A Fair Go? Casualisation of the Workforce

Your Task:
1. Select an issue from the list provided.
2. Describe the issue (150 words)
3. Explain why this is an issue of justice or the common good (150 words)
4. Identify the people or groups who have a stake in the issue and analyse their perspectives on it. Why would some stakeholders not want the situation to change? (750 words)
5. Analyse the issue in terms of the principles that have been studied that promote human flourishing. Which perspective would most effectively promote the common good? (750 words)
6. In light of your analysis, and after considering the ethical questions provided, discuss how you would respond to this issue. (200 words)

Can you think of any other perspectives?

Perspective: Government
- What belief is held by this group?
- What resolution would they opt for?
- Who would benefit?

Perspective: Employers
- What belief is held by this group?
- What resolution would they opt for?
- Who would benefit?

Perspective: Employees – Anti-casualisation
- Who might belong to this group?
- What belief is held by this group?
- What resolution would they opt for?
- Who would benefit?

Perspective: Employees – Pro-casualisation
- Who might belong to this group?
- What belief is held by this group?
- What resolution would they opt for?
- Who would benefit?

Perspective: Employees – over 50
- What belief is held by this group?
- What resolution would they opt for?
- Who would benefit?

Perspective: A Christian Perspective
- What belief is espoused in Christian teaching?
- What resolution is presented in this perspective?
- Who would benefit?
Introduction:

When we speak of decent work, we mean work on which women and men can raise their family and send their children to school. Work in which people are respected, can organize and have a voice. Work that will provide for a reasonable pension at the end of a working life. Policies that generate quality work throughout society. We call it decent work because we know work is a source of dignity. Work is fundamental to family stability. Work is linked with peace. A community that works well is a community in peace. Decent work recognizes you cannot have stable societies based on persistent social inequality, as there can be no social development based on unstable economies.¹

The Australian economy has witnessed a series of radical adjustments since the 1970s. In many ways this shift can be characterised as one of necessity rather than choice. Faced with an era of rapid technological change, the internationalisation of the economy and above all else, the increasing power and significance of global financial institutions, Australia was forced to generate a more open, and a more responsible economy. While the need to transcend the isolationism that for so long characterised the nation is certainly a positive, there is an increasing sense that society is being driven less by an overall sense of social purpose than by anonymous market forces. Although this paradigm shift can be mapped in terms of an increased multiculturalism along with the changing social roles of men and women, there is one issue that cuts across all others, and which is the focus of this particular topic: casual work.²

As Paul Howe has testified, the new divide within the Australian economy is not between the blue collar and white-collar worker, but between those at the core of the workforce and those at the periphery.³ For those at the ‘core’, their employment status is likely to be full-time and/or permanent. They possess skills for which there is a steady demand and for which they can charge a premium. They enjoy the luxury of paid holidays, sick leave and in many cases, parental leave above the government’s minimum standard. For those on the periphery, the situation could not be more different.

Engaged in what has variously been defined as ‘insecure’, ‘precarious’, ‘non-standard’, ‘non-traditional’, and most frequently, ‘casual work’, some 2 million Australians, or 40% of the entire workforce, face an entirely different series of challenges. ‘Work’ at this end of the spectrum is not a career, but a means to an end. Deprived of the rights and benefits that accompany permanent employment, casual workers have no access to paid leave of any type, have reduced access to skill and/or career development opportunities, minimal income security and most significantly, little if any employment security. Casual work however is not simply about the legal status of an employee under current legislation, nor is it about having a so-called ‘job for life’. It is first and foremost about the degree of control an employee has over when and where they work and what conditions are attached to those hours. It is about the impact such circumstances have on their personal and family lives. For while it has been widely recognised that casual workers are often more prone to work related injury,⁴ the impact of ‘casual employment is far more diffuse and wide ranging since ‘insecure’ income will often

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exclude an employee from gaining a foothold on the residential property market. Forced to make a choice between caring for a sick family member and earning a day’s pay, casual workers remain the most vulnerable to even the slightest financial crisis. The full impact such ‘choices’ have on mental health is yet to be fully appreciated.

While it is naïve to ignore the fact that for some people, casual work is a lifestyle choice, it would be equally naïve to ignore the fact that for many others, casual work is not a choice at all – it is all that they can get. Within the accommodation and food-services industry for example, along with retail, agriculture, forestry, fishing, administrative sectors, casual workers constitute a very high proportion of the total workforce. Even within the educational and health sectors, which for many are considered relatively secure forms of employment, the casualisation of the workforce has expanded exponentially. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that Australia ranks second only to Spain in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) for the prevalence of non-permanent employment of this sort.

In this age of uncertainty, unemployment not only serves to mask the further 7% who aspire to work more hours per week than they are allocated but totally ignores the thousands who have dropped out of the workforce altogether and are trapped in what Howe refers to as the limbo of a Disability Support Pension, until such time as they qualify for an Aged Pension. Indeed a fascination with unemployment statistics further masks any concern with those who move from employment of one type to another. While unemployment is certainly a scourge that can have highly corrosive effects on both individual moral and health, we need to start asking about the impact of periods of under-employment or casual work and the impact this has on the worker, on the employer, and most fundamentally, on society as a whole.

Over and against any notion of employment as an antidote to poverty and hardship, the increasing commoditisation of the worker which is the hallmark of casual employment, seeks to address a variety of issues such as: the perception that causal employment represents a manipulation of working hours by employers in a bid to reduce costs, the insecurity and vulnerability of workers, the erosion of family and household life, and ultimately the health of democracy and society in Australia.

The following resources will help to provide a broad understanding of the issue:


**Perspectives:**

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6 Brian Howe, “Confronting the Risk and Tackling the Challenge of Insecure Work.”


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There are various groups ("stakeholders") that are involved in this issue in some way. In this section, please reflect on the information from the previous section and from the following resources. In reviewing the information from these sources, identify the perspectives and interests of each stakeholder group. Consider the questions provided on the cover sheet of this task in order to guide your reading.

To begin to understand the various stakeholders and perspectives in this issue, see the following resources:


Now let’s look at each of the perspectives in detail.

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<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective 1:</strong> Employees – Pro-casualisation</td>
<td>Many people who undertake casual work say that the flexibility and working hours suit their lifestyle. View the following resource to find out more about this perspective: Paul Robinson, “Does a Casual Life Work?” The Age, July 31, 2004. Becker, McCutcheon and Hegney provide the following addition to this perspective: “Evidence from the nursing workforce in the UK, the USA and Australia has shown that many nurses choose casualisation over permanent positions because of higher hourly pay, more incentives and flexibility over when and where they work.” See the full research paper: Susanne Becker, Helen McCutcheon and Desley Hegney, “Casualisation in the Nursing Workforce – The Need to Make it Work” Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing 28, no.1 (2010): 45-51.</td>
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**Ethical Questions for Reflection**

From what you have read so far, what do you think, are the pros and cons of casual work?

Becker, McCutcheon and Hegney discuss the issues of flexibility, commitment and continuity of care, in relation to casual work. What are the implications of these issues for the worker? What are the implications of these issues for the employer? What strategies can be utilised to ensure the commitment of the worker and the continuity of care provided by the employer?

Many businesses are moving to whole workforces made up of casual employees. To what extent do you think this is representative of change and development in society? Is this a good or a bad thing? Does it benefit the company or the employee? What are the implications of such a move on the workforce as a whole?
What are the positive effects of casual employment on family life?

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<th>Perspective 2:</th>
<th>Employees – Anti-casualisation</th>
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<td>The article in <em>The Age</em>, provided above, also discusses the downside to casual work. Paul Robinson says that “up to 60 per cent of Australia’s 2 million casual workers detested the irregularity of income, the unpredictability of working hours and the hardships placed on family life. They often felt humiliated at a lack of respect for their work.” View the article again for the perspective of those against casualisation: Paul Robinson, “Does a Casual Life Work?” <em>The Age</em>, July 31, 2004.</td>
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<td>An anonymous submission to the <em>Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work, 2012</em>, states that the instability of the workforce, particularly in essential services (health, welfare and education), means that it is difficult to set and achieve long-term goals, and that the key expertise needed in order to achieve those goals is transient: “Anonymous Submission 11,” <em>Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work</em>, 2012.</td>
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<td>The following resource discusses the social and emotional costs of casual work, as well as the costs to productivity in the workplace: Barbara Pocock, Rosslyn Prosser and Ken Bridge, “Only a Casual ... How Casual Work affects Employees, Households and Communities in Australia,” (paper, School of Social Sciences, University of Adelaide, July, 2004).</td>
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**Ethical Questions for Reflection**

With many businesses moving to casual workforces, this may have implications for productivity across Australia. What are these broader implications, and why are they a concern?

Are there implications for the long-term career development of the individual worker in casual employment? What are these and why are they a concern?

What negative effect does casual employment have on family life?
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<th>Perspective 3: Employees – Over 50</th>
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<td>Another <a href="#">anonymous submission</a> for the Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work discusses the difficulties faced by casual workers in continuing to meet the requirements of accreditation with professional bodies.</td>
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**Ethical Questions for Reflection**

- What impact does long-term casual work have on superannuation, and in turn, how does this affect retirement age?
- In the submission above, the worker discussed the fact that she works over the allotted/paid time in order to complete her work. Is this fair? Based on what you have read so far, to what extent do you think this is a problem for other casual workers?

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<th>Perspective 4: Government</th>
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<td>View the following resource for some clear definitions of casual, full-time and part-time work:</td>
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<td>The “<a href="#">Fair Work Information Statement</a>,” derived from section 124 of the <a href="#">Fair Work Act</a> 2009, outlines 10 minimum workplace entitlements in the National Employment Standards, but cautions that “there are some exclusions for casual employees.”</td>
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<td>The following resources outline the National Employment Standards that pertain to casual workers:</td>
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<td>Dr. Mark Drummond, from the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations produced a “<a href="#">Supplementary Submission to the Fair Work Act Review</a>,” in March 2012, (note: you will need to click on ‘drummond_mark.doc’). In his submission, Drummond calls for clear definitions of the different types of casual employees, in order to ensure that they can</td>
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readily access information about their employment rights. 


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**Ethical Questions for Reflection**

Why do you think the Government commissioned the Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work? What values underpin this enquiry? What role does the Government play in the provision of adequate and stable employment for the Australian population?

To what extent do you think there is a lack of knowledge in the casual workforce as to workplace entitlements?

What are the implications of casual workforces on the nation as a whole? How does casual work affect productivity, job security, and the development and implementation of long-term goals? How does this affect the development of Australia as a nation?

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**Perspective 5:**

**Employers**

The Mining and Energy Division’s submission to the Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work outlines the reasons why employers may utilise casual workers, but cautions that casual employees need to be “engaged appropriately and for the correct reasons in Australian workplaces.” They assert that “there needs to be tighter controls placed on the use of this type of employment to stop victimisation of workers who stand up for their rights.” View the full submission here: “CFMEU, Mining and Energy Division Submission,” Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work, 2012.

In the following article, the authors argue that employers have “missed the point” when it comes to understanding the needs of the casual workforce:

Profits down, or just not high enough? Penalty rates getting on your nerves? Productivity sluggish? For big business, workplace ‘flexibility’ is the cure-all.

The employer-driven agenda to increase workplace flexibility has led to a rise in casual work arrangements in Australia, a sleeper issue catapulted into the headlines by the ACTU campaign on insecure work.

Business have fired back. Casual work is a win-win, they say. Workers like being casual – after all, casual means flexible, and who doesn’t want a bit more flexibility in their lives?

The article cited above in the pro-casualisation perspective, by Susanne Becker, Helen McCutcheon and Desley Hegney, “Casualisation in the Nursing Workforce – The Need to Make it Work,” also discusses the perspective of the employer.

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**Ethical Questions for Reflection**

To what extent is casual work beneficial for the employer?

As you will have seen in the National Employment Standards, referenced above, casual work precludes the provision of paid sick leave, holiday pay and paid parental leave. Do you think this is a consideration for employers when hiring casual workers instead of permanent part-time workers? Is this ethical? Why/ why not?

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**Perspective 6:**

**A Christian Perspective**

In a Pastoral Letter on The Dignity of Work, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Bishop Christopher Saunders, says:

> In a developed nation such as Australia, one would imagine that our wealth and the organisation of our labour market would ensure low paid vulnerable workers and their families could live in basic dignity. Sadly, this is often not the case...

> ...The casualisation of work over the past thirty years has not been confined to a few sectors of Australia’s labour market. It ranges across retail, accommodation and hospitality, health and social services, education, transport, construction and manufacturing industries.

> It is unacceptable that people who work to clothe us, feed us, clean for us, teach us and tend to the sick and those in need should endure poor conditions and have such a low value placed upon their work. It is time to consider the need for more decent pay and conditions for those in insecure work. A new approach is needed that places the dignity of the worker at the centre of labour market policy.


The Catholic Social Services submission to the Independent Enquiry into Insecure Work asks, “Is Any Job Better Than the Dole?” CSS say that “recent research suggests that poor quality jobs can leave the unemployed no better off than they were on income support.” They posit that employers use casual work as a screening tool for disadvantaged workers, such as the long-term unemployed. Is this just? What are the ethical issues associated with such a policy?
Ethical Questions:

There are numerous questions we need to ask, from an ethical point of view, in relation to the casualization of the workforce. Many of these questions have been asked through the examination of the various perspectives. A few more are listed here. Can you think of any others?

- Does flexibility of employment necessarily equate to insecurity?
- Do governments and organisations have a responsibility to ensure flexibility in the work force, particularly for students and for people raising young families?
- How can the problems associated with casual work (insecurity, lack of holiday and sick pay, unreliable hours, etc) be addressed?
- Do casual employees deserve the same entitlements as permanent employees?
- What does the trend towards casualisation say about the nature of the workplace in Australian society?
- What groups in Australian society are particularly disadvantaged by the increasing casualisation of the workforce? Who benefits? Is there any common ground?
- What rights do workers have in relation to reliable, stable employment?

Consider the quote that opened this “hot topic”:

> When we speak of decent work, we mean work on which women and men can raise their family and send their children to school. Work in which people are respected, can organize and have a voice. Work that will provide for a reasonable pension at the end of a working life. Policies that generate quality work throughout society. We call it decent work because we know work is a source of dignity. Work is fundamental to family stability. Work is linked with peace. A community that works well is a community in peace. Decent work recognizes you cannot have stable societies based on persistent social inequality, as there can be no social development based on unstable economies.  

After reading all of the resources provided in this package, do you think casual work is, by the above definition, “decent work”? That is, does it provide a means by which “women and men can raise their family and send their children to school”? Do casual workers have a voice in their workplace? Are casual workers entitled to superannuation and pension benefits? Is casual work a source of dignity for the employee? Can these concerns be addressed with changes to the nature of casual work?

Which approach would most effectively promote the common good?

Consider all that you have read in this module. Think about the history and background to the issue, and the diversity of perspectives and interests among the various stakeholders. Think about the ethical questions, and how the different positions dispose us to thinking differently about what the stakeholders should or should not do. Now ask yourself what the best course of action would be for securing the common good. What should each of the stakeholders do to bring about the common good? What should the Australian Government do to bring about the common good? How will the common good be realized in this situation, and who must contribute?

And what about us? What should we do?

This package has provided you with more than enough resources to complete your task, but if you are hungry for more, visit the ACU library guide: A Fair Go? Casualisation of the Workforce.