that is low-skilled, low status, and clerical (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). *Mary* shared that her supervisor described her role, to "clean up their personnel files," as a "hideous project." While contract work is often specialized and highly skilled, the company's rationale for hiring her was not on expertise: "it's something that needed to be done, so why not have a contractor come in and do it, you know, and just concentrate on it, so that's what I did." Mary's tasks were administrative and did not require a high level of skill to be completed. Like a temp, *Mary* was hired to complete tedious, unskilled work.

Nevertheless, like contractors, *Mary* was motivated to use the contract role as an opportunity to look for full-time work, she was not forced into the role out of necessity, and her onboarding experiences shared similarities with other participants. The example of *Mary* demonstrates that some work arrangements muddle the boundaries between contingent arrangements, and future work may be needed to understand how and why organizations label roles as "temporary" versus "contract." *Mary* does not fit perfectly into the definition of a temporary worker or a contractor, suggesting that her role may be an example of an organization assigning the wrong work to a particular type of worker (e.g., McKeown, 2005). As previous research suggests, contractors should be used to meet increased demand, to offer specialized skills, and to decrease costs (Holmes, 1986), or to perform technical and complex tasks once reserved for permanent employees (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Slaughter & Ang, 1996). While *Mary* held the title of contractor, her role tasks may have been better assigned to a temporary worker while *Mary* could have performed more highly-skilled work instead. Despite some similarities in

experience, *Mary* provided further clarification between the definitions of contract and temporary work, highlighting the importance of the type of work. Namely, highly-skilled work is an important part of the definition of contract work and is necessary to understand these workers as being defined by their expertise and skill.

When communication is ineffective between contractors and these sources of contact, the whole project can suffer. *Eden* expressed her frustrations with poor client communication: "it's a huge challenge and a lot of people think they know how to communicate, and then they'll say one thing and do another." When communication is going well, then a contract runs smoothly, but communication can be quite poor. Further, *Eden* explained what makes certain client relationships great: "the ones that I have right now are phenomenal . . . we both work very, very well with email, and we're both in the same, I don't know, wavelength there as to what's a reasonable time to respond to an email and not letting things slip through the cracks with an email." Not only is communication consistent, but she and her client have similar communication styles, which makes the relationship better on both ends. For contractors, who may have few channels for communication due to limited social networks within organizations, establishing effective and ongoing communication may already be difficult. Then, remote work can further exacerbate these issues by limiting their communication opportunities to technology-mediated channels and occasional onsite visits. Unlike many permanent employees and other contingent workers (e.g., temporary workers), contractors are likely to have both limited channels for communication and challenges due to remote working situations.

Collectively, participants' motivations, designated by their preferences, opportunities, and challenges, paint a complex picture of contract work. Not only do these themes distinguish contractors further from other contingent workers (e.g., temporary, seasonal), they also illuminate important distinctions within contract working arrangements. The following section will examine the current practices in contractor socialization, seeking to further understand contractors' employment experiences.

5.2 Current Practices in Contractor Socialization

A review of the contractor literature revealed that previous research on contractors' onboarding and socialization experiences is sparse (e.g., Benzinger, 2006). Existing research suggests that many organizations expect contingent workers to quickly assimilate (Druker & Stanworth, 2004), without providing much assistance or by handing off socialization and training to standard employees, regardless of whether these tasks are in they have the time or preparation to handle these tasks (e.g., Geary, 1992; Smith, 1994). Socialization offers an important opportunity to learn how to operate in one's role and organization, yet the extent to which organizations see this process as important to contract workers remains unclear. As such, this study examined what socialization processes contractors currently experience and how these experiences fit into existing socialization theory.

To fill this gap in the literature, research sub-question 1b was posed: *What onboarding/ socialization processes are currently used for contract workers?* In examining this question, it was quickly apparent that many contract workers did not have a traditional socialization experience. Despite their similarities (e.g., types of work, expertise, purpose for organizations' use), independent and agency workers experienced

different onboarding and socialization treatments from the organization. However, many

of their individual tactics were similar. As such, the current practices of each contract

type will be presented separately, followed by a discussion of their similarities. Finally,

this section will use the current practices to answer research sub-question 1c, *How do*

contractors' employment experiences fit within existing socialization theory? Following,

the importance and implications of these findings will be examined in the final discussion

chapter.

Participants' experiences provide evidence that contractors do experience some

typical features of organizational socialization, including organizational socialization

tactics and individual socialization tactics. However, several themes highlight their

experiences as atypical in the context of organizational socialization theory. First, the

onboarding experiences of participants varied across types, fields, industries, and

organizations. From more traditional orientations to rapid-fire starts, the early

experiences of contractors were not uniform. In particular, agency and independent

contractors experienced different socialization practices. Second, several categories

emerged as important and somewhat unique components of contractor socialization: the

purpose, speed, content, sources, and reliance on previous experiences. In this section,

themes consistent with previous socialization theory will be shared first. Then, categories

that illustrate how contractor socialization differs from previous theory will be discussed.

Organizational Socialization Tactics

In this study, contract workers experienced features of organizational socialization

consistent with how it has been previously theorized and researched. However, agency

and independent contractors often did not experience the same forms, with agency

workers experiencing both institutionalized and individualized tactics whereas

independent contractors only experienced individualized tactics. For a review of

organizational socialization tactics, see *Appendix B*.

Organizational Strategies with Agency Contractors

Many agency contractors experienced a more traditional onboarding process and

had a similar experience to full-time employees, similar to the findings in previous

research (Benzinger, 2006). Examples included *Steven*, who shared his experience,

"Everybody, the contractors and directs go through this same orientation," and Mary, "I

probably didn't need to be, but I was included in the orientation." *Mary* further

questioned the relevance of her orientation, commenting, "I think they did invite me to

orientation at [my company], part of which did not apply to me at all, because they talked

about benefits and all that stuff." While including agency contractors in the orientations

with full-time employees was quick and economical for companies, contractors typically

expressed frustration with these experiences. *William*, who had to participate in several

online trainings from both his agency and his organization, criticized the onboarding

process: "Oh, it's an insane waste of time. It's insane to make a professional person that's

been working for 12 years sit through something about how to not sexually harass

somebody, or how to not . . . how to protect their information. It just, it's insane. But I'm

sure everybody needs to have it to be covered legally. But it's a massive waste of time."

Legality and good intentions aside, the face validity of this experience was poor from the

contractor perspective.

Agency contractors also suggested that their agencies and the client organizations

focused on the wrong aspects of socialization when onboarding contractors. Namely,

institutionalized tactics (i.e., collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture) over individualized tactics (i.e., individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture) (Jones, 1986). For instance, *Ted* shared his experience with his most recent company:

> Since again going back to not having any benefits or any services provided directly by [my organization], a formal orientation wouldn't have been all that useful to begin with. But having all these things I would need to work, a badge and any other documents that they need me to sign, having all that stuff ready to go when I first showed up on my first day would have been nice.

From previous experience, *Ted* knew what to expect from traditional institutionalized orientation – reviewing organizational values, benefits packages – and he did not feel he needed it. What he did need were the specific materials to do his job. Another contractor, *Chris*, shared a similar sentiment, "I didn't do any of the rah, rah typical orientation," instead experiencing individualized and role-focused onboarding. He shared: "They set up a bunch of different office appointments for me for 30 minutes a piece with like 20 different people to really get a grip on what that person did and why their position was important in the project . . . But it was not structured at all and it was very essential need-to-know" (*Chris*). By homing in on "need-to-know" information, *Chris* was able to quickly grasp the scope of the project, better understand his role, and build key relationships he would need throughout his contract. Many participants demonstrated greater appreciation of individualized or role socialization efforts more than inclusion in institutionalized ones. The temporary and peripheral nature of their membership, coupled with the previous organizational experience, meant contractors often possessed the basic

tools to operate effectively in any work environment without feeling they needed institutionalized forms of socialization. Nevertheless, 80% of the agency contractors in the study experienced some form of institutionalized socialization. Since the aim of institutionalized tactics is generally to maintain the organization's existing rules, values, and ways of working (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), these tactics were somewhat surprising to use with non-employees. However, if the purpose was to prevent outsiders from changing the role or status quo (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), then the use of institutionalized tactics would be more strategic.

An important caveat is that contractors often did not know how similar or different their onboarding experiences were from full-time employees. While some simply guessed at their similarity, "I think it's the same orientation" (*Steven*), others identified similarities by talking to others in the organization: "I don't know what they offer full-time employees as far as orientation process. All the feedback I was getting or discussion I was having with fellow contractors and full-time employees within our group was that what I was experiencing was very typical" (*Ted*). Although *Ted* worked alongside permanent workers on his team, he had not thoroughly considered or witnessed how his own onboarding compared to that of employees. *Ted* and *Chris* were the only agency contractors who did not experience institutionalized tactics. However, *Chris* recognized how his employment arrangement affected the organization's socialization goals and tactics: "They weren't trying to build my commitment to the organization like a lot of full time ... Full time positions." The data collected for this study indicated that companies seldom attempt to integrate contractors as members from the start, though this may occur organically later. Rather, the goal of the onboarding process is generally to

make sure contractors can do their job. Yet many agency contractors received onboarding over-kill, with orientation, online trainings, and introductions coming from both their agency and the company where they work. This raises the question of why some agency contractors are approached with the same socialization efforts as full-timers (i.e., institutionalized tactics) instead of the more task or role-focused onboarding (e.g., individualized tactics, role socialization) they really value.

Importantly, agency contractors also experienced individualized socialization tactics. For example, *Steven* described how he was largely left to sink or swim: "Basically when I started then, it was almost, 'Alright. Well here's your first new job. Good luck'." On her first day onsite, an internal recruiter was *Mary's* first introduction: "She, maybe for the first hour or something of my assignment, she took me around, and so she did that kind of thing." After an initial orientation, contractors frequently received individual tours, met their managers, and the rest of their onboarding was an unstructured adjustment to their new surroundings.

The Organizational Socialization of Independent Contractors

In contrast, none of the independent contractors in the study experienced institutionalized socialization tactics. Instead, independent contractors had to fend for themselves upon entry in a manner consistent with more individualized organizational tactics, which lack structure and force newcomers to "sink or swim" (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007). They needed to know what to ask, who to talk to, and how to hit the ground running, often with limited information and access. Beyond the organization's role, the impetus of onboarding was often left on them. One independent contractor, *Tim*, said that he never received any kind of orientation or onboarding at the start of his role: "Never.

Not even 14 years ago." Similarly, *Callie* needed to find her own way: "It was all on me. So, yeah, it was weird, actually, now that you say that, because they built a brand-new building I had never been in before. I wasn't really sure where to go . . . Fortunately, I had worked with most of the people before. There were a lot of new people too who were wondering who I was or why I was there." During her contract she managed a team, and it became obvious that even they were also not informed about her role or what to expect from her return to the company: "I think that it would've been helpful if they had spoken to the team independently of me, prior to me actually coming there, and just explaining to everybody why I was coming back, what their expectations were of me, and what the expectations were of the group." Yet, *Callie* had to navigate her role and her relationships with her team on her own, in a manner consistent with more innovative and creative roles, when individualized socialization tactics may be preferable.

The use of individualized socialization tactics over institutionalized tactics with independent contractors may have been driven by organizations' efforts to meet the legal parameters around independent contracting. Independent contractors must be self-employed (Kalleberg, 2000) and cannot appear to be co-employed or organizations risk legal repercussions (diRuvage, 1992). Providing the same onboarding experiences as employees is a riskier practice with independent contractors than agency workers. In addition, independent contractors, most independent contractors in this study worked remotely (only 2 regularly worked onsite), while agency workers were more likely to work onsite (only 1 was remote). For legal reasons, organizations must keep independent contractors at arm's length and cannot treat them too much like employees.

Arguably, individualized socialization may be more feasible for contractors than permanent workers as contractors are less likely to have a cohort of peers entering at the same time, may perform more specialized or isolated work, and are not intended to be long-term organizational members. As *Janet* worded it, "being a contract worker who mostly works from home, this is a pretty isolating experience." Further, some independent contractors specifically connected their socialization experiences to their unusual membership. As *Samantha* described, contractors are neither insiders nor outsiders: "I'm not really part of the company, but I have to act like part of the company. Which is an interesting position to be in, I don't know if it's a surprise. As an outsider, but still acting like an insider, kinda of a weird, funny thing." As such, task or role innovation may be more applicable to contractors than a custodial orientation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), as contractors exist external to the organization and receive less guidance on what it means to be an organization member or how to perform in their role.

Individual Socialization Tactics

Despite key differences in the current organizational socialization tactics of agency and independent contractors, their individual tactics were often quite similar. Many contractors had limited or hands-off onboarding experiences in the companies where they worked, which made individual socialization tactics all the more important. In particular, contractors demonstrated proactive behaviors such as information seeking and expectation setting. Participants demonstrated proactive behaviors for understanding their role, their tasks, their relationships, and the organization in a manner similar to previous research on newcomers (e.g., Morrison, 1995; Teboul, 1994). Information seeking was a common tactic, as contractors were often left to their own devices to understand and

navigate their role and the broader organization. *William* discussed his goals in early employment conversations, as he described the information he wanted to gather about his new environment: "Yeah, lay of the land, the technologies, the teams, what kind of priorities, what we're hoping to accomplish, all that kind of stuff." Participants wanted to gather both task and interpersonal information to help them succeed in their roles. As prior research (e.g., Graen, Orris & Johnson, 1973; Jablin, 1984) suggests, when supervisors and peers do not provide enough information, organizational newcomers can compensate using information seeking tactics.

Some contractors even sought information prior to starting their role, especially technical and referent information (Morrison, 1995). In *Janet's* experience, contractors do not receive traditional onboarding and she had learned how to navigate the start of a contract through her own devices: "because it is this short-term intense thing, you can often ask people to send you things in advance. . . 'Cause you're not gonna go through any kind of onboarding. I don't . . . So, sometimes he'll send me some things in advance. I might ask for certain things based on the product." Through information seeking, her goal is to obtain more context upfront than the organization might be planning to provide and better position herself. *Janet* further elaborated, "they're not paying me to learn about them in that sense." By generally knowing what information she needed upfront and requesting it early, *Janet* was able to more quickly grasp the scope of the project and the role she needed to play. Her proactivity started her off more effectively, gave her greater control over the process, and enhanced her task, role, and organizational knowledge. Without her proactive information seeking, *Janet* may have struggled more to gather the insights and knowledge necessary to be successful.

Early in the contract, participants wanted to gain a clear understanding of the goals, priorities, and needs of their role, like *Callie*, who was glad her role was defined in her contract: "I think it's actually in my contract, but was also in an email, what the five priorities of work for me were and are." Similarly, *Samantha* tried to establish expectations upfront: "So you got to make sure you really get down the expectations and everything ahead of time as much as possible." Referent information was an important part of starting a new role. Importantly, even as a remote worker, *Samantha* stressed the importance of having more personal contact when identifying expectations: "There's all these expectations that go in to make sure we're on the same page. Meeting usually either face to face or Skype or phone call and then a follow up with email and written contracts." Both independent and agency contractors used expectation setting as a tactic for scoping and understanding their role. An agency contractor, *Rachel*, also emphasized these proactive behaviors: "you need to negotiate expectations." It was important for her to guide some initial conversations with her supervisor to increase their mutual understanding and position herself to effectively fill the role.

In contrast, contractors with less work experience (50% of participants were under 40 years old) were less likely to proactively set expectations upfront. For example, *Heidi* wished she had done so in her most recent contract: "I think it would have been good to sit down and sort of, 'These are what the expectations are,' and, 'This is the process that we're going to go through for each one'." Like *Heidi*, many contractors learned this lesson early on and it influenced how they approached their work in the future. While contractors with a long work history had already developed proactive socialization tactics, early career contractors had to make mistakes and learn more on the job. Research

on prior occupational experience and being a newcomer (e.g., Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006) suggests veteran newcomers possess knowledge, experience, and strategies that differ from less experience newcomers. It follows that these newcomers can draw on previous experience to proactively influence their adjustment to an organization. As experienced and frequent newcomers, contractors can also draw upon key learnings and tactics developed over their careers to take control of their own adjustment.

Further supporting the negative case analysis, *Mary's* reaction was dissimilar to other participants' reactions to traditional orientation experiences. She relied mainly on the organizational tactics provided by the organization rather than using individual tactics, such as information seeking, to navigate her role as other contractors did. Despite finding the orientations only moderately useful, she played a less proactive role in her own socialization than other participants. Her reaction supports Benzinger's (2006) research, which found that temporary workers demonstrate fewer proactive behaviors (e.g., information seeking) initially but increase these behaviors over a longer-term contract. In contrast, contractors performed more information seeking behaviors initially and they decrease over time (Benzinger, 2006). *Mary's* behavior better reflected the temporary worker reaction and further suggests that she was a temporary worker in the guise of a contractor.

5.3 Adapting Socialization Theory for the Contract Worker

Although previous socialization theory related to organizational and individual socialization tactics could be applied in the contractor context, contractors in this study also shared unique and nonstandard socialization experiences. This section helps answer the final piece of the research question, sub-question 1c, *How do contractors'*

employment experiences fit within existing socialization theory? Several features of

contractors' socialization distinguished their experiences from those of permanent

employees and challenged or expanded the fit of traditional socialization theories,

including: the purpose of contractor socialization, content, sources of onboarding, swift

socialization, and professional socialization. While some of these categories are driven by

the organization (purpose, content, sources), the emphasis on the other categories (swift

socialization, professional socialization) are necessitated by the nature of contract work.

Collectively, demonstrate how contractors' experiences are distinct from the experiences

theorized in socialization theories developed for standard, permanent employment;

however, other contingent workers (e.g., temps, seasonal) may have some of the same

experiences as contractors. Each category will be further defined and supported by

exemplars from both independent and agency contractors.

Swift Socialization

Due to the short-term nature of their contract and the organization's often

immediate needs, contractors must be prepared to begin their work upon arrival. As

Ashforth (2012) describes, the speed at which newcomers must be socialized has been

increasing due to the decline in the length of relationships between individuals and

organizations. For contractors, the speed of socialization increased the need to quickly

gather necessary information and then be able to learn as they went. Participants

commonly described the fast pace at which they needed to start their roles or projects,

like *Tabitha*, who said: "Everything moves so fast in what I do that the minute I walked

into the office and had a three-hour meeting with them about projects going on, it was off

to the races within the first five minutes of meeting the people and hearing a little bit

more about their business overall." When a contractor is hired in the nick of time, organizations expect workers to adapt to meet their needs, like *Chris*, who was hired for a large, long-term project as the communications expert: "it was kind of trial by fire because they needed me right then." *Heidi* experienced a similar kickoff: "And then they called and said, 'We do want to continue with this engagement.' And so, then, after that, we just kind of hit the ground running." However, there were exceptions to the swift socialization experience. For instance, *Ted* experienced a slow start to his contract: "It was pretty slow. That was more a nature of the size of [the company], I'm finding, than it was a contract role versus a full-time employee." Like any employment arrangement, contractor's early socialization experiences may be greatly influenced by the size and culture of an organization. Nevertheless, the nature of the role and status of a project may be especially important in driving onboarding speed.

Ashforth (2012) argues that organizations' reliance on individualized socialization tactics increase the likelihood newcomers will "sink or swim" during swift socialization, and as evidenced by the contractors in this study, onboarding is only successful by chance. Swift socialization creates additional challenges for contractors, as many organizations are ill-equipped for this newer form of socialization and attempt to use existing socialization tactics in an accelerated context, often leaving individuals to their own devices (Ashforth et al., 2012). In such situations, successful contractors recognize the purpose of the socialization, focus on the most important content (e.g., technical information), rely on the available sources, and pull from previous experiences (professional socialization) to navigate their new roles. When contractors are not proactive, swift socialization may become poor or incomplete socialization.

The Purpose of Contractor Socialization

As demonstrated by previous research, organizations generally do not want to integrate and assimilate contractors (e.g., Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003), and many contractors do not want to be integrated (Cohen & Mallon, 1999). The purpose of numerical flexibility is to shift between a larger or smaller able-bodied workforce as needed (Casey, Keep, & Mayhew, 1999). Participants' experiences supported this concept, like *Luke* and *Eric* who were laid off from contract roles right before their interviews. *Eric* was let go when the work in his department slowed: "'We'll rehire you in the future.' Blah blah blah. So, what I do know is that . . . the work slowed down, significantly, in the design field, there and I kind of saw it coming." However, the company left the door open for his future employment in case they needed to increase headcount again. *Ted* also acknowledge the temporary nature of his role: "it's a little bit of an understanding that that person is not trying to stick around or cultivate a long-term resource." Even for a long-time contractor like *Tom*, who worked with two clients for several decades, the role of numerical flexibility was obvious: "They want a really short timeframe where they can get rid of you." Since the flexibility of headcount is embedded in the reason to use contractors, organization's may lack the motivation (or need) to provide thorough, purposeful socialization. As such, the socialization that occurs is often only the essential, need-to-know information for a contractor to perform in their role. This approach to socialization demonstrates the poor fit of the traditional stage models (e.g., Jablin, 2001) as contractors are rushed from initial entry to almost immediate role performance with limited opportunity for typical encounter experiences (e.g., information seeking, sensemaking). The result may be greater difficulty reducing uncertainty,

performing with only limited information, stifled communication, and creating deliverables that do not fit the organization's needs.

For independent contractors, the organizations explicitly strive to not treat them like employees to protect themselves legally. *Tabitha*, a contract lawyer, explained the position companies are in when employing these contractors:

> Legally, they're in a tough spot, the employers are, the companies are. They're
> dealing with all of these issues on their side, potential co-employment where if
> they mean for it to be a true independent contractor situation . . . They're in a real
> pickle. They have to do as much as they can to make it look like an independent
> contractor situation, whereas some of the more welcoming things might make it
> look like a co-employment situation.

Any treatment too similar to a permanent employee, including socialization efforts, could defeat their intentions of using a contractor, and lead to undesirable litigation. For this purpose, companies do not seek to integrate and assimilate contractors into the broader organization.

Current socialization practices may be geared toward the purpose of using contract workers – quickly implementing a flexible and inexpensive yet highly skilled workforce (e.g., Holmes, 1986) – but the limited organizational socialization efforts may explain why some previous research has shown negative outcomes with contractor use (e.g., Kalleberg, 2000; Kochan, Smith, & Rebitzer, 1994). Further, organization's limited socialization efforts increase the need for contractors to drive their own onboarding experiences.

Socialization Content

Unlike permanent employees, for whom socialization involves becoming an organizational member by learning values, norms, and behaviors (Van Maanen, 1978), contractors rarely become organizational members. Participants' experiences demonstrated that contractor socialization is not focused on content like organizational values or culture. While they may learn about them, this content is often not explicitly taught. Instead the focus of organizational socialization efforts is on tasks (technical information), meeting key people (social information), and expectations (referent information) (e.g., Morrison, 1995). Generally, contractors learn just enough of "the ropes" to accomplish their work.

Technical Information

For both independent and agency contractors, task and relational onboarding were at play. Socialization research has highlighted the importance of multiple forms of socialization content, including technical, referent, social, appraisal, normative, organizational, and political (Morrison, 1995). Contractors, however, only evidenced a limited amount of information provided or even vital to their work. Specifically, technical (or task), referent, and social information were cited by many contractors as important facets of learning about and adjusting to their role in a company. Other forms of socialization content were rarely, if ever, mentioned.

In terms of task socialization, contractors were generally expected to possess the skills and knowledge to complete their assigned tasks prior to entry; however, they needed to apply their capabilities in a specific context. The purpose of contract roles not to learn and be developed or integrated, but rather to accomplish a certain objective or

deliverable during a set period of time. According to *Steven*, organizations enable

contractors to achieve their priorities and objectives: "As far as at your specific company,

they'll give you all the tools you need to operate just fine in the company." Upon entering

a role or project, contractors know the high-level description of their role, but it is

important to also identify specific goals, deliverables, and expectations. Once a contractor

knows the scope of their role, they must understand the resources and systems available

to help them deliver. Contractors reported that they often get an introduction to task-

related resources early on. *Gregory* described his own experience with technical

socialization:

> What are all the different tools and technologies that the organization uses and
>
> what tool is used for what, and then which systems are able for us to access and
>
> do yourself. Basically, getting acquainted with the tools and technologies that are
>
> available within the organization as well as the full-time people working for that
>
> organization. What are the different things that are available and how to use them.
>
> What is the process, access, request procedure? So that we don't have to go
>
> searching and struggling for it later on when we need that.

His organization provided him the tools, techniques, and processes to accomplish what he

was hired to do.

Among contractors in this study, the importance of task versus relational

onboarding was largely driven by the contractor's level of integration. While some roles

were more integrated and people-oriented, like contractors who worked onsite in a team,

other roles were more task-focused. For instance, *Tabitha* described the contrast between

her current and previous contract roles based on their task versus relationship foci: "I can

tell you about other contract positions where the contracting was sitting at the office each day doing all my work in the office . . . where you felt like you were meant to be more a part of the team, so it was more about knowing the people versus in certain contracting situations like this one where it's more about knowing the material and the work." By working onsite, *Tabitha* was more integrated with the organization and needed to understand the task at hand and the people who were involved. In contrast, her more recent role involved solo remote work and knowing others in the organization outside her key contact was less important. As she put it, "It was really about the information and not about the people" (*Tabitha*). Remote workers in the study were often more task focused, as long as they had a good working relationship with their organization contact(s) that enabled them to do their job.

Social Information

Although understanding the role and task at hand was the primary goal of many onboarding experiences, developing relationships with managers, teams, peers, and key stakeholders was important to success in role. As *Callie* explains, relationship building was vital to starting off her role on the right foot: "The number one tactic was meeting with people . . . You never go into a role without spending a significant amount of time with groups of people and with people as individuals, and understanding from their perspective what's going on, what's going well, what's not going well" (*Callie*). Another contractor, *Tabitha*, shared this emphasis on getting to know others in the organization: "It's getting to know the business and a little bit the people, if I'm going to be sitting there in person. It would be either getting to know the people or the business. Getting the lay of

the land." For contractors, relational socialization may not be absolutely necessary to do their job but was still desired.

Other contractors were positively or negatively influenced by relationship building. For *Steven*, a peer was an initial resource while he was adapting to his new role: "Basically when I started then, it was almost, 'Alright. Well here's your first new job. Good luck.' Basically, you were paired up with somebody and they kind of helped you out along the way." He learned quickly by using a buddy system and having a key contact for questions or information seeking. Sometimes contractors realized that relationship building was more important to their role than they initially thought, like *Eric* who spent more time focused on his work than on the people around him. After being laid off, he learned that getting to know the people around him may be just as important to his success as a contractor: "it doesn't hurt to make friends. Like, that's huge . . . a lot of the upper management guys, they played, they went bowling and they have, a lot of the contractors would be on their bowling team." However, he did not socialize with them in this way and asserted, "That was a mistake I made . . . getting to know people on a personal level, cause then you could talk outside of work and then get a better idea of who you are and what you do" (*Eric*). Through trial and error, *Eric* learned not to overly focus on the task at hand and neglect relationship building.

Contractors often emphasized the impact of having great working relationships with key individuals. For example, *Kat* shared a positive relationship with a client of hers: "I feel like he's very much rooting for me and on my side and so I want to do the best job that I can because I appreciate that," and *Tom* discussed his almost 30-year client relationship: "I obviously continually have to do my job, but if there's an issue with a

customer they know they can call me or count on me that I'm going to go in there and I know the business so they trust me in taking care of any sales issues or customer issues onsite here in this area." Relationship-building and maintenance were particularly important facets of effective contracting roles.

Relationships are a highly influential aspect of contracting, and as one participant, *Rachel*, explained, contractors play an active role in their development: "the most important thing is knowing how to blend in with your team, organization. If you limit yourself, you'll be an outsider. Show genuine interest in the organization and invest in yourself, develop relationships." Even if the organization did not actively facilitate social or relational socialization, it was contractors' best interests to cultivate key relationships in organizations.

Referent information

For contractors, understanding the expectations of a role are just as important as it is for full-time, standard employees, and contractors need to gain this understanding in an even shorter time frame. However, organizations frequently do not set clear expectations for contractors upfront, placing the impetus for expectation setting on the contractor. As such, the most successful contractors have expectation setting conversations upfront. For instance, *Janet*, an independent contractor in nonprofit management, stated: "Okay, well first it starts, before you actually start, which is about having a defined scope. What is it that I'm supposed to do because it's not everything. And I remind myself of that frequently." *Eden*, an independent marketing contractor, mirrored this sentiment, stating, "I do a whole lot of expectation management." Proactive expectations setting gives

contractors more clarity, helps with information seeking, and starts to build working relationships.

For contractors who do not set clear upfront expectations, the result can be confusion and frustration. While unclear expectations are confusing for any employee, the nature of contract work and organizations' often limited or unstructured socialization efforts may force contractors to initiate conversations about expectations. Expectation setting is a greater requirement for contract workers because of their socialization experiences. For *Heidi*, an independent grant writer, organization expectations were an impediment: "But that lack of communication that happened, the lack of expectations that was set within the university externally of me was challenging." She and other participants had learned that expectation setting is key in navigating contract work. *Heidi* expanded, saying, "Yeah. I think it would have been good to sit down and sort of, 'These are what the expectations are,' and, 'This is the process that we're going to go through for each one'." *Eden* had also learned this lesson the hard way: "I make sure that we scope things out in advance, and it just takes a little bit of time to think things through before starting, but these are kind of hard lessons that I've learned because I've seen things spin out of control." Learning the requirements and expectations of a role made the contracting process easier and became an important first step for many independent and agency contractors. For *Rich*, asking questions like "What sort of level of authority will you be giving me in conducting those assessments for you? Who do you want me to talk to? Who do you not want me to talk to?" became were vital. Asking important questions about the tasks and working relationship facilitated learning and uncertainty reduction. However, contractors often had to initiate these expectations setting conversations, like

Rachel who approached her manager: "Tell me about the work, your expectations, I'll tell you mine." For many, this was a two-way information exchange that reduced uncertainty and made the contract go more smoothly.

Contractors may be uniquely challenged to understand expectations because they work remotely, face limited or incomplete onboarding, and have a smaller network within the organization. Morrison (1995) suggests that while newcomers acquire more information, and are therefore better able to reduce uncertainty, through active means, some sources of information, such as referent and technical, are perceived as more important than others (e.g., social, normative, organizational). For contractors, initial conversations are important sources of referent information, but a contractor's main point of contact may not prioritize these conversations or readily offer relevant information. As such, contractors are once again left to their own devices with onboarding.

Role clarity was a key facet of understanding expectations. Some participants described the need to not only understand the scope of work, but also the specific role they were expected to play. *Samantha* described her experience as follows:

> What can I say and what can't I say? Like even with this white paper that I'm writing, I was on the phone last night with the person who contracted me, and I was like, 'Okay can I say this?' And he was like, 'Uhhh that's not really what we want to say' . . . Here I want to take this and make it what I want, but they have a very clear picture of what they want. The voice that I will be presenting is not necessarily my own, even though I will get some byline or writer credit for it.

While a contractor may not be a permanent member of an organization, they are often representing the company and/or completing work with a broader business impact, like

Maureen who said: "I'm representing [the company]." As such, knowing where their role

fits and what is expected or allowed is key to achieving the desired outcomes. *Tabitha*, an

independent contract lawyer, demonstrated the need to understand how one's work fits

into the broader context: "seeing that one little piece of the pie versus being able to see

the whole integrated pie, getting a full picture of what are they really doing at this

company, or what does all the work look like, not just a little piece of work they've

contracted me to do." While the broader expectations and role of one's work is often

important to contractors, organizations often do not offer this information freely. As such,

contractors must actively seek to understand expectations and their role in the larger

organization.

Sources of Onboarding

Unlike permanent employees, some contractors have an additional source of

onboarding information: agencies. The role of the agency in onboarding and socialization

was often to provide basic training or instructions on payroll. *David* described his

agency's involvement as fast and basic: "from the contracting agency it was just a quick

video about how to get my paychecks and check my portal and stuff like that. You know?

Because that's all they really did for me." *Mary* shared a similar experience with her

agency: "I did have a little orientation with [the agency] about how to, you know, how to

use the handbook, that kind of thing, and even how to fill out my time card for [the

company]." On the whole, contract agencies act more like headhunters and organizational

gatekeepers than employers, as agencies are often involved during placement and then

hands-off through the remainder of the contract. A few contractors described how agency

involvement in onboarding can actually be misguiding. *William* illustrated how agency's priorities can tamper with this early employment experience:

> They always try to tell you, this boss is this way, and this type of work is this way. But that's pretty much meaningless until you actually get into the role, and then you see what it really is. Because [my agency], or whatever agency, is basically trying to sell you on this role, saying this would work for you because of all these reasons, right? It's the opportunity that you've been looking for, it's the kind of work that you'll think is interesting. And I just . . . It's like, we'll see about that, basically. And then once you get in, then you find out what it really is.

The triadic relationship between contractor, organization, and agency can complicate matters. Even the best agencies must answer to both the contractor and the organization, and in many cases, the organization's voice is stronger. Further, recruiters in agencies are unlikely to have much insider organizational knowledge themselves. The may try to provide technical, social, and organizational information but contractors often end up misinformed. The information they do impart is either a script from the organization or collected through word of mouth. As such, the agency's role in onboarding, beyond giving instructions for payroll and benefits, may be misguiding noise rather than a helpful socialization experience. Finally, agencies do not appear to invest much time or effort in socializing contractors into their own organizations. All the agency contractors in this study demonstrated a lack of commitment to any one agency. Agencies, too, may feel little or no commitment to contractors, focusing instead on their long-term relationships with companies.

For those contractors without an agency, however, workers must often rely on themselves to learn about their roles and organizations. Independent contractors are especially unlikely to experience formal, structured, and comprehensive onboarding. Many projects simply began with a kickoff meeting or scoping session, wherein task, social, and referent information was shared (see *Socialization Content*). In these meetings, organizations often described their needs and expectations, but contractors were left to their own devices for finding more detailed information Like many others, *Briana* described her initial meetings as opportunities to gather and share information: "And I get their realities, and then my realities, and we talk through, 'What can we do? What's the best idea for this? What might you want to do, but right now it seems challenging?'" By coming prepared and taking control of this information exchange, contractors can be the drivers of their own socialization experiences.

Some especially important relationships for participants included managers, team members, and points of contact (or "clients"). Although the organization can be the strongest influence on permanent employee socialization, these other relationships are often stronger sources of socialization and interaction for contractors. As *Chris* illustrated, his supervisor relationship had a positive impact on him: "I mean, if me and him weren't buddies the experience would have still been fine. It would have still been good. But, the fact that we had this nice, joking, respectful relationship made it much more enjoyable . . . And that definitely made me . . . not want to go." Beyond simply enjoying his contract role more and enhancing his commitment to the experience, the relationship influenced how *Chris* was able to perform his role: "we developed some mutual respect for each other he stopped micro managing me." In contrast, *Eric* had a

polar opposite experience that negatively impacted his contract experience. When he was being laid off, *Eric's* supervisor expressed disappointment at not knowing him better: "He was like, 'Eric, I don't really know you, you know, at all or anything and it's horrible that I haven't – you know, we haven't – this is the first time I've really had a one-on-one conversation with you." He had actively avoided getting to know his supervisor and team members better, something he felt contributed to his lay off and quickly regretted. For contractors who did not have strong team relationships, like *Maureen*, "the team dynamic doesn't matter that much . . . I know they're there, but we haven't met . . . our tasks aren't related," the supervisor or client relationship was especially important. The majority of *Maureen's* information, communication, and access was filtered through her supervisor, emphasizing the importance this relationship.

Notably, most independent contractors did not have internal "managers" per se, but some did work as part of a team and the organization does employ them directly. Frequently, they called their internal point of contact a "client." In contrast, agency workers all had an internal manager, though the organization was not their direct employer, and they may or may not have worked on a team. Although companies often do not consciously consider or participate in the individual experiences of contractors, the managers, teams, and clients directly impact contractors. According to *Samantha*, "it's more person-specific than the company." For contractors, building high-quality relationships with key individuals is essential. They are key sources of role and organizational information and the most frequent sources of interaction.

Professional Socialization

During data analysis, the importance of previous employment experiences for contract work emerged as an overarching theme. Participants were greatly influenced and supported by their connections, industry understanding, knowledge of how to scope a role or project, time management, and ability to set expectations, which they had largely developed in previous professional experiences. Further, previous experiences impacted how they approached socialization and may be key to finding sustainable, long-term success as a contractor. More specifically, the professional socialization participants had experienced during their careers affected their experiences as contractors. This relationship is evidenced by contractors' career stages and the roles of expertise and reputation.

Influence of Career Stage

Through the course of interviewing, important questions arose around how contracting fits into a person's broader career. While the participants ranged in age from their mid-twenties to mid-sixties, statistics on the broader contractor population suggest independent contractors tend to be older than other types of contingent workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Nevertheless, differences by career stage did emerge.

When asked about how a person in their early career would fare as a contractor in their field, many contractors expressed skepticism for their potential success. One contractor, *Sarah*, a psychologist and trainer, stated: "Just being early in career to be a full-time consultant would be a risk, I believe, from my perspective. I think it could be done. I'm sure there's someone out there that would make it happen and do it at a very high level . . . Yeah, I think it would be tough straight out of training." *Jacob* also

expressed doubt for early career contracting as feasible: "It'd be pretty mind-blowing to me how people are very comfortable with this in their 30s." Similarly, *Rich* suggested contracting early on would be quite challenging but may be feasible: "Unless he's really focused on one area, and there's a few of those around. Like a soil scientist, expert on soil science. Sometimes you need that expertise. But then he can't expect to have constant work coming in." Although possible, contractors perceive additional challenges for contractors without much professional experience.

Nevertheless, half of the participants in the study were under the age of forty, suggesting early career contracting is in fact possible. In some industries where contractors have had a strong presence for a long time, like engineering and contracting, the transition to contract roles is increasingly expected at younger ages: "It used to be contractors were all older and I- when I first started at, like I said, *Company G*, 2011, me and my buddies were younger, and people were just like, "Dang." Like, 'Contractors are getting younger and younger'" (*Eric*). This may signal a shift in the appeal of contracting as younger generations increasingly shy away from traditional careers.

Education level may be a relevant feature for many early career contractors. Several of the younger participants had received or were pursuing a graduate degree while doing contract work, including *Maureen, Mary, Chris*, and *David*. In addition to gaining access to the work, higher education also provided important skills to succeed. *Chris* shared how his graduate school experience enabled him to more quickly adapt to his contract role: "I think also the fact that it was my first job out of grad school and I had repeated six months to one year on internships helped me out too. I feel like a lot of people would have taken a lot longer to understand even what they were doing there, and

I'm a lot quicker just because I've had a lot more practice because of all these darn internships." Previous experience with swift socialization gave him a boost when he needed to adapt to his contract role. For *Samantha*, graduate school also provided her with useful skills for contracting that she may not have developed otherwise: "Making sure to ask the right questions. Actually, what you're doing right now. This whole interviewing thing when I did that with my masters' degree that was the best prep for doing this kind of stuff." An affiliation with academia was common among study participants, as three participants, *Howard, Briana*, and *Sarah*, were professors with part-time contracting work. This relationship could be driven by using a university as a key recruitment source. It may also be indicative of the specialized skills and knowledge developed through a graduate education as well as the high prevalence of part-time contract work in the academic space. Academics are experts in a specified area and frequently have flexible schedules with a high level of autonomy and summers off. As such, contract work offers an enticing option for earning additional money, graduate student development, and doing meaningful work in one's field.

The majority of participants, however, spoke frequently about their previous experience in traditional, full-time, 9-to-5 roles. These previous experiences greatly influenced their decisions to enter contract employment, their success in finding work, and their ability to brand themselves as experts. Examples of previous careers are abundant for contractors in this study, including: *Callie*, who stated, "I'm very well networked from having such a long career in corporate marketing, and so I was able to pick up a lot of work right away," *Janet*, "Well, I had always worked a full-time really responsible position before. Management, leadership. My career's always been with and

for non-profits," and *Tom*, "I think that's something that I've picked up through years of experience too as far as just . . . I don't want to call it general knowledge, but knowledge that I've picked up through being in the business for X amount of years." Contractors draw on previous employment experiences to find new contracts and to inform how they approach their work itself. Finally, some contractors, like *Rich*, knew about contracting from working alongside contractors in their earlier career: "My previous jobs before I ever became a consultant or a contractor I managed a lot of people like that. I had to work with consultants and contractors." Previous experiences greatly influenced the knowledge, skills, expectations, and strategies of contract workers.

Contractors shared numerous lessons they had learned, whether in standard employment or in contract roles. Lessons were learned regarding communication, such as how *Tabitha* describes the "professionalism" of asking the organization the right questions: "Even though I've been out of the workforce, I've been doing this in some form or fashion for more than a decade. You have to know what to ask. You know what to ask. You just have to push. There's a lot of pushback. You're constantly saying, 'No, tell me about this,' or, 'Did you all consider doing this? Did you try this?'" To keep her clients and herself up-to-date on industry trends, *Eden* adopted a tactic from her previous employer: "That's something that I learned from the market research firm, and one of the things that I did for those eight or nine years is I did a weekly newsletter on, 'These are the things happening in this industry'." She was able to apply best practices learned in previous roles to enhance her own contract work and better connect with client organizations.

Roles of Expertise and Reputation

Expertise is an inherent component of contract work. Organizations hire contract workers when they need specific skills or knowledge not currently possessed by employees, or when more people with these capabilities are needed. *Rich* explains his role as an independent contractor: "you help those little companies who don't have in-house expertise." As expertise implies, organizations expect contractors to enter their roles with capabilities already in-tow. They should have skills and knowledge developed in previous roles within a field or industry, as several contractors explained: "I actually got my expertise in the field, not at the company" (*Janet*) and "you say you have experience in these areas and that's what they're hiring you for . . . that's the whole reason. It's just to hire people that know what they're doing or that don't have to develop, you know" (*Eric*). In terms of the tasks to be accomplished, they should be able to hit the ground running. An agency worker, *Eric,* further described the organization's expectations of a contractor, stating, "As far as the work being done, they assume that you know what you're doing and if you don't, you know, they're gonna be like, 'Hey, this guy lied on his resume.' Out the door." Expectations are high for contractors to quickly apply their expertise.

Due to the high value placed on expertise, it is also important for contractors to recognize their own limits. Experienced contractors were able to evaluate whether they were qualified to pursue a project or role based on expertise. An independent contractor, *Briana,* shared her thought process for deciding whether to accept work, explaining:

> And it often depends on what they want me to do. If they want me to just collect
> data and look at analysis, I can do that, but if they really want me to shape some

of the program, and it's outside my content area or outside my expertise area, that's where I would probably really have to think long and hard about, 'Do I have the time? And is this appropriate for me to do?'

If she decides she is not the right person for the job, her next step is often to refer the company to someone else who is: "At this point, I just don't think I have the time to learn this, but I have a colleague who's really . . . This is that person's area of interest" (*Briana*). Evaluating work based on expertise ensures a better skills match and also reduces contractors' needs to development new skills and knowledge at the last minute.

Due to this emphasis on expertise, contractors do need to continually maintain their skills and knowledge, but they rarely receive developmental assistance from organizations. Several contractors emphasized the importance of learning and adaptability, including an agency contractor, *Chris*, who stated: "My success is really gonna be determined by like learning agility, and my ability to quickly adapt which is part of learning agility, but also my organization. My ability to build relationships quickly with various project teams to really speed up how quickly I get information." While he brought certain skills and knowledge to the table, he felt his success would be determined by how he leveraged these skills and quickly adapted to his new context. Another agency contractor, *William*, expressed skepticism about the ability to maintain expertise in his field: "I actually think nobodies an expert right now, and I think the job industry in general is shifting towards people who can teach themselves, and teach themselves quickly . . . you've gotta learn it, or you'll be ... or you won't be able to keep up." While expertise is the item which gets organizations' attention and invites

contractors in the door, adaptability and the drive to continuously stay relevant are invaluable to continued employment success.

Additionally, expertise was often used as a rationale for why contractors received limited onboarding in organizations. At the start of a project, *Sarah* and her team received a basic overview of the goals of the project and the people they would interact with. While this onboarding experience would be vague for many roles, she felt it was adequate for the contractors involved: "We received all the support I think we needed, being brought on as expert consultants. We were brought on for the development of this organic process of consulting with folks implementing mental health programming for youth in their districts. The information received was totally appropriate, very helpful." As experts in their fields, organizations and workers alike often believed contractors did not need more than the basics they were given.

Unawareness of Socialization Needs

Although contractors could all describe their initial socialization experiences, when asked what else would have been helpful to include in their onboarding experience, many contractors did not have an immediate answer. For example, *Eric*: "that's a real tough question. I mean . . . that's a really good one. So good, I almost don't even have an answer to it." It quickly became clear that few contractors had consciously evaluated their onboarding and socialization experiences before, despite their frequent brevity and lack of details. Onboarding was not a practice contract workers even consciously considered, prior to being asked, but they were nonetheless able to successfully perform their work in new organizations, with partial information and no more than a few internal relationships. Drawing on previous experience, these newcomers felt they were able to quickly adapt

and perform their roles using knowledge and strategies developed in previous experiences (Carr, Pearson, Ves, & Boyar, 2006), in a manner akin to chain socialization (Van Maanen, 1984).

Research suggests that organizations that plan for and strategically use contract workers are more likely to see benefits like efficiency and cost-savings than organizations do not (Peel & Boxall, 2005). Yet, numerous organizations continue to provide limited, incomplete, or irrelevant socialization opportunities and force contractors to navigate their roles individually. Although veteran contractors, with the ability to draw on previous experiences and individual tactics to navigate their surroundings may feel they do not need additional organizational assistance, this will not be the case with all contractors. The frequent importance of contractors' roles (e.g., Lepak & Snell, 1999; Slaughter & Ang, 1996) as well as challenges organizations face related to swift socialization (Ashforth, 2012), poor project assignment (Gulati & Singh, 1998; Mayer & Nickerson, 2005), unclear management practices (Kalleberg, 2000) and permanent worker tensions (Kochan, Smith, & Rebitzer, 1994) suggest organizations and contractors may be unaware of the benefits of more purposeful socialization efforts. However, this does not mean socialization is not important.

In summary, the results of this study suggest 1) contractors are a distinct, albeit nuanced form of contingent worker, 2) contract workers experience varying socialization practices, including organizational tactics and individual tactics, and 3) traditional theories for organizational socialization only partly fit the experiences of contract workers. By providing a deeper examination of contract worker experiences, the current project can inform theory, practice, and future research

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The purpose this research project was to examine the expectations, experiences, and needs of contractors and understand how relationships help them navigate their organizational memberships. Further, the aim was to answer the overarching research question, *how do contractors understand their employment experiences and relationships in the context of organizational socialization?* Three sub-questions were posed: (*1a)* How do contract workers understand the nature of their employment arrangements as it relates to their motivation? (*1b*) What onboarding/ socialization processes are currently used for contract workers? *(1c*) How do contractors' employment experiences fit within existing socialization theory?

The findings address research question 1a by examining the nuances of contract arrangements, including terminology, opportunities, and challenges. In addition to describing contractor experiences, this study helped define and distinguish related terms like "consultant." Consultants were defined as a form of contractor associated with higher status and an advisory role. Further, the nuances of contract work were examined in more detail than any previous research has provided, highlighting important differences between independent and agency contractors, and part-time and full-time contractors. A recent NPR article (Noguchi, 2018) criticized the Bureau of Labor Statistics' recent report on contingent and alternative work arrangements for excluding contractors who use contract work to supplement their income (i.e., part-time contractors). The article

argues that estimates of contract workers in the U.S. would double the size of this population (Noguchi, 2018). The inclusion of part-time contractors in this study provides an initial glimpse into the full spectrum of contract workers.

In addition, the study supports and extends previous research by examining the opportunities and challenges (e.g., motivations) of contract work, including autonomy, money, scheduling, and communication. Overall, the results provide a detailed picture of contract workers as a distinct form of contingent work that contains two types – independent and agency – but involves other alternative employment features such as remote work and part or full-time schedules.

The research project addresses sub-question 1b by describing current socialization practices experienced by independent and agency contractors, including organizational and individual strategies. Finally, the results answered sub-question 1c by shedding light on the ways in which contractors' organizational experiences fit existing socialization theory as well as identifying the unique features of contractor socialization. Consistent with established socialization theory (e.g., Jones, 1986; Morrison, 1995; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), participants shared experiences with organizational socialization tactics, both institutionalized and individualized, and individual socialization tactics, especially information seeking. In fact, much of their socialization was contingent on how proactive they were in their pursuit of information and relationships.

Contractor entry and onboarding digressed from traditional socialization theory developed for permanent employees, who move from encounter to metamorphosis and exit intentionally over a period of time. Contractors' experiences were greatly influenced by their status as peripheral members, wavering on the line between being insiders and

outsiders. Unlike other lower-status contingent workers, contractors are elevated as experts, consultants, professionals, and advisors, but unlike employees, they often did not experience full organizational membership or its perks (e.g., access, benefits). Instead, contractors found success by using their past employment experiences, relationships, and professional know-how to navigate organizations. As described in the result section, contractors' socialization experiences were differentiated by five categories that emerged from the data, including: the purpose of contractor socialization, swift socialization, content, sources of onboarding, and professional socialization.

Although each of the five categories was a unique feature of contractor socialization experiences, professional socialization was an especially influential component. The importance of career and field experience prior to contracting may help explain why national statistics for contract workers skew older and better paid, whereas other groups of contingent workers (e.g., temporary, seasonal) skew younger and poorly compensated (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The bar for entry into independent contract work is professional experience, including expertise, relationships, industry knowledge, and the ability to find one's own way. However, agencies may sometimes lower the threshold for organizational entry of contractors. Although contracting without prior experience in one's field is possible, participants suggested these contractors will face more hardships and must be unique individuals. The knowledge, skills, and capabilities developed in standard employment fuel the successful contractor. They help them access new roles, accomplish challenging tasks, build reputations, produce high-quality deliverables, and eventually, craft (almost) self-sustaining careers. As socialization practices evolve, the role of professional socialization may become less vital

if organizations are more structured in their approaches to socialization (Van Maanen &
Schein, 1979), but until then, professional socialization will remain a key feature of
successful contract work.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

First, contractors should be treated as a distinct, albeit nuanced, form of
contingent worker. Previous research has grouped contractors in with temporary,
seasonal, on-call, and other forms of contingent workers (Bess & Tomlinson, 2017). All
of the participants, with the exception of *Mary*, fit the definition provided in the literature
review (see Appendix A) and showed the distinctiveness of contractors from other
contingent workers. Supporting previous research (e.g., Osnowitz, 2018; Rebitzer, 1995;
Summers, 1997), contractors were highly skilled and autonomous workers with
temporally defined contracts. However, the results also demonstrated that not all
contractors are alike, and their experiences may be strongly guided by their motivations
(i.e., stability or freedom) and employment features like working remote versus onsite or
part-time versus full-time. In fact, the findings suggest that these features may be more
influential than being agency versus independent.

Importantly, despite their distinctions legally (Kalleberg, 2000) and relationally
(see *Figure 3*), independent contractors and agency workers may have similar
employment experiences when they share the same features (e.g., remote, full-time) and
perform similar work (e.g., computer programming). Nevertheless, organizations often
use different socialization tactics for each group, which may be unnecessary. Indeed, the
same organizational socialization practices may apply to both types of contractors, as
long as they share employment features. Contractors are specialized workers for whom

expertise, professional experience, and unique motivations and employment features are integral to their definition and highly influential on their experience. Methodologically, this indicates that future research should consider the entire population of contractors (e.g., part-time, full-time, remote) and purposefully choose and describe study samples as the motivations and experiences of contractors may vary by employment features more than labels (i.e., agency, independent). All contractors do not have the same motivations or employment arrangement features, and thus understanding how these facets affect their experiences is important, yet theory and practice have not previously examined contract workers at this level of detail.

Second, researchers should be careful in applying theories and assumptions to contingent worker populations. Specifically, researchers should be cautious in applying socialization theories to contract worker populations. Although certain aspects of theory apply (e.g., individual socialization tactics) (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), others do not (e.g., stage models of socialization) (Jablin, 2001). In fact, caution should be used when applying any theory developed using standard, permanent employee populations. Researchers must question their pre-existing assumptions about employment when dealing with contingent workers as their employment goals, expectations, tasks, relationships, and experiences can greatly differ from permanent workers. As a result, there are many research opportunities for better understanding contractors and their socialization experiences.

Third, socialization theories for contract workers should incorporate the five categories identified in this study: the purpose of contractor socialization, swift socialization, content, sources of onboarding, and professional socialization. Contractors

do not experience the stages of socialization defined by previous research (e.g., Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 2001) While Benzinger (2006) found that all types of contingent workers were less likely to demonstrate proactive and information seeking behaviors than permanent employees, the results of this study suggest otherwise. Without proactive behaviors, contractors would not have been able to adapt to their role. Research suggests that onboarding is an essential practice that often cannot be provided by external agents (e.g., Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Feldman, Doerpinghaus, & Turnley, 1994; Feldman, Doerpinghaus, & Turnley, 1995; Foote & Folta, 2002; Koh & Yer, 2000; Ward et al., 2001), and yet organizations do not strategically consider how to onboard contractors. As the number of contract workers in the U.S. continues to grow (approximately 20% in 2018 – Noguchi, 2018), theory needs to better address how the experiences of these workers differ from permanent workers, as well as how those differences affect important organizational policies, practices, and strategies like onboarding. Contractors are more commonly used in the workforce now than several decades ago, and yet the call for specific management theories and practices remains relevant (Kalleberg, 2000; McKeown, 2005). By considering which features make contractors' current experiences different (e.g., five categories, motivations, remote vs. onsite), researchers may be better able to study which strategies are most effective and better inform practice.

6.2 Practical Implications

The results of the research project suggest implications for organizations and individuals. For organizations, socialization efforts should be more purposeful and strategic than they often are currently. Organizations have complex relationships with contractors, particularly as contractors may be varying motivations and employment

features. Frequently, companies want to remain distant from independent contractors and avoid treating them like employees, but as a result, they leave socialization almost entirely up to the contractors. With agency contractors, organization provide more structured onboarding (i.e., institutionalized tactics – Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), but these practices may still be geared toward permanent rather than contract workers, providing information that appears like irrelevant busywork. In both situations, however, organizations provide only limited onboarding and rely on contractors' own efforts.

Organizations should develop strategies for contractor onboarding, particularly as they are more likely to have longer-term, highly skilled roles in the organization (DiTomaso, 2001). Strategies should include opportunities to reduce uncertainty by seeking information and learning about the technical, social, and referent aspects of their roles (Morrison, 1995). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Benzinger, 2006), the findings suggest that the socialization needs of permanent and long-term contingent workers may not differ as drastically as scholars (e.g., Lepak & Snell, 1999) previously suggested. However, consistent management strategies for contract workers are still lacking (McKeown, 2005), often leaving the outcomes of socialization more to chance based on individuals' efforts rather than actual tactics (Ashforth, 2012).

In addition, organizations need to understand how contractors are different and adjust their onboarding processes to save time and money, avoid frustrating contractors, and get them up to speed as quickly and efficiently as possible. Since most contractors enter organizations with the individual strategies to identify and seek out the information they need, and because contractors are often specialized, socialization does not need to be facilitated in a formal, structured, or company-wide manner. Instead, they should train

managers or points of contact for contractors to handle the task. Contractor socialization should be strategic, but it does not need to be identical across the organization. In fact, contractors suggested that some organizations could be spending time and resources on institutional socialization is unnecessary for contractors. While the importance of organizations facilitating relationship building, information seeking, and connection development between contractors and other organization members was clear in this study, the effects of institutionalized socialization tactics on contract workers remains understudied. Although agency contractors who participated in structured onboarding did not appreciate the experience, it is possible that they did not recognize the outcomes or that the tactic was not ineffective, but rather the content. If an organization applied more institutionalized tactics and provided the information agency workers found necessary, then the practice may be impactful after all. Future research is needed to address the relationship between organizational socialization tactics and important outcomes, such as task performance and satisfaction.

Further, the impetus for following through on an onboarding strategy may be placed with the key contact, supervisor and/or team with whom the contractor will be working. Although an organization may not be able to apply a single structured approach to all contractors, practices could be dictated instead at the department or team level. Companies could provide contractors and managers with the tools to navigate entry and let the rest happen organically through information seeking (Morrison, 1993), uncertainty reduction (Teboul, 1994), sensemaking (Louis, 1980), and time. Echoing the requests of scholars like McKeown and Hanley (2009), organizations should provide contractors more support in the form of human resource management practices by training insiders to

manage, socialize, and support them. Additionally, the motivations and employment features (e.g., remote, part-time) should be considered as they may affect the method and content for socialization.

For individuals, a key takeaway is the importance of taking ownership over one's own socialization experiences. As the results indicate, organizations will not necessarily provide any structured or intentional avenues for socialization (e.g., institutionalized tactics – Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), even if technical, social, and referent information is essential to performing a role (Morrison, 1995). Contractors must be proactive in their efforts at learning and scoping their role at the start of a contract, asking questions, seeking information, and building relationships when possible. While proactive behavior has been associated with better newcomer outcomes for permanent workers (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007), and is likely important for any newcomer no matter their employment status, this study revealed that it is especially important for contractors. Both independent and agency contractors often experienced individualized tactics and were left to sink or swim (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), finding success through their own concerted efforts at navigating their new roles and relying on previous work experiences to inform their actions (professional socialization). As such, the importance of individual tactics for contractors was clear.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

As with any research, there are several limitations to the current project. First, the sample of contractors was highly varied in terms of industry, field, type, and demographic characteristics. The purpose of this sampling strategy was to gather information on a broad range of experiences and capture the nuances of contract working

arrangements. While the sampling served this purpose, it also necessitates that the findings provide less breadth than a specific sample of the population (e.g., all agency, all IT professionals) would provide. Future studies should carefully consider whether the aim of the research is to examine the breadth or depth of a phenomenon within contract work.

Further, the purpose of this qualitative research was descriptive. The goal was to better understand the features and experiences of contractors as a distinct form of contingent workers. Although interviews were conducted with a wide range of contractors, including independent and agency, full-time and part-time, early career and late, and across various industries, further research is needed to speak to the generalizability of the themes identified in this study. The results of this study were based on in-depth interviews with thirty contractors and may not be representative of all contractors' experiences. Nevertheless, the findings provide important insights into contact work and can serve as a catalyst for future research.

Although the study was focused on the onboarding and early socialization efforts of contractors, the results suggest connections to broader research on proactivity (e.g., Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas, Whitman & Viswesvaran, 2010; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Proactivity is defined as "taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions" (Crant, 2000), and has been linked to positive organizational outcomes such as innovation (Kickul & Gundy, 2002) and job performance (Thompson, 2005). There is evidence that training and development can serve as a powerful antecedent to proactivity (Strauss & Parker, 2016). As evidenced by

the use of self-driven and initiating (i.e., proactive) behaviors in contractor socialization, onboarding may also serve as an important antecedent to organizational proactivity. In addition, some employment contracts may encourage or even necessitate proactive behaviors, which may have interesting implications for future employment. While the current study cannot speak to these connections in depth, future research should examine the broader role of proactivity in the contractor context.

Future research should further examine how contractors' career paths influence their professional socialization, and thus their organizational experiences and success. As contractors in this study demonstrated, previous professional experiences influence how workers approach both their work and their organizational relationships. By taking a broader and more longitudinal approach, research may be able to speak more directly to concepts like chain socialization (e.g., Van Maanen, 1979) and lifespan careers (e.g., Super, 1980). Future research should examine which career experiences are most common or useful, the extent to which these findings generalize to the broader contractor population and identify best practices for transitioning professional skills to contract working arrangements.

In addition, the study provided evidence that industry differences play a significant role in contractors' organizational experiences. In particular, industries with a longer history of employing contractors, like Information Technology and Engineering, appear to have different approaches to the employment (e.g., more agency workers) and socialization of contractors (e.g., more institutionalized tactics). Questions remain around how IT and engineering organizations manage contractors versus industries who have just started using them, what strategies they use for hiring and tracking contractors, and

whether their strategies around contractors are more effective at meeting the organization's goals.

Finally, an important, but understudied aspect of organizational membership is exit. Across all employment types, organizational exit is often ignored, theoretically and practically. Due to the nature of their employment, contractors enter and exit organizations more frequently than the standard permanent worker, yet we understand little about this experience or its impact on careers, individual tactics, and organizational relationships. Some contractors suggested that organizations keep track of their favorite contractors for future openings, and contractors may work for organizations a different time points during their careers, yet no research on contractors examines the experience or practice of organizational exit. For contractors, exit may be just as important to consider as entry. In addition, research on frequent organizational exit may also be applicable to job hoppers – full-time employees who move jobs or organizations every few years. As organizational memberships become more truncated and non-traditional, seen by younger workers and those seeking more protean or boundaryless careers, socialization theories from alternative work arrangements may become more applicable to "standard" work, rather than the other way around.

6.4 Conclusion

Contractors are a unique employment arrangement and should be differentiated from standard employees as well as other contingent workers in both research and practice. Even within contract arrangements, important nuances should be recognized and considered related to terminology, independent or agency roles, part-time or full-time work, and other important demographics. Further, the socialization experiences of

contractors may be like that of full-time employees, but the most important features of their experiences are those that are unique. Specifically, contractors' socialization is influenced by its purpose, speed, content, sources, and their previous professional socialization. The results have important implications for questioning and extending socialization theory as well as informing the management and socialization of contract workers.

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APPENDIX A: KEY WORK ARRANGEMENT TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition	Examples
Nonstandard Work	"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" (Polivka & Nardone, 1989, p.11) anything that is not traditional, full-time employment (e.g., Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003; Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson, 2000) <u>Other names:</u> nonstandard employment relations, alternative work arrangements, disposable work, nontraditional employment relations, flexible staffing arrangements, flexible working practices, atypical employment, vagrant or peripheral employment, vulnerable work, precarious employment, new forms of employment	Umbrella term for: • temporary agency workers • direct-hire temporaries • part-timers • seasonal • on-call • consultants • contractors
Contingent Work	"people who do not expect their jobs to last or who reported that their jobs are temporary. They do not have an implicit or explicit contract for ongoing employment" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, quoted in Beranek & Kinnear, 1999) Contingent "work arrangements that were conditional on employers' needs for labor and thus lacked an attachment between employer and worker" (Freedman, 1996)	Contractors, Temporary (agency and direct hire), Seasonal, On-call
Temporary Worker	The unifying characteristics of temporary workers comprise of being employed by organizations for indefinite but short periods of time (i.e., may last hours, months, or years), and employment length is specified by the organization (Kalleberg et al., 2000)	Includes agency workers, direct-hire workers, on call workers
Seasonal Worker	Hired by organizations for a set time and employment is tied to a season. Resorts, tourism, and retail are industries where seasonal workers are frequently hired (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004), to meet the demand of busy (e.g., summer time at resorts) and slow seasons (e.g., winter at resorts)	Tourism, retail, etc. Sometimes classified as temp or part-time workers
Contractor	Develop employment arrangements with a variety of organizations, bound by agreements to provide services for a set time or project (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003). Once the contract expires, the contractor pursues other projects or roles (Davis-Blake & Broschak, 2003).	Independent, Agency, Workers misclassified as "contractors"
Freelancer	Similar to contractors (i.e., self-employed, not committed to one organization, career type characterized by choice) but typically employed in cultural and creative industries such as television and the magazine industry (e.g., Hesmondalgh & Baker, 2010; Upwork, 2016)	Independent, Self-employed
Vendor	A company or individual that sells goods and services. Independently direct and perform all activities. The contract is managed by the business, rather than HR (like contractors)	Street vendor, large consulting firm, etc.

APPENDIX B: VAN MAANEN AND SCHEIN'S (1979) PEOPLE PROCESSING STRATEGIES

Institutionalized	Individualized
status quo, formalized	*Innovative, creative, questioning*
Custodial orientation – "the caretaking response, marked by an acceptance of the role as presen*ted* and traditionally practiced by role occupants" (p.229)	**Role innovation** – "display a rejection and redefinition of the major premises concerning missions and strategies followed by the majority of the role occupants to both practice and justify their present role" (p.229) **Content innovation** – "an effort to locate new knowledge on which to base the organizationally defined role or improved means to perform it" (p.229)
Collective – "group of recruits who are facing a given boundary passage and putting them through a common set of experiences together" (p.232)	**Individual** – "processing recruits singly and in isolation from one another through a more or less unique set of experiences" (p.233)
Formal – "newcomer is more or less segrega*ted* from regular organizational members while being put through a set of experiences tailored explicitly for the newcomer" (p.236)	**Informal** – "do not distinguish the newcomer's role specifically, nor is there an effort made in such programs to rigidly differentiate the recruit from the other more experienced organizational members" (p.237)
Sequential – "the degree to which the organization or occupation specifies a given sequence of discrete and identifiable steps leading to the target role" (p.241)	**Random** – "when the sequence of steps leading to the target role is unknown, ambiguous, or continually changing" (p.241)
Fixed – "provide a recruit with the precise knowledge of the time it will take to complete a given passage" (p.244)	**Variable** – "give a recruit few clues as to when to expect a given boundary passage" (p.244)
Serial – "experienced members of the organization groom newcomers who are about to assume similar positions in the organization" (p.247)	**Disjunctive** – "no role models are available to recruits to inform them as to how they are to proceed in the new role" (p.247)
Investiture – "ratify and document for recruits the viability and usefulness of those personal characteristics they bring with them to the organization" (p.250)	**Divestiture** – "seek to deny and strip away certain personal characteristics of a recruit" (p.250)

APPENDIX C: EMAIL SCREENER (delivered prior to interview)

Hello [name],

Thank you for your interest in participating in the Contractor Experiences Study. Prior to our interview on [date decided between interviewer and participant], it would be helpful for me to know a little bit about you. Please take a few minutes to respond to the following questions. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, feel free to skip it.

1. Are you currently employed as a contractor? Yes or No
2. If yes, what is your current assignment?
3. How long have you been in this role?
4. Do you contract independently or through an agency?
5. How long have you been a contractor?
6. Is contracting your preferred form of employment? Yes or No

I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Best,

Chelsea Beveridge

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Question: How do contractors understand their employment experiences and relationships in the context of organizational socialization?

Thank you for agreeing to meet/talk with me today! I'm really interes*ted*   to hear about your experiences as a contractor. Before we begin, please read the consent form I have given you. If you agree to participate in the study, then we will begin.

I will be recording this interview for research purposes. Do you have any questions before we begin? At this time, I will turn on the recorder (*turn on device*).

Sub-question 1a: How do contract workers understand the nature of their employment arrangements as it relates to their motivation?

First, I want to ask you a few questions about your background and general experiences as a contractor.

1. Imagine someone asks you at a dinner party, "what you do?" What would you say?
2. What's one word you would use to describe contract work?
3. Why did you start contracting? Is this the same reason you continue to contract? Are there new reasons?
    a. Is contracting what you expected it to be initially?
    b. What surprises have you experienced, if any?
4. (*if unanswered in screener*) What is your current assignment? How long have you been in this role? What does it involve? What is the organization like?
5. (*if unanswered in screener*) Do you contract independently or through an agency? How do you usually find employment?
6. What opportunities and challenges are unique to contract work?

Sub-question 1b: What onboarding/socialization processes are currently used

Let's talk more specifically about what happens when you enter a new contract with a client organization.

7. What happens when you start a new contract?
    a. What does your first day like? What's the process? Who do you talk to?
    b. What happens formally? Informally?
    c. Is there anything that would make your transition easier?
    d. How do you make sense of your surroundings?
8. Describe your experience with getting up to speed or kicking off your current contract/project. If you are not currently under contract, describe your last job.

a. Who is involved? How do you get information? How are tasks delegated?
b. How do you set expectations with organizations/supervisors? Can you negotiate?
c. What role does the client organization play?
9. How have your previous jobs affec*ted* the way you approach a new contract position? (getting at development of scripts/schemas)
a. Have your developed tactics, techniques, a plan?
b. Do you rely on particularly tools or knowledge?

Sub-question 1c: How do contract workers navigate organizational relationships throughout their career?

Thinking about your contracting career overall…
10. What kind of relationships do you have with your client organizations?
a. How well do you feel understand your client organizations?
b. Are you an organizational member?
11. How connec*ted* or commit*ted* do you feel to the organizations where you contract?
a. Do you want to feel connec*ted* or do you prefer to keep a distance?
b. What would make you feel more connected/committed?
12. How do you find your next job? What is this experience like?
13. Do you see contractors as different from other types of employees (prompt only if needed: permanent, temporary, part-time)? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT

Interview Informed Consent: The Contractor Experience

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a study looking at the employment experiences of contract workers. Please read this document and think about your willingness to join this study. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you. Your decision to participate or not has no impact on course outcome.

Purpose of the study: To learn more about what professionals experience in contract roles. Data will be used to understand the contractors' experiences, career navigation, and identity related to their employment experiences.

If you decide to participate: You will take part in a one-hour semi-structured interview about your contract work experiences. The interview can be conducted in person or over the phone, depending on your preference and availability. It will then be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher.

Risks/ Harm: There is no risk or harm involved in this study.

Benefits to taking part in this study: I cannot guarantee that you will personally benefit from participating in this study. However, the current study will benefit others by seeking to better define and understand the contractors' work experiences, and inform management practices.

Confidentiality: The follow steps will be taken to keep information about you confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: all information will remain confidential (identities of participants will not be linked to their responses), and recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a secure computer.

Your Rights as a Participant: Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty.

Contact for Questions or problems: If you have any questions or problems rela*ted* to the study, please contact Chelsea Beveridge at cbeveri2@uncc.edu (pri*mary* investigator), Dr. Loril Gossett at lgosset1@uncc.edu (supervising faculty), or the Compliance Office at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Current?	Independent or Agency	Field/ Industry	Prefer?	Full or Part-time	Onsite or Remote
Briana	Yes	Independent	Evaluation	N	PT	Remote
Janet	Yes	Independent	Nonprofits	Y	FT	Onsite
Abby	Yes	Independent	Graphic design	N	PT	Remote
Ted	No	Agency	Information Technology	N	FT	Onsite
Maureen	Yes	Independent	Research	N	PT	Remote
Samantha	Yes	Independent	Human Resources	Y	PT	Remote
Mary	No	Agency	Human Resources	N	FT	Onsite
Eden	Yes	Independent	Marketing	Y	FT	Remote
David	No	Independent	Graphic design	N	PT	Remote
Lexi	Yes	Agency	Human Resources	Y	FT	Onsite
Rich	Yes	Independent	Agriculture	Y	FT	Remote
Tabitha	Yes	Independent	Legal	Y	FT	Remote
Chris	No	Agency	Communication	N	FT	Onsite
Kat	Yes	Independent	Graphic design	unsure	FT	Remote
Eric	Yes	Agency	Engineering	Y	FT	Onsite
Howard	No	Independent	Evaluation	N	PT	Remote
Callie	Yes	Independent	Marketing	unsure	FT	Remote
Rachel	Yes	Agency	Information Technology	N	FT	Onsite
Jacob	Yes	Agency & Independent	Facilities mgt; Training	Y	FT	Onsite
Gregory	Yes	Agency	Information Technology	N	FT	Onsite

Tom	Yes	Independent (former agency)	Sales	Y	FT	Remote
William	Yes	Agency	Information Technology	unsure	FT	Onsite
Joseph	Yes	Independent	Business	N	PT	Remote
Luke	No	Agency	Information Technology	N	FT	Onsite
Mark	Yes	Independent	Education; Hospitality	N	PT	Onsite
Devon	Yes	Independent	Information Technology	N	PT	Remote
Didi	Yes	Independent	Training; Development	Y	FT	Remote
Heidi	Yes	Independent	Grant writing	N	PT	Remote
Sarah	Yes	Independent	Psychologist, Clinical, Training	N	PT	Remote
Steven	Yes	Agency	Engineering	Y	FT	Onsite

APPENDIX G: LIST OF EXAMPLE MASTER CODES

Master Code	Code type	Definition	Exemplars	*Coverage
Consultant	emic	*In vivo* code for the use of the term "consultant" to identify oneself as a worker	"People like the word consultant better . . . Clients and people in general"	27%
Entrepreneurial mindset	emic	Wanting to be your own boss or brand and maintaining independence through control over how you work	"being my own boss" "And that's why I continue to do it because I think having something that you have ultimate control of"	63%
Instability or insecurity	emic	A challenge with instability, insecurity or uncertainty related to maintaining employment status	"One more challenge like I mentioned is just the instability." "In keeping that constant flow of work coming in is the problem because you get all those peaks and then you get a lot of shallows and saying what's going to happen tomorrow?"	93%
Employment preference	etic	Stated preference for a particular employment arrangement, namely contract or permanent work	"Especially if they're not underpaying me and giving me a full-time job, I would definitely take that" "That's why I prefer contracting. It's to get as much money as possible and then build some sort of asset"	100%
Purpose of socialization	emic	The purpose, rationale, and goals that guided an organization's practices for onboarding or integrating a contractor (or not)	"it's a little bit of an understanding that that person is not trying to stick around or cultivate a long-term resource"	80%
Content of onboarding (Morrison, 1995)	emic	The information (content) included in onboarding or socialization experiences, guided by Morrison's categories (e.g., referent, social, technical)	"Getting acquainted with the tools and technologies that are available within the organization as well as the full-time people working for that organization"	76%
Swift socialization (Ashforth, 2012)	emic	The increased speed at which newcomers must be socialized due to shortened individual-organizational relationships	"Like you get two days to gather, to gather and assess really quickly and then it's time to start. By the time that second week starts, they're like, 'Okay, what are we getting out of this? I'm spending a lot of money on this'."	90%
Sources of onboarding	emic	The people or places that provided contractors their socialization,	"from the contracting agency it was just a quick video about how	73%

		including resources, information, observation – agencies, managers, team members, etc.	to get my paychecks and check my portal and stuff like that" "Basically, you were paired up with somebody and they kind of helped you out along the way"	
Professional socialization	emic	The influence and support from by their connections, industry understanding, knowledge of how to scope a role or project, time management, and ability to set expectations developed in previous professional experiences	"I'm very well networked from having such a long career in corporate marketing, and so I was able to pick up a lot of work right away"	83%
Expertise	emic	*In vivo* code for possessing knowledge, skills, capabilities, and experience that signify a person as an expert	"they want to get my expertise on the evaluation plan and the tools they're using" "People looked at me as an expert"	100%
Loyalty	emic	*In vivo* code for one's level of connection or commitment to an agency; willing providing one's commitment	"I don't feel like I owe them something, or something, you know?" "I have no loyalty to any house really"	23%
Information seeking (e.g., Morrison, 1993)	etic	Acquiring new information about the role and work context through active and passive means	"My success is really gonna be determined by like learning agility, and my ability to quickly adapt which is part of learning agility, but also my organization"	80%
Institutionalized tactics (e.g., Jones, 1986)	etic	See *Appendix B* - collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics used by the organization to onboard contractors	"Since again going back to not having any benefits or any services provided directly by [my organization], a formal orientation wouldn't have been all that useful to begin with"	27%
Individualized tactics (e.g., Jones, 1986)	etic	See *Appendix B* - individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture tactics used by the organization to onboard contractors	"They set up a bunch of different office appointments for me for 30 minutes a piece with like 20 different people to really get a grip on what that person did and why their position was important in the project . . . But it was not structured at all and it was very essential need-to-know"	67%

*<u>Note</u>: "coverage" refers to the percentage of participants for whom the code was relevant based on interview data. Since 8 participants' interviews contained the code "consultant", then the coverage was 27%