# IT Contracting in Ireland:
# Are portfolio or boundaryless careers a suitable career choice for IT professionals?

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April 2012

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The completion of this Masters Level Dissertation would not have been possible without the support and assistance from several dedicated people. I would like to take this opportunity to extend a sincere thank you to my supervisor Mr. Enda Murphy, Senior Lecturer at Dublin Business School. His professional guidance, valued suggestions and encouragement throughout the research process has been greatly appreciated.

Special thanks must also go to the Programme Coordinator Dr. Chris McLaughlin and the Academic Operations Manager, Emma Balfe for their support. Huge thanks are warranted for all the questionnaire respondents who willingly took time out of their busy schedules to participate in my research.

I would like to extend special thanks to my parents for their external belief in me and for being an endless source of encouragement throughout my academic endeavours.

An finally I would like to extend thanks to Olga Halpenny, Mark Mearns, Gary Moran and Joe Freil for their support in the distribution of my questionnaire.

**ABSTRACT**

The demise of the traditional career is widely heralded (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Handy, 1994), and the advancement of traditional career paths towards non-traditional career paths due to more dynamic economic conditions and more transactional / hybrid (versus relational) psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995) suggest that an independent approach to the career is, at times, warranted (Briscoe and Finkelstein, 2009, p 245) and as such has led to emerging viewpoints on careers. Theorists have argued that linear careers are being superseded by more flexible, adaptive career patterns such as boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), protean (Mirvis and Hall, 1996) or portfolio careers (Handy, 1989) which has resulted in a shift from an essentially relational agreement to a much more transactional agreement. This study examines the experiences of 42 highly skilled technical contractors in order to explore their reasons as to why they entered the contracting market and identify how they made sense of their subsequent experiences. The study adopts a quantitative method and uses data from an e-survey in which IT Contractors completed an online questionnaire.

The study reveals that organisations striving to become more competitive and flexible have been advanced alongside organisational restructuring and employment change. As a result, downsizing, delayering, and a reduction of organisational cores of permanent full-time employees in favour of outsourcing and contracting out has reduced the opportunities for ongoing employment and increased opportunities for contracting (Peel and Inkson, 2004; Guest, 2004). The findings of this study also identifies that individualistic and financial motives were also integral for participant's choices to contract. The study examines Contractors experience and identifies the attributes that are required in order to face the new career era. The outcome of this research could support IT Contractors in gaining greater value from their careers from looking at workers experiences, the advantages of their choice and the barriers they faced when taking on this form of career.

# CHAPTER 1

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since mid 2008, we have entered into a period of recession and the Irish economy is currently facing very difficult economic circumstances. Incessant changes in the economic climate have meant that the Irish labour market is deteriorating at an increasingly rapid pace and as such impacted on the way in which employees work. This recession coupled with, advances in technology, increased workforce diversity, evolving organisational structures and increased global competition have changed the fundamental nature of careers (Sullivan, Carden, and Martin, 1998, p. 165).

Meanwhile, organisations are under intense strain to remain competitive. While market demands change ever so faster, organisations have to compete with ever increasing complex markets and are forced to keep pace with these developments and to adapt faster and more efficiently to market opportunities and demands.

Organisations are responding by implementing work structures that support adaptability and flexibility (Peel & Inkson, 2004; Clarke, 2008). Employers are increasingly striving for more labour market flexibility and responses often resulted in recruitment freezes and salary cuts. The movement to create organisational flexibility and responsiveness has also been associated with downsizing, partly through subcontracting those functions no longer considered core (Saunders and Thornhill, 2006, p. 450) and partly through wide-ranging and almost continual processes of restructuring, which aim to reduce workforce size and the number of hierarchical levels (Arnold and Cohen, 2008, p. 4) thus removing the structures which supported the traditional linear career (Mallon, 1999,  p. 358).

With the prevalence of contemporary worldwide pressures, it has been suggested that job security is now all but dead (Burke, 1998, p. 40) and that there is a growing emphasis on flexibility and employability rather than long-term job security, (Clarke, 2008, p. 259). According to Burke (1998, p. 40) historically managers and professionals who performed at an acceptable level and kept out of trouble were guaranteed a job for life; all employees had tenure. Now all that has changed and Rousseau (1995) explains that, due to a number of factors, the psychological contract has been modified and/or broken.

In an environment which no longer readily offers long-term employment (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007, p. 24) new career paths for employees include frequent changes in employer and even in occupations, lateral instead of vertical job moves and interruptions in employment (Reitman & Schneer, 2008, p. 19).

As a result people are encouraged to weaken their ties with organisations and develop psychological contracts built less on the expectations of a relational, long-term commitment and more on transactional, short-term, financial and demarcated exchanges (Rousseau, 1996). Individuals are urged to seek not employment security, but the security of employability (Mallon, 1999; Clarke, 2008). This requires individuals with the type of knowledge, skills and creative potential to enhance their employability by accepting personal responsibility for the development and exercise of skills (Mirvis and Hall, 1996) in order to maintain and enhance their attractiveness in the labour market (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007, p. 24). Essentially, individuals are encouraged to embrace career self-management rather than relying on the organisation for career planning which in turn incorporates management of their employability.

Employers are more likely to be looking for individuals who have the capacity to make an immediate and possibly, short-term, contribution rather than individuals who want long-term development and stable career paths (Clarke, 2008, p. 259). Organisations are increasingly positioning their human resources in work arrangements that create new forms of employment relationships (Cardon, 2003; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Lepak, Takeuchi & Snell, 2003 cited in Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow, and Kessler, 2006) and as such theorists have argued that linear careers are being superseded by more flexible, adaptive career patterns such as boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and portfolio careers (Handy, 1989).

These recent trends have been heavily researched over the years. The literature seeks to understand the reasons behind the transition from organisational employment to more boudaryless forms of employment however past empirical studies have either focused on self-employment (individuals who set up their own company) or contingent employment which according to Peel & Inkson (2004) has been one of the most significant human resource trends in recent times. Contingent employment generally consists of temporary or part-time employment. Feldman (2006) classifies contingent work as employment as:

   ‣ Not specifically associated with one employer or client;
   ‣ Less that 35 hours per week with any one employer; and
   ‣ Limited in duration either by contract or by the duration of the specific task or project.

Much of the research in these areas has taken the firms perspectives, focusing on the demand for Contractors and less on Contractor's experiences and the significance of Contracting as a career. Likewise with studies on contingent employment, the focus is usually on lesser skilled occupations long associated with temporary labour.

The literature seems to overlook one particularly significant career form - highly skilled professional long term Contractors. Unlike self-employed individuals, contractors contract their services to employers rather than run their own business and unlike contingent employment, Contractors may be employed by one or many companies on a long tem contract basis working more than 35 hours per week.

In contrast to traditional organisational employment, an organisation may purchase work from a Contractor who typically enjoys a greater degree of autonomy in how the work is done, and who invoices the organisation on completion or in agreed stages. In this study, the term Contractor is used to refer to workers who are operating as a business in their own right, who are not employing others, and whose services have been retained under contract by an organisation.

It is imperative that these workers are not overlooked in the literature as the use of contractors and / or outsourcing in the IT Industry is a growing trend worldwide, not least in Ireland which is one of the biggest markets for IT professionals (Logan, 2011). According to Logan, "in 2009 around 12 per cent of IT developers were on contract. In 2011 this rose to 29 per cent. In countries such as Australia, more than 70 per cent of IT jobs are on a contract basis" and Ireland could see something similar taking shape here. The popularity of outsourcing as a business practice is reflected in a substantial increase in the size of the contractor industry and a growth in the number of long-term contracted employees (Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow, and Kessler, 2006, p. 4). The IT sector was selected for this study as rapid technological change places high mobility and flexibility requirements on organisations and employees working in the field. There is growing identification that the knowledge and expertise that IT specialist possess is perceived as critical to the success and competitiveness of an organisation (Ituma and Ruth, 2005).

The continuing emergence of new career forms and new way of working (Clarke, 2008) and the challenges IT specialists face in order to come to terms with boundaryless and portfolio career paths have lead to this study.

The study will focus specifically on IT Contractors and identify and explore their choices to become a Contractor. The study will also focus on what a traditional linear career employee should expect if they are faced with contracting and how they negotiate the new psychological contract. Much of the previous literature which is identified in the literature review has concluded that while it is a choice for many to undertake contracting as a career, for others, they are forced into it.

This paper seeks to explore the challenges and benefits of IT Contracting from the perspective of individuals' experiences. While the reasons behind a workers choice to become a contractor are important for this study, the main aim is to examine the pros and cons of contracting through participant's experiences.

Using a quantitative method and data gathered from a questionnaire with 42 IT Contractors, this study focuses on the ways in which careers are affected by being constructed from a contract perspective rather than organisational employment. By comparing this data with the theory of "portfolio careers" or "boundaryless careers", this study hopes to be able to make some tentative judgements as to whether pursuing a career as a contractor status might be a suitable strategy for those seeking such careers and what are the upside and downsides to accepting such careers. The large body of literature on labour

flexibility has much to say on the advantages and disadvantages to business, but little to contribute to the effect on the workers themselves (Geary, 1992) and therefore that is a major objective of this study.

The outcome of this research could support IT Contractors in gaining greater value from their careers, looking at workers experiences, the advantages of their choice and the barriers they faced when taking this form of career.

### 1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the face of globalisation and other competitive pressures, organisations have slimmed down and delayered thus removing the structures which supported the traditional linear career (Mallon, 1999). The traditional linear career, has dominated employment mainly because most organisations structures supported it (Defillippi and Arthur, 1996, p. 116). Traditionally, careers were thought to evolve within the context of one or two firms and were conceptualised to progress in linear career stages. Now however the career can no longer be envisioned as upward progress through an organisational or occupational hierarchy (Mallon 1999) as the tall, multi-layer, functionally organised structures, characteristic of many large companies, have changed (Defillippi & Arthur, 1996, p. 116).

According to Defillippi and Arthur (1996) as organisations change, so too has their workforce. Careers must be recast as a boundaryless or portfolio adventure (e.g. Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Mallon, 1999). According the Arthur and Rousseau (1996), workers outside of the traditional career model, who have "boundaryless careers," are becoming the norm rather than the exception.

For most working individuals their career is a substantial part of their life, yet as factors previously mentioned impact the organisational landscape and organisations respond by becoming more agile, long-term job outlook are the first to be marginalised (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008). The changing career patterns and the erosion of long-tem job security have led to significant changes in the psychological contract.

Psychological contracts as described by Rousseau (1995, p. 9) are a set of expectations held by an individual employee that specifies what the individual and the organisation expect to give and receive from each other throughout the course of their working relationship. The "old" psychological contract implied that hard work, loyalty and commitment to the organisation would be reciprocated with job security, career opportunities, company supported training and internal promotions in an employment relationship characterised by paternalism and mutual trust (Baruch, 2001, cited in Clarke, 2008, p. 261). By contrast, the "new" psychological contract focuses more on transactional elements or "specific, short-term, limited involvement of the parties" (Morrison and Robinson, 1997, p. 229). Employees are only guaranteed a job while the organisation has need of their particular skills and attributes (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

Employers and employees are realising that long-term loyalty and commitment cannot be guaranteed and that jobs are more likely to be for now rather than forever and therefore many researchers have argued that this shift towards more flexible, shorter-term employment contracts has meant that psychological contracts are increasingly transactional rather than relational. Rousseau (2001) as cited by Clarke and Patrickson (2008, p. 123) suggests that over time a physiological contract "takes the form of a mental model, which is relatively stable and endurable". Thus, new psychological contracts tend to be interpreted in the light of past experiences. Individuals continue to expect that the promise made in the past will have a bearing on the current and future relationships with their employer.

Organisations today are increasingly outsourcing their IT tasks to IT Contractors and in doing so have reported on economic incentives that the non traditional arrangements cannot attain, such as their tremendous flexibility. Contractors are easy to hire and easy to dismiss because they have short-term contracts and no expectation of continued employment. Unlike core employees, whom employers can fire only with difficulty, contracted workers can be terminated with minimum hassle, at virtually no cost, and with little fear of legal repercussions (Tarantolo, 2006). Firms therefore can respond quickly to rises and falls in demand, minimising the number of extra workers on their payrolls.

This increase in Contract employment along with the shift from relational to transactional psychological contracts has led to this study.

The research question, **"Are portfolio or boundaryless careers a suitable career choice for IT professionals?"** acts as the basis to generate more detailed research questions or research objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

The research objectives are defined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007, p. 610) as clear, specific statements that identify what the researcher wishes to accomplish as a result of doing the research. The objectives are more generally acceptable to the research community as evidence of the researcher's clear sense of purpose and direction (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill*,* 2007, p. 32). In light of this, the research objectives of the present study aim to:

- Identify the trends specifically around the IT Industry in the contemporary word of work;
- Identify and explore the experiences of highly skilled IT technical contractors in order to broaden our knowledge on the key factors affecting worker choice;
- Identify what attributes Contractors hold for successful contracting;
- Identify the advantages or disadvantages of accepting a contract position;
- Examine the impact of the advantages and disadvantages of contracting on careers and make some tentative judgments as to whether pursuing contractor status might be a suitable strategy for those seeking such careers.

### 1.3. CHAPTER LAYOUT

**Chapter One: Introduction**

Chapter one provides an introduction to the study and a background of the research problem. It covers the approach to the dissertation the objectives of the study, the limitations involved and justifies its purpose and aim.

**Chapter Two: The New World of Work**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the literature so as to identify the various trends and to discuss the new world of work that employees today are faced with. This chapter reviews the advancement of traditional career paths towards non-traditional career paths due to the dynamic economic conditions that organisations face. The focus is consequently on the implications this trend has on individuals' careers and the attributes that are needed to be successful in the adaptive career patterns such as boundaryless and portfolio careers.

**Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader of the research framework used in the current study and to discuss the importance of a well-planned research process using Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2007) "Research Onion" as a template which consists of research philosophy, approach, methodologies, time horizon and data collection and analysis methods applied in a research effort.

**Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Findings**

Chapter four presents and illustrates the findings of the study

**Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion**

This closing chapter provides an in-depth interpretation of the results in order to point out the ways in which these particular findings illuminate and clarify the general issues and concepts raised in the literature review.

# CHAPTER 2

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

There is a growing consensus that we are experiencing an irreversible change in the organisation of our working lives and the structures and cultures of our working environments (Handy, 1994; Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Sullivan, Carden, and Martin, 1998).

In many organisations, the drive to become more competitive, achieve high levels of performance, quality and output, often linked with espoused policies about securing employees' commitment to and integration with business goals (Guest, 1987; Storey, 1992, cited in Saunders and Thornhill, 2006, p. 449) has been advanced alongside organisational restructuring, downsizing and employment change. These have been brought about in part by changes to organisational structures in the direction of providing greater flexibility. In this context, downsizing, delayering, and the reduction of organisational cores of permanent full-time employees in favour of outsourcing and contracting out reduces the opportunities for ongoing employment and increases opportunities for Contracting (Peel & Inkson, 2004; Guest , 2004).

Many researchers (Mirvis & Hall, 1994; Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Mallon, 1999) have highlighted the process of globalisation as having important consequences for the structure of career opportunities and career enactment (Arnold & Cohen, 2008, p. 3). One of the major forces for globalisation is the revolution in information technology. As discussed by Arnold and Cohen (2008, p. 4) these technological developments along with intense competition have encouraged companies to move quickly between geographical areas in search of labour cost efficiencies, higher levels of productivity, and greater market share.

What Handy (1989, 1994) referred to as "discontinuous change" DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) observe as a fundamental shift in the organisational landscape. DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) and Handy (1989, 1994) have acknowledged that the "fixed lattice of job positions" is being eliminated at speed as the result of organisations adapting to an environment that is changing swiftly and continuously. The result is a host of new employees. According to Handy (1994), the future of work is going ina direction that will see organisations buying most of the skills they need on a contract basis to do specific jobs or carry out specific projects. Activities outside the firm's 'core competence' will be contracted to outside specialists. In this way companies will be able to maintain the flexibility they need to cope with a rapidly changing world.

He describes what he suggests is a form of 'boundaryless organisation' where organisations are taking on a "shamrock" configuration whose three leaves comprise core, contract and temporary employees.

The first leaf and the most important for continuity and organisational survival, contains the core staff. These are highly skilled individuals who are expected to make a major commitment to the organisation and derive much of their sense of identity from it. The second leaf is Contractors, often sought outside of the organisation who are specialised people or firms. They serve a variety of needs, including supply, distribution, and routine control functions however their work is not of the essential core technology and competence of the firm and can usually be done better, faster and cheaper by someone else in a smaller, more specialised, and autonomous position. The third leaf is the contingent labour force. These are part-time and temporary workers who provide support to the core workforce of the firm.

According to Mirvis & Hall (1994, p. 368) the logic behind three leaves is that they enable and organisation to get a richer picture of its environment and flexibly respond to opportunities and threats - without a lot of overhead and bureaucracy. Defillippi and Arthur (1994) suggest that there will be more opportunities for people to develop entrepreneurial competencies formerly prohibited within more vertically integrated settings.

Although this shift from organisational to newer forms of employment is widely heralded, some writers debate the extent to which careers and employment patterns really have changed, suggesting that there is still substantial evidence for the existence of traditional, organisationally bounded careers (Ackah and Heaton, 2004; Collin, 1998; Guest and McKenzie-Davey, 1996 as cited in Clarke, 2008, p. 261).

Vos, Dewettinck and Buyens (2008, p. 157), argue that in many organisations vertical career paths are the only formal career structure that exist and in many company cultures moving up the (managerial, technical or professional) ladder is still valued. Briscoe & Finkleston (2009) believe that additional empirical data on the new careers, including portfolio and boundaryless perspectives, is needed to help sort out fact from fiction.

Many researchers have argued that the complete restructuring of the traditional career is far exaggerated however they do agree that careers are undergoing certain "shifts and transitions" (Baruch, 2006, cited in Clarke, 2008, p. 261). The rise in outsourcing according to Cary L, 2005 is compelling workers in outsourced activities to be more entrepreneurial and market oriented in their definition of their work roles and career opportunities. Such a re-orientation implies a shift toward more entrepreneurial, externalised work identities, skills and networks. The implications for individuals are that they are increasingly being called upon to become more flexible and adaptable in obtaining the necessary skills and competencies in order to cope with major organisational changes. According to (Greenhaus ela al 2005:5) the changes have exciting opportunities and new career paths for those individuals that have suitable combinations of skills, while individuals that are less adaptable have frequently found themselves obsolete.

The increased creation by organisations of contracts and projects at the expense of permanent jobs has been paralleled by a new conventional wisdom that people can no longer expect the organisation to look after their careers, but they must take responsibility for their own careers (Peel & Inkson, 2OO4). This according to many commentators could have significant implications for the kinds of careers available within organisations and for individual career sense making and enactment, in particular, commentators point to increasing insecurity and uncertainty (Arnold, 2001; Cohen & El-Sawad, 2006; Sennett, 1998), and a growing bifurcation in the labour market between those in a position to reap the benefits of the new, flexible career environment and those less able to gain a foothold (Noon & Blyton, 2002; Richardson, 2000).

In reality the "new economy", includes increased global competition and uncertainty, rapid technological advances, and pressures for lower costs and higher productivity. These pressures have forced many organisations to change their structures, processes, and human resource practices in significant ways (Snow and Miles, 1996). It is the opinion of some career researchers that the traditional organisational career is on it's way to becoming a thing of the past (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006).

More importantly, contemporary careers are seen as no longer "bounded" to single organisations; instead they have started to span boundaries of multiple organisations moving from company to company (Mirvis and Hall, 1994). In order to reflect these increasingly common new patterns of employment relationships, a number of researchers have offered the concept of the boundaryless career as an alternative perspective to the traditional view of careers (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

## 2.2.  CONTEMPORARY CAREER MODELS – THE NEW CAREER ERA

Throughout the literature it is evident that traditionally, career structures in organisations focused on advancing people on vertical ladders, in line with the traditional perception that a successful career involves successive linear movement up the organisational career ladder, gaining along the way additional increments in formal authority, prestige and rewards (Garavan and Coolahan, 1996, cited in Vos, Dewettinck and Buyens 2008, p. 159).

The literature implies that stability of structure and clarity of career ladders implied clear career paths, which were mostly linear and upward focused. An individual's commitment to an organisation was enhanced by the promise of a secure career ascending the organisation's hierarchy (Peel & Inkson, 2004, p. 543) however in recent years many organisational restructuring leading to redundancy and layoffs has resulted in a lack of trust in and commitment to employing organisations. Many studies have focused on employee commitment to organisations and one in particular which is quite recent is from Clinton, Bernhard-Oettel, Rigotti and De Jong, 2011. Their study recognised that workers who were confident that there will be prolonged employment opportunities reported significantly improved commitment to the employing organisation however those who lacked trust in job security were less committed.

Lifetime employment with a single employer as a career pattern and the traditional idea around employment is less likely to be found in today's organisations (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994) because contemporary careers are increasingly pursued in economic and organisational settings that are significantly different from those in the last two decades. As a result, notions of cradle-to-grave job security have been shattered along with the psychological contract binding people to companies (Rousseau, 1990, as cited by Mirvis and Hall 1994). According to Vos, Dewettinck, and Buyens (2008), in flattening organisations, many intermediate layers of management have been eliminated and more control is placed in the hands of frontline workers. Changing career patterns and the erosion of job security have led to a growing emphasis on employability as a basis for career and employment success (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008, p. 121).

Employability is often defined in terms of having the skills and abilities necessary for an individual to find employment (Clarke, 2008, p.265), remain in employment or obtain new employment as, and when, required (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007).  In essence, employability refers to both current employment status and the potential to find alternative employment should the need arise and the responsibility of this lies solely on the individual.

These developments lead to a violation of the implicit psychological career contract between the employer and employee. The psychological contract is the set of expectations held by the individual employee that specifies what the individual and the organisation expect to give and receive from each other in the course of the their working relationship. The "old" psychological contract implied that hard work, loyalty and commitment to the organisation would be reciprocated with job security, career opportunities, company

supported training and internal promotions in an employment relationship characterised by paternalism and mutual trust (Baruch, 2001, cited in Clarke, 2008, p. 261). By contrast, the "new" psychological contract focuses more on transactional elements or "specific, short-term, limited involvement of the parties" (Morrison and Robinson, 1997, p. 229, cited in Clarke, 2008, p. 261).

As explain by Nicholson (1995) cited in Clarke & Patrickson (2008) the psychological contract operates over and above the formal contract of employment and refers to "the unspoken promise, not present in the small print of the employment contract of what the employer gives, and what the employees give in return".

Researchers have identified two forms of the contract, relational and transactional. Relational is based on long term mutual commitment and over time any temporary imbalances in incentives or contributions would even themselves out. In contrast, transactional is based on more short-term exchange of benefits and services.

Relational is suitable more for the traditional linear employment with job security however, as employees are no longer offered job security and upward progression in exchange for commitment and there has been a noticeable shift towards more flexible, shorter-term employment contracts which has meant that psychological contracts are increasingly transactional rather than relational and loyalty is no longer a guarantee of ongoing employment. Individuals are thus expected to take primary responsibility for their own employability rather than relying on the organisation to direct and maintain their careers. Employers and employees are realising that long-term loyalty and commitment cannot be guaranteed and that employment and having a career are now seen less in terms of employment security within a single organisation and more in terms of individual employability across relevant labour markets. Essentially jobs are more likely to be for now rather than forever (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008, p. 123).

These developments have led researchers to the conclusion that people are encouraged to weaken their ties with organisations and develop psychological contracts built less on the expectations of a relational, long-term commitment and more on transactional, short-term, financial and demarcated exchanges (Rousseau, 1996). The fundamental issue is however that, psychological contracts do not change quickly. Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998, p. 680) suggest that over time a psychological contract takes the form of a mental model or schemas of the employment relationship, which is relatively stable and endurable. Thus, new psychological contracts tend to be interpreted in the light of past experience. Individuals continue to expect that the promises made in the past will have a bearing on current and future relationships with their employer.

For this reason the shift from employment security to employability involves a major shift in the employment relationship (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008) and in the psychological contract. Mallon (1999) suggests that careers must be recast as a boundaryless, protean, portfolio adventure. In contrast to the traditional career, under the most optimistic scenarios, people taking on this boundaryless, protean, portfolio adventure are expected to move seamlessly across levels and functions, through different kinds

of jobs, and even from company to company Mirvis and Hall (1994), and involve primarily horizontal mobility. Without the long-term job security of the traditional career employees today do not expect to keep the "one-company career", which was common during the last few decades (Rousseau & Arthur, 1996).

Essentially the "old" world of work was characterised by job security and vertical career progression, whereas the "new" world of work is characterised by the concept of employability. In this view the individual is the architect of their own future. This trend has shown that company loyalty is weakening, and employees are increasingly forced to take on non-traditional forms of employment, changing companies for better career opportunities.

However there are those that have challenged this view. Inkson (2006) cited in Briscoe & Hall, (2009) has disputed the metaphors of the protean and boundaryless careers in particular suggesting that they are not to be taken too literally. It has been suggested that individuals may not be entirely forced in this direction due to the economic situation but it is a conscious decision. Although is more strongly linked to self-employment studies rather then contracting, many researchers have often referred to the push / pull dichotomy (Mallon, 1999). Much of the literature thus far has been keen to distinguish the push factors, generally interpreted as responses to economic and labour market factors such as unemployment, redundancy and the perceived increasing insecurity of organisational positions (Granger, Stanworth and Stanworth, 1995) however studies such as that from Mallon (1999) also identifies that there is evidence that there is also the intrinsic pull of the potential benefits some of which many studies (Peel and Inkson, 2004; Mallon, 1999; Fenwick, 2006) have identified as higher earnings, greater autonomy, career development (Mallon, 1999),  independence, and flexibility (Mallon and Cohen, 2001).

In short, the decision to become a contractor seems to reflect a mix of structural and economic factors as well as a set of motives rooted in a professional ideology of work (Kunda, Barley, and Evans, 2002, p. 247). The choice that workers make will be constrained by an array of forces both external to and within the individuals (Peel and Boxall, 2005).

The potential benefits some of which many studies (Peel and Inkson, 2004; Mallon 1999; Fenwick, 2006) have identified as higher earnings, greater autonomy, career development,  independence, flexibility (Mallon and Cohen, 2001), and the enjoyment of a more holistic lifestyle than employees who are trapped in the webs of bureaucracy (Kunda, Barley, and Evans, 2002).

Desire for greater autonomy over one's working life is a factor that can lead workers to prefer contracting to employment. One of the most obvious benefits of certain contracting arrangements is the increased earning potential. In their study of highly skilled contractors' decisions to contract, Kunda, Barley, and Evans (2002) found that money was the most important theme in terms of the anticipated rewards of contracting.

In an extensive research study on career self-management, King (2004) as cited by Fernandez & Enache (2008) argued that taking responsibility for managing one's career development can deliver positive psychological outcomes including career and life satisfaction, enhanced self efficacy and individual well-being, if desired career outcomes are achieved.

While the organisation is the conduit for a number of material benefits, not least regular income but also a sense of belonging and purpose, in a study by Mallon (1999) regarding managers that chose contracting, there was a prevailing discourse about individualism, choice and autonomy. Mallon (1999) identified that those who sought self managed career such as contracting experienced a sense of value and personal integrity, a sense of development.

However in contrast to one of the main benefits, a study carried out by Peel and Inkson (2004) identified that while contracting provided a pathway for higher earnings, the insecurity of contract status, the variability of earnings and the time spent on non-revenue generating tasks, such as administration, limited the reality of a high income career. In addition Peel and Boxall (2005, p. 1681) identify that contracting relationships are less stable and predictable, as there is generally no commitment to a long-term attachment between the firm and the individual therefore many contractual relationships are also less predictable in terms of time and place. Contractors may not be sure exactly when and where their services will be required, making long term planning difficult, something that may impact negatively on other aspects of their lives.

In a study by Kunda, Barley, and Evans (2002) a mixture of positive and negative factors encouraging a decision to contract and the individuals that they encountered found contracting to be more lucrative than permanent employment, and a sizable minority saw it as more secure.

Kunda, Barley, and Evans (2002) conclude however that this is not to say that the economic pressures of today are irrelevant for highly skilled contractors. Although much of the research identifies certain pull factors the conclusion is usually that the push factors seem to more prevalent in the reasons for choosing contracting. This is evident in a study carried out by Mallon (1998). For the majority of individuals in her study, it was push from the organisation that sparked the decision to leave and try another way of working. Similarly, a study carried out by Stanworth and Stanworth (1995) cited in Peel and Boxall (2005, p. 1682) recognised that the forces that lead to labour-use patterns found that 'unemployment push' exerted a stronger influence than the pull factors.

This would suggest that although it is a choice for some, for many it is not. In addition to the evident push factors on closer inspection of the literature the benefits such as independence, security, income, and expertise had their dark side: a sense of estrangement and insecurity, the burden of being financially responsible for oneself, and, most important, the realisation that expertise was a commodity whose value was determined by market dynamics (Kunda, Barley, and Evans, 2002, p. 256).

In their study Kunda, Barley, and Evans (2002) argue that while contracting frees the individual from the sometimes cloying constraints such as organisational politics the price is often paid in terms of social isolation and the loss of career traction.

In much of the previous literature and nicely summed up by Duberley, Mallon and Cohen (2006), a role change to non traditional forms of employment such as Boundaryless and portfolio working could be regarded as desirable or not; as career development and the chance to exercise a wide range of skills over a larger canvass or as being thrown on a scrap heap and forced to take what work one can (Hirsch & Stanley, 1996, cited in Duberley, Mallon and Cohen, 2006).

In conclusion, Peel and Boaxll (2005) argue that contracting has the potential to offer many benefits to the worker as well as the firm however while there may be a variety of factors that make contracting relatively more or less attractive, the choice that workers make will be constrained by an array of forces both external to and within the individual.

## 2.3. THE PORTFOLIO CAREER / THE BOUNDARYLESS CAREER

The literature thus far has recognised that the emergent pace of economic change has resulted in a shift from "bounded" careers that are characterised by pre-ordained and linear development paths within an organisational hierarchy to more "boundaryless" or "portfolio" careers. This transition to portfolio work (and other more "boundaryless" forms of career) has been widely heralded as a contemporary career transition (Handy, 1994) and has proved to be a remarkably popular concept (Pringle and Mallon, 2003)

Boundaryless careers are broadly described as 'the opposite of organisational careers". The traditional careers being conceived to unfold in a single employment setting (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). It is essentially a term developed to distinguish such careers from the 'bounded' or organisational career.

According to Arthur and Rousseau (1996) the general meaning of boundaryless careers involves several specific meanings and go on to identifying six different but related meanings: careers that move across organisations and employers; Careers that draw validity and marketability from outside the present employing organisation; Careers that are sustained and supported by external networks; Careers that challenge traditional assumptions or where traditional organisational career boundaries have been broken; Careers in which individuals reject opportunities for advancement in favour of personal or family reasons and finally careers where an individual perceives a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints.

The meanings all have in common the motion of independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organisational career arrangements and the focus is on the weakening of people's ties with organisations (Arnold & Cohen, 2008).

The boundaryless career model Is touted as especially relevant to those (such as IT contractors) who theoretically operate outside the constraints of organisations, accumulate diverse competencies through diverse assignments, and sell their cumulative skills on an open market (Peel & Inkson, 2004).

Currie, Tempest and Starkey (2006, p. 755) advise that the boundaryless career has different levels of impact on employees, with "some losers and some winners'. According to some researchers the actual pursuit of a boundaryless career could pose new challenges to individuals. Uncertainty and a diminished sense of job security resulting from constant boundary crossing may be highly stressful especially for individuals who are not equipped with skills, competencies, and the mindset to cope with these challenges (Arthur, Inkson, and Pringle, 1999).

On the positive side, it has been assumed that a boundaryless career gives individuals higher earnings, greater autonomy, career development, independence, flexibility (Mallon and Cohen, 2001), and the enjoyment of a more holistic lifestyle than employees who are trapped in the webs of bureaucracy (Kunda, Barley, and Evans, 2002). Intensive boundary crossings may enhance individuals' perceived career

success by providing more opportunities for developing new skills, finding more interesting and challenging jobs, and aligning career choices with individual values (Ellig & Thatchenkery, 1996, citied in Colakoglu, 2005).

On the negative side, however, the presence of a relatively discontinuous, personal career path with periodic career transitions coupled with the lack of external guides may be very stressful for individuals (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Studies have shown that many workers are pushed into boundaryless careers by involuntary job loss, sometimes suffering long periods of unemployment and often finding only lower paying jobs (Mallon, 1998). If a person finds themselves in this situation the resultant career insecurity and uncertainty may decrease individuals' chances to derive full benefit from the flexibility and freedom of their boundaryless careers (Arthur Rousseau, 1996; Arthur, Inkson, and Pringle, 1999; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). As identified by Peel & Inkson (2004) an employee may never have thought about being in any other non-traditional form of employment however if they are faced with being let go and their position is being put out to contract, they are left with a stark choice - become a contractor or try to seek full-time employment  elsewhere. In this sense Fenwick (2006, p. 68) explains that people whose jobs are declared redundant are forced to compete with others for each piece of work, sometimes from their former employers, adapting to the organisation's unpredictable needs without income protection or benefits.

For these individuals, the boundaryless career is not an opportunity, but is the occasion for scrambling to keep a bad situation from getting worse and to salvage something from prior career investments (Mallon, 1998). Such discourse is reflected in the associated notions of portfolio careers (Handy, 1994) and the negotiation of our own individual psychological contract (Heniot and Pemberton, 1996, cited in Pringle & Mallon, 2003, p .842).

In portfolio work, individuals contract their skills and knowledge and abilities to a number of employers on a range of employment and contractual arrangements. Thus, the individual takes charge of their career and seeks to develop a range of sellable skills to maintain employability (Duberly, Mallon and Cohen, 2004). The individual becomes responsible for their own skills development, in order to maintain their employability on the labour market. As discussed earlier this brings with it the burden of being financially responsible for oneself, and, most important, the realisation that expertise is commodity whose value is determined by market dynamics (Kunda, Barley, and Evans, 2002, p. 256). The concern becomes apparent when the issue is raised as to whether people make the choice to contract out of some sort of economic necessity – following redundancy for example, pull factors of are they being drawn in by the intrinsic pull of the potential benefits of self employment.

To some commentators, portfolio careers offer freedom and choice to individuals, an opportunity to engage meaningful, creative activity and gain control over their work (Arthur and Rousseau, 2000). To others, portfolio work is just another form of flexible work undermining worker collectivises protecting workers' salaries, benefits, and decent work conditions (Fenwick, 2003).

Portfolio careers have been studied most often in terms of the personal transitions involved (Cohen and Mallon, 1999; Gold and Fraser, 2002; Sullivan, 1999) and workers career identity. Gold and Fraser (2002) for example examined portfolio workers' strategies for successful transition and discussed how individuals construct non-organisationally sustained accounts of their working lives.

However many researchers identify that a portfolio career is not necessarily a voluntary choice, but may be the only employment alternative for the "downsized" who must compete with one another for the opportunity to continue working at lower rates of pay (Fenwick, 2006, p. 67). The loss of identification with one's organisation, coupled with a loss of long-held status, responsibility, and monetary rewards as individuals move from one organisation to another may negatively affect their sense of career success (Minus & Hall, 1996) and, in turn their well-being. In summary, the potentially stressful consequences of boundaryless careers may prove to be costly for individual happiness.

The literature in general would suggest two contradicting perspectives when taking on a contracting career.  One is a "liberation" perspective that contracting provides flexibility and the freedom from constrictive bureaucratic structures and the other is the perspective that contracting is something people are forced into, unwillingly shunted from their jobs, and encouraged to view their resulting isolation as an empowering opportunity for which they must take responsibility.

This is evident is a Fenwick's (2006) study. The study argues that portfolio careers simultaneously embed both liberating and exploitative at dimensions for workers, which are at least partly related to their own conflicting desires for both contingency and stability.

Briscoe and Hall suggest that "a strong sense of identity and values as well as adaptability and boundarylessness are needed to successfully navigate the course of one's life" (Briscoe & Hall, 2006 cited in Arnold and Cohen, 2008, p. 15).

The question raised is weather this suggests that individuals without a sense of boundarylessness will invariably be unsuccessful in this journey?

There is also debate regarding the extent to which individuals prefer independence to employment security (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008), and the new psychological contract rather than the old, more secure psychological contract (Baruch, 2006, cited in Clarke, 2008).  Furthermore some studies have reported that autonomy, which is heralded as a benefit of contracting is achieved regardless of whether they work as a Contractor or as a permanent employee.

Prottas (2008) studies for example, do not support the view that the self employed benefit more from autonomy than their employee counterparts.

In summary many researchers such as Saunders and Thornhill (2006) and Handy (1989, 1994) are enthusiastic about a future in which increasing numbers of employees are peripheral to organisations, choosing to have a portfolio of careers, resulting in benefits such as a better work-life balance, greater control and variety.

Others however subsequently predicted that the decline of traditional careers will lead a complexity of feelings towards, and reactions resulting from, becoming a contractor. The attractions associated with obtaining greater freedom have been associated with greater insecurity, potentially lower control over hours of work and working patterns, and a continuing need to find new work. Any sense of greater independence and control might potentially be undermined by a growing dependence on a small number of clients to supply work, often including the previous employing organisation (Saunders and Thornhill, 2006).

It has been commonly suggested that because lifetime employment is being replaced by the goal of employability, individuals need to acquire a different set of competencies and a mindset to successfully navigate their boundaryless careers.

### 2.4. THE PROTEAN MINDSET

The protean mindset (Hall, 1976) which has dominated much of the literature is a self-directed orientation to the career that implies independence from external career influences. Essentially the protean concept can be described as a process which the person, not the organisation, is managing. It consists of all the individual's varied experiences in education, training, work in several organisations, changes in occupational field, etc. The protean career is not what happens to the individual in any one organisation (Hall. 1976, p. 201).

Behind the traditional organisational career were a set of assumptions (e.g., upward progress through an organisational or occupational hierarchy and seniority and maturity were valued and respected qualities). The shift to the more boundarlyless and portfolio careers means decoupling the concept of career from a connection to any one organisation and even from its exclusive association with lifelong paid employment (Mirvis and Hall, 1995, p. 271). Thus, if the old contract was with the organisation, in the protean concept the contract is with the self and one's work (Mirvis and Hall, 1994).

According to Peel & Inkson (2004), the protean concept combines individual qualities of strong sense of identity and high adaptability to fit new situations. In such a career, the individual, not the organisation, is in charge, (Hall, 2004, p. 4) in an effort to pursue psychological success in one's work (Hall, 1976; Mirvis & Hall, I994, 1996). The protean career is therefore well suited to contemporary career concerns. With regards to the contracting out of work, this often enables people to keep an occupational or even organisational identity, while adapting substantially in the way they organise their work and careers (Peel & Inkson, 2004).

Individuals that hold the protean attitude use their own values instead of organisations values to guide their careers. They are self-directed and manage their own experiences in education, training, employment and family life (Hall, 2004) in essence trying to justify the notion of psychological success (Mirvis & Hall, 1994, p.369). Those who are unable to internalise the protean career attitude are more dependant on external direction and assistance from an organisation rather then embracing the situation and taking a more proactive and independent stance (Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth, 2006, p. 31).

Those who possess the protean mindset are in a much stronger position to enhance their employability which is essential in the current environment. In order to succeed in the new employment scene, workers need to take control of their own career and show self directedness and entrepreneurship. Individuals who are constantly investing in their career capital (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999) and acquiring a protean approach to their careers are believed to enhance their employability and in turn, offset the negative consequences associated with the new career environment such as career insecurity (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). In other words, a boundaryless career can provide full benefits only to individuals who are able to acquire desirable competencies, skills, and a protean mindset (Colakoglu, 2005).

**2.5. SURVIVAL IN THE NEW CAREER ERA**

The boundaryless career could be a bane or boon to people's experience of psychological success. In many respects, the boundaryless career will give people the freedom and flexibility to more fully engage in life's work and find, where desired, greater balance in their lives. It will, however, be incumbent on individuals to integrate these diverse work and life experiences into their larger sense of self (Mirvis and Hall, 1994)

Formerly, a worker's skill set was developed within, by, and for a particular firm. Today however, workers moving across organisational and occupational boundaries are urged to seek not employment security, but the security of employability (Mallon, 1999; Marilyn Clarke 2008). This requires individuals with the type of knowledge, skills and creative potential to enhance their employability by accepting personal responsibility for the development and exercise of skills (Mirvis and Hall, 1996) in order to maintain and enhance their attractiveness in the labour market (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 24).

Essentially, individuals are encouraged to embrace career self-management rather than relying on the organisation for career planning which in turn incorporates management of their employability. The traditional concept of educating for a particular job or profession has been superseded by the concept of life-long learning. According to Clarke (2008) life-long learning recognises that all aspects of life and work have the potential to contribute to ongoing skill and knowledge acquisition and maintenance provided the individual has a learning attitude towards life.

In fact, a willingness and capacity to continually adapt to unexpected changes and to continually learn has become critical in the dynamic environments in which many employees now find themselves. Elemental to obtaining meaningful work is an understanding of what is personally meaningful.

These are but a few of the challenges to redefining psychological success that people will encounter as they embark on a boundaryless career. Many of the factors that have supported and reinforced feelings of psychological success, including job security, increasing levels of income, and the status that derives from one's position and employer (Mirvis and Hall, 1996). The new boundaryless career permits individuals to obtain more fulfilling work. Individuals, however as Sullivan (1999) points out, must be willing to take risks and change occupations, firms, or seek out new types of employment, including self-employment, to find more meaningful work.

Although a set of normative assumptions about what careers will be like and what kind of people can best navigate them has already emerged some warn that individuals will not give up lightly the aspirations and the socially embedded notions of success embodied in the traditional career (Pahl, 1995; Hutton, 1995, cited in mallon, 1999, p. 359). Such discussion is not dominant however.

Some researchers (Lewicki, 1981; Mirvis and Marks, 1992 as cited by Mirvis & Hall, 1994) argue that many people have resisted letting go of the seeming ideal lifetime work with one employer as well as the stability offered by predictable career paths. As a consequence, when moved laterally, laid off, or forced to retire early, they experience their loss of status or employment relational terms: they were 'seduced' by their companies and then 'betrayed, 'jilted' and 'abandoned' (Mirvis & Hall, 1994).

It would seem that those who desire freedom and flexibility, or those who have never experienced the "old" psychological contract, with its promise of security and organisational career management, are more likely to accept that responsibility for career and employability primarily rests with the individual. However, despite arguments to the contrary, there is still only limited evidence that employees in general have recognised and embraced a different and more independent view of career management (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008).

Those who have experienced the "old" psychological contract need to understand what is personally meaningful and according to Sullivan (1999) the following three major recommendations are suggested for managing a boundaryless career which were identified as: developing transferable skills, obtaining meaningful work, and managing one's own career.

## 2.6. SUMMARY OF LIT REVIEW

According to much contemporary theory and comment, career can no longer be envisioned as upward progress through an organisational or occupational hierarchy. The literature reviewed identified that these changes in the contemporary workplace have led to a progressive change away from traditional career models to new career pathways and the portfolio, boudaryless and protean career models were critically disused along with the challenges that individuals face when entering the world of work.

While it would appear less than fashionable, a balanced examination of "new careers" would account for the complexity of a new world of work that can advantage some groups of workers while the prospects for others are less promising (Peel & Inkson, 2004).

This study aims at look at past experiences of IT contractors to determining why for some it is beneficial but for other it is not.

# CHAPTER 3

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *3.1. INTRODUCTION*

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader of the research framework used in the current study and to discuss the importance of a well-planned research process using Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2007) "Research Onion" as a template which consists of research philosophy, approach, methodologies, time horizon and data collection and analysis methods applied in a research effort. Figure 1 illustrates the different layers and approaches that are available and must be consistently employed when conducting research.

There are many factors to be considered when choosing an appropriate research methodology; the topic to be researched and the specific research question are the primary drivers in the choice of methodology and therefore the starting point in choosing a research methodology for this study was to reiterate and reflect on the research question "IT Contracting in Ireland: Are portfolio or boundaryless careers a suitable career choice for IT professionals?" The purpose of this study is to explore the unique rewards and challenges of contracting through the experiences of IT Contractors in Ireland who contract their services to various organisations and clients in a variety of employment relationships, in what may be described as portfolio work.

The choice of research question, according to (Bryman and Bell, 2003) is the most important decision when it comes to undertaking research. Saunders, Lewis and Thornton (2007) agree with this train of thought stating that the initial stage of a research study should start with the formulating and clarifying of the research question in order to turn a research idea into a feasible research study, with obtainable research objectives. They argue that a poorly formulated research question will lead to poor research and a well approached research question will assist in the research process, as it will aid with the appropriate choice of research strategy, data collection and analysing techniques.

As berg (1998) suggests, most research starts with an idea. I came into this research because of my own experiences of working with contract professionals. My career experience included working within the human resources department of an IT Outsourcing Firm that has an increasing number of IT Contractors. Through my daily interactions with professional contractors and workers that are new to contracting I became intrigued by their desire to seek out contracting as a career option and to find out what the advantages and disadvantages to such a career were. The research goal was to develop an understanding of what was relevant to the contracting professional and how they experienced their contracting life.
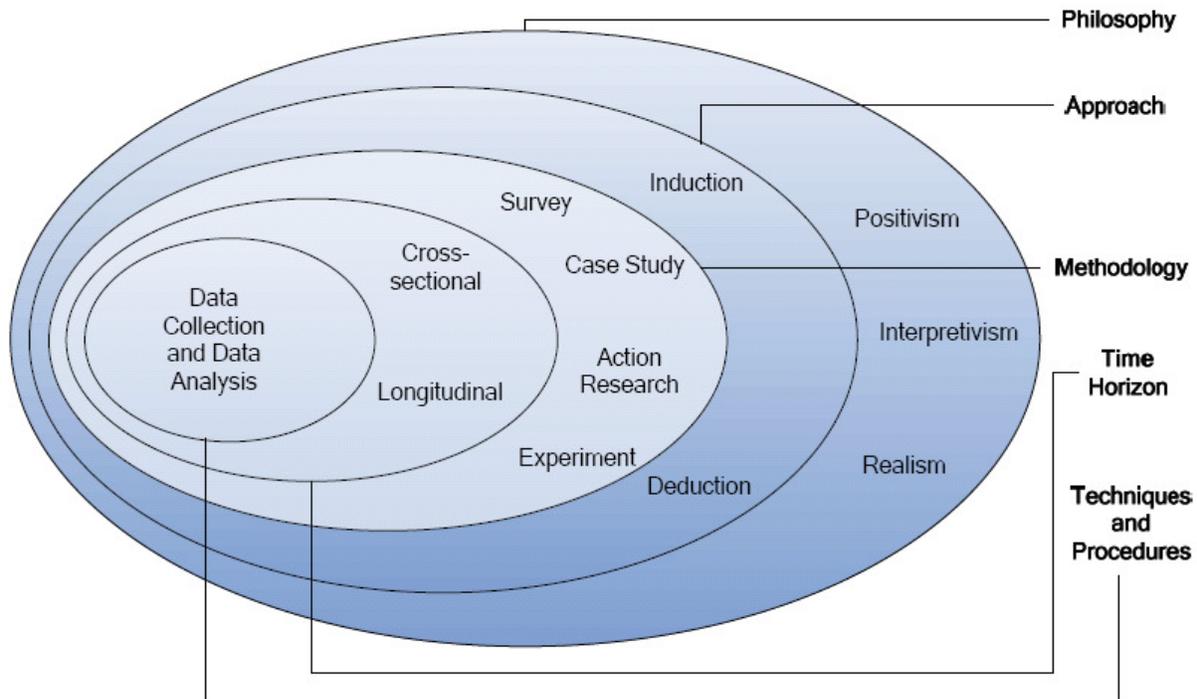
FIGURE 1: RESEARCH ONION
The research onion (Source: Saunders et al, 2007, p.102)

### 3.2. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

This section provides a basis to judge the philosophical base of the study in question. The definition of philosophy in a research context relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. Therefore it is a process of developing knowledge, in a particular area, in a specific way (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). The research philosophy can be categorised under three ways of thinking named as positivism, interpretive and realism (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007).

Positivism argues that the social world exists externally to the researcher, based on concept of neutrality and objectivity which the researcher can remain separate from and not affect the research field. It aims at validating the truth of a hypothesis that its properties can be measured directly through observation and is evaluated empirically by quantitative methods i.e. surveys and experiments and statistical analysis (Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle, and Locke, 2008).

Interpretivism is more applicable to research of social issues as it enables the researcher to focus on the exclusive matter of an organisation and examine the complexities that often surround corporations.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), interpretivism is a research philosophy that requires the researcher to seek to understand the subjective reality and meaning of the participants involved.

And finally realism traditionally presumes a scientific approach regarding to knowledge development which is similar to positivism tradition (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007). The fundamental nature of realism is that what the senses show us is authenticity, is true that objects exists independent of people's mind.

Having studied the different philosophical approaches and considered the nature of the current research, it was decided an overall view of a respondent's attitude and perception was required in order to get a better understanding of IT Contractors experiences. This type of research required the participation of a population sample, which in turn would create numerical and statistical data and information, which needed to be quantifiably analysed. When all these factors were taken into consideration positivism was decided upon as the most appropriate philosophical approach to answer the research question and meet the objectives of the current research.

### 3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH

In deciding which research to adopt, it is essential to select one which will yield the best possible analysis of the experiences of Contractors in the IT Industry. Generally, there are two main research approaches that can be applied: the 'inductive' and 'deductive'.

In relation to the inductive approach, this approach collects data first and theory second, and is preferred when the research question is a what-question. Plans are made for data collection after which the data is analysed to see any patterns that suggest a relationship between the variables. Through this data analysis it may be possible to construct generalisations, relationships and even theories however the inductive approach does not set out to corroborate or falsify a theory (Gray, 2009). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) successfully argued that the inductive approach would be particularly concerned with the study of a small sample of people as opposed to larger numbers with a deductive approach. Through induction, the researcher moves towards discovering a binding principle, taking care not to jump to hasty inferences or conclusions on the basis of the data (Gray, 2009).

Taking the opposite starting point, the deductive strategy demands that the researcher uses theory to form a limited number of hypotheses, which are finally tested through the analysis of data to answer "why"-questions. These hypotheses present an assertion about two or more concepts that attempts to explain the relationship between them. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) state 'that in order to produce hypotheses within the research question a deductive approach must be taken'.

Deduction begins with a universal view of a situation and works back to the particulars; in contrast, induction moves from fragmentary details to a connected view of a situation (Gray, 2009).

The aim of this study is to Identify the trends specifically around the IT Industry in the contemporary world of work and explore the experiences of highly skilled technical contractors in order to broaden our knowledge on the key factors affecting worker choice and to identify the attributes contractors hold for successfully navigating such a career. In order to do this a small sample of contractors will be subjected to quantitative research and the researcher will think about research that has already been conducted and develop an idea about extending or adding to that theoretical foundation.

By considering the above facts and keeping in mind the research question and objectives, the result of this study would be gathered through data collection after which the data will be analysed to see any patterns that construct generalisations, relationships and even theories. Thus, this particular research adopts the deductive approach.

### 3.4. RESEARCH STRATEGY

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) assert that the main research strategies of most intellectual interests to researchers are:

- Experiments;
- Surveys;
- Case Studies;
- Grounded Theory;
- Ethnography;
- Action Research.

There are two types of **experiments** that can be conducted, laboratory experiments and field experiments. Laboratory experiments permit the researcher to identify precise relationships between a small number variables that are studied intensively via a designed laboratory situation whereas field experiments extend laboratory experiments into real organisations and their real life situations, thereby achieving greater realism and diminishing the extent to which situations can be criticised as contrived. In practice it is difficult to identify organisations that are prepared to be experimented on and still more difficult to achieve sufficient control make replication viable. Experimental research according to Gray (2009), places an emphasis on reproducing the techniques of the laboratory experiment with highly structured methods and accurate quantitative measurement outcomes.

**Surveys** enable the researcher to obtain data about practices, situations or views at one point in time through questionnaires or interviews. Quantitative analytical techniques are then used to draw inferences from this data regarding existing relationships. A key weakness area is that there are several sources of bias such as the possibly self-selecting nature of respondents, the point in time when the survey is conducted and in the researcher him/herself through the design of the survey itself. In addition, survey structures may hinder the ability of respondents to provide illuminating information in a way that they would like.

As explained by Gray (2009) like the truly experimental approach, analytic surveys emphasise:
- A deductive approach.
- The identification of the research population.
- The drawing of a representative sample from the population.
- Control of variables.
- The generation of both qualitative and quantitative data.
- Generalisability of results.

Since this research takes the philosophical stance of positivism, the use of experiments and surveys are justifiable.

**Case studies** involve an attempt to describe relationships that exist in reality, very often in a single organisation. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), Case studies can be considered weak as they are typically restricted to single organisation and it is difficult to generalise findings since it is hard to find similar cases with similar data that can be analysed in a statistically meaningful way.

**Grounded theory** is conceived as the process of discovering theory data that has been systematically gathered and analysed. In grounded theory, data collection starts without the formation of an initial theoretical framework. Theory is developed from data gathered inductively by a series of observations. These data then lead to the generation of predictions which are tested in further observations that may confirm, or otherwise, the predictions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Thus, theory is generated by the observations rather than being decided before the study as in the positivist, deductive research.

**Ethnography** is an approach in which the researcher uses socially acquired and shared knowledge to understand the observed patterns of human activity. The main method of collecting data is by participant observation, where the researcher becomes a full working member of the group being studied. Further, ethnography research takes a considerable time period (Burns, 2000) often many months, in a location such as a factory, and involves direct participation in the activities of that particular workplace.

Using **Action research**, the researcher will be a part of the environment under study and the aim is to solve two goals, to solve practical problems and to contribute, influence or change the attitudes and behaviours of the participants. Action research is mainly concerned with the management of change and involves close collaboration of practitioners and researchers and is a form of applied research where the researcher attempts to develop results or a solution that adds practical value to the people with whom the research is working. There must be a mutually acceptable ethical framework within which action research is used (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002). While the emphasis is on seeking information on the attitudes and perspectives of practitioners in the field, the way in which data are collected may involve both quantitative and qualitative methods. The main action research medium, however, is the case study, or multiple case studies. In some research designs, both an experimental and a control case study may be used, so emulating the experimental approach (Gray, 2009).

The research question, "Are portfolio or boundaryless careers a suitable career choice for IT professionals?" attempts to obtain data about practices, situations or views at one point in time and therefore the Survey approach was undertaken. Since this research takes the philosophical stance of positivism, the use of surveys is justifiable.

### 3.5. TIME HORIZONS

One critical question for any research venture is to define whether a research effort is to observe a research problem at a specific point in time or over a defined duration (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). The decision whether to choose a longitudinal or cross-sectional study further relates to the choice of research methodologies. If a researcher decides to use a survey, this choice typically implies a cross-sectional time horizon, whereas action research may take a longitudinal perspective.

There are two types of timeframe:
- ▸▸ Longitudinal
- ▸▸ Cross-sectional

Most research studies are cross-sectional, mainly because of the pressure of time and resources and Cross-sectional studies often use a survey methodology (Gray, 2009). The former investigated issues over a period of time. The latter investigates at a given moment in time. As this research will be conducted at a given moment in time a cross-sectional approach will be taken.

## 3.6. DATA COLLECTION

### 3.6.1. SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

Secondary data was collected from multiple sources including academic journals, newspaper, books and e-books. Secondary research provided the latest theoretical and academic information about the study.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) it is important to assess the overall suitability of the data to research the study questions and objectives paying particular attention to validity, reliability and measurement bias prior to making a judgement whether to use the data. The majority of secondary data used in this research was published journals and books.

### 3.6.2. PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

Prior to discussing the intended data collection techniques and the ways and means of fulfilling the aims and objectives of the study a choice needs to be carefully made between quantitative and qualitative methods or to make a conscious decision to choose both. Simply put by Bryman and Belll (2003) on the face of it, there would seem to be little to the qualitative / quantitative distinction other than the fact that quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not.

Quantitative research is discovery orientated and usually entails large samples of the target population answering very structured questions, the findings of which can be statistically analysed with precise estimations. Therefore its results are considered valid and reliable. It focuses on 'what is now', that is, on what respondent's intuitively know and of which they have facts, including 'what respondents have done'. So it can be considered to be a snapshot. Subject to statistical analysis decision-makers can base their decisions on statistically proven facts with known margins of error.

Quantitative research is often done by means of questionnaires and data can be easier and cheaper to collect by post, telephone or computer – assisted interviewing systems than qualitative data, which would be costly for the same number of people.

However, Quantitative research has been labelled as 'scraping the surface of people's attitudes and feelings'. Qualitative research in comparison attempts to go deeper, beyond historical facts and surface comments in the snapshot approach, in order to get to the real underlying causes of behaviour. Qualitative research is more appropriate than quantitative research methods to seek out and understand the complexities surrounding the underlying causes of behaviours.

Qualitative research methods using in-depth one-to one interviewing and focus groups are popular. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003, p. 245) described an interview as a purposeful discussion that could gather valid and relevant data. Since Qualitative research is dependent on the skills of the interviewer or the moderator in charge of a focus group, its validity can be questioned if bias, misuse of stimuli and mistakes of interpretation are present.

For this study, the quantitative method will be employed due to the need to seek refinement and to explore the experiences of IT contractors. The study will focus on  what respondent's intuitively know and of which they have facts, including 'what respondents have done' and explore with them the subjective meaning of this transition in their working lives and what are the advantages and disadvantages of their move.

After taking into consideration the number of respondents which there could potentially be in the sample size along with the information required to meet the research objectives, the quantitative methodology adopted was an e-survey, which was a questionnaire containing structured closed questions and a variety of open ended questions.

### 3.6.2.1.    Advantages of a questionnaire

There are a number of advantages of using a questionnaire one of which is cost and time. Questionnaires are considered quicker and less expensive than other forms of collection methods such as interviews. They also require fewer skills than the interview method in the sense that there is less chance of influence or subjective bias by the researcher as the interviewer effect is eliminated (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

### 3.6.2.2.    Limitations of a questionnaire

Some of the limitations to questionnaires are that they typically have a low response rate and it is difficult to get in-depth information that would be possible in an interview.

Uncertainty can arise in the questionnaire both for the respondent while filling out the questionnaire and the researcher during the analysis of the data and these are unable to be addressed due to no personal contact between the two. Due to the nature of the questionnaire respondents don't necessarily report their beliefs, attitudes, opinions etc. accurately. There is likely to be a social desirability response bias, as respondents may answer the questions in the way that shows them in a good light.

However, bearing the advantages and disadvantages in mind the questionnaire was still deemed the more suitable method to employ for the current research. Using a questionnaire as the research instrument allowed the research to be conducted in the systematic scientific manner required to answer the research question and to meet the research objectives.

The questionnaire was constructed in such a manner so as to reduce the effect of the limitations and biases outlined above.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), it is worth noting that there are various types of survey methods that should be taken into account when implementing this specific method (Figure 2).
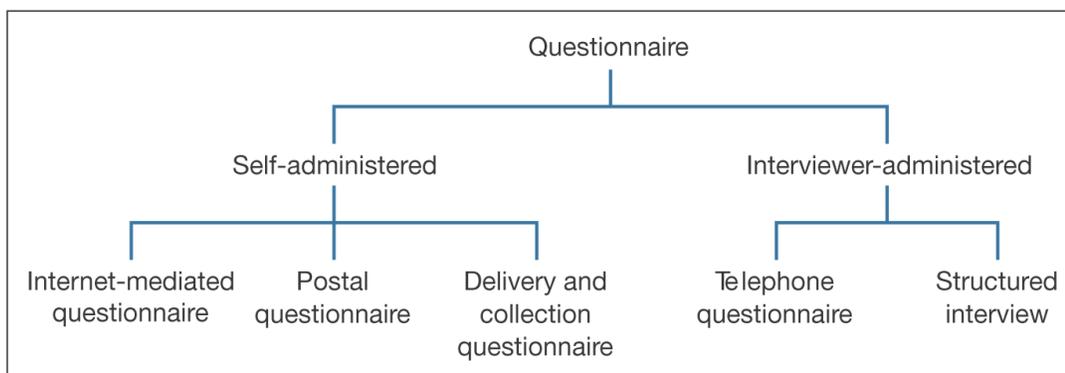


FIGURE 2: SURVEY METHODS

Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007)

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007) the two main methods to administer a questionnaires are self-administered or interview-administered.

Self administered questionnaires are often sent by post, enabling a large sample to be reached with relatively little problem. The questionnaire may also be handed personally to the respondent if the situation is appropriate and a structure is put in place to enable ease of delivery and collection. Finally the questionnaire can be administered via the internet and the respondents are responsible for completing the questionnaire themselves in self administered methods. The self-administered method is advantageous terms of convenience (time, cost and location for both interviewer and interviewee) and as it is less obstructive (absence of interviewer effects) to interviewers (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

With interview administered questionnaire however an interviewer asks the questions either over the phone or face to face in a structured manner.

After taking into consideration the different methods available to administer a questionnaire, the computer administered questionnaire was deemed as the most suitable research instrument for the current study. This method was decided upon because it would enable the collection of large quantities of data from a sizable population sample with relative ease and therefore aid the administration process.

### 3.6.2.3.    Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was deployed for the purpose of firstly providing background information about the sample. This included identifying participants that worked in the IT Industry and currently worked as a Contractor.

The instrument was developed specifically for this study by the researcher. The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was developed into an e-survey, and made available on the survey tool site http://www.surveymonkey.com for respondents to access electronically. The survey was emailed to potential participants and posted on the LinkedIn group "IT Contractors in Ireland". The email invitation included the link to the online survey and there was in total 56 responses. A total of 42 completed questionnaires were usable giving a 75% response rate.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions (this number was made up of main questions and sub questions). Section one was a letter of introduction explaining the study and the benefits it would deliver should recipients participate. The purpose here was to ensure that recipients could relate to the researcher and consider the aim of the study worthwhile. Confidentiality of the completed survey was guaranteed to all respondents.

The mid sections of the questionnaire contained structured closed questions and a variety of open ended questions. The danger of adopting all closed ended response categories developed from a prior theoretical speculation is that important reasons may be overlooked (Kolvereid, 1996). Thus, a mixed method of open and closed-ended format was employed in this study in an attempt to capture a wider range of reasons people may have for their career intentions.

Some questions were straight forward Yes/No questions while others were based on the five point likert rating where each statement was a separate variable and respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement (by indicating strongly disagree to strongly agree). Collis and Hussey (2003) believe that placing demographic questions at the beginning of the survey could be seen by respondents as personal intrusion, which may deter them from continuing the completion of the survey and therefore the demographic questions were included in the last section.

### 3.6.2.4.    Pilot Study

An essential stage of questionnaire based research is the pilot study. Five IT Contractors were invited to do a pilot test of the online survey prior to the distribution of the questionnaire in order to identify if there were any defects, omissions or confusion found in the draft questionnaire and so helping to ensure the successful collection of data. The five respondents completed the questionnaire and then provided feedback on the wording, the duration taken for completion and if it was clear and easy to use. Following a discussion with the respondents and checking the responses given on the questionnaire, it was found, with the exception of some wording issues, there were no changes needed to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then finalised and prepared for distribution.

### 3.6.2.5.    SPSS (PASW)

Once a suitable amount of questionnaire responses were gathered using survey monkey the results were downloaded directly to Microsoft Excel as an advanced spreadsheet. The advantages of utilising survey monkey for gather the data was that there was no need to enter any data manually which can create errors. With some data cleaning the questionnaire results were ready to be analysed. The data was then exported to a programme called Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) or more recently know as Predictive Analytical Software (PASW) and subjected to quantitative analysis. This programme was chosen as it aids in analysing large amounts of quantitative data and enabled the researcher to conduct a range of statistical tests quickly and accurately, whilst being able to present the findings in the form of tables and graphs.

### 3.7. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The target population of this study was a specific group of Contract workers that work in the IT Industry. The population was refined to IT contractors as contracting is very common in IT and it spans across multiple industries.

The sample did not take racial group, gender, sexual orientation or religion into account. To answer the research questions the researcher distributed an in-depth e-survey to a wide range of IT Contractors with the view of receiving a sample size of circa 50 participants.

### 3.8. LIMITATIONS

Most research has several limitations and this study is no different.

A quantitative approach to study was undertaken and it therefore made it difficult to determine where a question was misinterpreted or ambiguous, consequently the researcher may have unwillingly collected inaccurate data. In addition, the questionnaire asked the respondents only to list the single most important reason for their employment status preference. It is possible that this open-ended procedure which includes only one problem does not adequately represent the domain of interest.

It is difficult, due to the limited time frame to collect any qualitative data to compare with the survey for a greater understanding of the factors that influence workers choice to contract.

# CHAPTER 4

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS / FINDINGS

### 4.1. OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a description and analysis following the application of the research methods highlighted in Chapter 3 and in relation to the research question and research aims described in Chapter 1. The purpose of this study was to explore the unique rewards and challenges of Contracting through the experiences of IT Contractors in Ireland who contract their services to various organisations and clients in a variety of employment relationships, in what may be described as portfolio work.

The results and findings were analysed using the statistical software package, SPSS v17 and the findings are presented and divided into different sections addressing the aims and objectives of the study

The data was first factor analysed and the first thing that was done was to look at the inter-correlation between variables. In the likert scale, some of our questions measured the same underlying dimension and therefore we expected them to correlate with each other.

Survey results were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, standard deviations, mean, percentages and t-tests.

This chapter begins by outlining the general demographic information regarding the participants.

### 4.2. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

A number of questions were asked within the questionnaire regarding individual demographic characteristics of the respondents. Individual demographics were collected on: gender, number of years experience and highest educational level and income.
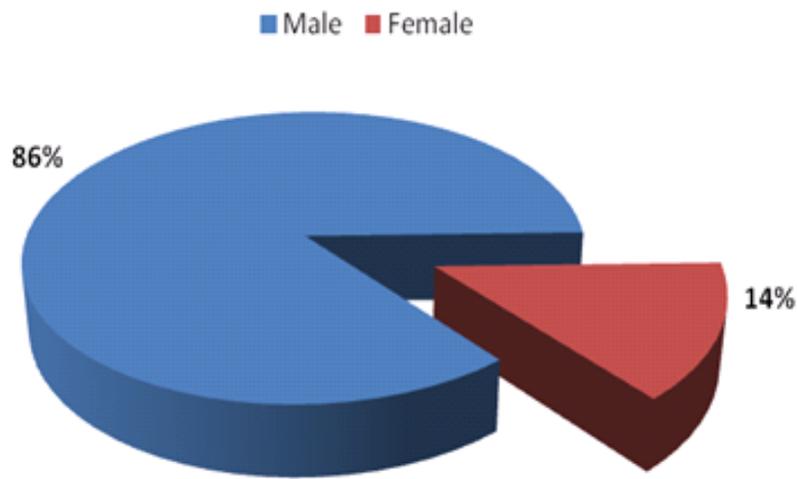


*FIGURE 3: RESPONDENTS BY GENDER*

Of the 56 responses receive, 42 were usable giving a response rate of 75%. Of the 42 responses 86% were male and 14% were female. This was not unexpected due to the nature of the participants work. The IT Industry is significantly male dominated.
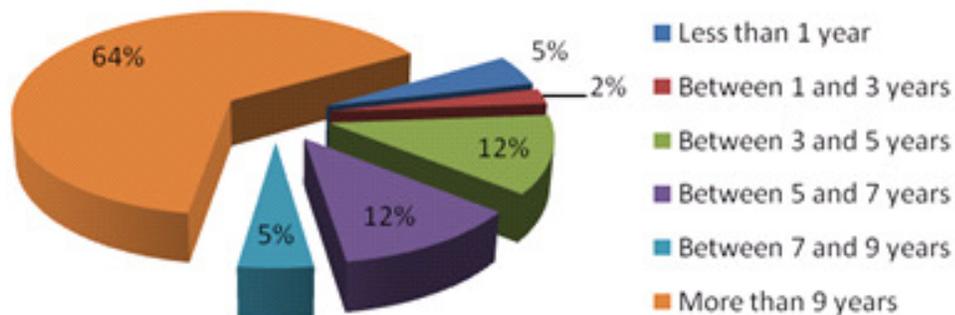


*FIGURE 4: YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN IT*

### 4.3. A NEW CAREER ERA?

In order to determine the opinions and perspectives of the types of jobs available within the IT Industry from the point of view of the IT professionals the question was asked if they felt that it was more common to be employed as a contractor or as an employee and then this was followed up by an open ended question in order to define the reasons for their opinion.

The results showed that opinions are divided in this regards, 52% of respondents felt that Contracting is the most common form of employment in the IT Industry while 43% felt that the Industry employs more permanent employees, the remaining 5% were unsure.

For those that felt that that contracting in the IT Industry is more prevalent there reasons for this were all based around the benefits to the organisation. 50% of replies were focused around the flexibility that is provides for an organisation while a further 23% felt that the reason was behind the cost savings that it brought. The remaining responses varied however similarities in responses were noticed around the skill sets that contractors bring to an organisation and a further similarity was found in responses such that they felt that contract was the only positions available to them and therefore they feel it is more prevalent.

In those that felt that permanent employment was more widespread it was interesting to note that over 50% felt that the reason was due to job security. Respondents that felt permanent employment was more common gave reasons that were based around the individual's choice as opposed to the organisations.

### 4.4. REASON FOR CONTRATING: PUSHED OR PULLED

In order to test whether the classification of reasons distinguishes people who prefer contracting to permanent, the reasons were cross-tabulated with employment status preferences.
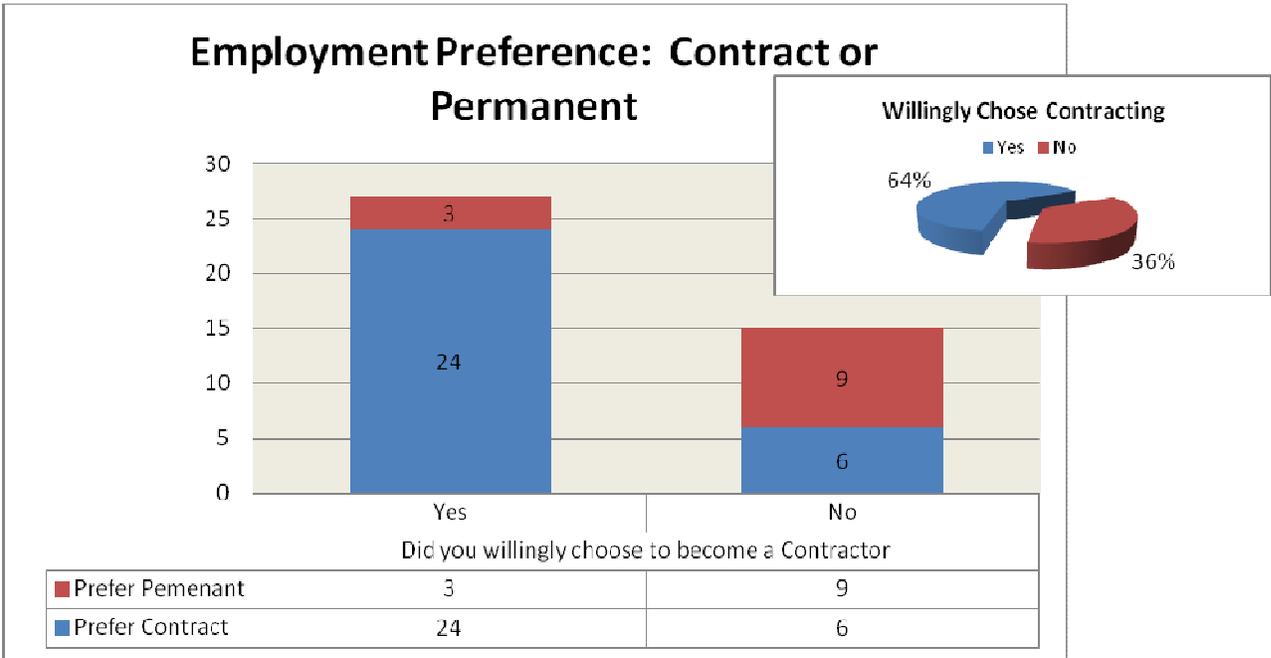


FIGURE 5: - CROSSTABULATION OF EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCE AND WILLINGLY CHOSE CONTRACTING

Of the 42 responses, 63% willingly chose contracting as opposed to organisational employment and 89% of those preferred it to their previous permanent positions. Of the remaining 36% who did not willingly choose to be a contractor a surprising 40% preferred contracting than permanent since taking it on. Another noticeable trend, which can be seen in Figure 6, is that those who did not willingly choose to become a contractor have a minimum of 3 years experience in the IT Industry and all previous positions were permanent.

## Willingly chose Contracting and Years Experince in IT

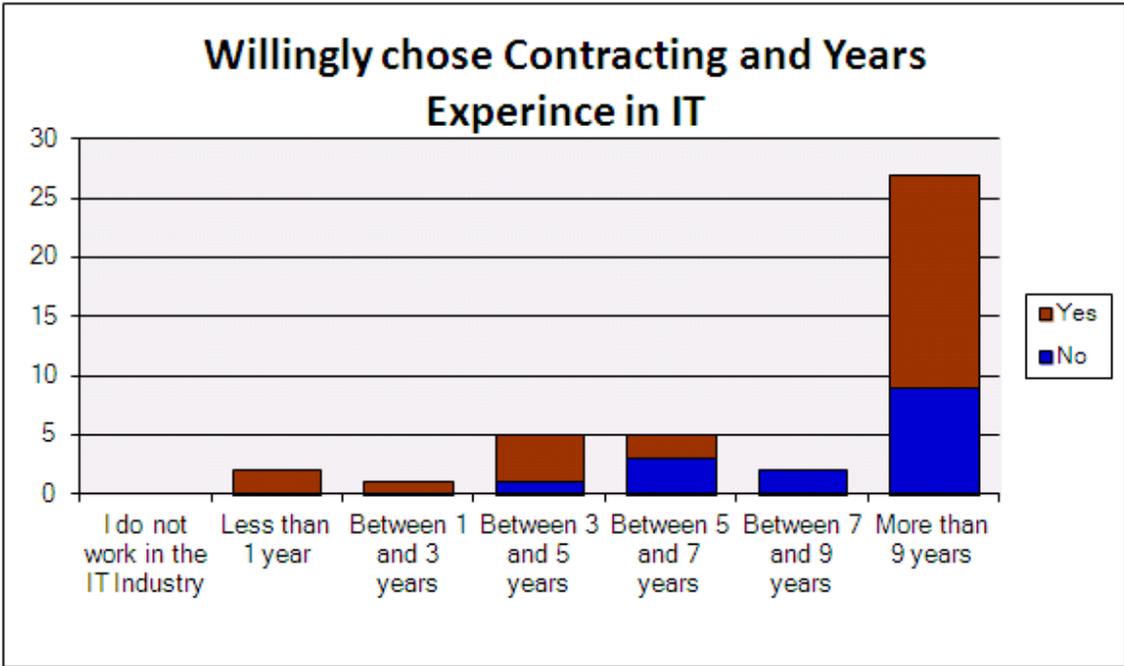FIGURE 6: WILLINGLY CHOSE CONTRACTING AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN IT

As per Figure 6, of the 15 respondents who did not willing choose contracting 6 now prefer it to permanent employment. In order to obtain reasons for the respondents' employment status choice intentions, the intention question was followed by an open-ended question: "What is the main reason for your preference of one career path over the other?"

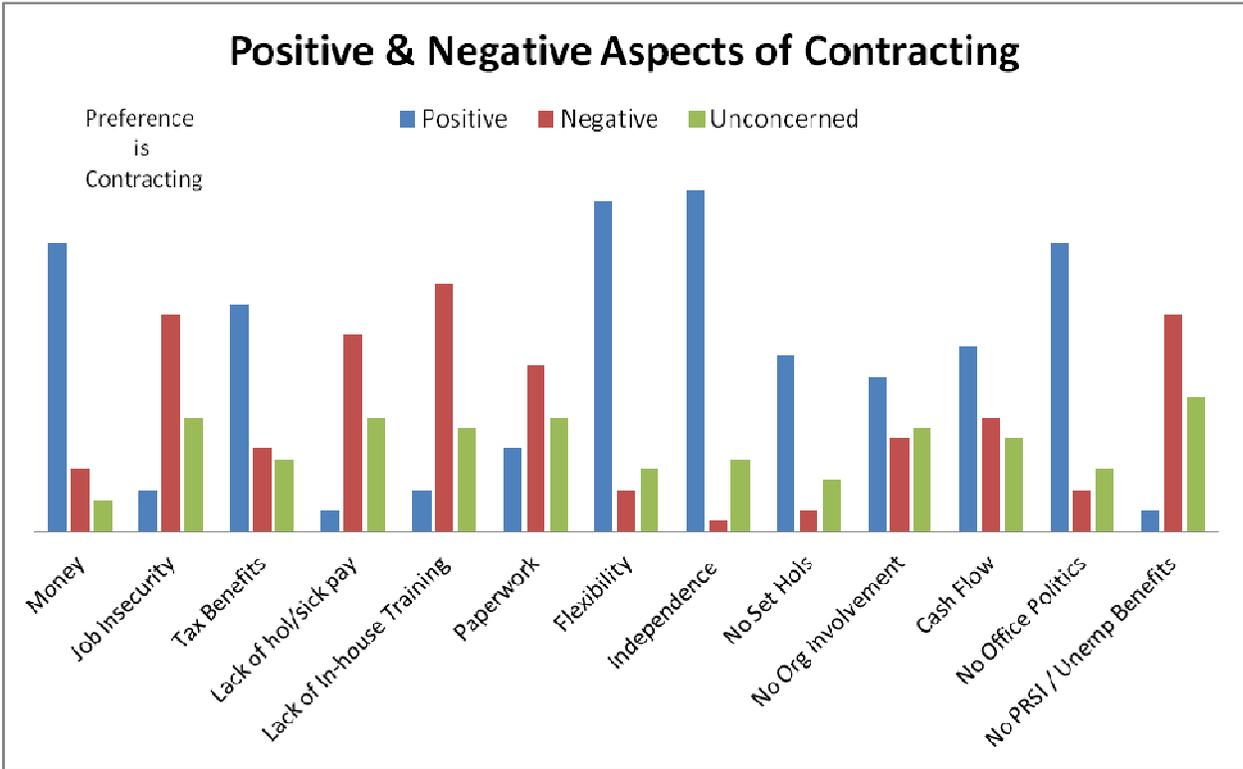### 4.5. WORKERS EXPERIENCES OF CONTRACTING



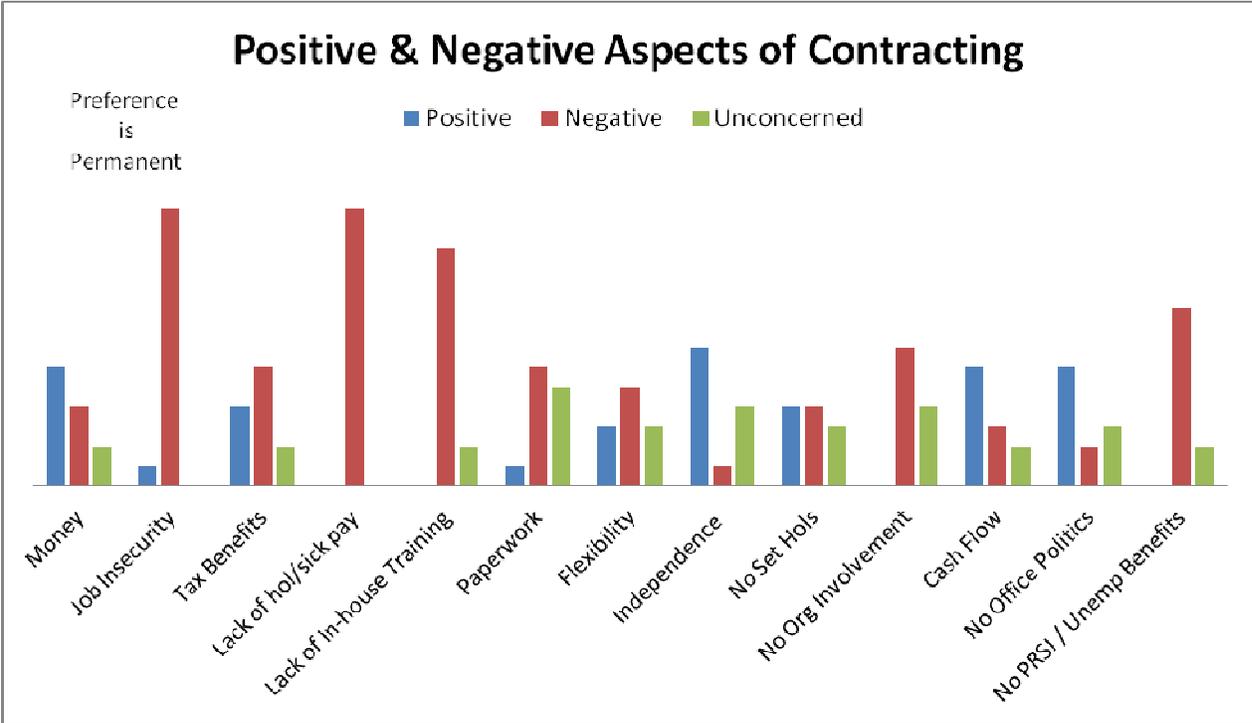FIGURE 7: POSITIVE & NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CONTRACTING: CONTRACTING PREFERENCE

*FIGURE 8: POSITIVE & NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CONTRACTING: PERMANENT PREFERENCE*

### 4.6. WHO IS SUCCESSFULL AT CONTRACTING

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and sample sizes for 8 of the questions measured on the 5 point likert scale in the questionnaire; {1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree}. These 8 items characterises the protean mindset and further in the findings a further 8 items characterise the traditional view of careers. The statistics were divided into two groups in order to gain an understanding on the different mindsets of those who prefer working as contractors and those who prefer working as permanent employees. As per Table 1, those who preferred contracting indicated strong agreement for the rules relating to the protean mindset with an average mean of 4.09 and an average standard error of 0.17. Those who preferred permanent employment were midpoint on the scale with an average mean of 3.21 and an average standard error of 0.26.

Inspection of Table 1 reveals that mean scores on 7 of the 8 items for those who prefer permanent employment were between 2.33 and 3.58, with standard errors around .26. There was, however one moderate outlier. Respondents that preferred permanent employment tended to report a strong belief that they must continue to learn new skills in order to add value to themselves and to remain employable.

**TABLE: 1**                                             **Group Statistics: Protean Mindset**

| | Do you prefer working as a contractor or as a permanent employee? | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I expect to be employed with several different employers. | Contractor | 29 | 4.10 | .817 | .152 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 2.50 | 1.087 | .314 |
| My employing organisation is simply the place where I do my work. | Contractor | 29 | 3.62 | .903 | .168 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 2.33 | .888 | .256 |
| I identify more with the work I do than with my employing Organisation. | Contractor | 29 | 4.07 | .884 | .164 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 3.25 | 1.055 | .305 |
| I see myself as a "free agent" as I develop my career. | Contractor | 29 | 4.03 | .944 | .175 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 3.50 | .905 | .261 |
| I must continue to learn new skills – to add value to myself – to remain employable. | Contractor | 29 | 4.59 | .867 | .161 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 4.33 | .888 | .256 |
| I believe that you can increase your portfolio of skills faster by changing employers than remaining with one Organisation. | Contractor | 29 | 4.00 | 1.000 | .186 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 2.58 | .996 | .288 |
| My skills and knowledge are portable – I can get a similar job elsewhere with little difficulty. | Contractor | 29 | 4.31 | .967 | .180 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 3.58 | .669 | .193 |
| Organisations today no longer can deliver on previous career promises. | Contractor | 29 | 4.03 | .865 | .161 |
| | Permanent Employee | 12 | 3.58 | .793 | .229 |

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and sample sizes for the remaining 8 question measured on the 5 point likert scale in the questionnaire. These 8 items characterise the traditional view of careers. Again in this case the statistics were divided into two groups in order to gain an understanding on the different mindsets of those who prefer working as contractors and those who prefer working as permanent employees.

On analysis on the data in Table 2, those who preferred contracting indicated moderate disagreement for the rules relating to the traditional career with mean scores on 4 of the 8 items less than 3.0, with standard errors slightly higher than 0.2. There were 4 outliers, the most significant being 3.9 with a standard error of just 0.2. Respondents agreed that forming a relationship with their employing organisation was important.

Those who preferred permanent employment had an overall average mean of 3.61 and an overall average standard error of 0.2. Those items below the mean included respondent's views towards their sense of belonging in the organisation, the involvement in the organisation and the help received from the organisation. The item that there was most agreement was Job Security with a mean of 4.92 and a standard error of only 0.08 which meant that respondents felt that job security was important. Career advancement was also significantly important with a mean of 4.58 and a standard error of 0.19.

**TABLE: 2**  **Group Statistics; Traditional View**

|  | Do you prefer working as a contractor or as a permanent employee? | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Job security is very important to me. | Contractor | 29 | 3.41 | 1.181 | .219 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 4.92 | .289 | .083 |
| Career advancement is very important to me. | Contractor | 29 | 3.76 | 1.354 | .251 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 4.58 | .669 | .193 |
| I believe that if you work hard your employer will take care of you. | Contractor | 29 | 2.66 | 1.143 | .212 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 3.50 | 1.000 | .289 |
| I feel a sense of belonging in this Organisation. | Contractor | 29 | 2.72 | 1.032 | .192 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 2.83 | .835 | .241 |
| I feel as if this Organisation's problems are my own. | Contractor | 30 | 2.52 | 1.022 | .190 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 2.92 | .793 | .229 |
| Help is available from this Organisation when I have a problem. | Contractor | 30 | 2.66 | .936 | .174 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 2.67 | .778 | .225 |
| The Organisation fairly rewards me for the amount of effort I put forth. | Contractor | 30 | 3.45 | 1.242 | .231 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 3.42 | .793 | .229 |
| Forming a relationship with my employer is really important. | Contractor | 30 | 3.93 | 1.067 | .198 |
|  | Permanent Employee | 12 | 4.08 | .515 | .149 |

### 4.7. ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF CONTRACTING

As you can see from Figure 9 the financial aspect of contract was the cited as being the best advantage followed by the flexibility it brings. The most negative aspect of contracting being job insecurity followed by the lack of in-house training and holiday / sick pay.
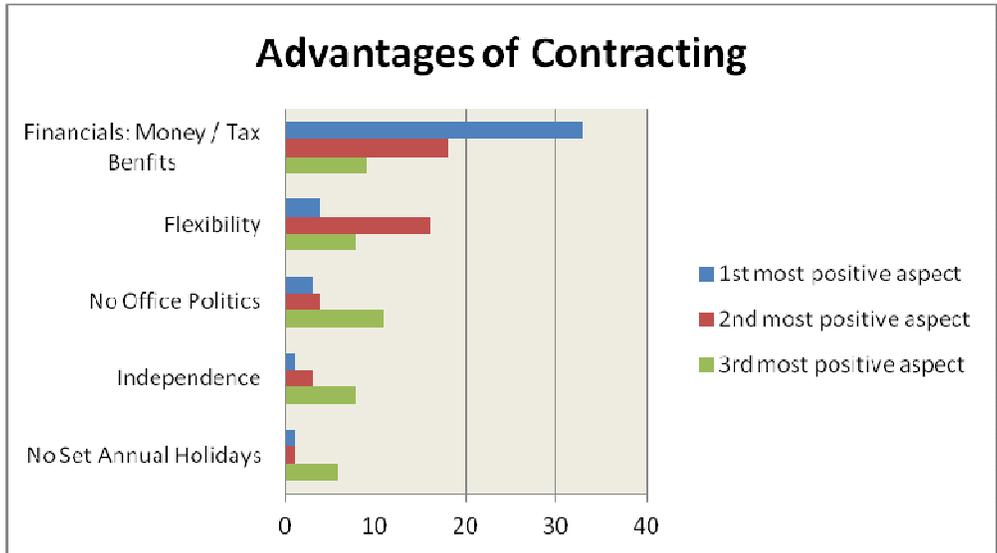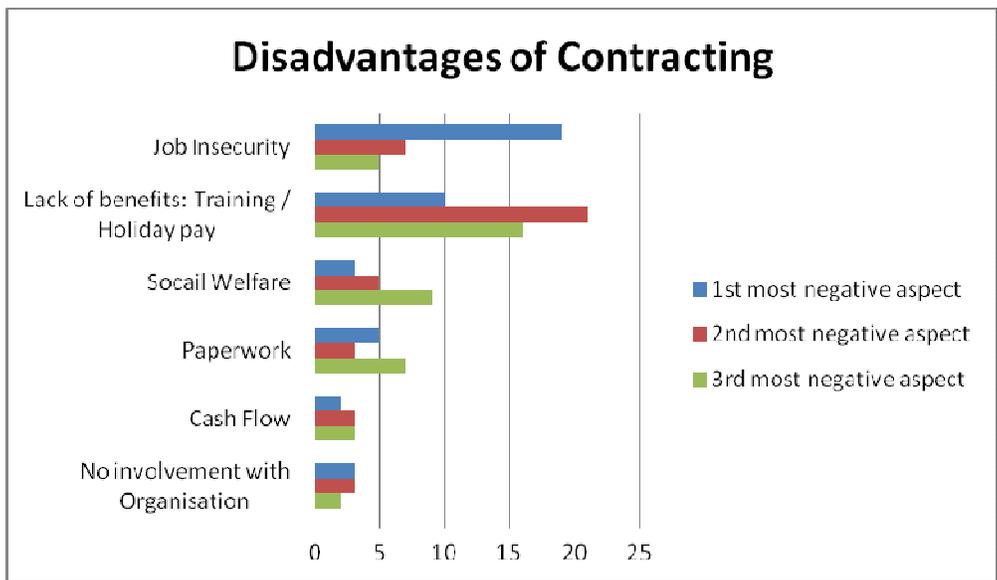


FIGURE 9: ADVANTAGES OF CONTRACTING



FIGURE 10: DISADVANTAGES OF CONTRACTING

# CHAPTER 5

## 5.  DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this paper the objective was to answer the research question, "Are portfolio or boundaryless careers a suitable career choice for IT professionals?" and to achieve our research objectives which were to:

- Identify the trends specifically around the IT Industry in the contemporary word of work;
- Identify and explore the experiences of highly skilled technical contractors in order to broaden our knowledge on the key factors affecting worker choice;
- Identify what attributes contractor hold for successful contracting;
- Identify the advantages or disadvantages of accepting a contract position;
- Examine the impact of the advantages and disadvantages of contracting on careers and make some tentative judgments as to whether pursuing contractor status might be a suitable strategy for those seeking such careers.

Of the 42 participants, 38 had previously held permanent positions however 4 had never held organisationally bounded jobs and had worked as contractors throughout their career. 63% of participants claimed that they had freely chosen the form of contracting while 37% did not willingly choose contracting.

Their reasons are consistent with those described in the literature, including "push" motives (redundancy or difficulty finding full-time employment ) and "pull" motives (desires for flexibility and independence, potential higher earnings and greater opportunities), or a push-pull combination (Cohen and Mallon, 1999; Mallon, 1998).

Although 37% of participants did not willingly choose contracting, this decreased to 29% when asked if their preference was now contracting or permanent. It was not until they encountered layoffs, redundancy, and other events that triggered a choice between seeking another full-time position, becoming a contractor, or becoming unemployed. When faced with this situation a significant number (10 out of 15) of participants stated that there were a lack of permanent positions when they sought reemployment and found greater opportunities in the contract market. 3 noted that they were made redundant or lost their full-time job and a further 2 said they entered contracting because it was a prerequisite of the job they wanted.

The reasons for willingly choosing to become a contractor were heavily weighted on the intrinsic pull factors that were involved. Of the various advantages of contracting the frequent belief was that contractors made more money. 33% of participants said that they were drawn to contracting due to the potential earnings that it could provide. It is not surprising then that over 77% of participants indicated that Money was the most positive aspect of contracting, in their opinion. Other advantages that were

volunteered as reason for contracting included flexibility, independence and better job opportunities and opportunities to develop skills. One respondent identified that contracting allowed him to accumulate the skills to perform his role, which wouldn't otherwise have been possible. Of the 30 who willingly chose contracting only 3 found it not to be as expected and noted that job insecurity was there reason for this.

Although much of the research identifies certain pull factors the conclusion is usually that the push factors seem to more prevalent in the reasons for choosing contract. In this study although more participants willingly chose contracting those who did not willingly choose contracting indicated the push factors as the reason for their choice. Those who willingly chose contract as a career were drawn from the intrinsic pull factors but often as a result of being unable to find alternative permanent employment. The findings of this study identify that individualistic and financial motives were also integral for participant's choices to contract. For this reason, the complexity of "pushes" and "pulls" that led participants into contracting make it difficult to distinguish from who entered voluntarily to those who did so involuntarily.

What is evident is that this study found that a significant portion of the participants had a preference for contracting as a form of work and indicated that although there were disadvantages, the advantages heaving outweighed them.

This is consistent with a study carried out by Fenwick (2006). In her study of contractors in the nursing and adult educators industry there was "an overwhelming theme in their descriptions of the conditions of portfolio work which was a strong preference for this form of work over the organisational employment that all had experienced." According to this study portfolio workers themselves – all declared higher satisfaction with their portfolio careers than they had enjoyed in organisational employment.

This is also the case represented by Kunda, Barley, and Evans (2002) in their study of 52 technical contractors. The contractors they encountered were not forced into lower-paying, less secure jobs than they desired. In fact, most informants generally preferred contracting.

It is evident in the findings that those who had embraced the protean mindset, which was the majority, expressed greater satisfaction with regards to flexibility, independence and earnings, no organisational involvement and the fact that they were not involved in any office politics. The findings identified that those preferred contracting scored an average mean of 4.09 and an average standard deviation 0.91 on a 5 point likert scale. Participants that had accepted the protean mindset showed less than moderate acceptance for the more traditional views of employment such as "I believe that if you work hard your employer will take care of you", "I feel a sense of belonging in this Organisation", "I feel as if this Organisation's problems are my own", "Help is available from this Organisation when I have a problem". However there were significant outliers with regards to both job security and career advancement.

In comparison, those contractors that had not fully embraced the protean mindset (3.21 and an average standard deviation 0.91) showed significant support for the traditional views of employment and showed no significant satisfaction in the benefits such as independence or greater earnings. In fact participants identified negatively with perceived benefits such as flexibility and no organisational involvement. In addition over 90% were anxious about Job Security.

The findings are comparative to the literature for example Currie, Tempest and Starkey (2006, p. 755) advise that the boundaryless career has different levels of impact on employees, with "some losers and some winners'. According to some researchers the actual pursuit of a boundaryless career could pose new challenges to individuals who are not equipped with skills, competencies, and the mindset to cope with these challenges (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999).

These findings would indicate that while over 70% of participants have embraced the mindset to cope with the challenges of contracting, there are still concerns regarding job security with 20% indicating that they would accept a permanent position with their current employer citing this as the reason. Having said that almost 60 % of those who had embraced the protean mindset strongly agreed that their knowledge and skills were portable and they could get a similar job elsewhere with little difficulty. This is in stark comparison to those who had not embraced the mindset with 0% strongly agreeing to this statement. While 45% were in agreement the remaining 55% remained neutral on the subject.

Those who acquire a protean approach to their careers are believed to enhance their employability and in turn, offset the negative consequences associated with new career environment such as career insecurity (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). In essence this security of employability is about having the skills and abilities necessary for an individual to find employment (Marilyn Clarke, 2008), remain in employment or obtain new employment as, and when, required (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007).

Whether pursuing a protean career (Hall, 1996) or a boundaryless career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), individuals need to make choices to engage in purposeful actions to achieve satisfying outcomes with respect to intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

To remind ourselves of the literature the new psychological contracts tend to be interpreted in the light of past experience. Individuals continue to expect that the promises made in the past will have a bearing on current and future relationships with their employer. Those individuals who did not willingly choose contracting all had previous experience in IT working under another form of employment, such as permanent. The minimum tenure for those that found themselves in a contract positions unwillingly and who's preference was to be employed on a permanent basis had a minimum of 3 years experience. This supports the suggestion that the new psychological contract is being interpreted in the light of past experiences and individuals are continuing to expect that the promises made in the past will have a bearing on current relationship with their employer.

It would seem that those who desire freedom and flexibility, or those who have never experienced the "old" psychological contract, with its promise of security and organisational career management, are more likely to accept that responsibility for career and employability primarily rests with the individual. However, despite arguments to the contrary, there is still only limited evidence that employees in general have recognised and embraced a different and more independent view of career management.

The protean mindset (Hall, 1976) which has dominated much of the literature is a self-directed orientation to the career that implies independence from external career influences. Behind the traditional organisational career were a set of assumptions (e.g., upward progress through an organisational or occupational hierarchy and seniority and maturity were valued and respected qualities). The shift to the more boundaryless and portfolio careers means decoupling the concept of career from a connection to any one organisation and even from its exclusive association with lifelong paid employment (Mirvis and Hall, 1995, p. 271). Thus, if the old contract was with the organisation, in the protean concept the contract is with the self and one's work (Mirvis and Hall, 1994).

In conclusion individuals that hold the protean attitude use their own values instead of organisations values to guide their careers, experience a higher level of satisfaction in their career. Those who are self-directed and manage their own experiences in education, training, and employment are better equipped for contracting in general.

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# APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE