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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

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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.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have highlighted the rapid rise in temporary agency employment that has occurred over the last twenty years (Burgess & Connell, 2006; Coe, Johns & Ward, 2007; Smith & Neuwirth, 2009; Ward, 2004). Research into this topic has generally focused on the three main groups of people involved in agency temporary work, these being employers, agencies and workers.

Employer focused research has examined the reasons why organisations hire temporary staffing and the ways in which temporary workers are actually utilised within organisations. Agency focused research has tended to examine the increasing number of temporary staffing agencies within contemporary labour markets and the entrepreneurial activities of agencies. Finally, worker focused research has investigated the reasons why job-seekers enter temporary employment and the psychological and economic effects of this type of work arrangement on temporary workers.

Research looking at employers across a range of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries notes a sharp increase in companies using private employment agencies for temporary staffing (Burgess & Connell, 2006; Hall, 2006). This increase tends to accelerate during times of economic growth when labour markets in most developed countries are buoyant, creating difficulties for employers trying to attract permanent staff. As well as hiring temporary staff to provide short-term needs for staff with specific skills, employers also tend to hire temporary staff to cover when permanent staff are absent or to help when there are peaks in demand. Other reasons include long-term organisational flexibility, legal risk minimisation, pre-selection of permanent staff and cost-cutting.

The results of organisations using an increasing number of temporary workers are varied. Some researchers emphasise advantages such as staffing flexibility, reduced costs, protection of permanent jobs and more effective management of workloads, whereas

other researchers have identified more negative outcomes such as a decrease in organisational specific skills, lower commitment to an organisation by both temporary and permanent staff, tension between permanent and temporary staff, and a loss of institutional memories (Davis-Blake, Broschak & George, 2003; Forde, MacKenzie & Robinson, 2008; Van Breugel, Van Olffen & Olie, 2005).

It is only relatively recently that research has focused on the temporary staffing industry, and compared to employer and temporary worker focused research, the activities of employment agencies are under-researched (Coe, Johns & Ward, 2009). Studies of the temporary staffing industry as an established institution in the labour market suggest that within an economic context, it is performing an increasingly active and important role by enabling organisations to dispose of workers quickly during recessions and re-employ them just as easily during economic up-turns. (Biggs, 2006; Mitlacher, 2008). Some studies suggest that individual employment agencies are now taking a more entrepreneurial approach, utilising a variety of tactics in order to shape a continuing demand for temporary staff within the labour market, rather than simply being intermediaries between client organisations and temporary workers (Ofstead, 2000; Smith & Neuwirth, 2009). There is evidence to suggest that the temporary staffing industry itself has become highly sensitive to economic cycles, with the activities of employment agencies changing to suit varying local and global economic conditions (De Graaf-Ziji & Berkout, 2007).

Research on temporary workers has shown that temporary staff are now being hired in a wide variety of occupations, ranging from low-skilled clerical and blue-collar industrial workers to highly-skilled, well-paid professionals in areas such as information technology, business management and medicine (De Cuyper, De Jong, De Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti & Schalk, 2008; Feldman, Doerpinghaus & Turnley, 1994; Hoque, Kirkpatrick, De Ruyter & Lonsdale, 2008). Despite this, agency temporary workers tend to be predominantly low-skilled and poorly paid with clerical staff continuing to be the largest occupational group within the temporary staffing industry (Coe et al., 2009; Theodore & Peck, 2002). Although a few highly-skilled temporary workers may deliberately choose this type of employment arrangement, the majority of research

suggests that most lower-skilled agency temporary workers would prefer permanent work and experience temporary work as being insecure, poorly paid and providing a lonely and monotonous working lifestyle with little prospects of further training or career advancement (Forde & Slater, 2006; Peck & Theodore, 2007; Virtanen, Kivimaki, Joensuu, Virtanen, Elovaino & Vahtera, 2005). These findings are consistent across countries and economic contexts, suggesting that the increasing use of temporary staff may have a negative impact on those who have been forced into this type of employment arrangement by economic necessity.

To date, relatively little research has explicitly examined the triangular working relationship between temporary workers, temporary staffing agencies and their client organisations. The psychological contract, as conceptualised by Rousseau (1995), has been widely used as a model for evaluating traditional employment relationships. This model is typically based on mutual expectations and obligations between an employee and employer. The extent to which perceived expectations and obligations between employers and workers are met is the essence of the psychological contract.

The traditional two-way psychological contract is predominantly 'relational', involving "indefinite but implicitly lengthy time-frames, emotional attachments between individual and organisation, and the promise of long-term security and career development" (Inkson, Heising & Rousseau, 2001, p.261). Temporary staff coming into organisations may create a sense of threat for some regular workers as their future permanent employment at the company may no longer be perceived as secure. This can represent a breach of the psychological contract between permanent employees and their employers, resulting in reduced affective commitment towards the company by the worker (Biggs & Swailes, 2006; Kraimer, Wayne, Liden & Sparrowe, 2005).

For temporary staff, the psychological contract between worker and client organisation is more likely to be 'transactional' as it is based on task completion with no expectation by either party of any ongoing relationship once the assignment has ended (Rousseau & Parks, 1993; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995). Furthermore, the structure of the temporary staffing business enables client organisations to terminate assignments or

return temporary workers to their agency without providing any prior warning. In view of this, the client organisation and temporary worker contract cannot be considered relational. Regardless of this, many employers can demand personal commitment from temporary workers in return for simply providing them with an assignment, without any addition of future job security (Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Blyton & Jenkins, 2007; Lai, Soltani & Baum, 2008).

As temporary workers are the employees of the agency but work in client organisations, they have duel psychological contracts. For much of the time, the only relatively stable relationship that temporary workers may have is with the agency, therefore the psychological contract they establish with the agency is often stronger than that which they have with the client organisations (Davidov, 2004; Druker & Stanworth, 2004). However, longer-term assignments may gradually change the client organisation and temporary worker relationship from being transactional to more relational as over time, the temporary worker becomes more socially 'embedded' in the organisation (Lee & Faller, 2005).

Despite the fact that the working relationship between employers, agencies and temporary workers differs considerably from the traditional employment relationship between an employer and a permanent employee, most studies on temporary staffing involve only one or sometimes two of the three parties involved.

This thesis has three main aims. Firstly, it will describe the differing aims, expectations and behaviours of employers, recruitment consultants and temporary clerical workers. Secondly, it will analyse the working relationship between these three groups and interpret the ways in which a buoyant labour market influences the interactions between the three parties. Thirdly, it will interpret female temporary workers' subjective experiences of clerical agency work from a psychological perspective.

When I began the thesis, my initial aim was to concentrate solely on the experiences of female temporary clerical workers in Auckland. Early in the study I decided to interview recruitment consultants and employers as well, to see if their statements corroborated

with the temporary workers' descriptions of their working conditions. However, when I did speak to all three groups, I found that most of the employers and recruitment consultants also wanted to talk about their roles and their experiences. It was then that I realised there was a very complex set of interactions going on between these three groups. This interested me and the more I looked at the relationship between the three groups, the more my study developed in that direction. The result of this was the main objective of the study changed from examining the experiences of one particular group to examining the triangular working relationship between clerical temporary workers, recruitment consultants and employers. Therefore, the final version of this thesis represents a shift in the evolution of my thinking and the research questions over the duration of this research.

It is essential to acknowledge the importance of the economic context when looking at the temporary staffing industry as periods of recession or growth may influence how the three groups of players experience their roles. Looking at everyday experiences from a psychological viewpoint is also important. This aspect has not been covered well in existing literature, especially within the framework of the triangular working relationship. From a psychological perspective, how these three groups impact on each other in regard to their day-to-day workplace functioning is largely unaddressed in research. The thesis addresses this gap by examining the interactions between client organisations, temporary staffing agencies and temporary clerical workers within the context of the buoyant Auckland labour market during the years 2006 and 2007. In this study, I will be demonstrating that the activities of each party were strongly influenced by the economic context as well as by the activities of the other two groups. This limited the freedom of each group and created outcomes which were often unintended, and frequently suboptimal for all concerned.

Literature Review

Structure of the Literature Review

The following three chapters (Chapters Two, Three and Four) present the literature review for this thesis. Each of these chapters is divided into three parts.

Chapter Two provides a broad overview of the literature on contingent labour. While the contingent labour market per se is not the focus of this thesis, an analysis of the key themes within this literature helps to locate this thesis within a broader conceptual framework.

Chapter Three is more narrowly focused and explores the role of private temporary employment agencies in the job market and the triangular working relationship between these agencies, employer (client) organisations and temporary staff.

The final chapter of the literature review explores the perspective of one group in more depth, examining research on the experiences of female clerical staff working as agency temporary workers.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTINGENT LABOUR

Overview of the Chapter

Part One of the chapter begins by providing background information on contingent labour, including reasons for its rapid growth in most OECD economies. The section highlights the ways in which the diversity of the contingent labour force, differing legal and economic conditions and different organisational contexts combine to create a highly complex and often contradictory body of research findings.

Part Two looks at the key themes in the literature on contingent labour and discusses these themes in relation to advantages and disadvantages for employers and workers. The main advantage of using contingent labour for organisations is highlighted in the literature as being able to provide staffing flexibility to meet variable product and service demands in a more global market. Specific advantages for organisations include managing temporary absences of permanent staff and avoiding some employment regulations and obligations. By contrast, the literature highlights the disadvantages for contingent workers, (particularly those in lower-level jobs), as well as noting limited advantages such as reducing financial stress for job-seekers in the process of looking for permanent work.

Part Three concludes the chapter by looking at the negative societal consequences of the increasing use of contingent workers. These consequences include a skills loss across the economy, the marginalisation of an increasing number of workers in temporary employment situations, and diminished social capital caused by sub-standard employment benefits. The section concludes by discussing some of the solutions to these problems put forward by researchers.

Part One

2.1 Background Information

2.1.1 Definitions

Contingent work is defined by the US Bureau of Labour Statistics as "any job in which an individual does not have an explicit or implicit contract for ongoing employment" (Polivka,1996, p.4). Another definition is provided by Kalleberg (1997) who defines contingent work as "short-term, unstable employment" with "work arrangements that are dependent on employers' changing labour needs" (p.354).

The OECD defines contingent work as an umbrella term "for all dependent employment of limited duration" with all other jobs referred to as "permanent" jobs (Tucker, 2002, p.15). Contingent employment is unlike standard permanent work in that both the worker and the employer have no expectation of the position being anything other than of a temporary nature.

A wide variety of generic terms are used to describe contingent workers. These include flexible workers, non-standard workers, temporary workers, external workers and peripheral workers. Different countries often use different terms, for example the term 'contingent employment' is mostly used in America and Canada, 'temporary employment' is mostly used throughout Europe and 'casual employment' in Australia (De Cuyper et al., 2008). In New Zealand research, frequently used terms are 'non-standard work' or 'precarious work' as well as casual employment (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Firkin, McLaren, Spoonley, de Bruin, Dupuis & Perera, 2003; McLaren, Firkin, Spoonley, Dupuis, de Bruin & Inkson, 2004; Tucker, 2002).

The variety of terms used to describe contingent workers, and differing legislation in various countries over different periods of time can create ambiguity. Because of this, contingent work is a complex area which can sometimes make it difficult to draw conclusions in the literature. Contingent work is not a 'unitary concept' as it covers a variety of non-standard types of employment, and contingent workers cannot be

considered as a homogenous group because there are significant differences in their skills, employability and job security (Silla, Gracia & Peiro, 2005).

For much of the twentieth century, contingent employment was largely associated with clerical work, but has now grown to include a wide variety of professional and technical roles, resulting in differences in wages and future employment prospects (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Hoque et al., 2008; Inkson et al., 2001; Segal & Sullivan, 1995; Silla & al., 2005). For example, an independent contractor who is highly skilled in information technology and a low-skilled agricultural seasonal worker are both contingent workers, but their experiences of employment are likely to be quite different. For these reasons, the context in which contingent work is performed is an important factor to consider when looking at temporary employment arrangements.

2.1.2 Types of Contingent Workers in Organisations

Specific examples of contingent workers are: independent contractors (freelance workers); temporary staff hired by organisations via private employment agencies; temporary staff hired directly by organisations; employees on fixed term contracts and casual or seasonal workers.

Given the diversity of contingent workers, how they are managed in the organisations where they work can also differ. The following are some examples of how contingent workers are managed by employers. Directly hired temporary staff are often 'on call' workers who are contacted by organisations when they are required. They are on the company's pay-roll only when actually working but are not provided with the same employee legislative protection as permanent staff. Casual or seasonal workers are in much the same category, but are only called in at certain busy times of the year. Such workers are often amongst the most vulnerable contingent workers as they are frequently low- skilled and low- paid employees moving between cyclically available jobs.

Employees on fixed-term contracts are also on a company's pay-roll but only for the agreed contracted period of time. They are managed in much the same way as permanent staff, for example the organisation is responsible for paying leave entitlements and

dealing with disciplinary matters. Although fixed-term employees are contingent workers, in most OECD countries the company is legally responsible for them during their period of time employed.

Independent contractors are self-employed, presenting organisations with an invoice for their work. They are not entitled to any sick or annual leave and are not provided with any benefits regular employees may receive. Organisations have no responsibility for independent contractors other than to provide a safe working environment and to pay for work done.

Contingent staff can also be hired by organisations via private employment agencies. The employment agency is the formal employer, even though the worker spends most of their time on assignments in a variety of organisations. The organisation pays a fee to the agency for hiring the worker but has little responsibility for the worker.

2.1.3 The Legal Context

Differing legislation for contingent workers can also create complexity as labour regulations covering contingent employment vary widely throughout the world and often with continuing modification. Many countries do not have the same employee protection legislation for contingent workers as they do for permanent employees, for example Australia, Canada, New Zealand or America, however many European countries provide a minimum level of rights although still less than those received by permanent workers (De Cuyper et al., 2008). Although some countries may have increased the rights of contingent workers, regulations are only as effective as their enforcement, which can sometimes be inadequate (Burgess & Connell, 2004).

In the UK, new legislation known as the Agency Workers Directive will give agency temporary workers additional rights. These new regulations will introduce the principle of equal treatment for agency temporary workers by making their conditions in terms of sickness, holiday benefits and wages comparable to a permanent worker performing similar work at the same organisation (www.shoosmiths.co.uk/news/2294.asp). The proposed changes have already created concerns. Some researchers claim the act will not

be thorough enough to provide equal pay and conditions for temporary workers (Countouris & Horton, 2009), while others believe the changes will result in fewer organisations using agency temporary workers because of the additional costs and responsibilities incurred (Green, 2009).

2.1.4 Economic Climates

The state of the economy can have an impact on all workers, whether they are permanent, temporary or self-employed. In periods of high employment, demand for both contingent and permanent staff increases, often providing more security for contingent workers. In a recession however, it is a different scenario. Permanent jobs often become redundant during a recession, putting more people out of work which in turn creates more people available for contingent work. However, during a recession there is often less contingent work available.

There is evidence to suggest that some employers try to take advantage of growth and recession cycles. As companies usually create more employment when the economy is booming than when it is in a recession, some organisations try to save on costs by increasing their use of contingent workers during the boom period. This helps to relieve the pressure to raise existing and new permanent employees' wages when companies face tight labour markets (Houseman, Arne, Kalleberg & Erickceck, 2003). When the cycle moves towards a recession, the contingent workers are disposed of as the pressure comes off to provide higher wages for permanent staff. However, by laying off temporary staff, the permanent workers' jobs are better protected from redundancy.

Although people may be willing to work in temporary positions when necessary, many studies suggest that the majority of contingent workers would prefer to be permanently employed if given the choice (e.g. Berlin, 1996; Buchanan, 2004; Felstead, Krahn & Powell, 1999; Hall, 2006; Hardy & Walker, 2003; Houseman & Polivka, 2000; Morris & Vecker, 2001; Standing, 1997; Tremlett & Collins, 1999; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002).

Consequently, a buoyant economy can create a shortage of contingent workers as more permanent jobs are created, shrinking the supply of people willing to accept temporary work or unpredictable hours (Houseman et al., 2003; De Graaf-Zijl & Berkhourt, 2007). This in turn can make it difficult for employers to easily find contingent staff without having to pay them higher rates, especially for workers in professional roles (Houseman et al., 2003). However, these higher rates are temporary, as at the start of a recession, it is the contingent workers who are often the first to lose their jobs (Houseman et al., 2003; Peck & Theodore, 2007).

2.1.5 Inconsistent Findings

Because of the complexity of contingent labour, results of research can be difficult to interpret and can be highly context dependent. Inconsistent results across studies can sometimes relate to differences in sampling methods, especially when different types of contingent work arrangements are combined, which can increase the likelihood of conflicting results (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Houseman, 1997; Kalleberg, Reynolds & Marsden, 2003; Smith, 1998; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002).

Additionally, researchers may follow certain research strands suiting their own areas of interest which may contribute to inconsistent results. The fact that theory and empirical research have been drawn from a variety of disciplines, such as industrial relations, sociology, economics and psychology, along with researchers studying in various countries at different periods, all contribute to conflicting findings. However, one finding is quite clear, and that is the contingent labour force has been growing rapidly during the last two decades.

2.1.6 Growth of the Contingent Workforce

Almost all researchers who have studied the contingent workforce agree it has been increasing globally and at a rapid rate for more than two decades (e.g. Appelbaum, 1992; Belous, 1989; Burgess, Campbell & May, 2008; Coe et al., 2009; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; McLaren et al., 2004; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998; Winson & Leach, 2002). For example, in America there was a 250% increase in contingent workers between 1982 and 1992 compared to a 20% increase in overall employment (Morrow, 1993). Other Western

countries reported similar figures. The OECD (2002) reported that about 12% of all workers in the EU (European Union) were in contingent employment. The same percentage (12%) was found in Canadian figures (Akyeampong, 2001), and in Australia these figures were even higher as by 2002, 27.3% of all Australian employees worked in contingent employment (data from Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003).

Unfortunately, few statistics are available indicating the number of people working as contingent employees in New Zealand as the only official data collected in regard to the topic of work on census forms has been whether a person is employed in full-time or part-time employment (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Surprisingly, when I rang the New Zealand Department of Labour I was told that this government department does not have any figures on the number of contingent workers in New Zealand either. However, two national workplace surveys conducted in 1991 and 1995 (Brosnan & Walsh, 1996) indicate that contingent work arrangements around that time comprised 11% of the New Zealand workforce.

Changes in how organisations operate have been largely responsible for the move towards using a more contingent workforce. During the early 1980s, many employers found themselves in "a new competitive landscape" caused mainly by global competitors, deregulation of many industries and rapid technological change (Matusik & Hill,1998, p. 681). To compete in the global marketplace, employers have been required to cut costs in order to support lower prices, and position themselves to respond with greater flexibility to changing market conditions (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Coolidge, 1996; Winson & Leach, 2002; Wysocki, 1996), which has meant moving towards using a more contingent workforce.

The rapid increase in employer demand for flexibility required increasing numbers of contingent staff, and the restructuring and downsizing of firms which characterised the 1980s and 1990s period helped to increase the number of people willing to accept contingent work (Laird & Williams, 1996).

Part Two

2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Contingent Labour

Part Two looks at the advantages and disadvantages of contingent labour for employers and workers. Generally speaking, the literature suggests that contingent labour is largely advantageous for employers, with limited and subtle disadvantages for this group. In contrast, the literature tends to emphasise the disadvantages for contingent workers, suggesting that lower skilled workers in particular gain few advantages from this particular employment arrangement.

2.2.1 Advantages for Employers

Many economists have pointed out that the use of contingent workers enables employers to respond more flexibly and rapidly to changing labour market conditions (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Coolidge, 1996; Tregaskis, Brewster, Mayne, & Hegewisch, 1998; Von Hipple, Mangum, Greenberger, Heneman & Skoglind, 1997; Winson & Leach, 2002). The fact that contingent labour provides staffing flexibility for employers is a key finding in the literature in that it affords employers a means of varying their staffing levels by increasing staff numbers during peak periods and decreasing them during periods of low demand (Forde et al., 2008; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993). Furthermore, employers can have access to workers with specialised skills for specific periods of time without having to permanently employ them (Hall, 2004). In short, using contingent workers allows employers the flexibility to better control their fluctuating requirements for staff.

Other benefits for employers include saving on recruitment and training expenses, avoiding potential redundancy payouts and overtime rates, and avoiding labour regulations and obligations associated with permanent workers (Brosnan & Scully, 2002; Brosnan & Walsh, 1996; Forde et al., 2008; Nollen & Axel, 1996; Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001). Hiring contingent workers is also generally assumed to save on costs because of their lower wage rates and exclusion from benefits which may be provided to permanent employees (Cooper, 1995; Segal & Sullivan, 1995).

Employers hiring contingent staff may also screen potential permanent employees (Aronsson, Gustafsson & Dallner, 2002; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Forde, 2001;

Houseman et al., 2003; Peck & Theodore, 2007) by taking advantage of 'try before you buy' opportunities in order to avoid costly hiring and firing mistakes. Depending upon a contingent worker's performance, an employer can decide whether to offer them a permanent position or not (Hall, 2004; Rasmussen, Visser & Lind, 2004b).

Hiring contingent workers can also enable employers to look after the welfare of their permanent staff by off-loading monotonous and undesirable tasks from permanent workers onto contingent workers (Burgess, Connell & Drinkwater, 2001; Peck & Theodore, 2007). Rather than risk having permanent employees leave because they feel bored or stressed performing tedious jobs, some employers bring in a contingent worker specifically to do this type of work

2.2.2 Disadvantages for Employers

Benefits for employers can be offset by the added difficulty of trying to manage a non-standard workforce with a high labour turnover. When calculating the costs involved in using contingent workers, there are often some costs which may not be easily identified. One of the themes in the literature is the idea that there are 'hidden costs' for employers who use contingent workers (Allan, 2002; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Gallagher & McLean-Parks, 2001; Hall, 2004; Matusik & Hill, 1998; Stratman, Roth & Gilland, 2004). For example, the amount of time contingent workers spend learning new tasks can be a hidden cost for employers, challenging any assumptions that permanent and temporary staff have equivalent worker productivity. Some studies suggest that contingent staff are generally less productive than permanent staff because of the time spent learning new tasks (Allan, 2002; Stratman et al., 2004). Although permanent staff are likely to be equally unproductive when they start a new job or if they are untrained, they eventually gain speed and knowledge and are likely to stay in the company longer than contingent staff, providing an ongoing benefit for employers. Because contingent workers are continually starting new jobs, they spend more time in a learning situation compared to permanent staff, which means organisations can spend more time training.

Hiring contingent workers can create a continual stream of temporary new people who are unfamiliar with organisational practices, and this can cause disruption to work

routines for permanent staff because more time is spent being involved in supervising and training (Geary, 1992). Furthermore, as the learning process can involve making mistakes, extra time may be spent rectifying errors. Such problems can impact negatively on permanent staff who end up having to perform extra duties for no additional compensation (Davis-Blake et al., 2003).

Although several earlier studies suggest the behaviour and attitudes of contingent staff and permanent staff who work alongside each other in organisations are much the same (Pearce, 1996; Porter, 1995), other researchers argue this is not the case (Beard & Edwards, 1995; Hall, 2004; Kidder, 1999; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). These researchers suggest that contingent workers may lack the same sense of commitment to a company as permanent employees, mainly because contingent workers often feel less attachment to an organisation because of their transitory roles.

As well as having less commitment to a company, it has been suggested that contingent workers can have a destabilising effect on organisations, especially when insecure permanent workers perceive an increasing presence of contingent workers in their company as a threat (Biggs & Swailes, 2006; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Kraimer, Wayne, Liden & Sparrowe, 2005). This can happen when the presence of an increasingly large contingent workforce leads some permanent staff to question whether the company is committed to their continued employment, consequently leading them to reduce their commitment to the organisation.

Permanent employees who value high standards of work can also be negatively impacted by the presence of contingent workers in their company. Some employees may view the hiring of contingent workers as evidence that their organisation is lowering its standards, which in turn creates a lowered sense of commitment by the permanent worker to the company (Pearce, 1998).

Although the above findings do suggest that hiring contingent workers may impact negatively on some permanent staff in organisations, it is important to keep in mind that there are also advantages for permanent staff in having contingent workers in their

organisations. Not only can hiring contingent staff provide some relief from work over-load or complete tasks that permanent staff may not want to do, in a recession, contingent staff can easily be laid off whereas laying off permanent staff can be more costly for the employer. This in itself is likely to create some sense of job security for permanent workers which may need to be emphasised more in the literature when looking at the various impacts of contingent staff on permanent workers.

2.2.3 Advantages for Contingent Workers

People choose contingent work for a variety of reasons. Some people prefer this type of employment arrangement for lifestyle benefits. A few studies have shown that some people engage in contingent work in order to have a greater sense of autonomy and flexibility over where and when they work, fitting work in with their particular lifestyle needs which may involve family, travel or study (Alach & Inkson, 2003; Casey & Alach, 2004; Cooper & Lewis, 1999; Lenz, 1996; Thrailkill, 1999).

Other people choose contingent employment for career related benefits, expecting to gain opportunities to broaden their range of marketable skills and to develop their networks and reputations (Inkson et al., 2001). There is also the aspect of not being exclusively tied to one company as contingent work enables individuals to experience a variety of organisational cultures.

Although contingent workers may often be paid less than their permanent counterparts, some contingent staff are highly skilled, autonomous workers who can earn higher rates of pay than their permanent colleagues. These contingent workers are mostly found in professional positions (Pink, 1998; Rassuli, 2005) and especially within the information technology industry (Harvey & Kanwal, 2002).

Contingent work may also be perceived as offering financial security for workers, being an “easy to get” type of employment for job-seekers compared to trying to secure a permanent job (Alach & Inkson, 2003, p.60). Earning money via contingent labour can be especially helpful for people in-between jobs or workers who are displaced because of restructuring, as contingent work can provide ‘a safety net’, reducing financial stress by

maintaining an income while searching for permanent work (Farber, 1999; Lenz, 1996; Smith & Neuwirth, 2009). Becoming a contingent worker can also help to avoid the negative stereotype often associated with being unemployed, which can sometimes make it harder to secure permanent work (Korpi & Levin, 2001).

Another advantage of engaging in contingent work is the opportunity to be offered permanent employment. Some researchers claim that contingent work can act as 'a stepping stone' to permanent work, with people frequently being offered a permanent job in the organisation where they are hired (Alach, 2001; Brogan, 2001; Casey & Alach, 2004; Lenz, 1996; Peck & Theodore, 1998).

In support of these claims, figures from the OECD (2002) show that many contingent workers shift into permanent jobs over a relatively short time period (Tucker, 2002). As some employers screen candidates before offering permanent work, the people they most often trial are contingent workers (Lenz, 1996), providing opportunities for people who want to move from temporary roles into permanent work. Conversely, other researchers have found no support for the 'stepping stone' metaphor, claiming that temporary work rarely leads to permanent job offers, although it was noted that younger contingent workers were more likely to be offered permanent work than their older counterparts (Korpi & Levin, 2001; Nollen, 1996; Risher, 1997). It is likely that these contradictory findings relate to labour market conditions as in boom times contingent work leads to permanent work more easily than during recessions.

Finally, even if temporary work does not lead to permanent, it could still be argued that contingent labour does provide some form of employment for people who may have limited opportunities of finding regular work via mainstream recruitment and selection procedures, thus enabling them to retain work related skills and labour market participation (Ecliogu, 2010).

2.2.4 Disadvantages for Contingent Workers

As noted earlier, researchers generally seem to have come to the conclusion that there are more disadvantages than advantages for workers (especially low-level workers) in

contingent work arrangements. For example, low job security for contingent workers is one of the main issues often raised. Insecurity has been found to be one of the defining characteristics of contingent labour (De Witte & Naswal, 2003; McLaren et al., 2004), causing some researchers to raise concerns about contingent workers becoming "a wandering underclass in the labour pool" (Von Hippel et al., 1997, p.3).

Romeyn (1992) argued that contingent work arrangements as an employment option should be discouraged rather than promoted because of the limited access to training and promotion opportunities for contingent workers, which can lead to poor future career prospects. Because of this, contingent work has been described as 'precarious employment' (Tucker, 2002), capable of 'trapping' people in a cycle of poverty and occupational downgrading, especially if a person has been engaged in this type of work long-term (Korpie & Levin, 2001; Lai et al., 2008; McLaren et al., 2004; Peck & Theodore, 1998; Rogers, 2000; Von Hippel et al, 1997).

Although contingent workers are not a homogenous group, and some are likely to have better future job prospects than others, the fact remains that much research has linked contingent work with job insecurity. In an economic downturn, contingent workers generally are the easiest to dispose of as there are few legal requirements to fulfill regarding redundancy or severance pay. When permanent staff are laid off, the supply of contingent workers is likely to become larger, increasing competition for temporary contracts, which in turn is likely to increase insecurity for contingent workers.

Some earlier studies in the UK and Denmark found that on average, contingent workers took fewer days off sick than permanent staff (Beale & Nethercott, 1988; Kristensen, 1991). Job insecurity was the reason put forward to explain this because contingent workers tend to be more worried about upsetting employers as this could mean losing their jobs, therefore they are more likely to go to work even when sick. It is also likely they could not afford to lose the pay for being off sick as contingent workers in many countries around that time were not entitled to any paid sick leave.

Low pay and few benefits for contingent workers can also contribute to financial problems. A number of studies suggest that on average most contingent workers are paid a lower hourly rate than their permanent counterparts (Heinrich, Mueser, & Troske, 2002; Kalleberg, Reskin & Hudson, 2000; Lane, Mikelson, Sharkey & Wissoker, 2001; Peck & Theodore, 2007). Unlike permanent work, contingent work is generally a case of 'no work, no pay' for workers (Lai et al, 2008). Some researchers even claim that contingent labour can "exert a downward pull on wages and regulatory standards" across the entire workforce (Peck & Theodore, 2000, p. 135) which may be a benefit for employers, but not for workers.

Another recurring theme in the literature is the association between lower levels of physical and psychological health and contingent employment. A review of 27 studies by Virtanen et al., (2005) suggests a relationship between contingent workers and psychological morbidity. These findings were explained by the adverse effects of job insecurity on mental health for contingent workers compared to permanent workers.

Psychological well-being may be particularly compromised for contingent workers who prefer to be in permanent work (Galais & Moser, 2009; Isaksson & Bellagh, 2002), with distress being manifested in symptoms such as a lack of concentration, sleep disturbance and a lack of confidence (Gallagher, Gilley, Nelson, Connelly & Michie, 2001). As many studies suggest that involuntary temporary status may be the case for the majority of contingent workers (Berlin, 1996; Buchanan, 2004; Hardy & Walker, 2003; Houseman & Polivka, 2000; Morris & Vecker, 2001; Standing, 1997; Tremlett & Collins, 1999; Watson, Buchanan, Campbell & Briggs, 2003; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002), this implies that the psychological well-being of many contingent workers may be below par.

Alternatively, a literature review of theory and research on the psychological impact of contingent employment by De Cuyper et al., (2008) concluded that results looking at contingent labour and psychological well-being are mainly inconclusive and often contradictory. Reasons offered for this include the heterogeneity of the contingent workforce and the methodologies used by researchers. The researchers claimed that factors such as contract duration and volition (whether the worker actually wants to be in

temporary employment) may not have been explored adequately enough, resulting in inconsistent findings.

As well as the possible association between lower levels of mental health and contingent work, another key point arising from the literature is that physical occupational health and safety may be compromised for contingent workers (Aronsson, 1999; Kochan, Smith & Wells, 1994; Quinlan et al., 2001). This is particularly the case for contingent workers in hazardous occupations who tend to have higher accident rates than their permanent counterparts (Brooks, 2008). Higher accident rates for contingent workers can be explained by unfamiliarity with organisational procedures, the brief induction process and a general lack of training received compared to permanent staff.

Part Three

2.3 Societal Consequences of the Increasing Use of Contingent Work

Several researchers have argued that the increasing use of contingent labour may have adverse consequences which spread beyond the contingent workforce and affect society as a whole (Burgess et al., 2008; Peck & Theodore, 2007; Standing, 1997; Stormer, 2008**).** The final section of this chapter discusses the adverse societal consequences of an increasing contingent workforce and examines some of the proposed solutions to these problems.

2.3.1 Societal Consequences

Some researchers believe that excluding contingent workers from training will negatively affect not only the individual worker's skill levels and ability to perform competently on a job, but also the economy as a whole, as lack of training can result in a skills loss across the economy (Burgess et al, 2008; Pocock, 2003). These views are supported by Quinlan et al., (2001) who point out that an increasing contingent workforce may seem "rational for the individual employer but may not be beneficial for the economy as a whole" (p.172). The reasoning behind this is the potential deterioration in employee quality caused by a general lack of training for an ever-increasing contingent workforce.

As well as a general lack of training, there is also the issue of emotional well-being at work for contingent workers. Stormer (2008) claims that human values in the workplace, such as the importance of workers' mental well-being, were developed in the pursuit of economic goals rather than for any higher idealism. Benefits that may provide emotional well-being in the workplace (for example, child crèches and flexible working hours to enhance work-life balance), are generally reserved only for permanent staff and in the case of contingent employment, the responsibility for addressing any issues involving well-being at work often rests with the contingent workers themselves.

If the consequences of contingent labour involve lower pay and few benefits for an increasing number of people, then this may become an ongoing form of marginalisation in the job market. Looking at future prospects from a societal point of view, it could be argued that contingent labour will have a negative impact on savings and self-funded retirement arrangements for a significant percentage of workers, resulting in a growing number of people reliant upon government funded assistance.

As a counter-argument to the above mentioned societal problems that may result from a contingent workforce, it could be contended that a certain amount of contingent work has some societal benefits too. A certain amount of contingent labour may be good for the economy as a whole as it enables organisations to be more competitive, which in turn produces more employment (whether permanent or temporary jobs, this is better than no jobs being created). It could also be argued that contingent labour offers individuals more opportunities to work flexibly and to combine employment with non-work personal goals than traditional models of long-term, full-time employment.

2.3.2 Solutions

To address the concerns outlined above, solutions have been put forward by some researchers. One solution is to impose a time limit on how long an employer can hire a contingent worker before being legally required to offer them permanent employment (Burgess et al., 2008). In order to evade such legislation, it is possible that some employers would try to work around any regulated cut-off point, and either hire another contingent worker or allow the required time to lapse before re-hiring the same

contingent worker. Increasing the general quality of labour conditions for contingent workers through legislation may be easier than through appeals to decency or even economic advantage. However, legislation does not always work in the way it is intended.

Another solution put forward is the creation of a new social contract between contingent workers and employers based on human values as well as financial matters (Burgess & Connell, 2004). On the surface, this may seem like a good idea but would probably require a significant mind-shift by employers as it raises the point of why would employers want to change the status quo? Differentiation of workers provides flexibility for employers, and flexibility for employers tends to be the main driver behind a contingent workforce.

As contingent workers tend not to have union representation, Standing (1997) argues that there is a need for 'a voice' for economic equality as unions tend to treat contingent workers as 'company outsiders' even when they are on long-term assignments (Druker & Stanworth, 2004). This is largely because contingent workers can be terminated at any time, leaving unions ineffective in flexible labour markets. Standing (1997) advocates the idea of a 'community union' as part of the more traditional workers' union in order to help contingent workers to deal with issues concerning wages and benefits. As well as helping contingent workers, Standing suggests that union membership that includes contingent workers would place more effective union pressure on companies, as some organisations use contingent labour in order to keep regular employment costs to a minimum. Although this seems a reasonable idea, it could be argued that contingent workers may find it difficult to pay union membership fees as easily as permanent staff because of unpredictable assignment availability and duration.

Other researchers claim that legislation should aim at identifying and helping only those temporary workers who are at a disadvantage without considering all contingent workers as a homogenous group (Silla et al., 2005). Although this may seem like a practical solution, creating legislation for specific groups of contingent workers would more than likely result in a number of anomalies.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the complexity of contingent labour makes it difficult to draw specific conclusions from the literature. Contingent workers are not a homogeneous group and factors such as volition, contract duration and the level of a worker's skills will influence findings. Nevertheless, figures do indicate that the majority of contingent workers are in lower level jobs and a large body of research suggests that job insecurity for these workers can be an issue. As the contingent workforce is increasing, a key debate in the literature is whether this trend is likely to be positive or negative for contingent workers, as well as for society as a whole. There appear to be no easy solutions which would advantage both employers and workers. Trying to balance economic efficiency for employers with a more equitable employment position for contingent workers is likely to be an ongoing challenge for governments around the world.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TRIANGULAR WORKING RELATIONSHIP

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter Three moves away from the broad view of the contingent workforce presented in the previous chapter, and concentrates on the triangular working relationship between employment agencies, client organisations and agency temporary workers.

Part One of the chapter provides a brief general overview of employment agencies and describes their spectacular growth over the last two decades. It looks at the services they offer and their relationship with client organisations. Part Two looks at the relationship between employment agencies and temporary workers, and some of the ways in which employment agencies try to attract job-seekers to temporary work. The ways in which employment agencies try to control their temporary workers are also analysed. The section ends by looking at legislation in the three-way working relationship.

Part Three discusses the relationship between agency temporary workers and client organisations. This relationship is largely transactional and is more complex than the traditional employee/employer two-way relationship because of the intermediary role of the agency. The level of commitment of a temporary worker to an organisation is also discussed.

Part One

3.1 Temporary Employment Agencies: General Overview

Temporary employment agencies provide one segment of the contingent workforce. Agencies range from huge multinationals such as Manpower, Adecco and Kelly Services to small one-person businesses. Agencies often cater for permanent staffing needs in addition to temporary staffing needs, and can be involved in different industries and occupations, supplying staff ranging from specialised medical professionals to warehouse assistants (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Hoque et al., 2008).

3.1.1 Growth of Employment Agencies

Private employment agencies originated in the American city of Chicago during the 1920s with the early employment agencies supplying calculating machine operators to companies on a temporary basis (Moore, 1965). By 1945, the hiring out of workers had spread to providing a wide range of clerical and administrative support staff who were mainly women. This new industry quickly spread to other American cities and the recruitment agency 'giants' began to evolve, for example, Kelly Girl in Detroit (later to become Kelly Services) and Manpower in Milwaukee.

By the 1950s, temporary clerical workers were increasingly in demand and successful temporary staffing agencies such as Office Overload were quickly spreading throughout Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and America (Vosko, 2000). These agencies provided clerical workers who were usually white, middle-class, married women. A typical temporary clerical worker in the 1950s was a former office worker who was married with children. There was an assumption that a married woman only worked to add "frills to the household budget", and was considered a poor choice for permanent work (Vosko, 2000, p.100). This was because the expected key role for a married woman was in the domestic sphere, looking after the home and family while her husband's main role was the 'bread-winner' in the household. By the early 1960s it was estimated that 90% of temporary staff worked in the clerical sector, and it was around this time that agencies began to expand into industrial operations (Peck & Theodore, 2004).

Between 1982 and 1990, the temporary employment industry expanded 10 times as fast as overall employment in Europe, America and Australasia (Appelbaum, 1992), with agency temporary work being the fastest growing segment of all contingent employment arrangements (Kalleberg et al., 2000; Segal, 1996). Figures from America show evidence of spectacular growth in the use of agency temporary workers, increasing by 278% from 1991 to 1999 (Peck & Theodore, 2004). In the mid 1990s, the employment agency Manpower was the largest single employer in America (Standing, 1997), and by 1999 it claimed to be the largest employer in the world with 2.1 million temporary workers on its books (Storrie, 2002). In the UK, temporary agency workers increased from 7% of the entire contingent workforce in 1992 to 17% by 1999, with the largest proportion of

temporary workers being in office work, information technology and manual labour (Druker & Stanworth, 2001).

Figures[1] from Statistics New Zealand (2008) indicate that the number of private employment agencies has been steadily rising each year. For example, in the year 2000 there were 870 employment agencies recorded in New Zealand, and by 2007 this figure had increased to 1,549, a 78% increase.

As well as being a growth industry in its own right, the temporary staffing business has been described as "an institutional fixture in the labour market" (Peck & Theodore, 2004, p.35). Along with hiring temporary workers for typical 'fill-in' roles, there is evidence to suggest that some larger companies are hiring temporary staff as part of their core business strategies (Brogan, 2001; Nollen, 1996; Purcell & Purcell, 1999; Richards 2001), and even 'shedding' permanent workers in favour of hiring temporary workers (Burgess, Rasmussen & Connell, 2004). For example, one call centre in Leeds (in the UK) was using 350 agency temporary workers, which represented 80% of the total staff of the company (Forde, 2001), showing how temporary staffing agencies can play an increasingly central role in the overall working of the contemporary labour market.

The rapid growth in agencies is not surprising as many countries have few barriers for anybody setting up in business as a temporary employment agency (Burgess et al., 2004; Fround, Johat & Williams, 2001; Gottfried, 1991). In New Zealand, employment agencies can be established without any public quality control, and anybody is allowed to set up business in this industry without registration, licensing or any proof of skills or experience (Rasmussen et al., 2004b).

[1]Data for these figures was collected by Statistics New Zealand via the Business Demography Statistics Survey, and recipients of this survey were determined by information provided by the Inland Revenue Department to Statistics New Zealand in regard to the GST (Goods and Services Tax) paid by businesses operating in New Zealand.

3.1.2 Services Offered by Agencies

Employment agencies can be involved in the permanent recruitment and selection sector of the job market as well as the temporary staffing sector, often combining both services within the one agency. The core business of employment agencies in the temporary staffing sector is supplying client organisations with suitable temporary staff on request. The client pays a fee to the agency for hiring a worker and has little responsibility for the worker as the agency is the legal employer of temporary staff. The agency is responsible for the provision of holiday or sick leave entitlement for the temporary worker, paying wages, ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) payments and dealing with disciplinary issues. This three-way relationship can be complicated in many ways, but involves minimal responsibility for the client organisation because the temporary worker can be returned to the agency once the assignment is completed (or if it is prematurely terminated). If a temporary worker is deemed unsuitable by the client at any time, he or she is replaced free of charge by the agency.

A speedy response to client requests is an important part of the service offered by employment agencies. In an American study by Peck & Theodore (1998), 15 recruitment consultants (agency staff) working in the temporary work sector were interviewed and results indicate that a major concern for consultants is meeting their client's request for a suitable temporary worker within the fastest time possible. Satisfying "clients' needs, preferences and prejudices" in a timely manner was found to be of paramount importance because for the agencies, "profit is derived from giving the clients what they want" (p.660). A more recent American study by Smith & Neuwirth (2009) reported similar findings.

As well as offering temporary staff 'on demand', some employment agencies offer the client a range of human resources functions ranging from control of payroll to the provision of training activities (Burgess & Connell, 2004; Forde et al., 2008; Ward, 2004). Some larger agencies offer on-site arrangements for clients in which the agency manages a complete job assignment, providing supervision of the temporary staff and performance monitoring (Campbell, Watson & Buchanan, 2004). The advantage of this for employers is they can outsource an entire operation with no staff management

required on their part. Only larger agencies are capable of organising this type of service, with the majority of agencies engaging in the more traditional three-way operation in which they act as intermediary between client and individual temporary workers.

In order to develop a long-term commercial relationship with their clients, a key aim of an agency is to become the 'sole supplier' for client organisations (Rasmussen et al., 2004b). 'Sole supplier' agencies tend to be the larger agencies as they are in a better position to offer more customised services such as the on-site management of projects (Forde, 2001). Although this is beneficial for the agencies because they have no competition for their clients' requests, it may be less satisfactory for clients as one agency may not always be able to fulfill their requests in a timely manner.

Because of this risk, many employers prefer to use multiple suppliers (usually between two and four agencies) to avoid dependency on a single agency and to create opportunities for negotiating prices (Gadde & Hakansson, 2005; Lai et al., 2008). This is obviously not what agencies prefer, as it means they have to share their client requests with other agencies and may have to lower clients' fees in order to remain in the 'supplier loop'.

3.1.3 Agencies as Providers of Flexibility

According to Peck & Theodore (2004) agencies are in the business of selling "flexibility packages" to employers (p.27). These 'packages' include different types of flexibility, for example 'temporal flexibility' which provides numerical cover for daily, seasonal or cyclical fluctuations; 'functional flexibility' provides employers with specifically skilled workers, and 'regulatory flexibility' allows employers to deregulate and liberalise the traditional employment relationship as temporary staff are not the legal responsibility of the organisation. In view of these available services, employers have come to regard this 'staff on demand' industry as a valuable way of gaining staffing flexibility. These different types of flexibility allow employers "access to labour without obligation" (Gonos, 1997, p.90), making the use of agency temporary workers more appealing than other forms of contingent labour as the agency is the official employer of the temporary worker rather than the client organisation. Hiring agency temporary workers involves

little administrative responsibility for an organisation, as it basically assumes an ancillary role involving supervision and some health and safety responsibility (De Ruyter, 2004; Lai et al., 2008).

Some researchers claim that agencies have been involved in actively fostering a growing market for flexible staffing arrangements (Coe et al., 2009; Ofstead, 2000; Peck & Theodore, 2007; Smith & Neuwirth, 2009), a trend which some researchers have not viewed in a positive light. For example, Peck & Theodore (2004) describe the agency temporary staffing industry as being "a conspicuous beneficiary of growing economic instability" which has been "remarkably inventive in its efforts to extend the market for contingent labour" (p.25). This view is supported by later research claiming that agencies deliberately cultivate precariousness for temporary workers in their pursuit of profit (Elcioglu, 2010). These perspectives portray temporary staffing agencies as active and powerful shapers of the contingent market rather than as passive purveyors of staffing services to client organisations. Whilst agencies may try to shape the labour market to further their own interests, it is important to keep in mind that agencies also provide opportunities for people to gain employment by matching potential employers and employees. They thus provide temporary workers with employment opportunities which might be unavailable without their services.

Part Two

3.2 Employment Agencies and Temporary Workers

3.2.1 Sourcing Temporary Workers

Resource Dependency theorists (e.g. Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) argue that organisations need to gain control of key resources in their environment in order to ensure their long term survival. For employment agencies, the two key environmental resources they need to gain control of are firstly, client organisations wanting temporary labour and secondly, an adequate supply of temporary workers available to send to organisations at very short notice. The previous section of this chapter suggested that employment agencies expend considerable effort maintaining and growing demand from organisations. This section discusses the tactics some agencies use to generate a good supply of temporary labour.

As economic cycles can influence the availability of temporary workers, temporary employment agencies have become very sensitive to business cycles (Peck & Theodore, 2004). Changes in the ebb and flow of people available for temporary work can often signal changes in the economy. For example, the temporary work sector may be the first to feel the effects of a change in economic cycles, acting like a barometer in regard to economic recessions and booms. Evidence in support of this involves a recent Dutch study by De Graaf-Zijl & Berkhourt (2007). This study found that temporary employment agencies can have a difficult time finding suitable workers in tight and buoyant labour markets, mainly because job-seekers generally prefer the security of a permanent job. In contrast, the study showed that during a recession, employment agencies have no difficulty finding people for temporary work because of the plentiful supply of qualified workers who cannot find permanent work and who are willing to accept temporary work in the interim.

When good quality temporary workers are in short supply, some agencies create advertising concepts such as the 'Entrepreneurial Temp' or the 'Career Temp' to help generate a good supply of temporary workers (Druker & Stanworth, 2004).These terms were used to entice job-seekers to consider temporary work rather than applying for permanent work. For example, a Brook Street advertisement located on the London underground promoted temporary work as being an entrepreneurial career option (Druker & Stanworth, 2004, p. 61):

> You are your own business….As chairman (*sic*) and workforce, you supply your services to whoever needs them. And if you want to close the factory down for a couple of months, well that's your business too…Why not make an executive decision to diversify? Talk to Brook Street. We'll help you make a career of it.

Such advertisements portray temporary work as a career choice in which workers can be enterprising and entrepreneurial. Ideas of independence and autonomy may sound promising to the prospective temporary worker, but the extent to which a temporary worker can manage themselves as an enterprise is debatable. A person's age, education, occupation and financial commitments may strongly influence how enterprising a person can be. An important factor when considering the idea of entrepreneurialism and

temporary work is that most agency temporary workers are paid less than their permanent counterparts and if they really are in an 'enterprising' position, then the potential financial rewards should be greater because of the 'risk' element of insecurity attached. Another way that agencies try to secure staff for temporary work is via the permanent job sector. A UK study found that agencies stock up their database of temporary staff by encouraging unsuccessful applicants for advertised permanent jobs to try temporary work instead (Forde, 2001). Hardy and Walker's New Zealand study (2003) supported these findings as job-seekers responded to agencies' advertisements for permanent work but were often only offered temporary work. Another New Zealand study by Davy & Handy (2004) looking at the impact of redundancy on middle-aged female clerical workers in Auckland found that many of the women were only offered temporary work rather than permanent work by employment agencies. In spite of preferring permanent work, many accepted temporary work rather than remain unemployed.

3.2.2 The Agency/Temporary Worker Relationship

In order to meet the requirements of their client organisations, employment agencies not only need access to a reliable supply of temporary workers, they also need to ensure that their labour force behaves appropriately within their client organisations. This necessitates maintaining an ongoing relationship with temporary staff and molding their expectations and behaviour to conform to client requirements. In order to meet this need, employment agencies have been described as using a range of control tactics to manage their labour force which are described in this section.

Several researchers have been critical of the mechanisms employment agencies use to control their labour force, suggesting that they treat temporary workers as commodities (e.g. Gonzalez, 2003; Parker, 1994; Peck & Theodore, 1998; Rogers, 1995). Peck & Theodore (1998) observed that some employment agencies in America tended to treat temporary workers more like merchandise than people – "they are treated on a price-orientated basis, as if they were an undifferentiated, industry-produced commodity" (p.658). Similarly, Parker's well known description of the temporary staffing industry being based on a "flesh peddling business" with clients "placing orders for warm bodies to be delivered on time" emphasises how impersonal some employment agencies may be

towards their temporary workers (1994, p.106). However, Inkson (2008) argues that this sort of commodification of workers is not restricted to temporary staff but that some permanent staff may also be treated as 'human resources' in the literal sense by their employers.

Employment agencies need temporary workers who are willing to accommodate the client's needs with regard to hours and assignments, therefore 'fussy' workers may be penalised by way of receiving no future offers of assignments from their agencies (Forde, 2001; Gonzalez, 2003; Gottfried, 1992; Henson, 1996; Peck & Theodore, 1998). For example, temporary workers who turned down offered assignments found "the phone went dead" and there were no more offers from that agency (Forde, 2001, p.641). As providers of flexibility to client organisations, agencies need temporary workers to be flexible, therefore discouraging unwanted behaviour by withholding future offers of assignments from 'choosy' workers is a way of trying to control the situation in the agency's favour. Temporary workers may also be penalised in the same manner if they register with multiple agencies in the hope of increasing their chances of being offered assignments (Henson, 1996).

This type of agency control of temporary workers drew Rogers (1995) to question what the human costs are in operating a flexible workforce, and who bears these costs. The answer, she concludes, is the temporary worker. Gonzalez (2003) came to a similar conclusion, claiming that employment agencies are primarily influential in molding the nature of the temporary worker's culture via the use of a range of control strategies. This 'molded culture' is not only conducive to temporary workers having to be flexible, but also having them follow agency instructions on how to behave and how to dress at the organisations, supporting findings of an earlier study by Gottfried (1992).

Behavioural control of temporary workers by agencies involves temporary staff being deferential to others when working in the client organisations so as to create a good impression of the agency (Gottfried, 1992; Henson, 1996). This is because the relationship between the agency and the employer is of prime importance to recruitment consultants (Casey & Alach, 2004; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Peck & Theodore, 1998).

Rogers (1995) suggests that recruitment consultants telling “bad temp stories” involving temporary workers who let their agencies down, serve as a warning to current temporary workers, conveying expectations of what is good behaviour and what is deviant behaviour (p.160).

In order to promote a ‘softer’ more caring image of employment agencies, some agencies have tried to take a more human approach towards their temporary staff. For example, Adecco’s commercial director was quoted as saying “our people (the temporary workers) are our main asset, and aside from our moral responsibility, there are sound commercial reasons for ensuring that they have appropriate terms and conditions” (Walsh, 1999, p.15). This quote suggests that the agency now views temporary workers as employees of the agency, mimicking traditional employment models. It could be argued that this ‘softer’ approach is a more subtle form of control, based more on “sound commercial reasons” for agencies rather than from any sense of human or ethical consideration for temporary workers. Nevertheless, Manpower and Adecco have both signed trade union recognition agreements for their temporary staff, demonstrating some initiative on their part. Theoretically, this could make a positive difference for temporary workers, but in reality unions are often ineffective in flexible labour markets. In fact, unions are often noted for their resistance to, and lobbying against the expansion of temporary staffing and its perceived weakening of worker pay and conditions (Coe et al., 2009).

Research findings supporting a more positive view of employment agencies was found in Druker & Stanworth’s UK study (2004) in which the majority of the 32 temporary workers interviewed experienced a positive relationship with their agencies. Most of the temporary workers in this study spoke well of their agencies, the recruitment consultants being perceived as offering a source of income and a more durable long-term future relationship compared to the client/temporary worker relationship. Similarly, an American study by McClurg (1999) also found that temporary workers generally feel more committed to their agencies than to client organisations, which can be especially the case when training and benefits are provided by the agency (Koh & Yer, 2000). How well a temporary worker feels about their agency may influence how well they engage in commitment to a client organisation (Moorman & Harland, 2002), which in turn could

create a good impression of the agency. In other words, temporary workers who perceive that they are treated well by their agencies are more likely to reciprocate that "history of positive treatment" within the client organisations by 'going the extra mile' as a worker (Moorman & Harland, 2002, p. 174).

The tenure length with an agency and the number of assignments offered by an agency to a temporary worker can also influence commitment levels, the longer the tenure and the greater the number of assignments provided, the higher the commitment levels towards that agency (Gallagher & McLean Parks, 2001). By contrast, a Dutch study by Van Breugel et al., (2005) showed that commitment based on a temporary worker's positive emotions (affective commitment) towards their agency tended to be stronger than commitment based on economic benefits or length of tenure. From a practical point of view, it could be argued that any temporary workers with a pressing need to earn an income would have to sacrifice emotional commitment to an agency in return for economic survival should a lack of assignment offers become a reality.

3.2.3 Legislation and the Three-Way Working Relationship

The more regulation there is in mainstream permanent employment, and the less in temporary employment, the better the prospects for employment agencies (Peck & Theordore, 2002; Ward, 2004), as hiring staff from agencies can seem less restrictive and therefore more attractive for clients than employing permanent staff. When there are two 'employers' but only the one worker in an employment arrangement, legal responsibilities for the worker can sometimes become obscured. Although the agency is the official employer of temporary workers, in many countries this does not mean that a temporary worker is entitled to the same legal protection and benefits as a regular employee.

In some countries (e.g. Belgium, Italy and France), the activities of agencies are more tightly policed than in other countries (Coe et al., 2009), and some countries accord agency temporary staff more rights than other countries do. In the Netherlands, agencies are expected to take on more employer responsibilities for temporary staff. For example, after three uninterrupted agency assignments or after being with the same agency for six

months, the temporary worker is considered to be permanently employed by the agency, with entitlement to similar benefits a permanent employee might receive (Buchtemann & Walwei, 1996; Rasmussen, Visser & Lind, 2004a). This is expected of the agency, even if it cannot find the temporary worker a placement. Legislation in Denmark decrees that a temporary worker absent from work through sickness is entitled to an hourly rate of pay equivalent to the current unemployment benefit rather than relying on savings to survive (Rasmussen et al., 2004a). As mentioned in the previous chapter, UK legislation known as the Agency Workers Directive Act intends to introduce the principle of equal conditions and treatment for agency workers (this legislation has now been postponed until 2011). Agencies will still pay the temporary workers, and the client organisations will pay the agencies, however, the client will need to inform the agency of the current hourly rate they pay their permanent staff doing similar work, and this is the rate that the agency has to pay the temporary worker.

Despite legislative initiatives, agency temporary workers can continue to be marginalised regarding statutory employment protection. For example, many of the rights for temporary staff require a threshold length of service with the same agency or organisation (for the new Agency Workers Directive it is 12 weeks) and any gaps of time in between assignments can mean temporary workers will lose entitlement to benefits that permanent workers would receive.

According to the New Zealand Department of Labour (2009), New Zealand legislation covering temporary workers and permanent staff is now much the same. After six months of continuous employment with the same employer (agency), temporary workers are entitled to holiday pay and paid sick leave on a pro-rata basis. Because of this however, rights to holiday and sick leave benefits may be compromised for temporary workers wanting to multi-list with other employment agencies in order to increase their chances of being offered enough assignments to cover their financial needs.

Part Three

3.3 Temporary Workers and Client Organisations

The relationship between agency temporary workers and the organisations where they work is different to the traditional employer/employee relationship because it is mediated by both parties' relationship with the employment agency. This makes the triangular working relationship structurally and psychologically more complex than the traditional two-way relationship between employer and employee.

In the traditional context, the relationship between employer and employee is typically based on mutual expectations between two major parties (McLean Parks, Kidder & Gallagher,1998; Rousseau, 1995). According to Rousseau (1995), this relationship is characterised on the employer's side by an obligation to provide job security and career development for employees in return for good performance and loyalty, and often involves open-ended agreements, with a focus on both economic and relational exchanges.

By contrast, the focus of the temporary worker and employer relationship is on economic exchange, with no expectation of long-term commitment on either side (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2005). This type of relationship has been described as being more transactional than relational (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995; Schalk & Roe, 2007), with employers being able to return temporary staff to the agency or terminate their assignments without any prior warning.

3.3.1 Commitment to the Client Organisation

Despite this transactional relationship, client organisations can have high expectations of temporary workers, both in terms of performance and attitude towards the organisation, often expecting similar levels of commitment to those seen in permanent staff (Blyten & Jenkins, 2007; Druker & Stanworth, 2004; Lai et al., 2008). For example, a UK study exploring expectations between all three parties of the triangular working relationship found that client organisations tend to expect temporary workers to be skilled (requiring little direction following only a brief induction), with high motivation, strong

interpersonal skills, energy, initiative and commitment, along with the ability "to be operational right away" (Druker & Stanworth, 2004, p.69).

These expectations however, are often perceived by temporary staff as being unrealistic given the transactional nature of the working relationship (Klein Hesselink, Koppens & van Vuuren, 1998), and especially when temporary workers are engaged in short-term assignments (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002: De Gilder, 2003; Forde & Slater, 2006; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Chaotic organisational conditions can make it difficult for temporary staff to fulfill employers' expectations of them. For example, temporary staff cannot be immediately productive or perform well when permanent staff are too busy to provide directions, or when no desks or logons have been made available for them at the organisations (Druker & Stanworth, 2004). In short, a transactional relationship is not conducive to developing high motivation in temporary staff or encouraging feelings of personal commitment to the client organisation.

Several studies suggest that the level of personal commitment demonstrated by workers towards organisations is associated with feeling valued and satisfied at work (Biggs & Swailes, 2006; Liden, Wayne, Kraimer & Sparrowe, 2003). When temporary staff do have high organisational commitment, there is some evidence to suggest that this can lead to adverse consequences for them because of the inherent contradiction between their marginal status and affective commitment to the client organisation. A recent German study involving clerical agency workers found that temporary staff who feel a sense of commitment to a client organisation tend to suffer emotionally when reassigned to a new company (Galais & Moser, 2009). In other words, having a sense of commitment to a client company may be a disadvantage for temporary workers because of the transitory nature of the job. People who tend to value an employee-organisation relationship high in socio-emotional terms can suffer emotionally as temporary workers, as this may often be lacking in the temporary role (Chambel & Castanheira, 2007).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the triangular working relationship between client organisations, employment agencies and temporary workers. Some researchers suggest that agencies

have been involved in actively fostering a growing market for flexible staffing arrangements, signifying that this industry acts as a powerful shaper of the contingent labour market rather than simply being intermediaries between temporary workers and employers. The actions of agencies thus help change the structural conditions of the labour market which may increase workers' vulnerability to insecure employment.

A key point raised in this chapter is the light regulation involved in setting up in business as a private employment agency in many countries. This may help to explain the spectacular growth of employment agencies in the industrialised world and may contribute to the negative image that has often been associated with employment agencies by researchers in relation to their poor treatment of temporary workers.

CHAPTER FOUR

AGENCY CLERICAL WORKERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF WORK

Overview of the Chapter

Given the heterogeneity of the temporary workforce, resulting in significant differences in workers' skills, employability and job security, this chapter focuses on the one particular group of temporary workers which concerns my thesis. It concentrates on agency temporary workers' psychological experiences of their work, concentrating primarily on temporary clerical work.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the temporary clerical labour force, looking at financial insecurity and flexibility for temporary workers, concluding that for the majority of temporary agency workers, reduced financial security can be a painful reality whilst flexibility and freedom is a chimera. The second part of the chapter looks at temporary work in relation to the latent benefits of work such as structured time, social contact, sense of belonging, status and meaningful work. Findings from many studies suggest that temporary work may compromise these latent benefits of employment for people in this role. The final section of this chapter examines a series of New Zealand studies which reveal a pattern of findings which are markedly different from the majority of research in this area.

Part One

4.1 Finance and Flexibility for Clerical Temporary Workers

4.1.1 Financial Issues and Temporary Clerical Workers

Clerical/secretarial work is generally considered to be a feminised occupation, being described as 'pink collar' work or even 'the pink ghetto' because of its association with female dominated work and low pay (Morgan, 2003). This type of work has also been described as "the mainstay of the temping industry" (Rogers, 2000, p.4) and the large majority of office temporary agency workers in New Zealand and overseas are women

(Alach, 2001; Coe et al., 2009; Forde & Slater, 2005; Gottfried, 1992; Theodore & Peck, 2002).

The most obvious reason why people work is to earn money. However, the irregularity of assignments means that temporary workers can often be waiting for their agency to offer them an assignment, and if there are no assignments being offered, then no money can be earned (Forde, 2001). Even when working on an assignment, a temporary worker can be laid off at very short notice (Parker, 1994). Consequently, for many temporary clerical workers, reduced financial security can be a hard reality, with research showing that lack of a regular wage can lead to disruptions in psychological well-being such as depression and anxiety (Feather, 1990; Miller & Hoppe, 1994; Vosler, 1994).

Despite low pay and financial insecurity, there are some financial advantages for temporary workers. Being hired via an agency, temporary workers are paid for any extra hours they work, unlike many permanent staff who may feel obliged to 'toe the company line' by working late for no extra pay (Druker & Stanworth, 2004).

4.1.2 Flexibility Issues

For some people, the amount of money earned is of secondary importance to having a lifestyle they value, which can mean being able to fit work around a particular way of life. Some researchers suggest that temporary work tends to offer more flexibility for privileged groups such as those in technical or professional roles (Bradley, Erickson, Stephenson & Williams, 2000; de Bruin & Dupuis, 2004; McLaren et al, 2004; Tucker, 2002), rather than for people in lower skilled jobs such as clerical workers. This is because higher skilled temporary workers are more likely to be in short supply and therefore be offered more work and paid higher rates of pay compared to lower skilled workers. Having stronger financial security provides confidence to be selective about assignments which in turn provides flexibility. By contrast, workers in lower skilled temporary roles are more likely to accept all offers of assignments regardless of the suitability of hours or the type of tasks involved because of economic necessity. As an employment arrangement for lower skilled temporary workers, this situation can offer little control or flexibility over work assignments.

As assignment lengths can be unpredictable, this creates difficulties for workers who want to plan ahead. Temporary agency workers can often be unsure of how long their assignments will last (Druker & Stanworth, 2004), which can create difficulties when trying to make future arrangements Given this situation, temporary workers would have little flexibility as far as lifestyle choice is concerned.

How clerical temporary workers may have tried to make flexibility work for them and how this would have impacted on employers or agencies has not been well covered in the literature. Although some studies describe people choosing office temporary work because it offers them flexibility (Alach, 2001; Alach & Inkson, 2003; Cai & Kleiner, 2004; Casey & Alach, 2004), there often seems to be little evidence in workers' everyday lives to support this, especially in regard to temporary workers being easily able to choose non-standard or part-time hours.

Henson (1996) attempted to explain why some temporary clerical workers cite flexibility as a key reason for choosing temporary work yet are unable to provide examples of how they actually benefit from it. He suggested that the 'propaganda' repeatedly expounded by employment agencies regarding the flexibility of temporary work is internalised by temporary workers (whether or not it conforms to their experiences) and is used as part of their rationale for choosing temporary employment.

Not surprisingly, one of the key findings emphasised in most research into temporary clerical work is that flexibility strongly favours the client rather than the temporary worker (Gottfried, 1992; Gonzalez, 2003; Hall, 2006; Henson, 1996; Nollen, 1996; Rogers, 1995). For flexibility to work for the client, agencies need temporary workers to be flexible in regard to their hours, the type of assignment they are willing to accept and the location of where they work (Gonzalez, 2003).

In an early American study, psychological uncertainty was found to be the most salient and pervasive characteristic of temporary work with 'uncertainty' being touted as 'flexibility' by the agencies (Parker, 1994). In a later UK study, a clerical agency temporary worker pointed out "you can look on it as flexibility but you can also look at it

as insecurity because on Monday we may not have a job" (Druker & Stanworth, 2004, p. 70). Theoretically workers can decline offers of assignments, leave unsatisfactory assignments and choose the hours they want to work, but the reality is usually quite different, as being 'choosy' can risk upsetting the agency's recruitment consultant. When this happens, offers of future assignments may be withheld (Forde, 2001; Gonzalez, 2003; Peck & Theodore, 1998). The 'flexibility package' for temporary workers is more often the 'take it or leave it' option and leaving it can mean earning no income (Rasmussen et al., 2004b), which in turn is likely to have a negative impact on psychological well-being for temporary workers.

Part Two

4.2 The Latent Benefits of Work and Clerical Temporary Workers

Jahoda (1988) views work as a social establishment, claiming that employment not only provides the manifest benefit of a regular income (something that many temporary workers may not experience) but also hidden benefits, which Jahoda describes as latent benefits. These latent benefits of work include structured time, social contact, a sense of belonging, status and being involved in meaningful activity. According to Jahoda's Deprivation Theory (1988), when people are denied these latent benefits, the loss is experienced at a psychological level.

Whilst temporary work does not involve the extreme financial and psychological deprivation documented by Jahoda in her ground-breaking community studies of the unemployed in Marienthal and Monmouthshire during the 1930s, it has been linked to both financial hardship and psychological distress (Gallagher et al., 2001; Gallie, White, Cheng & Tomlinson, 1998; Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel & Knottnerus, 1999). It is therefore possible that the latent benefits of work may be compromised in some ways for people in temporary employment. This section of the chapter looks at how clerical temporary workers experience their roles in regard to these five latent benefits of work.

4.2.1 Structured Time

Employment "imposes a time structure on the waking day" and is an important factor contributing to a person's psychological well-being because it provides routine (Jahoda, 1981, p.188). Routine provides predictability, which in turn provides some control over how a person can use the hours in their day or week. For the temporary worker, the working week may be unknown until they receive an offer of an assignment from the agency. The duration of an assignment can be anything from a few hours to several months, and can be terminated at any time by the client.

Uncertainty around work schedules means uncertainty over use of time. Research findings already covered in the previous section of this chapter show how providing flexibility for client organisations creates uncertainty around structured time for temporary workers. Because of this, some studies suggest that temporary clerical workers experience lower levels of psychological and physical well-being when compared to permanent staff in the same organisations (Lasfargues, Doniol-Shaw, Deriennic, Bardot, Huez & Noyer, 1999; Martens et al., 1999).

4.2.2 Social Contact

One of the key themes in the literature on temporary work is the lack of social contact often experienced by temporary workers at client organisations (Gonzolas, 2003; Gottfried, 1992; Henson, 1996; Mitlacher, 2008).

Results from several studies suggest that female clerical workers rate social contact at work as being a very important aspect of the job (Harriman, 1996; Morgan, 2003; Morrison, 2005; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1990). Jahoda (1982) claims that women, more so than men, place a high value on social contact at work, and may feel this loss as a psychological burden. Sociability with others at work is important because "it can make seemingly intolerable jobs tolerable and average jobs enjoyable" (Henson, 1996, p.172) and can also be a buffer against stress (Isaksson & Bellagh, 2002). Social support is defined by Winefield, Tiggemann & Winefield, (1990) as "general camaraderie and sympathy" (p.51), something that temporary workers can lack in their everyday work situations.

It has been suggested that the strong focus on task completion by employers and supervisors at client organisations may be a contributing factor to the social exclusion experienced by many temporary workers (Rogers, 1995; Richards, 2000). For example, little forethought on the location of a temporary worker's desk can result in physical isolation from others, restricting a temporary worker's interaction with permanent staff (Gonzalez, 2003; Henson, 1996; Rogers, 1995).

Social alienation may also be linked to the specific tasks temporary clerical workers are hired to do. For example, looking after the office or answering the phone while permanent staff attend a social event can incur feelings of exclusion (Smith, 1998).

4.2.3 Sense of Belonging

The third latent benefit of work is 'participation in collective purposes' which may be described as having a sense of belonging at an organisation, for example, feeling part of the departmental team.

Gonzalez (2003) investigated whether any occupational sub-culture may have developed for temporary workers, and found that a sense of loneliness and isolation were often part of everyday working life for them in client organisations. Gonzalez interviewed 23 participants who were working as clerical temporary staff registered with employment agencies. Some participants described their occupational culture as being "an outsider's culture" (p 193). According to the researcher, the culture was characterised by marginalisation as there was little evidence of the temporary workers 'belonging' in the client organisations. For example, most of the participants did not try to personalise their desks because it was always somebody else's desk.

An assignment's length can impact on team involvement at client organisations. Longer term assignments often provide more personal involvement for temporary workers than short-term assignments (Alach, 2001; Gonzalez, 2003; Parker, 1994; Rogers, 1995; Druker & Stanworth, 2004). In a longer term assignment, a temporary worker is more likely to be viewed as being one of the team rather than 'the outsider' because of increased opportunities for social interaction and gaining organisational knowledge, both

of which would likely provide some sense of belonging. For example, in Alach's study (2001), a temporary worker participant described being treated as part of the team while she was on a 21 month long assignment. Unfortunately, this assignment came to an abrupt end, but it does indicate that the longer the assignment the more likely a temporary worker will be accepted as part of the departmental team.

4.2.4 Status

Status is the fourth of the five latent benefits and is another key theme in the literature on clerical temporary workers, Jahoda claiming that work can provide some status and social identity (Jahoda, 1982).

Several studies suggest that temporary workers are often considered to be the least important person in an organisation ('just the temp'), making them marginalised workers (Boyce, Ryan & Imus, 2007; Burgess et al., 2001; Gonzalez, 2003; Henson, 1996; Rogers & Henson, 1997). Because of this, Henson (1996) claims that over time, a temporary worker may experience "an erosion of self-esteem as the unflattering views of the temp are internalised" (p. 149).

Another issue often found in research regarding the status of temporary workers is the poor treatment commonly meted out to them by permanent staff (Boyce et al., 2007; Connolly & Kelloway, 2003; Gonzalez, 2003; Henson, 1996; McAllister, 1998; Mitlacher, 2008; Richards, 2001). Examples include temporary workers remaining nameless while working in the organisations, referred to only as 'the temp' (Gonzalez, 2003; Henson, 1996) and being the target of taunts and jokes by permanent staff (Boyce et al., 2007; Connolly & Kellaway, 2003; Henson, 1996). It is not difficult to conclude that being subjected to such treatment in everyday work situations could impact negatively on a person's psychological well-being.

4.2.5 Types of Work Assignments

The last of the five latent benefits that employment theoretically provides is the opportunity to engage in meaningful work. A common thread throughout the literature on clerical temporary work is that assignments can often be boring and repetitive, sometimes

involving jobs permanent staff do not want to do (Burgess et al., 2001; Gottfried, 1992; Hall, 2006; Henson, 1996; Nollen, 1996; Parker, 1994; Peck & Theodore, 1998; Rogers, & Henson, 1997). Examples of clerical temporary assignments which can be boring include filing, photocopying and proof-reading addressed envelopes (Parker, 1994; Rogers, 2000). Consequently, temporary workers can often feel frustrated and bored, being over-qualified for many of the tasks required of them (Rogers, 2000). Although these tasks may be repetitive and non-challenging, it is important to remember that some organisations hire temporary workers specifically for such routine tasks in order to save their own permanent staff from doing them.

A lack of access to training courses for many temporary workers at organisations may also contribute to the types of jobs they are given. If temporary workers are continually excluded from organisational training programmes, then they may become increasingly limited in the types of assignments they perform. Performing continuous assignments of low-level tasks has been linked to occupational downgrading (Korpi & Levin, 2001), making it possible for temporary workers in clerical roles who are not using their existing computer skills or keeping up to date with new software, to eventually become 'unskilled' workers.

From the examples provided above, it seems there can often be a mismatch between workers' skills and the jobs they are given to complete. Employment agencies claim to offer clients the right temporary worker for the job (Hall, 2006), but research suggests that many clerical temporary workers experience poor utilisation of their skills, resulting in boredom and frustration. It could be argued that if the majority of tasks allocated to clerical temporary workers require little knowledge or experience, then the lower level of pay they receive simply reflects the role.

Part Three

4.3 An Alternative Position

The final section of this chapter looks at a series of New Zealand studies involving New Zealand researchers Petricia Alach, Kerr Inkson and Catherine Casey. Petricia Alach is involved as a researcher in all three of the studies and some of the findings appear quite

different to the majority of research looking at how clerical temporary workers experience their work. Alach and her co-authors have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of temporary work in New Zealand, which is an important corrective to the emphasis on the negative 'temp as victim' view so often portrayed by many researchers.

In all three studies (Alach, 2001; Alach & Inkson, 2003; Casey & Alach, 2004), the majority of participants chose to be temporary workers rather than preferring to be in permanent work. Although acknowledging that the financial precariousness of temporary work could be a disadvantage, several participants in Alach & Inkson's research (2003) described agency temporary work as being "a more reliable and secure source of income than many permanent jobs, which under current employment conditions are always at risk of being made redundant" (p.37). In a slightly later study, the majority of office temporary workers expressed confidence in their skills and abilities to gain sufficient regular assignments from employment agencies to meet their financial needs (Casey & Alach, 2004). As well as some positive findings in regard to the financial aspects of temporary work, many participants in all three New Zealand studies found that temporary labour provided them with flexibility to control when and where they wanted to work, thus enabling them to combine work and lifestyle.

With regard to the latent benefits of work, few people reported problems with the "people side" of their work, most participants describing permanent staff in the organisations as being "generally welcoming, friendly and helpful" (Alach & Inkson, 2003, p.39). When social alienation did occur, some temporary workers perceived it to be a benefit rather than a disadvantage, firstly, because it helped to avoid being drawn into office politics, and secondly, because it can discourage developing feelings of commitment to a company (Casey & Alach, 2004). Many described being treated with respect by permanent staff in the client organisations, as being temporary they could choose to leave the assignment if they wanted to, indicating some level of confidence regarding their temporary status (Alach, 2001; Casey & Alach, 2004).

The New Zealand studies also present a more positive view of the types of assignments given to clerical temporary workers, with respondents saying organisations often

provided them with a variety of tasks rather than temporary workers being given the most boring jobs. Many of the temporary worker participants said they would not accept offers of boring assignments, suggesting no fear of being penalised by their recruitment consultants as reported in several other studies (e.g. Forde, 2001; Gottfried, 1991; Henson, 1996; Parker, 1994; Rogers, 1995; Druker & Stanworth, 2004). In fact, some of the participants in the New Zealand studies specifically chose temporary work to avoid the boredom of performing the same routine clerical work that a permanent job might offer (Casey & Alach, 2004).

Overall, the New Zealand findings did not suggest that clerical temporary workers are adversely affected psychologically as a result of their roles. The fact that the temporary staffing industry moves cyclically (Biggs, 2006; De Graaf-Ziji & Berkout, 2007: Peck & Theodore, 2007), may help to explain why the New Zealand researchers found opposing results to the majority of studies**.** In other words, the state of the economy, including booms and recessions, can impact on how people (including temporary workers) may experience their work.

4.4 Conclusion

The literature findings covered in this chapter lend some support to the relationship found between contingent work and psychological morbidity covered in Chapter Two. Although a few studies suggest otherwise, the majority of results tend to suggest more negative aspects associated with clerical temporary work than positive. One of the key debates in the literature is whether or not engaging in agency temporary work provides flexibility for temporary workers who want to combine 'lifestyle' activities with work when hours of work, locations and types of assignments are often pre-determined by clients. Although temporary workers may theoretically refuse offers of assignments, how much freedom they really have may depend on their own financial situation, the flexibility of client organisations and the willingness of agencies to tolerate temporary workers seeking non-standard hours.

It could be argued that work has changed since Jahoda conducted her research on the unemployed in the 1930s as many people now work in a variety of employment

arrangements rather than a regular full-time job. Despite this, many issues raised in this chapter suggest that the five latent benefits of work as well as the benefit of earning a regular income may often be compromised for clerical temporary workers, resulting in lower levels of work-related psychological well-being.

To conclude this part of the thesis, Chapters Two, Three and Four presented the literature review pertaining to agency mediated temporary work. From the findings presented in these chapters, it is obvious that to date there has been relatively little micro-level research explicitly examining the triangular working relationship between temporary staffing agencies, their client organisations and temporary workers. This is despite the fact that the relationship between these three parties differs considerably from the traditional long-term employment relationship between employer and employee.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the interactions between employers representing client organisations, recruitment consultants from temporary staffing agencies and temporary clerical workers. The context of the study is the Auckland labour market during the last economic boom.

CHAPTER FIVE
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This chapter discusses qualitative methodology in psychological research and explains why I decided to take this approach rather than a quantitative approach for the present study. The suitability of using a grounded theory methodology for the study is examined, along with a philosophical and theoretical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses associated with grounded theory methods. The chapter concludes by looking at the processes involved in using grounded theory as a methodological tool.

5.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has been defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.17). Qualitative research is mainly used to investigate social processes in groups, individuals or organisations. As human experience and interaction are "far too complex to be reduced to a few variables as is typical in quantitative research" (Howitt & Cramer, 2005, p. 248), qualitative research often provides a richer understanding of the research topic than quantitative research.

According to Henwood & Pidgeon (1995), there are two main advantages associated with qualitative research. Firstly, as an alternative to hypothetico-deduction, it is more concerned with exploring new areas than testing a pre-conceived hypothesis. Secondly, it permits the researcher to generate analyses that are more in touch with the reality of participants' subjective worlds. This is because the qualitative researcher tends to be more concerned with the texture and quality of experience rather than identifying cause-effect relationships (Willig, 2001). Although psychological research is still a predominantly quantitative field, psychologists are becoming increasingly aware of the advantages of qualitative studies (Howith & Cramer, 2005; Willig, 2001; Woolgar, 1996).

As qualitative research is much more sensitive to context than quantitative research, this approach seems particularly appropriate when studying the experiences of people in

specific settings. In other words, qualitative research is often more appropriate when the researcher wishes to study the complexity of something in its natural setting (Howitt & Cramer, 2005).

Reflexivity

An important aspect of qualitative research is the reflexivity of the researcher. This means that the researcher needs to be aware of his or her own presence in the research project (Willig, 2001). All interpretation is made within the framework of the researcher's own concepts, but by adopting a constructivist approach, researchers are better able to acknowledge their own influences on the study (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996).

As the researcher for this study, I am aware that my own personal, cultural and ideological assumptions and experiences influence the research from its beginning to conclusion. For example, I am a female with prior experience of working in a clerical role as well as experience of hiring clerical temporary workers in the employer role. Although I have not worked closely with recruitment consultants, I did work for a large company which hired clerical temporary staff from agencies. I acknowledge that my own life experience may influence my interpretation and analysis regardless of any conscious attempt to remain impartial. I also acknowledge that in this respect, qualitative research can be perceived to be limiting and may not provide 'objective' data concerning the research topic.

The words used to describe experiences influence the meanings we attach to those experiences. Language does not simply mirror reality, rather it has a constructive component, thus critical language awareness needs to be acknowledged as part of reflexivity (Willig, 2001). With this in mind, I recognise that the choice of words I used in the semi-structured interview questions and the categories and codes that I created during the research process helped to shape the findings of this study.

5.2 Qualitative Methods

For the researcher embarking upon a qualitative study, there are numerous methods available. For example, interpretative phenomenology, discursive psychology, Foucauldian discourse analysis and grounded theory. Two main qualitative methods often used in psychological research are discourse analysis and grounded theory (Howitt & Cramer, 2005).

Discourse analysis can be described as a methodology which is essentially looking at language as a tool for creating and understanding social reality. Discourse analysts focus on the ways in which social power is created, reaffirmed and challenged through language, and perceive language use as purposeful activity which is used to achieve specific ends rather than simply representing external reality (Howitt & Cramer, 2005).

Discourse analysis could have been used as the primary analytic tool in this research. By doing this, the thesis would have explored the different discourses used by the three groups of participants to legitimate, resist or understand their respective positions within the temporary labour market. Whilst this approach would undoubtedly have generated some valuable insights into the ways in which the different groups of participants construct their situation, I decided not to use this approach because I was concerned that it would turn my participants into ciphers and detract from the psychological reality of their lives. Whilst I have analysed the activities of the employers and the recruitment consultants from a relatively structuralist position, I wanted to obtain a more nuanced appreciation of the material and psychological circumstances of the temporary workers' lives. I therefore rejected a discursive approach and used grounded theory to analyse my data.

5.3 Grounded Theory

A grounded theory is one that is discovered and developed through systematic data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher does not begin with a fully formed theory or a set of specific questions, only with an area of study and a series of relatively general research questions. The data collected that is relevant to that area is allowed to 'emerge' to form a theory. The concept of theory simply emerging from data

has created an ongoing debate among researchers and this will be covered in more depth later in this chapter.

Creativity is an important component of grounded theory. The creative ability of the researcher is demonstrated in recognising and naming categories; making the associations required for generating relevant questions and comparing and contrasting data, all of which leads to discovery (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The aim of grounded theory analysis is to produce theories that are grounded in the actual data.

The two founders of the grounded theory method were Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Unfortunately, they could not agree on exactly how grounded theory should be approached. Glaser maintained a purely inductive approach which assumes that the data speaks for itself and minimises the influence a researcher may have on the actual interpretation of the data. Strauss' version of grounded theory is more in line with the social constructionist approach which acknowledges that categories and theories are constructed by the researcher through an interaction with the data rather than simply 'emerging' on their own (Willig, 2001). Glaser (1992), claimed that Strauss' version was overly controlling in that it "forced results rather than let them emerge, that it asked directing rather than neutral questions, and that analysis was based on preconceived ideas rather than being open to emergent categories" (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999, p. 189). This division (inductive versus constructive) eventually led to considerable debate among researchers over the right way to conduct research using grounded theory.

The Epistemological Conflict within Grounded Theory

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy which is concerned with the theory of knowledge, and tries to find answers to questions such as "How, and what can we know?" (Willig, 2001). Qualitative research can be interpretive in its approach or at the other extreme, it can be positivistic (Charmez, 1995). An interpretive approach attempts to describe, explain and understand the lived experiences of a particular group of people. It starts with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person. In contrast, a positivist approach attempts to produce completely objective descriptions of

phenomena, independent of the process of human influence on the part of the researcher (Willig, 2001).

As well as being 'grounded in the data', a theory of the phenomenon being studied must be developed and explained, and be more than a descriptive account. The inductive or positivist label is often given to grounded theory because of its emphasis on all aspects of the process being grounded in the data (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999). A positivistic researcher takes an objective stance, similar to the quantitative approach in that the data itself is viewed as being 'factual' rather than having been manipulated by the researcher. The implication of a positivist epistemology is that production of objective knowledge is the goal of research. This means that any understanding or knowledge must be impartial and based on a view from 'the outside' with no personal involvement on the part of the researcher (Willig, 2001).

In grounded theory, agreeing with the concept that theory emerges from the data takes the positivist/inductivist perspective. This approach has been criticized by many writers who argue that observation and description are selective and any researcher's understanding of the world is partial and therefore limited (Charmaz, 1995; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to these writers, theory cannot simply materialise from data without interpretation by the researcher who will have prior opinions and preferences as well as social and cultural biases, therefore making it impossible for interpretation not be influenced in some way by the researcher. People create their own reality based on their own personal engagement and interpretation of the world (Crotty, 1998) and "no human being can step outside of her or his humanity and view the world from no position at all" (Burr, 1995 p.160). This is just as true of researchers as of everyone else.

An alternative to the inductivist/positivist view is the constructivist approach to generation of theory. The constructivist view acknowledges that the researcher is part of the study, regardless of how objective they may try to be, as their individual perspective influences and guides the topics during the interview stage. The researcher's individual philosophical stance will also influence interpretation of the data and any decisions

regarding what can be discarded and what can be built up to help form the theory (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995).

This 'tension' within grounded theory has resulted in different versions of grounded theory. This is not surprising given that the two founders could not agree on what grounded theory actually is. It is therefore important for researchers to state their own views on grounded theory, whether it be in favour of the constructivist or the inductivist/positivist approach. My preference is to take the constructivist view within this research. In common with many other researchers, I believe that grounded theory methods do not need to be followed rigidly, but are flexible enough to be modified according to the particular circumstances of the research project (Charmaz, 1995: Murray & Chamberlain, 1999; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997).

Most researchers begin their project with some background knowledge of the literature in that area, therefore the researcher using grounded theory needs to be aware of the possible influence of this knowledge on the project. To ensure that the project is not unduly influenced by any preconceived ideas, focusing tightly on the data collected from the participants helps the researcher to remain informed yet also remain open to discoveries (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999).

A weakness of grounded theory is the possibility that it may be overly descriptive rather than analytical. This is because it can tie the researcher so closely to the data that difficulties can arise when trying to reach a higher order of conceptual categories. Willig (2001) argues that using grounded theory procedures can be viewed as simply being a "mapping of experiences" leading to a descriptive rather than an explanatory exercise, which may not be helpful in developing higher level theory (p.46).

Grounded Theory Within This Study

I used grounded theory methods for the present study for three reasons. Firstly, grounded theory is investigatory in nature, providing an exploratory approach. This is particularly suitable for a topic which to date has received relatively little research. Secondly, it was selected because of its ability to provide detailed, rich data. Rich data reveals thoughts,

feelings and actions which can help the researcher to discern what the participants mean and how they define their experiences (Charmaz, 1995). This can provide new ideas and fresh slants on previously studied phenomena. Thirdly, as a research method, grounded theory is useful for rigorous research because it provides a systematic process for dealing with what may seem like an overwhelming amount of raw data. This can be especially so when interviewing three groups of people, which is the case in the present study. By using the systematic processes involved in grounded theory methods, the researcher can allow the data itself to help in controlling the creation and development of concepts and codes. This may sound a little like a positivistic view, but staying close to the raw data allows the researcher some objectivity, even though the researcher's own unique perceptions are likely to influence the process to some extent.

Although grounded theory is exploratory in nature, it does not obviate the requirement to think up a coherent set of initial research questions. Before interviewing any participants, my research questions focused on looking at how female clerical temporary workers experience their work from a psychological aspect, how recruitment consultants and employers perceive clerical temporary workers, how they conceptualise their own roles in the job market and how they view their obligations and responsibilities towards clerical temporary workers. These questions were formulated by reading existing research on employment from a psychological perspective and acknowledging a gap in the literature which formed my research questions. In view of the fact that recruitment consultants and employers are usually in more powerful positions than temporary workers, a further formulated research question was to find out what agencies and employers are doing or could do to ameliorate any detrimental effects of temporary work for the workers.

The collection of data was initially shaped by this set of research questions. As mentioned in Chapter One, over the course of the interviews, this focus changed and began to develop in unexpected ways as the collected data continued to create leads into new areas. Hence, the focus of the research questions changed to reflect the new topics. As agencies, their client organisations and temporary workers have an interlocking working relationship, new research questions around how these three groups interact

within the context of a buoyant job market were formed. In consequence, the interview questions themselves developed and altered as the research progressed.

5.3.1 The Process of Using Grounded Theory

Using a grounded theory methodology provides the researcher with a structured approach to qualitative data collection and analysis. This process is directed by the data itself. For example, the researcher is initially unaware of how many participants will be required for the study as the size of the sample is not usually decided in advance of the study commencing. Ideally, data collection continues until saturation is reached. This is when there is no data being collected from participants that adds anything new to the theory being developed (Morse, 1995) and it is at this stage of the data collection part of the study that the size of the sample is determined. Saturation ensures that the data collected contains sufficient information "to build a comprehensive and convincing theory" (Morse, 1995, p.148). Saturation makes sure that a topic has been thoroughly explored, resulting in a rich and full detailed understanding of the phenomenon which is grounded in the data.

However, saturation is to some extent also created by the researcher as sometimes a pragmatic choice needs to be made. For example, there may be a time-limit to be adhered to which makes it unrealistic to continue increasing the number of participants. Or there may be a situation when extra participants are expecting to be interviewed even though saturation point may have already been reached. In this case, continuation of data collection may be preferable to alienating people.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is another part of the grounded theory process and involves collecting extra data in the light of categories that may have developed from earlier stages of the data analysis (Willig, 2001). In other words, theoretical sampling involves following 'threads' from data already collected to further extend or modify emerging theory. For example, during data collection and analysis, including new participants with potential for extending any developing theory might be necessary. Sampling is driven by theoretical concerns, allowing the researcher to be selective in what topics are added to

the semi-structured interview sheet and what topics can be removed (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to analysis, and for this reason it is recommended that the researcher gives relevant issues a chance to develop before introducing theoretical sampling to the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Memo-Writing

In order to cope well with a large amount of data, the researcher using grounded theory uses memos and diagrams to keep observational notes regarding the research process. Keeping notes in the form of memos helps the researcher to keep track of ideas, questions or observations as they arise. These ideas or observations can be linked to other ideas or observations which encourage analytical shaping of concepts.

Maintaining memos throughout the data collection and analysis stages helps the researcher to think more theoretically about the data and can create analytical distance from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It helps to clarify which categories are important and which are minor, providing some shape for the research. As an organising strategy, it is useful for memos to be dated, stating where the data was from (Willig, 2001).

Data Analysis

In grounded theory, data collection and analysis occur contemporaneously. There are benefits from combining data collection and analysis as it can present the researcher with opportunities to follow unexpected leads into other areas previously unrecognised as being relevant to the research (Chamberlain, 1999). This is something that occurred within my research, ultimately resulting in the research focus moving to a slightly different area than the initial one.

Data analysis using grounded theory involves three sets of coding known as open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding generates a large number of categories from initial interviews in keeping with theoretical sampling. Open codes are concepts, mainly descriptive in nature, which are formed into axial codes. Axial codes involve linking the open codes into higher categories. These higher categories are then condensed

into the selective codes. Selective coding groups the axial codes into logical formats linked together to construct the grounded theory or theories.

As the analysis becomes more developed and conceptual, one or more core categories become apparent. A core category or categories is the key theme of the analysis and represents "the central phenomenon of the study" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 14), which links all the other lower-level categories.

5.4 Evaluating Qualitative Research

Objectivity, or the absence of bias on the part of the researcher, may be the aim of quantitative research (Willig, 2001), but evaluation of psychological research of a qualitative nature uses different criteria. The nature of social reality is not something that can be taken for granted. One person's perspective of a situation may be very different from another's, therefore social reality itself is subjective. To ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research, the qualitative criteria may include the evaluation processes mentioned below.

Coherence of Interpretations

One form of evaluation is the coherence of the researcher's interpretations. Asking questions such as "does the interpretation made by the researcher make sense from the data presented?" can be helpful. A way to ensure this is by working closely with the participant's own words to form the concepts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Presenting evidence in the form of raw data (the participants' own words as quotes in the report) helps the reader to ascertain whether or not the researcher has made a correct interpretation and to think of possible alternatives.

Independent Audit

Another way of evaluating qualitative research is that all the data be recorded so that another person could undertake an independent audit (Smith, 1996). In a grounded theory methodology, the coding system used to develop and create theory provides a record of the steps used during the research process, and can be reviewed by another person.

Having another person verifying that the findings correspond with the participants' accounts of their experiences is a way of evaluating the accuracy of the study.

Presenting a Summary of Findings to Participants

A common form of evaluating the validity of the data in qualitative research is to invite participants in the study to comment on the summary of findings (Yin, 1994). This is done to check that the researcher has adequately understood the participants' experiences correctly.

In the present study, each group's perspective was sent back to them as a summary of findings (Appendices J, K and L) and it was agreed by those respondents who provided feedback, that in terms of description, I presented their individual group's views accurately. These summaries only provided feedback which was descriptive without the analysis and each group of participants only received the summary of findings relevant to their group.

In research, the idea of only providing descriptive feedback rather than the final theoretical analysis to participants can be perceived as an ethical issue. According to Fine (2003), researchers need to take responsibility for the analytic interpretation of their research even if participants do not agree with it. In my study, the final analysis provided me as the researcher with a fuller and more comprehensive perspective of how each group influenced each other based on the interlocking actions of the three parties. At that point I had moved beyond the experiences of each particular group to a more super-ordinate analysis and decided not to send this analysis of the study to the participants.

Despite this ethical problem, sending participants a summary of the descriptive findings can be useful for a number of reasons. Firstly it provides participants with an overview of the raw data which they will probably be interested in reading. Secondly, it does provide them with the opportunity to comment on the findings and is a way of checking whether their views have been accurately represented. Thirdly, sending a summary of findings can be influential in producing catalytic validity. Catalytic validity refers to the impact of the

research on a participant. This occurs through the realisation that other participants shared similar experiences which can be helpful for an individual participant.

5.5 Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the rationale for choosing a qualitative rather than quantitative approach for the present study. The main reason for this was an in-depth interviewing approach is suitable for studying multifaceted and complex phenomena, such as exploring the relationship experiences of three different groups of people, and how the actions of each group impacts upon the others. The chapter also provided a theoretical discussion on grounded theory covering its strengths and weaknesses.

The main reasons grounded theory was chosen as a methodological approach for this study were because of its ability to provide detailed rich information and because of its systematic process for organising and analysing large amounts of data. It was also chosen because of its ability to take an exploratory approach to a topic which has received relatively little research. The application of a grounded theory methodology was also covered, discussing how it structures and organises the research process by using a systematic approach based on contemporaneous data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded by looking at the ways in which the validity of a qualitative study can be evaluated.

CHAPTER SIX
METHODOLOGY

Chapter Six comprises three parts. Firstly, the aims of the study are presented and the reasons for choosing this topic are explained. The second section discusses the research design, describes the three groups of participants and outlines the data gathering procedures. Finally, the chapter describes the grounded theory method of data analysis used in the study.

6.1 Aims of the Study

As stated in Chapter One, the study has three main objectives. The first objective is to describe the differing aims, expectations and behaviours of employers, recruitment consultants and temporary clerical workers in regard to the temporary staffing industry. 'Aims' refers to goals, in other words what people originally intended to achieve when they became involved in the temporary staffing industry. 'Expectations' refers to anticipation of the more probable outcome given the reality of a situation. Therefore, the intended goal of a group of participants can be different to their current expectations. 'Behaviours' refers to the actions taken by participants in their endeavours to achieve their goals or expectations.

The second objective of the study is to analyse the working relationship between these three groups of people and interpret the ways in which the buoyant Auckland labour market of 2006 and 2007 influenced the interactions between the three parties. The third aim is to interpret female temporary workers' subjective experiences of clerical agency work from a psychological perspective.

During the course of this research, the study's aims changed from the original intention of looking at the experiences of one particular group (temporary clerical workers) to the aims mentioned above. Consequently, the final version of this thesis focuses on the triangular working relationship between the three groups of participants (employers, recruitment consultants and temporary workers), denoting a shift in the progression of the research questions over the duration of this research.

In contrast to some researchers who have been critical of employment agencies and their client organisations, I want to suggest that the perspectives and actions of all three groups of participants were both intelligible and reasonable once we acknowledge that all groups participate in a labour market context where their freedom to act is limited by structural and ideological constraints, and where outcomes are often unintended and suboptimal for all parties.

6.2 The Methodology

Research Design

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three groups of participants, these being female clerical temporary workers, recruitment consultants from private employment agencies and employers who hire clerical temporary workers from private employment agencies. All interviews took place from September 2006 to June 2007. Participants were gathered from a variety of locations in the Auckland area, including the North Shore, South Auckland, West Auckland and the inner city.

The Participants

Before any interviews commenced, I made a pragmatic decision to initially interview twenty clerical temporary workers, ten recruitment consultants and ten employers and to only increase my participant numbers if it seemed necessary for theory generation. This decision worked out in terms of the grounded theory methodology in that I found I was reaching saturation using these numbers.

The participants for the first part of the study comprised twenty women who were currently working as clerical temporary staff via employment agencies or women who had previously worked as clerical temporary staff via employment agencies in the last six months.

The vast majority of female clerical agency temporary workers in New Zealand and overseas are women (Alach, 2001; Coe et al., 2009; Forde & Slater, 2005; Gottried, 1992; Theodore & Peck, 2002), and this influenced my decision to choose only female temporary worker participants.

As well as interviewing women who were currently working in a temporary clerical position, I decided it was important to include women who had recently quit this work to find out why they had left it. The interviews covered a wide range of topics, mostly relating to how the participants experience their work. Other questions included previous career history, original reasons for becoming a temporary worker, relationships with employers and agencies, advantages and disadvantages of temporary work and problem solving (Appendix C).

The temporary worker participants were found from a variety of sources. These were by means of providing employment agencies with flyers about the study which were included in their temporary workers' pay envelopes, placing articles in the local newspaper *The North Shore Times* (in editions 28th November 2006 and 23rd January 2007), and via my own personal contacts.

The ages of the women at the time of the interviews ranged from early twenties to early sixties (Table 1). Marital status included the categories married, single, widow, de-facto and divorced or separated, and educational levels ranged from high school to post-graduate qualifications (Table 1). Ten of the women had no children, seven had children who had grown up and left the family home, and only three had school age children living at home. The majority of the women (80%) were sole income earners, with financial commitments involving paying rent or a mortgage.

Table 1.

Characteristics of Temporary Workers at Time of Interviews

Characteristic	**n=20**
Age (years)	
20 – 30	6
31 – 40	5
41 – 50	2
51 – 60	4
61 - 65	3

Marital Status	**n=20**
Single	8
Married	5
Divorced or Separated	3
Widow	1
De Facto	3

Educational Level	**n=20**
High School	6
Commercial Certificate	6
Graduate	7
Post Graduate	1

Participants for the second part of the study comprised ten recruitment consultants (nine females and one male) who were working at private employment agencies at the time of the interviews. All participants were initially approached by me. Nine participants were found through the Yellow Pages and one through a personal contact. An introductory letter was posted to the recruitment consultants outlining the study.

The interviews covered a wide range of topics, many of which were linked to the original research questions involving how recruitment consultants perceive clerical temporary workers in order to corroborate the temporary worker participants' views (Appendix D). However, by the third interview with the recruitment consultants, it became apparent that they wanted to talk about other areas of their work as well as answering my questions about temporary workers. They particularly wanted to discuss the problems they were currently experiencing in their industry. Consequently, new topics were developed to add to the semi-structured interview sheet. These included looking at how the economy influences the temporary staffing sector, problems and problem solving strategies, how recruitment consultants perceive their role within the three way working relationship and their relationship with the other two parties.

Nine of the ten consultants were in senior roles such as branch managers or were owners of the agencies. Although there were other consultants working in the agencies, these senior consultants had decided to put themselves forward as participants for the study rather than their staff members. This may have been for the purpose of engaging in 'impression management' as they each strongly promoted their particular agencies during the interviews. The ages of the consultants ranged from 24 to 44 (Table 2). Their experience as recruitment consultants for private employment agencies ranged from 1 to 21 years, with the average duration being 9 years (Table 2).

Table 2.

Characteristics of Consultants at Time of Interviews

Characteristic	**n=10**
Age (years)	
20 – 30	2
31 – 40	5
41 – 50	3
Experience as Consultant (Years)	**n=10**
1 - 5	3
6 - 10	4
11 – 15	1
16 – 20	1
21 - 25	1

Ten employer participants representing client organisations (seven females and three males) were the third and final group interviewed for this study. All were in positions of responsibility for hiring employees, including clerical temporary staff from private employment agencies. The ages of the employer representatives ranged from 33 to 54 (Table 3). The organisations in which the participants worked covered a variety of fields including law, education, government departments, manufacturing, telecommunications,

local councils, electronics and information technology. Six participants worked in human resources roles within their organisations (Table 3). Six of the organisations were privately owned and four were in the public sector. Five were large organisations each employing between 1200 and 5,500 staff; three were of medium size, each employing between 300 and 630 staff, and two smaller companies employed 45 and 140 staff each.

I initially approached all employer participants using 'leads' provided by the recruitment consultants. A letter of introduction was posted or emailed to each of the participants outlining the study.

As with the recruitment consultants, the interviews with the employers covered a wide range of topics, many of which were to corroborate the temporary workers' views. Similar to the recruitment consultants, early on in the interviewing process, the employer participants wanted to talk about the current problems they were experiencing, especially in regard to the temporary staffing agencies. This increased the list of topics/questions on the semi-structured interview schedule to include problems, problem solving strategies, aims and expectations of using agency temporary staffing, their relationship with the other two parties and how employers perceive their role in the three way working relationship. (Appendix E).

Table 3

Characteristics of Employers at Time of Interviews

Characteristic	**n=10**
Age (years)	
30 – 35	3
36 – 40	2
41 – 45	2
46 – 50	2
51 – 54	1

Job Title of Employer	**n=10**
Human Resources Manager	2
Human Resources Advisor	3
General Manager	1
Departmental Manager	1
Customer Services Supervisor	1
Recruitment Organiser	1
Accountant	1

There was a degree of 'overlap' between different groups during the interviewing. For example, each of the ten employer organisations were mentioned by six of the recruitment consultants as being companies which hire clerical agency temporary workers. Two of the recruitment consultants were on quite friendly terms with two employer participants. Three temporary worker participants were working at three of the employer participants' organisations, and five of the temporary workers were registered at three of the consultant participants' agencies. It is possible however, that the degree of overlap may have been greater as generally I did not know whether participants knew each other or not.

I believe that interviewing temporary workers first, then consultants and finally employers in that order may have been somewhat limiting for the study. With hindsight, it may have been better to intermingle the group interviews rather than complete them in the order of one group at a time. This is because it was only when I began interviewing the consultants that I became aware that the economic context was an important factor. From the temporary workers' interviews, I did not immediately recognise that the labour market had changed, however, it was evident that most of the temporary worker participants believed they could secure a permanent job if they wanted to at that time. This provided some support for the consultants and employers' complaints in regard to the effects of the tight labour market on temporary staffing.

The Procedure

All respondents were provided with Information Sheets (Appendices A, F and I) detailing the participants' rights and the requirements of the research. An interview time and location was then arranged over the telephone or via email with each participant. Each participant was invited to telephone me or one of my supervisors if they required further information.

Prior to each interview, all participants were asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix B). I outlined the purpose of my research, discussed the printed information and invited questions, reminding them of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time and to have the tape recorder turned off at any stage. In keeping with recommendations in the literature on qualitative research, all participants were promised a report showing a summary of the findings, to be submitted at the end of the data collection phase (Yin, 1994). This seemed to help motivate participant involvement in the study, particularly with the recruitment consultants.

Nine of the interviews of the temporary workers took place in the participants' homes. Four preferred to be interviewed at their work premises, three chose to be interviewed at my office in Albany and four chose to be interviewed elsewhere. The interviews with the ten recruitment consultants took place at the agencies where they each worked and interviews with the participants representing employers took place at their individual work premises.

The semi-structured interviews for all participants ranged in duration from 40 minutes to 90 minutes and averaged about one hour. They were based on a list of guiding topics used to promote discussion, with the three groups being asked complementary sets of questions. These lists of topics increased as any new information that arose was added to the following interviews.

Summaries of Findings

At the end of the organisation of the data, three separate summaries outlining the main findings (mainly descriptive) were sent to participants (Appendices J, K and L). All

participants were invited to comment on the findings in the light of their own experiences and nobody disagreed with the content of the findings they received.

None of the employers provided any comments. This did not surprise me given that the temporary staffing industry is not a direct concern in regard to this group's livelihood. However, nine out of the ten recruitment consultants did comment. Most consultants' comments were congratulatory saying that the report had captured the complexities of the industry. This high number of consultants providing feedback may be explained by the fact that they had been experiencing quite a few difficulties in their roles at the time of the interviews, and the summaries may have provided some sense of relief that they were not alone in what they had been experiencing. Another possible explanation for the high number of consultants providing feedback might be the case that any information on their industry would be helpful given the lack of available research on temporary staffing agencies in Auckland.

Only three of the temporary worker participants provided comments confirming the interpretation of the findings. It is interesting to note that only one of the temporary worker participants (Sarah) remained in temporary work when the summaries of findings were sent out in October 2007, as most had chosen to take permanent employment instead. Given that most of the participants had left temporary work, it is possible they were no longer interested enough in the study to provide a response to the summaries.

Ethical Issues

Approval for this study was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were handled in accord with Appendices A and B. The majority of audiotapes were transcribed verbatim by me. However, given the large volume of audiotapes produced by the overall study (40 in all), it was necessary to hire a professional typist to help with about 30% of the transcriptions. Pseudonyms were used throughout the transcripts to ensure anonymity of participants. Any identifying information, for example company names, was omitted from the transcripts and final thesis.

6.3 Using Grounded Theory in the Study

Codes and Categories

Rather than fitting data to codes and categories, grounded theory works the other way around, in that the data itself is used to create codes and categories. Line-by-line coding involves analysis of each line of the transcript, keeping notes of each raw code created, and comparing and contrasting these with others to form categories. It is the line-by-line coding that provides leads to pursue in subsequent interviews with new participants. As theory is built from the ground up, it helps to keep any preconceived ideas of the researcher under some control, although what is 'found' in the data must inevitably be influenced in part by the researcher's own perspective.

After the first two interviews with the temporary workers had been transcribed, I began to examine the data. Using line-by-line examination, open coding generated a substantial number of categories, and from these I formulated several higher level categories and concepts. Three further interviews with the temporary workers were then carried out and the data provided by these transcripts added weight to the initial codes as well as generating a number of new codes. This in turn generated more high level categories and concepts, and new topics were added to the semi-structured interview schedule for subsequent participants.

An example of this process in action was when some temporary worker participants said they used technology (texting and emailing) as a source of social communication while working in the client organisations. This was not on the original list of topics, but as both the first and second participants had mentioned it, this issue was added to the list of topics under the 'social aspects' heading on the interview schedule. As a result of this new topic emerging from the initial interviews, 'technological socialising' was added to the semi-structured interview sheet as a topic to be raised with subsequent participants.

Seven hundred and sixty three raw open codes were initially generated from the 20 interviews with the temporary workers.These were formulated into 146 final open codes, 12 axial codes and 3 selective codes. From the interviews with the ten recruitment consultants, 411 raw open codes were initially generated. These were then formulated

into 50 final open codes which were then formulated into 6 axial codes. Three selective codes were formed from the 6 axial codes.

Interviews from the ten employers initially generated 159 raw open codes. These were formulated into 46 final open codes from which 6 axial codes were developed. Three selective codes were then formulated from the axial codes. The large amount of open codes generated from the interviews with the temporary workers compared to the number of codes generated by the other two groups was because clerical agency temporary workers' experiences of their work was originally the focus of the research topic. Many of the questions covered when interviewing the temporary workers focused on how they experienced their work from a psychological perspective which led to the larger amount of data for coding for this group than for the other two groups.

Open Coding

As advocated by Carpenter (1995) the initial raw open codes were generated using the participants' own language. For example when talking about pay, some temporary staff referred to their hourly rate as being "poor" compared to what permanent staff were paid. Others described their hourly rate as being "low" which made it difficult for them to save. It would have been easy to simply create the one open code of 'poor pay' to cover the two descriptions of the pay because of their apparent similarity. However the contexts in which these descriptions of the pay ("low" and "poor") were placed are different, therefore leading to two open codes rather than the one. These two open codes became 'Difficult for temps to save' and 'Less pay than permanents'. These two open codes fit into two different axial codes which are 'Financial' and 'Status'. These two axial codes fit into two different selective codes which are 'Economic Factors' and 'Relationships'. Staying close to the data enabled me to recognise contradictions and complexity in some aspects of the participants' accounts. For example, two of the temporary worker participants described how they were penalised by their agencies for leaving unpleasant or unwanted assignments, yet many of the recruitment consultants said their agencies no longer engaged in this type of behaviour towards 'choosy' temporary staff, highlighting a tension in the data. Looking again at the two temporary workers' accounts, I realised that they had been describing events from the past rather than the present. As well as temporal

reflecting creating ambiguity, other contradictions between participant accounts were attributed to variation in experiences and opinions.

Axial Coding

Axial coding involves linking the open codes to form a number of separate categories and occurs at a conceptual rather than at a descriptive level. In the present study, some categories emerged which, although coming under the same code, were at opposite ends of the same phenomenon. For example, under the axial code 'social aspects', some temporary workers complained of being physically isolated from the permanent staff when working at organisations. This produced the open code 'Physical isolation at the organisation'. However other temporary workers described being relieved by this social exclusion because it meant they were not involved in office politics - the open code for this was 'No involvement in office politics'. Both these codes were under the same axial code (social aspects) yet had different psychological implications for the participants.

Selective Coding

The three main themes emerging from the axial codes were Control and Flexibility, Economic Factors and Relationships. These same themes emerged for each group of interviews. Each code represented the most logical grouping of the axial codes and all three concepts were linked to make the grounded theory.

A theory that is grounded in data should be "recognisable to participants, and although it might not fit every aspect of their cases, the larger concepts should apply" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.161). As mentioned earlier, none of the participants disagreed with the findings sent to them, and twelve participants provided feedback confirming the results. During the final stages of data analysis, I experienced some problems using grounded theory because it tied me so closely to the data that it made it difficult for me to theorise how the three groups inter-relate to each other and why they behaved in certain ways. In order to analyse the interplay between the three groups, I needed to rise above the data and take more of 'a bird's eye view' of how the three parties were interacting. This helped me to see more clearly what was occurring and provided me with a more

analytical overview of how each group was interacting within the triangular working relationship.

6.4 Summary

In summary, the final main objectives of this research involved looking at the differing perspectives of temporary workers, recruitment consultants and employers, and the inter-relationship between these three groups within the context of a tight labour market. A grounded theory methodology was used throughout.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESULTS SECTION

Chapter Seven presents an overview of the findings of the study and outlines the way in which the Results are organised.

7.1 The Agency Temporary Staffing Industry

To understand the findings of this study, it is important to look at how the temporary staffing industry in New Zealand operated during the years of the early 2000s. According to the employer and recruitment consultant participants, there was a good supply of temporary workers during this period. A masters thesis looking at temporary work in New Zealand at around this time tends to support this (Hardy, 2000). Recruitment consultant participants in a slightly later study by Alach & Inkson (2003) reported that around the year 2000, there was a "buoyant temp market" with agencies reporting few problems recruiting an adequate supply of office temporary workers (p.16). This same study describes some temporary workers experiencing economic hardship during the years 2001 and 2002 because of a lack of demand for agency temporary staff by employers (attributed to global uncertainty following the events of September 11th in America).

Although there were plenty of people wanting temporary work around that time, many became temporary workers because they found it hard to find a permanent job and temporary work allowed them to earn money while they sought more permanent employment (Hardy & Walker, 2003). As a consequence, skilled temporary workers were plentiful and private employment agencies had few problems filling their data-bases with available staff to hire out to organisations. Employers were able to access a skilled temporary worker from an employment agency with very little notice, enabling them to operate an efficient, flexible workforce if they chose to. This economic context was favourable for employers and agencies, but not for many temporary workers.

7.2 The Present Study

By 2007, when most of this research took place, two changes had occurred which appeared to have significantly altered the temporary staffing industry in Auckland. Firstly, the number of employment agencies had greatly increased as many new employment agencies set up business in Auckland. In the 2000 edition of Auckland's Yellow Pages there were 178 private employment agencies advertised (pages 771 to 778). By 2007 there were 331 (pages 961 to 974) – indicating an 85% increase in just seven years. As mentioned in the literature review, figures from Statistics New Zealand are very similar and report a 78% increase in employment agencies for this period, however not all agencies were included in these figures. Many of the recruitment consultant and employer participants commented on the "huge increase" in the number of employment agencies operating in Auckland at the time of the interviews, creating fierce competition between agencies for clients and temporary workers. Some of the employers took advantage of the situation by negotiating lower fees for hiring temporary staff. This reduced the profit margins of agencies which limited their ability to attract temporary staff by offering higher wages.

The second and more important change involved the improved economic situation. In June 2000 the unemployment rate for Auckland was 5.8% but by June 2007 the rate had dropped to 3.3% - a 43% decrease (figures supplied by Statistics New Zealand, 2008). This created a stronger job market offering job-seekers more choices. As there were plenty of permanent jobs available, people did not have to opt for temporary work if they preferred permanent employment. The consequence of this was a disruption to the supply and demand balance in the temporary staffing industry because of a shortage of skilled people wanting to work as temporary staff.

In order to attract more people to temporary work, some agencies advertised it as an occupational choice which could provide flexibility for the worker to suit their lifestyle preferences. The agencies also promoted temporary work as providing a variety of interesting assignments with high rates of pay. As employers generally wanted temporary staff who could work full-time hours, the flexibility available to temporary workers was actually quite limited. Furthermore, rather than being offered a variety of interesting

assignments, temporary workers were frequently hired to complete boring routine tasks, and often earned a lower hourly rate than their permanent counterparts.

Temporary work therefore failed to provide the flexible, well paid lifestyle promoted by agencies, and many temporary workers decided to seek permanent work. The buoyant permanent job market of 2007 could easily accommodate them. By October 2007, only one of the twenty temporary workers interviewed for this study was still working in temporary employment. Nearly all had decided to move into permanent employment.

Economically, the situation was becoming increasingly difficult for employment agencies. Temporary workers were expecting higher rates of pay and clients were trying to negotiate lower fees. To stay in business, some recruitment consultants spent a lot of time trying to build relationships with employers and temporary workers in order to foster loyalty to their particular agency. Unfortunately, the shortage of temporary workers meant that agencies were no longer able to accommodate employers' requests for temporary staff in an expeditious manner. Employers could no longer depend on agencies to supply temporary workers when they required them. They also noticed that temporary workers being sent were often unsuitable.

Employers want flexibility to cope with fluctuations in workload and staffing. If agencies are unable to fulfill their requests for temporary staff in a timely manner, then employers need to solve the problem of staffing cover in other ways. Some employers began cross-training their staff, or hired employees on fixed term contracts. Others developed their own in-house data-base of casual staff who could be called in at short notice to perform routine tasks. As a result of this, human resources staff and managers were encouraged to hire temporary staff from agencies only as a last resort rather than as the first option. This meant that employers were not hiring agency temporary staff as frequently as they had in the past, which increased the pressure on agencies to try to maintain good relationships with client organisations.

Of the three groups involved in the temporary staffing industry, employment agencies seem to have been the most adversely affected by the labour market changes, finding

themselves trapped between the conflicting demands of their clients and their workforce. As labour market intermediaries, their structural position limited their manoeuvrability to improve their situation.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that in Auckland at the time of this study, temporary work was no longer meeting the needs of any of the three key players. It did not provide temporary workers with flexibility for lifestyle choices nor did it provide them with an interesting variety of work or good pay. It did not provide employers with staff on demand as well as it had in the past, and it did not provide agencies with the profitable business they had come to expect. Table 4 outlines the main findings in the form of a flowchart which shows the development of temporary worker-agency-employer interactions.

7.3 Organisation of the Results

Chapters Eight, Nine, Ten and Eleven present the findings from the interviews with the three groups of participants. Table 5 outlines the structure of these four Results chapters. When discussing aspects of a triangular relationship from the perspective of each of the three different groups of participants, a degree of overlap and repetition is sometimes unavoidable. Individual group perspectives are not always viewed in isolation, and sometimes viewpoints of other groups are included within the same section. This is done in order to emphasise key points. A conceptual framework for organising and interpreting the findings, showing the different ways in which a buoyant economy impacts on the triangular working relationship, is presented below comprising an overview of the Results chapters.

Chapter Eight looks at the aims and expectations of each group of participants, and what they had intended to gain from being involved in the temporary staffing industry. The findings presented in this chapter reveal that the consultants aimed to continue in their role as suppliers of trouble-free, high quality temporary labour for their clients.

Table 4.

FLOWCHART

TEMPORARY WORKER / AGENCY / EMPLOYER INTERACTIONS
Auckland 2007

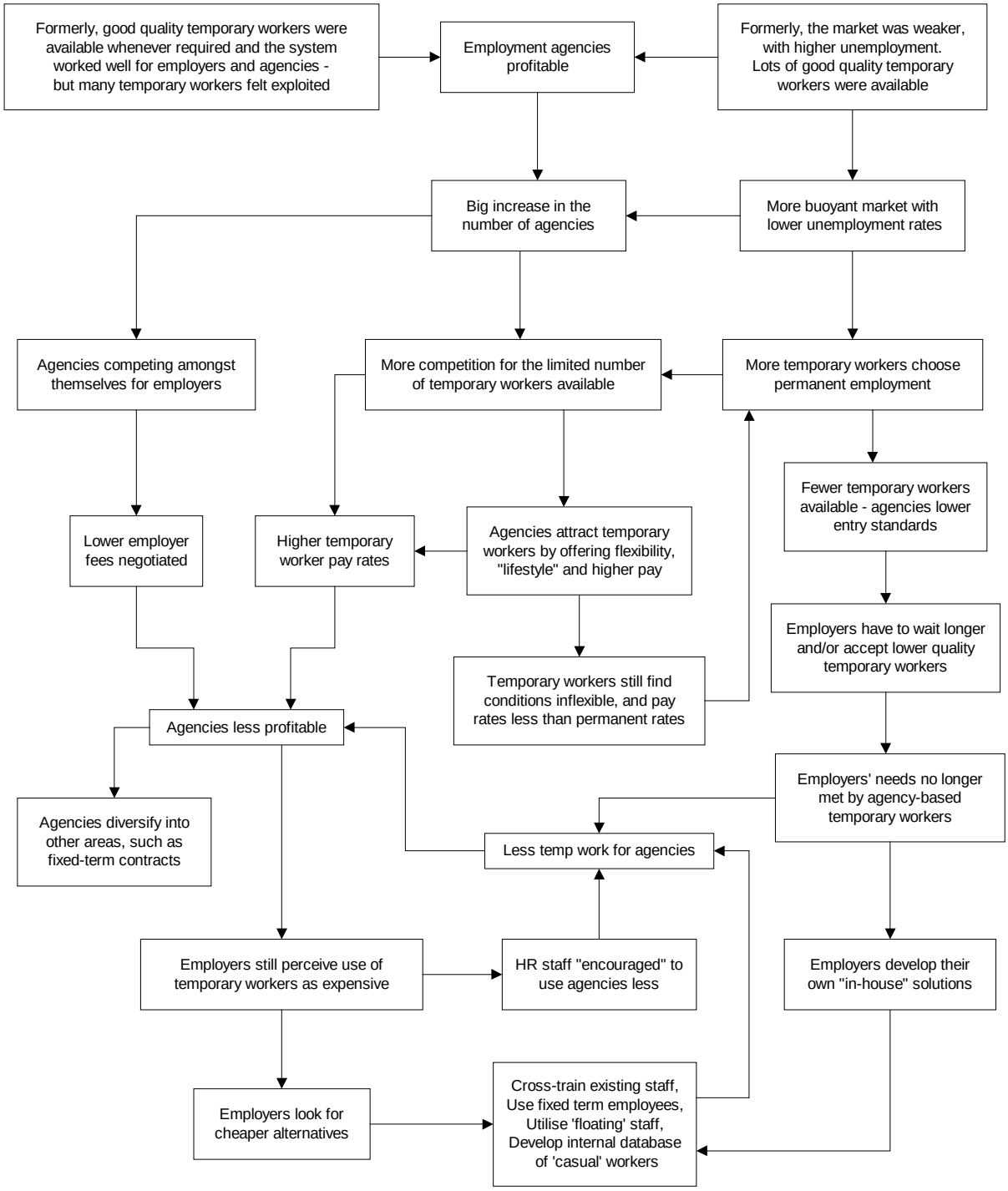

Table 5

ORGANISATION OF RESULTS CHAPTERS

	Chapter 8 Conflicting Aims and Expectations of the Three Parties	**Chapter 9** The Flexible Workforce	**Chapter 10** Relationships	**Chapter 11** Problem Solving
	Part One The Employers' Aims and Expectations	**Part One** The Employers' Experiences of the Flexible Workforce	**Part One** The Employers and Relationships	**Part One** The Employers and Problem Solving
	Part Two The Recruitment Consultants' Aims and Expectations	**Part Two** The Recruitment Consultants' Experiences of the Flexible Workforce	**Part Two** The Recruitment Consultants and Relationships	**Part Two** The Recruitment Consultants and Problem Solving
	Part Three The Temporary Workers' Aims and Expectations	**Part Three** The Temporary Workers' Experiences of the Flexible Workforce	**Part Three** The Temporary Workers and Relationships	**Part Three** The Temporary Workers and Problem Solving

The employers aimed to enjoy swift and unproblematic access to a reliable, hardworking and disposable workforce by hiring agency temporary workers. Unfortunately, these aims were no longer fully achievable because of the changed market conditions. The chapter shows how the temporary workers were not in a completely powerless position as many came into this industry with their own career-related agendas.

Chapter Nine is the largest of the Results chapters, and covers the issues of flexibility and control within the temporary staffing industry. The findings represented in this chapter show that flexibility and control for each group were constrained by the activities of the other two groups, by the prevailing labour market conditions or by the structural conditions of their place in the temporary staffing industry. The analysis shows how agencies tried to influence temporary workers' behaviour with the aim of creating reliable, flexible workers for their client organisations. This helped to ensure continuation of the crucial agency/client commercial contract. Although the buoyant labour market conditions placed temporary workers in a more favourable position, the structural conditions of temporary work itself continued to compromise flexibility for them in their working lives.

Chapter Ten looks at the types of relationships formed by the three groups of participants. This chapter shows how relationships between the three groups were mainly of a commercial or transactional nature. Because of the shortage of temporary staff, agencies promoted the relational aspect of the agency/temporary worker relationship as a strategy to retain and attract staff. The temporary workers preferred a more personal relationship with their consultants, but often perceived a reluctance by their consultants to negotiate better terms and conditions on their behalf with the clients. However, in such a competitive market and with growing financial difficulties, agencies needed to be careful not to upset their clients and sometimes this took priority over supporting their temporary workers.

Chapter Eleven, the final Results chapter, examines the different ways each group of participants tried to deal with the problems they faced. The employers mostly used a structural approach, making changes within their own organisations to create staff

flexibility. In their role as intermediaries, the consultants were in a strategically weaker position than employers, and tended to utilise ‘softer’ approaches such as relationship building, and ‘educating’ the other two groups to accept less satisfactory situations. The temporary workers tried to deal with their problems at an emotional level. Being unable to change the structure of their work environment, the only measures temporary workers could utilise were distraction or a cognitive shift in how they perceived their situations, or to leave the industry. The solutions attempted by each group sometimes failed to work satisfactorily, often creating detrimental effects for the other groups.

The Conclusion section at the end of each of the Results chapters explores the findings covered in the chapter and integrates the data from the three group perspectives in order to present a more analytical overview.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONFLICTING AIMS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE THREE PARTIES

Overview

This chapter discusses the aims and expectations of each group of participants in the temporary staffing sector. The tensions inherent in the different aims of the three groups are highlighted, each group tending to have mutually incompatible expectations in regard to temporary labour. The first part presents the employers' perspective, describing their reasons for hiring temporary staff from employment agencies and the benefits they expected to gain from doing this. The second part of the chapter looks at the recruitment consultants' aims and the way they viewed their roles in the Auckland labour market. The final part of the chapter covers the temporary workers' perspective and the reasons why they chose to engage in this type of work.

This chapter emphasises how the aims of the employers and recruitment consultants tended be somewhat unrealistic, reflecting past labour market conditions when plenty of suitable temporary workers were available. Agencies sought to provide trouble-free, high quality labour to employers and promoted themselves as such. As a consequence of this type of promotion (along with their experiences of labour market conditions of the past), employers had come to expect unproblematic access to a reliable, hard-working and skilled temporary workforce. The chapter also shows how the temporary workers were not entirely in a powerless position, as they came into the temporary work environment with their own agendas which they pursued with varying degrees of success.

Part One

8.1 The Employers' Aims and Expectations

This first part of the chapter looks at the aims and expectations of the employers in regard to the temporary staffing industry. Expectations included a variety of benefits ranging from financial savings to less legislative responsibility.

8.1.1 Expected Organisational Benefits: Controlling Risks, Responsibility and Costs

Historically, clerical temporary workers were used to fill short-term vacancies in organisations. Although many of the employers in this study still used temporary workers in this capacity, three employers also used agency temporary staff as a substitute for permanent staff.

John, (a human resources manager at a large American-owned information technology company) preferred to hire clerical temporary staff long-term rather than employ permanent workers, primarily because he believed it provides less risk. From John's perspective, hiring temporary staff meant very little risk of having to go through a legal process if a worker believes they have been unfairly treated. Dave (a manager at a large government organisation) also perceived diminished risk of being 'stuck' with an under-utilised or unsuitable employee by hiring agency temporary staff. Being able to return an unsuitable temporary worker to the agency, and receive a replacement free of charge was viewed as a significant benefit. Like John, legislation protecting permanent workers had created some concern for Dave in regard to employing permanent staff.

> *Temps you can give back at any time, but when you take on permanent people you're also tied in to all the other stuff that goes with it, and it's very, very difficult to fire somebody these days.*

These views indicate some fear around employing and managing permanent staff, suggesting that hiring temporary staff can be utilised as a mechanism for obviating the risk of employing unsuitable permanent employees.

For long term assignments, completion dates could sometimes be unknown, therefore hiring temporary staff enabled employers to continue "rolling over" a temporary worker's finishing time if necessary or "axing" the worker if an assignment was completed early. The employers were able to do this without needing to give prior notice to the worker, thus enabling them flexibility around staffing with no risk of legal action.

Hiring agency temporary workers was also expected to minimise the risk of losing permanent staff through work overload. Bringing in temporary staff could alleviate this pressure, thus reducing the risk of permanent employees becoming stressed and taking time off work, or leaving the company altogether.

> *We are really aware of the social responsibility going off balance and there's only so much you can put on a person's role before you are going to actually make them sick, so you know it's a lot easier for us to bring in a temp to help out.*
> *(*Caroline, manager of a small manufacturing company*)*

Giving temporary workers any boring or monotonous work that permanent staff did not want to do was another way that employers tried to safeguard the welfare of permanent workers. Hiring temporary workers specifically for monotonous tasks was expected to reduce the risk of stress on permanent staff, therefore reduce the likelihood of them leaving the organisation. This supports the research findings covered in the literature review (Burgess et al., 2001; Parker, 1994; Peck & Theodore, 2007), and agrees with the views of the temporary workers in this study. It also highlights the very different attitudes that employers can have in regard to looking after the welfare of their permanent staff compared to their temporary staff. This can be explained by the fact that agencies are the official employers of temporary staff, allowing clients minimum responsibility for the welfare of any temporary workers they hire.

As a consequence of this, all the employers in the study expected less involvement with employee related responsibility in regard to temporary staff from agencies. For example, if a temporary worker is away from work because of sickness, then it is the agency's responsibility to replace them (free of charge) for the employer.

The responsibility of providing any lengthy induction covering Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) procedures for temporary staff often lay with the agencies. Many employers expected recruitment consultants to have some knowledge of their company's occupational and safety procedures, therefore any temporary workers they sent were only provided with a brief, rather than full induction at the organisation. Even with a limited

induction, some employers viewed time spent on this as an unwanted responsibility and inconvenience.

> *I'll try to make sure that the induction is on the first day, and they just get the basics that are needed. (*Teresa, human resources manager of medium size legal company*).*

Interestingly, Alison (a human resources administrator at a local council) believed that temporary staff do not perform as well as permanent staff because their induction is inadequate. She had observed that temporary staff do not 'pick things up' as quickly as a new permanent employee would. Given Alison's observation, it could be argued that a limited induction process may restrict a temporary worker's performance and the idea that this is saving on time may be a false economy.

Along with using temporary staff to control risks and responsibilities, there was a general expectation on the part of employers that hiring a temporary worker would be a more financially viable option than taking on a permanent employee. When discussing reasons for this, a common explanation was because their company does not have to increase its payroll long-term for a short-term need. As temporary staff are formally employed by the agencies, employers who hire them are not liable for any employee-related legislative expenses. For example, employers do not need to pay or calculate ACC payments for temporary staff, nor be concerned with any annual or sick leave entitlements.

Some employers viewed time spent training a temporary worker as a possible investment for future assignments as they expected to rehire the same person from the agency on future occasions. This would obviously save on costs involved in training, especially for organisations with complex in-house computer systems which cannot be used without comprehensive training. Temporary staff can usually require some training, but according to four employers, the training period may be as long as two weeks. Given this scenario, employers would obviously prefer to rehire a temporary worker they have already trained. Being able to request specific temporary workers is likely to encourage loyalty to the one agency, however, underpinning this seems to be the notion that some employers

want the advantages of trained permanent staff by hiring temporary workers, but without the associated costs, risks or responsibilities.

8.1.2 Employers' Expectations of Employment Agencies

In the recent past, the employers had been accustomed to agencies supplying them with temporary staff as and when requested, but this expectation had been tempered by the reality of the currently tight labour market. Despite this, most of the employers still expected agencies to provide their organisations with top quality temporary workers. They expected recruitment consultants to 'go the extra mile' by making sure that only the best temporary staff are supplied.

> *Because it's a tight workforce out there, it's hard getting good temps and so that's also a reason why we stick with the same agencies, because they will go the extra mile to seek out the best temps. (*Dave, manager at a large government organisation*)*

All employer respondents expected recruitment consultants to do whatever it takes to provide them with the best and most suitable temporary worker to fit their organisational needs. For example, most employers expected recruitment consultants to spend a lot of time observing and understanding their business to make sure they sent the most suitable temporary worker. In order to maintain client loyalty to an agency, preferential treatment was expected.

> *They spend a lot of time just finding out about the business and that sort of thing, so they take a bit of care ensuring that we are looked after.* (Jenny, human resources manager for large company involved in telecommunications).

These examples imply that some employers expect agencies to carry out the same tasks that an internal human resources department would do, for example engaging in organisational analysis, recruitment and selection, and person-job fit.

Although temporary workers are the employees of the agencies, all employers expected agencies to allow them the option of offering permanent jobs to any temporary staff they hired. Nine of the ten employers had offered temporary staff permanent work within their companies, a finding which is congruent with previous studies in New Zealand (Alach, 2001; Casey & Alach, 2004) and overseas (Brogan, 2001; Lenz, 1996; Peck & Theodore, 1998). These temporary workers were often the ones who had received some training by the company, enabling employers to capitalise further on the time spent training. Additionally, as agencies attempt to provide their clients with the best temporary staff for their companies, an employer may be impressed enough with the calibre of the worker to offer them a permanent job in their organisation should a vacancy exist.

From the employers' perspective the ability to 'try before you buy' by using a temporary worker is an advantage over employing an untried permanent worker, and was considered an expected right of clients when hiring temporary staff through an agency. Whilst employers had to pay agencies a 'temp to perm' fee if the agency worker accepted their offer (which they often did not), the one-off fee incurred was considered good value and better than offering an untried worker a permanent position.

8.1.3 Employers' Expectations of Temporary Staff

From the employers' perspective, the main role of temporary workers is to come into an organisation and complete set tasks with the least amount of fuss.

> *Temp staff are good in that they come in here focused to do a job and they understand they're only here for a set period of time. They come in and they cover the role and then they go. First and foremost they're here to do business and temps understand their function, and temps can be given back anytime. (*Dave, manager at large government organisation)

The above comment typifies how employers can view a temporary worker's role in a very task orientated way. This can encourage employers to depersonalise temporary staff, obviating the need to foster a more personal connection.

All employer representatives stated that they tended to use temporary workers to fill fairly routine jobs where there was often little scope to use their initiative. Although temporary workers can sometimes receive training in organisations (more often for the longer-term assignments), they mainly performed lower level, repetitious tasks such as data entry work, filing and photocopying, especially for short-term assignments. This was regardless of the skills or qualifications of the temporary worker.

From an organisational point of view, hiring temporary workers to cover lower level positions such as data entry rather than more challenging work makes some sense as permanent staff would be more knowledgeable and better able to understand the company's more complex work than a temporary worker. However, this highlights a tension in that employers expect to hire only the 'best' temporary workers, yet the assignments they provide for them are often routine, non-challenging tasks.

As temporary workers are mostly hired for lower level mundane tasks, how employers perceive a temporary worker's commitment to their organisation was discussed during the interviews. There seemed to be a shifting and somewhat contradictory expectation on the part of some employers. For example, six employers took a very task focused, instrumental approach when describing their own commitment to temporary workers, yet expected temporary workers to have commitment to the actual organisation as well as to the specific tasks they are expected to perform.

To provide examples, Colin (a manager in a large organisation involved with education) expected 100% commitment from temporary staff, mainly because of the high hourly rate charged by the agency. Phillippa (a human resources advisor for a large government department) also expected "100% full commitment" to the company from temporary staff, adding that "even more would be great". Dave re-emphasised the fact that uncommitted temporary employees who do not reach a certain standard would be returned to the agency:

> *Temps should show the same commitment to the company as our own permanent staff do and the agents understand that if they don't have the same standard as*

*our own permanent staff, then we send them back. (*Dave, manager at large government organisation).

It may seem somewhat unrealistic to treat temporary workers as expendable yet expect them to have high levels of commitment to an organisation. The fact that temporary workers can be returned to the agency at any time, or have their assignments terminated without warning underlines the differences in treatment of temporary workers compared to permanent staff.

In summary, the interview data presented in Part One of the chapter suggests that employers hired temporary staff mainly to meet their own staffing needs, expecting to gain benefits such as lower costs, less risk and less responsibility. Most of the employers had offered temporary staff permanent jobs, suggesting that employing temporary staff was sometimes used as a mechanism for 'trialing' prospective permanent employees.

Part Two

8.2 The Recruitment Consultants' Aims and Expectations

This second part of the chapter looks at the recruitment consultants' aims and expectations, and how they perceived their roles as intermediaries between employers and temporary workers.

8.2.1 Providing a Service for Employers

All recruitment consultants saw their primary role as being a service provider for employers, their aim being to provide a trouble-free service to help their clients function well in business. During their interviews, all the respondents emphasised the ease with which employers can be supplied with a trouble-free labour force through agencies.

*There are huge benefits (*for clients*), they've got no commitments whatsoever* (Suzanne, owner of small employment agency).

The clients get it easy, they just get one invoice for the hours that the temps

work and I take care of all the expenses, and they (clients*) have no responsibilities*. (Monique, owner of small employment agency).

Large organisations which repeatedly hired temporary staff were carefully cultivated by employment agencies, and five of the ten consultants said they often went into larger client organisations to gain an understanding of how they work and what the culture was like. Although this was quite time-consuming for consultants, it was necessary if they were to retain the client's loyalty by supplying suitable temporary workers for that company.

Eve, the owner of a small employment agency, believed that most businesses are now structured to deal with "a high and quick turnover" of staff which made hiring temporary workers a sensible option for employers. Eve and three other recruitment consultants suggested that legislation making it difficult to dismiss permanent staff has been beneficial for the temporary staffing industry, since it has had the unintended consequence of encouraging employers to utilise temporary staff rather than risk employing unsatisfactory permanent employees.

Most consultants pointed out that part of an agency's service is to provide employers with temporary staff to cover assignments of any duration, whether short or long-term, thereby reducing stress on permanent staff, and providing flexibility for employers who may be unsure of an assignment's duration.

*If there's a project and they're not sure how long that project is going to be for, with a temp they could say "look, we've got an assignment, it could be between 3 to 7 weeks, we're unsure as to how long it will be, but it's until it's finished". So that is the flexibility for the client, it's fantastic, because they can cancel the assignment at any time their situation changes, and they are able to let the temps go .(*Sally, branch manager of large employment agency).

Sally's comment emphasises the 'client driven' nature of agencies and how clients can be provided with the flexibility to hire and discard temporary staff as the situation suits, with little regard by agencies on how this may impact on a temporary worker.

8.2.2 Consultants' Expectations of Temporary Workers

Given the client driven nature of employment agencies, there was a strong focus on supplying organisations with the 'ideal' temporary worker. At times, this strong focus seemed to foster unrealistic expectations of temporary workers in regard to their quality and availability, and tended to be based on the easier times of the past when there was a plentiful supply of people wanting temporary work. Requirements expected of temporary workers included the ability to work standard business hours from around 8.30am to 5pm, Mondays to Fridays, to be flexible about the type of work they were willing to do and the location of their work.

> *…flexible in terms of (*pause*) they haven't got all these preconditions of "I'm only available between 9am and 3.30pm Monday to Wednesday", or conditions about where they will or won't work, temps also need to be flexible about the type of work they will do.* (Pauline, recruitment consultant with North Shore branch of large global employment agency).

Along with being flexible, most of the recruitment consultants expected temporary staff to be resilient enough to handle the everyday stress which often accompanies temporary roles.

> *It is a challenge, it's like starting a new job every day or every week, and you have to have an incredible tool box of skills to be able to step up to that stress. The potential stress is huge!* (Eve, owner of small employment agency).

Stress for a temporary worker can also be associated with financial insecurity because of the uncertainty of assignment availability. However, most of the recruitment consultants expected temporary staff to be able to survive financially, claiming that if a temporary worker is "good at the job, flexible and reliable" then they would be employed virtually

full-time. This makes an assumption that all temporary workers would want to be employed full-time in the temporary staffing industry, an industry which is commonly promoted as being 'the flexible workforce'. Furthermore, given the fact that temporary assignments can often be unpredictable in regard to availability and duration, it could be argued that the recruitment consultants' claims seem somewhat overstated.

8.2.3 Agencies as Employers of Temporary Workers

Although temporary workers are agency employees, the recruitment consultants did not expect to engage in much actual management or training. Temporary worker performance feedback was provided by clients to the agencies and when necessary, this was passed on to the temporary worker by their recruitment consultant.

> *I'm liaising with the clients on a regular basis, I take on any feedback, I ask questions on how they* (temps*) are performing and behaving in the workplace. If they aren't dressed appropriately, I'll certainly speak to them about that. I consider that to be a performance appraisal.* (Monique, owner of a small employment agency).

Monique's comments indicate minimalist formal feedback for temporary staff which is both superficial and oriented towards ensuring that the worker meets client needs. It differs quite considerably from the sort of performance appraisals which might occur for permanent staff in an organisation.

As far as training was concerned, the recruitment consultants did not expect to be personally involved in any technical training of temporary workers. The majority of agencies had 'web-based training' enabling temporary staff to come into the agency offices and train themselves free of charge (although without being paid), if they needed to 'upskill' in any areas of their work. In organisations which required a temporary worker to learn their particular in-house computer systems, the recruitment consultants expected employers to spend time training temporary workers.

In summary, the information covered in this section of the chapter suggests that the aims and expectations of employment agencies are primarily focused on meeting their clients' needs, often at their temporary workers' expense. Their expectations of temporary workers seemed high, expecting temporary staff to be flexible and to handle "huge stress" with relatively little support from the agency.

Part Three

8.3 The Temporary Workers' Aims and Expectations

The final part of the chapter presents the temporary workers' aims and expectations. Fifteen of the twenty temporary worker participants said they preferred to work in temporary roles and were willing temporary workers, whereas five preferred to be in permanent work making them reluctant temporary workers.

8.3.1 Willing Temporary Workers

There were a variety of reasons why 75% of the participants preferred temporary work to permanent work. However, none of the women wanted to work in temporary roles as a long-term career choice. Temporary work was chosen mainly because it was expected to provide some form of income at a particular juncture in their lives.

The variety of reasons why these women chose temporary work included the opportunity to earn money while contemplating future career options or studying, being able to take school holidays off, to maintain or expand their skills, or because they did not want to commit to any one organisation. The latter two reasons contrast with the employers' expectations of temporary staff needing to be committed to their organisations, and the fact that temporary clerical workers are often hired to complete routine, monotonous tasks.

Before actually registering with an agency, several temporary workers had aimed to have flexibility around their hours, have interesting work and good pay. These expectations of temporary work were a result of seeing advertisements in local papers and on the internet, placed by agencies in their effort to attract people to the industry.

I saw a lot of advertisements for temps, you know, we want you, we have all these flexible hours and wonderful pay and different locations, so come and sign up. (Gina).

Once these temporary workers had become registered with an agency and were part of the temporary workforce, any expectations of having flexibility to suit them disappeared very quickly (the issue of flexibility is covered in more depth in the following chapter).

Five of the younger participants described using temporary work as a way of gaining 'a foot in the door' of a specific company. Knowing that many temporary workers can be offered permanent jobs at the client companies, they believed that becoming a temporary worker could help them to by-pass the mainstream recruitment and selection process for a permanent job in a particular company. This suggests that willing temporary workers can sometimes be pro-active participants within a labour market environment, which they exploit in order to meet their own goals.

Wendy used temporary work to gain 'a foot in the door' of the company where she wanted to work in a permanent role:

I identified organisations I wanted to work for and I looked for temp opportunities in those organisations and then my thought was I'd do that and get in, then they'd get to know me and then I could apply for jobs internally. And that's how I managed to get my permanent job in my chosen company. (Wendy).

Almost all of the participants expected to be offered permanent clerical-type jobs at the organisations where they were hired and were aware that temporary work could be a good way of securing such a job if they wanted one. Eighteen of the twenty participants had been offered permanent work by organisations where they were hired as temporary staff. Far from being in a powerless position waiting for any offer of a permanent role, these temporary workers were selective in regard to the types of permanent positions they chose to accept. A lot of the permanent jobs offered involved routine clerical work, but the majority of the participants did not want to accept such work on a permanent basis. The examples provided in this section suggest that people can choose temporary work in

order to achieve specific goals, and can actively use the temporary staffing industry for their own advantage.

8.3.2 Reluctant Temporary Workers

Five of the participants reluctantly worked in temporary roles while preferring to be in permanent work. All expected temporary work to provide them with an income while they tried to find a suitable permanent job. Unlike some of the willing temporary workers, they did not utilise the temporary work environment to manoeuvre themselves into any selected permanent position.

One mature participant was hoping to find a permanent job on Auckland's North Shore, which is where she lived. Another had been doing temporary work for several years and after separating from her partner, she now found that living on an income from temporary work was too difficult. She therefore preferred a permanent job for more financial security. Another participant was from the UK and believed she was unable to find a permanent job because she only held a temporary New Zealand visa.

The two remaining reluctant temporary workers were tertiary educated, but had only ever been offered permanent clerical jobs which they had turned down as both women were seeking permanent work better suited to their qualifications. They believed that accepting a permanent clerical position would jeopardise their future career prospects of being offered the higher level permanent roles they wanted, but engaging in temporary clerical work would not.

Ironically, in both these women's cases, for over a year they had not been able to secure any permanent high-level job while in temporary clerical positions. Contrary to their assumptions, it seemed that working in temporary clerical roles was a handicap to their being offered the positions they were seeking, even within a buoyant permanent job market. This suggests that seeking high-level jobs while working in clerical temporary roles may negatively impact on a worker's future career opportunities. It may be that the low status associated with performing long-term, temporary clerical roles can negate the value of having tertiary qualifications in the job market.

In summary, the main issue to arise from this third part of the chapter is that the majority of temporary workers in the study chose to be in this role because they believed it suited their current needs better than a permanent job. None, however, intended remaining in temporary work as a long-term career choice. Overall, what is demonstrated here is that temporary workers are not entirely powerless. They come into the temporary work environment with their own agendas which they actively, but not always successfully, pursue.

8.4 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter highlight the tensions inherent in the differing aims and expectations of the three groups. The three groups tended to have mutually incompatible and at times contradictory aims concerning temporary labour. For example, in regard to ` the issue of training, the majority of temporary assignments involved mundane tasks requiring little training, yet some temporary workers chose temporary work with the specific aim of maintaining and expanding their skills via training opportunities at the client organisations**.** In many cases, performing lower-level clerical tasks in the temporary work environment would fail to provide this.

Like client organisations, agencies also tended not to provide training for temporary workers, in spite of being their official employers. Only 'web-based training' was available, which meant temporary workers spent unpaid time training themselves, which is something they could easily do if they wanted to expand their skills, without becoming a temporary worker in order to achieve this. The aim of the consultants was to have as little involvement as possible in training their temporary staff, yet provide a trouble-free supply of skilled temporary workers for their clients. Training is an example of how the aims and actions of the three groups could create contradictions and tensions.

Whilst many of the employers recognised the importance of taking some responsibility for their permanent employees' psychological welfare in regard to work overload or performing boring tasks, this did not extend to their temporary staff. Organisational responsibility for the welfare of temporary staff was avoided by emphasising the fact that they are employees of the agency rather than the organisation. However, like the

employer participants, the consultants did not seem to be very interested in managing the welfare of temporary staff either. This enabled temporary workers to sometimes be perceived and treated in an impersonal way by both agencies and organisations. However, far from being in a completely powerless position, several temporary workers deliberately used the temporary work environment in order to achieve their own career-related goals.

The aims and expectations of the recruitment consultants tended to be geared towards supplying their clients with the 'ideal temp'. As a consequence of this, both employers and consultants seemed to have somewhat unrealistic expectations of temporary workers given the reality of the job characteristics that temporary workers have to contend with. This strong focus on pleasing clients may increase a client's commitment to an agency, but unfortunately for the agency, it can also increase the probability that the temporary staff they supply to organisations would make them desirable permanent employees. Accordingly, temporary workers were frequently offered permanent jobs while working at client organisations.

Finally, a key point in this chapter is that the aims of both employers and recruitment consultants tended to be rooted in labour market conditions of the recent past, when there were plenty of good temporary workers available.

CHAPTER NINE

THE FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

Overview

Chapter Nine looks at the concept of flexibility within the context of the temporary staffing industry. According to the Collins dictionary (1988, p. 382), the definition of flexible is “adaptable or variable, able to be persuaded easily”. In the context of a flexible workforce, for some people to gain flexibility, others need to be flexible. Flexibility can improve control over a situation because it allows manoeuvrability. Therefore if a person has flexibility, they have some element of control. If a person must be flexible, they lose some control. These two concepts – flexibility and control – are closely linked.

Part One of the chapter examines flexibility from the employers’ perspective and looks at their role as purchasers of flexibility. Part Two examines the recruitment consultants’ role as suppliers of flexibility. The final part of the chapter looks at the temporary workers’ experiences as flexible workers. The data presented in this chapter demonstrates that each of the three groups experienced difficulties associated with their respective roles in the flexible labour market.

In this chapter I will be proposing that both the employers and recruitment consultants experienced difficulties in regard to flexible labour mainly because of changes in the economy, which reshaped the Auckland labour market. Although these changes placed temporary staff in a more advantageous position in the labour market, the structural conditions of temporary work itself continued to compromise flexibility for this group in their everyday working life.

Part One

9.1 The Employers' Experience of the Flexible Workforce

This section of the chapter looks at 'the flexible workforce' from the perspective of the employers. The data reveal that regulating their companies' staffing levels by hiring agency temporary workers did not work out as well as the employers had expected.

9.1.1 Paying for Flexible Staffing

In the previous chapter we saw how employers expected to save on costs by hiring temporary staff. In reality, there were many hidden costs for employers when purchasing flexible staffing from agencies. This was partly because changed labour market conditions in Auckland had created a scarcity of temporary staff combined with a surfeit of employment agencies.

The main direct cost for employers was the fee paid to the agency for hiring a temporary worker. As well as the direct cost, there was also time-consuming transaction costs involved. For example, pre-trained temporary workers were not always available for re-hiring, therefore time spent training temporary staff often became a cost rather than a future investment. Requesting replacements for unsuitable temporary staff was also time-consuming, even though the ability to have unsuitable temporary workers promptly replaced was claimed by many of the employers to be one of the main benefits they expected when hiring temporary workers.

Another example of a time-consuming activity in hiring flexible staffing was filling in performance feedback forms for the agencies. These forms often required the client to comment on a temporary worker's attendance, timekeeping, personal presentation, ability to do the job and social skills. As well as gaining information from feedback forms, recruitment consultants often phoned their clients to find out how the temporary worker was performing. Eight employers stated they found dealing with calls from agencies to be annoying although they also saw it as an attempt at good customer service on the agency's part.

One issue regarding phonecalls was particularly frustrating for the employers. This involved the number of times they were being contacted by new recruitment consultants marketing their particular agency's services in the hope of gaining new business. This could occur between three and twelve times a day by different agencies.

According to Dave (a manager in a large government organisation), once agencies identify the key person responsible for staff in an organisation, the 'hard sell' begins:

> *They push as hard as they can for the first couple of weeks to get in because they understand as soon as they get into an organisation like this, their chances (*of repeat work*) are good.*

Agencies' marketing tactics were becoming more aggressive in other ways. For example, employers who advertised permanent vacancies on the internet were targeted. Trudy (a human resources manager in a medium-sized electronics company) said she can have more than ten different agencies calling her about their temporary and permanent services if she places an advertisement for a staff member on the internet. Other calls from recruitment consultants asked employers to encourage unsuccessful candidates to try temporary work. Trudy provided this example:

> *In the last month, two of the agencies we deal with have said to me "if you get applicants who aren't successful for the roles you're advertising, those people might be interested in temping. If you have the opportunity could you perhaps suggest to them that they temp?" (*Trudy, human resources manager for a medium-sized electronics company).

As well as creating problems, the over-supply of employment agencies in the Auckland area created some benefits for employers. The large number of agencies afforded them the opportunity to negotiate lower hiring fees for temporary workers. Colin (a manager working in a large organisation involved in the education sector) described how his company did a survey of all agency fees and after some negotiation, two agencies were chosen which all managers were instructed to use because they were the cheapest. According to six employers, fee negotiation with agencies was common. There were some perceived benefits for employers using a single agency. As well as the chance of

being able to rehire specific pre-trained temporary workers, they could negotiate for a lower fee in return for their client loyalty. In many instances an employer's loyalty to an agency seemed to be based on how willing that agency was to reduce costs for the employer, underlining the commercial relationship between these two groups. Such a situation is only possible when a large number of agencies are in competition with each other. Naturally this is likely to have a negative impact on the profitability of the agencies, especially when compared to the more lucrative times of the recent past.

9.1.2 Loss of Control and Flexibility

Along with costs and financial opportunities, the employers also discussed their actual experiences of staffing flexibility in their organisations. Unfortunately, labour market changes resulted in a shortage of people willing to work as temporary staff which made it difficult for the employers to obtain temporary workers 'on demand' from an employment agency. Seven of the ten employers interviewed said they now often had to wait for their agencies to find them a suitable clerical temporary worker. Caroline (a general manager for a small manufacturing company) described how it was now necessary to provide her agency with a week's notice in order for the consultant to supply a temporary worker. This defeats the 'staff on demand' concept behind the flexible workforce and in a tight job-market, loyalty to the one agency may not be a good strategy for employers.

The shortage of temporary workers created other difficulties for the employers. Eight participants said they preferred to rehire the temporary worker they had already trained, as this saved time and money, and in some cases company policy even required that line managers and human resources staff only hire temporary workers who had already been trained by the organisation. This underlines how employers can desire the same level of control with trained temporary workers as they have with a trained permanent workforce. Unfortunately these requests were not always accommodated as recruitment consultants were often unable to supply specifically requested workers because they were on a different assignment, which in some cases could be for several months. This situation can leave an employer with no option but to accept a new temporary worker to train. To provide an example, Caroline's organisation spent two weeks training a temporary

employee for a four month assignment, but when she tried to rehire the same worker for the second part of the project, it was not possible:

> *We had a lady who was excellent the first time around and when we needed her back for the next part of the project, she'd already been assigned to another job and that job is a two year job…so we had to train another temp who wasn't as good.* (Caroline, general manager of a small manufacturing company).

> *The good temps that we want back can be booked up months in advance. (*Teresa, human resources manager for medium-sized legal company).

Obviously this can be a frustrating situation for employers when they find themselves continually training temporary staff who are then hired out on long-term assignments to other organisations. In Caroline's comment earlier, she mentioned a temporary worker being used for a two year assignment. This raises the issue of why a company would want to hire a temporary worker for two years rather than take on a permanent employee. In light of the employers' comments in regard to feeling safer with temporary staff because "you can always send them back" or "axe the assignment at any time", it seems that some employers perceive their companies to be at less risk in hiring temporary staff than hiring permanent staff, even for long-term staffing needs.

Agencies supplying unsuitable temporary staff was a common complaint by the employers. Examples included people being slow learners, not skilled enough for the job, having poor English language skills or lacking in common sense. Others did not have the right attitude, for example spending too much time on the internet rather than working. According to Dave:

> *We haven't got time for people who can't cut it. For us to be able to function efficiently, we have to have efficient people on board.. they (*the temps*) couldn't cut the work we were asking them to do, couldn't actually perform the role properly or we've taken on international people whose grasp of English isn't the best and it's caused us a few issues, and so we've sent those people back to the agent. The agents understand that. They don't do it a second time, I mean*

> *we have put in a certain amount of time, we put the time and resources into temps and we're bringing them up to speed as well, and then we send them away being better equipped to go into different roles*.(Dave, a manager at a large government organisation).

Unsuitable temporary staff being sent to organisations was a fairly new phenomenon for most of the employers and can be attributed to the general shortage of temporary workers. This sometimes occurred in spite of employers using multiple agencies. Although employers perceived being in control by having the right to return unsuitable temporary workers to the agency, the reality was that this was time-consuming and replacement temporary workers sometimes proved to be just as unsuitable. For example, when Jenny (a human resources manager for a large telecommunications company) was sent an equally unsuitable replacement temporary worker, she decided she would interview any further workers herself rather than rely on the recruitment consultant's judgement, usurping the role of the agency. By taking over the recruitment and selection responsibility from the agency, the relative ease expected in hiring agency temporary workers was lost for this employer.

Other problems for employers can occur when employment agencies try to attract more people into temporary work by advertising it as being able to provide flexibility for both workers and employers. This can give a temporary worker the idea that they can choose their own working hours, which creates a conflict of needs between employers and temporary workers. This demonstrates how the individual action of one group of the triangular working arrangement towards their own interest (the agency in this case) can impact on the other two groups, consequently creating problems for both employers and temporary workers, and ultimately for themselves. Employers mainly want full-time temporary workers, yet temporary workers attracted by an agency's advertisement would expect flexible hours at the client organisations. Teresa (a human resources manager for a medium-sized legal company) had noticed that a lot of temporary staff now expect to be given flexible working hours to suit them, but in accord with most of the employers interviewed, the requirement of her organisation was for temporary workers to be able to work full-time hours:

Quite a lot of people going into temping now are actually looking for flexible hours, so they may only be available from 9am to 3pm, or they may only be available Monday or Tuesday, or they're having a trip to Europe and so they won't be back until a certain date, and that fits their lifestyle needs, but it doesn't fit ours.

During the interview, I asked Teresa if hiring two part-time (job-sharing) temporary workers might solve the problem. She did not think it would, explaining that this would not suit the company's needs. An underlying point here might be that organisations are not accustomed to making much effort to be flexible themselves because they have not had to consider this as an option in regard to temporary staffing before. This shows how unwilling employers can be to alter the structural conditions of temporary staffing in favour of workers, even though this could help alleviate the problem of adequate access to agency temporary workers in a tight labour market.

In summary, the data collected from the employers' interviews in this first part of the chapter demonstrates that trying to gain flexibility of staffing by hiring agency temporary staff not only involves direct financial costs for employers but also indirect time-consuming costs.

The employers seemed to be wanting or expecting the same level of control and certainty with a temporary workforce that they have with a permanent one, but were not succeeding in obtaining it. Instead, they experienced some loss of control around staffing flexibility, mainly due to their agencies' lack of ability to provide suitable temporary staff as requested. In short, hiring temporary staff from employment agencies no longer provided the satisfactory solution to an organisation's flexible staffing needs that it once did. How the employers dealt with these problems is covered in Chapter Eleven.

Part Two

9.2 The Recruitment Consultants' Experience of the Flexible Workforce

Employment agencies are providers of staffing flexibility for employers. At the time of the interviews, the recruitment consultants' role in the Auckland temporary staffing industry had become increasingly difficult as a consequence of the buoyant labour market. Finding themselves 'between a rock and a hard place', they were often conflicted by not wanting to upset their clients by supporting their temporary staff, or ***to upset*** their temporary staff by appeasing their clients. Given their structural position as labour market intermediaries, taking action either way would likely create upset for one group or the other, which could mean the risk of losing a client contract or a valuable temporary worker. Although the more buoyant labour market conditions had reduced the availability of temporary workers, the consultants continued to treat their clients' needs as the top priority because the temporary staffing business is predicated on meeting clients' needs.

Part Two looks at the ways in which the changing job-market created new challenges for the recruitment consultants, and limited their ability to operate as successful providers of flexibility for employers.

9.2.1 Supply and Demand Problems in the Auckland Job Market

All recruitment consultants agreed there was a shortage of people in the Auckland area wanting temporary work. Most believed this shortage was due to the strong New Zealand economy which had increased the availability of permanent positions for job-seekers.

> *Gone are the days when we would have a huge available candidate pool, that's gone, our candidate pool is quite small, now they're all able to find permanent employment.* (Cassandra, branch manager of large global employment agency).

Along with the shortage of people willing to accept temporary work, an abundance of new employment agencies in the Auckland region helped to make running a profitable agency business more difficult for recruitment consultants. The increased number of

agencies competing for clients and the limited supply of temporary workers caused client fees to be pushed down and pay rates for temporary workers to rise. This caused many of the consultants to feel financially pressured, describing their job as now being a 'juggling act' as they struggled to maintain their roles as providers of flexible staffing.

> *There's significant pressure on us, from one side, our clients keeping our charge rates low, and yet from the candidate side, people not really willing to even get out of bed for the minimum wage…there's a lot of pressure in the market at the moment*. (Melanie, branch manager at large global employment agency).

With temporary staff being 'a rare commodity' in an industry which is dependent upon having plenty of people to draw upon to operate its core business, many of the recruitment consultants were in a difficult situation. This situation was described by Eve (owner of a small employment agency) as being immobilising - "it's disabling our industry". From the recruitment consultants' perspective, they felt trapped and pressured with little flexibility to either charge employers more or pay temporary workers less. Their role as providers of flexibility was limited by their own diminishing flexibility and freedom to manouvre, which led to increasingly desperate and often unsatisfactory attempts at reasserting control (these strategies are covered in Chapter 11 which looks at the methods used by each group to regain control).

A trend towards longer term temporary assignments further contributed to the already shrinking data-base of available temporary workers.

> *One of the trends we've noticed in the last few years is the length of assignments has extended. Gone are the days when a company would just want a temp for one day to cover their reception….most companies now tend to struggle through without short term cover. The average temp assignment is probably at least four weeks and it could even be now extending out to an average of six weeks. They're now often only seeming to want a temp if they cannot find a replacement when their permanent staff have left on maternity leave.* (Cassandra, branch manager of large global employment agency).

Cassandra's observations correspond with those of the employers and temporary workers in this study, as all had noticed assignments were now longer in duration. This is an important point as with longer assignments the recruitment process itself can be different. Some consultants were now interviewing, testing and matching temporary staff for clients' longer term assignments just as they would for the permanent recruitment and selection process. It could be argued that this trend to hire temporary staff for longer term assignments may have developed as a response to employers not being able to hire temporary staff from agencies for short-term cover in an expeditious manner. It may also have originally developed from new legislation around maternity leave as mentioned in Cassandra's comment above.

A positive aspect of this trend is that it can create a more steady income for agencies (and temporary workers) compared to sporadic short-term assignments. However, it can also create extra costs for an agency because of the extra work involved when employers want a comprehensive selection package to make sure the right person is chosen. The benefits of this arrangement seem to accrue primarily to employers who can choose long-term temporary staff who would develop good organisational knowledge, yet do not have the same level of employment protection in law as permanent staff. This is more evidence of how employers want control and certainty over a temporary workforce, in the same way they have with permanent staff. It is also an example of how the actions of one player in the triangular working relationship can impact on the other two parties.

Another threat to an agency's shrinking list of available temporary workers occurs when clients offer temporary staff permanent jobs in their organisations. It is generally the good temporary workers who are offered jobs, and for recruitment consultants it represents a significant loss to the agency when they lose one of their good workers. Although clients pay a fee to the agency when a temporary worker accepts a permanent job offer, some recruitment consultants felt angry with their clients for doing this as it further reduced their own ability to control their agency business.

> *Essentially they (*employers*) have taken my business, the awful thing is that they've actually tried these people out before they've bought them, so that's*

*effectively what they're doing, so they can see if they can fit into the organisation. (*Monique, owner of small employment agency).

It is understandable that recruitment consultants would not like this because the 'temp to perm' fee paid to agencies by employers is a one-off payment and is less profitable than having a temporary worker regularly available for work on the agency's books. However, according to six consultants, their temporary staff frequently rejected permanent job offers at the client organisations because of the low calibre of work being offered. However, when a temporary worker did accept a client's job offer, there was little an agency could do to stop this from occurring given their structural position in the temporary staffing sector.

The issue of permanent job offers is perceived differently by each of the three groups of participants. From the recruitment consultants' perspective, in an industry where temporary staff are scarce, permanent job offers from clients constitute a threat. By contrast, from the employers' perspective, it represents an opportunity to observe a worker's performance before making an offer of permanent employment, thereby reducing the risk of employing unsuitable people. For temporary staff, the 'temp-to-perm' offer can provide the security of a permanent job if accepted, and by-passes the mainstream recruitment and selection process for job-seekers in the permanent labour market.

Even with a shortage of temporary staff, there were times when no assignments were available for temporary workers wanting work. Some temporary workers tried to address this problem by registering with multiple agencies to increase their chances of finding work. Four recruitment consultants stated in their interviews that they were not happy when this occurred.

The reality is, if we don't have work for someone, they will go and register with someone that does have work, and that's not OK because we invest an awful lot, firstly in attracting that person to our business, then going through an interview process which is quite lengthy and complex. (Eve, owner of small

employment agency).

Although it may seem unreasonable to expect a temporary worker to remain exclusively with a single agency when there are no assignments available, from the recruitment consultant's perspective, a temporary worker who registers with multiple agencies constitutes a loss of control over a valued resource.

All of the above mentioned problems occurring in the Auckland job market contributed to reducing the control and flexibility of employment agencies. This meant that recruitment consultants had to look at becoming more flexible themselves, especially in regard to negotiating client fees and temporary worker pay-rates.

9.2.2 Attracting and Retaining Temporary Staff

This section highlights the tension between what agencies offer to attract people into temporary work and the reality of the role itself. In order to meet employers' requests for 'just in time' staff, agencies need access to a pool of suitably skilled people wanting to do temporary work. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, to attract people into temporary roles, some agencies promote 'personal flexibility' for workers. Several recruitment consultants claimed that it was possible for temporary workers to select working hours to fit their chosen lifestyle.

> *The advantages of temping are that you can obtain flexibility, for instance if you have children, or sporting activities that you take part in, or you travel with a partner or family, or study.* (Monique, owner of small employment agency).

The following advertisement for clerical temporary staff was on an Auckland employment agency's website in January 2007.

> Do you need flexibility with your working hours? Temping can often give you this flexibility and we are happy to discuss short-term, long-term, part-time, full-time, or even glide-time assignment options with you. You have complete freedom to work when you like….You will never be bored!

In contrast to the above advertisement, the consultant participant who worked at this agency emphasised how flexibility is largely to benefit clients and has little to do with temporary workers, demonstrating a difference in what is promoted and actual behaviour.

> *Flexibility is all about your temps, it's not really about your clients…temps have to be available to come in at short notice, that's what temping is about, you can't let the clients down…. It's hard for the temps that come in and think they're going to get temp work and then stop when they want to stop.*

The consultant's comment above makes it quite obvious that the paramount aim of temporary staffing is to provide clients with organisational flexibility. There is obviously a tension between agencies requiring temporary staff to work hours to suit clients' needs, and promoting the idea that temporary staff can choose their own hours to suit. Advertising flexibility for workers may attract candidates to become temporary staff, but the reality of the role is often quite different.

Logically, personal flexibility for temporary workers and organisational flexibility for employers are largely incompatible. Flexibility of hours to suit the temporary worker would probably not suit most clients' requirements. Temporary staff are generally required by clients to work full-time hours Monday to Friday, and often for longer term assignments of three months or more. In cases like this, the requirements of temporary work may seem more like permanent employment for somebody trying to fit work around their lifestyle. The concept of personal flexibility for temporary workers as promoted by some agencies therefore seems unrealistic. Clients dictate the hours a temporary worker is required to work, which is usually a forty hour week. Because of this requirement, some recruitment consultants would not even interview a candidate for temporary work who expected to work part-time hours as this did not suit their clients.

> *Very few clients require part-time temps, although we do have clients that require the odd day here or there. But it costs us a minimum of $1300 to register any one candidate so we have to be quite clear with what we're doing and I guess the reality is we can't represent everybody, so generally speaking we do try to*

ensure that people are available for a forty hour week.(Melanie, branch manager at large global employment agency).

Melanie's comment clearly suggests that a candidate wanting part-time or flexible working hours would not even be interviewed at some agencies, despite the shortage of temporary workers. Most of the recruitment consultants were quick to point out that temporary workers can take as much time off as they like in between assignments, but this would be unpaid, therefore only financially secure people would be able to take advantage of this.

The structural position of agencies as labour market intermediaries in the tighter market meant they had to try to meet the needs of both temporary staff and clients, which could account for the tension between temporary work supposedly offering both personal and organisational flexibility. The changed labour market disrupted the supply and demand flow of temporary staffing, making it necessary for agencies to start acknowledging their temporary workers' needs, an aspect of their role which had rarely needed to be exercised in previous markets.

Because of the scarcity of temporary staff, and possibly as a result of advertising personal flexibility for temporary workers, many recruitment consultants found themselves attracting and settling for candidates who were less than ideal in an attempt to accommodate their clients' requests for flexible staffing. Some of the consultants complained about their temporary workers' increasing unreliability which had the potential to create problems in the agency/client relationship.

Some people who come into temping now are very here today and gone tomorrow, they might decide they want to do temping this week and you'll try to track them down, can't find them, they don't reply to your calls, and next thing, a week later they'll call you back, "Oh I've changed my mind, I don't want to keep going". They are so unreliable. (Monique, owner of small employment agency).

In previous times, temporary workers such as those described by Monique would probably not have been tolerated by recruitment consultants, but according to Melanie, (the branch manager of a large global employment agency) - “today everybody is valuable”, the implication of this comment being that the shortage of temporary staff has forced employment agencies to lower their recruitment standards. The agencies’ position in the labour market is based on supplying temporary staff to clients, therefore in a tight job market, it may have been a case of anybody is better than nobody, which of course would ultimately have a negative impact on clients.

As well as unreliable candidates, several recruitment consultants noted that in the tight candidate market, some temporary workers were now less willing to be available for assignments, creating new problems for employment agencies. Most of the consultants believed that temporary workers who are financially secure or supported by a partner tend to be less flexible and more ‘fussy’ about what days they will work and the type of work they are willing to do. Ironically the ‘ideal temp’ was described by Eve (the owner of a small employment agency) as somebody who was financially secure with another stream of income. The rationale was that a financially secure temporary worker is less likely to look at moving into permanent work if there are no assignments available. On the other hand, financial security also allows temporary workers the flexibility to be more selective over hours and assignments, making such people less than ideal for agencies. These are examples of the fraught situations the recruitment consultants found themselves facing. In previous times there were fewer available permanent jobs and plenty of temporary workers which meant less concern for consultants worrying about their temporary staff leaving to take up permanent work. But in the new ‘tighter’ job market with fewer temporary workers and plenty of permanent jobs available, there were new challenges.

The recruitment consultants were aware that the structural conditions of temporary work could create problems for temporary workers. People could be disappointed with temporary work for a variety of reasons, for example, boredom from monotonous tasks, dealing with a chaotic environment, financial uncertainty and social exclusion. The consultants dealt with these issues by viewing them as part of the ‘temping package’ for

workers, but were also aware that they could lose temporary staff because of them. From the recruitment consultants' perspective, the difficult working conditions often associated with temporary work are only to be expected given that organisations hire temporary staff because they are busy, and being in need of urgent help, employers do not have time nor the inclination to treat temporary staff in the same way they treat their permanent employees. In order for the consultants to retain their temporary staff in the face of these entrenched unsatisfactory working conditions, they needed temporary workers to accept the idea that these problems were just part of the job. The consultants were also aware that their structural position in the temporary labour market was accommodating clients' requests for flexible labour, a position that was becoming more difficult to maintain in the prevailing economic climate.

In summary, the information covered in this section shows that the recruitment consultants generally saw their role in the job market as being suppliers of staffing flexibility for employers. The phenomenon of temporary staff being 'fussy' and 'unavailable' was relatively new, reflecting the changed labour market conditions. It could also perhaps, be attributed to job-seekers being lured into temporary work by misleading advertisements about flexibility. These new candidates proved to be more difficult for agencies to 'mold' into being the 'ideal' flexible temporary workers that their clients had come to expect. With plenty of available permanent jobs, candidates now had more choices compared to previous 'flatter' job markets. The fact that temporary workers can be registered on an agency's data-base yet not be willing to make themselves available for assignments indicates a power shift in the labour market favouring temporary workers but creating difficulties around control and flexibility for recruitment consultants and employers. The agencies' position of power within the triangular working relationship had been weakened due to changes in the economic climate.

Part Three

9.3 The Temporary Workers' Experience of the Flexible Workforce

Although most of the temporary workers chose to be in temporary roles, none of the participants considered this type of employment as a long-term career choice. Regardless of economic conditions shaping the Auckland job market in favour of workers, the inflexible structure of temporary work itself meant that the workers' position of power in the triangular working relationship remained the weakest of the three parties. However, as noted in the previous chapter, people can use temporary work in order to achieve their own particular career goals, having no intention of remaining in temporary positions once their objectives have been met.

9.3.1 Lack of Flexibility and Control for Temporary Staff at Work

As temporary work requires staff to be flexible in order to create organisational flexibility for employers, the temporary workers' experiences of flexibility remained much the same. Although personal flexibility for temporary workers has been promoted by some employment agencies in their bid to attract people into temporary work, the reality seems very different. The following issues raised by the temporary worker participants clearly show that flexibility for temporary staff is quite limited in scope and demonstrate how temporary workers can be coerced into being flexible by their agencies in order to meet clients' needs.

Most of the temporary workers interviewed were aware that the only real flexibility for temporary staff is being able to take unpaid time off work between assignments. Eighteen of the twenty temporary workers interviewed stated that they had only ever worked full-time hours in the organisations because that is what most employers want. Theoretically, temporary staff could ask to only work certain days or hours, but in practice it was a case of having to accept whatever was available, especially if there was a need to earn money.

> *It's flexibility to work whenever they want you to and nothing to do with you. It has to be on their terms.* (Gina).

> *You are told what hours you have to work. If you have no back-up wage, then*

you have to be as flexible as they want you to be. (Carla).

Almost all of the participants found that temporary work offers workers very little flexibility to choose their own hours. It was more a case of the workers themselves who had to be flexible in order to create flexibility for the clients.

By contrast, one of the participants in this study did have flexible hours to suit herself. Andrea had worked as a temporary worker in the same large organisation for over four years. The flexibility of hours she enjoyed was the main reason she had stayed there so long. Of the twenty participants interviewed, Andrea's situation was exceptional. She had remained in the same organisation for over four years because she could take school holidays off without pay, but there were other reasons too. During her time there, she described seeing "waves of redundancies" resulting in many of the permanent staff losing their jobs. As a temporary worker, Andrea was somehow overlooked by management when the redundancies were occurring. The result of this was she became the longest remaining member of the clerical staff in her department.

This is perhaps, an example of a temporary worker not being perceived by an employer as presenting any risk or responsibility to the company as her temporary status made her easily disposable anyway. It seems ironic that those in the more 'secure' permanent positions lost their jobs while Andrea retained hers. Andrea joked that being a temporary worker in that company provided more security than being a permanent employee. Andrea's experience is however out of the ordinary as it is usually temporary workers who are the first to lose their positions in an economic downturn because they require no redundancy payouts.

Although temporary staff are able to take time off between assignments, the ability to do this once an assignment had commenced was very limited. Taking time off because of sickness could also be a problem, and was not viewed kindly by some recruitment consultants. Grace described being 'punished' for phoning the agency to say she was sick:

Once you ring in sick, you're not offered any more jobs, they want answers about

why you're ill, they want to know the ins and outs of what's wrong with you. (Grace).

Grace's comment suggests that temporary staff have less flexibility and are more tightly controlled than many permanent staff. Obviously some agencies try to influence the behaviour of their staff in regard to taking time off as they need reliable and flexible workers to send to their clients.

A temporary worker's ability to select only preferred types of assignments largely depended on their financial security:

If you have money, you turn down a job that you don't want, but if you don't have money, you just take what you can get. (Jane).

Turning down offered assignments could reduce the chances of being offered further assignments in the future. Fourteen temporary workers described being penalised by their recruitment consultants for refusing an offer of an assignment. Whilst some participants with other sources of income were better placed to turn down assignments, the majority of respondents needed a regular income and preferred to accept whatever assignment was on offer rather than risk being penalised by their consultant.

Leaving an assignment they did not like could result in even more severe consequences for temporary workers. Theoretically, temporary workers can advise their recruitment consultants that they do not want to remain on a certain assignment and be allowed to leave it. However most of the participants said they preferred to tolerate an assignment they did not like rather than leave, for fear of upsetting their recruitment consultant.

I definitely wouldn't just get up and walk out, because if you let the agent down, that agent isn't ever going to call you again. (Trisha).

Only two of the twenty temporary workers had ever actually left an assignment. Fleur described being sent by her agency to an organisation to work as a receptionist. When she arrived there, she discovered she would be doing call centre work instead, a type of work

she did not want to do. On contacting the agency, she was told it was not call centre work and that she should stay to cover the assignment:

> *The agency said it wasn't a call centre, but it was. So I actually walked out. It was full of temps dumped there. I felt quite strong just walking out like that. The others couldn't walk out like I did, they needed the money….They (*the agency*) never rang me back, that was it. I tried to get in touch with the recruitment consultant, but she didn't want to know.* (Fleur).

Leaving a job she did not want to do cost Fleur the contract she had with that employment agency. The other participant who refused to continue working in an organisation where she had been sent was Wendy, a legal secretary. In Wendy's case the employer already had a reputation for upsetting temporary staff:

> *I was put in a position working for a horrible person who was renowned for going through temps, and I thought oh well, how bad can he be, I'll give it a go and on about the fourth day he had me in tears and I went to the HR lady and said "I'm not working for him, I'm happy to stay here and I'll work for anybody else but not him". And they said " it has to be him", so I rang the agency and said "I'm not doing it, I'm not coming back tomorrow" and they were like "oh you have to, you were contracted blah blah blah" and I was like NO!* (Wendy).

Wendy's case is an example of how a temporary worker did take some control of a difficult situation, but without any support from the organisation's Human Resources department or her agency. As a legal secretary she was able to find new temporary work the next day from a different agency.

Wendy's and Fleur's situations demonstrate what may happen when temporary workers refuse to be flexible and compliant. An important point to note is that Fleur at that time was more financially independent than most of the other temporary workers and Wendy was a legal secretary, a role with higher status than general clerical roles and which is usually in high demand. In contrast to these two respondents, most participants stated that they had remained in assignments they did not like for fear of losing future work.

The examples presented so far demonstrate how temporary workers are encouraged to be flexible by their agencies so as to meet clients' requirements for flexible staffing with the least amount of disruption. It is noteworthy that many of the examples involving temporary workers being penalised for turning down or leaving an assignment raise the issue of their consultants' behaviour towards 'a scarce commodity' in the buoyant job market. Obviously, recruitment consultants working in the many different employment agencies in Auckland can have differing behaviours and opinions which would reflect how much they have adapted to the economic context. This may explain why some consultants were punitive and others were not.

Alternatively, when describing events, some temporary worker participants may have been mixing their past and present experiences. An example of this is when Fleur and Wendy described how they were 'punished' for leaving assignments. Both Fleur and Wendy were working in new permanent jobs at the time of the interviews, therefore the examples they were recalling were not current. However, nine of the temporary workers who described being penalised for turning down assignments were in temporary roles at the time of the interviews and were describing recent experiences. This suggests that some Auckland recruitment consultants can be more punitive than others, regardless of the economic context.

9.3.2 The Assignments

Assignments were described as being more mundane than interesting with little need for much concentration. Being given boring work to do because permanent staff did not want to do it was frequently mentioned and could involve tasks such as filling envelopes, filing and data entry.

> *I had an awful job where I was just snipping bits of cotton or thread off books, and that was terribly tedious. In other jobs I was stuffing envelopes…I felt that what I was doing was so unimportant that it wouldn't matter if I made a mistake*. (Donna).

Boring work is an issue that was perceived differently by each of the three groups of participants. As noted earlier, some employers hired temporary staff specifically for low-

level jobs in order to save their permanent staff from doing tedious work. From the employers' perspective, by doing this they considered themselves to be ethical employers, looking after their permanent staff. From the recruitment consultants' perspective, boring work was often just "part of the temping package" which temporary workers simply needed to accept. However from the temporary worker participants' perspective, performing low-level jobs could be boring and stressful.

When a temporary worker remains loyal to the one agency, they can be offered the more interesting assignments. These 'exclusive temps' were often given preferential treatment as long as they remained with the one agency. Carla had been an 'exclusive temp' with a previous agency and described being given the more interesting jobs.

> *Agencies have their elite girls or women that they give the cream of the jobs to, it's good to work for just the one agency, then they look after you.* (Carla).

Mary was another 'exclusive temp'. She described how her agency tried to look after her by offering the more mundane jobs to other temporary workers.

> *There was one job that involved just faxing all day and another just filing all day and the agency didn't want to call me because it would be so boring. They really try to look after me.* (Mary).

Not surprisingly, the majority of the temporary workers often felt overqualified for the tasks they were given to do at the client organisations as most were computer literate and several had tertiary qualifications. Employment agencies often claim to match the right temporary worker with the job, but in many of the examples described by the temporary workers, there seemed to be a mismatch of a worker's skills and the assigned task.

As well as mundane tasks, there were situations when a temporary worker would be hired by a company only to find little or nothing to do when they arrived there. Conversely, there were also assignments that were overly challenging and fast- paced. Both too little and too much work can create stress and demonstrates a lack of control over working

conditions for temporary workers. Although both boring and hectic assignments could be difficult, it was often the unrealistic expectations of employers in regard to the hectic jobs that tended to increase stress levels for temporary workers. Several participants felt as though they were expected to know the job without any prior training and be able to quickly learn something in a very short period of time.

> *You've got to be quick at looking at instructions and actually doing the job at the same time. You have to answer the telephone and actually work it all out while you are taking calls. It's really hard.* (Mary)

> *It is very stressful because you go in and you've got to learn something, plus they want it done right away. It's like "just hurry up and get the job done because you're costing us".* (Lila).

The "hurry up, you're costing us" attitude from employers was experienced by eight of the temporary workers in this study. This suggests that some Auckland employers expect temporary staff to simply blend into an organisation as if they already know the work and without any prior instruction, creating unreasonable pressure and stress for temporary workers. It is also more evidence of employers wanting the same level of certainty and control from a temporary workforce as they have with permanent staff.

Because of the lack of control around work assignments, feeling stressed was a regular occurrence. Many participants used descriptions such as "stressed", "overwhelmed", "frustrated" and "on edge", and complained that their sleep and appetites could often be disturbed because of their work. Unlike the concern claimed by some employers in regard to stress and their permanent staff, few people seemed to consider how stressed the temporary workers might be feeling. Although Andrea had remained in the same temporary role for four years because she was allowed to take school holidays off, she now needed medication to help her cope:

> *I have high anxiety. I think the stress from my work is because I get bored. The work is certainly not fulfilling.* (Andrea).

The lack of challenge in their jobs caused many of the temporary workers to feel disposable and seemed to contribute to a lower sense of emotional well-being. As well as this, they described a general uncertainty associated with starting new assignments, for example, worrying about being on time, parking or trying to find new organisations without getting lost.

> *Whenever I ran out of work, I couldn't sleep because I didn't know if or where I might be going to next. I'd wake up at about 6am waiting for a phone-call from the agency, kind of hoping for a phone-call, but anxious as to where they were going to send me as well, and hoping I wasn't going to get lost. (*Grace).

Being given short notice about assignments tended to fuel feelings of uncertainty and stress. Most participants agreed they were frequently given inadequate notice when being offered an assignment by recruitment consultants. This meant they had to get up early and be ready to leave if a call came through. It also meant they found it difficult to make any prior plans for the day ahead.

Uncertainty around assignments suggests that the benefit of structured time in the working lives of temporary staff may be compromised. If time cannot be structured by routine or regularity, then this makes it difficult to plan ahead which can limit a temporary worker's control of their day. By contrast, it provides employers with control to manage their time as they have the flexibility to terminate assignments to suit them.

9.3.3 Financial Insecurity

While long-term assignments could provide more financial security than short-term assignments for a temporary worker, any assignment could be suddenly terminated without prior warning.

> *I am very aware that my assignment could be terminated, and I know I could be out of a job at any moment…. In this current assignment they used to say "can you come back next week", now they don't say anything, and I just turn up and wait for them to tell me to leave, so that's where the financial insecurity problems*

come in. (Gina).

Gina's assignment had been for four months. Her comments show how temporary work can be financially unpredictable for workers. Being able to 'roll-over' a temporary worker on a week by week basis keeps flexibility and control of the situation with employers. Furthermore, a lack of communication from employers and recruitment consultants can be a major contributing factor towards the level of uncertainty experienced, as demonstrated in Gina's account.

Because of the financial unpredictability of temporary work, five of the participants complained about not being able to get loans or mortgages from banks.

My car broke down and I had to get a new car, and I went to the bank but they wouldn't lend me money because my job wasn't stable. Even things like buying furniture or a computer for home, I couldn't do it because I was temping. (Linda).

With the erratic nature of temporary work, it is not surprising that some banks will not provide mortgages or loans to people who are involved in this type of employment. The banks' position on this underlines the financial precariousness of temporary work. This makes it especially difficult for a temporary worker when there is a need for financial help in replacing a car or taking on a mortgage for a home, the types of commonplace debt that most permanent staff can take for granted. This is an example of how the temporary role can limit people's actions, even outside of the workplace.

In regard to hourly rates of pay, the majority of temporary workers believed they were paid below that of their permanent counterparts. Hourly rates earned by the temporary workers in this study were mainly between $12 and $20. Unlike a permanent worker, a temporary worker's hourly rate can fluctuate depending on the type of work they are given, which means in some cases hourly rates can go down rather than remain the same. From the temporary workers' perspective, consultants were often reluctant to negotiate higher pay rates on behalf of their temporary staff. Feeling financially pressured in a tight labour market, combined with extra competition from other agencies, it is understandable

that consultants would be reluctant to negotiate higher rates for their temporary staff for fear of jeopardising the agency/client contract.

Nevertheless, four of the younger temporary workers demonstrated some confidence in handling recruitment consultants, stating the hourly rate and the length of assignment they wanted.

> *You can state your bottom line with pay, for example, you can say "find me a job for this month with this pay". It's almost like you're sub-contracting yourself, so you have a bit of autonomy*. (Sarah).

Sarah was one of the younger (aged 23), more assertive participants, and took advantage of the buoyant labour market by being assertive in regard to hourly rates. However, given a downturn in the market, this may not be the case, as temporary workers might be less confident of securing a permanent job if they need to. Although a few participants were assertive with their agencies in negotiating rates, the majority did not seem to appreciate the fact that they were now a rare commodity in the Auckland job-market.

As an example of this, Trisha had been a temporary worker for over six years without being given a rise in her hourly rate by any of the agencies for which she worked. When I asked her why she had tolerated such a situation, she said she had never asked for a rise therefore had not received one. This passivity may seem difficult to understand, but unlike permanent staff, temporary staff do not have formal performance appraisals when pay-rates are often considered, nor do they have unions negotiating on their behalf. For these reasons, a passive permanent employee is better placed to receive regular pay-rises than a passive temporary worker. From some of the consultants' accounts, agencies try to make sure that their temporary staff understand that it is the client who makes the decision as to whether they receive a rise in pay or not, and that upsetting clients should be avoided. The implication of this is that a temporary worker is likely to feel discouraged from requesting a pay rise.

9.3.4 Moving On

Even after leaving the temporary staffing industry, flexibility for workers can be compromised when looking for permanent work. Firstly, there is limited access to a reference, and secondly, their CVs can signal the idea of 'instability' to a potential employer. Most of the participants were under the general understanding that clients should not be asked for a reference, yet references from an employment agency were usually only supplied to 'elite temps'. Even when a reference is provided by an agency, (according to most of the temporary worker participants), it tends to have little credibility in the job market because employers prefer references from other employers rather than from an agency. This situation can obviously leave temporary workers in a difficult position when seeking permanent work.

As well as limited access to references, many of the temporary workers realised that their CVs could jeopardise future career prospects, which is one of the reasons why most of them had no intention of remaining in this type of work. During the interviews, I asked all three groups of participants how they thought a CV showing a history of temporary work would be viewed in the job market. The overall response from all three groups was that it would be viewed in a negative light, indicating instability on the part of the worker. Grace described why she believed employers would not want to employ such a candidate for a permanent job:

> *If I was the employer and I saw a CV full of temping jobs, I would be put off because I'd think they had been job-hopping a lot, that they're not very settled, get bored easily, it could give the wrong impression. Employers don't take temp jobs very seriously, they're not seen as proper jobs, you know "couldn't you do something better?"* (Grace).

If a history of temporary assignments in a CV can create a negative impression in the job market, then skills or experience gained while doing temporary work may not be perceived as being very valuable by employers. The implication of this is that even when choosing to remove themselves from temporary staffing, a temporary worker's level of

control and flexibility may continue to be compromised when seeking future permanent employment.

In summary, this section of the chapter covering the temporary workers' experiences demonstrates that flexibility tends to revolve around accommodating clients' needs for organisational flexibility. Temporary workers can be coerced into being flexible in a variety of ways by their agencies in order for employers' needs to be met. As well as compromising a temporary worker's level of flexibility and control at work, financial and general uncertainty were often experienced on a daily basis. Additionally, a temporary worker's future endeavours in the permanent job market could be compromised due to their temporary work experience revealed in a CV, combined with a lack of suitable references. Overall, most of the examples in this section suggest that clerical temporary work is a particularly precarious type of employment situation for people who want to stay in it long-term.

9.4 Conclusion

The key points to come out of this chapter are that flexibility and control for each group were constrained by the activities of the other two groups, by the prevailing labour market conditions and/or by the structural conditions of their place in the temporary staffing industry. For the employers and recruitment consultants, constraints were mostly caused by economic changes which shaped the Auckland labour market creating a shortage of people wanting temporary work.

The changes in the labour market and the increase in agency numbers, created fierce competition, forcing agencies to become more flexible in negotiating higher pay rates for temporary workers and lower hiring fees for clients. These changes also threatened the agencies' role as providers of flexibility for clients as more unsuitable people were able to become temporary workers, boosting the number of available temporary workers for agencies, but creating problems for clients, which in turn, created problems for agencies.

Although the shortage of temporary workers seemed to have created a shift in the industry's power-base favouring temporary staff, most temporary workers in this study

had little awareness of this. The controlling mechanisms used by agencies were intended to ‘mold’ a temporary worker’s behaviour, the paramount aim being to maintain the client/agency contract, which meant pleasing rather than upsetting clients. This ‘molding’ of behaviour encouraged temporary workers to tolerate low pay and unsatisfactory working conditions and allowed them to be treated instrumentally by both employers and recruitment consultants. This in itself may have contributed to the passivity displayed by many temporary workers in regard to their unsatisfactory pay and conditions.

It could be argued that financially insecure people tend to make the most ‘suitable’ temporary staff because their need for an income ensures their compliance with the agency’s role of providing flexible workers for clients. On the other hand, these people may be forced to leave temporary work and take a permanent job if their financial needs become strong enough, and in a job market with plenty of available permanent positions, this would not be too difficult to do. In fact, this is exactly what many agency temporary workers in Auckland may have already done, which helped to create the shortage in the first place.

Finally, the psychological impact caused by the lack of flexibility involving work assignments for temporary staff is an important issue. Flexibility from the temporary workers’ perspective equals uncertainty and a lack of personal control, both of which are known stressors. Many of the examples in this chapter suggest that an emotional deprivation in regard to being engaged in meaningful activity and the ability to structure time was experienced by many temporary workers in this study.

CHAPTER TEN
RELATIONSHIPS

Overview

This chapter examines relationships between the three groups of participants. Part One looks at the employers' relationships with recruitment consultants and temporary workers from the employers' perspective. Part Two focuses on relationships from the recruitment consultants' perspective, explaining how they perceive and experience their relationships with temporary workers and employers. Part Three discusses the experiences of temporary staff, and describes their relationships with recruitment consultants, employers and permanent staff at the organisations.

This chapter shows that relationships between the three groups were mainly of a commercial or transactional, rather than personal nature. Although many temporary workers would have preferred a more personal relationship with the other two groups, both the employers and recruitment consultants' core attitude towards temporary staff was that they are commodities. As the temporary staffing business has evolved to meet clients' needs, a transactional relationship requires less effort or responsibility for employers and therefore both agencies and organisations tended to encourage a more instrumental approach to temporary staff.

Although basically a transactional relationship, the recruitment consultants' attitude towards their temporary workers was often overlaid by a veneer of personal concern in order to engender loyalty to their agency. Unlike the consultants, the employers made little effort to make any changes to the transactional relationship with their temporary staff, regardless of the changed labour market creating a shortage of temporary workers which made them a more valuable resource.

Part One

10.1 The Employers and Relationships

10.1.1 The Employers' Relationship with Recruitment Consultants

The relationship between employers and recruitment consultants was based mostly on their commercial contract. According to several of the employers, the strength of this relationship depended on how well the agency was able to meet the organisation's need for suitable temporary staff.

Employers dealing with a single agency cannot always be guaranteed the timely provision of suitable temporary staff, and because of this, some employers had created a 'preferred supplier list' comprising several agencies. However, many employers also felt some degree of loyalty to those agencies that best understood the particular needs of their companies.

> *At the moment we have a couple of preferred suppliers and what I'm wanting to do is have just a small selection of agencies that we use rather than anyone and everyone because then we can't establish a relationship with them. They need to learn our business and our needs.(*Phillippa, human resources assistant for a large government department).

Several other employers recognised the need to build some sort of a personal relationship with employment agencies in order for recruitment consultants to gain an understanding of how their particular companies operate. By doing this, consultants can supply employers with the most suitable temporary staff, therefore relationship building was used to enhance strategic goals.

In two instances employers and consultants had developed personal relationships which extended back over several years and provided mutual benefit for both parties. Caroline (a general manager of a small manufacturing company) described the relationship with her consultant as being based on friendship although remaining professional. She had

developed a friendship with Cassandra, (a recruitment consultant in this study) who had been providing Caroline's company with temporary staff for several years:

> *Cassandra and I go back three or four years and have now built up a professional relationship, but a relationship where you can sort of ring each other up and meet for coffee, so she's been very clever at getting our company loyalty*.

A recruitment consultant developing more personal terms with an employer can make it harder for the employer to drop that agency if it is under-performing in some way. It can also encourage patience in employers waiting for their agency to find suitable temporary staff. As noted in the previous chapter, several of the employers (including Caroline) were willing to wait a week or more for a clerical temporary worker from their agency, showing how relationship building on the consultant's part can be an effective strategy in helping to maintain the commercial relationship.

However, this mutually productive relationship between employers and recruitment consultants can be fractured by the high turnover of consultants in the temporary staffing industry. Teresa, (a human resources manager in a medium-sized legal company) commented that there is a very high turnover of consultants in this industry, and that she had recently noticed over 300 vacancies for recruitment consultants advertised in Auckland on the SEEK internet site. Since some personal connection between recruitment consultants and employers can be a key factor in maintaining client loyalty to a particular agency, it is likely that the high turn-over of consultants would have a detrimental impact on the employer/agency contract. It is possible that in some instances the personal connection between an employer and a consultant could be a disadvantage for an agency rather than a benefit. If an employer's loyalty lies with the consultant rather than the agency, this could leave an agency in a vulnerable position should that consultant leave to work for another agency.

Overall, the relationship between employers and recruitment consultants seemed to be based on a commercial footing with cost and reliability being of prime importance. Some

personal contact between employer representatives and consultants enabled this relationship to operate more smoothly for both parties.

10.1.2 The Employers' Relationship with Temporary Staff

From the employers' perspective, temporary staff were hired solely to come into an organisation to complete a set task, therefore the relationship between employers and temporary staff could be described as transactional rather than relational.

> *We hire them just solely for certain roles and then have no further commitment to that person after that project is finished. (*Jenny, human resources manager for a large telecommunications company).

During the interviews the status of temporary staff was discussed with the employers. Phillippa (a human resources advisor for a large government department) believed that, for a variety of reasons, permanent staff had higher status than temporary workers. Some employers made it quite clear that temporary workers are treated differently from permanent staff. Teresa (a human resources manager for a medium-sized legal company) did not allow temporary staff to vary their working hours, but was very flexible with her own permanent employees who wanted part-time hours:

> *With temps, it's a bit more difficult. They're coming in to cover a spot and if they can only do Monday or Tuesday, then I have to get another temp and there's no consistency, you know, they start on some work and then have another person doing it.*

From an employer's point of view this makes some sense. Permanent part-time staff are more likely to know the work than temporary staff. Employers' willingness to negotiate part-time or flexible hours with their permanent staff but not with temporary staff emphasises the fact that temporary workers are viewed as employees of the agency even though it is the clients who actually determine the hours via the agency. This is an example of the rigid organisational conditions of temporary staffing which can make it particularly hard for temporary workers wanting more flexible hours.

John (the human resources manager for a medium-sized technical company) made a special effort to ensure the temporary staff in his American-based company were treated very differently to the permanent staff. This deliberate differentiation had evolved because long-term temporary staff in America had won a legal battle against this global company and thereby gained the same treatment and benefits as permanent staff. These benefits included paid medical insurance and share ownership in the company. To ensure this did not happen in New Zealand, the company went to great lengths to ensure clear distinctions between permanent and temporary staff on a variety of employment related parameters. To give examples, unlike permanent staff, temporary staff were not given influenza inoculations, nor were they invited to company social functions. Even their logons and company badges were designed to specifically differentiate between the two groups. These policies might seem reasonable for temporary workers on short-term assignments, but many of the temporary staff working at John's company had worked there for over a year. This is another example of how employers can want the advantages of certainty and control with temporary workers that they have with permanent staff, but without the same costs, risks or responsibilities.

It could be argued that how employers view temporary workers can influence their relationship with them. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, when I asked the employers if they would want to interview an applicant for a permanent job whose CV showed a lot of temporary work, there was a general perception that this would be a risk because temporary workers are too 'unstable' for permanent work. Teresa's comment below was typical:

> *It's very hard from my perspective, employing someone who has moved around so much and doesn't really show us they have a work history for longer than six months, it's a little bit limiting for a person, it's a risk.(*Teresa, human resources manager of medium-sized legal company).

Regardless of this stereotyped, negative perception of temporary workers, nine of the ten employers said they had at some stage offered hired temporary staff permanent roles. These contradictory comments suggest that employers' perceptions of temporary staff tend to be negative until proven otherwise.

The examples of the employer/temporary worker relationship provided in this section demonstrate the instrumental way in which employers can view temporary workers. This disengagement by employers from temporary workers can encourage temporary staff to be viewed as commodities, which is conducive to the smooth running of flexible staffing for organisations. Disengagement from temporary workers as people also helps to shift any employer responsibilities on to another group – the employment agency. It is likely that this view of temporary workers has evolved because of agencies' promotion of how easy it is for organisations to hire flexible staffing allowing minimal responsibility for temporary staff.

In summary, this section shows how the relationship between employers and recruitment consultants was mainly based on commercial considerations with some personal connection being important so that agencies send the most suitable temporary workers. The relationship between temporary workers and employers was mostly transactional, based on the completion of set tasks.

Many of the employers tended to view temporary workers as commodities which facilitate organisational flexibility, viewing them as a 'human resource' in the literal sense, and feeling little sense of responsibility towards them beyond that of legal obligation. These attitudes persisted in spite of the labour market changes making temporary staff more scarce and therefore more valuable, emphasising the strength of the prevailing structural conditions of the temporary staffing industry.

Part Two

10.2 The Recruitment Consultants and Relationships

This section examines relationships in the temporary staffing sector from the recruitment consultants' perspective. A key issue in this section is how the recruitment consultants tried to influence the behaviour of the other two groups by fostering a more personal relationship with them.

10.2.1 Relationship with Clients

Due to the strong competition for clients resulting from an increased number of employment agencies in Auckland, all recruitment consultants attempted to develop a more personal relationship with their clients by keeping in touch more regularly by phone, email or in person. A strong personal relationship between the client and the consultant meant there was more chance of being given work.

> *It's a highly competitive market, and it's pretty cut-throat too, but if you're good, you'll get the work. If you've got a really good relationship with the clients, you'll get the work.* (Karen, manager of small employment agency).

Karen's comments highlight how agencies can try to cultivate a more personal relationship with employers for commercial gain. In a highly competitive arena, the commercial contract between agency and client may not be enough, therefore trying to develop a more personal connection with clients was used to strengthen the agency's commercial contract. However, no matter how good the relationship between client and recruitment consultant, its continuation was ultimately dependent upon whether or not the agency was able to supply good temporary staff in a timely manner.

> *If you get good candidates, clients are very happy. But if something goes wrong, then obviously we have to work twice as hard to make sure the relationship lasts.* (Jodi, manager of medium sized employment agency).

The quality of the personal relationship between agency and client was viewed as crucial by all of the consultants as it helped to maintain the commercial contract, which generates an agency's income. The relationship between client and agency is also crucially dependent upon the third player in this triangular working relationship – the temporary worker, and in particular the quality of the temporary worker. Any effort to develop a personal relationship with clients is unlikely to succeed unless agencies have suitable temporary staff available to meet their clients' needs.

10.2.2 Relationship With Temporary Workers

With temporary workers in short supply, all of the ten recruitment consultants said they were now making more effort than was ever previously needed to retain their temporary staff. One of the ways they did this was by trying to promote an employer/employee relationship with them, putting forward the idea that their agency was a caring employer. This approach was intended to make temporary staff more loyal to the agency in a changed and more competitive labour market which offered plenty of permanent jobs. The top priority however, remained the client/agency contract.

> *The relationship with candidates has changed dramatically. They have become employees, they never were employees, and there was literally no responsibility. Now we have an employment relationship, so that's been an enormous change…. personal relationships are now the key, a very personal relationship will retain someone much longer.* (Eve, branch manager of a small employment agency).

From Eve's comments, it is obvious that prior to the shortage of temporary staff, recruitment consultants had not needed to behave like responsible employers in order to retain their temporary staff. Trying to create a more personal employer/employee relationship because of the new economic conditions required some fundamental changes. One approach to help foster a more personal relationship was employee recognition. This was in the form of agencies developing special programmes to help reward their good temporary staff. Six agencies had 'Temp of the Month' using comments from clients as the basis for deciding the winning temporary worker. Other agency programmes were called 'Associate Care Programmes' or 'Candidate Care Programmes'. Rewards were often in the form of shopping vouchers, tickets for the cinema, chocolates, wine or flowers. These tokens of recognition may help temporary workers to feel more appreciated, but cost very little. Although a thoughtful gesture, if employment agencies are the employers of temporary workers, then it could be argued that appropriate performance appraisals, access to references and training, regular pay increases and other benefits associated with the usual employer/employee relationship might be considered as more effective rewards by temporary workers.

Making an effort to personalise their relationship with temporary staff seemed to be in the service of primarily instrumental ends, and from the recruitment consultants' perspective, this made good business sense. Although temporary staff have always worked for employment agencies, labour market conditions of the recent past had not warranted this sort of relationship building activity by consultants before. The more healthy and buoyant job market meant that job-seekers and current temporary staff were better placed to find permanent jobs if they did not want or like temporary work, therefore, from the recruitment consultants' perspective, a more personal caring agency would hopefully retain them longer.

Another way of engendering agency loyalty was by encouraging workers to become 'exclusive temps'. As covered in the previous chapter 'exclusive temps' are given preferential treatment in order to encourage them to work only for that particular agency. Comments made by three recruitment consultants suggested that temporary workers who are multi-listed with other agencies would be at a disadvantage.

> *We say to the candidate, we want you to come on board as an exclusive temp. A lot of temps these days aren't interested, so they're the ones that I can't really guarantee any work for, the multi-listed temps.* (Karen, manager of small employment agency).

There are times however, when an agency will have no work for any temporary worker, exclusive or otherwise. Rather than risk losing a valuable temporary worker to a permanent job, four recruitment consultants said they were now reluctantly suggesting that their temporary workers list with other agencies as well. This suggests that some agencies will alter their 'rules' in regard to temporary workers when faced with changed market conditions, reflecting the slightly stronger position of temporary workers, and the weakening position of agencies in the temporary worker/agency relationship.

Recruitment consultants were also modifying their behaviour towards their temporary staff in other ways. With some temporary workers making themselves less 'available' for

offers of assignments, three recruitment consultants said they now needed to be more aware of how they treat people who turn down work.

> *Today, everybody is valuable…back in the old days if a temp turned down work two or three times, a consultant would make a choice not to represent them again in the future, but now it's a candidate's market, they get to say "no", it's not like there are people that are readily available to replace them.* (Melanie, branch manager of a large global employment agency).

Although some employment agencies may no longer engage in withholding assignments from 'choosy' temporary workers in order to influence their behaviour, it is evident from some of the temporary workers' accounts in the previous chapter that there are consultants who may not have adapted to the economic context. Nevertheless, Melanie's comments do provide evidence that certain tactics used by agencies have changed to meet shifting market conditions. When temporary workers are 'a rare commodity' rather than being in plentiful supply, recruitment consultants are no longer in the more powerful position to withhold assignments, therefore trying to use 'softer' controlling devices such as relationship building makes good business sense.

10.2.3 The Commodification of Temporary Workers

Although the position of temporary workers had become slightly stronger in the temporary worker/agency relationship, agencies still required their temporary staff to behave appropriately while in the client organisations, as the temporary worker position in the client/temporary worker relationship remained much the same. While interviewing the recruitment consultants, I noticed a few consultants still referred to their temporary staff as 'job orders', a description likely to foster the view of temporary workers as commodities, with clients placing 'orders' and temporary workers being 'delivered'. These terms are suggestive of merchandise rather than people, and from many of the examples provided in this study, the general attitude of consultants towards their temporary staff remained primarily instrumental.

Viewing temporary workers as commodities rather than employees was shown in the recruitment consultants' failure to act as proper employers in terms of providing access to references, training, performance appraisals and regular pay increases, and expecting their staff to tolerate many of the unsatisfactory conditions that temporary work creates for workers. For example, there are times when a temporary worker might need their agency's support in an organisation. Pauline, (a recruitment consultant for a large global employment agency) described how some managers in organisations can be rude and obnoxious. She dealt with this problem by making sure she only placed temporary workers there who could cope with such behaviour. From the consultants' perspective, supporting a temporary worker faced with a difficult manager had the potential to jeopardise the client/agency contract, therefore sending only temporary workers who could tolerate such situations circumvents any need for agency intervention.

While it seems unreasonable to expect anyone to accept rude or obnoxious behaviour in the workplace, nine of the ten recruitment consultants interviewed said they had never had one of their temporary staff 'walk out' during an assignment regardless of difficulties. On the one hand this may demonstrate some level of commitment to the agencies, but it is equally likely to be the temporary workers' fear of reprisal from consultants if they leave an uncompleted assignment. It could be argued that such loyalty confirms how well the agencies' influencing tactics have shaped temporary workers' behaviour, as walking out on an assignment could mean upsetting the client, which in turn could threaten the client/agency contract.

In summary, many of the recruitment consultants had been making an effort to foster the idea of a personal and caring relationship between an agency and temporary staff, in the hope that this approach would engender temporary workers' loyalty to their agency. However, consultants' relationship with clients was focused on satisfying their requests for good temporary staff and maintaining the business contract. This focus could sometimes be at the expense of supporting their temporary workers, thereby calling into question the consultants' credibility regarding the caring employer/employee personal relationship approach.

Part Three

10.3 The Temporary Workers and Relationships

Part Three of the chapter looks at the temporary workers' experiences of work relationships with employers, permanent staff and recruitment consultants. The key point in this section is that the temporary workers remained in marginalised positions when working in the client organisations, regardless of labour market conditions shifting to favour temporary workers.

10.3.1 Social Exclusion

From the temporary workers' perspective, their relationship with the people in the client organisations was often viewed in a poor light. Many felt that they were treated differently from the permanent staff, and described a general lack of personal connection to others in the organisations. The following pages look at the variety of ways in which the temporary workers experienced exclusion in the client organisations where they worked.

Exclusion from social events was one of the main complaints made by the temporary workers. Christmas celebrations seemed to be a time when temporary staff were specifically excluded, often on the basis of company policy. Although four participants said they had been invited to company Christmas parties, many had been denied an invitation purely because they were temporary workers. As an example, for four years in a row, Andrea had been denied an invitation to the staff Christmas party, in spite of being an accepted and long-term member of the clerical departmental team. Despite the organisational knowledge and experience Andrea had acquired during her four years in the company, she was specifically excluded because of her temporary status. This left Andrea feeling bitter towards the company and demonstrates how temporary staff can be devalued in organisations, underlining a temporary worker's marginal position. The symbolic function of Christmas involving sharing and goodwill to others makes social exclusion at this time of the year much more apparent for temporary workers.

Sixteen of the respondents also described experiences of being physically excluded from permanent staff. Joanne's desk was situated in a corridor between two departments. She could hear both teams of staff talking but could not see them:

> *Within this company, I'm away from everyone. I have no contact with anyone. I'm quite isolated. I can go a whole day without talking to anybody. Nobody knows whether I'm here or not. And when you get to my age, or I suppose any age really, working with other people is important. Yesterday there was a celebration in Marketing and I could hear them all but I didn't know what it was about. Then there was some other celebration happening this end and I just felt so left out.* (Joanne).

The attitude and behaviour of some permanent staff towards temporary workers contributed to respondents' feelings of social alienation. For example, participants were rarely invited to go to lunch with permanent staff. Although temporary workers on long-term assignments generally felt more accepted as part of the team than those on short-term assignments, there were four exceptions to this. Gina found the social alienation particularly difficult because she prided herself on being a team player. She believed she had worked hard in the organisation, but did not feel as though her work contributed to the team. If Gina was on a short-term assignment, this may have been understandable, but she had been working on the same assignment for four months. Three other temporary workers on even longer term assignments also described feeling alienated from the team.

Participants who described themselves as natural team-players found the temporary role particularly difficult. Grace described what it was like for her on a Monday morning after becoming engaged at the weekend. She had been working in the same company for twelve months, so it was not a case of her being the 'new girl' on a short-term assignment:

> *I got engaged at the weekend, and for me it was a big thing, I'd never been engaged before. And I was so happy and they were asking "how was your weekend?" but nobody asked me about mine…Then I told one of them that I had got engaged and I was expecting her to congratulate me or something, but no nothing. It was depressing, the fact that there was nobody to share it*

with, and even when there was, they don't really want to know because you are only the temp. (Grace).

The example above shows how the personal life of a temporary worker can be of little interest in the office social scene. Grace also described how permanent staff sometimes did not return her 'hello or 'good morning' greetings. Two other temporary workers also commented on permanent staff deliberately ignoring their attempts at interaction.

Despite these examples, long-term assignments were generally more conducive to the social acceptance of temporary staff. However when companies are restructuring, this can be a particularly difficult situation for temporary workers, whether on short or long-term assignments. Permanent staff who are fearful of losing their jobs are not likely to be welcoming of any temporary workers.

It was tough when everybody was getting laid off and they were keeping me on as a temp. It was like "why are you still here and I haven't got a job?" They took it out on me, some wouldn't speak to me, there was a lot of resentment. (Anne).

Although many of the examples provided in the above accounts clearly demonstrate some hostility towards temporary workers, it is important to remember that mutual aloofness can become a vicious cycle. If temporary workers are expecting to be ignored or treated in a rude manner, then their interpretations of ambiguous situations may lean more towards the negative view, thereby fulfilling their expectations of exclusion.

10.3.2 Marginalisation: Being 'Company Outsiders'

Being 'company outsiders' was how many of the temporary workers described their experiences in the client organisations. Unlike permanent staff, a temporary worker's position can be suddenly terminated if an employer is in any way unhappy with them, resulting in a loss of earnings for the temporary worker, and creating extra work for the agency as a replacement would need to be supplied. In the worst instance, upsetting a client can mean jeopardising the client/agency contract, which as far as agencies are

concerned, should be avoided at all costs. Because of this, several participants stated how important it was that they maintain a low profile at the client organisations.

> *I had to watch what I said or did. If I talked to the wrong person in the wrong way, I could very well get the chop, they could ask me not to return. There were times when I couldn't speak my mind or give my general opinion on an idea or something, because I was the temp and I didn't have the right to participate or contribute to conversations. You become more aware, your awareness of what you are saying or acting is more heightened from knowing that you are on loan, you're not you. You don't talk unless you're asked to speak.* (Linda).

Linda's comments above show how a temporary worker can learn to suppress her own sense of who she is and avoid being spontaneous. This type of repression seems to be encouraged by some employment agencies, as eight of the temporary workers described being 'prepped' by their consultants on the importance of maintaining a low profile at the organisations. It could be argued that they were encouraged to remain in their marginalised positions by their consultants, so as to provide minimal disruption and responsibility for clients.

For Wendy, the consequences of suppressing her personality as a temporary worker became evident when she secured the permanent job she had been wanting. She found that she was unable to interact with her colleagues easily, as during her years of temporary work she had learnt to keep a low profile in order to fit the temporary roles:

> *In this permanent role, they were concerned that I was quite closed off, like no-one could say they really knew me and I think that's a product of years of temping. You learn to turn off who you are, it was emotionally learned behaviour.* (Wendy).

It may be feasible to assume there are benefits for employers and agencies when people learn to become emotionally 'closed off' while working in temporary roles, as it ensures compliancy towards tolerating unsatisfactory conditions. There are however, also disadvantages, not only for the temporary staff in having to suppress their spontaneity,

but organisations are likely to miss out on valuable information if knowledgeable temporary workers maintain a low profile.

Temporary staff can often be treated differently to permanent staff in regard to personal acknowledgement. For example, a permanent staff member leaving a company is often acknowledged by being presented with a farewell gift, speech or special tea, but for the temporary worker this rarely happens. Such things may seem of little consequence, and may even seem realistic in regard to transitory staff, but for many of the temporary workers in this study they were daily reminders of being treated differently to permanent staff. It is important to remember that employers consider temporary workers to be 'company outsiders' because they are the staff of another company – the agency. From the temporary workers' perspective however, some sort of personal connection and sense of belonging in the workplace seemed to be important, and the lack of it created feelings of marginalisation.

Additionally, a general lack of communication in regard to their work performance while at the organisation increased the temporary workers' sense of marginalisation, as well as fuelling feelings of insecurity around assignments. The positive feedback most participants did receive was usually in the form of being offered a permanent job, having their assignment extended or being specifically requested for future assignments by the employer.

> *They never say you did well. They will always let you know if they like you by asking for you to come back, that's the positive feedback, then you think, oh, I must have been alright*. (Grace).

The fact that employers fill in performance sheets for agencies may contribute to this deficit in direct verbal feedback, the assumption being that feedback for temporary workers would be the agency's responsibility. Unfortunately, feedback from agencies to temporary workers was also rare (this is covered in more depth later on in this section), leaving temporary staff dependent on any decisions involving the extension of their assignments as the main indicator of whether or not they were doing a good job. This

lack of feedback on the part of employers and agencies is further evidence of temporary workers being treated in an instrumental rather than personal way.

Many of the examples covered so far show how temporary staff can be marginalised workers at the client organisations with both agencies and organisations playing their part in maintaining this.

10.3.3 The Psychological Impact of Exclusion

Although three temporary workers claimed that their role had provided them with more self-confidence because of the skills they had learnt, many said otherwise. It was evident from comments that most of the temporary workers had experienced some form of emotional distress from being treated as marginalised workers. Social exclusion, having little sense of belonging, and low status tended to contribute to these feelings. Eleven participants described the lack of personal connection as being the worst part of temporary work, even worse than the financial instability. Typical emotional descriptions provided were “lonely”, “despairing”, “miserable”, “stressed”, “depressed”, “distressed”, “upsetting” and “disturbing”.

As mentioned in the literature review, temporary work has been shown by some researchers to have a negative psychological affect on workers (Gallie et al., 1998; Lasfargues et al., 1999; Martens et al., 1999). The emotional effects described by several of the participants in this study lend support to these findings, as well as to Jahoda’s Deprivation Theory (1988) in regard to the latent benefits of work.

Other research findings have shown that temporary work can have a particularly negative psychological impact on those who would prefer to be working in a permanent role (Gallagher et al, 2001; Isaksson & Bellagh, 2002). Interestingly, in the present study, most of the participants described experiencing some negative emotional impact from their roles regardless of whether they were reluctant temporary workers or those who preferred temporary work.

10.3.4 Relationship with Recruitment Consultants

From the temporary workers' perspective, their relationship with recruitment consultants was not strong, the majority describing little communication with their agencies once they had commenced an assignment. Four participants did not even know who their recruitment consultant was and complained about the overall lack of contact. Many of the temporary workers would have preferred to have a more personal relationship with their consultants.

> *I didn't feel like the agents were my employers. It felt like I was out there on my own, they paid your wages, but when you tried to get hold of them, you couldn't. I think the agency needs to have more contact with you, they ring you at first to see if it's going OK, then they ring you three months down the track. I think they should try to make it more like a team environment, maybe having training evenings for temps or having more of a company feeling, like you belong somewhere.* (Anne).

Anne's account underlines how the temporary worker/agency relationship can have little in common with the typical employee/employer relationship and challenges the comments made by the recruitment consultants in the previous section regarding the effort now being made by agencies to focus on developing more of an employer/employee relationship with their temporary workers. The contradictory statements of the temporary workers and recruitment consultants suggest that the relatively superficial relationship building tactics employed by the consultants were not perceived by temporary workers as adequate substitutes for a genuine relational employment contract.

Overall, there seemed to be a general sense of disconnection between most of the temporary workers and their agencies, although a few of the long-term 'exclusive temps' did receive more regular communication compared to others. Not surprisingly, when I asked each temporary worker how they viewed recruitment consultants, there were plenty of negative responses. Some participants tended to be cynical, interpreting any effort made by consultants to keep in contact as being an attempt to keep people in the

temporary role in order to make a profit. The claim that recruitment consultants were like car salesmen was made on several occasions.

> *It's a real salesman kind of relationship. You're not going to be best buddies with your car salesman, you know they are going to get you the car, but they are only nice to you because they are going to make some money, and that is essentially the kind of relationship you have with your consultant. It's a false niceness, it's very much a salesman relationship*. (Jane).

Comparing recruitment consultants to car salesmen is interesting, as Ruth Durno (a senior consultant with Phoenix Recruitment in Auckland) was quoted in a national newspaper as saying "Let's face it, recruiters do have a reputation up there with used car salesmen" (*Weekend Herald*, 5th April 2008, Section F, p. 9) lending some support to the temporary workers' views. However, views of recruitment consultants were not all negative. Mary (one of the two 'exclusive temps' in the study) described her relationships with recruitment consultants in a very positive light, emphasising how caring they were towards both their temporary staff and clients. Joanne thought her current consultant was really good because she rang her every week unlike her previous consultants who rarely kept in touch. Obviously some recruitment consultants make more of an effort than others to maintain genuine relationships with their temporary workers.

Most participants believed a recruitment consultant's top priority is fulfilling their clients' needs, and usually at the expense of their temporary workers' needs.

> *There was one agent I knew for quite a long time and I developed quite a good relationship with her. But at the end of the day I felt that she paid me lip-service and ultimately took the client's side. I've heard about other temps experiencing the same thing with their agents, not just me. They'll do what they can to help you as long as it doesn't in any way jeopardise the account. The top priority is the client.* (Andrea).

It is perhaps understandable that a recruitment consultant would not want to risk jeopardising a client contract by supporting an individual temporary worker. The client may well be a long-term customer hiring a lot of temporary staff and generating significant profit for the agency. On the other hand, poorly treated temporary workers may leave the temporary role, and in a tight job market, this could also be a threat to an agency, further reducing their dwindling supply of temporary workers.

As mentioned in the literature review, how a temporary worker feels about their agency can influence how well they engage in a client organisation. For example, the better a temporary worker is treated at the agency the more effort they will make to perform well at the organisation, which could ultimately benefit the agency (Moorman & Harland, 2002).

In summary, being treated differently to permanent staff at the organisations contributed to the temporary workers' sense of being marginalised workers. Most of the temporary workers in the study seemed to tolerate rather than enjoy their roles, having little emotional connection to anybody in their employment sphere. Many respondents described social alienation as the worst part of temporary work. Although temporary workers are the agency's employees, the recruitment consultants were generally perceived as being on the side of the client, often at the expense of their temporary staff.

10.4 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter raise several important issues. Firstly, the employers tended to view agencies primarily as providing a resource or commodity, just like any other supplier of resources. However, the resources in this case were human, and therefore emotionally affected by how they are treated. Secondly, neither recruitment consultants nor employers seemed to be involved in any real personal relationship with their temporary workers, yet most of the temporary workers wanted a more personal and less transactional relationship with them. Although some consultants claimed to now make more of an effort to help their temporary workers to feel like employees, there was no real evidence of this being more than a veneer of personal concern to help retain temporary staff in a tight labour market. Maintaining the commercial contract with a

client continued to be the top priority for recruitment consultants. Thirdly, conditions in previous employment markets had allowed employers to enjoy easy access to suitable temporary staff from agencies with no need to make any effort at forming a more personal relationship with the workers. In the 'tighter' Auckland labour market, the employers continued in this same mode and did not attempt to alter the environment for temporary staff by improving workplace conditions for them. From the employers' perspective, the value of temporary staff had not been raised, regardless of labour market forces reducing their availability.

Finally, the psychological impact of social alienation seemed to negatively affect most of the temporary workers regardless of whether they preferred temporary or permanent work. From the temporary workers' perspective, there was a lack of emotional connection to anybody in their working sphere, a situation likely to leave them psychologically fragile. It could be argued that people who are treated like commodities may start viewing themselves as such, resulting in low expectations of being valued, regardless of their original motives for choosing temporary work.

CHAPTER ELEVEN
PROBLEM SOLVING

Overview

The various problems facing each of the three groups of participants made it necessary for them to look for solutions to gain some control of their difficult situations. The final chapter of the Results section examines the ways in which each of the three groups attempted to address the particular problems they were experiencing.

Part One explains how the employers attempted to regain flexible staffing by making structural changes within their organisations. Part Two looks at the recruitment consultants' strategies. Being in a structurally weaker position, they could not use the same sort of problem solving tactics available to employers, therefore 'softer' techniques were used. Part Three examines the ways in which the temporary workers tried to cope with the variety of problems they faced in their temporary roles, with most ultimately 'voting with their feet' by leaving temporary work for permanent employment.

Part One

11.1 The Employers and Problem Solving

The lack of suitable agency temporary workers created by the healthier economic climate made it necessary for the employers to regain some control of flexible staffing cover in other ways. Hiring temporary workers from an agency had worked well for employers in the past, but had reached a point where it was no longer an adequate sole option for covering their flexible staffing needs.

11.1.1 Regaining Control through Structural Changes

The changes made by the employers were mainly structural in nature and implemented for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they were intended to provide managers with alternative sources of flexible staffing. Secondly, the employers wanted to exercise more control over the quality of their temporary workers. Thirdly, most of these solutions were considered to be less costly than hiring somebody from an agency.

Problem solving strategies implemented by three employers in the larger organisations involved using their own permanent staff to provide extra flexibility options. One such strategy was cross-training permanent staff. Dave (a manager at a large government department) explained:

> *We try to have our people trained up in a wide range of jobs so if it becomes an issue, we'll chop and change people's roles so they can cover the key jobs.*

Rather than cross-training a lot of people, two employers preferred to use a few multi-trained 'floating staff'. These were permanent employees who have no single regular position in an organisation. They fit in wherever they are needed to cover absences, reporting to the human resources department each day to find out where they are required. Floating staff would already be familiar with the culture and daily operations of that particular organisation, and would likely be more competent than a temporary worker who does not have these advantages. Companies do however, sometimes need staff for specific projects as well as for covering absences, and these projects can often be long-term. Therefore cross-training and having floating staff may not always be adequate.

Other structural changes involved organisations developing their own company data-base of direct hire temporary staff and employing people on fixed-term contracts. Direct hire workers (also known as 'casual' workers) were 'on call' mostly for short-term routine clerical work such as filing or photocopying. Advantages of having 'on call' casual staff meant that employers did not have to wait for an agency to find somebody, plus the hourly rate of a casual worker was less than that of an agency temporary worker because there is no agency fee included. These casual workers were often the teenage children of permanent employees in the organisations, glad of the opportunity to earn extra 'pocket money', and often available for tasks in the evenings, weekends and school holidays.

Although casual workers might be available to cover short-term assignments, they were often not available to work weeks or months at a time. Therefore, for longer term assignments, some employers hired people on fixed-term contracts. A fixed-term contract involves a person being employed by a company for a specific period of time, which means no redundancy concerns for the employer at the end of the contract and more

financial certainty for the worker. This differs from hiring agency temporary staff in that the people on fixed-term contracts are employed by the organisation rather than the agency, and therefore cannot have their assignments prematurely terminated, or be returned to the agency and replaced by somebody else if they are found to be unsuitable.

Several of the employers commented on how well these strategies were working as they helped to provide their organisations with some cost-effective, flexible staffing. The downside of these strategies for employers is that they have more legal and personal responsibility, as both casual staff and fixed-term contractors are on a company's pay-roll, and are therefore the organisation's responsibility. Interestingly, legal and relational responsibilities are aspects of employment that employers wanted to avoid by using agency temporary staffing, however, it seemed to be a case of anybody was better than nobody in regard to waiting for agencies to provide suitable temporary staff.

The developing trend of employers creating flexible staffing from other sources could leave temporary agency workers and employment agencies in a precarious position in the job market. This trend away from using agencies, with employers becoming more self-sufficient in regard to flexible staffing was confirmed by the recruitment consultants in this study. To meet this emerging trend in the labour market, some of the recruitment consultants said they had been expanding their services so they now assist employers in recruiting people for fixed-term contracts as well as supplying temporary staff. It is likely that temporary staff who prefer long term assignments would be recruited for these roles.

To ensure that these new approaches to obtaining temporary staffing were adhered to, two of the employer representatives described how their organisations had created company guidelines to help limit managers contacting agencies for temporary staff. This involved formally evaluating human resources staff and managers according to the means by which they provide staffing cover. This evaluation had become part of their performance appraisal and hiring agency temporary staff as a first option rated poorly.

A further problem solving strategy used by many of the employers was to utilise multiple agencies rather than a single agency. In the past, employers often only needed to deal

with the one employment agency to meet all their flexible staffing needs. Now, in order to increase their chances of hiring temporary workers when they need them, they found it advantageous to deal with multiple agencies rather than using a single supplier. This removed the sole-supplier status that many individual agencies had enjoyed, and meant they now had to share their clients with other agencies.

> *We have four agencies that we use and we're actually in the process of rolling out more agencies, setting up a supplier list of more agencies which will allow for the larger pool of temps.(*Jenny, human resources manager for a large telecommunications company).

Jenny's company employs over three thousand people and found four agencies were unable to supply enough temporary staff to cover flexible staffing needs. By extending the number of suppliers, Jenny was hoping to increase the chances of being able to hire good temporary staff whenever they were required.

In such a tight labour market, client loyalty to a single agency makes little sense. In an economic climate where temporary workers are scarce, it would be easy for one client (especially a large company) to deplete an agency of temporary workers, therefore the use of multiple agencies is logical.

In summary, the examples provided in this section suggest that hiring agency temporary workers may no longer be an organisation's first choice for gaining flexible staffing in a tight labour market. The section looked at the different problem solving tactics used by the employers to help them regain control of flexible staffing, as hiring agency temporary workers was becoming a less than adequate means of satisfying their needs. These strategies were mostly of a structural nature and were perceived to be working well as they helped to provide cost-effective, extra staffing flexibility for both short and long term assignments.

Part Two

11.2 The Recruitment Consultants and Problem Solving

The compounding effects of the shortage of temporary workers, employers moving away from hiring temporary staff from agencies and a proliferation of employment agencies in the Auckland area, all resulted in serious problems for the recruitment consultants. In an effort to solve some of these problems, they used a variety of strategies. This part of the chapter looks at the ways in which the recruitment consultants tried to counteract their particular problems.

11.2.1 Retaining Current Temporary Workers and Clients

Unlike the employers' stronger position to make changes, the recruitment consultants were in a structurally weak position. Apart from following emerging trends by including recruitment and selection of employees for fixed term contracts, there was little else that agencies could do to make constructive changes to strengthen their position in the changing market. The ultimate solution would be for consultants to leave the temporary staffing industry, and interestingly, the high turnover of recruitment consultants noted on the SEEK internet website (mentioned in Chapter Nine) indicates that this may have already been happening in Auckland. In a study by Alach & Inkson (2003), the majority of temporary worker participants had noted "an acceleration in the turnover of temp consultants" in Auckland which had created problems for them trying to deal with their agencies (p.47). However, most of the consultants in this study were managers or owners, and were all still in the industry 12 months after the interviews, unlike the temporary participants.

To help the consultants cope with the new difficulties created by labour market forces, they relied on 'soft' control strategies. Almost all had come to the conclusion that fostering more personal relationships with both clients and temporary workers would be helpful in retaining these people, which would hopefully keep their agencies in business. Encouraging temporary workers to remain in the temporary staffing sector rather than opt for permanent employment meant changing the image of temporary workers, so that they might perceive themselves as being more important than 'just the temp'. The promotion

of temporary workers as ‘employees’ of the agency was meant to foster the idea that temporary work was on a par with permanent work. For the recruitment consultants, it was important that temporary workers felt some sense of belonging and would therefore want to stay in the temporary staffing sector, and more importantly stay with their particular agency.

As part of the relationship building effort, and to combat the negative image associated with being ‘just the temp’, some new titles for temporary staff were created. These titles were aimed at helping temporary workers to feel part of the agency, as well as to raise their status. Instead of referring to their temporary workers as ‘candidates’ or worse ‘job orders’, most of the recruitment consultants said they were now using new terms such as ‘employees’, ‘field staffers’ and ‘associates’. In keeping with these changes, four consultants referred to themselves as now being ‘team leaders’. These new titles were intended to engender a sense of belonging for temporary workers in order to encourage loyalty to that agency.

> *We’re now supposed to call them field staffers, but because I’ve called them temps for 20 years, it’s hard…(*Cassandra, branch manager of large global employment agency).

Despite the new titles, as the researcher I noticed the terms ‘temp’ and ‘candidate’ were mostly used during the interviews with the recruitment consultants. At the agency described above, even the award that was created to motivate temporary staff was called ‘Temp of the Month’ rather than ‘Field Staffer of the Month’!

Another ‘soft’ controlling strategy was ‘educating’ clients and temporary workers to tolerate the unsatisfactory service or poor working conditions. Many of the recruitment consultants viewed ‘education’ as the key solution to the problems they faced. “It’s an education thing” was a common phrase used when discussing the problems experienced by temporary workers in client organisations, or when they required their clients to be more patient in waiting for temporary staff to be supplied.

As agencies could do very little to change the structural conditions that had evolved in the client organisations, educating temporary workers involved helping them to view the unsatisfactory aspects of their roles in a more positive light, especially when compared to permanent work. For example, social exclusion in the organisations was portrayed as an advantage because 'office politics' can be avoided. When temporary staff complained about boring assignments, they were encouraged to tolerate the boredom because their situation is only temporary, unlike the unfortunate permanent staff who remain 'stuck' in the job. 'Educating' is slightly different to 'accepting' because it encourages temporary staff to rationalise their situation in a more positive way rather than simply accepting the problems as being part of their role. The intention behind this is that people would consider themselves fortunate to be temporary workers rather than permanent workers, and therefore prefer to remain in the temporary roles.

Temporary workers wanting flexible working hours or days were educated to be more realistic in terms of what is available.

> *We try to educate them – I tell them "the description you're giving me, it's highly unlikely that I will be able to find something to match in a short space of time, you might have to wait a month, two months, three months."* (Pauline, recruitment consultant at large global employment agency).

The education of employers involved encouraging them to be patient and wait for a temporary worker to be supplied by their agency rather than contacting a competing agency, thereby allowing more time for somebody to be found.

> *We're always trying to educate the clients to give us lots of time so we can find exactly the right person for them*. (Jodi, manager of medium sized employment agency).

It seems paradoxical that employers wanting a flexible workforce should have to provide a lot of notice to agencies in order to hire 'just in time' staff. Notice of requirements well in advance might make the situation easier for employment agencies, but this runs

counter to the concept of flexibility for employers. It seems that employers were being 'educated' to accept less control over their staffing solutions when they hire temporary staff. This tactic may have worked for a short period of time, but longer-term it does not appear to have been very successful given the variety of strategies implemented by the employers in order to better control their flexible staffing requirements.

These examples suggest that educating clients and temporary workers to tolerate unsatisfactory situations is a way in which recruitment consultants try to influence the behaviour of the other two groups in order for agencies to continue 'business as usual' in a job market that has changed. Given that this tactic involves some degree of misrepresentation, it is likely to add more weight to the already established 'car-salesman' image of recruitment consultants, eventually creating disillusionment and frustration for clients and temporary workers. However, from the recruitment consultants' perspective, this seemed a plausible strategy given their limited access to other problem solving tactics which could strengthen their positions in the temporary staffing business at that time.

As well as trying to educate clients to remain loyal to their particular agency, one agency tried to do this by 'over-delivery' of temporary workers to assignments. This scheme may seem overly optimistic given the shortage of temporary workers, but according to Eve (owner of a small employment agency), one of the reasons why employers frequently offer her temporary staff permanent jobs is because her particular agency ensures that it 'over delivers' on its temporary workers. This makes the temporary staff from that agency appear very competent to the client compared to temporary workers from other agencies.

> *We always over-deliver a temp to a job…I'd rather always over-deliver the skills to what the requirement of the job is… their confidence is high, and they're very capable and therefore a client goes "oh you're fantastic, we really like you in this job"*. (Eve, owner of small employment agency).

The strategy of over-delivery of temporary workers for employers is likely to have a negative impact on all three groups (employers, temporary workers and recruitment consultants), if used as a long-term solution. Firstly it is likely to create unrealistic employer expectations. Employers may not realise they are being given the 'top temps' even for routine work (although from some employers' accounts in this study, it is what they expect anyway). As agencies are already struggling with a shortage of good temporary staff, it is unlikely they could continue repeating this tactic for very long. Furthermore, highly skilled temporary workers doing routine and unchallenging work are likely to feel frustrated and bored, as well as feeling overqualified for the jobs. The consequence of this would probably be an unhappy person who will leave that agency or leave temporary work altogether, further eroding the agency's ability to supply good staff.

11.2.2 Finding New Temporary Workers and Clients

In addition to problem solving strategies for retaining existing clients and temporary workers, the consultants had to find ways of attracting new clients and workers in a tight job market.

One strategy involved maintaining contact with temporary staff who had left the agency to work in permanent roles. The idea behind this was that one day the worker would return to their agency for temporary work.

> *By just keeping in contact, we make sure temps come back to us, we keep up the communication.. people tend to go back to the person they know.* (Pauline, recruitment consultant at large global employment agency).

Two consultants tried to view losing one of their temporary staff to a permanent role as an opportunity for gaining future clients via that person. The rationale behind this was that the new organisation where the worker is employed might need to hire temporary staff and an agency staying in touch with a previous temporary worker could result in gaining a new client via 'word of mouth'.

In two cases, even keeping in contact with 'uncommitted' temporary staff was practiced by the consultant just in case they may know somebody who wants to become a temporary worker, which could result in their particular agency being recommended to the interested party. This contrasts with the lack of contact from agencies described by many of the temporary workers in the study. The issue of variation and contradiction of accounts between the different groups may be explained by postulating that some consultants may have tried to adapt to the economic context much more than others.

> *In this market, we're looking for referrals, so if we're looking after even uncommitted people, hopefully they'll know someone who might be committed that can help us out*. (Melanie, branch manager of large global employment agency).

Melanie also talked about 'partnering up' with younger people who had once been temporary workers but who had become permanently employed. This involved keeping in touch with them throughout their careers. Melanie's agency only operated their 'Career Partnership Programme' with younger people rather than mature people. The theory behind this was that younger people like being 'on the move' more than mature people and therefore may be attracted back to temporary work.

Trying to maintain personal connections with current and previous temporary staff is very labour intensive for agencies. The consultants believed they now needed to spend a lot more time and effort in networking in this area, an activity that was not required in the labour markets of the past.

Strategies for finding new clients involved aggressive marketing to help agencies gain 'a foot in the door' of organisations. Examples included phoning or emailing potential clients, advertising on the radio, internet and in newspapers, as well as personally approaching employers. Three recruitment consultants said they tried to find potential clients by taking note of company names on CVs when registering new candidates, or noting managers' names and contact details when performing reference checks. These were used as 'leads' for approaching employers in the hope they would become new clients. Other consultants mentioned scanning the internet job advertisement sites to

collect employers' contact details to use as marketing leads. It is easy to understand why the employers found the constant contact from recruitment consultants to be frustrating, especially given the large number of employment agencies competing with each other for business in the Auckland area at the time of the interviews.

To compensate for the extra time-consuming activities involved in marketing and networking, some agencies attempted to reduce time spent in other areas as a way of reducing costs. Four consultants described shortening the registration process of temporary workers to significantly less than the average two and a half hours, resulting in a shortened version of the checking process. Although this might have reduced time-consuming costs in one area, it had the potential to increase them in another. Limiting the time spent checking a candidate's suitability is likely to allow more unsuitable candidates to become registered as temporary workers, resulting in extra time spent replacing them for dissatisfied clients. It could be argued that this time-saving measure may have contributed to a lowering of standards in regard to candidates, eventually resulting in frustrated clients. This is a further example which demonstrates how the individual actions of one party can have unintended consequences for the other two groups, as well as for themselves.

In summary, the information presented in this section shows that the recruitment consultants used a variety of approaches to help counteract the problems they were facing in their industry. These approaches mostly involved using 'soft' control strategies such as education, networking and marketing, which were mainly time-consuming activities. Compared to employers, the recruitment consultants were in a structurally weaker position and were therefore unable to make more constructive attempts at problem solving.

Part Three

11.3 The Temporary Workers and Problem Solving

The final part of this chapter looks at the strategies the temporary workers used to counteract some of the problems they experienced in their work. The structural

conditions imposed on temporary staff at client organisations left few options for them to make any real changes to their working environment. In contrast to the problem-focused, pro-active and practically oriented strategies used by employers and to some extent the recruitment consultants, most of the temporary workers' strategies took the form of emotional or reactive coping before finally exiting their temporary roles altogether.

11.3.1 Coping with Workplace Conditions

A number of coping methods were used to help the temporary workers better tolerate their working conditions. To combat the tedium of boring assignments, eight participants used distraction behaviours such as looking at the internet or listening to music. Others employed psychological strategies such as reminding themselves that the job was not permanent or by turning the negative experience of performing mundane tasks into a positive experience by viewing it as an opportunity to mentally 'switch off' and withdraw from reality.

> *There is a joy in doing mindless stuff, and that is your mind is free, think about it like that, and it doesn't last forever.* (Donna).

Donna's advice might be easy to do while on a short-term assignment, but for long-term assignments, it would probably be a less effective coping mechanism.

In order to cope with social alienation at work, three participants viewed it as an opportunity to avoid office politics. This way of thinking seemed to compensate for being socially excluded and was certainly a coping mechanism encouraged by several of the recruitment consultants. Other temporary workers said they accepted that social exclusion was simply part of their role and that temporary workers would always be treated differently to permanent staff. Being ignored by permanent staff when on short-term assignments was expected by most of the temporary workers, and for some the preference for aloofness was mutual.

Although three participants had chosen temporary work specifically because they did not want any commitment to the one organisation, others gradually developed similar ideas

as a way of counteracting feelings of marginalisation. They viewed the companies where they worked as having no investment in them as workers, and that employers and permanent staff saw them as being nameless people or 'just the temp'. They reacted to this by suppressing any feelings of commitment they might have to the organisation.

> *They were calling me ' the temp' and I thought, after tonight I'm going home but you still have to work here. It was like you didn't have ownership of the role. It felt weird at first, it took quite a while to get into that mind-set of it. (*Anne).

This suggests that temporary staff cope with feeling marginalised in the organisations by withdrawing any feelings of commitment. Employers may not realise that the deliberate withdrawal of commitment to a client organisation by temporary workers may have evolved as a coping strategy for feelings of alienation.

Feeling superior to permanent staff was another way that some temporary workers tried to cope with marginalisation, especially participants with tertiary qualifications.

> *I wouldn't want to sound condescending, but they are pretty uneducated, so I'm not really upset about not going to lunch with them…and I do think there is some jealousy because I have more prospects than they do.* (Gina).

Gina's comment demonstrates the type of compensatory thoughts that temporary workers might apply as a coping mechanism to help tolerate being socially excluded by permanent staff. These examples show that the problem solving strategies used by the temporary workers were mainly reactive and of an emotional nature, as their ability to make any real changes were limited given their rigidly structured positions within the temporary staffing sector. In view of the application of these strategies by temporary workers, it could be argued that some of the recruitment consultants' 'educational' tactics had been successful.

11.3.2 Coping with Financial Problems

Not all the temporary workers' problem solving strategies were reactive or of an emotional nature. Because of uncertainty around availability of assignments, most participants engaged in practical and pro-active problem solving methods when it came to finances. Five participants had regular part-time jobs in the evenings or weekends which created financial cover should there be no temporary assignments available, and most made sure they had some savings put aside to live on.

> *I always organise my money to have enough, in case I'm sick or because of my experience with fluctuating work. I'm really used to having a couple of weeks of work and then nothing.* (Sarah).

Although the temporary workers were very limited in their ability to make any changes at the client organisations in order to improve their working conditions, when it came to their own financial savings, they did have some personal control. Despite the insecurity of temporary work, the majority of participants were able to save enough to cover periods when no assignments were available.

Fifteen temporary workers said they preferred long-term assignments because of the increased financial security they usually provided. In order to help expand the duration of their assignments, two of the younger participants described working extra hard in order to be viewed as being very valuable workers by the clients.

> *The assignment I'm now on is for two months, and I've made sure I'm a very valuable person they wouldn't want to let go, so they've just extended me through to December.(*Jane).

Other participants registered with multiple agencies as a way of trying to increase their chances of being offered work. As agencies tend to look after their 'exclusive temps' by offering any available assignments to them first, this could be a counterproductive move, as multi-registered temporary workers might miss out altogether. On the other hand, in a

strong labour market, all temporary workers are likely to be viewed as being valuable to agencies.

As well as organising some financial cover for themselves, these examples show how temporary workers can engage in pro-active strategies to help them better cope with the financial uncertainty often associated with temporary work.

11.3.3 Leaving Temporary Work

The most obvious solution to the problems of temporary work is to leave and become a permanent employee. This was eventually the action taken by the majority of the temporary worker participants interviewed. As mentioned in Chapter Six, when I contacted the temporary workers twelve months after the interviews, Sarah was the only participant still working in a temporary role. All of the other participants had left temporary staffing, most of them to take up permanent work. This did not surprise me given the level of unhappiness evident in the interviews.

In support of previous New Zealand studies (Alach, 2001; Alach & Inkson, 2003; Casey & Alach, 2004), the majority of temporary workers in this study chose to be in a temporary role. However, unlike these earlier studies, most of the temporary workers in this study were not satisfied with the temporary employment arrangement and could only really solve the problems they encountered by leaving temporary staffing altogether. The strong economic climate in Auckland at the time of the interviews made it easy for people to move out of temporary work and into permanent work. However, an economic downturn could have created a different scenario. If fewer permanent jobs had been available, many of the participants could have continued to be unhappy temporary workers.

In summary, the coping strategies used by the temporary workers involved trying to change the way they viewed the unsatisfactory working conditions they experienced in the organisations. More practical coping mechanisms within the temporary workers' sphere of personal control involved financial resourcefulness and registering at multiple

employment agencies. Ultimately of course, most solved the problem altogether by leaving.

11.4 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the ways in which each of the three groups tried to manage the problems they faced in their respective positions in the temporary staffing industry. Each group used different approaches in trying to cope with problems. Being in the strongest position of the three groups to make constructive changes, the employers were able to utilise a structural approach, making changes in their own companies which would allow them flexible staffing arrangements without having to solely rely on employment agencies to provide this. The main strategies they used seemed to be effective in that they afforded employers more control covering short-term and long-term assignments without paying agency fees.

The recruitment consultants tended to use 'softer' control mechanisms as they could not use the sort of constructive problem solving tactics available to employers because of their structurally weaker position as intermediaries. Using tactics such as 'educating' people to accept and tolerate unsatisfactory situations were not likely to last as long-term solutions. Other 'softer' approaches such as changing the titles of temporary workers, or referring to themselves as 'team leaders' were attempts to retain existing staff or attract new people into temporary work by promoting it as being akin to permanent work, which it is not.

The approach taken by the temporary workers was of a different nature again. Many of their responses to problems were at an emotional level. Being unable to change the structure of their work environment, the only changes they could put into place were distraction or a cognitive shift in how they perceived their situations. In other words, some of the changes they made took place in their own minds.

Regardless of their particular coping mechanisms, most of the temporary workers eventually chose not to remain in their unsatisfactory work situations. Leaving temporary work altogether seemed to be one of the few active options available to them, and it was

precisely this action that helped to compound the problems experienced by employment agencies and employers.

The information in this chapter demonstrates that major changes had taken place in the Auckland job market during the years 2006 and 2007. Both employers and temporary workers had begun moving away from employment agencies, changing the power base in the three-way relationship. An abundance of permanent work in Auckland at that time provided alternative options for those who were no longer prepared to tolerate the problems involved in being temporary workers. Despite attempts made by the recruitment consultants to remedy the situation, this study has shown that the clerical temporary staffing business in Auckland at that time was not working well for any of the three players. As most recruitment consultants' pay is commission based, it is likely that many consultants working in the temporary sector may have needed to consider other job options. In support of this, at the time of the interviews, there seemed to be a high turn-over of recruitment consultants in Auckland suggesting that this group may have also dealt with the tensions in the industry by leaving.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter summarises the key findings, discusses their implications and provides recommendations for further research. The main purpose of this research was to explore the triangular working relationship between temporary workers, temporary staffing agencies and their client organisations. The study's aims were to describe the differing aims, expectations and behaviours of employers, recruitment consultants and temporary clerical workers; to analyse the working relationship between these three groups and to interpret the ways in which a buoyant labour market influenced the interactions between them, and finally, to interpret female temporary workers' subjective experiences of clerical agency work from a psychological perspective.

12.1 Core Theoretical Issues Arising From the Study

Three key theoretical issues are illustrated by this study. Firstly, the complex interdependencies between the three different groups in the agency temporary labour market, secondly, the ways in which the different forms of structural power available to each group limited or influenced the actions of that group, and thirdly, the ways in which each group was influenced or limited by the economic conditions at the time of the study.

The first key theoretical point which this research illustrates is that employers, recruitment consultants and temporary workers have a complex and interdependent three-way relationship. In consequence, the actions of any one group were influenced or constrained by the activities of the other two groups. Whilst the degree of dependency between the three parties, and the ways in which each group influenced the other players, shifted according to the vagaries of the labour market, their actions remained interlinked. The different actors in this dynamic scenario behaved purposively and rationally in pursuit of their own interests. However, all three sets of actors operated within conditions which were not of their own choosing and where their actions created unintended consequences as their efforts to achieve their own goals were thwarted by the actions of the other players.

Financial outcomes were particularly affected by the interdependent three-way relationship. Expectations around financial gain or cost-cutting were often constrained for each group as a result of the actions of the other two parties. Employers often believed that agency fees were too high, and therefore negotiated lower fees. This led to financial difficulties for agencies, especially as good temporary workers expected higher pay-rates. Poor pay-rates for temporary workers created fewer high calibre temporary workers which could indirectly cause financial problems for clients and agencies. The result of these three-way interactions was that all groups could experience some financial loss.

The consequences of each groups' actions were not always predictable to them and tended to create a labour market environment which all participants found unsatisfactory in different ways. As the original aims of each group of participants were hindered by the moves of the other two parties, the interactions between them formed a constantly shifting network of unsatisfactory interdependencies. In an effort to either limit or break the interdependent three-way relationship, each group attempted to take charge of their situation via a variety of problem solving strategies. As demonstrated in Chapter Eleven, many of these solutions failed to work satisfactorily, often creating detrimental effects for the other groups. Even the action of breaking the interdependent relationship altogether by moving away from the temporary staffing business continued to create a negative impact on others who remained part of it.

As well as the interactions of the groups creating difficulties, expectations between the three groups often tended to be unrealistic, with both the employers and consultants expecting a great deal from temporary staff yet providing relatively little in return.

The relationship between employers, the consultants and their temporary workers was largely transactional in nature rather than relational. Overall, the temporary workers tended to prefer a more socio-emotional rather than transactional relationship with both the recruitment consultants and within the client organisations. These findings lend some support to the idea that a working relationship based on a social exchange approach rather than transactional can have a positive influence on agency workers' levels of affective

commitment towards both the agency and the client organisation (Lapaime, Simard & Tremblay, 2010; Svensson & Wolven, 2010, Veitch & Cooper-Thomas, 2009).

Many of the temporary workers in the study felt let down by the agencies as their consultants were often reluctant to negotiate higher hourly pay rates with clients on their behalf or support them in difficult situations at the client organisation. In terms of psychological contract theory, this often resulted in the temporary workers' reduced affective commitment towards the agency, thus lending some support to findings in the literature (Biggs & Swailes, 2006; Liden ,Wayne, Kraimer & Sparrowe, 2003).

The second key theoretical point which this research illustrates is that power is a relational concept which was exercised through the inter-relationship among the different players. The actions of each group of participants were constrained or influenced by the shifting structural power of their positions in the temporary staffing industry. The three parties drew upon different, shifting and unequal forms of structural power. According to Giddens (1984), the exercise of power between different social groups involves a continuously shifting 'dialectic of control' in which the different parties draw upon various structural resources to achieve specific goals. This view of power interprets it as a relative rather than an absolute phenomenon and implies that under-powered groups still have the ability to exercise some degree of counter-control. This was evident in the study as some temporary workers were using the agency temporary work environment to actively pursue other career-related goals, which they achieved with varying degrees of success. This demonstrates that even people in the least powerful positions can manipulate an environment in order to manoeuvre themselves into more desirable positions, lending support to Alach's espousal of the 'entrepreneurial temp' (2001).

The temporary staffing business is primarily structured around providing flexibility for organisations. What was clearly demonstrated in the study is that flexibility became compromised for all three groups by the shifting structural positions of power within this industry at the time of the interviews. The employers expected flexibility because previous labour market conditions had made it relatively easy for temporary staffing agencies to meet their requirements. However, because of a weakening in their structural

position, both employers and temporary staffing agencies had lost some control and therefore rather than gain full flexibility, the employers themselves had to become flexible (although the degree of flexibility they were prepared to tolerate was limited). The employers were only prepared to make structural changes within their organisations in order to help themselves rather than to try to accommodate either of the other two parties of the triangular relationship. Altering their organisational structure by hiring agency temporary workers for part-time or flexible working hours was not considered as a possibility for retaining flexible staffing via agencies. This was in spite of the availability of agency temporary workers to provide this. From the employers' perspective, flexible staffing cover from agencies was supposed to be for full-time hours, and it was this mind-set of how the temporary staffing industry should operate that limited them from seeing other possibilities.

Like the employers, the agencies' structural positions as providers of organisational flexibility had weakened, resulting in a loss of control which forced them also to become more flexible. This study has shown that there is a link between flexibility, structural power and financial circumstances. Financial difficulties can mean less control, and this is what happened with the agencies. Although temporary workers had more power than they had in the past, they still remained the most underpowered group. As a consequence of this shifting power in the industry, all three players experienced some loss of control and flexibility.

The movement of structural power within the temporary staffing industry was shaped by the third core issue illustrated by this research. The third key theoretical point is how each group was influenced or limited by the economic conditions at the time of the study. The Auckland labour market environment has changed considerably within the relatively short time since the three groups of participants were interviewed, highlighting the importance of locating research findings within the specific labour market context in which they occur. As covered in the literature review, researchers have observed that the temporary staffing industry is influenced by economic cycles (Biggs, 2006; De Graaf-Ziji & Berkout, 2007; Peck & Theordore, 2007). Demand for temporary workers generally increases in the last phase of a recession and the first stage of a recovery, when

permanent staff have been cut back but business activity is increasing. As the economic recovery continues, agencies experience increasing difficulty meeting employer demands for suitably trained temporary staff because most job-seekers prefer the stability and better conditions of permanent work. As a result of this, employers are forced to meet their need for flexible staffing in other ways, making less use of agency mediated staff in the final phases of the business cycle.

This pattern is clearly observable in the data presented in this thesis, with employers seeking alternatives to temporary agency staffing because of problems with supply. Although the majority of temporary workers chose to work in temporary roles, they eventually opted for the stability of permanent employment, the buoyant Auckland labour market making this relatively easy for them to do. This shows how economic conditions can impact on participants' behaviour, making it important that the findings of this study are viewed within the economic context at the time of the interviews.

Newspaper articles as well as informal talks with Auckland employers and agencies over the past year have attested to the significant changes that have taken place in just under two years since the interviews took place. According to James Russell (an editor of the Career Section of the *New Zealand Herald*), the years 2000 to 2008 were part of "the greatest economic boom in history" (*New Zealand Herald*, 16th December, 2009, D1). Most of the recruitment consultant participants said they had never experienced such a tight labour market before in Auckland, even though several of them had been working in the temporary staffing industry for over ten years, lending some support to Russell's claim above.

The interviews for this study took place during this boom period, from September 2006 to June 2007. However, by the end of 2008, the New Zealand economic landscape looked very different as a recession followed the boom, highlighting the speed with which the temporary staffing industry can change. During this time, a newspaper article reported that "candidates were now lining up at the door" literally begging for temporary work at the agencies (*New Zealand Herald*, December 19th, 2008, p. A2). Since the interviews for this study were carried out, the Auckland labour market has shifted to one in which

employment agencies have a rapidly increasing supply of temporary workers but with diminishing employer demand for their labour. The interdependent power relationships between the three parties have therefore shifted once more, with employers gaining power and temporary workers becoming more vulnerable to the vagaries of the labour market.

All of the three core theoretical issues discussed in this section (the interdependencies between the three groups, the shifting structural positions of power within the temporary labour market and the economic context) are interlinked. Changes in the economy created a labour market environment which challenged the traditional structure of the temporary staffing industry. This structure was based on providing organisational flexibility as its top priority, however, maintaining this had become compromised due to economic changes. The result was a shift in power of the structural positions within the temporary staffing industry. In consequence, the actions taken by each group to rectify their particular set of problems only aggravated the situation for others given the interlinked relationship of the three groups. This curbed the manoeuvrability of each group, creating outcomes which were often unsatisfactory for all parties. The implication of this scenario is that in a buoyant labour market, the temporary staffing industry does not work at an optimal level for any of the three players involved.

12.2 The Subjective Experiences of Temporary Workers

One of the specific aims of this study was to describe female clerical temporary workers' subjective experiences of their work from a psychological perspective. The data collected from this study supports previous research suggesting that temporary workers' psychological health can be negatively affected by their roles (Gallie et al., 1998; Lasfargues et al., 1999; Martens et al., 1999; Virtanen et al, 2005).

There was some evidence to suggest that each of Jahoda's (1988) five latent benefits of work (structured time, meaningful tasks, social interaction, status and a sense of belonging) were compromised for many of the temporary workers in the study. Although the financial uncertainty of temporary work to some extent compromised the manifest benefit of earning a regular income, the lack of latent benefits in their work environment

seemed to create the most emotional distress for the participants. The structure of the temporary role itself presented few opportunities for them to improve their working conditions in the client organisations.

In a review of the empirical research on agency temporary work, Hall (2006) concludes that agency work (at least from the perspective of the workers) is a marginalised and inferior form of employment. The present study supports this claim as there were many examples of marginalisation, including temporary staff having inferior pay, treatment and conditions compared to their permanent counterparts.

Performing meaningful tasks was a latent benefit that often seemed compromised for the temporary workers. Assignments were described as mainly monotonous and non-challenging (often involving jobs that permanent staff did not want to do), and with few possibilities for skill utilisation. These results support findings from other studies (Burgess et al., 2001; Hall, 2006; Rogers, 2000). Although there was some evidence of temporary staff being trained at the client organisations, this seemed mainly to be based on employers' expectations of being able to rehire these same workers at a later date, viewing the time spent training as a future investment for the company. In other words, employers were expecting the same benefits from a temporary workforce that they have in a permanent workforce, but without the associated risks, costs and responsibilities.

Henson (1996) claims that social contact with others at work can help lessen the tedium of performing monotonous tasks. If this is the case, then some awareness on the part of employers of how the social structure of work can impact on temporary staff would be helpful. Physically placing temporary workers amongst permanent staff (especially when temporary staff are performing monotonous tasks) is likely to provide some opportunities for social contact, rather than physically isolating them from others.

Another stressor for temporary workers is the lack of belonging or support they receive from others in their working environment (Gonzalez, 2003; Rogers, 1995). In the present study, the lack of emotional connection at work was apparent, temporary workers frequently being on their own and having little support from recruitment consultants, the

staff at client organisations, unions or fellow temporary workers. This situation was particularly difficult for those participants who valued being part of a team as it emphasised their position as company outsiders.

On a more positive note, longer term assignments were noted by all participants as being a developing trend which could often provide more variety of work as well as more social interaction for temporary workers. A continuation of this trend would likely help to alleviate some of the stressors experienced by temporary staff.

Overall, findings in the literature (Gonzalez, 2003; Rogers, 1995; Richards, 2000; Smith, 1998) and the results of my study imply that the latent benefits of work can often be compromised for people working as clerical agency temporary staff. As a consequence of this, their emotional well-being may be adversely affected. Given the range of negative experiences described by temporary workers in this study, it may seem difficult to understand why they claimed a preference for temporary work. As mentioned in the literature review, Henson (1996) attempted to explain why some temporary clerical workers say they prefer temporary work because of the flexibility it provides, yet are unable to provide examples of how they actually benefit from it. He suggests that the notion of temporary work being able to provide 'lifestyle' for workers is so often promoted by agencies that temporary workers come to believe this, regardless of a lack of evidence to support it in their everyday working lives. Whether this is true or not, in this study, the participants' preference for temporary work turned out to be short-lived.

Although the temporary role may have the potential to be harmful to some workers' psychological health, it is important to remember that temporary work is often temporary in the literal sense, with much research showing that people do not tend to stay long term in this employment arrangement, and can find the temporary staffing industry to be a 'stepping stone' into permanent work (Alach, 2001; Brogan, 2001; Casey & Alach, 2004; Lenz, 1996; Peck & Theodore, 1998; Tucker, 2002). In the present study, most of the temporary workers were offered permanent jobs at the client organisations lending support to the 'stepping stone' metaphor. However, many of these jobs involved routine clerical type work, and were often turned down by the participants. In a recession, such

permanent jobs would certainly be better than being unemployed, and probably better than being in a temporary role, as in a recession, temporary jobs are often the first to be terminated.

Despite the few examples of self-directed temporary workers in the study, the temporary staffing industry itself creates a work environment which tends to disempower the temporary clerical agency worker both financially and psychologically. This was clearly evident in the experiences described by many of the temporary workers in regard to their unsatisfactory working conditions.

12.3 Limitations of the Study

The fact that the main findings cannot be generalised because they were influenced by the economic context in New Zealand at that time is a limitation of the study. The same study undertaken in a recession would likely provide differing results.

A further limitation of the study is the fact that the focus of the topic changed during the interviewing stage. In some ways this was also a strength as it provided some interesting and valuable findings. However, changing the focus of the study also limited my research design in some ways as I did not interview the three sets of participants simultaneously (I interviewed them in the order of one group at a time). Additionally, the number of participants may have been more aligned if the focus of the topic had not changed.

A further limitation of the study is the fact that the individuals who made up the three sets of participants were not directly connected with each other in their everyday working lives but merely represented the three positions in the temporary staffing industry. However, as mentioned in Chapter Six, there was some small degree of overlap between the groups.

12.4 Application of the Findings in New Zealand

This research has shown that clerical agency temporary staff are marginalised workers in New Zealand, therefore it is important to consider how these results may be of some benefit to this occupational group.

In July 2007, the New Zealand Employment Relations (Flexible Working Hours) Amendment Act came into effect. This allows permanent workers to approach their employers to negotiate changing their working hours if their situations require it. Employers need to base their decision on changing an employee's hours on whether or not their company can accommodate the change. It is not known how this new legislation might impact on the temporary staffing business. It is possible that an agency advertising flexible hours to attract job-seekers for temporary work would not be so appealing if permanent work might also provide access to flexible working hours. In fact, given the tension relating to the issue of flexibility of hours for temporary workers in this study, it could be argued that permanent staff may be better placed for securing the hours they want to work compared to temporary staff. Job-seekers wanting flexible hours may view permanent work as being able to provide opportunities to combine work and 'lifestyle' pursuits without contemplating the idea of temporary work. If this were the case, it could reduce the number of people exposed to the poor conditions of temporary work, however, this is not likely to make the conditions of the role any better.

New UK legislation aims to address the problem of agency temporary workers being financially disadvantaged in the workforce. It is important for employment legislators in New Zealand to observe the effects of changes occurring overseas and to look at implementing such legislation here too if it could improve the welfare of this occupational group. As mentioned in the literature review, the Agency Workers Directive Act in the UK has recently been put before the British Parliament. This legislation would provide agency temporary workers with pay and benefits equal to permanent staff in the hiring company after 12 weeks in an assignment. Although there has been a lot of union pressure to introduce the legislation as soon as possible, there was also much resistance from professional organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (Berry, 2009; Green, 2009).

Many believe that this legislation will have the effect of limiting job opportunities for the workers that it seeks to protect and will be a direct threat to the temporary staffing industry in the UK (Berry, 2009; Green, 2009). If temporary staff legally have to be paid

the same hourly rate as permanent workers in the hiring company, then the cost of using agency staff is likely to increase, which could result in fewer employers using agencies for temporary staffing. According to Peck & Theodore (2007), it has never been in the business interest of temporary staffing agencies to 'absorb' any associated costs in a difficult economy, therefore they tend to pass costs on "in a downstream direction" to their temporary staff and away from clients (p.190). In other words, it is temporary workers who usually bear the costs through static or lower pay rates (which was evident in my study). However, with the Agency Workers Directive Act, this could not be the case, as by law, a temporary worker's rate of pay has to be the same as that of a permanent counterpart in the hiring client's company. This would of course place temporary staffing agencies in a difficult situation as they would need to either carry this extra cost themselves or raise their clients' fees which could mean less business.

Due to strong opposition, the British Government has postponed the implementation of the Agency Workers Directive Act until October 2011. This shows how difficult it can be to introduce changes in legislation that would benefit temporary workers without it being viewed as a serious threat by those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo of the temporary staffing industry. For this reason it is important that New Zealand legislators keep a close eye on further developments in regard to this particular UK legislation.

Although improving a temporary worker's pay may be a step in the right direction, the results from my study indicate that it is the structural conditions of the temporary role itself that cause most emotional distress for temporary workers, depriving them of many of the latent benefits of work. Employers and managers need to be more aware of how temporary workers are treated at a personal level in their organisations. As many managers are now required by companies to have tertiary qualifications in Business Studies, I would suggest that New Zealand university papers on management provide some focus on how agency temporary staff could be better integrated within client organisations, rather than being differentiated from permanent staff.

An emphasis on 'healthy work' via management training and qualifications may help to increase employers' awareness of the emotional well-being of their staff. However, as temporary workers are often perceived as being 'company outsiders', the focus of 'healthy work' would possibly tend to be on mainstream (permanent) employees, overlooking agency temporary staff because they are the employees, and therefore the responsibility of the agency.

12.5 Practical Implications for Employers, Agencies and Temporary Workers

In light of the results from this study, a practical implication for employers is that they could make more of an effort to treat the temporary workers they hire in a welcoming and inclusive way. For example, helping temporary workers to form social links with the permanent staff and the inclusion of temporary staf in more training events. In support of these suggestions, results from a recent study (Veitch & Cooper-Thomas, 2009) indicate that a temporary worker's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in client organisations, can impact on whether the worker decides to remain in temporary staffing or seek a permanent position. In other words, temporary agency staff who are treated well in the client organisations are more likely to remain as temporary workers. Those who are treated poorly are more likely to leave the temporary agency workforce altogether and move into the permanent workforce instead.

Similarly, temporary employment agencies could provide better personal support for their temporary workers, especially if the temporary worker is on a long-term assignment in a client organisation when there is often little communication between the agency and the temporary worker. It is on the longer term assignments that a permanent worker is likely to be offered a permanent position which if accepted, would mean the loss of a valuable resource for the agency. Therefore, fostering a temporary worker's affective commitment to the agency via genuine personal support is likely to retain that worker for a longer period in the temporary staffing sector, even in a buoyant labour market when there are plenty of permanent jobs available. Ideally, with both agencies and client organisations, generating a more personal relationship with temporary workers would need to be an ongoing activity rather than something that only occurs when temporary workers are in short supply.

The practical implication of this study's findings for temporary workers is that they need to have some self-awareness of their individual preference to the type of relationship they want with their agencies and client organisations. Most of the temporary workers in this study seemed to prefer a more personal socio-emotional relationship with both their consultants and with those they encountered at the client organisations. In fact, the issue of social alienation was described by many of the temporary worker participants as being the most distressing feature of their temporary roles. In view of the structural conditions of agency temporary work, it is more likely to suit workers who are more comfortable with a transactional rather than a personal relationship with both their agencies and the client organisations.

12.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Choosing a qualitative framework for this study has resulted in a large amount of rich and detailed information provided by a relatively small number of participants. Based on the findings of the study, some suggestions are offered for further investigation into the topic of temporary work situations in New Zealand.

A similar study, but based in a time of economic recession in Auckland rather than in an economic boom period would be useful. This might identify different types of problems experienced by each party in the triangular working relationship, and could be compared to the problems documented in this study.

Similar research into the experiences of different occupational groups, such as agency temporary workers in more professional roles, (for example, information technology specialists), exploring their working relationship with employers and agencies would be interesting given their higher status in the labour market compared to clerical workers.

Another possible topic for future research could be comparing the experiences of direct hire temporary workers with those of agency temporary workers. Direct hire temporary workers and employers do not have an agency as a mediating partner, and it would be interesting to see whether these internal temporary workers experience the same issues as agency temporary workers. As direct hire temporary workers are employed by the

organisation rather than by an agency, issues such as commitment to the organisation, social alienation and general working conditions may be experienced differently from that of agency temporary workers.

In the rich data provided by this research, there is the suggestion that the recruitment consultants were often very stressed with their role as intermediaries between clients and temporary workers. Building on the present study, research looking more closely at the subjective experiences of this specific occupational group from a psychological perspective may help to expand the literature on temporary staffing in New Zealand. Despite the difficulties of the temporary workers in the study, they always had the option of moving into permanent work. As the researcher, I believe it was the consultants who were experiencing the toughest time out of the three groups in the study, as six of these participants were owners or managers of small employment agencies and were obviously struggling to survive in a very difficult and competitive environment.

Another possible topic for future research is looking at how permanent staff perceive temporary agency staff coming into their organisations within differing economic contexts. Given the temporary workers' descriptions of hostility towards them by permanent staff, research comparing and contrasting permanent workers' perceptions of temporary workers during a recession and also during a healthy economy, could make an interesting contribution to New Zealand literature on temporary staffing.

In New Zealand, the Employment Relations Act came into effect on 1st March 2009, but only applies to companies employing less than twenty staff. This law states that a company can trial a new employee for a 90 day period, with the employer being able to dismiss the employee during this time-frame without the employee being able to take any action on the basis of unfair dismissal. As this study suggests that some employers deliberately hire agency temporary workers on a trial basis before offering permanent employment, it is possible that this new legislation could result in less business for temporary staffing agencies. However, it could also have a positive impact for agencies, as there would perhaps be fewer 'temp to perm' offers by clients to temporary workers,

meaning that agencies would lose fewer good temporary staff to permanent job offers from clients. This too is a further area for future research.

In conclusion, this study has made a unique contribution to existing research on the temporary staffing industry in New Zealand. It has addressed a gap in New Zealand literature by investigating the interdependent relationships between the three groups of people who make up the triangular working relationship. Overall, the findings indicate that in a buoyant labour market, the temporary staffing industry does not operate well for any of the three parties involved. More importantly, findings from the study suggest that improving the quality of working conditions within client organisations for clerical agency temporary workers is likely to have a positive psychological effect on this occupational group, regardless of the state of the current labour market.

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Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet for Temporary Workers

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

PROJECT TITLE: Women's Experiences of Temporary Work

Who is conducting this study
My name is Doreen Davy and I am completing a PhD in psychology through Massey University. Before I began my study in psychology, for a period of time I worked with a variety of women based in a clerical setting. Because of this experience, and my observations from that time, I have developed a specific interest in researching women working in the clerical sector.

My research supervisors are Jocelyn Handy, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology, Massey University at Palmerston North and Dianne Gardner, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology, Massey University in Albany.

Who can take part
As well as being females, the participants need to be working as a temp in an office/clerical role such as receptionist or secretary, or have been in this position at any time during the last six months. The temp role needs to be via one or more private employment agencies and can be part-time or full-time.

What this study is about
This study focuses on the experiences of women who work as temps in a clerical setting. As there have been so many changes in the last few years involving how clerical work is done, for example continuing changes in computing, it is important to find out how this is impacting on the women doing this type of work. The temping industry is increasing as research shows that more employers are hiring temp staff, therefore it is important to find out how people experience this type of employment. It is hoped that the information gained from this research will assist practitioners working in this area in further understanding how changes in the workforce can affect people's lives at a personal and psychological level. The overall findings may be published in an academic journal.

What you would agree to do
If you are willing to take part, all you need to do is complete an interview with me. In the interview we will talk about your perceptions of work and your experiences working as an office temp. The interview will be like a conversation and will take us approximately an hour to complete.

Appendix A (continued)

Participant Information Sheet for Temporary Workers

Protecting your confidentiality
The recorded interview will be transcribed by myself. The tapes (and transcripts) will not have your name on them, you will be identified by a pseudonym. Your tape and transcript will be stored securely and will be destroyed at the end of the research, or the original tape and transcript can be returned to you. If the research is to be published, a copy of the transcript will be kept for 5 years at Massey University, but you may have the original tape and transcript if you wish. It will not be possible to identify you from any reports that are prepared in the study. The information you give me will be used for my research only.

My research supervisors will also have access to the tapes and transcripts, but is bound by the same confidentiality agreement that I am.

Your rights as a participant in this research
If you agree to take part in the study, you have the right:

- to ask any questions about the study at any time
- to refuse to answer any particular questions
- to withdraw from the study at any time
- to ask for the tape-recorder to be turned off at any time
- to provide all information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher and research supervisor
- to be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded

How to contact me
You are welcome to contact me at any time during the study for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

My contact details are:
Doreen Davy
Telephone (09) 4139-869 or
Email ddavy@xtra.co.nz.

My supervisors' contact details are:
Dr Jocelyn Handy
Telephone (06) 350 5799 extn 2055 or
Email J.A.Handy@massey.ac.nz.

Dr Dianne Gardner
Telephone: (09) 414 0800 ext. 41225
Email: D.H.Gardner@massey.ac.nz

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

PROJECT TITLE: Women's Experiences of Temporary Work

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that only a pseudonym will be used regarding any reference to me.

(The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project).

I agree/I do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Temporary Workers

- **Demographics:** - Age, marital status, children?

- **Career:** - History, type of work, qualifications, skills, training?

- **Temping**: - Type of work, how you came to do this type of work, original aims, preferred choice, how is this work different to what you expected? Current expectations?

- **Finance/Benefits** - Income and benefits – adequate to cover all needs, ability to save, treats, how does it compare to permanent workers' pay, benefits, holiday/sick pay, feelings of security, asking for a pay increase, future prospects in being a temp?

- **Social Aspect of Temping** – advantages and disadvantages, who do you lunch with, being part of office celebrations, being included, social camaraderie at work, temp evenings, meeting other temps, forming friendships at work, invited to Christmas party?

- **Hours of Work,** advantages and disadvantages, planning, routine, how much notice about assignments from agency, length of assignments, how much free time do you have and how is it spent, how does temping impact on planning hobbies, outings, childcare, etc

- **Assignments**, type of work, interesting/challenging/boring, advantages and disadvantages, keeping up to date with computer software programmes, do you feel overqualified for the assignment tasks, could your skills become obsolete if not being used on regular basis, length of assignments (personal preferences)?

- **Team Work**, sense of belonging, being part of the team, advantages and disadvantages, do you participate in training programmes or staff meetings at the organisations, how organised are the client companies when you arrive, i.e. desk, logon, somebody to set you up with the assignment tasks, proximity to others?

- **Feeling Valued,** do you feel valued in organisations, any 'just the temp' perception from others, perceptions of self, disadvantages and advantages in being stereotyped as 'just the temp', do you feel valued at the agency?

- **Problems encountered** - types of problems, strategies for dealing with problems?

Appendix C (continued)

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Temporary Workers

- **Personal Autonomy** – flexibility, choosing own hours and assignments, being able to plan your 'lifestyle' around work, are you able to leave a job you do not like, in what ways can the temp be 'enterprising' or 'entrepreneurial', how does temping compare with standard (permanent) employment, is temping what you would like to do long-term (i.e. being a career temp), how easy/difficult is it to move into permanent work?

- **Relationships**- with agency, overall experience, feeling supported by agency, any permanent work ever offered by agency, turning down offers of assignments, meeting other temps, commitment to agencies, enough work offered, Relationships with Employers: - overall experience, relationship with permanent staff at organisations, job offers at the organisations, training provided at organisation or agency, attitudes, positive experiences, negative experiences, discrimination, commitment to the organisations, temp's role in three way working relationship?

- **Psychological well-being** – Sleep, appetite, happiness, self-confidence, stress, feel that you are playing a useful part in things, ability to concentrate, stress, do you enjoy your work, what would you change if you could,?

- **Conclusions** - Advice for others, worst aspects, best aspects, trends, perceptions of what qualities makes the best temp, future hopes?

- **Closing Comments**
  Any issues that may not have been covered?

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Recruitment Agents

- **Clerical temp workers** – ideal candidates, qualities required, skills required, current trends, permanent job offers from clients, are temps ever found permanent work by the agency, how do older and younger temps compare?

- **Finance/Benefits** – pay rates compared to permanent staff. Benefits such as holiday pay, sick leave, pay increase, OSH issues, do they ever ask for pay in advance, what happens if a temp is sick during an assignment, how do you recognise or reward excellent temps, any performance appraisal?

- **Social Aspects** – How much social contact does the temp have at the organisations or via the employment agency (i.e. temp evenings), any advantages or disadvantages of the social aspects of temping?

- **Hours of Work** – Flexibility for temps – hours, days, assignments, locations, how quickly does the agency need to respond to a company's request for a clerical temp, temps with children – how do they manage with short notice of assignments?

- **Assignments** – What types of assignments, varied work/ challenging work/ boring work, training and keeping up to date,

- **Feeling Valued –** Marginalised workers or enterprising individuals, "just the temp" perception within the organisation, how deferential does the temp need to be at the organisation? How would a temping CV be viewed in job market?

- **Autonomy –** Any ways in which a temp can be entrepreneurial or enterprising, any negative consequences for a temp who is 'fussy' about assignments or who 'walks out' of an organisation because she does not like the work or the supervisor?

Appendix D (continued)

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Recruitment Agents

- **Perceived Responsibilities towards the Temp**
  What are the agencies perceived responsibilities towards the welfare of the temp, financially, psychologically and physically? References?

- **Problems in the Temp Staffing Industry**
  Shortage of temps? Economic climate, past and present, How does this affect your role (with temps and with clients?) Any significant increase in employment agencies, impact of this on agency, Problem solving methods?

- **Aims/Expectations**
  Original aims, current expectations?

- **The Triangular Working Relationship**
  How do you see your position in this three way working relationship, relationship with employers/temps?

- **Closing Comments**
  Any issues that may not have been covered?

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Employers

- **Clerical temporary workers** – How often do you hire clerical temps and for what reasons, ideal clerical temps, qualities required, skills required, offers of permanent work to temps, how do older and younger temps compare, what are advantages and disadvantages of hiring temps, do the agencies send the 'right' temps for the job?

- **Finances/Benefits** – Hourly rate paid to agency for clerical temp, overtime for a temp, other benefits such as holiday pay, sick leave, pay increase, OSH issues, what happens if a temp is sick or wants time off during an assignment, is an excellent temp worker recognised or rewarded in any way?

- **Social Aspects** – How much social contact does a temp have at the organisation with other staff, any advantages or disadvantages of the social aspects of temping, what happens when there is an office celebration, any physical isolation for temp?

- **Hours of Work** – what happens if you want a temp to work a longer day or come in at the weekend, how quickly does an agency need to respond to a company's request for a clerical temp, on average how long are assignments, once a temp is on an assignment, are the hours and days regular, terminating assignments?

- **Assignments** – What types of assignments, varied work, challenging work or routine and monotonous, training and keeping up to date?

- **Teamwork –** Does a temp's assignment need regular interaction with others, team membership, chaotic workplace for unexpected temps, are temps included in training programmes for permanent staff or able to attend staff meetings, how do temps get on with permanent staff?

- **Feeling Valued –** Marginalised workers or enterprising individuals, 'just the temp' perception within the organisation, how does a temp on a long-term assignment compare to a new permanent worker (i.e. induction, training, inclusion at meetings), and with a temp on a short term assignment? How would a temping CV be viewed?

Appendix E (continued)

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for Employers

- **Autonomy –** Flexibility for temp, in what ways can a temp who has been hired out by an employment agency be entrepreneurial or enterprising, what happens when a temp does not like the assignment or wants to go off early, or the temp who has good ideas about how a job could be done more efficiently?

- **Perceived Responsibilities towards the Temp**
  What are the organisation's perceived responsibilities towards the welfare of the temp, financially, psychologically and physically? References?

- **Problems**
  Types of problems for organisations in hiring agency temps, influence of economic climate, waiting for temps, quality of temps, increase in calls from agencies, impact of this on organisation, problem solving methods used?

- **Aims/Expectations**
  Original aims of hiring agency temps, current expectations?

- **The Triangular Working Relationship**
  How do you see your position in this three way working relationship, relationship with consultants/temps?

- **Closing Comments**
  Any issues that may not have been covered?

Appendix F

Participant Information Sheet for Managers or Employers

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

PROJECT TITLE: Women's Experiences of Temporary Work

Who is conducting this study?
My name is Doreen Davy and I am completing a PhD in psychology through Massey University. Before I began my study in psychology, for a period of time I worked with a variety of women based in a clerical setting. Because of this experience, and my observations from that time, I have developed a specific interest in researching women working in the clerical sector.

My research supervisors are Jocelyn Handy, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology, Massey University at Palmerston North and Dianne Gardner, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology at Massey University in Albany

Who can take part in the study?
To take part in this study you need to be in a position in which you are responsible for the hiring of staff for your company. You may be an employed manager or the owner of an Auckland based company. Your company currently hires or has hired (in the last three years) temps from private employment agencies to cover clerical related work (i.e. admin, reception, secretarial, etc).

What this study is about?
The temping industry is increasing, with research showing that more employers are hiring temp staff, especially to cover commercial (clerical-related) work. Because of these trends in the workforce, it is important to find out how temps experience this type of employment. The overall findings may be published in an academic journal.

What you would agree to do?
If you are willing to take part, all you need to do is complete an interview with me. In the interview we will talk about your perceptions of temp workers and the temping industry as an employer. The interview will be like a conversation and will take us approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Protecting your confidentiality
The recorded interview will be transcribed by myself. The tapes (and transcripts) will not have your name on them, you will be identified by a pseudonym. Your tape and transcript will be stored securely and will be destroyed at the end of the research, or the original tape and transcript can be returned to you. If the research is to be published, a copy of the transcript will be kept for 5 years at Massey University, but you may have the original tape and transcript if you wish. It will not be possible to identify you or your company

from any reports that are prepared in the study. The information you give me will be used for my research only.

My research supervisors will also have access to the tapes and transcripts, but are bound by the same confidentiality agreement that I am.

Your rights as a participant in this research
If you agree to take part in the study, you have the right:

- to ask any questions about the study at any time
- to refuse to answer any particular questions
- to withdraw from the study at any time
- to ask for the tape-recorder to be turned off at any time
- to provide all information on the understanding that it is completely confidential to the researcher and research supervisor
- to be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded

How to contact me
You are welcome to contact me at any time during the study for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

My contact details are:
Doreen Davy
Telephone (09) 4139-869 or
Email ddavy@xtra.co.nz.

My supervisors' contact details are:
Dr Jocelyn Handy
Telephone (06) 350 5799 extn 2055 or
Email J.A.Handy@massey.ac.nz.

Dr Dianne Gardner
Telephone: (09) 414 0800 ext. 41225
Email: D.H.Gardner@massey.ac.nz

Appendix I

Participant Information Sheet for Recruitment Agents

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

PROJECT TITLE: Women's Experiences of Temporary Work

Who is conducting this study?
My name is Doreen Davy and I am completing a PhD in psychology through Massey University. Before I began my study in psychology, for a period of time I worked with a variety of women based in a clerical setting. Because of this experience, and my observations from that time, I have developed a specific interest in researching women working in the clerical sector.

My research supervisors are Jocelyn Handy, a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Massey University at Palmerston North and Dianne Gardner, a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Massey University in Albany.

Who can take part in the study?
To take part in this study you need to be working as a recruitment consultant for a private employment agency in the Auckland area. You need to be involved in the commercial temping industry, hiring temping staff to organizations to cover clerical related roles, i.e. admin, reception, secretary, etc.

What this study is about?
The temping industry is increasing, with research showing that more employers are hiring temp staff, especially to cover commercial (clerical-related) work. Because of these trends in the workforce, it is important to find out how temps experience this type of employment. The overall findings may be published in an academic journal.

What you would agree to do?
If you are willing to take part, all you need to do is complete an interview with me. In the interview we will talk about your perceptions of temp workers and the temping industry as a recruitment agent. The interview will be like a conversation and will take us approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Protecting your confidentiality
The recorded interview will be transcribed by myself. The tapes (and transcripts) will not have your name on them, you will be identified by a pseudonym. Your tape and transcript will be stored securely and will be destroyed at the end of the research, or the original tape and transcript can be returned to you. If the research is to be published, a copy of the

transcript will be kept for 5 years at Massey University, but you may have the original tape and transcript if you wish. It will not be possible to identify you or your company from any reports that are prepared in the study. The information you give me will be used for my research only.

My research supervisors will also have access to the tapes and transcripts, but are bound by the same confidentiality agreement that I am.

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If you agree to take part in the study, you have the right:

- to ask any questions about the study at any time
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Email J.A.Handy@massey.ac.nz.

Dr Dianne Gardner
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Email: D.H.Gardner@massey.ac.nz

Appendix J

Summary of Research Findings for Recruitment Agents

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

15th October 2007

Re: Recruitment Consultants' Perspectives on the Temping Industry

Firstly, I would like to thank you for participating in my research on the temping industry in Auckland, it was much appreciated. The interviews provided some interesting and useful information. One part of my study explored recruitment consultants' perspectives on their role in the temping industry. Ten consultants were interviewed from ten different private employment agencies in Auckland. This letter outlines the main findings of the study.

I have summarised the main findings that came out of the interviews, but it is important to recognise that the findings reported are general ones and not all aspects are relevant to every individual recruitment consultant who took part in the study. I found that three main themes came out of the interviews. These are 1) Control and Flexibility, 2) Economic Factors and 3) Relationships.

Control and Flexibility

How much control and flexibility a recruitment consultant can exercise in the job market seems to depend on the current economic situation. The more buoyant the job market, the easier it is for people to find permanent employment. This in turn provides constraints for the recruitment consultant working in the temping sector. There were indications that the role of the recruitment consultant working in the temping industry can be quite difficult at times, with many describing their work as "a juggling act". In spite of this, most participants said that they enjoyed their work.

Less Availability of Suitable Temps

Skilled temps appear to be difficult to attract in today's buoyant job market. It was noted by several consultants that many temps had left temping to take permanent employment because of high demand for skilled workers in the current Auckland job market. Although many immigrants want to temp in order to gain New Zealand experience, some participants mentioned that their clients preferred temps with good English and hiring people with limited English language skills had created many problems in the past.

Appendix J (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Recruitment Agents

Although most of the consultants interviewed preferred to be able to keep their current temps registered solely with their agency, they were aware that the temp needs to earn money if they are to remain in the temping industry. Several participants recommended that temps should try registering at other agencies if their agency was not able to provide enough work for them.

Management of the Temp
As the consultant is not actually at the organisation to observe how well the temp performs, management of the temp can sometimes be difficult. Most participants stated that regular performance feedback on the temp is provided to the agency by the clients, providing the consultant with valuable information on the temp's level of performance.

Increase in Number of Agencies
With the increase in the number of private employment agencies in Auckland over the last few years, agencies are not only competing with each other for skilled temps but also for clients. Several of the consultants interviewed referred to the fact that they spend a lot of time checking the client company culture and specific needs to ensure that only the most suitable temp is provided. Satisfying the client's needs was stressed as being very important for the agency, which in some cases meant 'over-delivery' of the temp.

Economic Aspects
Costs for Agencies
Several of the recruitment consultants mentioned that good clerical temps were now being paid higher rates of pay by agencies compared with what they had received in the past. As well as complying with market rates, the buoyant Auckland job market (described as being a 'candidates' market') has created increased costs for agencies. To retain good quality temps, agencies often pay a premium hourly rate to their best temps. Registering a temp with an agency involves a fairly comprehensive examination process, for example testing their computer skills and checking their references. This process is costly for agencies, and can be a waste of time if a candidate is not serious about temping.

Advertising for temps is an ongoing cost for agencies and some participants have been trying to please clients by carrying the cost of advertising for the right temp for a specific client if there are no suitable temps available on the agency's data-base.

Trend for Longer Assignments
Most of the participants agreed that recent trends indicate that temp assignments are becoming longer, lasting from a few weeks to several months in duration. Because the temp may be working at the company for a long period of time, some employers want to choose the right temp by interviewing temp candidates themselves rather than relying on the agency to do this (which has meant more work organising interviews for consultants).

Appendix J (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Recruitment Agents

Relationships
Developing and maintaining good relationships with clients and temps was frequently mentioned as being one of the most important aspects of the consultant's role.

The Relationship with the Client
Many of the consultants interviewed stressed the importance of maintaining a strong relationship between consultant and client in order to foster client loyalty. When situations arose that required the client to wait for the right temp to be provided by the agency, the quality of the relationship made a difference. A well established relationship between the consultant and client often meant that the client was willing to wait rather than try another agency.

The Relationship with the Temp
As the legal employer of the temp, many consultants were spending a lot of time communicating with their temps, organising social events, rewarding temps for good performance and generally being more relationship focused. Building a healthy relationship between consultant and temp was mentioned by most participants as being very important because it encouraged temp loyalty to the agency as well as providing the temp with a sense of belonging.

Conclusion
From the information gathered, it seems that the role of the recruitment consultant working in the temping industry may be quite difficult at times, given the current Auckland job market. A scarcity of good temps has created some difficulties in accommodating employers' requests in a speedy manner. Accordingly a lot of time and energy is spent by consultants in relationship building in an attempt to retain existing clients and temps, as well as trying to attract new ones. In spite of the challenges, most consultants said that they enjoyed their work.

As already mentioned, the above findings will not pertain to every individual who took part in this research. Please feel free to comment on these findings. In order for your views to be included in my thesis, I would appreciate it if you would return any comments by 15th November 2007 You can telephone me on 09 4139-869, or email me at ddavy@xtra.co.nz if you prefer. Thank you once again for your participation.

Yours sincerely

Doreen Davy
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Email: ddavy@xtra.co.nz

Appendix K

Summary of Research Findings for Temporary Workers

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

15th October 2007

Re: Temps' Perspectives on the Temping Industry

Firstly, I would like to thank you for participating in my research on the temping industry in Auckland, it was very much appreciated. The interviews provided some interesting and useful information. One part of my study explored the temps' perspectives regarding their role as a temp worker. This letter outlines the main findings of the study.

In my research I was exploring the experiences of women who were currently working as temps or who had worked as clerical temps in the past. Twenty participants were interviewed. Below I have summarised the main findings that came out of the interviews but it is important to recognise that the findings reported are general ones and not all aspects are relevant to every individual temp worker who took part in the study. Three main themes came out of the interviews. These were 1) Control and Flexibility, 2) Economic Factors and 3) Relationships. More information under each theme heading is provided below.

Control and Flexibility

Temp work is often described as being able to provide people with flexibility and 'lifestyle choice'. People taking up temp work may believe that they are able choose their own hours, days, type of work and location of work, thus providing them with control over organising their working life.

Flexible Time

The study found that the flexible working hours for temps mainly involves the ability to take extra weeks away from work between assignments. The hours that temps work are mainly around 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, which is what employers (the clients) want. Although temps can tell the agency that they only want to work certain days or times, the agency can only offer assignments that are available, which tend to be mainly

full time hours. Almost all participants said that they are free to say yes or no to assignments offered by the agencies, providing some flexibility.

Uncertainty
Many temps interviewed described a sense of uncertainty around new assignments, for example the type of work they would be doing and finding the location of the organisation on time. There was also uncertainty about whether or not there would be a new assignment ready for them when nearing the end of the existing assignment.

The Work
Although there were a variety of tasks, many participants described the work overall as being fairly routine. To cope with the monotony of routine work, several temps listened to music, went on the internet or coped by reminding themselves that it was only a temporary role. A few temps enjoyed the stimulation involved in learning different skills and looked forward to starting new assignments at new organisations. Short term assignments, for example, reception work, could be "full on" with temps often expected to work things out for themselves. Although a temp may walk out of an assignment that she does not like, very few temps actually did this, preferring to stay and remind themselves that it is only a temporary role.

Self-Direction
The majority of temps had been offered a permanent job by the organisational manager while on a temping assignment. Some of the temps had accepted the offered permanent position (often for financial stability) but many had refused because the actual work did not appeal on a full time basis or because they preferred to be temps at that period of time.

Most of the participants temped because it suited that particular juncture of their life, for example studying, having school holidays off, travel, or being able to earn money while contemplating what career they might like. Several younger temps described how they were trying to use temping to "get a foot in the door" of a specific organisation. The idea of placing oneself in the right organisation and then requesting a permanent job was part of their career plan. Unfortunately, the permanent positions offered to these temps were often those they did not want.

Economic Factors
As temping can be more erratic than permanent work, the financial side of temping is likely to be an important focus for temps.

Appendix K (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Temporary Workers

The Pay
Most of the temps interviewed agreed that it was necessary to have some savings or a regular part-time job in order to cover periods when there may be no assignments. The longer term assignments were favoured because of the financial stability they offered for the temps compared to the short term assignments. The majority of participants also agreed that on average the hourly rate earned by an agency clerical temp was lower than that earned by a permanent clerical worker. However a few temps did acknowledge that their hourly rate was actually more than what a permanent worker would earn in that type of work. A pay rise for the temp often needs to be negotiated with the client via the agency.

Security
How flexible a temp can be seemed to depend on how financially needy they were at the time. Temps with financial commitments were often prepared to accept any assignment that the agency offered in order to earn money. Some temps complained that it was very difficult for them to procure a personal loan or mortgage from banks because temping was deemed to be "unstable" employment.

Some temps were concerned about how their CVs might look after long periods of temping, but believed that temps make better employees than other people because of their variety of skills and ability to adapt to different situations.

Relationships
As temping involves three sets of people (the temp, the recruitment consultant and the client employer) temping relationships can be more complex than the usual two way employee/employer relationship.

Relationship between Agency and Temp
Although the agency is the employer of the temp, many temps did not feel as though they were the employees of the agency. This was mainly because they spent most of their working time in client organisations and communication between recruitment consultant and temp was infrequent rather than regular. This was especially so when the temp was on a long term assignment. In spite of this, many temps did feel some loyalty to the agency and often chose to stay in difficult assignments rather than let their agency down.

Relationship between Temp and Client Employer/Permanent staff
Several temps described the manager or HR person at the organisations in a positive way, mainly because these people often offered them a permanent job while in the temping role. However some temps described difficulties with permanent clerical staff. For example, being rude or ignoring the temp, or trying to "push" their unwanted tasks onto the temp to do. Those temps working in an organisation where restructuring was

occurring found it particularly difficult, especially trying to interact with permanent staff who were about to be made redundant.

Social Aspects
Although some of the temps interviewed said that they had been invited to Christmas parties or social events at the client organisations, many temps had not. Some temps described feeling upset over being excluded whereas other temps ignored it, deciding that it was "all part of the package". Being uninvolved in office politics was seen as an advantage by a few temps.

Some agencies organised 'temp social evenings' which were often experienced as being "awkward" because temps didn't know each other. Other agencies had organised "movie evenings' where a temp could bring a friend along. When temps worked in large client organisations there were sometimes opportunities to socialise with temps from other agencies.

Sense of Belonging
Most participants had experienced situations when they had arrived at an organisation to find nothing prepared for them, for example no desk or logon. Many temps did not feel a sense of belonging at the client organisations although some temps on longer-term assignments did gradually end up feeling more part of the team. Although the majority of temps gave their best effort in performing well in the tasks they were given, many temps said that they felt no ownership of the job because it was somebody else's job that they were covering. For several temps, one of the main advantages of choosing to temp was having no commitment to any particular company.

Status
Although many participants in the study felt that attitudes towards temps being "just the temp" had not changed much over the years, a few felt that temps were like "the cavalry", coming in to help in crisis situations. These temps felt important and valued by the clients because of this. Some temps with tertiary qualifications often felt "superior" to the permanent clerical staff. Several participants mentioned that it was particularly frustrating when a temp's advice or ideas (outside of the clerical sphere) were often not welcomed at the organisation, even when the temp had prior knowledge and experience in that area. However, some temps were able to show permanent staff how to better use computer programmes and felt appreciated for this.

Appendix K (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Temporary Workers

Conclusion
The study found that there are a variety of difficulties for people working as clerical temps but also some positive aspects. In spite of the challenges of temping, the majority of temps in the study chose to temp because it suited their particular circumstances at the time.

The above findings will not pertain to every individual who took part in this research. Please feel free to comment on these findings. In order for your views to be included in my thesis, I would appreciate it if you would return any comments by 15th November 2007. You can telephone me on 09 4139-869, or email me at ddavy@xtra.co.nz if you prefer.

Thank you once again for your participation in this research.
Yours sincerely

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Appendix L

Summary of Research Findings for Employers

(Printed on Massey University Psychology Department letterhead)

15th October 2007

Re: Employers' Perspectives on the Temping Industry

A few months ago you took part in my study on the temping industry in Auckland. I would like to thank you for agreeing to be a participant in the study, it was very much appreciated and the interviews provided some interesting and useful information. One part of my study explored employers' perspectives regarding the hiring of temps from private employment agencies. This letter outlines the main findings of the study.

In my research, one of the things I was investigating was employers' views on the advantages and disadvantages of using temps. In order to canvass employers' opinions, I interviewed ten people from different Auckland organisations. These organisations comprised a variety of industries including legal, Information Technology, manufacturing, government agencies, education, telecommunications, medical technology, etc. Below I have summarised the main findings that came out of the interviews. It is important to appreciate that the findings reported are general and not all aspects are relevant to every individual employer who took part in the study. These main findings of the study are divided into four categories. These are 1) Reasons for Hiring Temps, 2) Advantages of Hiring Temps, 3) Disadvantages of Hiring Temps, 4) Maximising Advantages and Minimising Disadvantages of Using Temps.

Reasons for Hiring Temps

There are a variety of reasons why employers hire temps. The study found that temps were used for short-term assignments to help with fluctuating workloads, to help with a backlog of work and meeting deadlines. Some employers mentioned that bringing in temps helped to alleviate stress on permanent staff, by taking routine or boring tasks away from existing staff.

Appendix L (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Employers

Temps were also used for short term cover of permanent staff who may be absent from work due to sickness or leave. Many participants said that they were increasingly using temps to help with longer-term projects which could last from a few weeks to several months in duration.

Advantages of Hiring Temps

As well as being able to request temps whenever extra help was needed, there were also other advantages for organisations in hiring temps from agencies. One of the main advantages was less legal responsibility for the organisation. For example, no ACC payments, sick leave or annual leave responsibility because the agency is the employer of the temps not the organisation hiring temps. OSH inductions were often carried out by the agency rather than at the organisation, saving the organisation the responsibility of arranging this.

Hiring temps provided less risk for employers. Many of the participants said that they had offered good performing temps permanent jobs while they were temping at their organisations. Being in a position to see how an employee performs over a period of time was an advantage, providing a "try before you buy" situation with less risk of employing the wrong person.

Another advantage of hiring temps was that it helped to keep permanent staff happy. By hiring temps, the company ran less risk of losing good permanent staff because of overload or work becoming overly monotonous. Hiring temps seemed to be helpful in keeping staff turnover down.

The huge increase in the number of private employment agencies in Auckland has created fierce competition for clients, providing organisations with the opportunity to negotiate lower hourly rates for temps. Some employers had taken advantage of this, selecting agencies who offered the lowest rates.

Recruitment consultants from the agencies try to build a good working relationship with the employer. Most participants appreciated the amount of time the recruitment consultant spent checking out the organisation's specific needs in order to make sure the right temp is provided when needed.

Disadvantages of Hiring Temps

Most participants felt that the main disadvantage in using temps was the direct economic cost. The agency's fee covering the hourly rate for a clerical temp was perceived to be quite high.

Appendix L (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Employers

Time spent training temps, for example teaching them how to use an organisation's in-house computer system was perceived to be a cost, especially when it was not possible to rehire the same temp for future assignments. Other costs mentioned were time taken to fill in feedback forms about the temp's performance for the agency plus time spent taking calls from agencies marketing their services.

Some employers described feeling frustrated when agencies sent them temps who were not skilled for the job or who did not have the right attitude. Although these temps were quickly replaced by the agency, the time wasted was perceived to be a cost to the employer.

Maximising Advantages and Minimising Disadvantages of Using Temps

The current buoyant job market in Auckland seems to have created a shortage of good temps. Many employers said they sometimes had to wait for the agency to accommodate their request for a suitably trained temp because none were available on the agency data-base. Several employers described using multiple agencies rather than the one agency so as to increase their chances of getting their needs met promptly rather than having to wait.

To minimise the costs of hiring agency temps and to maximise the company's ability to meet its fluctuating staffing needs, a few employers mentioned that their organisation had a list of casual staff available for helping out when required. Other employers had tried to cross-train their staff or have a "floater" (an employee trained in a variety of skills) who could cover staff shortages in different departments.

To save costs on training new temps, many employers asked the agency to send them the same temp that they had previously trained. Most of the time this was possible, but sometimes the requested temp was unavailable.

Conclusions

From the information gathered, it seems that although employers continue to hire temps from their preferred employment agencies, some do not use this as their first option for covering staffing needs. There appear to be numerous benefits for employers in hiring temps, however the current shortage of good temps may have created difficulties for the agencies in being able to deliver on time. In short, employers seem to be developing their own organisational strategies for staff cover alongside rather than instead of using temps from agencies.

Appendix L (continued)

Summary of Research Findings for Employers

The above findings will not pertain to every individual who took part in this research. Please feel free to comment on these findings. In order for your views to be included in my thesis, I would appreciate it if you would return any comments by 15th November 2007 You can telephone me on 09 4139-869, or email me at ddavy@xtra.co.nz if you prefer. Thank you once again for your participation in this research.
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