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‘People don’t really care’: Working at the Margins of the Organization

A significant feature of the new economy workplace is the fixed term contract, where candidates are hired repeatedly and at short notice to deliver specific tasks vital to the functioning of the organization. The security of ongoing employment eludes these workers, despite their ongoing and important contributions, and yet there is pressure on them to perform to a standard that is proven and reliable < if not for their current boss to recognize, then to build a portfolio for prospective employers.

This paper draws on a three-year study to highlight the condition of part-time, contract and casual staff in large organizations of the cultural and information industries. Focusing specifically on the experiences of ‘white-collar apprentices’, it asks whether the very idea of vocational training for ³a² career adequately reflects the current and future workplace. The magnitude of dependence on mismatched work hours and the number of years workers excuse their precarious conditions are just two features the paper explores.

Multiple opportunities, each considered too precious to pass up, stretch young workers¹ energy to exceptional levels that are justified because they are seen as temporary. This is the case even when this is the only professional existence they have ever known.