

Isabel Fernandez-Mateo wins award for paper exploring career paths of contract workers

'Personal development', 'lifelong learning' and 'trust' are words beloved of many 'conventional' organizations today. But what if you don't happen to work in a 'conventional' organization? Can you access or achieve any of these long-term goals traditionally associated with career development?



As a number of recent labour market trends - successive waves of downsizing since the 1980s, an increasing reliance on outsourcing arrangements, and an apparent weakening of the implicit contract between employees and firms - suggest bureaucratic employment is experiencing a radical transformation, the issue of career development for those in non-traditional employment, becomes very pertinent.

Assistant Professor Isabel Fernandez-Mateo has been awarded the 'Best Paper' by the Careers Division of the Academy of Management for a paper that analyses just this issue. Looking at highly-skilled contractors working for staffing agencies – she analyses the role that these intermediaries play, or can play, in the careers of those who seek work through them.

She concludes that these exchanges, rather than being 'arms-length transactions' freeing a contract worker from the bureaucracy of conventional organisations but denying her access to training and support, often become "embedded ties". In fact, in time, many staffing agencies begin to exhibit characteristics associated with more conventional organisations.

These characteristics include the importance of long-term relationships and trust and the increase in pay for long service/loyalty. The staffing agency values and cultivates long-term relationships because it is in this way that they can discover how contractors' skills and interests best serve the agency's goal of building and maintaining good relationships with client companies.

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