



Title: A Critical Review of "Contractor Performance: How Good Are Contingent Workers at the Professional Level"

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Abstract: A paper titled "Contractor Performance: How Good Are Contingent Workers at the Professional Level" is critically reviewed in this individual report.

**A Critical Review of “Contractor
Performance: How Good Are
Contingent Workers at the
Professional Level”**

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Article Summary

There has been little or no research performed in the area of 'professional level' contractor performance. A professional level contractor would be defined as an individual holding a bachelor's or master's degree, who is employed by an agency who in turn sells that persons professional services to a third party.

The authors of this article set out to explore the subject of how contract employees compare with regular traditional employees in terms of job performance. 96 managers working for 6 different hi-tech firms were surveyed. The entire range of contractual working arrangements was explored, from 'coemployment' employees who are very nearly the same as regular employees, to employees working under very strict and severe buffers. Characteristics of the contract employment experience such as time duration on the job, type of job assignment, and level of skills required were also explored.

It was found that the respondent managers as a whole rated contract employees higher than their regular employees in terms of job performance. The treatment the contract employees received, the amount of buffering, and time on the job seemed to have little effect on the perceived good job performance they delivered.

Methodology

The authors solicited survey participation from 50 different companies and received permission from six to have their managers participate in answering the survey questions. The survey was performed during the summer of 1992, a period in which the subject of contract employment was a sensitive issue; one possible reason for the poor rate of willingness on the part of invited companies to take part.

A survey questionnaire was designed specifically to answer three questions:

- Does the amount of buffering contract employees receive affect their perceived job performance?
- Does the length of time of the contract have an effect on job performance?

- Do contract employee performance ratings compare with that of regular employee performance ratings?

In order to answer these three questions, the managers surveyed were asked for their opinion in six different areas dealing with contractor performance:

- level of contractor work effort,
- the level of difficulty of work performed,
- the attendance records of contractors,
- the level of skills possessed by contractors,
- the level of contractor commitment, and
- the overall managerial level of expectation towards contractors.

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was included to work in possible effects of 'buffering' and 'time in workplace' on managerial held bias towards perceived performance.

A simple average of survey scores in the six different areas was to be used as an index of overall perceived contractor performance. The lower the resultant index value, the higher was the opinion of the survey participant towards contract employees.

Research Results

The authors formed two hypotheses prior to the survey: 1) Average time in the workplace, degree of buffering, and level of interaction have significant effects on the overall perceived contractor performance; and 2) Respondent managers would report that contract employees performed worse than regular employees. Both of these hypotheses were nullified and rejected by the survey results. The managers surveyed held high opinions of contract employees and felt that their performance was as good as regular employees.

Conclusions of the paper

Managers have a high perceived rating of contract employee performance. This high job performance is not appreciably affected by buffering, time in the workplace, or by the contract employee being treated differently than regular employees. Managers expect no less out of contract employees, and those expectations are being met. The authors state their conclusions well. The conclusions are adequately supported by the research performed in the

paper, and they need no strengthening.

Contributions of this paper to the literature

To date, there has been little or no research done in the area of professional level contract employee performance. The U. S. economy is relying more heavily on contract and temporary employees every year, [1] [4] [7] making it crucial that this employment alternative be studied and fully understood. "Jobs will increasingly become tasks or 'piece work' rather than positions within an organization." [4] It is somewhat intuitive to conclude that contract employment would not have grown to the extent it has over the past decade if there were huge quality or performance issues with the workers. But what are the issues in this industry? How is contract employee performance? How can performance be effectively measured? This paper is a major first step in answering these questions.

Comparison of paper with other resources

There is no other literature to which this paper can be compared. As the authors point out, there has been no published empirical research on contract employees. There are, however, numerous users and suppliers of professional level contract employees in the market place. I contacted four managers of contract employees whom I have deep respect for, as I have worked with them over the past several years. I also contacted one of the principals of a local firm that is the major supplier of these contract employees.

Two of the managers were in total accord with the authors conclusion in the paper: contract employees are generally as good if not better than regular employees. [2] [5] A third manager echoed the conclusion, but from a weaker point of view: "There are good and bad in both employee groups (contractor and regular employees); care needs to be taken when hiring either; expectations need to be clear." [6] The fourth, a high ranking manager, stated that there are not a lot of differences between contract and regular employees in terms of performance, and then qualified his response by adding "but the worst regular employees are far worse than the worst contract employees." [8]

A principal in the local firm which supplies contract employees to the four managers I interviewed, also agreed with the paper's conclusions. She remarked that over 20% of the contract employees she supplies are in turn hired by the organization they were originally contracted to. Many contract employees are "tested out" first before becoming regular employees. [3]

Strengths and weakness of the paper

This paper breaks new ground in an area that is important but till now, not researched. The set of questions designed for the survey are inclusive and are reiterated from different angles to invoke a meaningful response regardless of existing bias on the part of the manager being interviewed. The authors submit that this is only exploratory research, and that the results should not be over-generalized.

The sample size appears to be quite small in terms of number of organizations represented, but this is understandable when considering the prevailing attitudes toward contract employees at the time. The data have come from hi-tech firms only, so the results and conclusions may not be valid without appropriate adjustments for professional contract employees in firms engaged in other disciplines.

References utilized in this paper

The references cited in this paper appear to be adequate under the circumstances. This is a topic that has not been widely explored or researched adequately in previous literature.

Research ideas

This research topic is in its infancy as demonstrated by the lack of other literature available to compare it to. It would be interesting and useful to expand the research on professional level contract employee job performance from exclusively 'hi-tech' industries to organizations in other disciplines as well. Civil engineering and other engineering disciplines which utilizes contract employees extensively should also be made a part of the research.

References

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