Title: Contract Professionals in Precarious Times: An Implicit Critique of the Standard Job

Abstract:

In a period of precarious employment, how do contract professionals negotiate work relations? How do they understand their choices and constraints? What can their experiences reveal about the risks and opportunities of this form of nonstandard, “contingent” work? I address these questions with a qualitative analysis of contract professionals. Drawing from interviews and observations, I identify strategies through which contractors maintain work relations with clients and colleagues. Contract professionals, I argue, are strategic actors. Charting careers in external labor markets, they engage in interactive processes that both sustain market connections and exert occupational control. As they navigate risk in a volatile economy, their everyday choices and practices constitute an implicit critique of the standard job.