

Blended teams in a changing workplace: how permanent employees perceive collaboration with non-permanent workers

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Executive Summary

This article examines how permanent employees perceive collaboration with non-permanent workers in blended teams, a topic of growing relevance as organisations increasingly rely on flexible workforce arrangements. Drawing on Psychological Contract theory and signaling theory, the authors hypothesise that higher proportions of non-permanent workers negatively affect permanent employees' organisational trust, job insecurity, and team commitment, with Perceived Organisational Support (POS) as a moderator. Using a mixed-methods design across six Swiss organisations, Study 1 surveyed 878 permanent employees and Study 2 conducted 22 semi-structured interviews. Quantitative results yielded no significant main effects for the hypothesised relationships; however, POS moderated the association between non-permanent worker proportion and organisational trust at low POS levels. Qualitative analysis identified seven themes revealing that collaboration is experienced ambivalently — non-permanent workers simultaneously reduce workload and introduce burdens such as onboarding demands and increased responsibility. Outcomes were more strongly shaped by organisational conditions, communication quality, and the perceived rationale for non-permanent hiring than by team composition alone. The study advances understanding by centring permanent employees' perspectives and demonstrating that blended team outcomes are highly context-dependent.

Key Insights

1. The proportion of non-permanent workers in a team does not directly or uniformly affect permanent employees' organisational trust, job insecurity, or team commitment — contextual conditions mediate these relationships.
2. Perceived Organisational Support (POS) moderates the relationship between non-permanent worker proportion and organisational trust: negative associations emerge only when POS is low, suggesting that organisational signals of support buffer potential negative interpretations of blended team composition.
3. Permanent employees' experiences of collaboration are inherently ambivalent — non-permanent workers are valued for workload reduction and expertise but simultaneously generate burdens including onboarding demands, responsibility for others' errors, and administrative overhead from restricted system access.

Practical Takeaways

- Organisations that communicate clearly about the rationale for non-permanent hiring — distinguishing workload management or expertise acquisition from cost-cutting — appear to generate more positive permanent employee interpretations of blended team composition.
- Structured integration practices such as buddy systems, internal flexible worker pools, and supervisor-led expectation management are associated with more positive collaboration experiences in blended teams across occupational groups.

Frameworks Mentioned

Psychological Contract Theory — A framework distinguishing relational and transactional employment relationships used to explain how permanent and non-permanent workers operate under divergent mutual obligations, affecting group cohesiveness and commitment.

Social Exchange Theory — A theoretical lens applied to interpret how perceived organisational support shapes permanent employees' reciprocal attitudes and behaviours toward their organisation in blended team contexts.

Signaling Theory — Used to explain how HR practices — including the composition of blended teams — convey signals to permanent employees about organisational priorities, stability, and appreciation.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model — Referenced as a theoretical resource framing workload and support dynamics relevant to permanent employees' experiences in blended teams.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The study employs a pre-registered mixed-methods design with a substantial quantitative sample (N=878) across six organisations and multiple sectors, enhancing internal validity. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed discriminant validity among key constructs. The qualitative component meaningfully extends null quantitative findings by surfacing the mechanisms and meanings underlying blended team experiences. The theoretical integration of PC theory, signaling theory, and POS is coherent and well-developed. **Limitations:** The broad categorisation of all non-permanent workers as a single group obscures potentially important differences between, for example, agency workers, freelancers, and fixed-term employees. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Reliance on self-reported, perceived team composition rather than objective measures introduces measurement imprecision. The Swiss labour market context — characterised by relatively strong worker protections — may have suppressed job insecurity perceptions, limiting transferability to other national contexts. Inability to account for nested data structures (employees within teams within organisations) is a notable methodological limitation. The confounding of organisation with occupational group restricts organisational-level interpretation. The qualitative sample of 22 is adequate for thematic saturation but drawn from the same survey pool, which may introduce self-selection bias.

Organizational Practice

Six Swiss organisations across healthcare, mobility, and financial services employed blended teams comprising permanent and non-permanent workers. Practices observed include internal flexible worker pools, buddy systems for onboarding integration, supervisor-led expectation management, and role-based system access differentiation. Non-permanent workers were deployed across IT, management, and nursing functions, with varying proportions averaging 15% of team composition.

Strategic Implications

The null main-effect findings suggest that simple headcount ratios of non-permanent workers are insufficient predictors of permanent employee attitudes, pointing toward a more nuanced understanding of blended workforce management in which organisational culture, communication, and support structures carry greater explanatory weight. The POS moderation finding indicates that investment in perceived support infrastructure may be consequential for trust outcomes in contexts of workforce diversification. The ambivalence theme across qualitative data implies that the effects of non-permanent workforce expansion on permanent employee experience are not predetermined but are shaped by managerial practices and integration quality. Occupational variation in perceptions suggests that sector-specific approaches to blended team management warrant further investigation. The absence of job insecurity effects in the Swiss context raises questions about whether findings from high-security labour markets generalise to more precarious employment environments.

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