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Alternative Times: Temporal Perceptions, Processes, and Practices Defining the Nonstandard Work Relationship

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Alternative notions of temporality are the defining quality of nonstandard work relationships such as temporary jobs, contract labor, part-time employment, and various forms of telework. These arrangements challenge traditional boundaries of personal versus work time, call into question unlimited versus conditional time limits for membership, and highlight seasonal versus steady-state orientations toward production. This chapter focuses on the unique temporal perceptions, processes, and practices associated with nonstandard work arrangements that shape and are shaped by communication in local and global circumstances, spanning multiple levels of organizational analysis and, indeed, diverse areas of our discipline. Given the position of time as a constitutive communication construct, examining the intersection of time and nonstandard work relationships lends value to investigations on a wide variety of important “life” issues. For instance, contemporary stakeholder conversations surrounding issues of work–life balance, a changing life span and lifestyle, and global community have all been accompanied by increased discussion of nonstandard work relationships. The temporal dimension of these discourses foregrounds the role of communication in shaping the quality of members’ lives in both professional and personal domains.

Time represents a unifying theme among nonstandard work relationships—part-timers, temps, teleworkers, and independent contractors all share nontraditional temporal relationships with their employing organizations. More than a coincidence, time is one of the constituent elements signifying the “alternative” nature of these labor arrangements because temporal norms and assumptions shape the very process of communicating and organizing (Ballard & Seibold, 2003; Bourdieu, 1977; Hall, 1983; Schein, 1992). These nonstandard forms of employment challenge traditional boundaries of personal versus work time, call into question unlimited versus conditional time limits for membership, and highlight seasonal versus steady-state orientations toward production. As such, the “time” of these arrangements presents an opportunity for us to consider vital communication and organizational processes. The need to problematize basic

communication and organizational aspects of nonstandard membership is underscored by the fact that, despite their fairly long-standing position in modern organizational life, extant organizational and communication theories continue to presume traditional membership roles (see related reviews on identity by Young, this volume, and on organizational assimilation by Waldeck & Myers, this volume).

Time remains critical to understanding communication across a range of settings and divisional boundaries. Bruneau (1974, 1977) addressed the far-reaching importance of time in the study of communication more than a quarter of a century ago. Termed *chronemics* (following Poyatos, 1976), Bruneau (1979) encouraged scholars to concentrate on “the meaning of human time experiencing as it influences and is influenced by human communication” (p. 429). Bruneau underscored two important assumptions regarding the relationship between time and communication in this definition. First, time and communication are recursively constituted. Our experience of time impacts our communication patterns and, in turn, such communication patterns help frame our experience of time. Second, the focus on meaning implies that intersubjective—or shared—experiences of time, and not solely objective measures of temporal behavior or individual (subjective) orientations, should inform communication scholarship. To wit, the study of human temporality is inherently the study of human communication. Social constructions of time exist intersubjectively through persons’ interaction and coordination with others, as well as in their shared symbolic representations of temporality (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984). As elaborated in this chapter, our experience of time is dynamic and molded through the process of communication in a variety of work, family, interpersonal, and global settings.

In the following pages, we theoretically ground the present discussion in terms of both temporality and communication. We draw together three complementary frameworks—McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) framework of the communicative constitution of organizations; Ancona, Okhuysen, and Perlow’s (2001) integrative interdisciplinary framework of organizational temporality; and Ballard and Seibold’s (2003) multilevel communication-based framework of organizational temporality—to accomplish this goal. MCPhee and Zaug’s work attracts our attention to key communicative aspects of nonstandard work arrangements and assists development of a typology of these arrangements as a means of synthesizing a currently fragmented literature. We then introduce Ancona and colleagues’

framework to offer a broad temporal perspective on nonstandard work and the role of temporal perceptions, processes, and practices in its social construction. Finally, we employ Ballard and Seibold's model to identify specific factors that have been theorized as impacting the status of nonstandard work and the members who hold these arrangements, as well as specific temporal dimensions that shed light on their unique position in the organizational landscape. In the remaining pages, we integrate these three models to explore the unique temporal perceptions, processes, and practices associated with alternative work arrangements that impact (and are impacted by) human interaction. Throughout the chapter, we reference several analogous findings and/or questions relevant to topics of scholarly interest across the field of communication. As such, we point to potential research directions in a variety of areas—including interpersonal, family, health, small-group, technology, conflict, religious, critical, and feminist communication scholars—that can help inform (and be informed by) research on nonstandard work relationships.

Theoretical Background and Outline of Chapter

Theorizing Nonstandard Membership

McPhee and Zaug (2000) identified *membership negotiation* and *activity coordination* as two of the four message flows or interaction processes (in addition to *self-structuring* and *institutional positioning*) contributing to the communicative constitution of organizations. These message flows shed light on the nature of nonstandard work relationships. By definition, compared to standard arrangements, nonstandard work features unique member negotiation flows (messages about the meaning of membership) and forms of activity coordination (messages about the time and timing of work). These two flows foster understanding of relationships that individuals have with (or in relation to) formal organizations and serve as an important boundary condition for our discussion. The other two flows—self-structuring and institutional positioning—examine macrolevel issues, such as the structure of the organization as a system (self-structuring) and the identity of the organization within the larger environment (institutional positioning). Thus, by focusing on member negotiation and activity coordination, we distinguish alternative

work relationships (mesostructures) from alternative *forms of organizing* (macrostructures), a separate, albeit important, topic.

As McPhee and Zaug (2000) indicated, “These flows are arenas in which organizations do vary and can be changed in their fundamental nature” (§ 13). They added:

Many authors have claimed, over the decades, that new forms of organizations have emerged, as a result of various social and technological developments. A theory such as this one gives us a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena. (§ 13)

Their theoretical framework stems from the assumption that examining the relatedness of these interaction processes in organizational life encompasses essential background to an informed understanding of organizations and their members. Nonstandard work arrangements provide an ideal context in which to explore the relatedness of membership negotiation and activity coordination and, in so doing, reveal fundamental assumptions about the connection of work, time, and communication in our lives. The growing body of literature on nonstandard work arrangements, however, lacks a clear organizing framework to facilitate analysis of the similarities and differences among the various types of nonstandard work arrangements.

According to Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson (2000), standard employment arrangements involve “the exchange of a worker’s labor for monetary compensation from an employer, with work done on a fixed schedule—usually full time—at the employer’s place of business, under the employer’s control, and with the mutual expectation of continued employment” (p. 258). In contrast, nonstandard work arrangements entail positions that are part time, temporary in nature, or oblige employees to work in a different space or time than their co-workers and supervisors. McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) *membership negotiation* and *activity coordination* communication flows offer a theoretical lens to identify and compare both standard and nonstandard organizational memberships. These two mesolevel flows particularly pertain to the study of nonstandard work arrangements because they highlight the ways in which organizational members establish their identities and learn how to function within the organization.

McPhee and Zaug (2000) discussed the process of membership negotiation as communication within the organization that “recounts the struggle of individuals to master or influence their member roles, statuses, and relations to the organization” (§ 42). Specific interactions

that typify the membership negotiation flow include recruiting, socializing, and positioning the individual within the larger organizational framework. These membership negotiation processes differ based on the degree to which the organization treats an individual as a “permanent” or “temporary” member of the organizational system (for related argument on organizational assimilation, also see Waldeck & Myers, this volume). In contrast, according to McPhee and Zaugg, activity coordination concerns the interactions within the organization that focus on “members engaging in interdependent work or deviating from pure collaborative engagement” (§ 42). The activity coordination flow emphasizes day-to-day interactions and negotiations that take place among members in order to meet the practical demands and situations of daily organizational life and differ based on the degree to which an individual maintains a “fixed” or “flexible” spatial and temporal presence in the organization.

These two communication flows (membership negotiation and activity coordination) represent the key dimensions that distinguish varied types of work arrangements. We use them here to create a typology illustrated in Figure 6.1 that depicts four membership types, allowing us to distinguish among standard (i.e., “real” membership) and nonstandard relationships as well as between two types

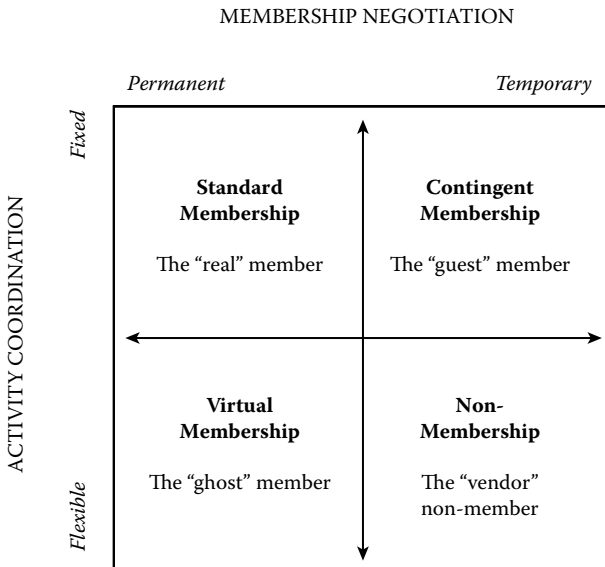


Figure 6.1 Typology of nonstandard work relationships.

of nonstandard arrangements (i.e., contingent “guest” membership and virtual “ghost” membership) and to provide a boundary that signifies where membership ends (i.e., “vendor” nonmembership). Notably, drawing from McPhee and Zaug’s (2000) focus on *organizing* as a process—as opposed to *organizations* as entities—this typology pertains to a variety of organized social collectives (including family units and religious communities) and, potentially, to interpersonal, family, small-group, conflict, health, religious, feminist, and critical communication scholarship. We will detail such possible connections throughout the chapter.

The “Real” Member Versus “Vendor” Nonmember: Traditional Relationships Standard membership consists of persons treated as *real* members who occupy fixed physical and/or temporal space and unrestricted membership expectations. Examples of standard organizational membership include traditional employment relationships as well as associates of work cooperatives (Cheney, 1999). Family communication and conflict scholars might recognize discourse about “real” membership in terms of parents who occupy the same physical and temporal space as their children, thus constructing the noncustodial parent’s family as nonstandard and less real, due to the lack of shared time and space (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

In contrast, nonmember *vendor* status reflects the absence of any fixed physical or temporal organizational presence within the system, a true outsider, including third-party service providers such as property appraisers or lawyers hired to perform specific tasks. Nonmembership might also encompass home-based businesses, such as the new discourse on “mamapreneurs”—women who start their own businesses as a way to stay at home with their children while maintaining an income source (Ellison, 1999). The nonmember comprises an important distinction in an era of increasingly nontraditional work forms and arrangements, where nonmembership often gets confused with nonstandard membership. In health communication and small-group contexts, the distinction in online social support groups between members and “lurkers” exemplifies the difference between a member and nonmember (Alexander, Peterson, & Hollingshead, 2003, p. 313).

The “Guest” Member: Contingent Relationships Contingent membership consists of “guests” who occupy fixed physical and/or temporal

space but are bound by conditional membership, including temporary employees, independent contractors, interns, substitute teachers, and seasonal workers. For example, guest members may work within the regular organizational system with respect to activity coordination but know a pre-established departure date or expect to leave upon the completion of a particular set of duties. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines a guest variously as “one who is entertained at the house or table of another” and “a stranger” (Simpson & Weiner, 2006, ¶ 1). This definition reflects a conditional association, and it implies relational and communicative distance.

For instance, in religious communities, church attendees may judge membership status, in part, based on spatiotemporal regularity (i.e., by formally or informally tracking attendance). Regular and irregular attendees may be discursively regarded as real and guest members, respectively (Association of Religion data archives, 2006). Similarly, according to Simpson and Weiner (2006, ¶ 1), the OED defines *contingent* as “dependent for its occurrence or character on or upon some prior occurrence or condition” and “nonessential.” Thus, the common use of terms like contingent to depict this part of the workforce reflects a superfluous orientation to their membership. Gossett (2002) employed the term *guest* to describe how organizations keep contingent members “at arm’s length” in many settings (p. 385).

Communication scholars identify a variety of ways in which temporary relationships impact human interaction. For example, conflict theorists argue that people more likely engage in competitive rather than collaborative strategies when negotiating with someone they do not expect to see or work with in the future (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991). Temporary relationships allow people to engage in communicative strategies that may not be sustainable over the long term, but provide them with some short-term advantage. In the organizational context, temporary workers can afford to make mistakes at a job assignment because they are unlikely to follow them to their next job (Gossett, 2006; Henson, 1996).

Likewise, some employers treat contingent workers in a way that they would not be able to treat their permanent staff—subjecting them to abusive work conditions or sexual harassment (Gottfried, 1991; Rogers & Henson, 1997). Employers often perceive the temp as disposable, and he or she therefore may not receive the organizational considerations that a firm might offer to regular employees.

Additionally, in this volume, Miller, Roloff, and Malis's theorizing about ongoing conflicts raises the specter that new temps or interns might actually be participating in conflicts that began with previous members in their position. For example, we co-direct our department's internship program, and we routinely find that our students inherit conflicts that began before their arrival, especially in circumstances where others refer to them only as "the intern." This notion of "naming" members as a position, instead of a person, comprises an important communication phenomenon associated with contingent relationships.

The "Ghost" Member: Virtual Relationships Virtual membership consists of "ghost" members who occupy permanent positions within the organization but who differ from others in the organization with respect to the way that they navigate the spatiotemporal boundaries of the system. Such organizational members encompass telecommuters, virtual team members (that are members of brick-and-mortar firms), part-timers, and job sharers. These members hold a flexible physical and/or temporal presence, but long-term membership expectations. The definition of *virtual* in the OED originally referenced being "possessed of certain physical virtues or capacities" and now more commonly suggests "that is so in essence or effect, although not formally or actually; admitting of being called by the name so far as the effect or result is concerned" (Simpson & Weiner, 2006, ¶ 1). Thus, the physical absence of these members (for at least some of the time) distinguishes them from their standard counterparts, particularly in the discourse of their colleagues.

For example, Ostrom (2003) described confusion about time and space as a common issue associated with job-sharing arrangements. As a job sharer herself in a newsroom setting, she recounted:

Despite our constructing giant charts, plastering them everywhere and peppering our various editors with them, there always seemed to be confusion about who was where when ... which inevitably led to the 5th "W": "Why?" As in, "Why the hell are they doing this????!!!!!" (p. 151)

The situation that brought on this tirade by her editor reflects her status as a *ghost*, defined as "an incorporeal being" (Simpson & Weiner, 2006, ¶ 1). Connotatively, describing a person as a ghost means that he or she remains conspicuously absent from normal, day-to-day interaction.

In contrast to organizational contexts where those working in conventional settings sometimes see ghost members as deserters, in relational and interpersonal communication contexts, ghost membership sometimes leads to greater intimacy due to idealized perceptions of the real persona. For example, research on long-distance romantic relationships indicates that these couples often feel more committed to each other than co-located couples. According to Dainton and Aylor (2002), while the lack of regular physical intimacy or casual interaction is difficult, these communicative challenges can encourage committed partners to emphasize the positive over the negative.

Similarly, virtual organizational members often find value in their alternative labor arrangement despite the fact that these employees also report greater social isolation and fewer advancement opportunities than their “real” co-workers. Committed virtual workers tend to emphasize the temporal flexibility and personal freedoms (e.g., the ability to wear casual clothes, no commute time, etc.) created by their long-distance organizational memberships—advantages not similarly available to “standard” employees of the firm.

The present discussion focuses on contingent and virtual work arrangements and the distinct temporal perceptions, processes, and practices that define them. Having established the phenomena of interest as well as their origins in McPhee and Zaugg’s (2000) communication flows, we turn next to the temporal aspects of the analysis.

Theorizing Organizational Temporality

Ancona and colleagues (2001) offered an integrative framework designed to provide a common set of terms and points of reference for the study of temporality in the workplace. Used here to order our analysis, they described three interrelated categories of temporal constructs—*conceptions of time*, *mapping activities to time*, and *actors relating to time*—that allow researchers simultaneously to clarify the focus of a given analysis as well as to consider multiple aspects and interrelationships concerning said constructs. They recommended that researchers specify a category (from among these three) when using a term in order to set the context of the conversation. Because “our understanding of a variable in one category affects and is affected by variables in the other two categories” (p. 521), they suggested that investigations should be described in terms of each of

the three categories, highlighting the interrelationships. The concurrent clarity and insight of this practice should foster more fruitful conversations with greater synergistic potential. Locating the ensuing analysis within this broader framework facilitates such dialogue as well as underscores the mutually constitutive nature of temporal perceptions, processes, and practices.

In the following sections of the chapter, we link each of these aspects of temporality—the perceptions, processes and practices—associated with nonstandard work relationships to Ancona and colleagues' (2001) framework concerning broader conceptions of time, how persons and organizations map activities to time, and the ways in which actors relate to time, respectively. Within this larger metaframework, we use Ballard and Seibold's (2003) mesolevel model to identify temporal perceptions at the individual, group, organizational, and cultural levels that give rise to nonstandard work relationships; examine how members' diverse *construals of time* impact temporal processes surrounding membership issues, and explore the *enactments of time* most pivotal to the temporal practices of alternative organizing. We address each of these issues (i.e., temporal perceptions, processes, and practices) in turn and employ them as the organizing framework for the remainder of this chapter.

Temporal Perceptions Associated With Nonstandard Relationships

The unique temporal perceptions associated with nonstandard relationships extend from members' *conceptions of time* (Ancona et al., 2001). Variables in this category concern the different types of time organizations and their member experiences, and how these conceptions influence (and are influenced by) the ways in which members *map activities to time* (e.g., their temporal enactments that reflect unique temporal practices associated with activity coordination) as well as *relate to time* (e.g., their temporal construals, which alter or forestall the temporal processes associated with traditional membership negotiation). Three types of temporal conceptions through which members discern what counts as nonstandard include objective, subjective, and intersubjective (Hernadi, 1992).

Objective time references external pacers in the organizational environment, such as market forces that dictate product life cycles.

Subjective time inheres in individuals' unique temporal experience associated with individual characteristics such as personal influences, professional–personal conflicts, and social identity. Finally, *intersubjective time* concerns shared experiences of time by a group of people, including dominant cultural patterns, industry norms, occupational norms, organizational culture, and work group norms as related to time. Hernadi (1992) explained that “[a]s social role-players, natural organisms and personal selves we always exist at the intersections of those *intersubjective*, *objective*, and *subjective* life-times through which each of us participates in a variety of world times” [italics added] (p. 151). While time is never solely objective, subjective, or intersubjective—as each one shapes the other—these distinctions help us to reflect on how varied conceptions of time impact perceptions of nonstandard work arrangements. Ballard and Seibold (2003) addressed each of these varied temporal conceptions in their mesolevel model of organizational temporality. Their model offers an integrative perspective on the role of cultural, environmental, organizational, group, and individual level influences in shaping organizational members' temporal experience. We detail each of these sources in the following section.

Cultural-Level Influences

As elaborated below, *dominant cultural patterns* frame the broader conversation about members' orientation to employment, in general, and their relationship with their employing organization, in particular. For example, cultural norms surrounding temporal compression, speed, long- versus short-term expectations, face time, and downtime and leisure work to shape perceptions of nonstandard arrangements.

Temporal Compression While researchers have established differences in time across cultures (Bruneau, 1979; Hall, 1983; Hofstede & Bond, 1988), the increasing use of nonstandard work arrangements represents a global spatiotemporal phenomenon in industrial culture. For example, organizational and national borders do not bind independent contractors or teleworkers—they rely on communication technologies to work virtually throughout the globe. The

proliferation of communication technologies enables and constrains this intersubjective experience of temporal “boundarylessness,” and it reflects the larger postmodern theme of temporal compression articulated by Hassard (2002). The temporal compression that characterizes members’ lives at work and home often makes alternative work arrangements that rely on such compression more culturally accepted—even if the coordinative and self-structuring interaction processes can cost more for organizations and create more physical and emotional demands on their members than traditional arrangements (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002). The rapid growth of this industry illustrates a global transformation of the temporal contract between the worker and the employer and shapes perceptions of their conventionality.

Related to the boundarylessness created by advanced communication information technologies (ACITs) is the fact that, because it is always 8:00 a.m. somewhere and the Internet is always “on,” non-standard members (such as independent contractors or teleworkers) must adapt their home or local schedules in order to be available whenever needed by organizations. Increasing discussion around the Blackberry phenomenon (also called “Crackberries”) and their associated 24–7 work demands raises questions for critical scholarship about where power resides in these arrangements. A related study of governing in operating rooms suggests that, regardless of formal power positions, the persons that control the time and scheduling can exert significant power and influence over others (Riley & Manias, 2006). While telework, job sharing, and independent contracting can constitute forms of employee control, critical scholars are well situated to problematize the distribution of power in such relationships. Similarly, communication technology scholars may explore the intersection of ACITs and temporality.

Speed Contingent employment, in the form of temporary labor, is rapidly expanding in nearly every industrial economy due, in part, to the speed with which such relationships can be formed and the related lack of long-term obligation. While staffing firms employ only 2% of all U.S. workers, they comprise the nation’s fifth fastest growing industry (Berchem, 2004). This field represents one of the most rapidly growing types of nonstandard employment in the European Union (Townsend & Stohl, 2003; Van Breugel, Van Olffen,

& Olie, 2005). Since 1992, temporary work has “increased five-fold in Denmark, Spain, Italy, and Sweden and just under four-fold in Austria” (Storrie, 2002, p. 28).

Temporary staffing has become a fully multinational industry, with firms such as Manpower Staffing maintaining offices in 68 countries, including locales as diverse as the United States, China, and Morocco. Manpower’s expansion into China is particularly interesting; the agency established its Beijing office through a joint venture with the Chinese government. According to Parker (1994), “Like the U.S. offices, the purpose of the Chinese unit is to provide clerical and technical workers to Western and Japanese companies operating in China” (p. 32). The increasingly globalized nature of the temporary help industry allows multinational firms to move quickly into new countries and take advantage of the local labor pool, without altering the contingent labor practices of their home culture. Here, a culture of speed leads to positive perceptions of contingent relationships.

Long- Versus Short-Term Expectations Despite a broad shift toward contingent labor around the world, facilitated by a shared experience of temporal compression, differences in temporal perceptions associated with contingent work still persist across countries due to an intersection of economic and cultural differences concerning the temporal nature of work itself. For example, Houseman and Osawa (2003) noted national differences in the growth of nonstandard work arrangements. In countries with high employment taxes or expectations of lifetime employment, such as Japan, companies have increasingly embraced the use of part-time rather than full-time employees. This labor arrangement has the advantage of maintaining a degree of employment stability within the organizational system while reducing the financial burden of maintaining a large “standard” workforce.

In the United States, the advantages from the employer perspective include the absence of benefits, retirement plans, and insurance programs for nonstandard members; only an elite group of permanent employees are afforded such resources (Jorgensen & Riemer, 2000; Wiens-Tuers, 2001). This economic incentive for companies encourages the long-term use of nonstandard labor arrangements. It also explains why, in Europe (where governments often require companies to provide equal pay and benefits for their nonstandard

and standard employees), vendor relationships are more common, forcing the division between members and nonmembers to become more explicit (Houseman & Osawa, 2003).

The growth in contingent labor (temporary and contract work, in particular) in countries like Singapore relates both to a need for companies to attract employees in a tight market as well as to cultural values of long-term membership for standard members (Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). In Singapore, a country with chronic labor shortages due to low birthrates and an aging population, contingent work arrangements draw people into the organization rather than pushing them away. Thus, offering flexible work conditions to young workers as a low risk way to try out an organization comprises a strategy that firms use to attract and retain valuable members.

Related to the intersection of cultural values and economic policy, unions in Europe remain strong and labor laws make it difficult to terminate employees without cause (e.g., downsizing); as such, workers still expect organizations to offer stable and somewhat permanent employment relationships (Amuedo-Dorantes, 2000). The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006) offered one example:

In Spain, job security has been, and is still, one of the principles underlying labour regulations, and has led to regulations such as the preference for contracts of employment of indefinite duration, the prohibition on repeated renewal of temporary contracts, continuation of the contract of employment in the event of transfer of undertaking, and the requirement for justified reasons for dismissal. (¶ 1)

Job security was at the heart of the 2006 youth riots in France after employers wanted the right to dismiss employees under 26 years of age without cause during the first 2 years of employment (Ford, 2006). While 2 years at the same firm may seem like a somewhat permanent job to U.S. workers, French youth perceive such a work arrangement as inherently “temporary” (even though they may not be terminated after 2 years). In contrast, after experiencing several decades of corporate downsizings in the United States, workers have come to accept the notion that organizations no longer offer long-term employment stability. Buzzanell and Turner (2003) argued that job loss has become so common that Americans view all jobs as somewhat temporary and “redefine career as a series of employer–employee contracts” (p. 28). Thus, different cultural attitudes about

the temporal nature of work and related economic policies shape how workers perceive guest versus real membership.

Face Time Cultural differences toward the meaning of work relationships also impact perceptions of virtual work and the frequency with which companies and individuals make these arrangements. For example, some U.S. employees may view virtual work arrangements (such as telecommuting) as desirable because these situations allow them to spend more time at home while still maintaining a degree of organizational presence (constituting a *ghost* membership) (Hylmö & Buzzanell, 2002; Kraut, 1989). For these members, time spent in the workplace does not hold symbolic value as long as the job gets done—a specific cultural orientation that regards a strict demarcation between work and home (A. G. Golden, Kirby, & Jorgenson, 2006; E. P. Thompson, 1967).

However, in cultures where work and life are not so carefully divided (E. P. Thompson, 1967), members treat virtual work arrangements as less socially acceptable. For example, Claus Bang Møller, a Danish employment expert, noted that workers in his country are expected to develop strong ties with their organizational colleagues and become part of the work community. Face time and socializing entail important aspects of employment in that culture, and, as such, they do not consider telecommuting to be an appropriate work arrangement (C. Møller, personal communication, March 27, 2006).¹ They envision members' time as a shared commodity that permits the organization to function as a whole.

Downtime and Leisure Part of the popularity and desire for virtual work arrangements in the United States may stem from the fact that the country has one of the longest average work weeks and the fewest vacation days compared to other industrialized countries (De Graaf, 2003). The temporal demands of U.S. companies continue to be so great that workers may need to negotiate for “part-time” status simply to be assured of a 40-hour work week (Catalyst, 1993; Goldstein, 2006). Increasingly, this challenge has created a discursive environment where organizational members talk openly about the need for decreased work hours.

Citizens in the United States and Canada celebrated the first annual “Take Back Your Time” day” on October 24, 2003. As described on their Web site (www.timeday.org, ¶ 1), “Take Back Your

Time is a major U.S./Canadian initiative to challenge the epidemic of overwork, over-scheduling and time famine that now threatens our health, our families and relationships, our communities and our environment.” As a bona-fide political movement, initiatives such as Time Day make a perfect site for studying the role of discourse in engaging civic participation. In marked contrast to U.S. working conditions, the European Union has a “Working Time Directive” that mandates a 48-hour limit to the work week (Millar, 2005). Additionally, France and parts of Germany have attempted to further limit the work week to 35 hours (Hermann, 2005). Many European countries also offer six or more weeks of annual vacation time, all of which may make it easier for employees to see full-time employment as reasonable rather than a familial or lifestyle sacrifice (Houseman & Osawa, 2003; Knox, 2004).

Environmental-Level Influences

Technical Environment The technical environment (Scott, 1987) within which an organization exists contains fairly objective temporal pacers, or *zeitgebers* (a German word literally meaning “time givers”) (Bluedorn, 2002), that influence perceptions of nonstandard work arrangements. Aside from the intersubjective temporality, organizations must also deal with objective temporal markers that indicate things like average time to market for their competitors as well as observed fiscal markers for reporting quarterly performance. Because of market speed and other pacers in the environment, various forms of virtual work have come to be utilized by contemporary organizations as a way to meet these challenges. While variations on this theme are not novel, the increased use of this work arrangement and its particular reliance on communication technology encompass some of the factors that distinguish it as a new and nonstandard work relationship. Environmental *zeitgebers* have contributed to its increasing prevalence and its status as a preferred alternative in certain contexts and industries (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002).

Members of virtual teams confront their own circadian rhythms, another *zeitgeber* in addition to the environmental one, which draws attention to the disadvantages of certain virtual arrangements (McGrath & Kelly, 1986; Shockley-Zalabak, 2002). Unfortunately, coordinating across time zones means a disruption in traditional

sleep cycles. While Shockley-Zalabak characterized this situation as an inconvenience, depending on the regularity of such disruption, it can actually represent a potential health risk for participants in these arrangements. In fact, medical professionals have recognized that the health risks associated with ignoring the body's circadian rhythms may extend beyond the employee. Not surprisingly, extended work shifts for medical residents are dangerous for patients (Humphries, 2004). Downplaying the health risks of a variety of time-related stressors, including nonstandard work arrangements, comprises an area that health communication researchers are well situated to interrogate these messages. Further, examining the ways that organizations normalize and downplay these health risks in everyday discourse would be a valuable contribution to the literature.

Institutional Environment Related to the notion of a zeitgeber, some organizations hire temporary workers to act as "rate busters" and speed up production or increase the effort exerted by their regular workforce. Coupled with decreased job security, this type of cultural practice can shape the institutional character of members' work environment as even less secure and more competitive. Temporary members interested in obtaining permanent positions learn to work at a faster pace and take fewer breaks than their permanent counterparts in order to demonstrate their value to the company (Gottfried, 1991; Henson, 1996). These behaviors can threaten the job security of permanent workers, pressuring them to match the pace of the temps in order to maintain their position in the organization. This rate-buster effect has also been found with part-time workers, who use high productivity as a way to compensate for the lack of physical time that they spend in the office environment (Kropf, 1998).

Organizational-Level Influences

Industry and Occupational Norms

Industry Norms Depending on shared conceptions of time, we should note that members do not always label virtual work relationships as "alternative," and these arrangements may even be common in certain industries, such as day trading and insurance sales. Additionally, nursing and other types of "shift" work occupations common in certain industries now embrace part-time and job-sharing

arrangements (Goldstein, 2006; Thornicroft & Strathdee, 1992). Acceptance may extend from the fact that shift work already draws clear temporal boundary lines between those who are on and off the clock, regardless of their status as professional or managerial employees. Even the notion of being “on call” discursively represents that times exist when one is not available (aside from exceptional circumstances). Thus, the lack of shared space and time (i.e., the physical absence of some members while others work) may be more expected and acceptable in some occupations than in others. Future research may seek to compare the negotiation of nonstandard work arrangements in 24-hour or shift-based occupations (healthcare, manufacturing, hotels, etc.) with professions that organize labor around a more traditional 40-hour week (office administration, banking, etc.).

Occupational Norms The perceptions associated with contingent work arrangements also differ based on occupational members’ intersubjective experience of time. As an occupational group, managers and executives must take a long-term perspective on short-term decisions and be strategic about the types of work arrangements that best suit their organization (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Accordingly, the long-term implications of entering into contingent (i.e., short-term) labor agreements shape their perceptions of this work practice. For instance, in the volatile U.S. economy, organizations often use guest workers (temps, contract labor, interns, etc.) to enable core-periphery management models where “real” organizational members are protected from organizational downsizing by a layer of easily excisable contingent members (Aaronson, Rissman, & Sullivan, 2004; Wiens-Tuers, 2001). This “just-in-time” approach to staffing permits managers to keep a degree of distance from their contingent employees and makes them easier to terminate (Gossett, 2002). Used in this way, contingent work arrangements serve as a management strategy for keeping guest workers separated from the rest of the organization.

Organizational Culture In addition to broad cultural norms, varying organizational cultures also shape (and are shaped by) members’ intersubjective temporal experience, which informs perceptions regarding nonstandard work. Specifically, notions of face time and normative career trajectories comprise sociotemporal issues that

inform our conversations about nonstandard work relationships such as telework, job sharing, and part-time employment. These virtual arrangements can meet with resistance precisely because they violate the spatiotemporal norms of an organization (Feldman & Doeringhaus, 1992). For example, Glass's (2004) study of work-family policies used by women found that "months spent working from home or working fewer than 30 hours per week (accommodations that reduce the physical time employees spend at their workplace) were heavily penalized [on wage growth], though only for managerial and professional women" (p. 387). Staff employees might be able to manage ghost membership, but managers and professional female employees needed to be constantly and physically present within the work environment to avoid negative salary consequences. Organizational norms that place a high value on face time and physical presence can intervene to frame virtual arrangements as marginal and, thus, the participants less committed or promotable (Ellison, 1999; Hylmö & Buzzanell, 2002; Kropf, 1998).

Shared beliefs and norms associated with time and perceptions of contingent and virtual work practices vary widely across a given occupation within the same environmental and national context. For example, stories about senior colleagues discouraging tenure-track female faculty from "setting back their clock" (analogous to going part time or job sharing) to have children prior to promotion and denying tenure to others for the same reason exist alongside accounts of university departments where multiple assistant professors have young children and receive support from colleagues to do so (Story, 2005). Face-time norms fluctuate a great deal as well. Whereas some academic departments expect assistant professors to work from campus and be visible at all hours of the day (and night), face-time requirements might be nonexistent at a sister department in another location. Therefore, organizations' and work groups' experiences of time strongly influence perceptions of ghost members (those engaged in arrangements like telework, part-time employment, or job sharing).

Group-Level Influences

The Group Guest The process of group development places a premium on member stability (Arrow, Poole, Henry, Wheelan, & Moreland, 2004). Relatedly, group norms surrounding temporal continuity influence perceptions of members with discontinuous

histories and/or without expectations for a future with the group (for related reviews of research on community and identity, respectively, see Underwood & Frey, this volume; Young, this volume). As a result, guest members can find themselves defined as outsiders and not allowed to participate fully in the group (Barker, 1999; Galup, Saunders, Nelson, & Cerveny, 1997; Gossett, 2002).

While new standard employees might be quickly socialized into the group, organizations can marginalize contingent employees by treating them as outsiders with limited interaction opportunities (for related discussion of organizational assimilation, see Waldeck & Myers, this volume). For example, Sias, Kramer, and Jenkins (1997) found new temporary workers less likely than their new standard counterparts to engage in regular interaction with their co-workers (i.e., asking or giving information). These guest members may have difficulty communicating with their permanent co-workers and fellow temporary employees because they lack a past or an expectation of a future relationship with each other (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). As such, these members struggle with significant challenges as they strive to be integrated into work groups and develop the social norms that might govern their interactions with others.

Contingent workers may not be communicatively isolated within the group environment, but their interpersonal interactions can look different from those of their permanent co-workers because of their short-term membership expectations. For example, Nelkin (1970) concluded that migrant workers tend to form affective rather than instrumental friendships with one another since they do not perceive value in an instrumental friendship but affective relationships make the environment more pleasant.

As co-directors of the internship program for our own department, we find that student journal entries based on their internship experiences regularly reflect frustration with feeling excluded from ordinary member rituals, despite receiving messages about their wonderful performances as contingent group members. In more than one instance, interns described exclusion from staff parties, even after actually helping to plan and execute the event. Nonetheless, in other cases (though certainly not the norm), students felt welcomed into the fold and given full membership privileges immediately upon arrival, evidence in support of the moderating role of group norms. Thus, at the group level, intersubjective temporal norms concerning continuity intercede to shape the meaning ascribed to nonstandard work relationships.

Finally, the presence of contingent workers can have an impact on the entire group environment and not just on individual workers. For example, Pearce (1993) determined that the inclusion of contract employees on workplace teams lowered the level of trust permanent employees had in their employer. Additionally, Cheney (1999) noted that the addition of temporary members in Basque work cooperatives challenged group norms of full participation and organizational ownership. Nelkin's (1970) study of migrant work groups found that tension and mistrust were common characteristics of these work groups because the workers did not necessarily know each other and had no clear expectation of a future relationship after the season was over. Contingent work relationships frame perceptions about the meaning of group membership and the nature of interactions between co-workers, mirroring the "support" attributes of community described by Underwood and Frey elsewhere in this volume.

The Group Ghost Similar to the challenges of guest members, ghost members who may be longtime employees of the organization also report feeling communicatively isolated from their work groups as a result of their nonstandard work arrangement (Kraut, 1989; Meyers & Hearn, 2000). Teleworkers and part-timers can lose touch with group norms by lacking a physical presence in the office at the same time as their co-workers—missing out on lunches, gossip over coffee, and spontaneous hallway interactions. Hylmö (2004) equated the transition to telework with the loss associated with organizational downsizing. In both situations, co-workers "lose" the day-to-day interactions that they had with one another and may mourn the loss of daily contact (p. 62). The telework experience feels so distinct that many of the virtual members in Hylmö's study referred to themselves as "independent contractors" (p. 54). Thus, the ghost member may come to feel like a guest as well because of the change in group dynamics. Similar to contingent members, virtual members' perceptions of group dynamics and interactions often change with their transitions to this alternative work arrangement.

The family communication literature discusses related group norm challenges created by divorce and remarriage (Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman, 2001). Blended family communication dynamics are particularly complicated because they highlight the fact that members cannot presume stability within the family system. As a result, some members may be defined as more "ghost" than "real" (e.g., the

parent living outside the home) or treated inherently as “guest” (e.g., a parent’s most recent spouse) (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Blended families experience group norms that are uniquely flexible; members cannot take their relationship and status with the others in the system as stable or permanent. Related to the absence of stability in a family unit, migrating agricultural workers must physically move between regional and national boundaries in order to keep up with seasonal and crop changes. They must adapt to the temporal norms of their various employers (work hours, growing seasons, pace of labor, holidays, etc.) to stay on an assignment. In the case of parents who hold these work arrangements, this instability directly affects their families.

Individual-Level Influences

Personal Influences: Life Cycle Stages

Early and Late Career In addition to intersubjective temporal constructions at cultural, organizational, and group levels, organizational members’ own subjective experiences of time reinforce the alternative nature of certain work relationships. Age constitutes one such temporal variable that, while objective in and of itself, takes on a subjective meaning for individuals. Age-based social norms often moderate members’ perceptions of participating in nonstandard employment relationships. For example, a contingent work arrangement shifts in its meaning and significance depending on the time in a worker’s life that it occurs (Hassard, 1991). For a younger worker, contingent employment (internships, temping, etc.) may provide an opportunity to experiment with different occupations without a corresponding perception of commitment or obligation to the employing organizations (Kurlantzick, 2001). Relatedly, contingent work can allow older workers to downshift into more flexible employment arrangements while still remaining active and earning an income (Hignite, 2000; Parker, 1994). Individuals nearing retirement (as well as those in early career stages) can perceive contingent work arrangements as boundary spanning, allowing them to move gradually from organizational outsiders to insiders and then back to outsiders (see, e.g., Riggs, 2004).

Midcareer In contrast to perceptions of nonstandard employment during early and late career stages, workers perceive temporary work quite differently during the middle stages of life or when such situations unfold involuntarily. For example, mid-career professionals

who have been downsized often report difficulty finding employment despite their many years of work experience (Riggs, 2004). In a study by Buzzanell and Turner (2003), some downsized men felt unable to navigate the challenges of finding work after they had been let go from their former employer. One gentleman indicated that he was “‘dumbfounded’ and felt victimized by bureaucracy and age discrimination because he was in his 50s ... [H]is preparations and his job search, while resulting in part-time work with career potential, were perceived as unsuccessful” (p. 38).

Age-based cohort differences can also lead to interpersonal problems on the job for employees who suddenly become the generational minority. Once hired, older members can struggle to be defined as legitimate subordinates by their (sometimes younger) organizational superiors (Riggs, 2004). As a result of these factors and because of broader culturally based attributions that associate seniority in age with organizational seniority, older workers re-entering the workforce face age-based hiring discrimination (Chan & Stevens, 2001; McCann & Giles, 2002). While part-time and temporary employment may be desirable for younger and preretirement workers, these arrangements typically do not satisfy mid-career professionals who expected to be at the height of their earning power and organizational status during their 40s and 50s (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). Thus, perceptions of nonstandard work can be shaped both by members’ subjective temporal experience as well as their colleagues’ intersubjective (i.e., cultural) constructions of time.

Work–Home Conflict: Professional Versus Personal Time In addition to issues associated with age, individuals’ subjective temporal experiences with conflicts between their professional and personal time can lead them to seek out nonstandard work relationships (Bailyn, 1993; Edley, Hylmö, & Newsom, 2004). Similar to the dialectics that communication scholars use to examine the nature of interpersonal and familial relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and, in the current volume, that Acheson uses to explicate silence, the formation and performance of nonstandard arrangements can be understood as a negotiation between multiple and competing notions of membership.

These arrangements make explicit the fact that memberships extend beyond organizational borders to family, friends, civic groups, religious communities, and other non-work-related entities. They

prompt organizational scholars to extend their boundaries outside the workplace and, similarly, encourage others to consider how professional issues shape (and are shaped by) personal ones. Notably, we find “work–life balance” discourse to be problematic because it reflects and reinforces a tension between “working” and “living.” Rather than broadening scholars’ range of inquiry outside work-related issues, it actually creates a false dichotomy and continues to privilege work. Instead, we choose to describe this dialectic as a tension between the professional and personal—which we constantly negotiate in our day-to-day interactions across settings and contexts.

Job sharing, shifting to part-time status, becoming an independent contractor, and engaging in telework constitute some of the ways that individuals use alternative work forms to negotiate issues of professional/personal balance and (re)define their temporal relationship with their employing organization (A. G. Golden et al., 2006; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Solomon, 1994). For example, people who wish to stay home to care for children or the elderly, attend school, or pursue another avocation need to attain personal flexibility without compromising economic stability. Nonstandard employment can facilitate accomplishment of both goals. Nonetheless, as described next, cultural differences impact the degree to which individuals envision this choice as a viable option.

Hantrais (1993) noted that the United Kingdom boasts one of the highest rates of part-time work in Europe. She argued that the prominence of this particular nonstandard arrangement can be partly attributed to the preference of British mothers to work part time in order to be home to care for their children. In contrast, according to Hantrais, “French women in professional occupations more readily accept that a child’s mother is not necessarily the only person who could look after him/her in the early formative years” (p. 154). Additionally, Warner (2005) found that French society considers work to be “a normal part, even a desirable part, of a modern mother’s life” (p. 10), and women do not feel guilty about maintaining a full-time career after they have children.

Related to the cultural and economic intersections described earlier, many Scandinavian countries provide state support for child-care facilities, making it cost effective for both parents to work full time rather than for one parent to stay at home to look after the children, according to Birte Asmuss, a professor of business communication in Denmark (B. Asmuss, personal communication, March 27,

2006).² Conversely, “the rapid growth of part-time employment among Japanese women has been linked to a tax structure with strong financial incentives for married women to keep their earnings below certain thresholds” (Houseman & Osawa, 2003, p. 11). Therefore, according to Houseman and Osawa, Japanese women often leave the workforce entirely when raising young children, and they only work part time when their offspring reach adulthood because their extra income is offset with the cost of child care and taxes.

Consistent with these findings, the Japanese employment model encourages a strong divide between personal and professional responsibilities, with one spouse fully responsible for parenting and the other for wage earning. However, parenting is expected to be a shared duty in many Scandinavian countries. For example, in Sweden, a couple can only get full family leave by sharing it between the father and mother (Eriksson, 2005). Additionally, both parents possess the right to shortened work hours until their children reach 8 years of age. Such policies encourage both men and women to make adjustments in their work arrangements as a way to balance personal and occupational demands, shaping positive perceptions of nonstandard work relationships (Houseman & Osawa, 2003).

In cultures such as the United States, where couples do not necessarily divide family-care expectations equally, women may be more likely to pursue family leave than men (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Thus, when home life becomes demanding, women, rather than men, tend to make the occupational and temporal adjustments. The predominance of women in part-time and job-sharing positions marks these work arrangements as more than simply “nonstandard” in these cultures. Instead, nonstandard arrangements become gendered, defining the part-timer or teleworker as someone on the “mommy track” and no longer a full-fledged member of the organization (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006; Ellison, 1999; Rogers, 2000). Such discursive formations serve to differentiate this work relationship, and the subjective temporal experiences that give rise to it, as nonstandard.

Social Identity

Separate Identities While group norms concerning temporal continuity and stability often marginalize short-term members, these same members—such as independent contractors, interns, and temporary employees—often possess a distinct social identity that impacts their own subjective experience of time and perceptions of their status as

different from others (Henson, 1996; Jordan, 2003). Gossett (2006) found that, just as employing organizations may keep their temporary employees at arm's length, the temps themselves can draw boundaries and forestall their complete assimilation into the organization. The short-term nature of many temp assignments allows these workers to experience time as well as perceptions of their membership as highly punctuated and enables them to maintain social identities separate from their various employers (Gossett, 2001).

Multiple Identities Independent contractors also experience unique temporal challenges to their social identity. Contractors may work for multiple organizations at the same time by contributing to several different projects at once. The overlapping temporal nature of these work relationships challenges the ability of contractors to define their identities clearly as members of one firm or another. Additionally, in the case of job loss, adopting the nonstandard identity of an independent contractor or consultant can provide persons with an occupational identity to replace the organizational one that they lost. Contractors and consultants are never really out of work. They just continually search for new clients (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004). Thus, the fluid temporal boundaries frame their perceptions of this work arrangement.

Threatened Identities The role of social identity in shaping perceptions of nonstandard work has a great deal to do with the degree to which these arrangements are voluntary or involuntary. For example, Buzzanell and Goldzwig (1991) observed that "linear thinking and talk" dominate the career literature (p. 475). Persons who deviate from this norm by choice can find their nonstandard work identities empowering and uniquely satisfying. However, as members feel forced into the nonlinear trajectory associated with nonstandard employment due to job loss or lack of other opportunities, these work arrangements can threaten their sense of social worth and self-esteem. Despite the fact that downsizing has become common enough to lose some of its stigma, workers still do not always know how to process the negative emotions associated with job loss (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). In this case, they perceive nonstandard work as inherently problematic.

Further, in the United States, relying on nonstandard work can place the health and safety of a person's family at risk, contributing to negative perceptions of certain virtual and contingent arrangements.

American workers typically count on their employers to provide health insurance, retirement benefits, and other key services. However, temporary and part-time positions in the United States rarely come with benefits similar to those enjoyed by full-time employees (Rogers, 2000; Smith, 2001). In countries where the government provides affordable public health care, child care, and strong unemployment benefits (i.e., most of Europe), individuals perceive nonstandard arrangements as less threatening because they do not prevent them from providing for the basic needs or welfare of their families (B. Asmuss, personal communication, March 27, 2006).

Mistaken Identities Virtual workers also struggle with social identity issues related to their nonstandard work arrangements. Hylmö (2004) noted that teleworkers start to feel defined by the technological tools they use to interface with their co-workers. While these workers maintain a virtual presence through e-mail, instant messaging, and phone calls, they find that their relationships and identities within their respective organizations fundamentally change. These workers can start to feel that they no longer constitute full-fledged members of the firm and instead occupy a more *ghostly* organizational persona. These workers may morph into a type of organizational “cyborg,” connected and identified by communication technology rather than their physical person.

Additionally, virtual workers must negotiate their identities within the home environment. Children, neighbors, and other diversions must be managed by the individual worker without the boundaries of the formal organization to help define when and how work and play get negotiated. One telecommuting friend of the second author had to repeatedly refuse neighbor requests for babysitting and other considerations when they saw her “home alone all day.” Also, family members may not treat the teleworker as an organizational employee when they are in the house, requiring the employee to navigate different types of familial relationships in order to occupy both roles in the home (Ellison, 1999). At least in part, virtual members’ perceptions of nonstandard work can be constructed through their frequently mistaken identities.

Ancona and colleagues (2001) proposed that organizational members’ conceptions of time shape (and are shaped by) the ways in which actors relate to time. We consider these issues next by explicating the temporal processes associated with nonstandard work relationships.

Temporal Processes in Nonstandard Relationships

The temporal processes that typify nonstandard relationships reflect differences in how actors relate to time compared to traditional arrangements. Variables in this category concern the actors themselves (Ancona et al., 2001), and they include members' temporal construals, or the ways in which they orient to time (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). For instance, their orientations to time as fleeting or limited or interests in long-term plans or immediate concerns reflect how group members construe time.

Organizational members' construals of time impact (and often get impacted by) the communication structures that enable and constrain members' work processes (Ballard & Seibold, 2003), including mesolevel structures such as coordination methods, feedback cycles, and workplace technologies (Barley, 1988; Dubinskas, 1988; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Orlikowski, 2000; J. D. Thompson, 1967). A distinguishing characteristic of the temporal processes that guide nonstandard work relationships resides in the brief feedback cycles within which organizations undertake basic membership negotiation message flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) and the ways in which these cycles shape the distinct temporal perspectives members hold toward the present and future.

Feedback cycles comprise the time horizons across which organizations hold units accountable for their performance (Cusella, 1987). While the notion of feedback typically implies that some assessment or information will be provided at the end of that horizon, the communicative power of these structures does not reside in such outcomes. Rather, feedback cycles, or loops, enable and constrain members' behavior through the symbolic functions that they serve. They communicate the expected timing of members' actions and thus serve as a standard to give meaning to members' time at micro- and macrolevels. The expectations associated with this cyclic process frame perceptions of the present and future in jobs with conditional time limits for membership. Jones (1988) described the difference between construals of the present and future:

We can distinguish between time as a structured, unitized measure of the sequence of unfolding events, *compelled toward some distant outcome*, and time as the backdrop for behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. The former is a conception of action that occurs within a time that flows linearly, inexorably, and necessarily forward. It is a perspective that is

strongly guided by the future. The latter is a feeling of behavior that occurs *in-time*, where time consciousness is suspended and action occurs in the infinite present. (p. 26)

Because membership negotiation message flows concern relationships between organizations and their members, the issue of present and future becomes central to (temporally bound) relational processes. McPhee and Zaig (2000) asserted that “one process vital to an organization is the communication that establishes and maintains or transforms its relationship with each of its members” (¶ 23). The very notion of a relationship includes an explicit temporal dimension (Fisher & Drecksel, 1985). In many nonstandard work arrangements, such as temporary employment or contract labor, a stable, future-focused temporal construal may be absent on the part of the employer or the employee (Henson, 1996; Jordan, 2003; Parker, 1994). Such a void poses implications for communication processes, such as identity formation. In his social theory of learning, Wenger (1998) detailed multiple modes of belonging that members might assume. For example, according to Wenger, imagination involves a process of expanding oneself in time and space to produce new images of the world and oneself. As such, it explicitly concerns the future (and past). Given that temporary and contract workers often share a limited past and future with their employing organizations, this process is forestalled. Thus, the impossibility of temporally bound membership processes constitutes a hallmark of the alternative status of particular work relationships.

Many guest work arrangements feature a tension between present and future time orientations of the workers and their employers. As organizational guests, contingent workers (contractors, temps, etc.) know that they may be asked to leave at any time, with little or no warning. Transitory members must get used to living in the present rather than plan for futures with particular organizations. In a study of migrant labor, Nelkin (1970) asserted:

Time is not perceived as a continuous and predictable process, but as a series of disconnected periods; of good seasons and bad seasons, good weeks and bad weeks. What happens during the current week or season is not perceived as having much to do with what will happen during a future period. (p. 480)

Contingent workers seldom receive feedback or performance evaluations from the organizations that employ them, underscoring this

present-centered focus (Gossett, 2006). Evaluations constitute training tools that organizations use to improve member performance for the future. These evaluative processes may not be considered necessary for guest members who can be dismissed easily or lack a clear future within the organization. Future research might explore the extent to which a lack of consistent feedback for contingent workers reinforces the “here today, gone tomorrow” quality of this nonstandard work arrangement.

Related to the process of membership negotiation and its evaluative dimensions, based on their unique activity coordination patterns, virtual members employing innovative solutions to their personal time quandaries often find themselves under more regular organizational scrutiny than their standard counterparts (Ostrom, 2003). Virtual relationships, such as job sharing and teleworking, may hold an (explicitly or implicitly) experimental quality, which may be renegotiated at any time. Organizations often enter these *ghostly* membership arrangements as a means to retain valuable employees who need additional flexibility in their work schedules. Therefore, the organization communicates a long-term orientation toward these individuals by making nonstandard work an alternative to leaving the system entirely. However, subsequent evaluations often concern both the work performed by the employee and the value of the work arrangement itself (Cunningham & Murray, 2005; Kurland & Egan, 1999; Solomon, 1994). The long-term success and acceptance of these virtual work arrangements require that they survive this additional degree of scrutiny.

In contrast to the goals of job sharing and telecommuting (i.e., to retain more talented employees), organizations frequently conceptualize *guest* members (i.e., temporary and contract work) as a disposable workforce (Henson, 1996; Smith, 2001). Seemingly, these work arrangements encourage all parties involved to adopt an exclusively present-focused orientation toward their respective work relationships. However, the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics (2005) indicate that 56% of temporary employees would prefer a permanent, secure (i.e., standard) work arrangement. As a result, employers can use a temp’s desire for a stable future as a unique motivational strategy: *If you work hard enough as a temp, we might make you a permanent employee* (Smith, 1998). The stakes remain even higher for many foreign contractors, who need their work assignments to last long enough for them to complete their U.S. citizenship paperwork. At a

personal level, these foreign contractors possess a long-term orientation toward their relationships with clients. However, these workers must also struggle with the daily reality of little job security, and, as such, they can be let go and deported at any time (Alarcon, 1999). Thus, a central tension in many of these nonstandard work relationships comprises the highly contested nature of the present and future orientation for both the worker and the employer.

Importantly, existing models of communication processes now commonly assume long-term relationships. Given the unique temporal expectations associated with contingent relationships, examining relational processes in this context can expand existing models of development. Fisher and Drecksel's (1985) cyclical model of developing relationships depicts the ebb and flow of relational processes, and Waldeck and Meyers's review of assimilation issues in this volume highlights the temporal aspects of assimilation.

Of related interest for interpersonal communication contexts, self-disclosure scholars note that people may reveal a great deal of personal information to total strangers whom they never expect to see again (Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984). Although inconsistent with traditional self-disclosure processes, this occurs commonly in temporary situations (e.g., talking to fellow passengers on a plane). Hence, self-disclosure processes in relationships across varying time scales can be informed by research on nonstandard work.

Temporal Practices Related to Nonstandard Relationships

The unique temporal practices related to various nonstandard relationships reflect differences in how members map activities to time compared with traditional arrangements. Variables in this category concern the creation of order (Ancona et al., 2001) and include members' temporal enactments, or the way that they "perform" time (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). For instance, a group's flexibility regarding work plans and timing, the tendency of members to multitask or juggle several things at once, the pace at which the group usually works, punctuality of members in beginning or carrying out their work, degree of scheduling, and member ability to focus on work encompass different dimensions of the ways that organizational members enact time.

Organizational members' day-to-day temporal enactments frame (and are framed by) the communication structures that enable and

constrain members' work processes (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). Two of the most distinguishing characteristics of nonstandard work relationships reside in the coordination methods and workplace technologies upon which they rely to accomplish basic activity coordination message flows (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). These structures contribute to the unique temporal *flexibility* and *separation* associated with both virtual and contingent arrangements such as telework, independent contracting, job sharing, and virtual teams.

Flexibility

The type of activity coordination required among organizational groups prescribes and delineates the communication processes involved (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). In J. D. Thompson's (1967) view, varying coordination needs linked to internal task interdependencies foster specific organizational communicative requirements. These requirements, in turn, give rise to particular temporal enactments. The minimal, or pooled, nature of interdependence mandated by certain jobs affords members the ability to work in flexibly designed work arrangements, including telework, job sharing, and independent contracting. Flexibility refers to the degree of rigidity in time structuring and task completion plans and occurs in work that permits relative temporal autonomy (Ballard & Seibold, 2000, 2004). Nonstandard work relationships take advantage of this flexibility to form new arrangements.

For example, job sharing permits individuals to divide responsibilities for a single job temporally so that they can make more fluid task commitments. This virtual work arrangement does not simply constitute two people who alternate the times that they work in a part-time capacity; rather, job-sharing requires two people to share fully the responsibilities of a regular organizational position. This arrangement allows nonstandard workers to avoid being reduced to marginal part-time jobs that may not offer desired advancement opportunities and intellectual challenges. The job-share partners have flexibility in how they negotiate the duties of the position between them, but they do not have flexibility in the degree to which they are expected to adapt and respond to the temporal demands of the larger system.

Cynthia R. Cunningham and Shelley S. Murray (2005), two women who successfully negotiated a job-share position within the

banking industry, discussed the unique challenges of this type of nonstandard work relationship. Some of their “standard” co-workers attempted to exploit their alternating absence from the office and pit them against each other in meetings where only one was present or to cut out one of the partners in favor of the other when making decisions. Such communicative tactics resemble children who try to play one parent off another in order to gain an advantage in the relationship. To keep their employment arrangement intact, Cunningham and Murray remained in constant communication with each other, regardless of their physical location. According to Cunningham and Murray, “[W]e did regular ‘data dumps,’ leaving each other voice-mails—sometimes 15 to 20 daily ... We knew if anything fell through the cracks, there would be no more job-share” (p. 128). While job-share arrangements may not always offer microlevel flexibility in terms of what Evans et al. (2004) described as fine-grained time (immediate time concerns within a given day, hour, or minute), they can facilitate macrolevel flexibility by providing one partner with needed downtime, or beach time, a positive connotation for time off between projects or days in the office.

In contrast with job sharing, telework explicitly promises a great deal of flexibility within fine-grained time, and workers rely on particular types of coordination and new communication technologies. Thus, new workplace technologies—including e-mail, instant messaging, cellular phones, and virtual meeting applications, to name a few—comprise central enabling structures. This fine-grained flexibility, resulting from working at home and making connections through various technologies, can be questioned by co-located organizational members who emphasize the lack of precise accounting for teleworkers’ time (Hylmö & Buzzanell, 2002). They advance this suspicion despite member accessibility (which, ironically, serves to weaken promised flexibility). In spite of these perceptions, the actual practice of teleworking often becomes more temporally expansive (in terms of longer working hours) than traditional work. L. Golden and Figart (2002) argued that teleworkers regularly work longer hours than their counterparts due to a blurring of the lines between work and home. As a result, temporal rigidity gets traded for temporal overload, and many members find themselves overworked and isolated.

In their study of technical contractors, Evans et al. (2004) sought to contrast the temporal flexibility of permanent employees, like teleworkers and job sharers, with independent contractors who can do as

they please. However, despite the flexibility afforded by the coordinative requirements and workplace technologies connected with their jobs, they discovered that many contractors fail to take advantage of this temporal practice for a number of reasons. For instance, people who go into contracting tend to feel a high sense of professionalism or love of their “craft” and are likely to be workaholics. Additionally, contractors may be called in during times of organizational crisis for their particular specialty, so the arrangement fundamentally restricts flexibility. Finally, they perceive the need to enact traditional “hard-working” behaviors due to their reliance on referrals for future business. In Evans and colleagues’ study, approximately one fourth of the independent contractors interviewed scheduled downtime as a way of enacting coarse-grained flexibility; whereas, only 14% of participants enacted fine-grained flexibility. Evans et al. noted that, “unlike insisting on temporal autonomy within a contract, taking time off between contracts might lower contractors’ annual incomes and deplete their savings, but it did not jeopardize their reputations” (p. 29), supporting Ancona and colleagues’ (2001) assertion that members mapping of activities to time intersects with their conceptions of time.

Ciulla (2000) argued that craftspeople in the pre-industrial era enjoyed a great deal of flexibility in their work schedule. They got their work done but did not necessarily punch a clock. Instead, Ciulla explained, skilled, pre-industrial workers lived a life “a bit like the life of a college student—irregular eating and sleeping, intermingled with intense drinking, partying, and all-night work sessions” (p. 177). In short, these workers integrated their work with the rest of their lives. Nonstandard work arrangements recall some of the flexible aspects of this pre-industrial work ethic. According to Ciulla, industrialization moved organizational members toward Fordist models of management, with everyone in the same place and time to ensure maximum efficiency and production.

Virtual work arrangements challenge the activity coordination norms that encourage employees to work at the same location and period of time. Contingent work arrangements complicate membership norms that encourage employees to commit to a single system for an indefinite period of time. By examining the nonstandard labor practices of negotiating *how much time* a job should take (part-timers, contract jobs) and *where* it should be done (telecommuters, migrating workers) as well as *how long* membership will last

(temporary workers, interns), researchers can explore the ways in which these labor arrangements may embrace some pre-industrial attitudes about work and time.

Separation

Temporal separation concerns the degree to which stakeholders eliminate or allow extraneous factors in the process of task accomplishment. Members display low levels of separation in practices that make their time expressly available to others with few boundaries (Ballard & Seibold, 2004). In contrast to nonstandard work arrangements that permit high levels of flexibility, arrangements characterized by low levels of separation provide members with little ownership over their time. Virtual teams exemplify this temporal practice, owed to the communication technologies that facilitate interaction with members around the globe as well as the different time zones that members must cross to coordinate synchronously (e.g., DeSanctis & Monge, 1999; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997).

These issues constitute the protean places detailed by Shockley-Zalabak (2002). In her study of the communication processes of a virtual team, one manager confirmed that each team member had been chosen specifically because of his or her demonstrated ability to manage high-pressure situations. A key aspect of the high-pressure task environment stems from the temporal simultaneity required to function successfully in the team. According to Shockley-Zalabak, members were routinely woken in the middle of the night to offer troubleshooting advice to members in other parts of the world and “concluded they were not really engaged in self management but continuous reactions to customer demands” (p. 247). In response to this almost total lack of temporal separation, one member protested that “[w]e work across time and space, but we don’t want to be boundaryless” (p. 247).

Flexibility–Separation Dialectic

Communication tools (cell phones, pagers, the Internet, etc.) act as technological leashes, keeping the worker tied to the organizational environment. Ciulla (2000) noted that employees who are informally

“always on call” never truly separate from their work and become prisoners of the organization. In this way, the flexible work environment can also develop into the inescapable work environment. A variety of nonstandard work arrangements simultaneously struggle with issues of temporal separation and flexibility.

For example, migrant workers constantly manage their personal lives in response to the transitory nature of their occupation. Migrants comprise a unique form of contingent labor in the sense that they often bring a specific skill set that employers demand for a limited period of time in a particular location. Once they complete a project, these workers need to be able to move to another place where they can utilize their abilities. Migrant workers must be flexible enough to travel wherever and whenever potential employers require their skills (Nelkin, 1970; Thornburgh, 2006). The temporal and spatial flexibility mandated for this particular contingent occupation overwhelms all other aspects of the worker's life, determining where the employee lives, in what conditions, and for how long (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Migrating workers from foreign countries face additional challenges adjusting to their constantly changing work environments. New host communities do not necessarily embrace foreign workers; instead, residents often define them as criminals (Flores, 2003) or accuse them of taking jobs away from local workers (Seper, 2006). As such, these workers may come to feel like *unwelcome guests* within the organizations that they serve and communities in which they live.

Time in a distant location coupled with the low-tech environments in which they often work complicates connections with friends and family back home. This separation can cause migrating workers (often forced to leave their families behind) to suffer from anxiety and other mental health problems (Grzywacz et al., 2006). The threat of estranged marriages, the challenges of remote childrearing, and the difficulty of crossing national borders to stay in regular contact with their loved ones can encourage migrant workers to bring their families with them (Schneider, 2004; Thornburgh, 2006). As a result, these workers and their families struggle to separate their personal lives fully from this nonstandard work arrangement.

While the term *migrant worker* is often associated with low-skilled, manual labor positions (e.g., agriculture, construction, ranching, etc.), increasingly, a variety of professional occupations require workers to move frequently in order to stay employed

(Schneider, 2004). These workers face significant adjustments to their personal lives (constant travel, long-distance relationships, etc.) in order to meet the geographic demands of their various employment arrangements (Ciulla, 2000). As such, people in these highly skilled occupations (e.g., health care, information technology workers, organizational consultants, etc.) may experience familial separation challenges similar to those traditionally associated with migrating farm workers and day laborers. Future research might explore the ways in which various migratory work arrangements impact family dynamics or local community engagement.

Conclusion

Nonstandard work relationships encompass a wide range of employment options in contemporary organizations. Despite their prevalence, communication scholars have not interrogated these arrangements and their related theoretical and practical concerns. In order to facilitate inquiry into these important changing membership forms, this chapter joined three compatible and complementary perspectives to engage these issues from a communication perspective and informed by a temporal outlook. Notably, we used McPhee and Zaug's (2000) theoretical framework of the communicative constitution of organizations to advance a typology of nonstandard work relationships that distinguishes among standard "real" members, contingent "guest" members, virtual "ghost" members, and "vendor" nonmembers. Throughout the chapter, we have pointed to similarities in the temporality of nonstandard work and communication issues across a variety of divisional boundaries.

As we have stressed, stakeholders construct nonstandard work relationships via alternative times. These "times" reside in members' temporal perceptions associated with the arrangement, the temporal processes that are precluded by it, or the temporal practices that define it. While *membership negotiation* explicitly concerns the process, and *activity coordination* speaks to the practice, organizational members' temporal perceptions about nonstandard work arrangements emerge through message flows as *organizational self-structuring* (communication concerning internal relations and norms that become the basis for work processes) and *institutional positioning* (communication

with outside entities that serves to establish an organization's identity and its place within the larger system of other organizations).

For example, as a part of their institutional positioning, organizations might self-structure through nonstandard work arrangements like virtual teams, a dispersed workforce, network organizing, and immigrant labor in order to manage the challenge of global relevance. In recent years, this practice has been reflected in the increased prevalence of migrant labor in the form of international, highly skilled, semipermanent workers in the high-tech and medical industries (Alarcon, 1999) and the expanding use of a dispersed workforce in the form of network organizing and cross-national virtual teams (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002).

Additionally, during times of a labor shortage, an organization may self-structure using multiple "family-friendly" policies such as telework and job sharing in order to affect institutional positioning message flows designed to attract and retain the most talented members. In this case, organizations design these microlevel aspects of activity coordination to improve membership negotiation processes. In contrast, underlying temporal perceptions, based on long-standing cultural values concerning face time, often limit such policies during times of a labor surplus when organizations tend to neglect membership negotiation message flows (Hochschild, 1997). Thus, the relatedness of these flows—and of the temporal issues constituting nonstandard work relationships—remains essential to understanding these work arrangements and the communication processes that give rise to them. We have interrogated the mesolevel flows in the present chapter. We recommend that researchers pursue the macroflows described by McPhee and Zaug (2000) in future research.

Given the position of time as a constitutive communication construct, examining the intersection of time and nonstandard relationships lends value to investigations on a variety of "life" issues that span traditional divides. While *perceptions* of time shape (and are shaped by) these arrangements, and unique temporal *practices* call attention to their use, an often overlooked aspect concerns the ways in which they impact basic communication *processes* that unfold over time. The intersection of temporality and nonstandard work has been overlooked in the literature, but it reflects a natural marriage of two timely organizational and societal matters. Through

our synthesis of these two literatures, we hope to provide communication scholars with a compelling research agenda that will drive scholarship in multiple areas of the discipline.

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Notes

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2. Birte Asmuss, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the Centre for Business Communication at the Aarhus School of Business, Denmark. Dr. Asmuss uses conversation analysis, interviews, and linguistic anthropology to examine talk at work (job appraisal interviews, meetings, etc.) and related issues of organizational and intercultural communication.

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