



Good, bad, and not so sad part-time employment



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ABSTRACT

With increases in part-time employment, the need to understand its diverse forms is growing. The aim of this study is to develop a typology of part-time employment on the basis of role occupancy and work characteristics. Latent class analysis was applied to data from a sample of 1826 part-time workers. The pattern of conditional probabilities suggests four types of part-time employment: Good, bad, student, and transition. Further analysis indicates that gender, age, education, seniority, and work experience are correlates of being in one or other types of part-time employment. Finally, good part-time employment is associated with higher job satisfaction and health although better health is reported in student part-time employment.

1. Introduction

Over 26 million persons in the United States are employed part time (BLS, 2014), well over three million in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017) and about 19% of the workforce in the European Union (Eurostat, 2017); with steady increases observed in several countries (ESDC, 2014; Pak, 2013). Considered nonstandard or nontraditional work (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Chadwick & Flinchbaugh, 2016; Feldman, 1990; Hoque & Kirkpatrick, 2003; Kalleberg, 2000; Snider, 1995), often contrasted with full-time employment (Beham, Präg, & Drobnič, 2012; Broschak, Davis-Blake, & Block, 2008; MacDonald, Bradley, & Brown, 2009; Sinclair, Martin, & Michel, 1999; Smith & McDonald, 2016; Steffy & Jones, 1990; Thorsteinson, 2003; Warren & Walters, 1998), part-time work situations are in reality quite diverse; possibly ranging from good to bad in terms of job quality.

Drawing from role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978), Martin and Sinclair (2007) identified groups of part-time employees that suggest differences in patterns of role occupancy. Though an important step toward a better understanding of modern employment relationships, the role occupancy perspective does not admit that work characteristics are widely regarded as meaningful criteria for defining types of part-time work. Rather than identify groups of part-time *employees*, the first aim of this study is therefore to develop a typology of part-time *employment*. Drawing from the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider, 1987), we argue that people and work characteristics together best define part-time employment and job quality. We therefore include in a latent class analysis (LCA) individual differences related to role occupancy and work characteristics. The simultaneous consideration of work characteristics and role occupancy variables is expected to provide a more complete and realistic picture of part-time employment; one that may better inform discussions about part-time work in light of societal concerns about job quality (Brookings Institute, 2007; Jackson, 2010; Lyonette, Baldauf, & Behle, 2010; OECD, 2010; Osterman, 2010). The second aim of this study is to examine the antecedents of being involved in one or another types of part-time employment. We thereby distinguish types of part-time employment from the exogenous individual demographic and human capital characteristics that may be associated with being in different part-time situations. In so doing, our study will address a gap in the literature by investigating the correlates of part-time

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employment type and this is a necessary step toward a better understanding of inequalities in employment relationships and job quality. The third aim of this study is to relate different types of part-time employment to meaningful outcomes. Research that compares part- and full-time work on attitudes or behavior (e.g., Saba, Blouin, & Lemire, 2006; Thorsteinson, 2003; Wakefield, Curry, Mueller, & Price, 1987) does little to capture the seemingly important finer inter-group contrasts between part-time work situations. Moreover, research on underemployment considers the consequences of working fewer hours than desired (Allan, Duffy, & Blustein, 2016; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016), but not those of being involved in different types of part-time employment. Drawing from research on job quality (Knox, Warhurst, & Pocock, 2011; Loughlin & Murray, 2013), we expect different types of part-time employment to range from good to bad and therefore result in dissimilar levels of job satisfaction and self-reported health. Because employment types are by nature configurational, LCA should provide a rich account of this complex phenomena following an underdeveloped approach in management research (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013).

1.1. Typology of part-time employment

The ASA framework provides a theoretical basis for the simultaneous consideration of role occupancy and work characteristics. To operate this integration, we however need to first develop the role occupancy and work characteristics perspectives.

1.1.1. Role occupancy

Drawing from role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978), much research on part-time work has attempted to determine the degree to which part-time employees are included in their focal organization. From this standpoint, they are often assumed to be less included than their full-time counterparts (Miller & Terborg, 1979; Thorsteinson, 2003); but there may also be varying degrees of inclusion within the part-time workforce. Martin and Sinclair (2007), for instance, argued that being married, attending school, working in a full- or part-time position elsewhere as well as the number of children at home, age, and income contribution could influence involvement levels in the part-time work role relative to other life roles that form self-identity. If, for instance, the part-time job simply supplements income from another source, the employee should be less included in the focal organization's social system. In this way, role occupancy (i.e., degree of inclusion or involvement) in part-time employment varies according to the salience for self-conception of that role relative to other role identities that compose the self. A student pursuing a college degree and working weekends in the kitchen of a local restaurant may not attach a great deal of importance to this work role relative to attending school. It is possible then to develop a typology of the part-time workforce on the basis of role occupancy profiles (Martin & Sinclair, 2007).

Although role occupancy offers a meaningful perspective for studying part-time work, this theoretical stance alone is limited in terms of its predictive power. Reining in studies largely based on partial inclusion theory, a meta-analysis found no significant differences in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to leave between part- and full-time workers (Thorsteinson, 2003). The reason for this is most likely that work characteristics are not given adequate consideration in this stream of research. Simply put, being more included in a part-time job with lesser work characteristics may result in similar outcomes as being less included in a part-time job with better work characteristics. Role occupancy is nonetheless an important consideration as role theory predicts that involvement in different life roles, including the part-time worker role, fluctuates in a system of competing attachments. We therefore included in our configurational analysis having a partner, parenting, being a student, contribution to household income, and being employed elsewhere.

1.1.2. Work characteristics

Assuming variability in part-time work (Feldman, 1990), observers noted that good part-time jobs have high pay, promotion opportunities, require many skills (Tilly, 1991, 1996), and are career occupations (Higgins, Duxbury, & Johnson, 2000). Conversely, bad part-time jobs have low pay, few promotion opportunities, require few skills, involve routine or monotonous tasks (Tilly, 1992, 1996) and are not career occupations (Higgins et al., 2000). Part-time police work, for example, was qualified as good as it involves high wages, challenging work and career potential (Dick, 2010). More generally, part-time employment may be set in a Taylorist system of work organization with low interdependence or in the context of enriched work that requires teamwork and cooperation (Edwards & Robinson, 1999).

Two conclusions are easily drawn from these observations. First, types of part-time work are often described in terms of their work characteristics. In addition to those just mentioned, Feldman (1990) contrasted permanent and temporary as well as year round and seasonal part-time work. Other work characteristics used to delineate types of part-time employment include the provision of benefits (Kalleberg, 2000), job security (OECD, 2010), level of responsibility (Charlesworth & Whittenbury, 2007), performance of core work (Chadwick & Flinchbaugh, 2016), hours worked (Beham et al., 2012; Robotham, 2012), wages (Bardasi & Gornick, 2008), and the amount of training (Arulampalam, Booth, & Bryan, 2004; Bidwell, Briscoe, Fernandez-Mateo, & Sterling, 2013). Second, other than anecdotal reports and keen observations, the only empirical attempt to delineate different types of part-time work was based solely on individual role occupancy variables (Martin & Sinclair, 2007). This, in itself, is quite restrictive because the approach does not account for the work characteristics that may activate intrinsic motivation and the proclivity to work in one or another types of part-time employment. We therefore include a set of work characteristics that includes educational and experience requirements, work hours, supervision, pay level, flexibility, and permanent status.

1.1.3. Attraction-selection-attrition

The main thesis of the ASA framework is that the attributes of people in a workplace define the way that place looks, feels, and behaves (Schneider, 1987, p. 437). Applied to our research, we advance that individual role occupancy profiles in a workplace help

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