

The transition to part-time:

How professionals negotiate ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deals and craft their jobs

Abstract

For professionals working in demanding environments, the negotiation of part-time or workload reduction idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) may be challenging, with negative consequences for career progression. Yet there are few studies of part-time i-deals specifically, or empirical studies of the process by which they develop. This paper examines the process of achieving a part-time i-deal, drawing on interviews with 39 part-time professionals in two organizations each located in the UK and the Netherlands. The paper contributes to i-deal theory, first, by defining the four elements of a new category of ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal for professionals: perceived suitability of the work, schedule, workload, and career impact. Second, it refines Rousseau’s model of the development process, by adding an initial ‘private consideration’ of options stage, where the feasibility of working part-time is evaluated against alternatives including remaining full-time, or leaving the organization. Third, it identifies as structural constraints, two work practices designed for full-time professional work in demanding environments: the routine expectation of unpredictability, and the absence of substitutability in resourcing. Fourth, it shows how, post-negotiation, professionals use informal job crafting, both individual and collaborative, to try to overcome these constraints. The implications for achieving flexible and sustainable careers are discussed.

Key words

i-deals; job crafting; job design; part-time work; part-time workers; flexible workers; professional workers; flexible careers

Introduction

Being able to alter the amount of time committed to work at different stages throughout the life course is an important route to achieving a flexible and sustainable career (Valcour, 2015). Part-time work is a means of reconciling work and personal life (Eurofound, 2012) and is increasingly used by employers to attract and retain professionals throughout their careers. In the UK almost one in five professionals work part-time and in the Netherlands the figure is more than two in five (Eurostat, 2015). However, many organizations perceive part-time working for professionals as an inconvenience (Dick, 2009; Lee et al., 2000), especially where working hours are long and commercial pressure is intense (Perlow, 2012). Those who work part-time may be stigmatized or marginalized (Kossek et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2013), and suffer poor career progression (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010; Hall et al., 2012; Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003). Nonetheless, organizations may be reluctant to lose expensively-trained professionals for work-life reasons (Tomlinson, 2006), and national economies may suffer if individuals leave the labour market (Connolly and Gregory, 2008).

Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are individually negotiated employment arrangements which reconcile the needs of the individual and the organization by customizing work schedules or development opportunities (Rousseau, 2005). Hornung et al. (2010) have related i-deals to an individualized form of job design, job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), which, like i-deals, is employee-led, but is unauthorized, rather than a formal agreement.

Part-time i-deals (where the number of contractual hours is reduced), although included in generic studies of i-deals, have not generally been examined as a separate phenomenon (Hornung et al., 2009). Moreover, the i-deals literature has not been related to that on part-time working and lacks clarity on the conceptual boundaries of different types of i-deal (Briner, 2014; Liao et al., 2016). The *process by which* i-deals are negotiated is a further gap (Liao et al., 2016). This paper examines *how* part-time i-deals are achieved by professionals

working in demanding environments, using a process approach. Process studies focus on the temporal dimension – the stages and events in the evolution of a phenomenon over time – and can help to identify new variables in the development of a phenomenon (Van de Ven, 2007). This may be particularly important for a working arrangement which is perceived as an alternative or ‘female’ way to work (Smithson et al., 2004).

Drawing on 39 narrative interviews with part-time professionals, we make four contributions to both i-deals theory and job crafting for professionals who work part-time. We add to i-deals theory by defining first, a new category of ‘time and workload reduction’ i-deals, and secondly a new stage in the process of development. Thirdly, we identify two work practices which constrain the negotiating power of part-time i-dealers and fourthly we identify individual and collaborative job crafting techniques used to overcome these constraints. We conclude by discussing the implications for professionals’ ability to forge a flexible and sustainable career over their life course.

I-deals and part-time professionals

This section examines extant research on i-deals, including the small literature on part-time i-deals, and relates i-deals to the literature on part-time professionals.

Idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) are ‘special terms of employment negotiated between individual workers and their employers (present or prospective) that satisfy both parties’ needs’ (Rousseau et al., 2006:977); they may be ex post or ex ante. The content of i-deals includes a variety of resources valued by workers, such as pay, flexible scheduling, location of work and development opportunities, but the concept of ‘mutual benefit’ is key. Rousseau (2005) classified i-deals into flexibility i-deals (including part-time), which are negotiated in pursuit of work-life balance, and developmental i-deals, referring to customized career

opportunities. With flexibility i-deals, employers benefit by being able to attract and retain staff, while employees benefit from being able to manage the work/non-work relationship.

Hornung et al. (2009) identify a separate category – ‘workload reduction’ i-deals, based on the reasons supervisors authorize such i-deals, but does not specify the difference between ‘part-time’ and ‘workload reduction’: those working *either* ‘reduced work hours’ *or* ‘reduced workload’ are included. This conflation of time and workload persists when Rosen et al. (2013) draw a distinction between schedule and location flexibility, and place workload reduction i-deals in the schedule flexibility category, implying that ‘workload reduction’ is a matter of scheduling rather than job content or workload. Where there is a close relationship between hours and outputs, for example in shift-based work (Rousseau et al., 2009), this categorisation may apply, but where outputs and hours are not so closely related, as is the case for much professional work (Kalleberg and Epstein, 2001), the negotiation of reduced *outputs* may differ from the negotiation of reduced *hours*.

A further type of i-deal, the ‘task i-deal’, adds job content to the list of resources which may be negotiated and thus relates i-deals to an individualized form of job design – job crafting (Hornung et al., 2010, 2014). Job crafting is defined as ‘the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work’ (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001: 179). Like task i-deals, it is a proactive, individual activity, involving job content, but it differs from task i-deals in that it is unauthorized.

However, Rosen et al. (2013: 716) categorise i-deals differently, combining tasks and career development into a single category of ‘task and work responsibilities’ i-deals, since both refer to ‘*what* an employee does on the job’; their other categories are ‘when (schedule flexibility), where (location flexibility), and why (financial incentives)’. The assumption is that work-life needs may drive both schedule and location flexibility, but that tasks and responsibilities are driven by skills and career aspirations. This excludes a situation where

tasks and responsibilities may be determined by work-life needs – as when professionals downgrade to more routine work on transition to part-time (Meiksins and Whalley, 2002).

Much of the literature does not distinguish between the nature or content of different i-deals, focusing instead on antecedents and consequences, leading to calls for contextualised, qualitative research on the different types (Briner, 2014; Liao et al., 2016). Confusion around categorisation implies the need for separate study of the part-time i-deal. Extant literature also lacks much examination of the *process* of how i-deals are negotiated (Liao et al., 2016). Rousseau (2005) proposed that an i-deal develops in three stages. The first, ‘pre-work’, covers the individual’s information-gathering and relationship-building to build the case for an i-deal. The second, negotiation, involves problem solving through understanding of the other side’s position, while remaining aware of one’s own best alternative if the negotiation fails. The third covers maintaining the i-deal’s boundaries, legitimacy and fairness. However, these stages have not subsequently been empirically examined.

Many i-deal studies draw on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964): in exchange for privileges (development opportunities, flexible hours), individuals provide enhanced value to the organization through, for example, high performance. However, Liao et al. (2016) propose that the study of i-deals should pay more attention to both context (also suggested by Hornung et al. 2010) and alternative theoretical perspectives. One alternative perspective, ‘systemic power’ (Lawrence et al., 2001), suggests that the institutional context impacts on the negotiating power of the individual. This negotiating power depends on the ‘best alternative to a negotiated agreement’ (BATNA), so individuals with few alternatives have reduced bargaining power (Kim et al., 2005). Contextual differences might be expected between developmental and flexibility i-deals, especially in terms of mutual benefit to employer and employee: while developmental i-deals have recognizable benefits for both sides, flexibility i-deals often sit within a narrative of work-life balance concerned with

employee benefit (Hornung et al., 2009). Flexible, especially part-time, working can be perceived as an alternative, ‘female way’ to work (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005), which is costly and inconvenient for employers (Dick, 2009).

To date there has been little examination of part-time i-deals using insights from the flexible working literature. Greater integration could assist with the categorisation of i-deals: first because part-time work presents challenges which are recognisably different from other types of flexible working, and secondly because this literature distinguishes between part-time and reduced-load working, based on an understanding that some work is defined by outputs, not hours (Kalleberg and Epstein, 2001; Lee et al., 2000).

Literature on the development of part-time working arrangements (PTWAs) for professionals identifies constraining and enabling contextual factors. At an institutional level, the ‘national working-time regime’ encapsulates the ‘ legal, voluntary and customary regulations which influence working-time practice’ (Rubery et al., 1998:72). For example the Netherlands operates within a ‘social democratic’ welfare state model (Esping-Anderson, 1990), which enshrines support for work-life balance in law (Abendroth and den Dulk, 2011): since the 1990s the Dutch state has encouraged part-time working, especially for parents, and generous parental leave can be taken as part-time work. Although expressed as a ‘right to request’ part-time, some argue that it has gained the status of an expectation or ‘moral right’ (Den Dulk et al., 2011; Rasmussen et al., 2004): requests are rarely rejected (Den Dulk et al., 2011; Plantenga et al., 1999). In contrast, the UK’s ‘right to request’ flexible working operates within a less regulated, ‘liberal’ socio-economic model (Esping-Anderson, 1990) where work-life balance is regarded as a private responsibility (Abendroth and den Dulk, 2011). The right to request is mitigated by a range of conditions allowing the employer to refuse a request; the individual is responsible for providing a ‘business justification’ (Tomlinson, 2007); and there is a widespread assumption that it will disadvantage the

employer (Lewis 2003; Hooker et al 2006). The UK's part-time workforce find it hard to access 'quality' jobs (Connolly and Gregory, 2008; Fagan et al., 2014; Lyonette et al., 2010). The differences in working-time regime have resulted in very different proportions of part-time workers: in the Netherlands, 50% of the workforce works part-time, compared with 26% in the UK; among managers and professionals, the figures are 42% and 17% respectively (Eurostat, 2015).

At the organizational level, policy on flexible and part-time working may be weakened by cultural stigma (Williams et al., 2013). Reluctance to take up flexible working, especially among men (Burnett et al., 2013), has been attributed to the attitudes of line managers (Lirio et al., 2008; Ryan and Kossek, 2008) and to perceived negative consequences for career progression (Hall et al., 2012; Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003; McDonald et al., 2009; Smithson et al., 2004).

For professionals working in demanding environments, there may be further constraints in the perceived nature of professional work. Global competition and 'always-on' technology have resulted in expectations in some sectors that professionals will work long hours and be available during non-working time (Kunda, 1992; Perlow, 2012). Part-time professionals may be seen as unable to meet organizational needs (Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013; Kuhn, 2006; Meiksins and Whalley, 2002), so may need to take on less demanding work, with longer time horizons (McDonald et al., 2009; Meiksins and Whalley, 2002).

In sum, existing studies differ about whether part-time and flexible scheduling i-deals are different phenomena, although the flexible working literature suggests they are distinct, as well as suggesting a further distinction between part-time and reduced-load. A lack of contextualised studies of different types of i-deal may limit our understanding of the systemic power inherent in different contexts, and therefore the negotiating options available to individuals. Moreover, a lack of process studies may limit our knowledge of the variables

which influence this negotiating power. This paper therefore examines the process of *how* part-time i-deals are achieved, in demanding professional contexts.

Methods

A process approach is appropriate for studies aiming to understand how and why things evolve over time, in context, and at different levels of analysis. It allows for a greater depth of understanding of the phenomenon under study, and contrasts with a variance approach, which offers greater ability to draw conclusions about the relative importance of different factors (Langley, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007). The study used narrative interviews because part-time i-deal development is an episodic phenomenon, less suited to ethnographic or real-time methods (Glick et al., 1990). The disadvantages of using retrospective event histories to study a process (over-rationalization, memory lapses) (Glick et al., 1990) were mitigated to some extent by the variety and relatively large number of processes (39) for a qualitative study.

Research was conducted in two multi-national organizations, each operating in the UK and the Netherlands, giving four research sites (InfoCo UK, InfoCo NL, PSF UK, PSF NL). As discussed above, the Netherlands offers a social and legislative context which is more supportive of part-time work than the UK. Sites were chosen in order to maximize both opportunities for identifying the events and stages in the process, and the sources of change within the process (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Van de Ven, 2007). Each site had its own management structure: the majority of staff reported to someone in their country, but a small number of InfoCo staff reported internationally.

Both organizations reported long-hours cultures. Although mitigated to some degree by the institutional context in the Netherlands, part-time workers remained exceptions to the norm, or ‘extreme cases’ which render a process particularly visible (Eisenhardt, 1989; Van de Ven, 2007). However, there were different approaches to part-time work. ‘InfoCo’ is a

global public limited IT company, whose flexible working policy focuses more on flexible schedules and locations than on part-time work. 'PSF' is a global professional services firm with a partnership structure. PSF's approach to flexible working was motivated by a desire to retain women in senior jobs, and sat alongside a programme of maternity coaching, extended leave, and peer support networks for women, as well as a part-time scheme for older workers. However, despite formal pronouncements, in practice part-time working remained rare among managers and professionals: although there were variations between the four contexts, the levels of part-time work were lower in the UK, where it was seen as particularly counter-cultural.

All interviewees worked part-time. As in other studies of part-time work (Lee et al., 2000, 2002), both managers and professionals (self-defined) were included. Although some suggest (Wheatley et al., 2011) that managers identify more closely with organizational goals than professionals do, Watson (2002) argues that the distinction between professionals and managers is less analytically useful in commercial environments, where time commitments are determined by market demands (Kalleberg and Epstein, 2001; Perlow, 2001).

The 39 participants were selected for variation in %FTE (full-time-equivalent) they worked, seniority, occupation, gender and reason for working part-time. The %FTE, typically 80%, ranged from 60 to 90%. Occupations included tax accountants (10), engineers (6), business development (6), auditors (4), central services (HR, legal and finance) (4), mergers and acquisitions (3), operations (3) and marketing (3) roles. Twenty-seven were women and 12 were men. Most participants gave multiple reasons for working part-time: 23 (18 women and five men) cited care of children under 11; others cited prioritizing other activities over money, often after life-changing events (10 participants), health (8), prelude to retirement (5), care of older children (4), care of elderly relatives (4), and other paid work (2). Just over half (including eight partners or directors) had responsibility for managing staff,

while the remainder managed projects or budgets. Almost half had a professional qualification. All but one had more than a year's experience of working part-time, and two thirds had 5+ years, providing long experience of the phenomenon – a key element of process research (Van de Ven 2007). Seventeen of the 39 cases transitioned from full-time to part-time in the same job (ex post), and eight replaced a full-time predecessor (ex ante). The remaining 14 moved into a part-time job tailored to their requirements: nine were externally recruited (ex ante), and five moved out of an 'unsuitable' job in the same company.

The narrative interviews were conducted in English, mostly face to face, but for logistical reasons, between one and four in each site were conducted by telephone or videoconference. Interviews were typically 1.5 hours: the shortest was 45 minutes and the longest two hours. In total, 54 hours of recordings were made. Interviewees were invited to recall when they started considering transition to part-time, and what was happening in their life and work at that point; and then to describe their working arrangement and how it had developed up to the present. The temporal dimension provided the structure of the interview (Musson, 2004), with follow-up questions tailored to previous responses, to reveal how each event was connected to the next, and what motivated each event (Van de Ven, 2007). This narrative approach allowed participants to introduce issues of importance to them (Musson, 2004) while they were prompted for details of the arrangement and how they negotiated them; who they negotiated with; and the barriers and enablers at each stage. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

Template analysis (King, 2004) was used to identify the stages and sequence of events which are the main outputs of a process study (Van de Ven, 2007). Analysis began using Rousseau's (2005) model of the development of an i-deal: pre-work (including trigger events

in the individual's personal life as well as preparation for the negotiation), negotiation (problem-solving and the content of the i-deal) and maintenance (trialing and adjusting the formal agreement). These were populated with content specific to the development of a PTWA, using knowledge of the literature on job design, temporal flexibility and part-time work, while remaining open to new categories. One transcript from each research site was checked by a colleague for reliability of coding and bias in questioning (Bryman, 2008). The initial stages were refined (see table 1) in two principal ways: the separation of 'pre-work' into two, and the extension of the maintenance stage into 'adaptation'. Separate feedback sessions with participants and the sponsoring directors were used both to sense-check and to validate the process (Bryman, 2008).

Findings

This study revealed a four-stage process of developing a PTWA, which combined both a formal i-deal and ongoing, informal job crafting. This model adds an extra stage to Rousseau's (2005) three-stage process of developing an i-deal, and builds on the link which Hornung et al. (2010) make between i-deals and job crafting. Since the focus here was the PTWA, rather than the part-time worker, the process began when an individual began to evaluate the possibility of doing a *specific* job on a part-time basis, and ended when the person left the job. If someone moved to a new part-time job, the four-stage process began again.

Stage 1: Private consideration

At this stage, individuals assessed part-time against three other perceived options: leaving the organization, remaining full-time, and postponing part-time. All participants in this study eventually achieved a PTWA: nonetheless, a quarter of them (11) had initially decided

against transition to part-time, changing their minds later as circumstances changed. The fear of ‘coming out’ as a potential part-timer led many to conduct this stage of the process in secrecy.

The legal and social context in the Netherlands made it easier to consider transitioning to part-time, at least for those on permanent contracts with more than one year’s service. The ‘rules that an employer needs to follow’ meant that they ‘couldn’t really say no’ (Clara, Operations manager, InfoCo NL). However, other issues had to be considered. One Dutch participant had postponed a move to part-time because, despite the organizational and legal entitlement, it seemed impossible to reduce their workload or avoid being available during time off.

I can request it [part-time], and I think by law it will *have to* get approved. I just don’t feel there is enough structure in this job or in this company to request that. I think it will just be less money, same amount of work; and there is an expectation of being available. Jeroen, Project manager, InfoCo NL

Organizational culture and a lack of role models were constraints, especially at InfoCo UK, and at PSF before the recent initiatives to support part-time working.

At the time, there were no partners working anything less than five days. I was quite a new partner and it [part-time] just seemed impossible, and it was certainly not spoken about. There were no role models. Cassandra, Partner, Tax, PSF UK

Line managers’ views could differ from organizational policy: Anneke worked in an international department and had experienced line managers from different cultures.

I thought they might think I’m not as keen any more or I’m kind of taking a step back, or would it impact my career? So I was quite worried to ask the question. But [my new manager] was from Sweden, and in Sweden it’s also a bit more common; it

made the conversation a bit easier, to have it with a Swedish manager than to have it with a UK manager. Anneke, Marketing manager, InfoCo Netherlands

Others struggled with people's perceptions of them as part-timers, and the possible impact on their careers: one participant had earlier decided to leave InfoCo because of the perceived impact of part-time on her professional identity and promotion prospects.

I didn't quite have the courage to go and ask somebody. I thought they would somehow think less of me and look me over for promotion or other opportunities.

Wanda, Technical director, InfoCo UK

Although significant, Dutch law and PSF policy were thus sometimes insufficient to overcome constraints such as lack of role models, unsympathetic managers and fear of career impact, leading to secrecy at this stage, and raising the question of how many other potential part-timers never progress to the next stage.

Stage 2: Preparation

After making the decision to apply for part-time work, professionals began to build the organizational case: this involved having and articulating 'credit' as someone worth retaining or hiring – but also taking personal responsibility for solving anticipated problems and avoiding impact on coworkers or the business.

A key element of preparation, especially in the UK, was how to overcome the perceived inconvenience of part-time work.

I explained the position as I saw it and I didn't *demand* to go part-time; we discussed it. I think you do need, in any environment, to see that you can make it work.

Alistair, Director, Tax, PSF UK

The practical preparations, especially in the UK, often revolved around whether the individual had enough 'credit' to counteract the perceived expense of part-time work. For

those applying for a new job on a part-time basis, ‘credit’ might involve rare or highly-rated skills or knowledge, a good reputation, or a relationship with the manager.

They knew me in advance, I was writing articles and things on fiscal matters. That also helped for the credibility in obtaining the job. Simone, Senior manager, Tax, PSF NL

Filling the resource gap created by a transition to part-time – without overloading colleagues – often involved having the contacts, skills and experience to continue to deliver 100% of ‘a job’ in 60-80% of the time.

You can find that you have the same workload. When you’re going to work part-time the targets will stay the same so it’s the thought of whether you want to do that, knowing that you’re going to have more pressure and earn less. Wilma, Account manager, InfoCo NL

The timing of the transition was also important: filling the resource gap would be easier if the transition to part-time matched the organization’s budget cycle, rather than an event in one’s personal life.

InfoCo have reorgs every year. If I was to come back [from maternity leave] at the end of our fiscal, end of July, the conversations would start happening in March, they could put forward a good case. I don’t know that anyone would necessarily tell you that, but I do think it’s quite key. Patricia, Marketing manager, InfoCo UK

Professionals preparing for part-time thus took responsibility for problem-solving and avoiding inconvenience to their coworkers and employer.

Stage 3: Negotiation

The formal negotiation of a PTWA involved four potential elements: the suitability of the job for execution on a part-time basis, the schedule of availability, the workload, and the

implications for career and professional identity. While the first two were usually discussed, the third often went unchanged, and the last was rarely mentioned.

The ‘suitability’ of the job for being done part-time led a quarter of the respondents to restrict or change their jobs, cutting out work that was perceived to be difficult for part-timers. In both companies, this meant client-facing work, and at InfoCo, team management.

I had a discussion with [the manager] and he said, Listen, this is not a good fit for you and I was like, No, I agree it’s not a good fit for me, so they found me another position within the company. I had to go down in rank. Margreeth, Operations manager, PSF NL

The second element, the schedule of availability, also formed the basis for the salary reduction, even though nominally these professionals were paid for outputs, not hours. Especially in the Netherlands, a critical mass of part-timers had shifted expectations of availability on Fridays, making time off easier to envisage.

It’s a lot more difficult to explain that you cannot attend a meeting on a Thursday than on a Friday. It’s more normal that Fridays are difficult to plan things. If people take days off, it’s always on a Friday. If people work part-time, it’s usually on a Friday. Andre, Senior manager, Tax, PSF NL

The schedule of availability was also affected by whether the part-timer could be interrupted during their time off. Many saw it as a professional responsibility to continue to service clients and other unpredictable business needs during time off.

He [the manager] said that you had to make it work for both you and the firm, and how are you going to make sure that your clients are still going to be serviced even though you’re part-time? So I remember writing down that I’ve got a BlackBerry, if people want to reach me. Carrie, Assistant director, Transaction tax, PSF UK

The third element, workload, did not always calibrate closely with working time for these professionals. Workload reduction was particularly difficult for those who were switching to part-time in the same job or replacing a full-timer: only six of the 25 participants in this situation were able to reduce their workload at the negotiation stage. Despite many examples of positive manager support, especially at PSF, managers did not always take responsibility for reducing workload.

He [the manager] did say to me, It's important that you don't just get paid for four days and end up working five. Basically in the first year my portfolio didn't actually change at all. So there was kind of, noises around, If the portfolio has to change or whatever, let us know. But there wasn't anybody that I could really hand it over to.

Fiona, Senior manager, Assurance, PSF UK

However, the other 14 participants had a job which was *created* as a part-time job, tailored to their needs: some had joined the organization to do a newly-created role, and others had been reassigned from an 'unsuitable' job. For these people, workload was always calibrated in proportion to the size of their role.

The fourth element was the career implications of part-time. For 15 participants, this was not an issue: six were approaching retirement, and nine were either already at the top of the corporate hierarchy, or had decided that hierarchical career progression was not important. The remaining two thirds (24) felt that they faced a career penalty (Hall et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2009), but only two participants made it clear at negotiation stage that their aspirations had not changed. This may indicate a strong career identity, or a confidence in their bargaining power, perhaps, in some cases at PSF, derived from the recent initiatives.

I was keen to explain that ultimately I do still want to go to the next level and maybe ultimately partner; I wanted to make sure people understood where I was coming from, and that they didn't make assumptions. Naomi, Senior manager, Tax, PSF UK

Many of the participants in this study therefore started their PTWA without negotiating either workload or career implications.

Stage 4: Adaptation

The first 6-12 months of the new employment arrangement was often a period of informal adaptation of job content, during which part-timers could repair lacunae in the formal negotiation process and develop their jobs through job crafting (Hornung et al., 2010). Those who managed their job redesign alone had fewer options for designing a feasible PTWA. Collaboration with coworkers offered more opportunities to make two key adaptations to create a feasible part-time job: reducing workload and designing an availability schedule which provided predictable and uninterrupted time off. However, two work practices made such collaboration harder: the absence of substitutability between colleagues (which impacted on part-timers' ability to reduce their workload), and the expectation of unpredictability (which impacted on part-timers' ability to achieve time off).

Adaptation of workload Those who tried to reduce workload alone had few attractive options. The most common was to cut out personal development or 'extra' activities, including profile-raising special projects or internal process improvements, broadening the range of clients or projects, and building new client relationships – aspirational activities, not a core part of the job, but key to getting promoted.

There's not always time for just calling up a client to see how they are or if you can help them out. So you just focus on your work now, and that bit of extra, there's not always time for that. Before, you were also wondering, How can I improve something? Marloes, Managing consultant, Tax, PSF NL

The other activity to be cut was networking, even when it was recognized that this was career-limiting (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010).

Previously I would have had lunch with somebody, networking, and catching up, and coffee chats. Whereas I don't have time for that... I have still got to... build my network up again, which is very key at InfoCo, in order to progress. Patricia, Marketing manager, InfoCo UK

Those who collaborated with coworkers had another option for reducing workload: finding *substitutable* subordinates or peers with the appropriate skills, relationships and capacity, so that some of their workload could be transferred.

This was easiest for team managers, who could reduce their workload by delegating to subordinates.

I have a choice, to either organise the [work] myself, or I say, Your objective is to make sure this happens. So it's just about how I roll down the objectives and spin the plates to make sure it's all happening. It's not about how much you actually do, it's about how many plates you can keep spinning. Wanda, Technical director, InfoCo UK

Non-managers might be able to substitute workload with peers. The structure at PSF consisted of a cadre of 'floating' professionals with similar skills who were allocated to different projects with different managers. People at the same grade were, to some degree, substitutable, so workload could be distributed across the group in a collaborative way.

I do have colleagues who are at the same level as me in the national team. We try and be very accommodating with each other. Often we will say, I am going to be particularly busy next week, has anybody around the team got a bit more capacity?

We have those sorts of conversations weekly. Naomi, Senior manager, Tax, PSF UK

In terms of workload, there were three potential outcomes, each found in all four research sites. Approximately 40% of this sample (17) had managed to reduce their workload to an appropriate level by the time of the interview, although more than half of these had achieved

this by restricting their job content to more ‘suitable’ work. A further seven were team managers who, while reducing their personal workload through delegation to subordinates, retained full-time-equivalent management responsibility. The remaining third simply retained their full-time-equivalent responsibilities and workload after transition to part-time.

Adaptation of availability schedules Those who tried to manage availability schedules alone also had limited options. In both organizations, a ‘crisis’ mentality and an expectation of unpredictability was the norm. This unpredictability was less of a problem for full-timers, who were expected to put work before non-work. Part-timers had to manage their availability schedule more proactively, and get better at planning, in order to increase the predictability of their work.

If you organize things upfront there’s less panic because panic is causing long days.

I think it’s a key part of part-time work. I’m more in a proactive mode to make sure that I’m not getting into panic mode. If you’re used to work[ing] in a panic mode, working part-time is almost impossible. Paulus, Director, Assurance, PSF NL

Part-timers managed deadlines and diaries around gaps in their availability, in order to avoid, or at least minimize, interruptions to time off.

By the time I get to Thursday, there are things that I’m doing to try to minimize the impact on Friday. And earlier in the week I’m probably trying to work ahead to minimize having to work on Friday. Alistair, Director, Tax, PSF UK

Those part-timers who worked more collaboratively with colleagues could communicate their availability in open diaries, out-of-office messages, and email signatures: this enabled them to enlist others in planning projects around gaps in availability to minimize both the project management burden on themselves and interruptions to their time off.

They know when I'm around, when not, the teams that I work with. So from that point of view the expectation has been set. It took me about half a year I guess, but by then they knew. I needed to be a bit stubborn in the beginning, and then you don't need any further technology things like out of offices. Tjarko, Internal consultant, InfoCo NL

However, it was not always possible to 'organize out' all unpredictable events or calls, so it might be necessary to organize cover to service clients, coworkers or managers, in the part-timer's absence. An IT operations manager, in charge of a 24/7 operation, had a schedule of emergency cover, and robust processes for others to follow during her absence. This gave her confidence that her juniors would be able to provide good client service during her absence.

If something goes really, really wrong, theoretically I could be pulled in. So I was a bit wary of that, but I think if there is a robust process and an organization in place, it should not depend on *people* [individuals]; it should depend on, Are there sufficient people on shift? Clara, Operations manager, InfoCo NL

However, those who had no substitutable resources were subject to interruptions during their time off. A senior manager at PSF UK had been paired with an assistant manager with the same day off, so there was no cover for client contact.

Unfortunately, the assistant manager that we've got on the job doesn't work Fridays either. And mostly I've picked up when they [the clients]'ve emailed and said they need something doing urgently. Fiona, Senior manager, Assurance, PSF UK

Three different outcomes in terms of availability were observed with no obvious pattern across occupations or across the research sites. About a third of participants achieved predictable time off without interruptions; a third had occasional or emergency contact only; the final third had no expectation of predictable or uninterrupted time off, and continued to respond to urgent or unpredictable events during their time off.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the process by which professionals achieve part-time i-deals. As a process study, it focused on identifying the factors and stages in the development of the process. Our contributions develop i-deals theory, and relate it to job crafting.

Defining the elements of a ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal

These findings suggest that, for professionals at least, existing categories of i-deals need refinement. Both schedule and workload (tasks) were negotiated separately within the same i-deal – perhaps better characterized as a ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal. This finding reflects the distinction in the flexible working literature (Lee et al., 2000) between ‘part-time’ (based on hours) and ‘workload reduction’ (based on outputs). Thus, we build on Hornung et al.’s (2009) finding that ‘workload reduction’ i-deals are a separate category, but our findings do not support Rosen et al.’s (2013) contention that workload reduction i-deals can be subsumed within schedule flexibility i-deals. The ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal may be specific to professionals, to those who are managed by outputs (Kalleberg and Epstein, 2001), or to those whose jobs are not highly prescribed (Felstead et al., 2002). It may be less relevant to those whose work is measured in hours, such as shift workers (Rousseau et al., 2009). In addition to workload and schedule, we identify two further elements of the ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal: perceived ‘suitability’ of the work and career impact.

These i-deals are motivated by work-life balance needs rather than career development needs: this contrasts with Rosen et al.’s (2013) suggestion that i-deals involving changes to job content are always motivated by career development. In terms of ‘mutual benefit’ (Rousseau, 2005), they are similar to flexibility i-deals: attraction and retention for employers, and work-life balance for employees. However, in these demanding, long-hours

environments, mutual benefit was often achieved via considerable job redesign, to avoid inconvenience to their employer or coworkers. In this respect, our findings confirm the overlap between employment terms and job design identified in the study of i-deals by Hornung et al. (2010).

Our findings also add to understanding of the sources of negotiating power in ex ante and ex post i-deals. Negotiating power in an ex ante i-deal is theorized as coming from the individual's value in the market, but in ex post i-deals stems from the relationship with the employer (Rousseau 2005). Studies of part-timers suggest that the negotiation of a minimal reduction (e.g. 10%) is easier than a larger one (e.g. 40%), perhaps because as found here, many continue to deliver a full-time-equivalent workload (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009). While these sources of negotiating power were relevant for part-timers in this study, the ability to negotiate a feasible workload was also related to the pre-existence of the job as full-time. When part-timers took on a job previously done by a full-time (either themselves or a predecessor), regardless of whether they were recruited internally or externally, they were less successful in negotiating a reduced workload. This held true even for minimal time reductions, although the numbers involved do not allow for conclusions to be drawn about the relative importance of the different factors. This finding suggests a structural constraint in the way that work is resourced – an inability or unwillingness to reorganize tasks and reallocate a proportion of the job, affecting part-timers in both ex ante *and* ex post situations.

Refining the process of developing a part-time i-deal: the 'private consideration' stage

.....

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

.....

This study adds an extra stage to Rousseau's (2005) process model of developing an i-deal (see figure 1). We divide Rousseau's pre-work stage into private consideration of options (a private stage, to assess the feasibility of part-time against other options) and preparation (after deciding to pursue it). The secrecy of the 'private consideration' of options stage may be due to fear of the negative impact of part-time work on professional status or career (Hall et al., 2012; Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003; McDonald et al., 2009; Smithson et al., 2004), or perhaps related to the perception that an i-deal motivated by work-life needs, rather than career development, originates in the 'separate sphere' of personal life rather than in the organizational sphere (Andrews and Bailyn, 1993). Despite Dutch legislative provisions and PSF's organizational policy, the 'ideal worker' archetype (Acker, 1990) was prevalent in the contexts studied: organizational expectations of high availability and prioritization of work above non-work (Perlow and Porter, 2009), together with a sense of professional responsibility, may also have inhibited requests to disrupt prevailing work practices. The 'secret' consideration of options stage may be applicable to other contexts in which the i-deal content represents stigma of some kind.

Conversely, factors from the 'separate sphere' of personal life may explain participants' determination to overcome formidable barriers to achieving a 'reduced time and workload i-deal'. As noted previously, many had multiple reasons for wanting to work part-time, reflecting the reality of complex lives. Life-changing events such as childbirth, death of a family member, serious illness or accident may have been a spur to persevere.

Professional work practices as structural constraints on the BATNA for professionals considering part-time work

Previous research has identified legislation, policy and organizational culture as constraints on achieving a PTWA (Campbell and van Wanrooy, 2013; Fagan, 2001; Lee et

al., 2002; Ryan and Kossek, 2008). Gender also figures: men find it harder to ask, and are less likely to have requests for part-time work granted (Burnett et al., 2013). However, differences between the four research sites were fewer than expected.

Lawrence (2001:629) suggests that the ‘routine ongoing practices of organizations’, although ‘seemingly disinterested’ can systematically advantage some groups over others. So while professionals who wish to work part-time may derive encouragement, and negotiating power, from legislation based on society-wide obligations to support carers (Den Dulk et al. 2011) and from organizational policy (Lee et al., 2002), work practices designed for full-timers – indeed for ‘ideal workers’ unencumbered by non-work activities (Acker, 1990) – remain a further barrier. As discussed above, this study identified two such practices – the expectation of unpredictability, and the absence of substitutability and collaboration in resourcing. These practices render professionals working part-time unable to fulfil obligations to clients, or meet quality standards (Kuhn, 2006), but remain common across professions such as management consultancy (Perlow and Porter, 2009) and engineering (Watts, 2009), and may be only partially mitigated by legislation and social culture (Merilainen et al., 2004). Where these practices pertain across an occupation, individuals wanting to work part-time have a limited BATNA (Kim et al., 2005), which reduces negotiating power. Such practices may override organizational policy, or even legislation, making mutual benefit for both employer and employee difficult to achieve, and discouraging professionals from seeking i-deals.

Overcoming structural constraints through individual and collaborative job crafting

Only a minority of participants had achieved a workable, mutually beneficial i-deal at negotiation stage, and could then focus on maintaining its boundaries (Rousseau, 2005). For the majority, workload was not renegotiated at i-deal, so there remained a job design

challenge, which was overcome through unauthorized, informal job crafting – either individual or collaborative (Leana et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Those part-timers who relied on individual rather than collaborative job crafting used only two options, both of which had major disadvantages. Reducing workload by cutting out networking and development may contribute to career marginalization (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010). Reducing availability while retaining the same outputs (by improving efficiency and timekeeping) may contribute to work intensification (Kelliher and Anderson, 2009; McDonald et al., 2009), leading some to conclude that part-time is unsustainable at some levels in some jobs.

Collaborative crafting was able to mitigate some of these disadvantages, in some circumstances. First, reduction in workload could be achieved through delegating or swapping tasks with ‘substitutable’ colleagues, a technique also identified in studies of temporal flexibility (Briscoe, 2007; Tomlinson, 2006). Secondly, enlisting others in project management and arranging cover (again, with suitably ‘substitutable’ colleagues) could achieve ‘predictable time off’ (Perlow, 2012; Perlow and Porter, 2009). However, importantly, the collaborative crafting found here differs from that identified by Leana et al. (2009) in that it was achieved through part-timers’ proactive behaviours, personal influence and the (usually serendipitous) availability of substitutable resource, rather than through objectives discussed and agreed with colleagues.

Since the constraints on developing a reduced time and workload i-deal were found in organizational and occupational working practices, a work design approach may be needed to overcome them. While legislation may challenge thinking, and collective agreements may provide some support, their ability to change work practices, at least in the short-term, may be more limited (Hutchinson, 2016). Organizations looking to attract and retain talent might look to work redesign aimed at improving work-life balance, such as the dual agenda

(Rapoport et al., 2002) and the Work Redesign Model (Perlow and Kelly, 2014). Such approaches involve all staff, not just those working part-time, and so reduce the stigma of ‘otherness’ often experienced by professionals who work part-time.

Implications for flexible and sustainable careers

These findings have implications for professionals’ ability to achieve a flexible career. Although in both countries studied, legislation allowed changes to working arrangements, and both organizations had part-time working policies, examination of the process by which part-time i-deals happen has identified obstacles in maintaining a career in these contexts.

The reduction of workload was a notable absence from many i-deal negotiations. Part-timers unable to reduce workload developed a number of coping strategies, including acceptance of a disproportionate workload, reducing development and networking activities, and collaborative crafting of both schedule and workload. For ex post i-deals, and ex ante i-deals in which the part-timer replaced a full-timer, the lack of organizational involvement in re-examining workloads was remarkable. If those who want to work part-time have to use their negotiating power to redesign schedules and workloads, it may be more problematic to include future career plans at the negotiation stage, potentially reinforcing traditional assumptions about the low ambition of part-timers (Benschop et al., 2013).

These findings suggest that employers who wish to utilize part-time i-deals to support the development of flexible careers need to be more proactive (Vinkenburg et al., 2015) in reducing workload to match a part-time arrangement, challenging established practices in professional work (Lawrence et al., 2001) and reviewing organization culture. Championing the kinds of collaborative adaptations to work practices found in this study could enable organizations to support part-timers, and indeed full-timers seeking greater temporal

flexibility (Briscoe, 2007), while continuing to service client needs. This in turn could help retain professionals in the workforce and enable them to develop careers.

For those who want to move forward in their careers, these findings suggest a burden of having to renegotiate not just employment terms, but also the way the job is designed at each job change. These difficulties might explain the absence of career discussion in the i-deal negotiation, but may also discourage attempts to climb the corporate hierarchy, and encourage alternative definitions of career success (Sturges, 1999). Furthermore, the finding that a quarter of participants had previously decided that working part-time was not possible, raises the question of how many more leave their organizations, remain unhappily full-time or postpone the transition to part-time. This adds to explanations of why part-timers, especially women with socially-valued alternative identities such as motherhood, leave the workforce (Blair-Loy, 2003; Stone, 2007), with negative consequences for career.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

This study has highlighted several avenues for further research. The identification of the workload as well as scheduling elements of the ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal suggests that that the concept deserves further examination as a separate category from flexible schedule i-deals (Rosen 2013). Future research might also examine whether the four-stage process is applicable to other types of i-deal. Two specific professional work practices were found to create structural constraints, but further research on other types of work may identify other constraining practices. Collaborative crafting (Leana et al., 2009) may provide a useful lens for better understanding how part-time professionals undertake the work redesign necessary for achieving a manageable workload and predictable time off.

Like any qualitative study, this one has limitations in terms of generalizability. Our approach and sample size did not allow for analysis of the *relative* importance of different

factors, such as legislation or organizational policies, gender, or managerial or coworker support, as opposed to work practices or job designs, in achieving a part-time i-deal. Coworkers and managers were not included in the study, limiting our understanding of legitimacy and fairness of the i-deals (Rousseau 2005); furthermore, our data only covered the employee perspective on mutual benefit.

The culture and work practices of the commercial, long-hours environments studied may make part-time i-deals harder to achieve than in less demanding or shorter-hours environments. On the other hand, large organizations may offer multiple opportunities for substituting and delegating, while smaller organizations or teams may not have the same scope. Part-timers in other sectors or jobs might experience barriers in different work practices from those identified here, as might those in organizations without supportive policies. Any study of those (perhaps the more resilient or resourceful) who have achieved a PTWA in demanding environments may overstate the options, and needs to be counter-balanced by study of those who did not stay the course. Furthermore, such interviewees may tend to overstate their own agency, and understate the importance of legislation or policy.

Conclusion

This article has presented evidence about how professionals achieve a part-time working arrangement. We have defined a new type of ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal which is relevant to those whose jobs are defined by outputs, not hours. We have proposed that, for i-deals which represent some kind of stigma, or those which originate in the ‘separate sphere’ of non-work life, an initial stage of private consideration of options may be added to Rousseau’s (2005) three-stage model of i-deal development. Importantly, we have shown how work practices designed for full-timers – the routine expectation of unpredictability and the absence of substitutability in resourcing – make it hard for professionals to achieve a

mutually-beneficial ‘reduced time and workload’ i-deal, and how professionals use informal job crafting, both individual and collaborative, to create an appropriate workload and schedule. At every job change or promotion, the need to renegotiate not just the design of the job, but potentially the work practices of the team as well, adds to explanations of the negative consequences of part-time work for professional careers.

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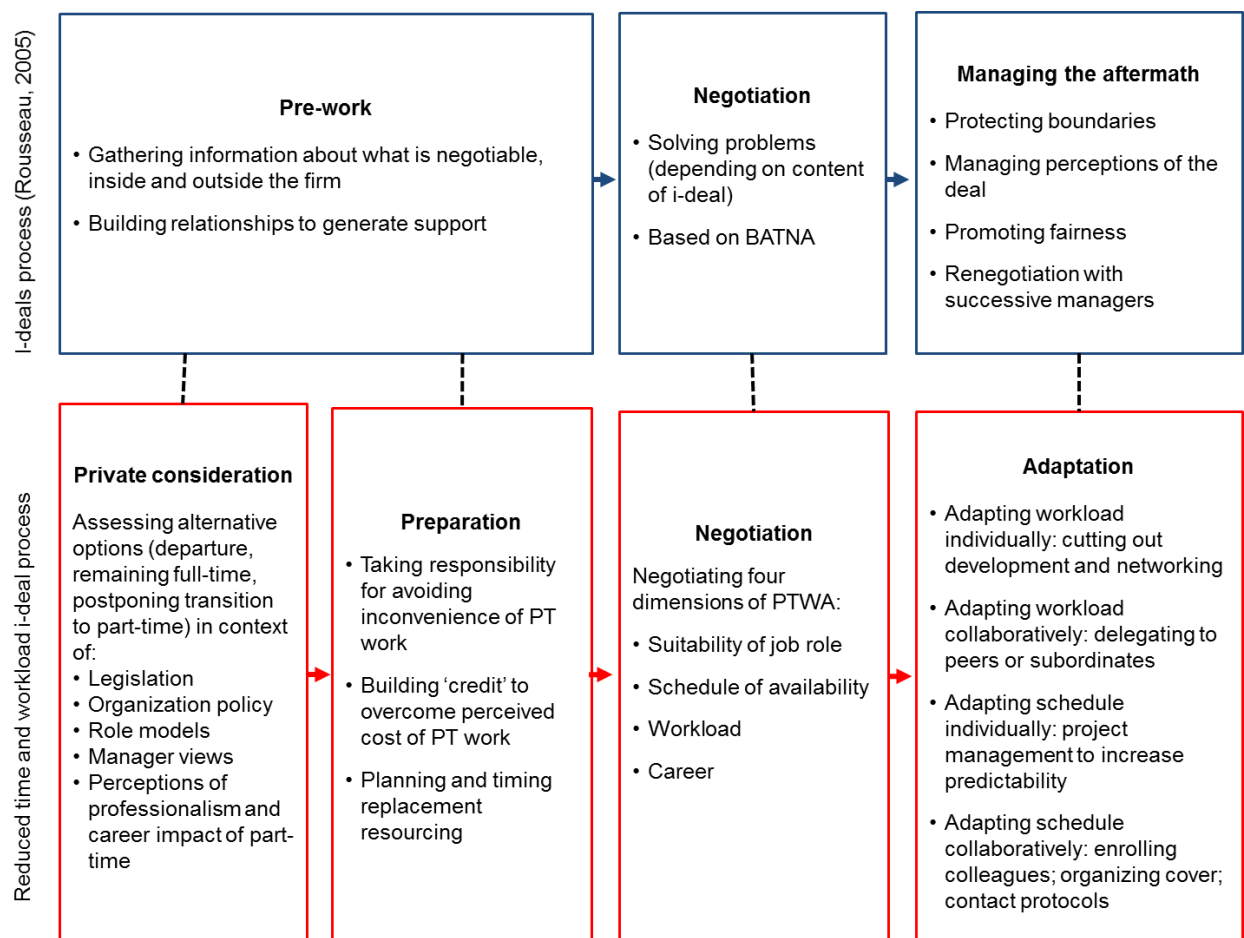
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Table 1 Data analysis

Initial categories of analysis	Final categories of analysis
<p>PRE-WORK</p> <p>Triggers for thinking about part-time (Re-)evaluating place of work in life Role of partners, family, personal circumstances Building up ‘courage’ to ask; fear of repercussions for professional status Fear of impact on promotion prospects Constraints in organizational culture Variability of managers’ views; finding a ‘suitable’ manager Doing ‘suitable’ work: availability expectations, pace of work, managing teams, client service Building up ‘credit’ (business case for PT) Choosing time to request Doing research; knowing what to ask Looking for role models Understanding HR systems and protocols Understanding the legal position</p>	<p>STAGE 1 PRIVATE CONSIDERATION</p> <p>Assessing alternative options: (departure, remaining full-time, postponing transition to part-time) in context of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Organization policy • Role models • Manager views • Perceptions of professionalism and career impact of part-time <p>STAGE 2 PREPARATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking responsibility for avoiding the inconvenience of part-time work • Building ‘credit’ to overcome perceived extra cost of part-time work • Delivering the full-time job to fill resource gap without overloading coworkers • Planning and timing replacement resourcing
<p>NEGOTIATION</p> <p>Choosing a more suitable job Negotiating and managing schedule of availability Managing gaps in availability Choosing to retain 100% responsibility Career</p>	<p>STAGE 3 NEGOTIATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitability of job role • ‘Normal’ schedule of availability (changing status of Friday; which days and why; degree of contactability during time off) • Workload (or keeping 100% responsibility) • Career and development impact
<p>MAINTENANCE</p>	<p>STAGE 4 ADAPTATION</p>

<p>Trial period</p> <p>Defining what PT means</p> <p>Keeping 100% of the job</p> <p>Adapting the job to reduce workload</p> <p>Changing the job post-negotiation</p> <p>Being available outside of working hours</p> <p>Negotiating and managing schedule of availability</p> <p>Setting boundaries</p> <p>Arranging cover</p> <p>Managing messages and perceptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting workload individually: cutting out development and networking • Adapting workload collaboratively: delegating to peers or subordinates • Adapting schedule individually: project management to increase predictability • Adapting schedule collaboratively: enrolling colleagues; organizing cover; contact protocols
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Figure 1: Stages/activities in the development of a ‘reduced time and workload i-deal’ for professionals, compared to Rousseau’s (2005) model



The transition to part-time: How professionals negotiate 'reduced time and workload' i-deals and craft their jobs

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