Just Working

Looking beyond graduation, what are your career plans?
What kinds of jobs do you expect to have during your worklife?
Do you expect to work for just one employer during your entire career? for how many different employers? in which industries?
What is your strategy for coping with accelerating technological changes requiring life-long learning?
How can you best adapt to the rising skill demands of your profession?
Who’ll pay for you to keep your skills up-to-date?
Changing the Employment Contract

Globalization has seriously eroded U.S. employee attachments to firms since 1970s

Many large corporations downsized & restructured to create more flexible workforces with less lifetime job security, benefits, pensions

Professional, white-collar & blue-collar jobs all now more exposed to external labor market forces

Current economic recession will accelerate this change

Summarized by an increasing contingent labor force & the change from traditional to new employment contract between employers and employees
Increasingly Contingent Labor Force

**Part-time employees** (<35 hrs/week) have indefinite job duration, but some job rights and benefits similar to FTEs

Doubled 1957-97 from 12% to 25% of U.S. labor force

**Contingent (nontraditional) workers** lack “implicit or explicit contract for ongoing employment” (BLS)

Fastest increasing labor force segment; broad definition = 9.9% in 1997 (12.5M)

**Emergence of a 2-tiered workforce in many orgs**

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
The Traditional Employment Contract

EXTERNAL LABOR MARKET

FIRM BOUNDARY

Commitment, Loyalty, Longevity

EMPLOYEE

Job Security:
Implicit Lifetime Employment
Generous Fringe Benefits
Internal Career Promotions
Job Skills Training

EMPLOYER
The New Deal at Work

**EXTERNAL LABOR MARKET**
- Contingent employees
- Outsourcing
- Joint ventures
- Mid-level hires

**FIRM BOUNDARY**

**EMPLOYEE**
- Intense short-term effort: “hustling”
- Employability:
  - Project-length tenure
  - Internal job reassignments
  - Skills useful elsewhere
- External contacts
  - Job networking
  - Skill training by community colleges, commercial vendors

**EMPLOYER**
High Performance Workplace Practices

Mass-production orgs, such as auto assembly plants, but also many service companies, implementing various high performance workplace practices (HPWP):

• Just-in-Time delivery & Quality Circles
• Self-managed work teams [Thursday’s simulation]
• Cross-training in skills; job rotation
• Efficient physical work-flow designs
• Information technology; statistical process control
• Total quality management (TQM) mantra
• Incentive pay: profit-sharing; group pay; pay for skills

PARADOX: Why limited HPWP penetration inside many orgs, despite evidence of substantial productivity gains?
Teams: Worker Autonomy or Tyranny?

Self-managing teams allegedly can overcome the mind/hand split generating Marx’s worker alienation (remember Chaplin’s *Modern Times*)?

Teams allegedly foster autonomy & empowerment, participation in creative problem-solving, higher worker commitment and morale; thus greater production efficiency & corporate profits.

But are teams also a sophisticated tool for indirect management control & coercion in the workplace?

Because team members identify with co-workers & internalize the team’s self-enforcing norms, they are locked inside an iron cage of peer-pressured authority (“concertative control”).

James Barker’s ethnography of ISE Communications restructured teams shows how members self-monitored their performances and punished violators of the team norms (e.g., Sharon’s persistent tardiness).
Gung Ho
Watch segments from *Gung Ho* (“work together”), 1987 movie starring Michael Keaton & Gedde Watanabe and directed by Ron Howard, which depicts Japanese takeover of faltering U.S. auto plant at the height of American worries that its manufacturing economy would be eclipsed.

Look beneath humorous misunderstandings as Japanese managers try to get American auto assembly workers to adopt Japanese-style production techniques:

- Do the clashes between managers & workers reflect an irreconcilable conflict between the collectivist vs. individualist national cultures?

- Or just short-term adjustment pains during the transition from traditional production to HPWP?
The new employment contract’s staffing flexibility, coupled with high performance workplace practices (HPWP), enables companies to create more productive and competitive workplaces than possible with a traditional rigid bureaucratic hierarchy. Yet many companies and employees experience difficulties and resistance to adopting such changes.

Discuss a social, cultural, or authority problem that firms and workers are likely to encounter when changing from traditional assembly line production methods to HPWP. Cite one or more examples from the movie Gung Ho.
The new employment contract requires workers in all types of occupations, professionals as well as blue-collar employees, to take greater responsibility for managing their own employability opportunities throughout their careers. Even people remaining with one employer for their lifetime must compete for jobs on new projects and teams. Developing better social capital skills, in the form of networking activities within and between orgs, is vital for success.

Describe a strategy for forming work relationships leading to valuable career opportunities, both within and across organizational boundaries, which a young professional or managerial employee might implement. (If you know enough about orgs you might join, use that industry as an example.)

What are the potential advantages and drawbacks from pursuing a networking approach to getting ahead in a career?

Explain which types of connections yield the best returns on employee network investments, in terms of better information and control benefits?

**Limit:** 3-4 typed double-spaced pages (~1,000 words). **Due Nov 20**
Simulate traditional assembly line and high-performance work systems. This company mines raw words from dictionaries and manufactures finished sentences. WORDSMITH’s separate establishments compete to be the firm’s most efficient & profitable unit for each business cycle.

TRADITIONAL ASSEMBLY LINE:

MINING UNIT: extracts boldface raw words from dictionary, writes them onto log sheets, transports them to the remote assembly line

ASSEMBLY UNIT: builds one sentence of 3 or more English words from each raw word it receives
1. No letter can be used more often than it occurs in a raw word
2. One word in sentence must be a VERB; no duplicate words
3. Sentences do not have to make “sense” (see examples)

FINANCE UNIT: calculates profits & losses on manufactured sentences
1. Raw words cost $1 per letter
2. Sentences earn $1 per letter used + $1 per word
### WORDSMITH, Inc. II

**Examples of raw words manufactured into sentences & profits:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw words</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Earnings</th>
<th>Profits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPHERICAL</td>
<td>► HE IS PAL</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7+3=10</td>
<td>+$1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISSOCIATE</td>
<td>► I SAID COTES</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8+3=11</td>
<td>+$3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERNIZATION</td>
<td>► TIME RAN IN ZOO</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12+4=16</td>
<td>+$3</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENINGITIS</td>
<td>► I SING IT MEN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10+4=14</td>
<td>+$4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUFACTURE</td>
<td>► MAN ARE CUT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9+3=12</td>
<td>-$1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHISPER</td>
<td>► WE SIP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-$7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANATOMICAL</td>
<td>► A CAT ON LIMA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-$10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TRADITIONAL ASSEMBLY LINE:

• One practice session to learn job skills (5-7 minutes)
• “Real” business cycle (10-12 minutes) with rewards for highest performing unit(s)

HIGH PERFORMANCE WORKPLACE:

Units redesign their job assignments & work flows to increase output

• One practice session (5-7 minutes), then brief adjustments
• “Real” business cycle (10-12 minutes) with rewards

DISCUSSION:

How (un)realistic were the two simulated workplace designs?
Are self-managed teams more efficient? Why or why not?
How important is matching of job tasks with worker skills?
What kinds of incentives motivate high-quality work efforts?