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**THE TRIANGULAR WORKING ARRANGEMENT:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
AUCKLAND TEMPORARY STAFFING AGENCIES, THEIR  
CLIENT ORGANISATIONS AND TEMPORARY CLERICAL  
WORKERS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2010

## **ABSTRACT**

This research explored the triangular working relationship between employers, temporary staffing agencies and clerical temporary workers. The study used a qualitative approach to investigate the interdependent relationship between these three groups within the context of the buoyant Auckland labour market of 2006 and 2007. Findings are based on in-depth interviews using a grounded theory methodology. Participants comprised ten employer representatives, ten employment agency consultants and twenty female agency clerical workers.

Interviews with the employer representatives revealed that employers expected agencies to facilitate swift and unproblematic access to a reliable, hardworking and disposable workforce. Unfortunately, labour market conditions meant that agencies were increasingly unable to meet this requirement. In consequence, employers developed various strategies designed to limit their dependency on agencies. These tactics helped solve employers' staffing needs but created problems for agencies.

Agencies function as intermediaries between employers and workers. In order to operate profitably they need to generate a demand for their services and have a reliable supply of good quality workers. According to agent respondents, these conditions existed at the start of the last economic boom but had now changed. An oversupply of agencies, coupled with an undersupply of temporary workers meant that agencies were finding it increasingly difficult to meet their clients' needs. Agencies used various strategies to try and overcome these problems but were seldom able to meet the needs of both their clients and their workforce.

Although temporary workers were in a more favourable position in the labour market, this did not translate into improved working conditions. Temporary worker respondents described social alienation, poor pay and benefits and monotonous assignments as commonplace. In consequence, most respondents eventually left temporary work for permanent employment.

This research has demonstrated that labour market conditions and the structural conditions of temporary work strongly influenced the activities of each group in the triangular working relationship. The aims, expectations and behaviours of the three sets of participants were often mutually incompatible which limited the manoeuvrability of each group. This created outcomes which were often unintended, and frequently suboptimal, for all three parties.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the people who provided assistance and support throughout my thesis. I would especially like to express my appreciation for the advice and supervision provided by Drs Jocelyn Handy and Dianne Gardner. I am also grateful to Massey University for awarding the doctoral scholarship that made this research possible, and for the permission to conduct the research granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

I would also like to thank all the forty participants who were willing to share their personal experiences of the temporary staffing industry that formed the basis of this research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, particularly my husband for his support and patience over the last five years.

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