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Article

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South African Journal of Business Management

Provided in Cooperation with:

University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB), Bellville, South Africa

Suggested Citation: Horwitz, Frank M.; Allan, Cameron; Brosnan, Peter; Walsh, Pat (2000) : Flexible work practices: Perspectives from the southern hemisphere, South African Journal of Business Management, ISSN 2078-5976, African Online Scientific Information Systems (AOSIS), Cape Town, Vol. 31, Iss. 2, pp. 76-83,
<https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v31i2.736>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/218224>

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Flexible work practices: perspectives from the southern hemisphere

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Received May 2000

Labour market flexibility continues to be important for employers seeking to improve productivity, reduce costs and be competitively agile. But it also carries downside costs for employees of increased insecurity, potentially deteriorating employment standards and lower morale. In this article numerical and temporal types of flexibility are considered in an analysis of three southern hemisphere countries.

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Introduction

The last three decades have seen a major challenge to traditional forms of work organisation. Until the 1960s, employment was offered predominantly as forty hours or more a week for 52 weeks of the year, performed in daylight hours, and with the possibility of continuous employment until retirement. This pattern suited male workers who comprised the overwhelming majority of the paid labour force up to that time. By the 1990s, this model of 'standard' employment had been undermined by fundamental socio-economic, competitive, and technological changes. On the one hand, new technologies, economic globalisation, economic recession, intensified product market competition, and new forms of company ownership and structure created a demand for alternatives to 'typical' or 'conventional' employment. On the other hand, the impacts of these new technologies, changing social attitudes, the extension of tertiary education, the increasing labour force participation of women, unemployment and changes in the bargaining position of organised labour made these alternative forms of work organisation possible (Brosnan, Horwitz & Walsh, 1999).

Atkinson's highly influential model of the flexible firm (1984) has projected a future where firms employ a 'core' of workers in typical employment arrangements with a 'periphery' of workers in atypical arrangements. Pollert (1988) has criticised this model as being at odds with the actual experience of most firms. Rubery & Wilkinson (1981) suggest that certain forms of atypical work represent a last-ditch effort by unprofitable firms to survive. Alternatively, it may signify a fundamental break with the past as is argued by post-modernists and their critics (Harvey, 1989). Blyton's (1991) work flexibility typology is an instructive analytical framework. It

differentiates between functional, numerical, temporal and wage flexibility. This article focuses on numerical forms of flexibility and also refers to data on temporal types. Numerical flexibility refers to varying the size and structure of the workforce in response to changes in the level and pattern of demand. The optimum mix of core or standard, and non-core employees is important. An allied construct is temporal flexibility. This involves work times tailored to periods of peak demand, with fluctuations in demand accommodated by varying patterns of work hours, shift systems, part-time work, homework, flexitime, temporary and casual work.

Non-standard forms of employment create opportunities for employers, particularly in the new service industries. The strategic use of different employment forms allows labour deployment through use of casual employees or by consultants and contractors. By abandoning the commitment to conventional work, employers gain flexibility, can avoid training costs, and transfer economic risk to the labour force. However, the benefits are consequently offset by the enhanced difficulty in managing an atypical labour force. Thus managers are faced with a fundamental strategic choice between the 'hard' model of human resource management which would encourage the strategic use of atypical employment forms, and the reduction in overhead costs, and the use of a 'soft' model which emphasises quality of work life, the development of mutual commitment between workers and their employers and value adding human resource strategies (Brosnan *et al.*, 1999; Gunderson, 1997; Locke *et al.*, 1995; Storey, 1995; and Tyson, 1995). The latter concept remains at the heart of most contemporary statements of human resource management philosophies even as management practice seems increasingly to depart from support for stable internal

labour markets and lifelong careers for significant proportions of their workforce.

A challenge is also posed for trade unions and for policy makers concerned with the supervision of labour standards. While many of these non-standard employment forms suit particular workers, or groups of workers (for example, permanent part-time employment may meet the needs of some mothers with young children), they are viewed as less attractive by many other workers. By their nature, most non-standard jobs are less secure, develop fewer recognisable skills and produce less income for the worker. The development of non-standard employment has the potential to create new segments in the labour market as those who are able to secure conventional employment continue to enjoy good pay and conditions with an agreeable social life, while those whose circumstances make them available only for non-standard employment or who are unable to obtain standard employment may have to accept different terms and conditions for performing essentially the same work. In most countries, the law of employment, the industrial relations and bargaining systems, and social security provisions tend still to be predicated upon standard employment. However, if a significant proportion of the workforce is employed under non-standard employment conditions, there is a need for employment and social security law and bargaining structures to make provision for them. There is much evidence to suggest that certain social groups are over-represented among temporary, part-time and other forms of non-standard labour. Women with dependent children have been a major source of recruitment in these categories, particularly for casual work (Felstead & Jewson, 1999).

Labour market regulation in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

Industrial relations systems in the three countries have undergone considerable change over the last eight years. They are different although the Australian and New Zealand systems were similar before the 1990s. Cultural factors may play a determining role in deregulation/regulation strategies, with a statistically significant association having been found between cultural indices and various labour market rigidities (Black, 1999).

The South African system, previously based on racially dualistic institutions, has changed considerably since the new Labour Relations Act of 1995 and Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1998. Improved minimum employment standards have occurred, with all workers also having organisational rights. Collective bargaining is encouraged and bargaining councils supported by the Labour Relations Act sets sectoral wages and conditions of employment. Unfair labour practices, including procedurally and substantively unfair dismissals, are prohibited. A statutory dispute resolution body, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), provides a simplified and speedy process for resolving disputes. Workplace forums which give employees rights of information, consultation and joint decision making on certain matters, are provided for by the Labour Relations Act.

Although the Australasian system produced outcomes which employers and unions generally regarded as satisfac-

tory, the system came under pressure since the 1970s. In both countries the industrial relations system was regarded as too centralised and organised, as to prevent enterprise bargaining and flexible work practices. Although both countries had Labour Party governments after 1994, the traditional system was undermined, with an increasing emphasis on workplace level negotiations. In New Zealand, this culminated in the 1991 Employment Contracts Act which abolished the traditional system of individual and collective contracts underpinned by minimum statutory entitlements. The Australian system was still in place at the time of this survey, but has now partly followed the New Zealand approach.

Non-standard employment has not been constrained by the industrial relations system of any of the three countries. South Africa's system has provided only minimum protections for non-standard employees; consequently casual staff work a 45 hour week or longer. New Zealand and South Africa are however, moving more quickly than Australia to protect non-standard employees. In South Africa, the work week has been reduced to 44 hours and there are minimum protections for non-standard employees. Small enterprises contribute 29.5%, medium enterprises 15.3%, and large firms 55.2% toward private sector employment in South Africa. The contribution to GDP is estimated at 20.8% for small enterprises, 11.9% for medium and 67.3% for large enterprises. Small and medium firms are therefore an important component of South Africa's labour market (Reader, 1997). Labour Court jurisprudence indicates that an employer does not have an unfettered right to renew or not renew a fixed-term contract in South Africa.

New Zealand's Employment Contracts Act (1991), whilst removing the blanket coverage which awards provided over all employers in an industry, and also constraining the ability to collectively bargain, has continued some protections, notably against unfair dismissal. There are supplementary statutes which provide a minimum floor of conditions. New Zealand courts have also been active in terms of protecting employment. Workers on fixed-term contracts are guaranteed their jobs should the position continue. Similarly casual workers employed on a continuing basis are deemed as permanent employees by the Employment Court.

Australian labour law tends on the one hand, to provide fewer protections. But it has more generous provisions in awards and legislation in relation to matters such as superannuation and various types of paid leave. The concept of unfair dismissal is not well developed in Australian labour law, and any attempts at liberalising the concept have met with hostility from employer groups. Thus while it is somewhat easier for Australian employers to dismiss employees, they face considerable on-costs when employees have permanent contracts or when their monthly earnings exceed threshold. Some of the additional costs relate to compulsory superannuation payments (currently 6% of salary) and until recently there was a requirement that money be set aside for training. A consequence was that many Australian employers attempted to avoid these costs by restructuring jobs into part-time positions or employing people as casuals.

Australian and New Zealand awards made some attempt to control the use of casual labour by including penalty wage provisions in awards. This made it more expensive by the hour to use casuals. However, while the premium for casual

labour does make it more expensive by the hour, it is not clear that it is so on an annualised basis, as casual employees do not receive paid holidays, sick leave, and can be laid off if there is no work, and in Australia and South Africa, do not have superannuation payments made on their behalf. They also do not accrue entitlement to long service leave or awards in both Australia and South Africa. In all three countries, casual workers are less likely to belong to trade unions and may be less aware of their rights. Thus while the Australian and New Zealand systems may have attempted to restrict the use of casual labour, other features of the systems made it attractive for employers.

Method

The survey, from which the results presented in this article were derived, covered a range of questions relating to labour usage and employment forms within workplaces. The results were obtained from a postal questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on that used in an earlier survey in New Zealand in 1991 (Anderson, Brosnan & Walsh, 1994a; 1994b) and a further revised version which was used in a survey of employers in Queensland in 1993 (Brosnan & Thornthwaite, 1994).

The questionnaire was revised again for this study. A draft questionnaire was prepared and tested in a pre-pilot survey of employers personally known to the researchers. After revisions, a full pilot was conducted using a sample of 200 workplaces. The sampling method was different from the two earlier surveys. Those surveys had shown that the response rate is higher for larger workplaces. In this survey it was decided to take account of this explicitly, and samples were drawn from each size group so that equal numbers of responses in each size group were obtained. The total sample comprised 15,600 workplaces (5,200 in each country). The sample was drawn by the Government Statistics agency in each country. The response rates were 34% in Australia, 41% in New Zealand and 14% in South Africa. Whilst stronger inferences might be drawn from the larger Australasian response rate, a weighting process was applied to optimise valid data comparisons.

To compensate for the different sampling fractions and response rates, responses were weighted according to industry and workplace size. In order to check on the sampling and weighting process, the overall workforce data collected from the survey were compared, where possible, with corresponding official statistics. Despite using different definitions, and different sampling procedures in the surveys, and the fact that our data were collected from employers rather than from the population, the weighted data corresponded closely with official estimates.

Terms such as 'casual' and 'fixed-term' have different meanings in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa and also have different legal implications in each country. In the questionnaire, the categories used were chosen to represent the differing employment practices in each country and terms were defined to avoid ambiguity. *Temporary* employees were defined as employees taken on for a relatively short but unspecified period. *Occasional* or *casual* employees were defined as employees hired on a periodic basis as need arises; that is genuine casual employees. *Fixed term* were defined as

employees on a contract with a specified expiry date or employed to complete a specific project. *Permanent* employees are those who work all year and have an expectation of continuing employment. These definitions are different from the ones used by government statistics' agencies and therefore are not directly comparable.

Findings

Part-time employment

Part-time employment is considered as a means of creating an appropriate mix of core and non-core employees. It is not the same as casual employment as there may be some degree of continuity or regularity of employment. Part-time work is almost a 'standard' form of employment in sectors such as retailing, with week-end work most often done by part-timers. There are legislative provisions to move towards 'harmonised' terms of employment on a pro rata basis between part-time and full-time employees in South Africa and New Zealand. Motivations for increasing part-time work are largely to effect operational improvements, productivity enhancement and cost containment.

There are striking differences between Australia and New Zealand on the one hand and South Africa on the other in the incidence and distribution of part-time employment. It was found that in both Australia and New Zealand almost three-fifths of workplaces employ part-time workers, about three times as many as in South Africa. Another difference is that the incidence of part-time employment rises with workplace size in New Zealand and Australia, but varies little by size in South Africa. The majority of workplaces in all size categories in Australia and New Zealand employ part-timers compared with about a fifth of workplaces in each size category in South Africa.

Regarding the distribution of part-time employment, 22% of the workforce in both Australia and New Zealand are employed as part-timers compared with only 2% in South Africa. The effect of workplace size in the former two countries is the reverse of that for incidence – the smaller the workplace the greater the usage of part-time employment. The proportion of the workforce employed as part-timers declines with increasing workplace size in all three countries although there is no difference between the two largest categories in South Africa.

The gender composition of the full-time and part-time workforce was analysed by workplace size. In Australia and New Zealand, more than three-quarters of workplaces employ males as full-time employees compared with about two-thirds which employ females. In contrast, in Australia and New Zealand, twice as many workplaces employ women as part-timers than employ men. The largest gender differences in full-time employment were in small workplaces of 2–9 employees. In the two larger workplace size categories in Australia and New Zealand more than 90% of workplaces employ both men and women as full-time employees. In contrast, substantially more workplaces in each size category employ women as part-timers than employ men.

The South African pattern is quite different from that of Australia and New Zealand. There is no strong gender effect in the incidence of part-time employment. In South Africa more workplaces (83%) employ women as full-time workers

than men (80%) and there is very little difference between the proportion of workplaces employing women as part-timers (14%) and those employing men (12%).

The data for workforce distribution confirm the gender effect in Australia and New Zealand and the different outcome in South Africa. Almost two-thirds of the full-time workforce in all three countries are men. This applies across all size categories in New Zealand and Australia, but in South Africa the predominance of males is less for workplaces of fewer than 50 employees. When the focus is on part-timers, it was found that in Australia and New Zealand nearly three-quarters of part-timers are women. South Africa is quite different; 60% of part-time workers are men.

The three countries do not differ greatly in the relative incidence of part-time workers by gender, although again the New Zealand and Australian results are almost identical (data not shown). In all three countries the vast majority of workplaces which employ part-time workers employ females. In Australia 97% do so and in New Zealand 86%, which in both cases is more than twice the proportion which employ male part-timers. In South Africa, 76% of employers of part-timers employ females compared with 42%, which employ males.

In all three countries, the most frequent working time option for part-time workers is to work fewer than 7 hours daily and fewer than 5 days per week. This is substantially more common than working a full week but fewer than 7 hours or working full days but fewer than 5 days per week.

For part-time employees, an important aspect of flexibility is the capacity to choose their hours of work and to change them if necessary. The results show that the ability to change hours is more common in New Zealand and Australia where just over half the employers of part-timers reported that their part-time workers had either complete freedom to choose their hours of work or were able to do so subject to the employer's convenience. In South Africa, only 21% of employers of part-timers conceded this degree of flexibility to their employees. This probably reflects the fact that part-time work itself is far less well established in South Africa than in Australia and New Zealand and the rights of part-time workers are correspondingly less well advanced. Similarly, almost five times as many employers of part-timers in Australia and New Zealand as in South Africa claimed to allow their employees to swap hours and days of work with co-workers.

In New Zealand and Australia, the smaller the workplace the more freedom enjoyed by part-time employees to decide when they worked. For example, in workplaces of 2 to 9 employees, 17% of part-time employees in New Zealand and 14% in Australia had complete freedom to choose when they worked. By contrast, in New Zealand only 5% of workplaces of 10 to 49 and 7% of workplaces of 50 or more enjoyed the same right. In Australia, the figures were 4 and 5% respectively. In South Africa, however, the picture is more mixed. It differs from New Zealand and Australia in that larger workplaces are more likely to allow part-time workers complete freedom to choose when they work. On the other hand, however, it is similar to New Zealand and Australia in that the largest workplaces are also more likely to deny part-time employees any freedom at all to choose when they work. In all three countries, the middle size category of 10 to 49 employees has the highest proportion of workplaces which allow part-time workers to swap hours with co-workers.

Casual employment

Casualisation is considered by trade unions as resulting in a deterioration of employment standards, with casual workers having fewer statutory and collectively bargained protections than standard or part-time employees. A significant increase in casual work in several sectors such as retailing and dock workers has been noted (Kenny, 1998). This results in a re-segmentation of the labour market, with union organisation of casual employees proving difficult. Casualisation is used mainly to reduce labour costs and sometimes to avoid legislative protections. Casual employees are considered more vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal, and lack bargaining power and employment security.

Both the incidence and distribution of casual employment, which was found to be much higher in Australia than in New Zealand or South Africa, were considered. In Australia, one quarter of all workplaces employ a casual worker compared with 17% in New Zealand and 9% in South Africa. In Australia, 10% of the workforce is employed on a casual basis, twice the level of New Zealand and five times that of South Africa. Table 1 shows that whereas in South Africa there is little difference between part-time and full-time casual employment, in Australia and New Zealand casual workers are predominantly employed on a part-time basis, which is one of

Table 1 Casual employment by size of workplace (percentage)

Number of employees	New Zealand			Australia			South Africa		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Incidence									
2 to 9	5	9	14	8	15	21	2	4	5
10 to 49	10	16	25	15	26	37	8	4	12
50+	18	20	34	21	35	49	19	13	32
All	6	11	17	10	18	25	4	5	9
Distribution									
2 to 9	2	4	6	3	7	10	1	1	2
10 to 49	1	3	4	3	7	10	2	1	3
50+	1	5	6	3	7	10	1	1	2
All	1	4	5	3	7	10	1	1	2

Note. For the incidence data, the total column above includes, full-time, part-time and employers who employ both categories

the most vulnerable forms of employment. In Australia and New Zealand, workplaces are almost twice as likely to employ part-time casual workers than full-time casual workers. In both Australia and New Zealand, the great majority of the casual workforce, 70% in Australia and 80% in New Zealand, are part-time employees.

The relationship between workplace size and the incidence and distribution of casual employment is striking (Table 1). In all three countries, the incidence of casual employment rises with workplace size and by a considerable amount. Thus in Australia, 49% of workplaces of more than 50 employees employ at least one casual worker, while for similarly sized workplaces in New Zealand and South Africa it is about one-third of such workplaces. In New Zealand and Australia the largest workplaces are more than twice as likely to employ casual workers, while in South Africa they are six times as likely. However, there is no workplace size effect on the distribution of casual employment. The proportion of the workforce employed as casuals does not increase with workplace size. Remarkably, in Australia exactly the same proportion are casual workers in each workplace size category. Nor is there any observable size effect in any of three countries on the proportion of the workforce employed as full-time or part-time casual workers.

Regarding the feminisation of casual employment there is a different picture in Australia and New Zealand from South Africa. In both Australia and New Zealand substantially more workplaces employ women as casual workers than men compared to South Africa. The proportion of the female labour force in Australia (14%) and New Zealand (8%) employed as casual workers is more than double that of the male workforce. In South Africa, there is no difference.

Industry variations were considered. The most striking feature is that in Australia and New Zealand, the primary sector has the highest proportion of casual workers (35 and 17% respectively). In South Africa, however, there is little difference by industry sector. The incidence of casual employment by industry sector is consistent with this in Australia where more than one-third of primary sector workplaces employ casual workers compared with 20% of secondary and 25% of tertiary workplaces. In New Zealand, however, despite sectoral differences in the size of the casual workforce, virtually identical proportions of workplaces employ casual workers in each sector (16–17% in each).

Respondents were asked if they had increased or decreased their employment of casual workers in the previous 5 years and what changes they intended to make in the next 5 years. The results are presented in Table 2.

What is most evident is the dominance of the no-change option for both past and expected changes in all three countries. These data do not support the argument that casual employment has been growing at a great rate and will continue to do so. Nonetheless, far more workplaces had increased their employment of casual workers than decreased it and this was expected to continue over the next 5 years.

The Australian and New Zealand results show similar patterns of change over the last 5 years. In both countries, the trend has clearly been towards increased employment of casual workers. The employment of full-time and part-time workers had increased in 15–20% of workplaces in both

Table 2 Past and expected changes in casual employment (percentage)

<i>Past changes</i>	New Zealand	Australia	South Africa
Full-time increase	17	18	26
Full-time decrease	5	8	18
Part-time increase	20	16	14
Part-time decrease	8	9	5
No change	57	58	46
<i>Expected changes</i>	New Zealand	Australia	South Africa
Full-time increase	23	13	25
Full-time decrease	4	3	20
Part-time increase	20	15	17
Part-time decrease	2	3	2
No change	57	70	44

countries and decreased in 5–10% of workplaces. The South African results show greater fluctuation. Although the employment of full-time casual workers had increased at more than a quarter of workplaces, it had also decreased at almost one-fifth of workplaces. Looking to the future, only in New Zealand is the rate of growth in the incidence of full-time employment expected to rise. Whereas 17% of respondents in New Zealand reported an increase in full-time casual employment over the previous 5 years, 23% said they expected it to increase over the next 5 years. In Australia, the proportion expecting employment in this category to increase fell to 13% from the 18% who reported an increase over the previous 5 years. In South Africa, there was little difference. The incidence of part-time casual employment is expected to continue to increase at about the same rate in Australia and New Zealand and to increase slightly in South Africa. The data suggest that this increase in the incidence of part-time casual workers is not likely to be countered by large numbers of other employers decreasing their employment of part-time casual workers. The proportion of employers reporting that they expected to decrease their employment of part-time casual workers fell by very large amounts in all three countries from the levels reporting a decrease in the previous years. The results for the rate at which the incidence of full-time casual employment decreases show little change in New Zealand and South Africa and a large fall in Australia. Overall then, although the no-change option predominates in all three countries for both the past and future, it is evident that the incidence of casual employment has been increasing and will continue to increase.

Temporary employment

Temporary employment is mainly used on an indefinite, non-fixed term, but potentially renewable contract basis. A recruitment agency or labour broker may supply an employer with a person with the requisite skills to do a particular job for an undefined or open-ended period. It is not ad hoc, irregular employment as tends to be the case for casual work. A repeated renewal of a temporary contract may constitute standard employment in some jurisdictions; especially if a valid expectation of contract renewal has been created. This is more likely if the person is on a fixed-term contract as

discussed in the next section. The employee may then be entitled to the same or similar terms and conditions as a core, standard employee.

The incidence and distribution of temporary employment is higher in South Africa than in New Zealand or Australia. In South Africa 17% of workplaces employ temporary workers compared with 7% in New Zealand and 11% in Australia. Only 2% of the New Zealand and Australian workforces are temporary workers compared with 4% in South Africa. The relationship between workplace size and temporary employment is similar to that for casual employees. The incidence of temporary employment increases substantially by workplace size for all categories except for part-time temporary workers in South Africa. There, 5% of workplaces with 2–9 employees employ casual workers compared with only 1% and 2% for the two larger categories. The size effect is much more marked for full-time temporary workers. In New Zealand and Australia, 22% and 27% respectively of workplaces of more than 50 employees employ casual workers compared with 4% and 2% respectively for workplaces of 2–9 employees. As with casual employment the same size effect is not visible for the distribution of temporary employment. The proportion of the workforce employed as temporary workers does not increase with workplace size.

The strong gender effect identified for casual employment does not hold for temporary employment. There is virtually no difference in the proportion of workplaces employing male and female temporary workers in any of the three countries. There is a moderate gender effect on the distribution of temporary employment in South Africa and an even smaller impact in New Zealand and Australia. It does not seem therefore in any of these countries that temporary employment has been feminised to anywhere near the degree for casual employment. Downsizing and retrenchments are no longer confined to blue-collar employees, and in the 1990s included significant numbers of managerial and professional staff, often at very senior levels. In most firms these are largely male employees. With organisational restructuring leading to a smaller core work group, many of these employees have established independent contracting firms, which do work on a part-time or piece-meal basis. They may work from home or small rented premises, and may often sell their services back to their original employer on a part-time, fixed-term contract basis.

In Australia and South Africa secondary and tertiary workplaces are much more likely than primary sector workplaces to employ temporary workers. In New Zealand however, the incidence of temporary employment hardly varies by sector. There are no marked sector effects in the distribution of temporary employment. There are some differences by country, with temporary employment being most common in the tertiary sector in Australia and South Africa and in the primary sector in New Zealand.

Table 3 presents results showing past and anticipated changes in temporary employment. The picture is similar to that for casual employment. The 'no-change' option predominates. It is notable that higher proportions in each country expect no-change in the future than report no-change in the past. South Africa's higher levels of temporary employment is reflected in the reported rates of increase in the previous five

years. A minority of South African employers reported that their employment of temporary workers had not changed compared with substantial majorities in Australia and New Zealand whose employment of temporary workers had not changed. This picture of change is confirmed by the relatively large proportions of South African employers reporting either an increase or decrease in their employment of full-time temporary workers. In South Africa, 38% of employers reported that they had increased their employment of full-time temporary workers in the previous five years and 17% had decreased it. In contrast, 20% of employers in New Zealand and 8% in Australia had increased their employment of full-time temporary workers and in both countries fewer than 10% had decreased it. There was very little difference among the three countries in the proportion of employers reporting an increase in part-time temporary employment during those five years. In South Africa, the proportion of employers expecting to increase their employment of full-time and part-time temporary workers is far lower than the levels of the previous five years whereas in Australia and New Zealand, it has changed very little for both categories. In Australia and New Zealand, lower proportions of employers expect to decrease their employment of full-time and part-time temporary employment. In South Africa, more employers expect to decrease their employment of full-time temporary workers.

Table 3 Past and expected changes in temporary employment

<i>Past changes</i>	New Zealand	Australia	South Africa
Full-time increase	20	8	38
Full-time decrease	6	8	17
Part-time increase	12	10	11
Part-time decrease	5	4	2
No change	62	75	42
<i>Expected changes</i>	New Zealand	Australia	South Africa
Full-time increase	19	9	20
Full-time decrease	3	1	20
Part-time increase	11	8	2
Part-time decrease	3	2	1
No change	69	85	58

The proportions reporting a past increase and anticipating a future increase are at about the same level in Australia and New Zealand. In South Africa, however, there is a very large fall in the proportions expecting an increase in temporary employment from those reporting an increase in the previous five years. There are some notable variations by country. A much smaller proportion of Australian employers report a past increase or anticipate a future one than in New Zealand or South Africa. In turn, South Africa is much higher for both past and anticipated increase than either New Zealand or Australia. This may reflect South Africa's higher usage of temporary labour.

Fixed-term employment

As mentioned earlier, in this survey fixed-term employment is distinguished from temporary employment. Fixed-term

employment was defined for respondents as employment in which there is a contractual specification of the period of employment. Temporary employment, on the other hand, was defined as employment of a limited but unspecified duration. Fixed-term employment is less common than casual employment in Australia and New Zealand but more common in South Africa. In all three countries, the incidence of fixed-term employment is below that of temporary employment but the distribution is about the same. There is little variation across the three countries in either the incidence or distribution of fixed-term employment (less than 10%), although it is more common in New Zealand (9%) and South Africa (10%) than in Australia (6%).

The relationship between workplace size and fixed-term employment is very similar to that for casual and temporary employment. The incidence of fixed-term employment rises sharply with workplace size in all three countries although in South Africa, workplaces of 2–9 employees have a slightly higher incidence than for the next largest category. Even there, however, there is a seven-fold increase in incidence for workplaces of more than 50 employees. The incidence levels for New Zealand and Australia are similar for all workplace size categories. However, there is no marked workplace size effect on the distribution of fixed-term employment. In Australia and South Africa, it is slightly higher in the largest workplaces but the differences are very small. In New Zealand, workplaces of more than 50 employees have a slightly lower proportion of their workforce on fixed-term contracts than workplaces of 10–49 employees.

In the three countries examined here, fixed-term employment is commonly thought of as applying more to management, especially senior management positions, than to workers in general. As such, it might have been expected that males would be more likely to be employed on a fixed term. There is a moderate gender effect in South Africa with both incidence and distribution higher for males than females, but not in Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, in New Zealand the incidence and distribution of fixed-term employment is identical for men and women (5%), while in Australia, women are slightly more likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts. This pattern does not change when controlling for workplace size.

Regarding fixed-term employment by industry sector, there is no strong tendency for one sector to employ more fixed-term employees than any other except for the secondary sector in South Africa. New Zealand and the other two countries differ noticeably. In New Zealand, the primary sector has the highest incidence and distribution of fixed-term employment whereas in both Australia and South Africa it has the lowest. In Australia and South Africa, the tertiary sector has the highest incidence of fixed-term employment. In each country, a different sector records the highest distribution of fixed-term employment. The incidence and distribution of fixed-term employment in the secondary sector is identical for Australia and New Zealand. The proportion of the workforce employed on fixed-term contracts is the same in the three tertiary sectors.

As with casual and temporary employment, most employers have not changed their use of fixed-term employment in the previous five years and most expect to make few changes in this regard over the next five years. This is less firmly the case in South Africa than in New Zealand or Australia. Just over one half of South African employers reported no change in fixed-term employment in the previous five years and fewer than two-thirds expect no change in the next five years. In Australia, however, well above 80% and in New Zealand more than three-quarters of employers reported no change for the past and the future.

Expectations about the future of fixed-term employment form three different national patterns. The expectation of an increase is highest in South Africa but this is made up almost entirely of employers expecting full-time fixed-term employment to rise. One quarter of South African employers hold this view whereas only 2% expect an increase in part-time fixed-term employment. In contrast, the proportion of New Zealand employers reporting that they anticipated an increase in part-time fixed-term employment was about the same (11%) as those expecting full-time fixed-term employment to rise (13%). In Australia, twice as many expect an increase in full-time fixed-term employment (11%) as expect part-time fixed-term employment to rise (6%). The different expectations with regard to full-time and part-time fixed-term employment is underscored by the fact that in all three countries the proportion of employers expecting an increase in full-time fixed-term employment is about the same as those reporting that it had increased in the past five years. The picture for part-time fixed-term employment, however, differs for New Zealand and Australia on the one hand and South Africa on the other. About twice as many employers in New Zealand and Australia expect to increase their employment of part-time fixed-term workers in the next five years as report an increase in the previous five years. In South Africa, on the other hand, whereas 10% of employers report that they increased their employment of part-time fixed-term employment in the previous five years, only 2% expect to do so in the next five years. Thus, in all three countries the rate of increase in full-time fixed-term employment is not expected to rise, while part-time fixed-term employment is expected to grow much more quickly in New Zealand and Australia and much more slowly in South Africa.

Conclusion

The recent literature on flexible labour suggests that the expansion of non-standard employment in all developed economies represents a significant shift in the employers labour utilisation strategies. Research in a number of countries suggests that employers are using these new forms of labour to achieve greater flexibility and lower costs in an increasingly competitive environment.

The three-country survey of employment practices and patterns in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa indicates that non-standard forms of employment represent an important feature of the contemporary workplace, to varying degrees, in these three countries. Results indicate that a moderate proportion of employees are engaged in various types of non-standard employment. Taking these types of employment together, the research shows that flexible forms of

labour are commonly used by employers. Employees were most likely to be found in part-time and casual employment in Australian and New Zealand. In South Africa, temporary and fixed-term employment was more prevalent. Women were more likely to be found in part-time employment whereas men were found in full-time jobs, with some exceptions. Significantly, workplaces reported that they had increased their use of non-standard forms of employment in the recent past and intended to increase it. The results reinforce the view that the non-standard employment is growing in importance. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that standard, full-time, permanent employment remains an important form of employment in all three countries.

Overall, the data presented in this study indicates an emergent rather than pronounced shift towards use of numerical and temporal flexibility in the three countries. Public regulatory policy and employer opposition to the degree of regulation of flexible work practices remain important issues. For instance, in South Africa, government has recently agreed to review aspects of labour laws which are arguably employment restrictive. The notion of 'regulated flexibility' advocated by South Africa's former Labour Minister, Tito Mboweni, is an attempt to prevent deteriorating employment standards in the face of globalisation.

Comparatively, institutional protections vary in their ability to withstand these pressures. The more voluntarist the industrial relations system, the more employers are able to make strategic choices regarding flexible and other innovative work practices. Although use of flexible work practices varies comparatively, exposure to increasing globalisation, new defining technologies, and international competition, may accelerate diffusion of flexible work practices at enterprise level. This tends to underline an evolving convergence of management practices, though implementation differences occur as a result of cultural, legislative, work restructuring and resourcing factors. Whilst labour tends to remain largely local and national in organisational focus, multinational firms segment activities according to performance attributes of international labour markets and different industrial relations regimes. International variation in unit labour costs, employment standards, skill levels, and labour productivity, are particularly relevant in strategic choices of multinational firms. Achieving a balance or even synergy between enhanced economic performance and work place equity, will remain an important, but difficult challenge in the new millennium.

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