Old Assumptions, New Work: 
The Opportunities and Challenges of 
Research on Nonstandard Employment

SUSAN J. ASHFORD 
Ross School of Business, University of Michigan

ELIZABETH GEORGE 
School of Business and Management 
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

RUTH BLATT 
Ross School of Business, University of Michigan

Abstract
We review the literature on nonstandard work with three aims: to portray the 
breadth and nature of the research and theorizing to date, to document the 
challenges and opportunities this domain poses to both practice and theory, 
and to bring the study of nonstandard work more to the center stage of micro-
OB. After defining nonstandard work and documenting scholarly interest 
in it, we discuss the literature on the experience of nonstandard workers, on 
managing the nonstandard workforce, as well as that on managing the inter-
face between standard and nonstandard workers. We analyze the themes that 
are raised in these literatures and point to new research questions that need to 
be addressed. Research on nonstandard work can enhance our understanding 
of the nature of work, the relationship between individuals and organizations, 
and how organizations and individuals can undertake these new work forms.
Introduction

Alternative, nontraditional, market mediated, vulnerable, contract, freelance, e-lance, contingent, disposable, temporary, nonstandard, and telecommuting—all labels for forms of work seen with increasing frequency in the last decades of the 20th century. Standard workers, who put in set hours at a firm's location with the expectation of long careers within it, are being supplemented by multiple stripes of nonstandard workers who undertake work differently, connect to firms differently, and pursue careers with a different look (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Shamir, 1992). The pervasiveness of this phenomenon has led some scholars to argue that the large-company, bureaucratic model through which work has been mostly organized since World War II is becoming increasingly obsolete (Cappelli, 1999). This observation is noteworthy as many of our most influential theories also were developed in reference to a post-WWII American corporate landscape, with its munificent environment, set trade boundaries, and low levels of technology (Scott, 2004; Walsh, Meyer, & Schoonhoven, 2006). Clearly, much has changed. Organizational environments have become increasingly competitive (D'Aveni, 1994); trade boundaries are now so fluid as to represent a single global marketplace for many industries (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989), and technology not only has enabled new forms of work practices but also has changed the nature of work itself in many cases (Schilling & Steensma, 2001).

Many of our organizational theories are grounded in the experience of traditional, "1950s" workers who go to their company's location daily to put in a fixed number of hours each day (by clock or by normative pressures) in the full expectation of spending a career in the company's employment (Shamir, 1992). Yet, a significant class of workers does not engage work in this manner. Work can now be done virtually on one's own. Homes and coffee shops have risen in importance as hubs of economic activity. More and more individuals either work on their own and bring their products to market, work for a firm, but work out of their homes, or work for an agency and put in flexible hours (Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999) at various firms within and across industries. While work in some occupations has always been organized in this manner (e.g., actors, dancers, writers, and artists), and these "new" forms of work may hearken back to a preindustrial era where guilds and markets predominated (Peipperl & Baruch, 1997), nonstandard work has now entered bureaucratic organizations in significant numbers. For some, this means the end of the organizational world as we know it. As Cappelli (1999) dramatically put it, "Career jobs are dead." The growth of this class of workers poses new management challenges for firms employing them, new effectiveness challenges for individuals choosing to work in this manner, and new challenges for our theory and research about work and workers as well.
Responding to this changing landscape, Shamir (1992) called for the creation of “a nonorganizational work psychology” to generate better understanding of the work lives of those working outside of organizational settings. Feldman, Doeringhaus, and Turnley (1994) implored us to respond theoretically and empirically to the growing phenomenon of nonstandard workers in terms of the number of individuals working in this manner, number of firms employing them, and the amount of money involved. While large, bureaucratic organizations still dominate society (Perrow, 1991), change is clearly afoot. Yet much of the literature still implicitly assumes that standard ways of engaging with the organization are normal, and that the more nonstandard workers “look like” standard workers (e.g., by being strongly identified), the better. As Kanter (1977) argued with respect to gender, organizational roles “carry characteristic images of the kinds of people that should occupy them” (p. 250; see also Acker, 1990). The implicit expectation or desire in much of our theorizing is that employees maintain the 1950s’ “organization man” terms of engagement with organizations, even as organizations themselves have abandoned it. This unacknowledged bias does not serve researchers or managers well, as it makes less likely the belief that there can be good workers who are not standard. It also marginalizes research on nonstandard workers, with some scholars viewing work done on the outside or periphery of organizational boundaries as not in the domain of our field.

We propose instead that nonstandard work is a topic worthy of study in and of itself and also is an ideal context for testing and developing theory about organizations, work, and workers. As nonstandard work becomes more prevalent in the economy, in organizations, and in individuals’ career paths, we need to update our field’s implicit portrayals of the nature of employees’ attachment to organizations. Indeed, over the past several decades, cultural narratives about work have shifted; it is now increasingly legitimate to be non-standard, as people take their careers into their own hands, construct their identities as professional and entrepreneurial, and view organizations in an increasingly negative light. It is time for our field to follow suit.

We set three goals for our review of the literature on nonstandard work. Our first is to portray the breadth and nature of the research and theorizing to date. Second, we aim to document the challenges and opportunities this domain poses to both practice and theory. Finally, we hope to bring the study of nonstandard work more to the center stage of particularly micro-OB, as these workers raise important and interesting theoretical issues about the nature of work, the relationship between individuals and organizations, and how organizations and individuals can undertake these new work forms. Our task is made difficult by the fragmented nature of the literature on nonstandard work. Research streams have grown largely independently by type of worker (temporary, virtual, contractors, etc.). Scholars’ contributions also flow from different disciplinary perspectives, with little interaction between
sociological, labor relations, psychological, and managerial or popular perspectives. The result is a literature filled with redundancies, on one hand, and theoretical gaps, on the other, as work tends to be organized around practical domains rather than theory.

This chapter proceeds in its goal of characterizing and reviewing the literature by discussing the forms nonstandard work takes, its magnitude and scholarly interest, explanations for its prominence today, and the experience of nonstandard workers themselves. We then discuss the management challenges nonstandard workers pose for firms, whether firms are trying to manage these workers or blend a standard/nonstandard workforce. We end with some overarching conclusions about the literature and future research needs in the area.

Understanding Nonstandard Work Forms: Definitional Issues

Of the many labels used to describe this growing class of workers, we, along with Cappelli, (1999), find “nonstandard” the most descriptive as it clearly invokes a norm of “standard” work arrangements against which these workers contrast. Nonstandard workers are something “other than” standard workers, those who work on a fixed schedule, at the employer’s place of business, under the employer’s control, and with mutual expectations of continued employment (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000). This definition is consistent with Pfeffer and Baron’s (1988) description of the three types of attachment that exist between workers and organizations: attachment based on the degree of physical proximity between employer and employee (see also Kalleberg et al., 2000); attachment based on the extent of administrative control that the employers exerts over the employee; and attachment based on the expected duration of employment. When duration of employment is limited, the organization has limited administrative control over the employee, and/or workers are not physically proximate to the organization, work is more nonstandard.

While Davis-Blake and her colleagues (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993) have used these bases of attachment to predict different outcomes of nonstandard employment, we propose that the literature would benefit from a further consideration of the ways in which nonstandard work highlights the need for theories that are pertinent to their experiences and behaviors. Since Pfeffer and Baron’s (1988) theoretical conceptualization dominated the field, it seems appropriate to start our theorizing about types of nonstandard workers with their framework. As a preliminary step toward this goal, in Table 2.1 we define and give examples of nonstandard work for each of Pfeffer and Baron’s dimensions. We also identify some theoretical mechanisms that possibly explain why or how this form of attachment affects workers and identify some mainstream theories used in organizational
behavior that might be affected by variations in the levels and forms of workers' attachment to the organization.

**Temporal Attachment**

Scholars who research "contingent workers" have focused on the temporal dimension identified by Pfeffer and Baron (1988). Contingent work is "any work arrangement that does not contain an explicit or implicit commitment between employee and employer for long-term employment" (Polivka & Nardone, 1989, p. 11). A couple of definitional issues, however, limit the utility of defining work solely by the temporal dimension. First, literature on contingent work has included part-time workers (e.g., Feldman, 1990; Hulin & Glomb, 1999). In our view, however, part-time workers do not easily and unequivocally fall within the nonstandard domain. There are at least two types of part-time workers. While certain "retention" part timers do have limited work hours, they nevertheless could have expectations of employment continuity since they typically are in this work arrangement voluntarily and as a part of the organization’s retention strategy (Bauer & Truxillo, 2000; Tilly, 1992). Other part-time workers form a part of a secondary labor market, work limited hours, and have no expectations of long-term employment. Given these
ambiguities, we do not focus on part-time work in this review, though we occasionally reference research on part-timers to make more general points.

A second problem with defining employment relationships based on expectations for the future is that in today's uncertain work world, all workers, even standard workers, are "contingent" by this definition to some extent. The implicit commitment between employee and employer for long-term employment appears to no longer be the norm (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Cappelli, 1999). That said, employees do appear to differ significantly on their extent of formal and/or informal expectation for a future in the organization, with many nonstandard clearly acknowledging a limited future within an organization. This expectation may be shaped by formal organizational policy or might exist irrespective of formal policy.

Variation in expectations of longevity in employment likely affects individual behavior in organizations, but we do not yet understand how. An example of a behavior that might be affected by the limited longevity of nonstandard work is organizational citizenship behavior (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). Citizenship behaviors are typically exhibited when employees expect that the organization or its representatives will reciprocate, even if not immediately. When workers do not expect to be in an organization over a time, they are likely to reduce their citizenship behaviors. Consistent with this argument, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) and Van Dyne and Ang (1998) found that temporary workers exhibit fewer citizenship behaviors than their permanent counterparts. However, Pearce (1993) found that temporary workers engaged in more extrarole behaviors than permanent workers, suggesting that there may be more going on. In the case of temporary workers, calculations of reciprocity might not be the only factors that affect citizenship behaviors. More work is needed for understanding how weak temporal attachment affects organizational citizenship behavior.

Similarly, when individuals expect that their association with an organization might not last for long, they may be less likely to be concerned with impression management, or how others see their performances (Barsness, Diekmann, & Seidel, 2005). Sias, Kramer, and Jenkins (1997) found support for this argument in a sample of temporary workers. They also found that these workers sought appraisal feedback less frequently, consistent with a reduced concern for how others view them. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this reduced interest in what others at work think. For individuals, less impression management may mean that they can be more authentic at work, with reduced pressure to conform to the expectations of others (Pink, 2001). On the down side, however, because they receive less feedback from others, nonstandard workers may learn and develop less than those more concerned with others' opinion of them (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003). Thus, in line with their increased responsibility for their own careers, contingent workers may engage in impression management for helping them secure
future positions (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). From the firm's perspective, less impression management may mean quicker and greater accuracy in managers' knowledge of the abilities, skills, and motivations of contingent workers. In light of the relatively short history together, this speed and accuracy are important for mobilizing this workforce. On the other hand, less impression management concerns may mean lowered performance from these workers, particularly in the realm of extra-role or citizenship behaviors (Bolino, 1999). The impact of weak temporal attachment on impression management warrants further investigation.

Administrative Attachment

A second distinction raised by Pfeffer and Baron (1988) is who controls the worker administratively. In the case of self-employed independent contractors it might be the workers themselves, or it may be an agency, as is the case for contractors who are employees of a mediating agency that screens and then finds employment for them in a client organization. In the latter case, the agency participates in the control of the nonstandard worker on most issues, but some aspects of administration, such as attendance, might be the purview of the client organization. These workers tend to be treated as outsiders at their client organizations, even though they sometimes have frequent and proximate interactions with others in the organization (Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002), and might even represent the organization to external groups (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005). Theories that are premised on membership in a group or organization, such as social identity or self-categorization theory, may be affected by the unique situation of contract workers. For example, how do nonstandard workers reconcile the differences between perceived group membership (Stamper & Masterson, 2002) and actual group membership as they form their identification with work organizations? While the idea of multiple identities has received some attention in the social psychology literature (Cinnirella, 1997; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Mlicki & Ellemers, 1996; Wenzel, 2000), nonstandard workers provide a significant context in which to test theories that can help us understand how individuals manage multiple work-related identities, especially between identities that might be simultaneously and equally salient (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001).

Physical Attachment

Nonstandard workers vary in their levels of physical attachment, with some conducting work at the organization's site, others working from home a day or two a week, and others working almost entirely on their own with only infrequent contact with the organization (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). Physically detached workers thus include those who work from home, like telecommuters, as well as those who work at client sites. The challenge for those who work
remotely from their principal employer is one of managing the nature and quality of the interactions with members of the organization.

A number of organizational behavior theories are based on assumptions related to physical interactions between individuals in organizations. For instance, the research on mental models suggests that the more people interact, the more similar their mental models become (Moreland, 1999). However, this finding might not hold when people work remotely from each other, as their e-mail and phone interactions lack the richness of face-to-face contact. Levesque, Wilson, and Wholey (2001) found that in virtual teams, the longer the team operated, the further apart their mental models became. They explained this finding by suggesting that virtual team members experience less social pressures for conformity and focus instead on the task. As a result, individuals develop unique task-related skills and divergent mental models.

Insights from physically weakly attached workers can contribute and add nuance to established theory. For example, George and Chattopadhyay’s (2005) research on the social identity of contract employees suggested that organizational identification can develop not only through impersonal means, such as organizational reputation, but also through personal interactions. They found that impersonal bases increase identification with the agencies who mediate contract work whereas personal bases increase identification with the client organization. Their study highlighted that weak attachment makes salient different mechanisms for developing identification with the employing and client organizations. Weak physical attachment to the agency leads to a heightened role for impersonal mechanisms and weak administrative and temporal attachment to the client organization increases the importance of personal relationships.

Our theories of work meaning also stand to benefit from reconsideration in light of weak physical attachment. Interactions with others have long been held as important means through which workers come to understand the meaning and value of their work (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Weick, 1995; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Yet, Blatt and Ashford (2006) found that workers who are physically (and often also temporally and administratively) detached from organizations, such as independent contractors, freelancers, consultants, and designers, make meaning through different mechanisms. Specifically, they find that independent workers make meaning by drawing on their self-knowledge and culturally available meaning units rather than through interaction with others.

These three dimensions of the relationship between workers and organizations—(a) physical, (b) administrative, and (c) temporal (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988)—are helpful for distinguishing between different kinds of workers in a world where nonstandard work forms abound. Future research on nonstandard work would benefit from a shift to an explicit consideration of these theoretical dimensions, based on aspects of the relationship between employees.
and organizations, rather than a focus on a particular category of workers as defined, for example, by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (e.g., "independent contractors" or "temporary employees"). Such an approach will advance understanding of how varying attachment on any one or combination of these dimensions influences important outcomes such as the development of shared cognitions (Levesque et al., 2001), organizational identification (George & Chattopadhyay, 2005), organizational citizenship behavior (Pearce, 1993), and social relationships at work (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006). Understanding nonstandard work through these dimensions of attachment also moves beyond simple dichotomies that distinguish "good" and "bad" nonstandard jobs (e.g., Kalleberg et al.'s, 2000, distinction between "bad" jobs that are low in wages and offer no pension or health benefits and those that are not), issues that, we believe, characterize the experience of nonstandard work rather than constituting defining feature of its form. It moves us beyond the limitations of the categories enumerated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to portraying how people understand and experience their jobs.

Utilizing these three dimensions in empirical research, however, has its difficulties. First, although their simplicity is elegant, it can sometimes be challenging for researchers to tease them apart, since they intersect and interact in ways that make it difficult to differentiate their individual effects. For example, the current legal environment surrounding temporary employment has encouraged firms to strictly contain administrative attachment among temporary workers (to avoid coemployment claims). As a result, temporary work and administrative attachment have become more strongly linked than in the past. Similarly, the kind of "supervision" that is possible remotely means that limited physical attachment often occurs with limited administrative attachment as well (Davis-Blake, personal communication, October 2006). These difficulties may account for why Davis-Blake and her colleagues (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Davis-Blake et al., 2003) often referred to the degree of externalization generally rather than dimension by dimension. Their ability to theorize about the implications of different degrees of externalization is a model for future research.

Second, if being nonstandard is a matter of degree, then the question of at what point (or threshold) is someone appropriately classified as a nonstandard worker becomes pertinent. We believe that this issue is best addressed by considering two questions. First, does the individual's affiliation with a work organization place him or her at the lower end on any of Pfeffer and Baron's (1988) three dimensions of externalization? If yes, then the second question follows: Is the job traditionally conducted in a "standard" way? If both of these questions are answered affirmatively, this means that the worker is physically, temporally, or administratively weakly attached in a job that traditionally was conducted by workers who were strongly attached on any of these dimensions. Thus, the worker is nonstandard. This criterion excludes entrepreneurs,
artists, and farmers, since their weak attachment to organizations has been the norm for those occupations. Likewise, it excludes those part-time workers who are in occupations that have traditionally been part time.

The second criterion we introduce suggests that the definition of nonstandard has an inherent subjective element. Indeed, what may seem standard to some employees or organizations may appear nonstandard to others. To some extent, being nonstandard is socially constructed and changes over time, as norms about employment change. This fact is reflected in the relative lack of consensus in the literature about who is included in this definition. Despite this subjective element, we believe that the definition of nonstandard work as a combination of the nature of the work arrangement along the three continua specified by Pfeffer and Baron (1988) and the fact of how work in that occupation has been traditionally arranged is a useful one.

The Magnitude of the Phenomenon and Scholarly Interest

Nonstandard work and workers no longer inhabit the fringes of the labor market. Yet estimating the number of nonstandard workers is difficult. Estimates vary and conditions change. For example in 1996, Silicon Valley, California was held up as representative and predictive of the future regarding labor trends (Carnoy, Castells, & Benner, 1997). Based on the Silicon Valley case, workers were predicted to increasingly move between organizations, filling positions on demand, or to be self-employed, providing labor to the market place (Carnoy et al., 1997). Given the technology bubble of the late 1990s, these figures and even more extravagant portrayals of the possibilities for the future seemed credible. The bubble’s burst in the early 2000s, however, challenges this portrayal.

Still nonstandard work appears to be here to stay. A conservative estimate from the most recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) survey of nonstandard employment shows that in 2005, 14.8 million people, or 10.7% of the U.S. work force, were employed in a nonstandard employment arrangement. If one considered only those in contingent jobs, such as those who did not expect their jobs to last over a year, approximately 5.7 million Americans (or 4.1% of the work force) could be counted as part of this group. Although these numbers have remained consistent over a 10-year period (see Table 2.2), nonstandard work is gaining prevalence among highly paid, high skilled jobs that represent key sectors of the economy (Bendapudi, Mangum, Tansky, & Fisher, 2003). Thus, the BLS reports that in 2005, 39.9% of the individuals categorized as independent contractors were managers and professionals and that this subcategory is the fastest growing of all segments of independent workers. Less conservative estimates claim that the proportion of U.S. workers in nonstandard arrangements is as high as 33% (Houseman & Polivka, 2000). It should be noted that these BLS figures do not include individuals in part-time work.
Table 2.2 Workers in Nonstandard Work Arrangement in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Independent Contractors</th>
<th>On-Call Workers</th>
<th>Temporary Help Agency Workers</th>
<th>Workers Provided by Contract Firms</th>
<th>Workers with Traditional Arrangements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>10,342,000</td>
<td>2,454,000</td>
<td>1,217,000</td>
<td>813,000</td>
<td>123,843,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>8,456,000</td>
<td>1,996,000</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
<td>809,000</td>
<td>114,119,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>8,309,000</td>
<td>1,968,000</td>
<td>1,181,000</td>
<td>652,000</td>
<td>111,052,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 Percentage of total number of employed workers.

Nonstandard work is not a strictly American phenomenon. In Japan, 40% of the labor force is self-employed, part time, or temporary. Similar figures hold for the United Kingdom (Carnoy et al., 1997). The Australian Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that, in 2002 and 2005, approximately 20% of the workforce was in casual employment (roughly equivalent to temporary work in the United States). Nonstandard work arrangements are gaining popularity also among firms in Canada, Europe, and parts of Asia (Allen, 2002; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004).

The size, diversity, and prevalence of nonstandard work have piqued scholars’ interest. Of particular interest is the large numbers of firms that employ nonstandard workers—up to 90% of American firms (Matusik & Hill, 1998). Also, information technology makes more and more of us partially virtual—we check e-mail from home, we collaborate with others virtually, and often are just a keystroke away from work at any hour of the day or night. The nonstandardization of work now affects almost everyone’s work experience.

Yet research on nonstandard work remains limited. Why do not all studies on work and workers, as a matter of course, take into account the nature of the work arrangement between workers and organizations? One explanation could be that since World War II, standard jobs were available to most of the (then White and male) American workforce, and thus, this work arrangement became the norm for how work was done (Morse, 1969). Most scholars, though they themselves might work in a virtual, nonstandard way, developed their theories of organizational behavior to describe these jobs and workers. A second, and related, explanation is that, even though since the 1920s and 1930s, there were segments of the work force in contingent, nonstandard jobs, these jobs were traditionally occupied by more marginalized members of society—women, youth, immigrants, and members of minority communities (Morse, 1969). Writing about these workers would involve taking into
account not just the nature of the jobs, but also the social and political conditions associated with them. Organizational behavior scholars tended to focus their attention on the relatively less politicized population of standard workers (Martin, 2006). Third, standard employees in standard jobs have been the most accessible samples throughout most of our field’s history. Researching nonstandard workers has historically been difficult due to their relatively peripheral status and intermittent physical presence in many organizations, which has made them less accessible to researchers.

However, today many nonstandard workers are not marginalized people in peripheral jobs. Independent contractors tend to be male (65% of contractors), White (89%), have at least a bachelor’s degree (36%), and work in management, business, financial operations, or sales-related occupations (BLS, 2005). As a result, we need to face some of the tacit boundary conditions of our theories. For example, many of our theories focus on strong individual-organizational relationships and the desirability of such a bond (e.g., Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1999). Elements of Weberian bureaucracy, such as an organizational career, assume a future in the organization and membership in the organization and thus a strong organization-employee attachment. This implies a strong individual motive to fit in (which is evidenced in the socialization literature), to belong and identify (as posited in the organizational identification literature), to impress superiors for getting ahead (a central tenet of the impression management literature), to internalize organizational values (a key assumption of the culture literature), and so on. These motives have come to be understood as important mechanisms through which organizations bring about the participation of their employees. Relaxing some of these boundary condition means that some people may not be as strongly motivated to fit in, belong, impress, and internalize organizational values. Their participation is brought about perhaps through other means.

Why the Rise in Nonstandard Work?

The rise in nonstandard work can be accounted for by firm strategic decisions, the changing nature of work, and changing employee preferences. Firms choose to employ nonstandard workers as part of their labor force for a variety of reasons (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Uzzi & Barsness, 1998). In what is perhaps the best empirical examination of this issue, Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993) suggested three categories of reasons why firms use nonstandard workers: costs/flexibility, feasibility, and the nature of the work being performed.

**Cost/flexibility.** Firms also employ nonstandard workers to stay flexible in increasingly uncertain labor and product markets by expanding and contracting their employment at will (and therefore the size of their workforce; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). These practices allow firms to cope with increased global competition and uncertainty (Kalleberg, 2000). Theory suggests that
employing nonstandard workers also allows firms to focus on their distinctive competencies by externalizing noncore work (Matusik & Hill, 1998; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988) and to curb shirking within the ranks of standard workers as the latter are pressured to perform in the presence of harder-working nonstandard colleagues (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). Management's distrust of labor also may be an important correlate of the use of nonstandard workers. Previous research has shown that management-labor conflict, as exhibited in strikes or other forms of industrial action, has a significant positive relationship with the extent of use of contract workers (Uzzi & Barsness, 1998). Firms may employ more nonstandard workers to decrease their reliance a workforce they perceived as antagonistic. Davis-Blake et al.'s (2003) evidence suggested that the causality is reciprocal: that the use of temporary workers is also associated with standard workers' increased intent to unionize.

**Feasibility.** Firms cannot always employ nonstandard workers, despite a cost advantage. Feasibility is constrained by the firm's size and the level of bureaucratization of its employment practices. Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993) found support for their argument that larger firms, and firms with bureaucratized employment practices, are more focused on maintaining workforce stability and control and therefore are less interested in using temporary workers. Their data also suggested that feasibility is constrained by the presence of powerful influence groups outside of organizations (e.g., government oversight), such that greater government oversight is correlated with lower use of temporary workers (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993).

The employment of nonstandard workers is made more feasible, though, by two factors. First, the rise in the prominence and number of firms that act as employment intermediaries, such as temporary help agencies or contract companies (Kalleberg, 2000; Kalleberg & Marsden, 2005), has greatly facilitated the use of nonstandard workers. In a survey of U.S. organizations (without restrictions on size, sector, or industry), Kalleberg and Marsden (2005) found that approximately 54% used some form of employment intermediary in staffing the various activities of their organization.

Second, technology has also made nonstandard work more feasible. Whereas previously workers needed to assemble in large numbers around machinery and energy sources to coordinate their work; the advent of inexpensive communication technologies has reduced this need. Many kinds of work can now be done from almost anywhere (Kalleberg, 2000; Shamir, 1992). Technology also enables monitoring workers who are not physically present (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988). This development may increase organizations' comfort with employees conducting work off premises, making nonstandard work seem more feasible.
Nature of work. The development of information, communication, and automation technologies in the second half of the 20th century also has profoundly changed the nature of work done within organizations (Bradley, Schipani, Sundaram, & Walsh, 1999) and thus aided firms' ability to reap the cost and flexibility advantages of nonstandard work (Kalleberg, 2000; Shamir, 1992). Today, knowledge is the key factor of production and value creation. While workers were historically selected for their capacity for exertion, dexterity, and endurance, creativity and problem-solving skills are more critical in today's knowledge-based economy (Bradley et al., 1999). The result is a blurring of the divide between the functions of workers and managers (Cobble & Vosko, 2000) and a rise in work that requires considerable freedom and flexibility (Florida, 2002) for which traditional bureaucracies may be ill suited (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004).

Given the complexity and importance of such work, however, firms may not easily let go of their control over it. In support of this observation, Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993) found that the type of work undertaken determines employment conditions, whereby jobs high in either technical or informational complexity are less likely to be given to nonstandard workers. Thus, firms make sure that the key source of value remains within the firm. On the other hand, they find no relationship between the interpersonal complexity of a job and the use of nonstandard workers, suggesting that a wide array of jobs might be profitably structured in nonstandard work arrangements. Indeed, we are seeing firms take advantage of this fact by sending many jobs to distant locations with only minimal connection to the main body of the firm through a process of offshoring. While this practice may be nonstandard at the firm level, researchers need to carefully examine the work arrangements between the offshore firm and its workers as these may be quite standard.

Workers' preferences. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2005, about 32% of temporary agency employees and 82% of independent contractors prefer nonstandard employment to a standard arrangement. Workers may prefer nonstandard work because of its flexibility, variety, freedom from organizational politics, and sometimes higher pay (Florida, 2002; Kunda et al., 2002). Moreover, glamorous portrayals of “free agency” further the cultural sentiment that quality of work life is higher outside of organizations (e.g., Pink, 2001). Particularly women may see nonstandard work as an opportunity to effectively combine participation in the workforce with child care or to overcome barriers to career advancement within organizations (Rothstein, 1996; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002).

In sum, because nonstandard work reduces organizational costs, gives organizations and employees more flexibility, is more feasible and acceptable today, may be more consistent with important knowledge and creative work needed by today's organizations, and is aligned with many people's preferences
and lifestyles, it is gaining prevalence and momentum. Its increasing prominence may be an additional source of growth for nonstandard work. That is, the more nonstandard work exists as a model of how to do work and conduct a career over a lifetime, the more legitimate it becomes as a work form and life pattern. The more legitimate it becomes, the more firms and employees will choose to engage in it. Thus, for example, it would not be surprising to see more and more jobs in the future, including jobs at the organization's core, being done in nonstandard ways and the high status and legitimacy of temporary employees that we see in high-tech occupations (Barley & Kunda, 2004) spreading to new occupations. Incrementally and over time, society changes, as do people's expectations of organizations and careers. If the number of people in nonstandard jobs increases, just what is "standard" work becomes an open question.

To understand the implications of nonstandard on the organizational behavior of nonstandard workers and on their management, a good place to start is with their experiences. These experiences have received considerably less attention than have the experience of the firms that employ them and the experience of standard workers. As such, this area is ripe with opportunities for future work.

The Experience of Nonstandard Workers

If organizations increasingly will be an agglomeration of differing types of workers, only some working in the traditional way, then we ought to look carefully at the experience of nonstandard workers, as existing research does not offer a nuanced or adequate understanding of the new world of work (Barley & Kunda, 2001). There have, though, been quite a few descriptive studies of the experience of nonstandard workers, both qualitative (e.g., Ammons & Markham, 2004; Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Baines, 1999; Barley & Kunda, 2001, Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Baruch, 2000; Brocklehurst, 2001; Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Garsten, 1999; Gossett, 2002; Jordan, 2003; Lautsch, 2002; Mallon & Duberley, 2000; Mirchandani, 1999; Olson, 1989; Parker, 1994; Rogers, 1995) and quantitative, focusing usually on nonstandard employees' attitudes (e.g., Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Benson, 1998; Dennis, 1996; DiNatale, 2001; Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Feldman et al., 1994; Howe, 1986; Kalleberg, 2000; Kalleberg et al., 2000; Katz, 1993; Krausz, 2000; Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002; Parker, Griffin, Sprigg, & Wall, 2002; Pearce, 1993; Raghuram, Wiesenfeld, & Garud, 2003; Staples, Hulland, & Higgins, 1999; Workman, Kahnweiler, & Bommer, 2003). The time is ripe for developing new theory and elaborating existing theory based on these findings. In the following section, we outline what these studies show about the experience of being a nonstandard worker with respect to control, boundaries, relationships, career, self, and choice. We also identify opportunities for both theoretical and empirical work suggested by findings in each segment.
For simplicity in this and subsequent sections, we sometimes make general statements about nonstandard workers as a group. We do recognize, however, that motivation and experience will likely vary depending on the type of nonstandard worker considered. We back our general statements with careful specification of the types of nonstandard workers examined in the studies we cite. In subsequent research, care must be taken to tailor the ideas to the specific ways in which the individual's job is nonstandard.

The Experience of Control

Nonstandard work is often associated with freedom, autonomy, and liberation from corporate control (Davenport & Pearlson, 1998; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Pink, 2001; Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005). In fact, increased autonomy is one of the reasons that self-employed workers are more satisfied than their standard counterparts (Katz, 1993). At the same time, many nonstandard workers also experience great constraints, whether self-imposed or imposed by others. For example, Tietze and Musson (2003) described virtual workers' tendency to exercise self-imposed discipline. Contractors' freedom is also constrained by forces such as cyclical downtime and the structure of projects (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004) and by economic concerns (Jurik, 1998). Just as with standard workers, family members, and nonwork responsibilities may likewise limit nonstandard workers' experience of freedom, particularly for telecommuters and contractors working from home (Ammons & Markham, 2004; Baines, 2002). Finally, organizations often attempt to exercise greater control of nonstandard workers by restricting their hours and duration of employment (Baruch, 2001; Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006) and by giving them specific instructions on what they are to do and how, with little ability to negotiate demands (Ang & Slaughter, 2001). In the case of telecommuters, organizations tend to place great emphasis on scheduled meetings, reviews, and other means of monitoring (Pearson & Saunders, 2001).

This apparent paradox suggests important research regarding the optimal combination of structure and freedom for achieving favorable outcomes among nonstandard workers. Just as organizations have a keen interest in controlling nonstandard workers, these workers need to grapple with the issue of control themselves. Following Brown and Eisenhardt (1997), who found that "semistructures," in which only some features are prescribed, are most adaptive for organizational innovation in high-velocity environments, a fruitful research stream might explore individual-level semistructures for facilitating nonstandard work. Such research could identify which elements should be tightly controlled and which should remain free, which elements should be controlled by the worker and which by the organization and which combination of freedom and constraints is experienced as most favorable by the workers themselves. Qualitative work by Ashford and Blatt (2003) began to suggest the range of tactics independent workers use to create optimal structure for the pursuit of the
work, ranging from tactics that structure their time and space, to those that regulate their emotions and emotional reactions. Blatt and Ashford (2006) further examined how nonstandard workers use meaning making to facilitate staying on task and getting work done under conditions of great freedom. Considering that autonomy and freedom from organizational influence is both a common reason people enter nonstandard work (Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Kunda et al., 2002) and an important source of satisfaction (Baruch, 2000; Katz, 1993) and that a primary concern of organizations utilizing nonstandard workers is the reduced ability to control them (Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Matusik & Hill, 1998), this set of research questions merit both greater theoretical development and further empirical work.

The Experience of Boundaries

The distinction between an organizational insider and an outsider used to be relatively clear. Today the rise of nonstandard work has made it much less so (Rafaeli, 1998). Consequently, issues relatively dependent on the experience of membership, such as identification, sense of community and belonging, and socialization into the organizational culture, are rendered problematic. Indeed studies have found that contingent workers often do not feel a part of the organizations that employ them (Allan & Sienko, 1998) and are less likely to identify with them (McLean Parks, Kidder, & Gallagher, 1998; Nollen & Axel, 1996) or be committed to them (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). This is also the case for virtual employees (Rock & Pratt, 2002; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). In the face of blurred organizational boundaries, organization may not be the source of community (Kogut & Zander, 1996), belonging (Hogg & Terry, 2000), and identity (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994) that they once were.

Although people often enter nonstandard employment to better manage the work-nonwork boundary (Rothstein, 1996), ironically they may find this boundary more difficult to manage in their new work mode. Nonstandard work can blur the work-nonwork boundary, both physically, as people work from home, and temporally, as they are likely to work at all hours. Those who work at home may find it difficult to establish these boundaries, especially if they are highly involved in their work and their hours are long and irregular (Ammons & Markham, 2004; Mirchandani, 1999). They may experience the problem of “presenteeism,” the inability to take time off from work, even when sick (Mann, Varey, & Button, 2000). Even the boundary between working and socializing is blurred, as nonstandard contract workers concerned about employability attend social events in the hope of making connections to facilitate future career opportunities (Kunda et al., 2002).

These observations challenge much of the research in organizational behavior that is premised on clearer distinctions. For example, the notion of “spillover” (Westman, 2001) suggests a clear boundary between work and nonwork. Herein lies an opportunity for future research. Do nonstandard workers
experience boundaries as blurred or distinct? Do their actions serve to distinguish them or blur them further? Is this a source of stress or satisfaction?

The Experience of Relationships

Nonstandard work often has a substantial impact on one's relationships. For example, many have documented the feelings of isolation experienced by teleworkers (Baines, 2002; Baruch, 2001; Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden, 2006; Kurland & Bailey, 1999), contractors (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Feldman & Bolino, 2000), and temporary employees (Feldman et al., 1994; Rogers, 1995). However, many workers appear to adjust to this problem over time or develop strategies for dealing with it (Ammons & Markham, 2004; Baines, 1999). Another issue is the negative treatment that temporary and contract workers receive from coworkers while on site in organizations (Hudson, 2001; Smith, 1997). These experiences can lead many nonstandard workers to feel marginalized. It is perhaps because of the prevalence of exclusion that nonstandard workers are keenly attuned to how they are treated by others, with positive treatment particularly appreciated (Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld, in press; Benson, 1998; Blatt & Camden, 2006; George & Chattopadhyay, 2005; Pearce, 1993). Such relationships may also affect tangible outcomes. In Ho, Ang, and Straub's (2003) study, a positive relationship with the boss is positively related to evaluations of the nonstandard contract worker's performance. The reality of an insecure livelihood in some forms of nonstandard work (e.g., where friendship and support may coexist with competition) and the complexities of working in the home, in the case of contractors and telecommuters, can generate interpersonal tension and a greater need for social support (Baines, 1999, 2002; Trent, Smith, & Wood, 1994).

This research suggests that there may be a new set of relational rules in a complex social world where nonstandard and standard employees work alongside one another and workers work where their families live. As Lautsch (2002) wrote, nonstandard jobs entail "complex social relationships, rather than... wage contracts" (p. 41) How can nonstandard workers overcome differences in experience to create common ground for coordination, translate across disciplinary differences for communication, and develop enough trust for innovation? How do they negotiate family relations to create effective work practices?

A second research opportunity lies in understanding the community of practice that nonstandard employees develop to adapting to the nonstandard role. Numerous Web sites, online communities, associations, and networking events represent grassroots attempts by nonstandard workers to learn from each other about how to deal with these complicated relational realities (Jordan, 2003) and create community. What do they learn from each other and what can we learn from them about relationships in the new world of work? Another important area of ongoing research concerns the influence of technology on relationships patterns and the need to use technology to replace
face-to-face communication (Davenport & Pearlson, 1998; Golden, 2006; Mann et al., 2000; Pratt, Fuller, & Northcraft, 2000; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999; Workman et al., 2003). Given the growing prevalence of the substitution of technology for face to face as a means of connecting even in standard work, this research has broad appeal.

The Experience of Career

Nonstandard work generally means that workers manage their own careers, rather than putting their fate in the hands of an organization (Heckscher, 2000; Hoque & Kirkpatrick, 2003; Tench, Fawkes, & Palihawadana, 2002). This fact has several implications for how nonstandard work is experienced. The first is the experience of job insecurity and the continuous search for work (Kalleberg et al., 2000; Marler et al., 2002). Temporary work is often seen as a dead-end career pattern with little or no job security (Feldman et al., 1994; Hudson, 2001). Contractors also experience significant preoccupation with maintaining their network and securing future work (Kunda et al., 2002). The second is the experience of vulnerability to market shifts stemming from nonstandard workers' closeness to and dependence on the market and forces beyond their control (Feldman & Bolino, 2000). Studies find, for example, that contractors' actions are strongly motivated by concern over income (e.g., Evans et al., 2004; Jurik, 1998).

Much has been written about whether nonstandard work is marginalizing or liberating. The research reviewed above suggests a more complicated reality, whereby even the most "boundaryless" independent contractors face economic pressures and worry about future income (Evans et al., 2004). It is time for research to focus on how to manage the complexities of personal responsibility for career, how the agency (e.g., the capacity to do otherwise; Giddens, 1984) inherent in "free agency" is best realized, and how individuals can buffer themselves against the insecurities associated with the new world of work. The latter issue is relevant for nonstandard and standard workers alike.

The Experience of Self

Nonstandard work makes identity problematic. The work lives of nonstandard workers are more likely to be marked by discontinuity, and their identities are more likely to be fragmented or liminal (Smith, 1998). Overlaid on this reality, contingent workers, contractors, and virtual workers are often marginalized, stigmatized and treated as outsiders, second-class citizens, or invisible (Barker, 1998). For example, temporary agencies often treat workers, even highly educated ones, as a bundle of skills rather than as individuals (Inkson, Heising, & Rousseau, 2001). Not surprisingly, contingent and virtual workers often do not identify with organizations and may even be resentful toward them (Feldman et al., 1994; Jordan, 2003).
Relatively little research has examined nonstandard workers' response to these experiences. A study by Jordan (1996) found that many temporary employees respond with active resistance to dehumanizing practices. Others appear to focus on re-narrating and redefining their identities in positive terms (Pink, 2001; Tietze, 2005; Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002). This mirrors the identity work of people in stigmatized occupations, who tend to develop a strong culture that positively redefines their collective identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Pelipper & Baruch, 1997). Some research suggests that nonstandard employees turn to non-organizational sources of identity, such as occupational communities (Kunda et al., 2002). This may entail dissociation from the negative identity of being nonstandard (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001). As yet, little empirical work has offered support for these ideas, and we have limited understanding of where nonstandard workers turn to enhance their self-esteem and reduce uncertainty, two known functions of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The Experience of Choice

The literature portrays one key determinant of workers' response to being nonstandard as the degree of choice workers had in their standard versus nonstandard status. Indeed, Parker and colleagues (2002) argued that negative versus positive reactions to nonstandard work may depend on whether nonstandard workers entered that status involuntarily or voluntarily. McLean Parks and colleagues (1998) suggested that "the degree to which employees believe they had choice in the selection of the nature of the employment relationship" (p. 720) affects the resulting psychological contract. With increasing "voluntariness" comes increasing perceptions of justice and more extrarole behavior (McLean Parks et al., 1998). However, while the degree of choice in engaging in nonstandard work has been extensively invoked with respect to its importance in explaining the experience of nonstandard work, empirical findings have been mixed. For example, Benson (1998) found that preference for contract employment influences commitment to the employing organization but not to the host organization among temporary employees. Both Feldman, Doerpinghaus, and Turnley (1995) and Krausz (2000) found that choice in temporary work is associated with more positive attitudes toward aspects of their jobs, but Van Breugel, Van Olfen, and Olie (2005) found that choice is not associated with attitudes among temporary employees. In another empirical investigation, Ellingson, Gruys, and Sackett (1998) concluded that "the reasons leading to a choice to pursue temporary work have little relationship to performance levels" (p. 918).

The mixed findings may result from the fact that actual entry into nonstandard employment typically has both volitional and nonvolitional characteristics (Polivka, 1996) and that choice is both prospectively and retrospectively evaluated. As such choice may not be as important a variable as it first appears.
Both Jurik (1998) and Kunda and colleagues (2002) found that people face a combination of constraints (little choice) and agency (choice) in beginning to work as temporary workers and contractors. The fact that a career path is first characterized by a high degree of choice or not may not be an important determinant of subsequent attitudes. Studies find that those who did not choose nonstandard work still report satisfaction with the role as they come to see it as an opportunity to get away from the negative aspects of organizational employment (Jurik, 1998) whereas those who did choose it often report some dissatisfaction as they come to see value in their organizational pasts (Mallon & Duberley, 2000). Likewise, Marler and colleagues (2002) expected to find that high skills would coincide with preferences for temporary work (along the lines of a boundaryless career model), whereas low-skilled workers would prefer a standard job. However, what they found was that, while high-skilled workers prefer temporary work more than do those with low skills, only 35% express such a preference. Thus their data suggested that preference and skill level are somewhat orthogonal.

It may be more fruitful to write about how choice is construed to the self or others (narratives of choice), rather than actual choice. First, as previously stated, actual degree of choice may not be a clear-cut issue. Second, in terms of behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, narratives of choice may matter more. For example, Ammons and Markham (2004) found that those respondents who talk about working at home as a result of their choice have greater motivation to make it work. The degree of volition in their post hoc narrative—or their perceived choice to work in a nonstandard arrangement—has particular behavioral consequences quite independent of their actual level of choice at the time they made the decision (McLean Parks et al., 1998). Dick and Hyde (2006) similarly found that what mattered in the choice to engage in part-time work depended on how workers narrated it to themselves. As Weick (1996) wrote, nonstandard careers are “improvised work experiences that rise prospectively into fragments and fall retrospectively into patterns” (p. 40). What may have been a complex and messy process of choice and nonchoice when entering nonstandard employment may emerge as a coherent narrative of either choice or lack of it, each with its associated pattern of attitudes and behavioral inclinations. Blatt and Ashford's (2006) qualitative research on independent workers suggested that nonstandard workers nimbly construct and alter the meaning of their work to remain focused and positive while working in ambiguous conditions. The role of meaning making in work outcomes for nonstandard workers is a fruitful area for future research.

When considering the experience of nonstandard workers, it is important to keep in mind significant differences among the various types of workers within the category of nonstandard work (Polivka, 1996). Some of these differences have to do with status and class. Kunda and colleagues (2002) pointed out that the literature on the work of free agents focuses almost exclusively
on the experience of highly skilled contractors, thereby glamorizing nonstandard work. However, these workers tend to earn premiums relative to standard employees in their occupations due to their status and skill, while other types of nonstandard workers (e.g., on call and temporary workers) are penalized (Belman & Golden, 2000; DiNatale 2001; Smith, 1997). Marier et al. (2002) labeled the first group “boundaryless” workers and the second “traditional temporary employees.” They paint a somewhat glowing portrait of boundaryless workers enjoying job security rooted in their own skills and their ability to sell them. Boundaryless workers supposedly increase their security through skill accumulation and thus may not even desire a permanent job. Marier and colleagues (2002) noted that boundaryless nonstandard workers are more likely than traditional temporary employees to perceive that they have more alternatives and to expect and receive higher wages. Further, Kalleberg et al. (2000) found that, while employment in nonstandard arrangements increases the risk of bad job characteristics substantially, the self-employed and contract workers have jobs with fewer bad characteristics than do regular part timers, temporary help agency workers and on call workers or day laborers (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Our field in general knows little about the latter set of workers. The nonstandard work area might lead the way in bringing attention to issues specific to these workers.

High-quality research focused on the questions we have raised here and sensitive to the type of nonstandard worker under consideration will go a long way toward addressing Barley and Kunda’s (2006) critique of this literature as focusing too much on economics and the labor market and too little on nonstandard workers’ actual experiences. A focus on theory and mechanisms will also help to order the qualitative and quantitative descriptive data that do exist so that it begins to give more insights than simple description.

The Blended Workforce: A New Set of Challenges

Management increasingly faces the challenge of managing a blended workforce that includes standard and nonstandard workers performing side by side, often over some period of time. The challenges are substantial.

Attitudes and Behaviors of a Blended Workforce

Many studies have established that the employment of nonstandard workers is likely to negatively affect standard workers’ attitude toward management and the organization, as well as toward their coworkers (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Chattopadhyay & George, 2001; Geary, 1992; George, 2003; Davis-Blake et al., 2003; Pearce, 1993; Smith, 1994). For example, Pearce’s (1993) study of the effects of the presence of contract employees on the internal workers of a large aerospace company found that permanent employees with comparable temporary coworkers reported lower trust in the organizations than employees in permanent employee only work units. While Pearce (1993) found no
difference in the self-reported organizational commitment of the internal and contract workers, the presence of temporary workers has generally been shown to be associated with poorer relations and lower trust in managers among standard workers (Davis-Blake et al., 2003; George, 2003) and with poorer supervisor-subordinate relations among all workers (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006).

The blending of standard and nonstandard workers also negatively affects relationships among workers in organizations. In a qualitative study of three electronics firms in Ireland, Geary (1992) found that the presence of temporary workers gives rise to tension between permanent and temporary employees. Chattopadhyay and George (2001) reported that interpersonal attraction and trust between all workers is lower as the number of temporary workers increases in work groups in three different organizations. Similarly, Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) found that the greater the degree of blending of temporary and standard workers in a financial services organization, the worse standard workers' relationships with their colleagues.

Moreover, employing nonstandard workers affects standard workers' behavior on the job. Standard workers have been found to engage in less extrarole behaviors than contract workers (Pearce, 1993), exhibit fewer helping behaviors (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006), and increase their propensity to unionize (Davis-Blake et al., 2003) when nonstandard workers are added to their group.

Why All the Negativity?

Several factors may account for these negative attitudes and altered behaviors among standard employees. First, the presence of nonstandard workers may cause standard workers to question the security of their own jobs. This uncertainty may negatively affect their job attitudes (Smith, 1997) and build the sense that they have to work harder to protect their jobs from nonstandard coworkers (Geary, 1992). Permanent employees feel compelled to work overtime so that they can keep up with their temporary coworkers in one electronics firm (Geary, 1992). Geary (1992) quoted a shop steward, who said, "People complain to me about the level of overtime. But what can you do when you have 20 temps and 5 permanent people on the line? Temps feel obliged to come in at the weekend and so do permanent people as a result" (p. 263). This finding suggests that competition for resources also may help account for more negative attitudes toward organizations, managers, and coworkers among standard employees whose work groups are increasingly populated by nonstandard employees.

Nonstandard workers may alter the career mobility opportunities for standard workers as well. In a study of a large Fortune 500 utility, Barnett and Miner (1992) found that the use of temporary workers quickens the mobility of permanent employees in higher level jobs but retards the mobility of those
in lower level jobs. They argued that the introduction of temporary workers reduces opportunities for advancement for lower level workers by increasing the number of potential competitors for each job while decreasing the number of individuals eligible to compete for higher levels jobs, thus eliminating the rivalry that exists for those jobs and increasing the likelihood that permanent workers advance into higher level jobs (Barnett & Miner, 1992). More recently, Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) found that the negative effects of employment heterogeneity on employee attitudes and behaviors are particularly negative for those holding jobs that are one standard deviation below the mean job grade. The reduced mobility opportunities for these workers, as well as the resultant threat to their status, are particularly triggered by the presence of nonstandard workers.

The negative attitudes and behaviors of standard employees in response to nonstandard employees may relate to their perceptions of fairness. When standard and nonstandard workers are paid differently, standard workers may believe that the organization is unfair to the standard worker or that the organization is exploiting the nonstandard workers. In both cases, the standard workers may come to perceive the organization as untrustworthy (Pearce, 1993). George (2003) found that standard workers view the use of external workers as a violation of the psychological contract between employees and the organization. She proposed that when organizations or their representatives engage in actions that are seen to be detrimental to workers' interests, standard employees are likely to reduce their trust in the organization.

Standard workers might also resent the presence of nonstandard coworkers because they place additional role-related demands on them. In a study of staffing arrangements in a large manufacturer of photocopy and computer equipment, Smith (1994) found that standard workers believe that temporary workers do not care about work quality, and thus, the standard workers have to "organize their efforts around the expected inconsistent work of the temporary workers" (p. 299). Similarly, since the procedures used to hire temporary workers are often truncated (Christensen, 1998), the blending of standard and nonstandard workers can be associated with increased workloads for all workers. This workload increase compensates for the perceived lack of organization-specific skill of temporary workers (Pearce, 1998). Geary's (1992) case study found that temporary workers are brought in on short notice, with little screening, thus placing additional supervisory demands on standard workers. George, Chattopadhyay, Lawrence, and Shulman's (2003) study of the effects of externalization on the work of research scientists found that the greater use of temporary workers in teams is associated with scientists reporting more time spent on administrative work and less time spent on work that was meaningful to them.
Minimizing the Costs of Blending

The attitudes of standard workers toward the use of nonstandard workers are not uniform, however. There are some preliminary indicators that organizational factors can moderate the relationship between the extent to which work groups are blended and the attitudes of standard workers. Four variables have been shown to mitigate the effect of employment status heterogeneity on standard workers' attitudes. First, Davis-Blake and colleagues (2003) argued that the impact of nonstandard workers varied with the proximity of the nonstandard workers to the firm. Temporary workers, who are both physically proximate and supervised by the organization, are more disruptive to the relationship between standard workers and the organization than are contract workers, who are only physically proximate to the organization. It appears that the more similar the nonstandard worker to the standard worker, the more the standard worker is threatened by and resentful of the nonstandard worker. Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) made a similar argument to explain their finding that temporary worker heterogeneity has a more negative effect on coworker relations than part-time worker heterogeneity does. They argued that temporary workers affect the mobility opportunities of standard workers more than do part-time workers. Also, the difference in status levels between temporary and standard workers likely triggers conflict between the two groups.

Second, the standard workers' level in the organization may buffer them from the detrimental effects of having nonstandard coworkers (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006). Barnett & Miner's (1992) findings that the impact of nonstandard workers on standard workers' mobility depend on the latter's organization level suggested this moderator. It may also be that workers with supervisory responsibilities feel more valued by the organization and thus are not as affected by the presence of temporary workers as those with no supervisory responsibilities (George, 2003).

Third, the relationship between the extent to which the work group is blended and standard workers' attitudes and reactions toward the organization may depend on the nature of the psychological contract between standard workers and the organization. Paradoxically, the more positive the psychological contract, the more standard workers may feel a sense of violation by the introduction of nonstandard workers into the organizational workforce. For example, in a multiorganization study of standard workers with varying levels of temporary or contract coworkers, George (2003) found, contrary to her hypothesis, that greater job security and longer term use of temporary and contract coworkers is associated with greater perceptions that the psychological contract between the standard employees and the organization has been violated, lower levels of trust in management, and lower affective commitment to the organization. She speculated that this result could be explained
by Brockner, Tyler, and Cooper-Schneider's (1992) argument that the more positive the affect that individuals have toward organizations, the more severe their reactions to perceived violations of trust by the organization in comparison with those who do not have this positive affect and the related set of expectations.

Finally, standard employees' relations to the heterogeneity of the work group may depend upon the extent and nature of standard and nonstandard workers' interactions with each other. Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) found, for example, that after controlling for group work status heterogeneity, nontask-related interactions are positively related to employee attitudes and behaviors, while task-related interactions have a negative relationship with supervisor-subordinate relations. They argued that the information and familiarity that comes from nontask-related interactions may mitigate concerns associated with the more frequent use of nonstandard workers. Task-related interactions, however, are fraught with the issues and problems that differentiate between standard and nonstandard workers. Thus, task-related interactions only serve to make salient and to exacerbate the problems of blending the two groups. These studies suggested that managers can mitigate the negative effects of blending different categories of workers by managing the types of workers used, the level of standard workers put with nonstandard coworkers, and the opportunities for interaction between standard and nonstandard workers.

Existing research also leaves room for further identification of moderators of the relationship between the extent to which groups are blended and the attitudes and behaviors of workers. While Davis-Blake and colleagues (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Davis-Blake et al. 2003) argued that the effects of blending standard workers with different types of nonstandard workers will vary depending on the type of nonstandard worker (e.g., temporary, contract, or part time), no research to date has examined if this effect will vary depending on the occupations to which these standard and nonstandard workers belong. It may be that the use of such workers is more threatening in some occupations than others. For example, for occupations with tight labor markets, a firm's decision to use nonstandard workers poses a great threat to standard workers. In fact, a tight labor market may render nonstandard work more desirable, as was the case for technical contractors in the late 1990s (Barley & Kunda, 2004). In occupations with labor shortages across industries, the threat is substantially reduced.

The threat that nonstandard workers pose to standard workers could also depend on the extent to which the nonstandard workers are voluntarily in this work arrangement (Ellingson et al. 1998; Holtom, Lee, & Tidd, 2002; Tan & Tan, 2002). If they are nonstandard by choice, chances are they are not hoping to receive permanent employment in the firm and therefore are less of a threat to the standard workers' jobs.
An open question also is whether the negative effects of blending standard and nonstandard workers are asymmetrical such that standard workers are more negatively affected by the mix than are nonstandard workers. While Chattopadhyay and George (2001) were able to examine some of these asymmetries using social identity theory, future research could build on the rich research on relational demography (e.g., Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992) to explore whether nonstandard and standard workers have differential reactions to working with each other. The asymmetry also persists in that we now know quite a bit about the effect of nonstandard workers on standard workers, but far less about what affects the perceptions and experiences of nonstandard workers as they are placed in work groups with few or many standard workers. For managers and organizations truly interested in blending the workforce, the experiences of both sides need to be fully understood and the explanatory mechanisms uncovered.

Whatever the type of nonstandard work, their increasing prominence suggests that a key issue for organizations employing or interacting with them is their management. We now turn to the managerial issues associated with employment of nonstandard workers.

Managing Nonstandard Workers

While organizations employ nonstandard workers to gain flexibility and reduce costs, the practice presents several managerial problems. Principal among them is the problem of control—how to manage the output of workers who cannot be watched closely. This problem is a growing one even with standard workers, as spans of control increase in organizations and as the knowledge and creative processes of work are less amenable to observation and direct control (Bradley et al., 1999). However, Shamir (1992) noted that organizations trying to control workers who are at home through the traditional means of bureaucratic, outcome, clan, or market control face substantial difficulties.

The difficulties of managing nonstandard workers may stem in part from implicit managerial beliefs about the relationship between commitment to the organization and productivity. Managers have traditionally held two beliefs: that workers who are committed to the organization are better workers (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) and that nonstandard workers may be less committed to the organization than workers in standard work arrangements (Gallagher & McLean Parks, 2001; Hulin & Glomb, 1999). Research indicates that they are mostly correct (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006; Wheeler & Buckley, 2000), although findings have been mixed (e.g., Benson, 1998). How then does an organization gain the advantages of flexibility (with its accompanying weak commitment toward nonstandard workers), as well as the organizational benefits of a committed workforce (e.g., nonstandard workers)?

Management scholars, taking the perspective of the organization, have addressed these problems of commitment and control in four interrelated
streams of research. The first, which we call managing through job design and fit, presents the view that the challenge of managing nonstandard workers is essentially one of managing the context in which they work. According to this view, managers can focus either on designing the job, choosing the right person, or a combination of the two, in order to increase the productivity of nonstandard workers. The second stream, building on social exchange and psychological contract theories, suggests that the key to managing nonstandard workers is to understand the factors that motivate them and to then provide them the right inducements to work. We call this approach managing through exchange. This approach focuses more on explicit inducements rather than the more diffused motivators that stem from a fit between individuals and jobs. The third stream of research, management through relationships, recognizes the growing evidence that positive relationships between coworkers can go a long way toward substituting for a positive relationship with the organization, and that managers stand to gain from facilitating the kinds of connections that make a difference. The final stream of research considers the fit between a nonstandard worker's personal identity and the values of the organization. We refer to this stream of research as management through identity. We discuss each of these approaches in the following section.

Management Through Job Design and Fit

One way of managing the contribution of nonstandard workers in organizations is through the jobs that are given to them. For example, Ang and Slaughter (2001) found that the jobs that organizations assign to contract workers are associated with perceptions of their trustworthiness and performance. Like Allan and Sienko (1998), they concluded that the satisfaction and performance of nonstandard workers is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. If organizations give nonstandard workers peripheral tasks, then these nonstandard workers tend to become alienated and unmotivated. But if these workers are given richer tasks, the picture can be quite different. Indeed, when nonstandard workers' jobs contain considerable autonomy, variety, flexibility, and skill utilization, they tend to be more satisfied than standard workers (Hundley, 2001; Kalleberg et al., 2000). Yet too much autonomy, when paired with extensive interdependence with others in the completion of work tasks, can prove to be too difficult to manage and has been found to reduce nonstandard workers' satisfaction (Golden & Veiga, 2005).

The characteristics of the jobs given to nonstandard workers often result from organizational attempts to achieve greater control over them. Thus researchers find that nonstandard temporary employees are more likely to be employed in jobs with less complexity and less skill utilization than permanent workers (Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Kalleberg et al., 2000). Further, because firms often employ nonstandard workers to adjust for fluctuations in workload demand (Houseman, 1997; Kalleberg, 2000), jobs with unstable demands
are more often assigned to temporary or contract workers than are jobs with stable demands. Organizations also assign jobs to nonstandard workers based on whether the nature of the work is amenable to it. For example, virtual work is more or less appropriate depending on characteristics of the job such as whether much of it happens on customer sites, whether it involves rapid changes, and the extent to which it requires interaction among colleagues (Cascio, 2000; Shamir, 1992).

The degree of "fit" between the worker and the job has also been invoked as important. Thus, managers attempting to manage nonstandard work arrangements can either shape the job, choose the right person for the job, or a combination of the two. For example, virtual work arrangements might be inappropriate in the earlier stages of employment, before the employee has fully understood the culture of the workplace (Cascio, 2000). The level of congruence between the work arrangement and the individual's preferences also impacts outcomes for the individual and for the organization. Ellingson and colleagues (1998) found that if the decision to take on temporary work is more voluntary, then individuals are more satisfied with their jobs, though their performance is unaffected. Tan and Tan (2002) observed that there is a positive relationship between an individual's desire to work as a temporary worker and subsequent performance. More generally, Holtom and colleagues (2002) found that the greater the congruence between employees' preferences for full or part-time work, schedule, shift, and number of hours and the work arrangement that they have, the more positive are their work-related attitudes as well as their performances. Thus, matching work arrangements to the nature of the job and employee preferences appears to be an important means for obtaining performance and satisfaction (Feldman & Gainey, 1997).

Management Through Exchange

This stream of research, building on social exchange and psychological contracts theories (e.g., Rousseau, 1995), suggests that the key to managing nonstandard workers is to understand the factors that motivate them and to then provide them the right inducements to work (e.g., McDonald & Makin, 1999). We call this approach "management through exchange" as it focuses on the conditions that affect the exchange relationship between individuals and organizations.

Several studies supported the notion that workers are responsive to the extent to which the organization meets their expectations. For example, Liden, Wayne, and Kraimer (2003) predicted that contingent workers will be more committed to organizations that provide them greater procedural justice and organizational support. This commitment, in turn, will lead them to display more citizenship behaviors aimed at these organizations. Their findings supported this theoretical framework. Ang and Slaughter's (2001) study of
information systems contractors also found that contractors engage in fewer organizational citizenship behaviors and are perceived to be less trustworthy, loyal, and obedient than permanent professionals, supporting their argument that since contractors have weak ties to organizations in the form of short-term contracts, low job security, and no opportunities for advancement, they will reciprocate by having low levels of attachment to the organization. Similarly, Chattopadhyay and George (2001) and Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) found that temporary workers have lower organizational commitment and engage in fewer organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). They reasoned that because temporary employees do not expect long-term security and have fewer opportunities for training and career development, they may reciprocate this relatively unfavorable treatment with lower levels of OCB. Permanent employees, on the other hand, may see OCBs as less discretionary and more part of their role than temporary employees.

An interesting pattern of findings in this research stream suggests that the positive relationship between the inducements provided by the employer and OCB is stronger for temporary employees (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). Thus, nonstandard employment may moderate the relationship between inducements and behavioral outcomes. This finding may result from differences between standard and nonstandard workers in terms of their expectations of the exchange relationship with organizations. Research suggests that nonstandard temporary and contract employees perceive greater organizational support, perhaps because they do not expect as much as permanent employees (Ang & Slaughter, 2001; Pearce 1993; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). It may be that the lower level of support nonstandard workers experience fits with their expectation levels, and thus, even though it is objectively lower than the support received by standard employees, they rate it more positively than standard employees do (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001). However, research also shows that nonstandard workers are less willing to go beyond their job descriptions on behalf of the organization (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001), suggesting that the support they receive from organizations, while noted, may not translate into a felt need to undertake OCB.

One factor influencing the terms of the exchange may be the nature of the labor market. Van Dyne and Ang (1998) used social exchange and psychological contracts arguments in their study comparing the citizenship behaviors of temporary workers and regular workers in two organizations in Singapore. Contrary to their exchange-based hypotheses, they found that temporary workers display more positive attitudes to the organization than standard workers do. They interpreted this finding in light of Singapore's tight labor market, which may have led temporary workers to see this form of work as a potential means to obtain permanent employment in organizations. These findings suggested that firms need to understand what workers want and offer it (or the possible promise of it in the future). Thus, the management
implications of an exchange argument are different depending on whether nonstandard workers want to become permanent or are happy in their nonstandard and temporary role (Bauer & Truxillo, 2000). There is substantial heterogeneity in what workers want. These preferences are driven not only by individual differences but also by the social and cultural norms associated with various kinds of contingent work, with some workers valuing flexible hours, others saving time on the commute, and still others income (Barley & Kunda, 2006).

Management Through Relationships

People care about relationships at work, and nonstandard workers may, in fact, care more than most. Working as a nonstandard employee is often accompanied by a sense of fragmentation, discontinuity, and confusion about one's identity and the meaning of one's work (Brocklehurst, 2001; Guevara & Ord, 1996; Kallinikos, 2003). No matter what their dimensions of weak attachment, nonstandard workers are "betwixt and between" social structures (Garsten, 1999), simultaneously both part of and outside of the social fabric of the organization. This can be an uncomfortable place to be, and other people may play an important role in helping nonstandard employees resolve, or at least cope with, these ambiguities. For example, Pratt (2000) found that in a distributed organization, personal relationships play a key role in how employees come to understand themselves, their work, and their relationships with the organization at large. Thus, he concluded, "Forming an identification with an organization is about more than creating a link with an abstract organization, it is also about making sense of the self through one's relationship with members, non-members, or both" (Pratt, 2000, p. 484; see also Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001).

It is through relationships that nonstandard workers come to understand who they are relative to the organization. Their experience of belongingness (or perceived insider status; Stamper & Masterson, 2002) is sensed not through the objective details of their work arrangements but in their daily encounters with others who grant them a sense of organizational membership and acknowledge their claims that they belong to the social fabric of the organization (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Blatt & Camden, 2006). These mundane acknowledgments occur despite the fact that the organization's formal working arrangement may undermine it. Organizational practices, such as different colored badges and limited access to resources, remind temporary employees and contractors that they are different, if not second-class citizens (Kunda et al., 2002; Smith, 1998). By virtue of their remoteness, virtual workers often experience social isolation as well (Mann et al., 2000). Standard employees also sometimes participate in the social exclusion of nonstandard workers, for example by calling temporary employees "the temp" rather than by name, as in "Give it to the temp" or "Where's the temp?," and by avoiding socializing
with them (Rogers, 2000). As Wheeler and Buckley (2000) wrote, “Because temps frequently take short duration assignments, client employees do not establish social relationships with temps; thus the temps feel further isolation” (p. 342). Standard employees may also exclude virtual workers, for example by leaving them out of the communication loop (Wiesenfeld et al., 1999).

Against this backdrop, positive relationships with coworkers can go a long way toward making nonstandard workers feel less socially isolated (Hodson, 1997). Such relationships need not be long-standing or enduring to have their positive effects. Sometimes it is enough for people to connect, or form a short and momentary bond (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Blatt and Camden (2006) found, for example, that small acts of positive connecting between temporary and permanent employees that signal inclusion, importance to others, mutual benefit, and shared emotions increases the former's sense of community at work. These positive connections serve as viable substitutes for organizational practices fostering community, as most organizational practices exclude rather than include temporary employees.

Interestingly, the sense of cohesion cultivated by positive connections among peers and between nonstandard employees and their supervisors also can strengthen the bond nonstandard employees feel toward the organization at large, which is why it may be in the organization’s interest to facilitate them. Studies found that coworker solidarity is positively associated with good relations with management and commitment to the organization among standard employees (Hodson, 1997). A few studies also found this pattern among temporary and contract employees. For example, George and Chattopadhyay (2005) found that positive interpersonal relationships predict contractors’ identification with the client organization, and Benson (1998) found that support from temporary employees’ supervisors is a significant predictor of commitment to the client organization. Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) found that when blending standard and nonstandard workers, social time spent with workers of the other type was associated with greater helping. Finally, Gibson and Gibbs (in press) found that creating an interpersonally psychologically safe climate is important to overcoming some of the downsides of “virtuality” (e.g., not being colocated with key coworkers).

Thus, relationships between nonstandard workers and their peers and immediate supervisors can be one key to facilitating positive organizational outcomes, such as identification and commitment, as well as nonstandard workers’ personal well-being. Managers can enable the development of these relationships, thereby leveraging their potential. In fact, management may find it easier to enable positive relationships than to implement organizational practices for including and supporting nonstandard workers, simply because they are constrained by the structural features of nonstandard work and by their desire to cut costs.
Management Through Identity

A final stream of research suggested that managers of nonstandard workers can facilitate their experiences of identity, thereby aligning the identity of the individual with the interests of the organization. Chattopadhyay and George (2001) observed, for example, that temporary workers have low status in organizations and that, as a consequence, they experience low organization-based self-esteem. They found that when temporary workers work in groups dominated by permanent workers, their organization-based self-esteem is not as badly affected as when they work with mostly nonstandard workers. These findings suggested that fostering a positive work-related identity entails assigning nonstandard workers to work groups dominated by permanent workers (though, as shown in the following section, this prescription has its complications). It is important to note that the identity findings may be explained by an “opportunity” mechanism as well. Perhaps the positive effects of a nonstandard worker being assigned to a work group with standard employees are due to the fact that nonstandard workers in such groups come to believe that they have an enhanced opportunity to convert to permanent status. More research is needed to better understand this issue.

Clarifying and demonstrating organizational values can be another way to manage nonstandard workers via their identities. For example, in a study of information technology contractors, George and Chattopadhyay (2005) found that individuals identify most strongly with organizations that display values that match their own values. The more nonstandard workers see and feel the identity of the organization, the more this match can be discovered and influence subsequent attitudes and behaviors.

Themes and Issues in the Nonstandard Work Literature

In the following section, we share our general observations about research on nonstandard work. We highlight both theoretical and methodological issues in the work to date, along with our suggestions for how these can be overcome.

Using Nonstandard Work as an Attractive Context for Theory Development

Practical challenges of managing nonstandard work and interest in simply describing this emerging phenomenon, rather than theory-based research questions, have largely driven the development of this literature. As a result, the insights gained from the research have not realized the potential of this literature to contribute to the broader field of OB. Much of the research is descriptive rather than theoretical. As a result, we have a good picture of the experience of the firms employing nonstandard workers, the groups in which they are working, and a growing picture of what nonstandard workers themselves experience, but our accumulation of knowledge is slow and uneven.
The study of the phenomenon—nonstandard work—can serve as an arena for developing all kinds of midrange theories about business practice (problem-driven research) and as a means both for testing and extending foundational theories (paradigm-driven research; for a discussion of this distinction, see Davis & Marquis, 2005). Problem-driven research on nonstandard workers can focus on understanding the *whys* behind the described realities. We do not always know *why* nonstandard workers experiences are as they are. *Why* are nonstandard workers sometimes different from standard workers (or from each other) and not different at other times? A more concerted, theoretical push for developing midrange theories—theories that are moderately abstract, limited in scope, highly relevant, and easily testable (Weick, 1974)—is needed so that we can explain this multifaceted phenomenon.

Nonstandard work can also serve as a context for extending and/or identifying boundary conditions for existing theories. Yet, when theory has entered the picture in research on nonstandard workers, researchers have tended to apply theories, such as psychological contracts (e.g., George, 2003), social exchange (e.g., Liden et al., 2003; Pearce, 1993), or internal labor markets (e.g., Barnett & Miner, 1992) to explain empirical observations without extending theory. We believe that insights gained from nonstandard workers have great potential to teach us new things about our theories. These insights can then be applied to different populations, contexts, or phenomena. We have much to gain by considering questions such as the implication of nonstandard work for how our theories construe the nature and boundary of the firm, the distribution of power within and across firms, and how differences between groups of nonstandard workers are linked to underlying psychological processes, such as coping with ambiguity, managing identity, building relationships, managing role conflict, or making choices. Our research will also benefit from cross-disciplinary intersections, such as utilizing our understanding of “bad” job characteristics (Kalleberg et al., 2000) to inform our appreciation of the challenge of constructing positive work identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) or the study of resilience (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003).

One goal for this chapter was to show how and why nonstandard work should be brought to the center stage of micro-OB. Recent empirical work suggested that the study of nonstandard workers might help to uncover boundary conditions for our theories. It may show us representative situations in which established relationships between constructs do not hold. For example, whereas usually the longer groups work together the more likely they are to have their mental models converge (Moreland, 1999), Levesque and colleagues (2001) found this pattern to be reversed in temporary teams, where individuals did not expect to interact in the future. Another study finds that the commonly observed negative effects of gender dissimilarity for women (Tsui et al., 1992) disappear in virtual teams where members do not interact face to face, as gender becomes less salient (Chattopadhyay, George, & Shulman, in
press). In both of the previously mentioned studies, the extent and type of interaction between nonstandard workers were conceptualized as the underlying cause for the divergent results. Other features of nonstandard work, such as physical distance, administrative independence, or shortened tenure might similarly work to restrict or reverse relationships that are generally held to be true in mainstream micro-OB. Such restrictions and reversals are important in a world that will be increasingly populated by "new standard" workers who do not match our long-held picture of what is standard.

Nonstandard work is also an ideal context to study particular issues of long-standing theoretical concern to micro-organization behavior researchers. Here, the issue is the theoretical concern, not the workers or work per se. For example, workers holding nonstandard jobs are a great sample for studying self-regulation, since these workers operate with loose organizational controls. They are also a great sample to study ambiguity, tolerance for ambiguity, and choice. They might provide different insights into the recent focus on "self-socialization" in the socialization literature (Ashford & Black, 1996), since many nonstandard workers undertake this process regularly as they move from job to job. High status, high income nonstandard workers, with their higher levels of power, would be an ideal sample to study the concept of "i-deals" (individualized negotiated agreements about work arrangements) recently introduced by Rousseau, Ho, and Greenberg (2006).

A recent study by Barsness et al., (2005) showed the potential theoretical contribution of studies of nonstandard work. These investigators used characteristics of nonstandard work and workers to uncover general theoretical relationships relating to impression management. For example, they found that virtual workers differ from standard workers in both their motivation and opportunity for various impression-management tactics. Thus, their results informed us about impression management generally (specifically the role of motivation and opportunity), as it might unfold in a range of contexts, rather than about nonstandard workers exclusively. Thatcher and Zhu's (2006) theorizing about identity and identity enactment was a further example of what we are suggesting here. They used the realities of telecommuting to gain fresh insights into theories about identity.

Improving Theoretical Precision

In reviewing this literature, we identified a tension between general statements about nonstandard work and workers as a whole and specific consideration of the differences among such workers, for example, between temporary employees and contractors. In the following section, we argue against having separate literatures for each type of worker. However, it is important that researchers carefully consider the sample used in their research. Specifically, researchers need to be clear about how their sample differs theoretically from other nonstandard workers. For example, high status, highly paid contractors
have one experience, whereas low paid temporary employees and day laborers or migrant farm workers who contract with large agricultural organizations may have an altogether different experience. Researchers need to capture the underlying theoretical differences that differentiate these groups. Clearly, status and power differences are involved, but there may be other more subtle dimensions as well. In addition, low-status jobs (e.g., day laborers) and the workers who fill them have long been considered outside the purview of organizational behavior. If we are to develop a full picture of work, both standard and nonstandard, we need to be both more precise in our theorizing and broaden the boundary of what we consider relevant to organizational behavior. Such a move would answer calls such as Martin’s (2006) recent argument that our field would gain by studying traditionally marginalized groups and that the focus in business-school-based OB on managers has prevented us from gaining a sufficiently broad understanding of work and workers.

Moving Beyond Good and Bad

A predominant preoccupation of the literature on nonstandard work has been the question of whether nonstandard work is “good” (e.g., efficient for organizations and liberating for individuals) or “bad” (e.g., threatening organizational proprietary knowledge and marginalizing individuals; e.g., Felstead & Gallie, 2004; Kalleberg et al., 2000). Given that this work can be both good and bad as are its consequences, we believe a better approach may be to accept and appreciate the prevalence of nonstandard work in organizations and individual careers as a starting point for systematic theoretical and empirical research.

First, to the extent that there are negative features of nonstandard work it may be most fruitful to focus on how to transform the potentially “bad” aspects into “good.” Although this question has been written about from the managerial perspective—how organizations can “make the most” of employing nonstandard workers (e.g., Cascio, 2000; Kurland & Bailey, 2002; Pearlson & Saunders, 2001; von Hippel, Greenberger, Heneman, & Skoglund, 1997), few studies have examined how individuals can make the experience of nonstandard work more positive. If more and more individuals are going to be working in this manner and if this is to be the organizational experience for greater numbers of employees, then these questions become highly relevant. What personal and social resources should they mobilize to be successful as nonstandard workers? What are their proactive strategies for adapting to frequent moves from situation to situation? Norman, Collins, Conner, Martin, and Rance (1995) studied the kinds of attributions, cognitions, and coping strategies that telecommuters use to cope with work-related problems. Likewise, Blatt and Ashford (2006) examined how meaning making helps independent workers sustain goal-directed activity. More such work is needed to understand high levels of performance, engagement, and other positive outcomes
among nonstandard workers and to give aid and advice to those struggling in nonstandard roles.

Second, overcoming the simplicity of the “good versus bad” dichotomy may entail focusing the research lens on moderators, or the conditions under which nonstandard work becomes either positive or negative. The sample employed in research is one such moderator; context is another.

Capturing Context

Context is the “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior, as well as functional relationships between variables” (Johns, 2006, p. 386). A consideration of context using the lenses provided by Johns suggested several ways to make sense of the ubiquitous contradictory findings in the research we have reviewed, such as on the experiences of nonstandard workers or the differences between them and standard workers.

Context shapes how organizational events are interpreted and which features of the situation are salient to those being studied (Johns, 2006). Occupation may be an important context factor that influences the meaning ascribed to work, as membership in an occupational community influences the perspective one applies to situations (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). For example, we can learn from work that has been conducted outside of organizational settings for generations. Creative writers and artists may have quite different experiences than workers in occupations for which there is an organizational analog, such as graphic designers or computer programmers. The former may be less apt to assess their experience with reference to full-time organizational work as a comparison. Moreover, they are more likely to have well-developed narratives for making sense of their nonstandard experiences. For example, although high skill levels and training coincide with frequent mobility, low pay, and job insecurity for many artists, they tend to see it as an occupational norm and make sense of it using notions of self-actualization at work, an idiosyncratic way of life, and a strong sense of community, frames which are well-developed in the artistic occupational community (Menger, 1999). Nonstandard workers might benefit from the creation of similar overarching narratives for their occupations. Another example of a contextual feature that shapes the meaning of nonstandard work is the organization’s strategic reason for hiring temporary employees (cost reduction vs. flexibility; short term buffer or hiring portal for more permanent employment) and organizational norms for how to treat temporary employees. Lautsch (2002) found that these moderate the extent to which contingent workers experience their work as positive or negative.

Context also serves as a cross-level effect, in which situational variables at one level of analysis affect variables at another level (Johns, 2006; Rousseau, 1985). Although a few studies examine the influence of variables at the
organizational level of analysis, such as degree of unionization (Uzzi & Barsness, 1998) or organizational development activities (Cooper & Kurland, 2002), on variables at the individual level of analysis, such as workers' attitudes and beliefs, most studies remain at a single level of analysis. For example, a number of studies have looked at the impact of an individual-level factor—whether one works part or full time—on individual attitudes, with mixed results. Some studies find that full-time workers are more satisfied with their jobs (Hall & Gordon, 1973; Lee & Johnson, 1991; Miller & Terborg, 1979) or with their careers (Hall & Gordon, 1973) than part-time workers. Others find that full-time workers are less satisfied with their jobs (Eberhardt & Shani, 1984; Jackofsky & Peters, 1987; Lee & Johnson, 1991; Peters, Jackofsky, & Salter, 1981), or feel less commitment to the organization than part-time workers (Martin & Peterson, 1987). Still other studies show that there is no difference in the job satisfaction of full- and part-time workers (Logan, O'Reilly, & Roberts, 1973; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990).

The key to resolving these contradictory findings may lie in cross-level effects, such as the composition of the group. As relational demographers have shown, the composition of one's work group explains attitudes over and above the explanatory power of one's own demographics (e.g., Tsui et al., 1992). Thus, part-time workers in these different studies may have been comparing themselves to differing referent groups, which may explain the patterns of findings. Researchers need to conceptualize the influence of context ranging from societal, national, to the more local context effects in explaining nonstandard workers' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Chattopadhyay & George, 2001).

Finally, context can be seen as a configuration or bundle of stimuli (Johns, 2006). Perhaps it is not a single feature of the individual (e.g., skill level or occupation), the market (e.g., demand for certain skills and occupations), the economy (e.g., thriving, stagnating, or declining), or organizations (e.g., growing and bureaucratized) that explain the experiences of nonstandard work or the differences between standard and nonstandard workers, but particular combinations of these features. For example, skill level may interact with market demand to explain the difference between the positive experiences of highly skilled computer contractors, who were in high demand when studied by Barley and Kunda (2004), and the negative experiences of highly skilled adjunct professors who were in a field in which supply overwhelmed demand when studied by Barker (1998). The more we can build context explanations into our theorizing about nonstandard workers, the better.

Capturing Collective Processes and Broadening the Scope of Variables Considered

An additional weakness in the nonstandard literature is its individualistic nature. Research has tended to focus on the individual and his or her experience and attitudes. As a result, we know relatively little about the collective
experience of nonstandard workers, the existence or nature of a nonstandard culture or collective identity, and how people are socialized into it. It is likely that nonstandard workers’ interactions about their experiences contain elements of communities of practice, in which they negotiate a shared meaning of working in the way they do and strategies for dealing with common problems (Orr, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Although the importance of occupational communities is sometimes mentioned, their role in the collective experience of nonstandard work has not been empirically explored. The focus on individual attitudes also limits our understanding of collective behavioral outcomes, such as coordination, innovation, and reliability, all of which are rendered problematic when standard and nonstandard employees work together. One of the functions of organizations is to create common ground through shared meanings and shared identity (Kogut & Zander, 1996; Simon, 1976). How do people organize when they do not share a history, identity, and interpretations of the situation? These collective outcomes are a promising area of focus for future research.

Moreover, we know relatively little about the behavior of nonstandard workers as opposed to their attitudes. Most research has focused on their satisfaction, commitment, identification, and other attitudes, rather than on their concrete behavior (two notable exceptions are studies of organizational citizenship behavior among nonstandard workers; e.g., Pearce, 1993; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998; and safety behavior; Rousseau & Libuser, 1997). We do not know, for example, about their staying or leaving, their voicing or silence, or their seeking and using feedback. Beyond behaviors, emotions and emotional reactions are rarely considered as dependent variables either. Mann and Holdsworth (2003) found that teleworking is associated with significantly more negative emotions such as loneliness, irritability, worry, and guilt. These workers also experience more negative physical health symptoms than standard workers, another rarely considered dependent variable (see also Bauer & Truxillo, 2000). By broadening the range of dependent variables considered, we can capture more fully the differences between standard and nonstandard workers.

Finally, we could broaden our appreciation of the effects of nonstandard work by considering their families. While some studies have examined work-family balance issues for teleworkers (e.g., Baines & Gelder, 2003; Golden, 2006; Hill, Miller, Weiner, & Colihan, 1998) or work-family balance for part-time workers (e.g., Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000), issues such as the impact of having a worker in the home, having a worker who works odd hours, and having a worker with an unpredictable job future all warrant more attention. It is likely that not just workers, but also their families feel the impact of the new world of work.

Increasing Methodological Rigor

The empirical studies in the nonstandard domain have varied widely in quality. A significant proportion is purely descriptive with no theory tested.
Samples sizes have ranged from lows of 10 or 12 in qualitative interview studies to highs in the 1000s in large database studies. Measurement quality also has been highly variable across studies. Finally, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Chattopadhyay & George, 2001; Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998), the analyses and statistical tools employed have been fairly simple. While recognizing this variability, the average quality of the empirical work in this area needs to be raised as current methodological practices will hold back the development of this literature. As we build an empirical base on the experiences of nonstandard workers, we need to be especially attentive to methodological rigor in this more emergent area of research. Several issues warrant attention.

First and most importantly, the fragmentation of the literature by type of nonstandard worker studied and across academic disciplines needs to be addressed. There may be cause to study one type of nonstandard worker or another, but there is no cause for wholly separate literatures to develop as if there were no similarity on underlying dimensions. Similarly, there is no cause for literature reviews to ignore research done in “other” areas of nonstandard work, for developing new sets of constructs without recognition of similar constructs used elsewhere and for measuring them with unique instruments. Our efforts to advance conceptually will benefit from examining literature and theory across disciplinary boundaries. As a notable example of this fragmentation, a recent review of contingent work in the *Journal of Management* (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004) did not cite any of Barley and Kunda’s more sociologically oriented research on contractors (Barley & Kunda, 2004, 2006; Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002). Similarly, Barley and Kunda (2002; 2004; 2006) underreferenced work published in more micro and personnel outlets. Fragmentation by type of nonstandard work and fragmentation by discipline make progress difficult. Researchers in this domain need to work extra hard to cross boundaries and synthesize.

Second, if researchers are going to limit their purview to a single type of nonstandard worker, it is important that they state clearly the kind of nonstandard workers they are studying. If such a practice is followed, then future meta-analyses can help overcome the empirical fragmentation in this field because researchers can account for the type of worker studied. Careful attention to the type of nonstandard worker studied is important theoretically as well. Davis-Blake’s papers with her colleagues are good models of this practice (Broschak & Davis-Blake 2006; Davis-Blake et al., 2003; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). First, these articles clearly stated which nonstandard workers they sample and then argued for the theoretical relevance of particular contrasts across specific types of nonstandard workers. For example, Davis-Blake and colleagues (2003) argued that temporary and contract workers reflect differing degrees of externalization of work and demonstrated how this difference affected outcomes.
Third, measurement consistency (using the same measure to assess the same construct across studies) has often been lacking in this fragmented literature. Also, measurement quality has sometimes been traded off to enable use of large scale data bases. Single-item scales allow a glimpse at the phenomenon, but do not allow findings to be compared to findings elsewhere in OB research.

Fourth, research in this area would benefit from greater integration across quantitative and qualitative work. Building theory explicitly from qualitative studies and using qualitative approaches to supplement quantitative findings are two ways of achieving greater integration. Ang and Slaughter's (2001) research on information systems consultants used both qualitative and quantitative data to good effect, as their qualitative data helps them explain unexpected findings in the quantitative study. This suggestion is in line with Chatman and Flynn's (2005) recent recommendations for "full cycle research" that integrates both quantitative and qualitative research and research across disciplines.

Fifth, as previously noted and as observed by Connelly and Gallagher (2004), our research on nonstandard workers is for the most part static. Studies are often "snapshot" accounts rather than longitudinal portrayals of nonstandard careers or process-oriented understanding of organizing by or involving nonstandard workers. This lack is problematic especially for research that invokes notions of the careers of nonstandard employees (e.g., boundaryless careers; Marler et al., 2002) as these most likely entail movement in and out of nonstandard and standard work in a dynamic process (Hulin & Glomb, 1999). Thus, when Marler and colleagues (2002) studied an unfolding career with a snapshot of a single data collection, their findings underrepresented the dynamic nature of the careers that they depict theoretically. We also miss how these careers are embedded in a social and cultural context (cf., Cohen & Mallon, 2001). The result is a fractured understanding. For example, the amount of time one works as a temporary employee increases employability for many clerical employees but decreases it for nonstandard academics (Barker, 1998). These findings suggested that one cannot understand the nonstandard phenomenon without considering dynamics as they unfold over time.

Causal inference is often problematic in research with data collected at one time point. Many studies in this literature slip into causal language when discussing results for data collected at one point in time. For example, when studying permanent workers' reactions to increasing proportions of nonstandard workers, researchers appear to infer that the nonstandard workers are influencing permanent workers' attitudes (Davis-Blake et al., 2004; George, 2003). However, there are other possibilities. First, causality may be reversed, whereby initial negative attitudes among permanent workers are motivating firm's to hire more temporary workers. Second, an unspecified variable such as environmental uncertainty may be causing both increasing hiring of
nonstandard workers and increasing negative attitudes of permanent workers. Field experiments and longitudinal data are needed to sort out these issues.

Conclusion

The world of work, they say, is changing (Barley & Kunda, 2001). The model for how individuals interact with organizations is different now than it was in 1950 and will be different yet again 50 years hence. Our imagination about organizational behavior, about appropriate constructs, and about important processes to examine needs to expand accordingly. The more nonstandard workers exist as a model of how to do work and conduct a career over a lifetime, the more legitimate it becomes as a work form and life pattern. The more legitimate it becomes, the less counternormative it is to work in this fashion and the more people will choose to do so. Over time, society will change and people's expectations of organizations will change accordingly. An organizational behavior field that clings to an outdated model of individuals and their interactions with organizations will become anachronistic. The growth of research on nonstandard workers and the organizations that employ them is central to filling in a portrait of this new future. This literature review, with its suggestions for areas of future emphasis and research, puts us on the path toward creating that picture.

Acknowledgment

The authors are very grateful to the following people for their generous and insightful comments on previous drafts of this chapter: Joe Broschak, Prithviraj Chattopadhyay, Alison Davis-Blake, Adam Grant and Jone Pearce.

References


